House of Commons

Wednesday 17 November 2010

The House met at half-past Eleven o’clock

PRAYERS

[MR Speaker in the Chair]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Yemen

1. Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the developmental situation in Yemen; and if he will make a statement. [24336]

2. Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the developmental situation in Yemen; and if he will make a statement. [24337]

6. Mr Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the developmental situation in Yemen; and if he will make a statement. [24341]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Alan Duncan): Yemen is of the highest priority to the coalition Government. Subject to the Department for International Development’s bilateral aid review and the security situation in Yemen, DFID is inclined to increase its commitment to that country. We believe strongly in the power of development to give solid foundations to a country that faces threats to its stability and economy.

The UK is playing a leading role in the Friends of Yemen process, in which our partnership with Gulf states is an essential element. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently visited Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to exchange views on Yemen and to build our common approach. That will help to ensure that the commitments made in New York in September are delivered in time for the next Friends of Yemen meeting in Riyadh in February.

Caroline Nokes: Given the difficult security situation in Yemen, will the Minister outline UK priorities in that country?

Mr Duncan: DFID’s programme is part of the UK strategy to address instability and conflict in Yemen and to develop the economy. We engage with the Government and other donors to create the political will needed for action on reforms. Our work helps to make people’s lives better by delivering basic services such as health, education and justice to the poorest communities, and to provide jobs and short-term employment through cash-for-work schemes. We also provide life-saving humanitarian support for the 300,000 displaced people in Yemen.

Graham Evans: At the last International Development questions, I raised the importance of Yemen in the war on terror, which the subsequent ink cartridge plot underlined. The Gulf states are obviously key to addressing Yemen’s challenges. What are the Government doing to engage with those states?

Mr Duncan: The security situation is obviously of the utmost importance. The most important Gulf partner is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which co-chairs the Friends of Yemen process, but more than $3 billion-worth of pledged financial support has remained unused since 2006. We are therefore pressing for better donor co-ordination, in which the Gulf states are obviously crucial partners.

Mr Spencer: I welcomed the Minister’s speech at Chatham House—he set out the challenges facing Yemen and spoke of putting development and diplomacy at the heart of our response. Will he inform the House what progress has been made to implement reform through the Friends of Yemen process?

Mr Duncan: In my speech at Chatham House, I outlined the importance of development in Yemen. The Government want to underpin that country now rather than have to step in later should things get worse. Through the Friends of Yemen process, we are helping the Government of Yemen with the implementation of an International Monetary Fund financial reform programme. I stress very strongly that we are not telling Yemen what to do; we are working as a partner to support it in facing its challenges.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Mr Speaker, you very recently met the Speaker of the Yemeni Parliament, and President Obama and the Prime Minister spoke about Yemen last week at the G20. Processes are very welcome, as is Britain’s leadership role in this whole endeavour, but we need positive action. Will the Minister ask the Foreign Secretary to issue an invitation to the Yemeni Foreign Minister and other Yemeni Ministers, so that they can come to London as a matter of urgency—before Christmas—and we can implement the very good words that the Minister has just spoken?

Mr Duncan: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his suggestion—he has a strong interest in, and knowledge of, Yemen. His suggestion is constructive. There will be a further Friends of Yemen meeting in Riyadh. If we are to get anything out of that meeting, we have got to get cracking now, which means that constant purposeful engagement with our Yemeni counterparts is essential. I will certainly ask the Foreign Secretary to take up his suggestion.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): It is obviously important for us to do all we can to help to tackle poverty and instability in Yemen, but where there is instability, it is even more difficult to get aid to
people who need it. The expertise of DFID officials in that regard is widely respected around the world. Will the Minister assure us that as the work of his Department is reviewed, nothing is done to undermine its ability to play its part in ensuring that aid in conflict zones really gets to those who need it?

Mr Duncan: May I say what a pleasure it is to be up against the right hon. and learned Lady once again, after a little gap? What she says is absolutely right. We are, as I said, inclined to increase our support for, and spend in, Yemen, but obviously the security situation will determine whether we can put enough boots on the ground to deliver the aid and assistance that we wish to deliver. Crucially, however, we are looking on our work there as a pioneering exercise in trying to address the challenges of a fragile state before its condition gets worse.

British Charities (Funding)

3. Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): What funding his Department provides to British charities with international developmental goals operating overseas.

Dr Poulter: I am sure that the Secretary of State would agree that we need to get funding to the right place. On improving women's health overseas, does he agree that the focus should be on making interventions in the right place, which is during delivery and childbirth, which account for over 50% of deaths among women? That is where we should be focusing our resources when we fund overseas aid.

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Reproductive, maternal and newborn health care is the subject of a business plan discussion that is under way. With his expertise, I very much hope that he will contribute to our thinking on that. The plan will be published in January. As he said, we need to focus on the continuum of care, up to birth and beyond. We are quite clear about the importance of the issue, but he will know that placing women's choice over whether and when they have children is at the heart of all the overseas programmes that we run.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Let me declare an interest in that I recently went to Bangladesh as a guest of Oxfam. I am sure that I join the whole House in paying tribute to the excellent work of British development non-governmental organisations around the world. In Bangladesh, I saw Oxfam's work in raising awareness of the impact of climate change on some of the world's poorest. Although the Government's commitment to continue the work on development and climate change is welcome, the commitment of the international community still falls short. Ahead of Cancun, what steps will the Government take to push for a greater commitment on climate finance from other countries?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Lady for what she said about the quality of the programme and those who staff it in Bangladesh. I am glad that she was able to visit our programme last week. She has seen a country where climate change affects the everyday lives of millions of people, and she is quite right to underline the Government's commitment to ensuring new and additional mechanisms for raising international finance to tackle climate change. I will be making a speech on the subject tomorrow, and the Government will be pressing hard in the run-up to Cancun and beyond to see that we make significant progress in this area.

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): British development NGOs are world class and do a fantastic job, but has my right hon. Friend noticed that they all have their own advocacy departments and produce their own glossy publications? Would it not be better if they co-ordinated themselves slightly more, so as to cut out unnecessary duplication and competition?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend raises an important point. He will have noticed that the global poverty action fund that we launched is principally a matched fund, in order to enable the taxpayer to piggyback on the brilliant development outcomes that many of our NGOs produce. That is the right principle, whereby taxpayer support can focus on results, outputs and outcomes, and not on inputs.

HIV (Maternal Transmission)

4. Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): What steps he is taking to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV in developing countries by 2015.

Dr Poulter: In 2009-10, the Department for International Development provided £362 million to UK charities and civil society organisations to assist in poverty reduction overseas. The global poverty action fund, which will increasingly shape partnership with charities and non-governmental organisations, was launched on 27 October.

Mr Mitchell: I am aware that the Secretary of State for International Development provided £362 million to British charities with international developmental goals operating overseas.

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend raises an important point. He will have noticed that the global poverty action fund that we launched is principally a matched fund, in order to enable the taxpayer to piggyback on the brilliant development outcomes that many of our NGOs produce. That is the right principle, whereby taxpayer support can focus on results, outputs and outcomes, and not on inputs.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Stephen O'Brien): The Government are committed to a comprehensive approach to eliminating paediatric AIDS by focusing on where we have a comparative advantage—that is, on primary prevention of HIV among women of child-bearing age and on prevention of unintended pregnancies among women living with HIV through our investments in family planning.

Bill Esterson: Does the Minister agree that it is important that children who have already contracted HIV should be able to access medicines to stay alive? If so, will he join me in calling on pharmaceutical companies to make their patents available to the patent pool, so that there can be affordable HIV drugs for children?

Mr O'Brien: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's question. The Government definitely support the UNITAID patent pool, which is, as he knows, a mechanism to facilitate the development of new, particularly fixed-dose combination drugs, partly to ward off the danger of
monotherapies. That can be a key means of addressing the treatment challenge. We welcome UNITAID’s decision to create a separate foundation to manage the pool’s activities, and we recognise that that is an important step. We now need the milestones to be put in place as rapidly as possible, so that we can convert it to a working programme going forward.

Katy Clark: We believe that about 1.4 million pregnant women globally are infected with HIV, and about 1,000 babies are infected every day. We also believe that worldwide funding for HIV treatment is on the decline. Will the Government commit to making a strong contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and also to prioritising not just keeping those pregnant women alive, but taking steps to prevent those babies from being infected?

Mr O’Brien: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. I know from the number of her questions that I have answered that she takes a keen interest in these issues. The UK has been a good supporter of the global fund to date, and its replenishment is subject to current negotiations and the multilateral aid review.

On the hon. Lady’s particular concern, the reproductive, maternal and newborn health business plan is the coalition Government’s key mechanism to prioritise the health of women and babies. It will support service delivery across the continuum of care needed to improve the health of women and girls, and will scale up the prevention of mother-to-child transmission—PMTCT—of HIV. That will address the underlying causes of the AIDS epidemic, gender inequality, gender-based violence and poverty. We will certainly—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am grateful, but the Minister must cut it short. Work needs to be done on these things. The answers are often far too long.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): As the Minister said, the current Government strongly support, as did the previous Government, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. What is the Minister’s assessment of the success of the country co-ordinating mechanisms, and particularly the efforts to ensure that co-infection of HIV and TB is well managed on a country basis?

Mr O’Brien: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. One way of ensuring that the global fund, which scores well on its effectiveness, gets even better is to ensure that when there are conflicts in the country co-ordinating mechanisms, they are addressed. The co-infection of HIV and TB is an increasingly well understood area of research and practice, and that understanding is shaping the programmes through the multilateral aid review, and will therefore inform those programmes going forward.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Will my hon. Friend tell the House what his Department is doing to support the Glion call to action, whereby consensus has been reached on the importance of family planning in preventing the spread of HIV, particularly maternal transmission from mother to child?

Mr O’Brien: My hon. Friend makes the vital point that family planning is at the heart of ensuring that we prevent the transmission of these diseases. I assure him that we are putting women’s and children’s health at the core of our international development agenda, and will contribute to saving the lives of at least 50,000 women and 250,000 babies, and to providing 10 million more couples with access to family planning.

Access to Basic Sanitation

5. Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of people in developing countries without access to basic sanitation.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Andrew Mitchell): Reducing the number of people in developing countries without access to basic sanitation is a key priority of the coalition Government. The review of our aid programme will determine how we scale up our efforts and results in this area.

Fiona Bruce: I thank the Secretary of State for his reply. As Friday is world toilet day, what is his Department doing to raise the international agenda’s priority to improve sanitation, particularly as 1.5 million children under five die every year from poor water hygiene and sanitation, which is more than die from malaria, AIDS and measles combined?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend is right to raise this issue in those terms. Diarrhoea is the biggest killer of children in Africa. This is a core subject for the coalition Government, and we are looking at it in our bilateral aid review. Although I do not wish to pre-empt that review, I can tell the House that I am confident that we will be able to ensure that, over the next four years, tens of millions of people will be able to gain access to clean water and sanitation who are currently unable to do so.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his remarks at the millennium development goals summit earlier this year, in which he emphasised the importance of sanitation, but will he explain to the House why, when the United Nations passed an historic resolution on 30 September affirming that access to water and sanitation were human rights and that Governments had a legal responsibility to deliver that access, the United Kingdom voted against it?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman needs to look carefully at the words that I used at the summit, about which he has just made his nice remarks. The fact is that 2.5 million deaths are caused by a lack of sanitation and 39% of people in our world do not have any access to a basic hygienic latrine. That is why we are focusing not on rhetoric but on results in trying to achieve specific outcomes in this very important area.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): In the last Parliament, the Department for International Development acknowledged that it had refocused its priority on sanitation in the wake of the report by the International Development Committee. Given that, according to figures from the Water, Sanitation and Health 2008 report, "79% of rural homes in India have no access to sanitation, what will the Secretary of State do within the programme for India to ensure that sanitation is a key priority?"
Mr Mitchell: The Chairman of the Select Committee is absolutely right to say that my predecessor admitted that the Government had taken their eye off the ball on this important matter. We are looking carefully at the Indian programme as part of the bilateral aid review and, as part of our examination of the programme, we will be looking specifically at our support for sanitation.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): The sanitation situation in Haiti remains critical after the earthquake in January this year. Following that earthquake, many of our constituents sent donations to support relief efforts there, and they are now very concerned about the outbreak of cholera, which is having a devastating impact. Will the Secretary of State update the House on the delivery of aid in Haiti, and on how the help is getting through to those who need it most?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman raises an extremely important subject. Britain has helped to bring clean water—the specific point that he raised, I think— to 380,000 people in Haiti. I sent a senior humanitarian expert last week to look at the situation on the ground, and to help specifically with co-ordination there. We are working with other United Nations agencies to ensure that this is prioritised and we are of course considering the recent appeal that the UN put out in that respect.

Global Fund Projects

7. Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): What recent assessment has he made of the outcomes of projects under the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. [24342]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Andrew Mitchell): The global fund is assessed annually against key performance indicators. The programmes of the global fund have saved 5.7 million lives since 2000. The review of all our multilateral spending, including on the global fund, is designed to ensure maximum impact and value for money.

Grahame M. Morris: Does the Minister recognise that other countries look to the United Kingdom for leadership on HIV strategy? If so, does he agree that a strong UK contribution to the global fund will encourage other countries that have not yet made their financial contributions to step up to the plate? [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. There are far too many private conversations taking place in the Chamber. That is very unfair to the hon. Gentleman and the Secretary of State and unimpressive to those following our proceedings. That is very unfair to the hon. Gentleman and the Secretary of State.

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is right to underline the importance and success of what the global fund has achieved. This includes circulating 2.8 million people with antiretrovirals, diagnosing and treating 7 million people with tuberculosis and distributing more than 122 million bed nets to help to prevent malaria. We have sent a clear signal to the global fund of strong support in this replenishment round. The precise level of that support will be dictated by the multilateral aid review.

Asbestos Products

8. Jim Sheridan (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that funds allocated for development programmes by his Department are not used to purchase imported asbestos products. [24343]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Alan Duncan): Asbestos is banned in 52 countries, including in the EU and the UK. We are totally opposed to its use anywhere, and would deplore its supply to developing countries. We are not aware that DFID funds have been spent on asbestos products, and we would take urgent action, should we be so advised.

Jim Sheridan: I thank the Minister for that response, but can he assure the House that UK assistance to improve health standards in developing countries is not compromised by asbestos mining in Quebec? He may be aware of the multimillion dollar guarantee for development in Quebec, which might mean millions of tonnes of asbestos being dumped on unsuspecting populations in the years to come, with more than 4,000 people killed a year.

Mr Duncan: I note that the hon. Gentleman has campaigned tirelessly on asbestos and pleural plaques, and I studied his debate on the subject in Westminster Hall last year. I understand that Canadian exportation of asbestos is a cause for concern, and I will pass the issue he raises to my colleagues in the Foreign Office and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. From my Department’s point of view, we will take all necessary steps to ensure that we do not use dangerous asbestos products anywhere in the world.

Global Plan to Stop TB

9. Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the likely effects on the incidence of tuberculosis in developing countries of the revised global plan to stop TB. [24344]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Stephen O’Brien): I know the hon. Gentleman takes a close interest in the terrible suffering caused by tuberculosis around the world. I am happy to confirm that the Government welcome the Stop TB Partnership’s revised global plan, which sets out a clear road map to achieve ambitious targets, including to halve TB deaths by 2015. This will require making progress on the underlying causes.

Mr Sharma: I thank the Minister for his response. As I am sure he knows, TB needlessly kills 1.7 million people a year, yet no new treatments or vaccines have been developed for 30 years. What are the Government doing to ensure that the UK plays its part in eradicating this disease by funding TB control measures and supporting the development of new drugs, diagnostics and vaccines?

Mr O’Brien: The UK is committed to reducing unnecessary deaths and suffering from TB. My Department is currently reviewing its aid programme to determine how to achieve better value for money for the taxpayer.
and accelerate progress towards achieving all the millennium development goals. We will certainly review the forward approach to TB, including research, once we have the findings from the bilateral and multilateral aid reviews. As of 2009-10, we estimate that about £55 million was spent on direct programmes, and health system strengthening also needs to be taken into account.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Somalia is one of the countries with the highest incidence of TB. Will the Minister say how practical it is to reduce the incidence of TB across the world, particularly in countries where law and order has broken down?

Mr O’Brien: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to identify the fact that TB ravages countries, not least in conflict states. As we design programmes that will have an effect in conflict states, it is vital that TB is right there among the very top of interventions. As we go through our bilateral aid review and focus on hard-to-reach people in conflict states such as Somalia, we must ensure that TB is one of the pre-eminent issues to be tackled.

Mr Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise, which is indisciplined and discourteous. I, for one, want to hear Mr David Ruffley.

G20 Summit (Seoul)

10. Mr David Ruffley (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the value for money of his Department’s aid delivered through the UN Relief and Works Agency.

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Alan Duncan): UNRWA is performing well against agreed performance indicators and delivering value for money with United Kingdom funding. For instance, it is delivering teaching to nearly half a million children, and social services to more than a quarter of a million. During my recent visit to the Palestinian territories, I announced an extra £8 million to reward UNRWA’s good performance and ease its budget shortfall.

Joseph Johnson: During a recent visit to Gaza, it was obvious that UNRWA was struggling to obtain the construction materials that it needs to rebuild schools and find housing for refugees. Does the Minister agree that DFID would derive greater value for money if the partial blockade were completely lifted?

Mr Duncan: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I am glad that he was able to see the situation in Gaza for himself.

Although some progress has been made since Israel eased access restrictions, UNRWA is still unable to import the volume of reconstruction materials that it needs. Any restricted access enhances the tunnel economy and risks putting revenue straight into the hands of Hamas, which in itself is entirely counter-productive.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [24321] Mark Lancaster (Milton Keynes North) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 17 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in paying tribute to Ranger Aaron McCormick of 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment, who died on Remembrance Sunday. His commanding officer has described him as “the epitome of the Irish Infantry soldier: tough; selfless; good-humoured and full of compassion.”

He showed astonishing bravery, leading the way in clearing improvised explosive devices for the safety of local civilians and his fellow soldiers. We send our sincere condolences to his family, friends and colleagues.

I am sure that the whole House will also wish to join me in sending our warmest congratulations and best wishes to Prince William and Kate Middleton on their
engagement. I am sure that everyone agrees that it is wonderful news. We look forward to the wedding itself with excitement and anticipation.

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.

Mark Lancaster: I associate myself with the Prime Minister's comments.

Possibly the best piece of news to emerge from the unemployement figures this morning is the rise in the employment count, but small businesses in Milton Keynes are still concerned about both the cost and the bureaucracy of taking on extra workers. What can the Government do to help them?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has made an extremely good point. We must do more to make it easier for small businesses to take people on. However, this morning’s figures are good news. The claimant count is down by 3,700 on the month, unemployment as defined by the International Labour Organisation is down by 9,000 on the quarter, and crucially, as my hon. Friend has said, employment is up by 167,000 on the quarter.

We are helping small businesses by cutting the small business rate of corporation tax, we have the “one in, one out” rule so that new regulations will be limited, and we have a new enterprise capital fund to provide additional equity finance. We need to do all those things, but I think we also need to do more to help small businesses to take people off the unemployment register and put them back into work.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to ranger Aaron McCormick of 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment, who died on Sunday. His brave service in our armed forces will be remembered, and we send our deepest condolences to his family.

I also join the Prime Minister in sending our warmest congratulations to Prince William and Kate Middleton on their engagement.

Will the Prime Minister tell the House how many fewer police officers there will be as a result of his 20% real-terms cut in the police budget?

The Prime Minister: It will be up to individual police forces—[HON. MEMBERS: “Ah.”] This is very important. It will be up to individual police forces to try to ensure that they maximise resources in the front line. What we said in the spending review was that it was possible to retain the high level of visibility and activity of police on our streets. That is the challenge to every police force in the country, and I think that when we look across police forces and see how many officers there are in human resources and information technology and performing back-office functions, it is clear that we can succeed.

Ms Harman: Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary says that while there are, of course, efficiencies, cuts of beyond 12% will inevitably result in cuts in the number of front-line police officers, yet the Prime Minister is asking not for 12%, but for 20% cuts. As usual, he has ducked the question, and he will not admit how many front-line police he is cutting. He used to be very clear about protecting front-line services. This is what he said on 2 May:

“Any cabinet minister if I win the election...who comes to me and says, ‘Here are my plans’ and they involve frontline reductions, they’ll be sent straight back to their department to go away and think again.”

So what did he say to the Home Secretary?

The Prime Minister: This is question has been asked of the right hon. and learned Lady’s own former Home Secretary—now the shadow Chancellor—and this is what he said. [HON. MEMBERS: “Answer.”] He was asked—[INTERUPTION.]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister’s answers will be heard. [INTERUPTION. Order, What Opposition Members make of them is up to them, but they will hear them.

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Andrew Neil asked the shadow Chancellor a very simple question:

“Can you guarantee if you form the next Government that police numbers won’t fall?”

Alan Johnson: No.”

That is what Labour said. It can engage—[INTERUPTION.]

If the right hon. and learned Lady wants to, why do we not engage in a proper debate about how we try to make sure we maximise resources on the front line? That is what we are asking the police force to do, and that is what the Opposition should be involved in, instead of this cheap game.

Ms Harman: We were absolutely clear in our manifesto, and the former Home Secretary was absolutely clear, that we would guarantee central Government funding to protect front-line services. No wonder the Prime Minister’s Back Benchers are so silent: he is planning to cut their police forces by 20%. [INTERUPTION. Their constituents will be astonished to see them cheering 20% cuts in the police budget.

The Prime Minister will be aware of the report of the chief constable of Greater Manchester setting out how front-line police numbers will have to be cut. What does the Prime Minister say to the people of Greater Manchester, who will be deeply worried about the cut in police numbers?

The Prime Minister: First, let me answer the point the right hon. and learned Lady made about what Labour said after the election. The shadow Chancellor was asked about—[INTERUPTION. Well, the right hon. and learned Lady raised the point about what was said after the election, and the Shadow Chancellor said:

“If Labour had won the general election, the Home Office budget would have been cut and the police would have had to make savings.”

That is what it said.

The right hon. and learned Lady asks about Greater Manchester, so let me answer specifically about Greater Manchester. First, the chief constable of Greater Manchester has said that his plans are putting “the maximum resources” on front-line policing, and I am not surprised he is able to say that, because here are the figures for the employment levels in the back-office functions: human resources, 187 people for that force;
fleets. Vehicle maintenance, 106 people; finance, 106; IT—

**Interruption.** Well, Opposition Members want to know the facts about Greater Manchester police, and these are the facts about Greater Manchester police. Guess how many people are involved in IT in Greater Manchester police: 225. This is the debate we ought to be having: how do we get resources from the back office to the front line? How do we do it when right now only 11% of police officers are on the streets at any one time? That is the mess we have inherited; that is the mess we are going to clear up.

**Ms Harman:** But the chief constable’s report is clear. As well as cutting important back-office staff, front-line police will have to be cut; that is what the report says. The Prime Minister says—he always says this—that all this is unavoidable because of deficit reduction. In that case, he can explain why he is spending what the Association of Police Authorities says is £100 million creating new elected police commissioners at the same time as cutting police numbers?

**The Prime Minister:** The police commissioners will replace the police authorities—that is the point. The key issue, which the right hon. and learned Lady has now addressed, is that we are doing this because we inherited the biggest budget deficit in the G20. It is no good Labour talking about cuts, because it was planning 20% cuts. We are just having to introduce measures to deal with the mess that Labour made, but instead of just top-down cuts, we want to work with these organisations and say, “How do we help you to maximise the impact on the front line?” That is why we are scrapping the stop form—Labour introduced that—and that will save 450,000 hours of police time. We are going to limit stop-and-search reporting, and that will save another 350,000 hours of police time. This is the nonsense, the bureaucracy and the form-filling that Labour put in place. We are freeing the police officers to get out to do the job that people want them to do.

**Ms Harman:** By the way, it is an extra £100 million and the Prime Minister is spending it on elected police commissioners when that extra £100 million is the equivalent of hundreds of police officers. Police numbers do matter in tackling crime—of course they do. Will he drop his proposal for elected police commissioners and give the police the resources they need to protect front-line policing?

**The Prime Minister:** The straight answer to that is no. I will not, and I will tell you why. It is about time we had more accountable police forces in our country. I want there to be police commissioners so that when they do a good job calling the police to account and they are fighting crime in the way that local people want, they get re-elected. If they do a bad job, they will get thrown out. We all think that democracy is a great thing in here; what about a bit of democracy in policing as well?

**Ms Harman:** What local people want is to see their local police on their local streets. There he is posing as the guardian of probity in public finances. It cannot be denied that he knows a thing or two about posing. Why, at the same time as he is cutting police numbers, did he choose to use public money on not only a vanity photographer, but on putting staff from Tory headquarters on to the public payroll, with taxpayers footing the bill. Why did he do that?

**The Prime Minister:** Even the jokes are lame this week.

Let me tell you a few people we will not be employing. We will not have special advisers ordering around civil servants like Labour did. We will not be employing Damian McBride to smear the wives and families of politicians. We will not be employing Alastair Campbell to sex up dossiers to make the case for war. I have got a list—[HON. MEMBERS: “More, more.”] Do you want some more? There is plenty more. I have got a whole list of people here who were employed by the last Government. Here is one, Ruth Mackenzie. She was a Labour party employee. She then became an expert adviser in the Department. What was her qualification? Well, according to The Guardian, “She speaks new Labour”. Well, there we are, that is a great qualification. There is another one here—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I think I got the gist of it. We do not need to hear any more. Let me just say to the House, and that includes every Member of the House, that it is now time that we got back to questions and answers about the policies of the Government. That is what the public expect and what is the public are entitled to get.

Q2. [24352] **Mr Brian Binley** (Northampton South) (Con): More than 41% of all loans drawn from the enterprise finance guarantee scheme were issued by the Royal Bank of Scotland and a further 30% were issued by Lloyds Bank, yet 27 banks are operating in the marketplace. No matter how we look at the figures, that means that 25 banks are simply not doing their job and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises. What will the Prime Minister do to ensure that those dilatory banks do all they can to help SMEs have the working capital?

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Binley:** To ensure—

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend has spoken up very passionately—and rightly—and I agree with him that we need to be vigilant on the issue and to keep pressurising the banks to do more to help those small businesses.

**Q14. [24334] Gemma Doyle** (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab/Co-op): Reports suggest that as many as 1,700 of my constituents will lose their jobs as a direct consequence of the Government’s spending cuts. What action will the Prime Minister take to ensure that unemployment in West Dunbartonshire does not reach the levels that it did under the last Tory Government?

**The Prime Minister:** What we have to do—the hon. Lady is right—is make sure that there is a private sector-led recovery. That is why we have low interest rates, corporation tax coming down, cuts in national
The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend speaks up powerfully for her constituency. I can understand the concern. Obviously, it is important that school inspections are carried out to the highest possible standards and I do not think that it would be right for me to comment in detail on an individual case. There would be dangers in automatically withdrawing a report because a complaint has been made—some might use that to frustrate the process—but we need to ensure that reports are done in a good and professional manner.

Constituency Visit (Central Ayrshire)

Q4. [24324] Mr Brian H. Donohoe (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): When he next expects to visit Central Ayrshire.

The Prime Minister: I look forward to visiting Scotland soon.

Mr Donohoe: I note that the Prime Minister did not say that he was coming to Central Ayrshire; he does not know what he is missing. If Mohammed will not come to Ayrshire, is it possible, given the reports in the national press about Irvine, the largest town in my constituency, having the highest unemployment in Scotland, that he would meet a small delegation to discuss the question of unemployment?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman raises what will be one of the defining issues of the next few years, which is how we get people out of unemployment and how we ensure that losses of jobs in the public sector are made up for by growth in the private sector. That is an absolutely key area. That is why bank lending matters, why helping SMEs matters, why tax rates matter and why the regional growth fund that we are introducing helps. I am certainly happy to meet the hon. Gentleman—I wanted to keep him in a bit of suspense—just in case I do not make it to Central Ayrshire.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. As the House will know, that was a closed question about Central Ayrshire. We are now back to open questions.

Stephanie Cadwalladr (Carnarvon and Penryn) (Lab): I am not fully up to date with that particular planning circular, but I reassure my hon. Friend that, as I have said here before, Traveller communities
should be treated in a similar way to other communities, in that they cannot have planning permission retrospectively granted when they have not obeyed the rules. That is not right. Everyone should obey the law.

**Q6.** [24325] Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I wrote to the Prime Minister about my constituent, Scott Sheard from Formby. Scott suffered severe brain damage when he was assaulted in July, and he needs a wheelchair so that he can go home. Will the Prime Minister join me in welcoming the good news that Scott’s wheelchair will be ready next week, and will he intervene to help others in Merseyside and elsewhere who have been on the waiting list for wheelchairs for far too long?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, I am certainly happy to do that. The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important point. MPs of all parties in all parts of the House, and anyone who has ever tried to get a wheelchair for anybody, will know that the delays and the lack of choice and the lack of power people have is incredibly frustrating. It must be possible in this day and age to put more power in the hands of patients or parents to make sure we have better choice, faster wheelchairs—[Interruption.] Sorry. We should get the wheelchairs a bit faster.

**Andrew Griffiths** (Burton) (Con): With Ministers taking 5% pay cuts and Departments facing a reduction of 19%, does the Prime Minister share my dismay that the Labour party is to receive an extra £1 million of taxpayers’ money—an increase of 20%? If we are all in it together, should it not pay it back?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. A lot of people on the Opposition Front Bench do not seem to understand that the taxpayer provides Short money and the amount that goes to Labour is going up by 21%. As other Departments are having to take such severe cuts—the cut in No. 10 Downing street, for instance, is 25%—I look forward to an offer from the Labour party.

**Q7.** [24327] Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I welcome the commitment the Prime Minister made two weeks ago to a new silicon valley in east London, but will it be like the promise to the midwives? Can he tell us how far too long?

**The Prime Minister:** The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is right. The training mission and the equipping and training of Afghan soldiers and police officers is not only essential for the future of Afghanistan, but is the way in which we will be able, over time, to draw our own soldiers down and bring them home. We have the NATO summit this weekend. That will be one of the most important issues on the agenda. The training mission is now being well supported. We are giving huge support, but other countries are coming in behind us. The performance of the Afghan army is improving, but we have to keep working at that and making sure that it has all the equipment that it needs.

**Q8.** [24328] Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): One of the keys to securing economic growth in areas such as Staffordshire Moorlands is the promotion of vocational education and apprenticeships. Can the Prime Minister assure students and staff at further education colleges, such as Leek college in my constituency, of the Government’s continued commitment to this area?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, absolutely. My right hon. Friend the Skills Secretary produced the skills strategy yesterday, and yes, we are having to make difficult decisions, but in the middle of that, we are increasing the number of apprenticeships by 75,000 over what was planned, as well as putting more money into building FE colleges, which is vital for the future skills of our country.

**Mr Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): I endorse the sentiments expressed earlier by the Prime Minister in relation to the tragic death of Ranger Aaron McCormick of the 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment, who was tragically killed on Remembrance day. His service and that of others will never be forgotten. Many troops from Northern Ireland are serving in Afghanistan.

May I associate my right hon. and hon. Friends with the Prime Minister’s expression of best wishes to the happy couple—the royal couple? We wish them well for the future and I hope they will enjoy a visit to Northern Ireland in due course.

On Afghanistan, can the Prime Minister give us an update on the training and equipping of Afghan security forces, a process allowed only by the service and sacrifice of our troops?

**The Prime Minister:** The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is right. We are committed to supporting the film industry. We are committed to continuing with the tax credits that he speaks about. One of the keys to Warner Bros’ success in his constituency is the Harry Potter film franchise that it has been making. It has been incredibly successful. There is a great tip and key to filmmakers, which is that...
we must make films that people want to watch, and films that will have a benefit beyond themselves—that also encourage people to come and visit our country.

Q10. [24330] Tony Lloyd (Manchester Central) (Lab): Can the Prime Minister be very precise and tell the House whether he is honestly saying that if one in four police officers are taken out of Greater Manchester, as well as one in four of the police community support officers, that will have no impact on deterring and detecting crime? If he will say that, will he come to Manchester and explain it to people whose fear of crime is still a major issue?

The Prime Minister: What I say to the hon. Gentleman is, first, that the chief constable has said:

“We have been working for some time on plans to ensure the Force provides the most efficient service and the maximum resources are focused on frontline policing.”

When one looks at the figures for how few police officers really spend their time on the beat because of the paperwork and the form-filling, and when one looks at how we are managing our police forces and at the numbers in human resources, finance, IT and training, I say that we must do better. There is a choice. We can either say, “All reductions in public spending are a disaster and we can’t deal with them,” or we have to try and find a way to get more for less. That is what we are doing in the coalition Government. The Opposition are just not engaged in the debate.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): Does the Prime Minister agree that as an international trading nation and a leader in international development, it is vital that we can attract key people from around the world to this country for short and long-term stays? When will he be able to tell the House how the Government are finalising the criteria for the visa and immigration cap, to end the uncertainty that could damage investment in the UK as a preferred location?

The Prime Minister: I can tell my right hon. Friend that we are working on the issue. I do not think there will be any difficulties in achieving the two goals that we have. One is to get the immigration system that we inherited under control. The current level of net immigration into the UK of 200,000 a year—2 million over a decade—is too high. It needs to be brought down, but we should do that in a way that is business-friendly and helpful to the economy. When we look at the rules that we inherited and the fact that people were coming into this country under tier 1, but often had no skills at all or were not working in skilled jobs—some were even working in pizza restaurants—it is clear that the system was not working properly. That is what we have to get right.

Q11. [24331] Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): What does the Prime Minister have to say to my constituents on the Ings estate on Preston road in east Hull, who will now be left in unfit housing because his Government have scrapped the flagship housing market renewal programme, the Gateway pathway scheme? Over the past few days, I have been inundated with constituents who are desperate, living in properties surrounded by properties that are boarded up. I am seeing them tomorrow night at a residents meeting—what message of hope can I give them?

The Prime Minister: There are schemes like the regional growth fund that people in the hon. Gentleman’s constituency will be able to apply for to help to deal with issues such as improving the level of housing. That is one of the schemes that we have. We also have a huge programme for upgrading and building new homes through the new rent scheme. All these can make a difference, and he can talk to his constituents about them.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): Sandwell metropolitan borough, part of which I represent, has very high levels of deprivation. Can the Prime Minister reassure the children and parents from schools in Sandwell that the Government, particularly with their pupil premium policy, are on the side of children and families in Sandwell?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely can do that, because we made some difficult choices in the spending review to say that we are going to put more money into early-years education for two-year-olds from deprived families. That was previously not available. We are going to fund extra hours for three and four-year-olds in nursery education. We are going to make sure that there is a pupil premium, never dreamed of by a Labour Government in 13 years in office, that is over and above the per-pupil funding in our schools. Then we are going to carry that through to university so that children on free school meals will get some time at university for free and will not have to pay the student premiums. All those things will make a big difference, and they show that this is a Government who have made some progressive choices in education, even though we inherited a mess that we had to clear up.

Q12. [24332] Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister agree with his Business Secretary that the scrapping of regional development agencies has been “Maoist and chaotic”?

The Prime Minister: Given that my right hon. Friend is implementing the policy, that is not his view. We all take the view that the RDAs wasted a vast amount of money. Many of them were not popular with the businesses in their area, and the local enterprise partnerships will do a much better job. I suggest to the hon. Lady that instead of complaining about it, she works with her local authorities to get a good local enterprise partnership in her area to start backing business, jobs and economic revival.

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): On a day when employment is at the top of people’s minds, could I ask the Prime Minister to join me in congratulating the Saga Group on its wise decision to move into Hastings, which has very high public sector employment, with up to 800 new jobs for the town?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating Saga and the very good work that it does. I am sure that in choosing Hastings it has made an excellent decision. There is good news in today’s unemployment figures, and we should celebrate that. There is a lot more to do to get this economic
recovery under way, but it would help if we did not have so many people determined to talk down the performance of the British economy.

Q13. [24333] Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Does not the devastation in Cornwall illustrate the false economy of the Prime Minister’s recent decision to slash investment in flood defences?

The Prime Minister: That is simply not the case. The fact is that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be spending over £2.1 billion on flood and coastal erosion risk management over the next four years; that is roughly the same as what was spent over the past four years. We made some difficult choices in the spending round, but we protected flood defences because that is important. But all the while we had to bear in mind the absolutely wretched and rotten inheritance we had from the lot over there.

Mr Speaker: We now have an Urgent Question. I call Mr Peter Bone. [Interruption.] Before the hon. Member for Wellingborough gives the House the benefit of his thoughts, can I appeal to right hon. and hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber to do so quickly and quietly? Mr Bone wishes to be heard, I wish to hear him, and I hope that the House wishes to hear him.
Finance Ministers’ Meeting (Ireland)

12.34 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): (Urgent Question): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement on the Government’s position re the proposed financial rescue package for Ireland.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Mark Hoban): I am grateful for this opportunity to make a statement to the House about Ireland.

The House will understand that the Chancellor is currently in Brussels at the meeting of the Council of EU Finance Ministers. I understand that hon. Members are concerned about the events that have unfolded.

Ireland has been facing difficult economic and banking challenges for some time, and as a member of the euro area its ability to use policy to respond to economic shocks is less flexible than our own. As a result, there are ongoing market concerns about Ireland’s economic and financial resilience.

Let us be clear: there has been no formal request for assistance from Ireland, or for that matter from any other member state. I hope the House will understand that it would be inappropriate for me to engage in any speculation on what might happen in Ireland, given that it has made no request for assistance. It is not for me to say whether Ireland should request assistance, just as I would not tell it how to run any part of its economy. Its financial institutions have obviously got themselves into difficulty, and we very much hope it will be able to resolve those pressures.

Ireland is one of our biggest export markets. We have very close economic ties with it and, as the Chancellor said this morning, it is in Britain’s national interest that the Irish economy is successful, so we stand ready to support Ireland in the steps that it needs to take to bring about stability. I am sure that our fellow EU member states will share that sentiment, and I assure the House that we will keep it informed of developments.

Mr Bone: I thank the Minister for his response. At a time when the United Kingdom is already contributing extra funds to the European Union—over the next five years our net contribution will be £41 billion, an increase of more than £21 billion compared with the past five years—and when we are making drastic cuts in the UK’s economy, does he think it is acceptable that any further funds should be committed to the EU?

The coalition Government have made it clear that we will not join the euro during this Parliament, and I believe that they need to be held to account for that decision.

Mr Hoban: May I first reassure my hon. Friend that it is not the Government’s intention to join the euro during this Parliament? I am not entirely sure what the Opposition’s view is, but we have ruled that out.

My hon. Friend mentions the two mechanisms that are available for stabilisation. The stabilisation facility is purely for eurozone member states, outside the auspices of the current treaties and a bilateral, Government-to-Government arrangement. The mechanism that he refers to is available to all members of the European Union. The previous Government and the previous Chancellor decided to join it in the days prior to the formation of the current Government, and I believe that they need to be held to account for that decision.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Clearly, these are difficult times for the world economy, and Ireland is the current focal point of market concerns. Although the Minister offered little in the way of detail today, is it not clear that, stepping back, the overall long-term lesson to learn from these developments is that economic growth matters?

Ireland is a vital trading partner, to which 7% of our exports are sold, and the current situation matters because its economic strength has a significant effect on our own growth prospects. Will the Minister accept that the emerging global recovery is fragile, and that to rely as heavily as the Government do on export-led growth in the years ahead is a risky gamble?

Will the Minister confirm that this issue extends beyond trade, and that UK banks have lent about £83 billion directly to Irish households and companies? We saw at the G20 last week that the Government need to show stronger leadership on economic growth here and abroad, so can he reassure the House that any forthcoming package from the EU will address fundamental and underlying economic issues rather than act as a sticking plaster, merely tackling symptoms that may recur again and again in future?

The previous Government were clear that the problems facing countries adopting the euro would need to be solved first and foremost by member states within the euro area. Will the Minister confirm that the principal fund designed for any loan to support the Irish or other eurozone countries would be the European financial stability facility, which is envisaged at about €750 billion? Are reports in today’s Financial Times correct that the UK is spending time and effort spinning any future action as “bilateral support” rather than co-ordinating with the EU? Would it not be better if the Government were straight with the public about what they plan?

Does the Minister accept that, although we were right to stay out of the euro, it is essential that the euro is stable and successful for the long term? Will the Minister say categorically that the Treasury’s position will be driven by the best interests of British growth and jobs and not designed to pander to the Euro-sceptic political instincts of those in his party who might circle the eurozone in its time of difficulty?
In 2006, the Chancellor wrote in *The Times* that Ireland’s economy provided a “shining example” to us all. Is it not clear now that, rather than being an example, it provides a warning of the dangers of a one-track economic strategy, built around austerity alone, that endangers growth and puts jobs at risk? Both abroad and at home, what matters is a strong strategy to rebuild jobs and growth.

**Mr Hoban:** The Chancellor made it clear this morning that we will do what we need to do in accordance with Britain’s national interest. Ireland is our closest neighbour, and it is in our interests to ensure that the Irish economy is successful and that it has a stable banking system. He said that we stand ready “to support Ireland in the steps it needs to take” to bring about that stability. The reality is that Ireland has got some things right. It has a flexible labour market and low taxes. None the less, it made the same mistake as the previous Government—it failed to regulate its banks properly. The problem in Ireland is driven not by high public spending but by a banking crisis. If we listened to the Opposition, the UK would be the only country that was weakening rather than strengthening its fiscal position.

It is clear that the actions we have taken have been welcomed by a range of bodies at home and abroad. What is happening at the moment demonstrates that concerns about sovereign debt issues have not disappeared. We should be grateful that, thanks to the actions of this Government, Britain has moved out of the fiscal danger zone.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There is much interest and little time, so in questions and answers alike I require brevity.

**Mr William Cash** (Stone) (Con): The €440 billion eurozone facility can be used without infringing either UK liability or sovereignty. The Darling guarantee mechanism with qualified majority voting involves, unnecessarily, both UK liability and sovereignty. Where it is in our national interest and we can afford it, why not provide a UK-Irish but non-EU loan?

**Mr Hoban:** I hear my hon. Friend’s words, but reiterate to him and to the rest of the House that no request has been made for assistance, and that it would be inappropriate to make any further comments.

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): I have a large number of Irish constituents, and I am naturally concerned about their families and livelihoods back in Ireland. The fact is that the Irish crisis is part of a wider crisis in the eurozone, affecting a number of countries that will be unable to sustain long-term membership of the euro. Is it not time to have discussions—privately, perhaps—about the possibility of reconstructing national currencies, particularly the punt, so that the Irish can join the sterling zone, where they belong, and not the eurozone?

**Mr Hoban:** I am sure that the Irish Government will have heard the hon. Gentleman’s remarks. It is not for this Government to dictate policy to other EU member states.

**Mr John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): As the Irish Government need a workout and not a bail-out to deal with their risks and credit problems, should not the British Government support them and resist the foolish intervention by Germany, which is trying to use this as part of a power grab for the EU?

**Mr Hoban:** Let me repeat the remarks that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made earlier today. To an extent, they reflect the concerns raised by my right hon. Friend. He said: “Britain stands ready to support Ireland in the steps it needs to take.”

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): Given that Chancellor Merkel’s comments have caused such turbulence in the bond market in the past week, I welcome the measured and respectful terms in which the Financial Secretary and the Government have addressed the crisis in Ireland. Does the Financial Secretary accept the judgment of EU Commissioner Olli Rehn? He said: “In the case of Ireland in particular, we need to recall that sovereign debt has not been at the origin of the crisis. Rather, private debt has become public debt. The financial sector has misallocated resources in the economy and then stopped working. It needs reform.”

The problem does not apply only in Ireland. I remind the Financial Secretary that, if the national pension reserve fund is counted, Ireland’s debt to GDP ratio is not that far wide of the UK’s currently.

**Mr Hoban:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The crisis is around the banking system in Ireland—it is not a fiscal crisis. Of course, we almost had to learn the lessons of failure to regulate the banking system. The Government therefore introduced radical reforms to strengthen the stability of the banking sector in the UK.

**Duncan Hames** (Chippenham) (LD): Does the Financial Secretary accept that it would be a disservice to families and businesses in Ireland to exaggerate their economic woes, just as it would be in this country?

**Mr Hoban:** We are in difficult times and it is best to focus on what can be done to help the Irish economy rather than engage in a debate about statistics on Ireland’s current economic performance.

**Mr Denis MacShane** (Rotherham) (Lab): May I welcome the statement of the Financial Secretary and the Chancellor, and their offer of £6 billion of UK taxpayers’ money to help stabilise the eurozone? We must all welcome the contribution to consolidating the eurozone as a sound economic area. However, what has happened to moral hazard? Most of the money will go to the banks. When will they pay anything—any price—for the crisis they caused?

**Mr Hoban:** I want just to reiterate—to correct the right hon. Gentleman—that no formal request has been received from the Irish for assistance.

**Michael Fallon** (Sevenoaks) (Con): Irrespective of our obligations under the new European mechanism, which the Labour Chancellor agreed, will my hon. Friend...
confirm that there is a strong British national interest in securing a stable banking system on both sides of the Irish sea?

Mr Hoban: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have strong economic ties with Ireland, which is one of our biggest trading partners. Our economies are closely interlinked, and it is therefore in our national interest to ensure that the Irish economy and banking system are stable.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): What is Her Majesty’s Government’s strategic view of the crisis? Should we bail out the Government or their banks?

Mr Hoban: I reiterate that no request for assistance has been received from the Irish Government.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will my hon. Friend confirm the extent of Britain’s liability under the non-eurozone mechanism? Has he considered the possibility of renegotiating the package that the previous Government left us?

Mr Hoban: My hon. Friend should be aware that under the mechanism there will be no liabilities if no request for assistance has been made.

Michael Connarty (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (Lab): Does not the Financial Secretary think it worrying that, when the Irish Government consistently say that they do not require a bail-out, the speculators in the bond market—the hyenas who used to attack our currency—try to bring down the Irish Government’s financial position? Is it not right to support Ireland and the euro, of which it is part?

Mr Hoban: As I said before, it is important that Britain stands ready to support the Irish Government to resolve those problems.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): Will the Financial Secretary tell the House about the strong interest being shown across the world in the Government’s positive approach to tackling fiscal consolidation? Does not that further confirm that this country is now on the right path to tackling the economic crisis?

Mr Hoban: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The crisis reminds us of the continuing focus on sovereign debt. The Government have taken clear measures to tackle our fiscal problems, and international bodies have recognised that. It is one of the reasons for Standard & Poor’s reporting our credit rating as stable compared with its negative outlook under the previous Government. We are taking the right steps to secure our fiscal position, bearing in mind that the crisis in Ireland is around banking, not the fiscal position.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): It is in no one’s interests for the Irish Republic’s economy to go down even further, but taxpayers in the United Kingdom are worried that the Irish Republic could be next, followed by Portugal, Spain and Italy, and that the full and true extent of what we might have to pay is not known.

Mr Hoban: I do not want to engage in speculation about the eurozone; I do not think that that is very helpful. The hon. Gentleman, like the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) and his colleagues, will know from experience in Northern Ireland that we have very strong interests in the stability of the Irish economy, and it is important that we stand ready to help the Irish Government in stabilising it.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the problem in Ireland is not so much the fiscal measures that it is taking, or global growth, but the fact that it is in the euro, and that as long as Ireland is in the euro it is hard to see how it can work its way through these problems? Would the Minister like to pay tribute to all those on this side of the House who fought to keep this country out of the euro?

Mr Hoban: Indeed, and my hon. Friend makes an important point. We have access to a wider range of economic tools to resolve our problems as a consequence of our being outside the euro. It is also worth bearing it in mind that this crisis flows from the banking sector, not from public spending in Ireland.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): It is right to support our near neighbours in Ireland and their economy. The problem over the past 18 months has been twofold: severe austerity measures and the collapse of the construction industry. Will the Government ensure that we do not follow that path? Will the Minister use the flexibility the Government have outside the euro to ensure that we slow the cuts and do not have the mass unemployment and depopulation that we have seen in Ireland?

Mr Hoban: I thought that the hon. Gentleman almost had it. The crisis in Ireland is around the banking sector, not the fiscal position. I believe that we are taking the right measures to stabilise the UK economy—the cuts we are making in public spending—to get our deficit under control and to keep interest rates as low as possible for as long as possible. Labour Members are the only ones calling for a weaker fiscal position when the world is moving to stronger fiscal stances.

Mr Douglas Carswell (Clacton) (Con): If we are to spend taxpayer money dealing with this crisis, rather than bailing out the euro should we not be helping Ireland to bale out of the euro or, at the very least, to retain her economic independence against the Van Rompuy system of pan-European economic governance?

Mr Hoban: I hear what my hon. Friend says about the crisis. Let me be absolutely clear: no request for support has yet come from the Irish Government. It is important that we ensure that the Irish economy is stabilised—it is in our national interests to do so.

Naomi Long (Belfast East) (Alliance): I thank the Minister for the reassurance he has already provided in not ruling out intervention or assistance should it be required. Will he provide further reassurance that he will give special consideration to the situation in Northern Ireland, where many of the Irish banks to which he refers are operational and indeed on which many of our businesses rely?
Mr Hoban: Indeed, and the hon. Lady makes an important argument about why we need to stand by the Irish Government and provide assistance if they request it.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): Can the Minister provide my constituents and the markets with the reassurance that any British involvement will be conditional on the full involvement of the IMF?

Mr Hoban: As no request has been made, I cannot comment on that. Where support is given to economies, it is commonplace for the IMF to be involved.

Gregg McClymont (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (Lab): The Government spent six months telling us that Britain was very much like Ireland and had a similar sovereign debt crisis. Now we hear that we are in a very different position because we are not in the euro and we have other economic tools. Which is right?

Mr Hoban: We have taken action in the UK to tackle our fiscal position to avoid a sovereign debt crisis. [Interruption.] Opposition Members need to recognise that the problems facing Ireland stem from a banking crisis—the banking sector was poorly regulated. We are learning lessons from that in the UK, but it is very clear that because we are outside the euro we have the flexibility to engage in economic policy by setting interest rates that meet our economic needs, and we have the flexibility that our exchange rate brings in stimulating exports. We are in a much better position as a consequence of being outside the euro.

Matthew Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con): Would it not be a grave error if we took from this episode the lesson that we should weaken our resolve to deal with our debts and keep our house in order?

Mr Hoban: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is noteworthy that Opposition Members have made yet another call for us to put off making difficult decisions. We see in Ireland what will happen if we do not make difficult decisions now and sovereign debt ratings come under pressure.

Mr Ian Davidson (Glasgow South West) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister agree that we should thank goodness that Scotland is part of the United Kingdom? Scottish banks were bailed out by the UK as a whole rather than being left to float loose as those in Ireland have been? Does he agree that if, when they are making cuts, the Government can find billions of pounds to bail out Ireland, they could better use that money to ameliorate the effect of the cuts in the UK?

Mr Hoban: As I said, no formal request has been made for assistance. We have a clear national interest in the stability of the Irish economy, and that must be recognised.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): Does not the crisis in Ireland and across Europe underline how right the Government have been to take the tough but necessary action to save us from bankruptcy? Will the Minister condemn the siren voices in Europe that are talking down Ireland, and will he be a friend in need, as we, as a country, should be?

Mr Hoban: My hon. Friend makes a number of very valuable points. If we had not taken tough action when we came into government, when rating agencies had our credit rating as negative, we would not have managed to narrow the spreads on UK debt compared with German bunds and reduce the yields on British debt. All that is testament to the strength of the action we have taken to tackle Britain’s fiscal problems and the legacy we inherited from the Labour party.

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): Has the Treasury considered the implications for sterling if the Republic of Ireland were to leave the euro and seek to re-peg to the pound?

Mr Hoban: That is speculation, and I do not think it appropriate to engage in that at this stage.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): In the event of a request for assistance from European funds, does the Minister believe that Ireland should be allowed to set its own rate of corporation tax, with its low rate being a strength rather than a weakness?

Mr Hoban: As I said earlier, a number of aspects of Irish economic policy created growth, but I remind my hon. Friend, and Opposition Members, that the problems facing Ireland stem from a banking system that was not well regulated, which led to an asset price bubble. We have taken the right action in this country to tackle our deficit and to avoid having our credit rating put at risk.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The mechanism established to address bad banking debt in the Republic of Ireland, the National Asset Management Agency, known as NAMA, holds several billion pounds of properties in Northern Ireland and across the rest of the United Kingdom, particularly here in London. What representations are the Government making to protect our economy from NAMA deciding to float that property at the cheapest possible price to meet the needs of the banking sector in the Republic of Ireland, thereby damaging our economy?

Mr Hoban: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about NAMA. It is not for us to speculate on the policy that should be followed by NAMA or the Irish Government.

Andrea Leadsom (South Northampshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the banking crisis was caused, in large part, by poor regulation? Will he take into account comments made by the City of London corporation to the Treasury Committee yesterday that UK banks believe that the regulatory regime we are putting in place in the UK has elements that are not compatible with the European regulatory regime? Will he take those comments very seriously and try to make sure that Britain’s banking sector is properly regulated and not incompatible with the European regime?

Mr Hoban: I have not seen in detail the comments made by the City of London corporation yesterday in evidence to the Treasury Committee, but I am determined that the regulatory reforms that we introduce will lead to a more stable and sustainable financial services sector—and a more stable and sustainable economy.
Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the test of any currency is in the tough times, not just the good ones? That was explained to all the countries that joined the euro, many of which, in my view, did so with their eyes wide shut. Is it not abhorrent that this liability, and the failure of the euro, should become a liability to the UK taxpayer at this time?

Mr Hoban: I do think that we have an interest in having a strong, stable eurozone and eurozone economy. Member states will reflect on the measures that need to be taken to strengthen the eurozone; that is part of the thinking behind some of the measures in the economic governance paper proposed by Herman Von Rompuy just a few months ago.

Points of Order

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am sure that you are aware that on 19 March 1997, the House passed a resolution that included various provisions, one of which is that it is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, and another that Ministers should be as open as possible with Parliament and refuse to provide information only when disclosure is not in the public interest.

Yesterday evening for some hours, we debated whether the next general election should be held in 2015 or 2014. Of material relevance to that debate were the Government’s intentions in relation to the combining of polls in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland with the general election in 2015. The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), sat in the Chamber throughout the debate but said nothing until the very last moment at 9.30 pm, when he revealed that he intended to write to the devolved Administrations—I understand that that has already happened—to ask whether they would like a new power.

That materially affected every single aspect of yesterday afternoon’s debate. I believe not only that it was a gross discourtesy to the House for the Minister to have operated in that fashion, but that it offends directly the resolution of the House of 19 March 1997. He said that he will write to the devolved Administrations, and therefore relied on that for part of his argument. Will you, Mr Speaker, ensure that he makes all such letters available in the Library of the House? I realise that it is not within your power to tell him that we cannot have Report stage of the Bill until such time as amendments on elections can be tabled in the elected House—before they can be made in House of Lords—but can you look into whether there has been a breach of that resolution?

Mr Speaker: What I would say to the hon. Gentleman is that ordinarily—as he would expect—the precise contents of the resolution of 19 March 1997 are firmly imprinted on my mind almost as firmly as they are on his. Nevertheless, I am happy to refresh my memory on that matter.

On the face of it, however, I have a slight suspicion that the hon. Gentleman, who is a very assiduous parliamentarian, is continuing the debate. I am not saying that there is not something upon which I need rule, but that I am not clear whether there is. Ministers can speak when they wish in relation to those matters, including when winding up debates. I sense that the hon. Gentleman is extremely dissatisfied with ministerial silence when he expected a ministerial response. That may be a matter of a point of frustration, and there might even now and again be discourtesy, but it is not apparent to me as yet that there has been a breach of order.

I know how persistent a terrier the hon. Gentleman is, and I will look into the matter and revert to him, but I do not think that he needs to make another long point of order just yet.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.
Mr Speaker: On this matter, the Deputy Leader of the House might be able to provide enlightenment.

Mr Heath: The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) would be the first to make a point of order had my hon. Friend the Minister released in writing something that should properly have been put before the House—as it was—by him in a debate on the relevant subject. I can think of no better illustration of the proper way for Ministers to behave in relation to the House.

Mr Speaker: I hope that colleagues will understand if I say that at this point, pending any further study, I feel confirmed in my suspicion by that exchange that we are having a continuation of the debate. That may be stimulating, but it is not really within the realms of points of order. Someone who I am sure knows about the realms of points of order on the strength of his 26 years’ service in the House is the hon. Member for Stone (Mr Cash).

Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am extremely grateful to you for reminding me of that.

What happened last night was somewhat affected by the fact that the Minister’s statement came at the end of the debate. Would it not have been far more convenient and courteous to the House if he had made that announcement at the beginning of the debate? The announcement affected proceedings and the status of amendments that were not debated.

Mr Speaker: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that that may or may not be so, but unfortunately, it is not a matter of order. If he or other hon. Members are seeking to increase the powers of the Chair, they must find ways to do so—if he is asking whether I would strenuously resist, the answer is almost certainly no—but within the powers that I have, I cannot do anything about the matter other than to allow him, within limits, to expatiate, which is what he just did.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Today we heard the Prime Minister pledge that the Government would stand ready to help the flood victims in Cornwall. That pledge is similar to one that he made to my constituents when we had a terrible gas explosion two weeks ago—200 households were evacuated, and a dozen people were injured, including one very seriously.

When I tried to follow up on the Prime Minister’s pledge to my constituents, his officials said that no help was forthcoming. Is it in order for the Prime Minister to stand at the Dispatch Box in Prime Minister’s questions pledging the Government’s support to victims of explosions or floods when his officials have no intention whatever of offering any support?

Mr Speaker: Of course, action should always follow words, but if we were to establish that as a total precedent in the House, it would probably create some difficulty. The hon. Lady has put her thoughts very clearly on the record. It was not really a point of order, but she is a pretty ingenious Member, and I have a feeling that she will find other ways, in debate and questioning, to air her views on that subject. I look forward to her doing just that.

Onshore Wind Turbines (Proximity of Habitation)

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

1.6 pm

Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con): I beg to move, That leave be given to bring in a Bill to give powers to local planning authorities to specify the minimum distances permissible between onshore wind turbines of certain dimensions and the nearest habitation; and for connected purposes.

I am proud to be a Back-Bench Member of a Government who truly believe in localism and removing the top-down, centre-knows-best approach to government that grew out of hand in the past 13 years. Nowhere was that malignant approach more visible to the people who elect us than in how the previous Government forced their views on local areas and imposed massive changes on localities, such as large, controversial housing developments, or even more controversial wind farms.

My Bill simply gives local people and communities in areas where there are such wind farm proposals a real say on whether they take such developments. Numerous communities up and down the UK will be happy to take on such development, and I strongly believe that this Government’s approach of much more carrot, compared with the previous Government’s stick, will ensure that more proposals are passed.

I strongly contend that such developments should be allowed only when the local residents in the affected community have actually had a say—not just when they have been consulted—on the development that will change the nature of the place where they live. I also strongly contend that the best way to save so many communities up and down the country an enormous amount of strife, and at the same time save developers a reasonable amount of money, is to allow each local planning authority to set such minimum distances. Thus everyone will know exactly the state of play in each area.

That will hopefully eliminate the huge number of speculative proposals in areas where, under normal circumstances, it would be difficult to get planning permission even for a double garage. Many Members will know of the angst that is caused by proposals for massive turbines that are completely out of keeping with the local environment.

In my constituency, the usual height of a turbine applied for is 126.5 metres. Let me put that into perspective. The tower that supports Big Ben is 96.3 metres or 316 feet to the top of the spire. The London Eye is 135 metres tall. Those two structures dominate the local cityscape. Imagine what a number of structures twice the size of Nelson’s column situated close together do to the landscape in the rolling countryside of Northamptonshire or similar, but not quite as beautiful, parts of the country. If hon. Members consider that alongside the problems associated with flicker and noise from turbines, they will understand why local planning authorities are best placed to judge whether areas within their boundaries are suitable for such large-scale developments. Wind turbines are the only thing that if there is a minimum distance between turbines and dwellings—a distance of 2 km, say—there would be very few areas in the United Kingdom where turbines could be sited.
That might be the case, but my Bill does not state what the minimum distance should be; it simply gives local planning authorities the opportunity to determine such distances—hopefully after consulting the people who live in an area—based on local knowledge and local conditions.

Many hon. Members feel the same way, including my hon. Friends the Members for Hexham (Guy Opperman), for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) and for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans), who have all followed me on this matter with great interest. In an Adjournment debate in October, the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry) reflected on the direction of current Government policy, saying:

“We have seen the benefits from offshore wind, but we recognise that communities often feel concerned that proposed wind farms in their areas will destroy the environment or have other negative impacts. We are convinced that, in the policy of localism that we are going to drive forward, local councils should be the driving force in deciding how they want their communities to develop. That is a fundamental part of the planning changes we are making.”—[Official Report, 13 October 2010; Vol. 516, c. 137WH.] I would like to think that the Government will see this ten-minute rule Bill as a helpful nudge in the right direction, and perhaps even try to encompass it in the forthcoming localism Bill, and in doing so put some public confidence back into the planning system.

1.11 pm

**Martin Horwood** (Cheltenham) (LD): I agree with the commitment to localism shown by the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), and I suspect that there is barely a wafer between us on issues such as regional spatial strategies. However, I rise to oppose the Bill on the grounds that it is unnecessary, unwise and very unlikely to encourage the shift that we need in this country towards renewable energy. Instead, it runs the risk of feeding the irrational objections of a minority who have decided that wind power is bad and who will use almost any excuse to oppose it.

If hon. Members are in any doubt that this group is a minority, market research is remarkably consistent, with 70 to 80% of the UK population expressing support for wind, partly because wind turbines are probably the most beautiful and graceful form of energy generation, and because they are certainly prettier than the average nuclear power station—something that I understand the hon. Gentleman supports. Interestingly, support for wind power increases with proximity to wind farms. One piece of research showed that among people living near existing wind farms, support rose as high as 94%.

That is entirely consistent with the experience in Denmark, which has the highest proportion of onshore wind and wind power in general, at nearly 93%, and the highest public support for wind power, at 93%. Indeed, that figure will probably increase as designs improve and wind turbines become quieter and possibly even more beautiful, as well as probably larger and more efficient.

The Bill is unnecessary because planning policy statement 22, which is already in force, says that local authorities already have the power to set minimum distances on a case-by-case basis. Paragraph 22 of the statement says quite clearly:

“Plans may include criteria that set out the minimum separation distances between different types of renewable energy projects and existing developments.”

Indeed, our hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), whom I am pleased to see in his place, confirmed the position in a reply to the hon. Member for Redditch (Karen Lumley), saying:

“Under current planning policy distances between wind turbines and dwellings are decided on a case by case basis so that local factors can be taken fully into account. Local planning authorities are already able to set out the criteria they apply in assessing applications for renewable energy development in their local plans provided this does not rule out or place constraints on development without sufficient reasoned justification.”—[Official Report, 1 November 2010; Vol. 517, c. 544W.]

That seems to strike exactly the right balance between localism and our commitment to renewable energy. The Government’s localism Bill will, I hope, increase and enhance the freedom of local authorities to look at such matters freely, on a case-by-case basis. Bills such as this run the risk of undermining that by once again trying to get Parliament to hand policies to local authorities that they are better able to decide for themselves.

That is unwise, because blanket bans based on proximity are likely to lead to bad policy. If a ban had been in place in my constituency last year, it would almost certainly have prevented our very first wind turbine, which has been placed in Springfield park. It is much smaller than the ones that the hon. Member for Daventry talked about, but it is much closer to human habitation. A blanket rule might have prevented that wind turbine, which will now generate 9,500 kWh of electricity a year, save 4 tonnes of CO₂ a year and shave £1,000 a year off the energy bill of the nearby neighbourhood project. If a borough-wide policy had been in place, it would have complicated the process. Presumably the hon. Gentleman might argue that the local community could have tried to overturn that policy, but if it could be overturned, what would be the point of having it in the first place?

There is also the unintended consequence that might result, which is that the more we restrict wind turbines near to human habitation, the more we encourage them in more rural and more sparsely populated areas. I can see the planning appeals now, in which somebody cites what would be known as the Wind Turbines (Proximity of Habitation) Act 2010 as evidence that a wind farm should go ahead in an area because it falls outside the set distances. The Bill might therefore have precisely the opposite effect from that intended by the hon. Gentleman.

I am sad to say that I suspect that the real purpose behind the Bill is probably to appeal to the anti-renewable lobby, which seems to be growing. I would have hoped that, in the new situation, both coalition parties had moved on from this kind of politics. We are intending to be the greenest Government ever, and the Bill would sit badly with that ambition. Luckily, as a ten-minute rule Bill, it has little chance of success, so I will not trouble the House with a Division. However, I remain opposed to the Bill.

**Question put (Standing Order No. 23)** and agreed to.
Ordered,
That Chris Heaton-Harris, Andrew Percy, Sarah Newton, Natascha Engel, Matthew Hancock, Nigel Adams, Karen Lumley, Alec Shelbrooke, Andrea Leadsom, Mark Pawsey, Mr Richard Bacon and Andrew Griffiths present the Bill.

Chris Heaton-Harris accordingly presented the Bill. Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 June 2011, and to be printed (Bill 108).

Opposition Day
[6TH ALLOTTED DAY]
NHS Reorganisation

1.17 pm
John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I beg to move,
That this House believes that the Government is pursuing a reform agenda in health that represents an ideological gamble with successful services and has failed to honour the pledges made in the Coalition Agreement to provide real-terms increases each year to health funding; further believes that the Government is failing to honour its pledge in the Coalition Agreement by forcing the NHS in England through a high-cost, high-risk internal reorganisation as set out in the health White Paper; is concerned that the combination of a real cut to funding for NHS healthcare and the £3 billion reorganisation planned by the Secretary of State for Health will put the NHS under great pressure and that services to patients will suffer; supports the aims of increasing clinician involvement and improving patient care, but is concerned that the Government’s plans will lead to a less consistent, reliable and responsive health service for patients which is also more inefficient, secretive and fragmented; and calls on the Secretary of State for Health to listen to the warnings from patients’ groups, health professionals and NHS experts and to rethink and put the White Paper reforms on hold, so that in this period of financial constraint the efforts of all in the NHS can be dedicated to improving patient care and making sound efficiency savings that are reused for frontline NHS services.

The motion is set in similar terms to the motion standing in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), the shadow Education Secretary, which we will debate a little later. That is because in both health and education we are seeing many of the same broken funding promises, much of the same free market ideology, many of the same problems of big changes forced through without considering or caring about the consequences, and many of the same risks that the poorest and most vulnerable will lose out and that comprehensive, consistent public services will be broken up. Beyond the spending cuts, we are starting to see the pattern of what public service reform means in Tory terms.

The Prime Minister told Britain before the election: “We are the only party committed to protecting NHS spending.” In his coalition agreement with the Deputy Prime Minister, he went further, saying: “We will guarantee that health spending increases in real terms in each year of…Parliament”.

The Government whom the Prime Minister leads are now breaking the promises that he made to the British people. The Secretary of State has been caught out double-counting £1 billion in the spending review as both money for the NHS and money to paper over the cracks in social care. Let me quote from a Library research paper, which confirms: “Including the (social care) funding is critical to the description of the settlement as a ‘real terms increase’; without it, funding for the NHS falls by £500 million—0.54% in real terms.”

There we have it—the facts in the figures. There is no real-terms rise in NHS funding, but a real-terms cut over this Parliament by this Government—[Interruption.]

The Secretary of State says, “Nonsense” from a sedentary position. If he wants to deny the figures in the Green Book, deny the report in the Library research paper,
and take issue with the Nuffield Trust, who all say the same, he should do so. He should by all means take credit for funding social care, but he should not double-count the credit by including it for both NHS funding and social care funding.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Andrew Lansley): I do indeed deny that. It is very simple. The total NHS budget will rise in real terms. Resource funding will rise by 1.3% in real terms over four years. Even if the money to be transferred to local authorities were taken out, that is an increase in resource funding for the NHS in real terms.

The right hon. Gentleman must consider that if a health service buys rehabilitation for patients returning home after being in hospital so that they do not need another emergency hospital admission, or puts telehealth in someone’s home so that their independence at home is maintained, that is health spending. It is the normal approach of the NHS to providing preventive services.

John Healey: There is a good case for more funding in social care, but the truth is, as Age UK says, that in this Parliament it will be cut by an average of 7% in real terms. Social care may help the health service, but if money is spent on social care, it is not spent on NHS services, and it cannot be double-counted as NHS funding. When that is taken into account and when the Secretary of State stops fiddling the figures, we see that the country and the NHS will get a real-terms cut, not a real-terms rise during this Parliament.

Mr Lansley: I have a simple question for the right hon. Gentleman. Is he in favour of the budget that we announced for the NHS, and does he wish to spend more or less?

John Healey: My right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor said in response to the Chancellor’s spending review:

“We support moves to ring-fence the”


People saw Labour’s big investment in the NHS bring big improvements—50,000 extra doctors, 98,000 more nurses, deaths from cancer and heart disease at an all-time recorded low, the number of patients waiting more than six months for operations in hospital down from more than 250,000 in 1997 to just 28 in February this year, and more than nine in 10 patients rating their experience of hospital care as good, very good or excellent.

John Healey: We still have a lot further to go. There have been big improvements in international comparisons, but we must go further. It beggars belief that the Government have decided not to press ahead with plans to give patients a guarantee of, for example, receiving test results within one week, especially as hon. Members

on both sides of the House recognise the importance of early diagnosis for cancer, and the cancer specialist, Mike Richards, said that this contribution to early diagnosis could save 10,000 lives a year.

Instead of building on those great gains, I fear that the NHS will again go backwards under this Tory-led Government. It is already showing signs of strain. The number of patients waiting more than 13 weeks for diagnostic tests has trebled since last year, 27,000 front-line staff jobs are being cut, and two thirds of maternity wards are so short-staffed that the Royal College of Midwives says that mothers and babies cannot be properly cared for.

This is not what people expected when they heard the Prime Minister say that he would protect NHS funding. In fairness, a proper, long-term perspective is needed on NHS financing. Year-on-year funding just below or even 0.1% above inflation is way short of the 4% average increase that the NHS has had over its 60 years. During the last Labour decade, it averaged 7% in real terms.

There are, and have been for many years, built-in pressures on the NHS: the cost of staff, drugs and equipment rises by about 1.5% above general inflation, and the demands of our growing and ageing population adds £1 billion to the bill each year just to deliver the same services.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): It is interesting that the right hon. Gentleman omitted from his list any mention of the escalating costs of administration in the NHS. Does he agree with us that what is really important is to reduce the cost of administration?

John Healey: The hon. Lady is right, and there is plenty of scope to do that. We recognised that, and we had plans to take out many of the managerial costs. I will come to that later, but it is hard to understand how creating three or even four times as many GP consortiums doing the same job as primary care trusts is likely to reduce rather than increase bureaucracy in the NHS. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh says that in Wigan there is one PCT, but it is set to have six GP consortiums. The same job will be done six times over in the same area. How is that a cut, or an improvement in the bureaucratic overheads and costs of the NHS?

In the spending review, the NHS is set for the biggest efficiency squeeze ever. On 12 October, the NHS chief executive, David Nicholson, told the Health Committee:

“It is huge. You don’t need me to tell you that it has never been done before in the NHS context and we don’t think, when you look at health systems across the world, that anyone has quite done it on this scale before.”

Money is tight, and something must happen, but that can be done by building on Labour’s big improvements in the NHS over the last decade. It will be tough, but I will back the Government, as long as all savings are reused for better front-line services to patients.

Mr Lansley: Before the right hon. Gentleman continues, may I remind him that the “it” that Sir David Nicholson was talking about was the achievement of between £15 billion and £20 billion of efficiency savings, which is a substantial improvement in productivity that is expected over the next four years? That is in complete contrast with a Labour Government who had declining productivity over the whole of the last decade. The efficiency savings
of £15 billion to £20 billion that Sir David was talking about were set out by the last Labour Government in late 2009. We are continuing with that, but we will make it happen, and Labour did not.

John Healey: I have read David Nicholson's transcripts, and he was indeed talking about £15 billion to £20 billion of efficiency savings, which were not achieved, as the Secretary of State said, but planned. That is a big test for the NHS, and it will be more difficult because of his plans for reorganisation, which I will come to.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): As I was at the evidence session, I can confirm that Sir David Nicholson was clearly talking about the challenging £15 billion to £20 billion savings, which I would have thought the whole House approved of and agreed should be achieved. But the right hon. Gentleman was right to say that Sir David was also talking about their achieved in the context of the proposed changes in the White Paper.

John Healey: Of course Sir David was talking about the two together, because the Select Committee was understandably probing both matters. In the quote that I gave, he was talking about the significant efficiency savings required of the health service at this time of an unprecedented financial squeeze. Many would say that that is the toughest financial test in the NHS's history.

Mr Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

John Healey: Of course I will give way to the Chairman of the Health Committee.

Mr Dorrell: The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that Sir David was talking about the £15 billion to £20 billion efficiency challenge, and as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, that programme has its roots in the time of the last Government. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that his party still supports the QIPP challenge—quality, improvement, productivity, prevention—that was first articulated when his right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) was Secretary of State?

John Healey: If the right hon. Gentleman reads the official record, he will see I have just said that I will back the plans to get the efficiency savings out of the NHS. They are needed and they have to happen, and I will back them as long as all the savings are reused for front-line services to patients.

Faced with the toughest test in its history, the least NHS patients and staff can expect is that the Government keep their funding promise. At this time of all times, the last thing the NHS needs is a big internal reorganisation. The Prime Minister ruled out such a reorganisation, which I will come to.

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The coalition agreement was clear and reassuring on this point. In it, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister pledged:

“We will stop the top-down reorganisations of the NHS that have got in the way of patient care”.

That was before the Secretary of State’s White Paper plans, which the head of the King’s Fund has called “the biggest organisational upheaval in the health service, probably since its inception”.

Promise made in May, broken in July. Promise made by the Prime Minister, broken by the Secretary of State. There is a story doing the rounds in the media of a journalist being briefed by No. 10, early on the morning of the publication of the White Paper, and told “there’s nothing much new in it.”

When did the Secretary of State tell the Prime Minister that he was breaking his promise? When did he tell the Prime Minister that he was not only breaking the Government’s promise but forcing the NHS through the biggest reorganisation in its history, with a £3 billion bill attached, at a time when all efforts should be dedicated to achieving sound efficiencies and improving care for patients? This is high cost and high risk; it is untested and unnecessary.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The Public Accounts Committee has identified that improving integration and co-ordination of services for the 580,000 people who suffer from rheumatoid arthritis would deliver efficiency savings on the annual £560 million bill faced by the NHS each year for this care. The National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society believes, however, that the new commissioning responsibilities outlined in the White Paper “risk increasing fragmentation in services” and reducing savings overall. Does my right hon. Friend agree?

John Healey: In a way it does not matter whether I agree; it matters much more that the National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society and many other patients groups are deeply concerned about this. It is not just patients groups but professional bodies and NHS experts who are worried. Even the GPs are not convinced, and they are meant to be the winners in all this. They are meant to be the ones planning, buying and managing the rest of the NHS’s services. A King’s Fund survey carried out last month found that fewer than one in four GPs believe that the plans will improve patient care, and only one in five believe that the NHS will be able to maintain the focus on efficiency at the same time.

Nick de Bois (Enfield North) (Con): In my constituency, we have been holding one-to-one dialogues with GPs, particularly about the White Paper, and I can tell the right hon. Gentleman with total confidence that well over 65% of the GPs I have met—it is only 65% because I have not managed to meet all of them—have endorsed the removal of the PCTs, from which they felt remote and disjointed and from which they felt they were getting poor value for money.

John Healey: If two thirds of the GPs the hon. Gentleman met are in favour, one third are obviously not convinced, but they will be forced to do this anyway. That is part of the problem, and I will come to that in a moment.
It is no wonder that the head of the NHS Confederation, the body that is there for those who run the NHS, told the Health Select Committee last month that “there is a very, very significant risk associated with the project”. Even the Secretary of State’s right-wing supporters in the Civitas think-tank tell him that he is wrong. They have said:

“The NHS is facing the most difficult…time in its history. Now is not the time for ripping up internal structures yet again on scant evidence”.

Mr David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I have been listening to the right hon. Gentleman with great interest. I know his moderate views on many things, but he misrepresented what my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Nick de Bois) said about the numbers of GPs. Now that targets and top-down management—the centrepiece of the last Labour Government’s policies—are being discarded even by those on the right hon. Gentleman’s own Front Bench, does he not agree that giving significant freedoms to front-line professionals is a better way forward?

John Healey: Yes, of course; we had been doing that for some years before the election and we had plans to do it after the election, but the fact is that we did not win the election, and the Secretary of State is in power now. He is making the decisions and he is the one who is entrusted with the future of our NHS. He is the one who needs to answer to the House for his plans.

The problem with broken promises is worse than I have already suggested. The coalition agreement promised:

“The local PCT will act as a champion for patients and commission those residual services that are best undertaken at a wider level, rather than directly by GPs.”

The Secretary of State’s plans will do precisely the opposite. He is abolishing the PCTs, not building on the best of what they do.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): There is a great deal of talk about reducing bureaucracy and administration, but PCT staff work on issues such as NHS treatment for people with learning disabilities. Ministers have talked about that role continuing, but will those staff not be really worried about their futures now? They will be looking around, and if they see another job, they are not going to wait two years; they are going to jump now, and the PCTs will lose that expertise. It will drain away and the PCTs will be unable to carry out all those important residual functions.

John Healey: This is precisely why those who understand the health service, including those who run it, say that it is going to be so hard, at a time when the NHS has never faced such a tough financial challenge, to see through the biggest reorganisation in its history at breakneck speed.

Whether on funding, reorganisation or the role of the PCTs, the Secretary of State is doing precisely the opposite of what was set out in the coalition agreement. He is running a rogue Department with a freelance policy franchise, in isolation from his Government colleagues. He claimed on the “Today” programme yesterday that he had been saying all this for four years before the election. So when did he tell people, and when did he tell the Prime Minister, that GPs will be given £80 billion of taxpayers’ money—twice the budget of the Ministry of Defence—to spend? When did he tell people that, in place of 150 primary care trusts, there could be up to three times as many GP consortiums doing the same job? When did he tell people that GP consortiums will make decisions in secret and file accounts to the Government only at the end of the year?

When did the Secretary of State tell people, and the Prime Minister, that nurses, hospital consultants, midwives, physiotherapists and other NHS professionals will all be cut out of care commissioning decisions completely? And when did he tell the Prime Minister that hospitals will be allowed to go bust before being broken up, if a buyer can be found for them? When did he tell people that NHS patients will wait longer, while hospitals profit from no limit on their use of NHS beds and NHS staff for private patients? When did he tell people that lowest price will beat best care, because GPs will be forced to use any willing provider? When did he tell people that essential NHS services will be protected only by a competition regulator, similar to those for gas, water and electricity? And when did he say that he was creating a national health service that opens the door for big private health care companies to move in?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who is generous in giving way. It is never an ideal thing to quote yourself, but let me risk doing so:

“We have been clear about the need for improvement in the NHS: responsive to patient choice; where budgets are in the hands of GPs; where hospitals are set free; where professionals are released from targets and bureaucracy; where the independent sector has a right to supply to the NHS; where competition delivers efficiency; and where patients have the assurance that NHS standards of care are based on the founding principle of the NHS—free at the point of use and not based on the ability to pay.”

I said that in a letter to The Daily Telegraph on 10 March 2006—four years ago.

John Healey: The real question is why the right hon. Gentleman, if he had these plans, did not tell the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister when they were writing the coalition agreement what he wanted to do on funding, on reorganisation and on the role of primary care trusts. Why did he allow his Government to make these pledges to the British public in May and then break their promises two months later in the White Paper? Whatever the boss of Tribal health care says about the private health care companies, he described the White Paper as “the denationalisation of healthcare services”.

He went on to say that

“This white paper could result in the biggest transfer of employment out of the public sector since the significant reforms seen in the 1980s.”

This is not what people expected when they heard the Prime Minister tell the Conservative conference last month that the NHS would be protected.

Andrew George: It is incontrovertible that the White Paper contradicts the coalition agreement in respect of top-down reorganisation, but I think we would accept the right hon. Gentleman’s criticisms of top-down manipulation of local services a great deal more if he were prepared to accept that the previous Government
failed in their attempt to reorganise through independent treatment centres or alternative providers of medical services which were massively expensive and did not necessarily provide better services on the ground. Will the right hon. Gentleman at least acknowledge that the previous Government failed in that regard?

John Healey: The treatment centres, which the hon. Gentleman mentions, helped contribute to bringing waiting times down to 18 weeks and helped to say to the British public, “Whatever treatment you need in hospital, you will not have to wait more than 18 weeks for it.” That was a consistent universal promise that we were able to make to patients as a guarantee for the future. That has now been ripped up, and we can see the result as waiting times and waiting lists lengthen. As I said at the start of my speech, my fear is that during this period of Tory leadership, we will see the NHS going backwards.

As for the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George), I understand his problem. He is a Liberal Democrat and I have to say that this health policy bears very little of the Liberal Democrat imprint. The one part of the Liberal health manifesto that they managed to get into the coalition agreement was this: “We will ensure there is a stronger voice for patients locally through... elected individuals on the boards of their local primary care trust”.

Within two months, of course, that was not even worth the coalition agreement paper it was written on.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is something else that the Government are not telling us—namely, the huge cost of getting rid of primary care trusts and strategic health authorities in respect of redundancy and getting out of broken contracts? Does he, like me, speculate that many of the people affected will end up working for GP consortiums or private health care firms—a huge cost to the public purse that delivers not one iota of front-line care?

John Healey: Quite so. Estimates of the cost of the reorganisation are up to £3 billion, but we have not had any cost announcements from this Government, who will not tell us how much it is going to be spent on reorganisation rather than on patient care. At a time when finances are tight, this is precisely the wrong prescription for the NHS over the next few years.

It is no wonder that GPs have grave doubts—they trained as family doctors, not as accountants or procurement managers, and they are committed to treating patients, not doing deals over contracts. However, they will be forced to commission services, whether they like it or not; they will make rationing decisions, not just referral decisions for their patients; and they will have to take on the deficits or inbuilt funding shortfalls in their PCT areas. GPs spend an average of eight or nine minutes with each patient. If they plan, negotiate, manage and monitor commissioning contracts in future, they will have no time left to see patients. If they continue to be family doctors, commissioning will be done for them, not by them; it will be done in their name by many of the same PCT managers who presently do the job or by commercial companies that have already started hard-selling their services to GPs. The other day I picked up “The Essential Guide to GP Commissioning” helpfully published by United Health—one of the biggest US-based health care companies in the world.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that not all GPs will have to be involved with commissioning? Does he welcome the efforts the Royal College of General Practitioners to introduce real clinical leadership and tuition for those GPs interested in taking up commissioning, helping them to provide this service?

John Healey: It is a very good thing that the Royal College of General Practitioners is trying to bring the skills of many GPs up to speed because this is a big job for which GPs are not trained and not equipped, and which many do not want to do.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that we had GP fundholders during the previous Conservative Government, and the doctors managed the budgets all right and increased choice for patients?

John Healey: The GP fundholding experiment took place in a completely different context—within an NHS that still had an area-based plan and still had bodies accountable through the Secretary of State to Parliament. In the end, however, it did not work and we stopped it.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is some kind of ideological disagreement going on in his own mind, given that the last Labour Government did exactly the same thing to head teachers by bringing alternative providers into schools and giving them control over budgets and what services to deliver? Our proposals for GPs are exactly the same—aiming to put in charge the professionals who deliver services and have contact with the people who use them.

John Healey: I gave way to the hon. Gentleman, who I thought was in his place at the start of the debate. In that case, he will have heard me say that one reason for having an Opposition day debate on both health and education is that we see many of the same ideological fingerprints over the plans for education and for health. These are Tory ideological fingerprints, and I hope that this will become clearer as the debate progresses.

Let us make no mistake: if these changes go ahead, patients will rightly question whether GPs’ decisions are about the best treatment for them or about the best interest of the GP budget and consortium business. The public will find “commercial in confidence” stamped over many of the most important decisions taken about our NHS services. Members of Parliament wanting to hold Ministers to account in future when hospitals go bust or there are no contracted services for constituents or there is a serious failure in the system will be told, “It’s nothing to do with me”.

Dr John Pugh (Southport) (LD): Was the right hon. Gentleman perfectly happy about the situation under the last Government? When anyone complained in this Chamber about anything happening in their local health economy, they were told rather piously by a Minister that it was a matter for local decision making by a quango that was completely unelected and beyond their control. In what sense were the PCTs in any sense accountable?
John Healey: Part of the problem is that there is so little detail in the White Paper that we simply cannot see how the bodies taking big decisions about taxpayers’ money will be accountable to the public. I lost count of the number of times during the last Government when Health Ministers came to this House and to Westminster Hall and had meetings with Members in order to respond to and sort out the problems that their constituents were experiencing with NHS services.

What the Secretary of State says he wants from the White Paper plan is to put patients first, to improve health care outcomes, to cut bureaucracy and to improve efficiency. These are “motherhood and apple pie” aims. We can support his aims, but we cannot support the action he is taking or the breakneck speed with which he is forcing these changes on the NHS. He wants shadow GP consortiums to be in place by April, and he will remove primary care trusts entirely two years after that. What he is doing is rushed and reckless. Almost every respondent to the White Paper has warned of the risks and said, “Slow down.”

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend aware that yesterday the Health Committee was told by health service organisations that some London PCTs would close by March 2011? Is anything happening in that regard? We know that there was a suggestion that PCTs would close in 2012, but we heard for the first time yesterday that they might close in 2011.

John Healey: I am very concerned if those plans are being speeded up rather than slowed down, because that would be entirely contrary to the view that has been consistently expressed by patients groups, experts in the NHS and professional bodies in response to the consultation on the White Paper. “Too far, too fast,” says the King’s Fund. According to the NHS Confederation:

“It will be exceptionally difficult to deliver major structural change and make £20 billion of efficiency savings at the same time.”

The Alzheimer’s Society says:

“The pace of structural change has the potential to undermine the progress made in services for people with dementia and their families, unless handled carefully”.

Almost every other group representing patients says the same. Even the chief executive of the NHS has written to the Secretary of State saying:

“Implementing the White Paper will require us to strike the right balance between developing early momentum for change and allowing enough time to properly test the new arrangements. Getting this balance right will be critical to maintaining quality and safety”.

Mr Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I know that the right hon. Gentleman does not have a policy of his own, but the motion seems to be saying, “It’s all become too slow.” Until when exactly does he propose to put these changes off? Will they be made in the current Parliament, in the next Parliament, or 10 years down the line?

John Healey: The hon. Gentleman is new to the House, but he and his party are in government now. One of the frustrations for me and for other Labour Members is that his party is making the decisions, and is responsible for the future of the health service. Our plans would be different, but this is what the Government are planning.

The Secretary of State has received the responses that I have quoted. He has been advised to listen, to slow down, and not to risk the future of the NHS in his consultation. However, he is not listening. I hope that the Prime Minister is listening, for the sake of the NHS, its patients and staff, and for the sake of us all.

Here is a “thought for the day” for the Prime Minister. The Tories worked hard to be trusted by the public with the NHS before the election. The Government’s reckless big-bang reorganisation at a time of tough financial pressures in the NHS will wreck their reputation, but that is the Prime Minister’s problem. My problem is that he is set to wreck the great NHS gains made for patients over the last decade, and to wreck the founding principle of our NHS: that it should be available equally to all, free at the point of need, and properly funded through general taxation. We on the Labour side of the House will not allow him to do that.

I commend the motion to the House.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. Some 15 Members are seeking to participate in the debate. Mr Speaker has therefore decided that there will be a seven-minute time limit on speeches after the Secretary of State has spoken. I remind Members that they do not have to speak for as long as seven minutes; seven minutes is the maximum. If they bear that in mind and are considerate to other Members, it may be possible for everyone to contribute.

1.54 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Andrew Lansley): I will ask the House to reject the motion.

As I listened to the speech of the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) I was very disappointed, because it seemed to be all about primary care trusts rather than about patients, all about managers rather than about doctors and nurses, and all about processes rather than about outcomes. It was completely the opposite of what the White Paper sets out to do, which is to give patients control of health care and allow more shared decision making for patients.

The White Paper is all about focusing on improving health care outcomes, and about empowering the doctors and nurses who work in the health service and recognising the contribution that they make. I am really disappointed that the Opposition motion does not recognise fully, as it should, the role that should be played by patients and staff in the NHS. I advise the right hon. Gentleman, when he tables motions such as this, always to think more about the staff of the NHS and the patients whom they look after, and less about the managers and the processes.

I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman if he wishes, but let me tell him this. Fighting a campaign called “Save the primary care trusts” will cut no ice with the people of this country. Fighting a campaign to save our NHS is what we did in the last Parliament; we did it successfully, and now that we are in government, saving the NHS is exactly what we are going to do.
John Healey: If the Secretary of State—who, I concede, has a six-and-a-half-year head start on me in this job—really cared about NHS patients, really cared about NHS staff and really cared about NHS services, he would not be putting the NHS through the biggest reorganisation in its history, especially at this time. As I said earlier, it is patients groups and bodies representing NHS staff who are saying, “Slow down—think again.” I urge the Secretary of State to do that today, and to rethink.

Mr Lansley: The right hon. Gentleman has just taken to heart the old saying that the job of the Opposition is to oppose. That is all he is doing: he is simply opposing. Nothing in his motion states positively what should be done, whether that is supporting NHS staff or listening to patients and giving them the shared decision making opportunity that is so essential. While opposing the reforms that we in the coalition Government are introducing, he seems to have ignored the simple fact that those reforms, in truth, represent the coherent consistent working out, in practice, of policies that were initiated, but never properly implemented, by the Government of whom he was a member. They are not revolutionary, as he has called them.

Andrew George: As the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) said earlier, the seventh point in the coalition agreement begins with the words:

“We will ensure that there is a stronger voice for patients locally through directly elected individuals on the boards of their local primary care trust…The remainder of the PCT’s board will be appointed by the relevant local authority or authorities”.

Was the Secretary of State consulted before those words were included in the agreement? If he was, what changed his mind between the drawing up of the agreement and the White Paper?

Mr Lansley: The answer to the first question is yes. The answer to the second question is that we in the coalition Government collectively took the sensible view that form must follow function. If we arrived at a point at which people were being elected to primary care trusts which themselves no longer had a substantive role to play, because public health was rightly being transferred to local authorities—

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): Did you know that at the time?

Mr Lansley: We did know that at the time. /Interruption./ I will not engage in a conversation with the hon. Lady when she is intervening from a sedentary position. I am replying to my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George).

If we arrived at that point—a point at which GP-led commissioning consortia were rightly leading on the commissioning of health care services—we would then find ourselves suggesting the election of people to a body that did not exercise any substantive responsibilities.

We therefore made a collective decision not to implement the policy in that way. The principle that we were pursuing was the strengthening of local democratic legitimacy in relation to health care—and, for that matter, social care—and that is exactly what we are going to do. We are going to do it through the health and well-being boards, and through the local authorities that are directly responsible for the provision of health improvement plans in their areas, engaging directly with local GP consortiums in the strategic commissioning functions and increasingly integrating health and social care.

Let me return to the point that I was making to the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne. He ought to recognise, but does not seem to understand, that when I was announcing our intentions in 2006, the Government of whom he was a member were saying that these were the reforms that they wished to pursue. Tony Blair made a speech in June 2006 in which he said that NHS reform should be based on patient choice, independent sector providers, general practice-led commissioning and foundation trusts, yet the right hon. Gentleman’s motion today has left all that out. All those things that the Labour Government once supported, he, in opposition, now opposes.

The right hon. Gentleman’s motion is notable for what it has left out: it has left out the call for patient information and choice; it has left out any reference to the need for improving health outcomes; and it has left out a recognition, which the House should always reiterate, of the commitment of health and social care staff to the patients they care for. Particularly tellingly, it has also left out any indication of whether Labour supports or opposes our health service spending plans.

The right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) has left the Chamber, but before the spending review he said to us, “Don’t protect the NHS budget; cut the NHS budget and transfer it to social care.” We did not do that; we did not do what the Labour party suggested. Instead, we have both protected the NHS budget and supported social care.

Before the election, the Labour Administration said, “Cut NHS capital budgets by 50%,” but the real-terms reduction in NHS capital budgets will be just 17%. They said, “Protect the primary care trust budgets but cut central budgets; cut research and development in the NHS; cut education and training,” but we are not doing that. We are protecting the resource funding for the NHS, and it will increase in real terms.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Lansley: I will give way to the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) first, and then to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr Evennett).

Barbara Keeley: The Secretary of State talks about protecting social care, but he must be aware that at the same time cuts of 28% are being made to local council budgets, of which social services and social care account for the largest component. Even before the comprehensive spending review, six or seven councils were already saying their situation was moving from moderate to substantial, and for one council that has now risen from substantial to critical—and that is before the Government implement their cuts of 28%. There is no such protection in place, therefore. Instead, this radical NHS reorganisation is happening at the same time as those huge council budget cuts, and next year will be terrible. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) was right to protect social care, as well as in the other things that he did with the NHS.
Mr Lansley: The hon. Lady is simply completely wrong. Local government budgets are not being cut by the figure she cites. The formula grant from central Government is having to be cut because of the debt we inherited from Labour, although she, like the rest of her party, is in denial about that, but that does not mean a cut—

Barbara Keeley: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr Lansley: No; I am addressing the point that the hon. Lady made. That cut in formula grant does not mean a corresponding cut in council tax, so that revenue is available to local authorities. In addition, the NHS is going to support social care activity in the ways I have described, such as through telehealth, re-ablement and equipment adaptations. We are transferring the learning disability transfer grant and other adult social care grants collectively representing £2.7 billion a year from the NHS to local authority funding, without reductions in those grants. I am afraid the hon. Lady is just simply wrong, therefore.

Mr Evennett: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his determination to improve our national health service, and on the initiatives that he is proposing. However, does he agree that in enabling the NHS and social care services to work more closely together, it is vital to have integrated cost-effective services, and make sure that the patients get the best out of the system?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Burstow), and I are very impressed that the local NHS and local authorities are, sometimes for the first time, sitting down together and discussing how they can use their resources. Even this year we managed to save £70 million from the budget that we inherited from the Labour party. That money can be invested in re-ablement, and in bringing local authorities and the NHS together to improve the service to people who are going home.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr Lansley: I want to make a little progress first. The Opposition motion reveals that they have no clear and consistent vision for achieving that, based on three guiding principles.

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. He has argued the need for greater localism and for local health services to be more accountable to local people. However, pulmonary hypertension is one condition in which significant advances have been made in recent years. It affects a number of my constituents but it is a rare condition, and has to be managed not locally but on a country-wide—indeed, often a Wales and England and Scotland-wide—basis. How can the Secretary of State make sure that, with the pressure towards local services, proper account is also taken of conditions on which action can be delivered only on a national basis?

Mr Lansley: For England, the White Paper sets out very clearly that specialised commissioning, whether currently regional or national, will be undertaken through the NHS commissioning board, rather than by individual commissioning consortiums.

The point about the reform process is that if we change nothing, nothing will change. The Labour party is the party of no change: it is the party of stasis, inertia and inactivity. Labour says, “Do nothing, put the reforms on hold”—whatever that means. Our aim is a simple one. We cannot stand still. If we carry on as we are, resources will, as over the last decade, be consumed without delivering the improved outcomes for patients that are so essential. Delivering improved outcomes for patients is our objective, and the White Paper gives us a clear and consistent vision for achieving that, based on three guiding principles.

Frank Dobson (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Lansley: Of course. I will give way first to my hon. Friend.

Margot James: The Secretary of State was discussing the disappointing cancer survival rates. A National Cancer Intelligence Network survey was conducted earlier this week, and I was shocked to learn that it found that one in four cancers were diagnosed only when a patient was rushed to hospital experiencing symptoms. Does the Secretary of State think ring-fencing the public health budget and co-ordinating it better with local authorities will enable us to make a swifter impact in respect of the preventive aspects of cancer management, in order to reduce that figure?
Mr Lansley: Yes, I feel that it should. When the NHS last came under financial pressure in 2005-06, public health budgets were cut and public health staff were lost, but we are determined to address the worrying situation that my hon. Friend described. That is why we are committed to the implementation of a cancer signs and symptoms campaign. It will be launched in the new year, and its purpose is precisely to ensure that we tackle the lack of awareness of cancer symptoms, so that people will present to their GP earlier and we can bring them to diagnosis sooner.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Lansley: I said I would give way to the right hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson), if he still wishes to intervene.

Frank Dobson: The right hon. Gentleman said that he wanted to improve treatment. How does he think the treatment of sick children at Great Ormond Street hospital will be improved if it has to do without the £16 million that his Government are currently threatening to take away?

Mr Lansley: I explained to the right hon. Gentleman at health questions just a fortnight ago that we are in discussions with the specialist children’s hospitals. They are very clear that they are engaging constructively with the Department, with the intention that the payments through the tariff should accurately reflect the costs incurred in providing specialist services. That is the current situation, and no decision has yet been made.

I was talking about the principles of the White Paper.

John Healey: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr Lansley: In a moment; the right hon. Gentleman must allow me to make some progress.

I was talking about the principles of the White Paper. They are very clear. First, patients should be at the heart of the new national service, with a simple principle of “No decision about me without me” transforming the relationship between citizen and service.

Secondly, we will focus on outcomes, not processes. We will focus on outcomes that capture the entirety of patient care, and quality standards and indicators that genuinely reflect what a high-quality service should actually deliver. We will orientate the NHS towards focusing on what really matters to patients, not narrow processes. Thirdly, we will empower clinicians, freeing them from bureaucracy and centralised top-down controls, so that change is genuinely driven from the grass roots, rather than driven, top-down, from above.

The right hon. Gentleman’s speech did not appear to recognise that central principle at all when he talked about people in the NHS Confederation and the managers who run the NHS. Clinicians are already the people who actually do the commissioning: general practitioners make the referrals and write the prescriptions, and consultants in hospitals make referrals from one consultant to another. In effect, cost and commissioning in the NHS is already controlled by clinicians, but they are divorced from the processes of combining the management of patient care with the management of resources. Whether in this country or in others around the world, it is perfectly clear that that divide is what breaks health care systems. What makes health care systems more effective is bringing together the management of patient care with the management of commissioning and resources on behalf of patients.

John Healey: I wanted to intervene to discuss what my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson) said about Great Ormond Street hospital. I have the official record of what was said at health questions, to which the Secretary of State referred. He said that the proposal would have “the overall effect of reducing Great Ormond Street’s total income by less than 2%.”—[Official Report, 2 November 2010; Vol. 517, c. 754.]

How does he reconcile that with the trust’s figures, which say that the reduction will not be less than 2%, but will be more than 5.5%? Would he like, therefore, to correct the official record now? Will he also publish the figures so that this House and Members who represent these areas can make up their own minds about whether those big stealth cuts to the hospitals that treat many of our most critically ill kids are a good idea?

Mr Lansley: No, I will not do those things, because what I said was accurate. The specialist children’s hospitals and ourselves are engaged in a constructive process of discussion about the future of the tariff for those hospitals, and the top-up, should be. Until a proposal is made there is no purpose in informing the House. We will inform the House as soon as we are in a position to say what the tariff for next year looks like.

Mr Baron: I totally commend the Government for their focus on cancer reform and improving outcomes. I accept that this is in the melting pot at the moment, but does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that the one-year and five-year cancer survival rate figures are presented not as a league table but as a performance table, to ensure that all primary care trusts and GP consortiums are tasked with improving performance, irrespective of how they compare with others?

Mr Lansley: Yes, my hon. Friend makes a good point. What we are looking for is not a league table at all, as health care should not be regarded in that way; we are looking for proper benchmarking to take place. We are going to benchmark this country’s performance against that of the best health care systems around the world—the Labour party never did that—and we are going to ensure that there is a culture of continuous improvement in the NHS in respect of both the one-year and the five-year cancer survival rates, which my hon. Friend rightly mentioned.

The reforms that I was talking about are not a radical departure from the past. The principles of the White Paper should be what the NHS has always been about, but it has been distracted too often by the bureaucratic processes that the Labour party was always supporting. Let me make it clear that many of the things that we are doing were championed by former Labour Ministers. When John Reid was Health Secretary he championed patient choice, and we know why. His view was, rightly, that in the NHS, in a bureaucratic system, the articulate middle classes get access to the best health care, and it is only through institutionalising and embedding patient
choice—shared decision making for every patient—that we will ensure that the most disadvantaged in society get the right access to health care.

As for GP-led commissioning, the Labour party was supposed to have introduced practice-based commissioning.

Rosie Cooper rose—

Mr Lansley: I am not giving way, so the hon. Lady must sit down. [Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State is indicating that he is not giving way, and that is his choice.

Mr Lansley: Not only is it my choice, but it is a necessity. As you said earlier, Madam Deputy Speaker, 15 Members wish to speak in the debate, and they will be allowed only seven minutes. I shall therefore take less time than the shadow Secretary of State did.

The Labour Administration pursued practice-based commissioning. Labour Members now make up numbers about how many GP-led commissioning consortiums there will be, but under practice-based commissioning there are 909 practice-based commissioning consortiums—the Labour Government did not give them any power, but they established them and they all have costs associated with them; there are 152 primary care trusts. Bureaucracy and cost in the system is legion, and we have to take it out; we have to reduce the number of people.

Under the Labour Administration the number of managers and senior managers in the NHS doubled. Where was the corresponding improvement in outcomes? The number of nurses increased by only 27%. That shows the kind of distorted priorities that were at the heart of the previous Government. They said that all NHS trusts should be foundation trusts by December 2008, but they simply did not bring that about; we are now bringing that about. Yesterday, I was able to announce 32 more social enterprises in the NHS, where staff are now bringing that about. Yesterday, I was able to announce 32 more social enterprises in the NHS, where staff are taking responsibility and ownership of the service that they provide, representing 15,000 additional staff and more than £500 million of revenue. If the Labour party is now against all the reforms that used to be part of the White Paper, we shall engage clinical leadership in the commissioning process and scrutinise the services being tendered, and did not monitor the contracts or the quality of the contracts. PCTs have too often been responsible for simple cost and volume commissioning. What we are concerned with, because we shall engage clinical leadership in the commissioning of services through the NHS, is being engaged in commissioning for quality. Patients will be able to exercise choice based on real information that tells them about the quality of the services being provided, not the cost and volume—

Mr Barron rose—

Mr Lansley: I have already given way to the right hon. Gentleman, and I am now going to conclude rapidly.

Contrary to what the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne said, we have heard organisations from right across the NHS supporting the principles of the White Paper. The British Medical Association says that it “strongly supports greater clinical involvement in the design and management” of the health service.

The Royal College of Nursing said: “The principles on which the proposed reforms are based—placing patients at the heart of the NHS, focusing on clinical outcomes and empowering health professionals—are both welcome and supported by the RCN.”

The King’s Fund said that it “strongly supports the aims of the White Paper”.

The National Association of Primary Care described the White Paper as “a unique opportunity to raise the bar in the commissioning and delivery of care for patients.”

The chairman of the NHS Alliance said that it provides “a unique opportunity for frontline GPs...to make a real difference to the health of their patients.”

The Foundation Trust Network said: “the vision for the NHS articulated in the White Paper is the right one—putting patients and carers at the centre”.

The right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne made a number of specific points. He said that the reforms were an ideological gamble. Well, if they are, they are based on an ideology once shared by the Labour party. And if there is an ideology, it is the belief that patients and clinicians in the health service know best. That is not a gamble at all; it is a certainty.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about reorganisation, but he did not say that the number of managers in primary care trusts rose all the way through to last year in the face of the impending crisis in finances over which the Labour Government presided. He did not tell
us that last year primary care trusts spent £261 million on consultancy—an 80% increase in such expenditure in two years.

The right hon. Gentleman gave us the benefit of some of his figures—some of his dodgy numbers—so let me give him a real number. Our decisions to cut the cost of management and administration in the NHS will release £1.9 billion of savings a year by 2014-15. That money will be reinvested directly to support front-line care, so there will be not only a real increase in the resources available to the NHS, but a real change and increase in the resources that get to the front line, because we are cutting the costs of administration and back offices.

Let me make this clear—

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Lansley:** No.

Against all the advice from the Opposition, we protected the NHS budget in the spending review. It was a brave decision for a Government to take in such circumstances, but it underlined our commitment as a coalition to the NHS. It was a decision that went contrary to the advice and recommendations of the Opposition. For the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne to try to attack the Government over “cuts”—he used that word—in the present circumstances is pure opportunism.

The right hon. Gentleman will not say whether he backs our NHS budget. He talked about what the shadow Chancellor is supposed to have said, but it was the shadow Chancellor who specifically said that he did not support our proposals to increase the NHS budget. Does the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne support our cancer drugs fund or not? He did not say. Does he back our integration of health and social care and the resources that we will use through the NHS to support social care and local authorities? He has not said.

The right hon. Gentleman has not said whether the Opposition oppose or support our commitment to the NHS. How could he? The Leader of the Opposition said before the spending review that he would publish his alternative proposals, but he never did so. The Opposition were promised it, but it did not happen. Without a plan for the economy and for public services, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne can say nothing about the NHS.

Our commitment to the NHS is clear. We have made tough choices on public spending so that we can protect the NHS and ensure that the sick do not pay for Labour’s debt crisis—

**Frank Dobson:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Lansley:** I gave way to the right hon. Gentleman before.

The big gamble is not pressing ahead with reform; the gamble now would be to carry on as the last Government did, failing to implement the reforms that are necessary and desirable—and supported—across the service. The spending review and the White Paper give the health service a clear, practical, evidence-based framework for sustained improvement in the future. We will not go back to the days of top-down Whitehall micromanagement and bureaucracy. We will free the NHS to improve outcomes for all patients and to meet our vision of ensuring that health outcomes for the people of this country are among the best in the world. I urge the House to reject the Labour party’s motion.

2.23 pm

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I want to focus on one specific part of the Government’s plans, which has already been mentioned by a couple of my hon. Friends and by the former Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson). It is the funding of our children’s hospitals.

I am fortunate enough to have at the heart of my constituency Sheffield children’s hospital, which is a centre of excellence for the region and for the country. It offers pioneering services in trauma and orthopaedics, it is a regional centre for the whole of the north of England for burns injuries and the principal treatment centre for South Yorkshire for childhood cancers, and its metabolic bone service is accessed from across the UK. It does a superb job treating some of our most critically ill children and I want to use one example to bring to light the importance of its work.

A young girl was left unconscious on the streets of Derbyshire with devastating brain injuries after being hit by a car. She was 13 years old. She was transferred to the hospital’s intensive care unit, where a scan revealed the full extent of her head injuries. She was seen to have diffuse axonal injury, one of the most devastating types of traumatic brain injury and, as the Secretary of State will know, a major cause of long-term unconsciousness. She was moved to the children’s hospital’s neurosciences unit, which has specialist equipment to support her rehabilitation and expert consultant neurosurgeons—these are crucial points. Her mother said:

“The doctors and nurses were wonderful and really did go above the call of duty to provide the very best care and treatment. The ward manager was like a second mum to her. The team cared for her like a member of their own family. She is now back at home, relearning simple things such as walking and talking. There is a long road ahead, but if it was not for the Children’s Hospital she wouldn’t be here.”

Such cases involve staff from many disciplines and services to ensure that the patient makes the best recovery possible. Neurosciences are one of the trust’s flagship services, treating children who have suffered brain injuries or who have other brain conditions, spinal cord conditions, diseases such as meningitis or conditions such as epilepsy. The intensive care unit is part of the hospital’s state-of-the-art critical care facility for children and is situated alongside high-dependency and neonatal surgical units, meaning that all the critical care services are in close proximity.

Such services come at a cost, however, and I have always understood that that is why we have had a top-up tariff to pay for the extra staff and the additional support needed to provide that specialist care to very young patients. We now understand that the Government plan—they might be in discussions, but we understand that this is the plan—to cut the tariff to less than a third of its current value.

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that that puts a whole new slant on the saying, “Women and children first”?
Paul Blomfield: I certainly would. To cut the tariff from 78% to 25% is the most outrageous proposal on health care to have come from this Government. When questioned on this issue—this is extraordinary—a spokeswoman from the Department of Health said, very casually, “less than 10 hospitals are likely to be affected significantly by these changes and the tariff is not their only source of income.”

We are talking about 10 of the leading hospitals that care for our children. Let us be clear: the Sheffield Children’s NHS Foundation Trust has estimated that the change could cut its budget by as much as £4.9 million. That is a reduction of almost 10% in its total funding. It has said that that “would have a serious impact on the hospital finances and ability to deliver some services.”

Gordon Birtwistle (Burnley) (LD): I am very pleased that the hon. Gentleman has an excellent hospital in his constituency. Will he advise me why the Labour party set in train the closure of Burnley’s children’s ward when it was in power, leaving an area of Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale and more than 250,000 people without a children’s ward, never mind a children’s hospital?

Paul Blomfield: I can certainly talk at length about the enormous investment that we made in our hospitals and health services and about the tremendous difference that that made to patients and to reducing the waiting lists that we inherited in 1997. However, I want to make the point about the impact on Sheffield children’s hospital. As the hospital said, the change will have a serious impact on its ability to deliver services that provide critical interventions for those whom we should be protecting most—our children. If the Government are prepared to attack these budgets in such a way, what will the commitment to guarantee health spending increases in real terms in each year of this Parliament be other than another broken promise?

2.29 pm

Mr Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood) (Con): In the brief time available, I do not want to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) in a detailed discussion of children’s hospitals, but I congratulate him on the first part of his speech, because he reminded us of what we are here to talk about—the delivery of high quality care to patients, often in circumstances of extreme distress to them and their families.

I welcome the fact that the debate is taking place, but it is important for us not to imply that there is a choice to be made by politicians in 2010 about whether the health service faces the need for fundamental reform. The truth is that the health service, by which I mean the national health service; and the need to deliver better health outcomes?

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): But does the right hon. Gentleman agree that instead of taking such a big gamble with the NHS at this stage, it would be better to pilot some of the initiatives and changes to see whether they actually deliver better health outcomes?

Mr Dorrell: I shall come to the White Paper later, but I want to focus on what I regard as the key, unavoidable reforms that have to be delivered during this Parliament. I do not think the hon. Lady will find them controversial. They are the continued development of improvements in the delivery of primary care; the priority need to address unnecessary admissions to hospital, which have been identified by the National Audit Office as running at 30% of non-emergency hospital admissions; the need to address the requirement the health service faces to use its most expensive resource, clinicians’ time, more effectively; the need to improve links between social care and health care, because if they do not work effectively there is no way we can deliver the aspirations we all share for high quality care delivered by the national health service; and the need to deliver better patient, user and local community involvement in the design and delivery of health care.

All those things are the challenges the health service faces over the lifetime of this Parliament. They are not a matter of political choice; they were articulated by Sir David Nicholson during the previous Government. They were endorsed by the previous Secretary of State and this afternoon they have been endorsed again by the shadow Secretary of State. It is simplest to summarise them by describing them in total as the need to deliver a 4% efficiency gain through the entire national health service system for four years running.

A few weeks ago, when Sir David Nicholson was before the Health Committee, which I have the privilege to chair, we asked him to set that challenge in context and he described it—as the shadow Secretary of State was right to say—as the most substantial challenge not just anywhere in the public service, but anywhere in the economy. The challenge has no precedent in any advanced health care system in the world. The challenge is huge: a 4% efficiency gain throughout the NHS, four years running. We are looking to deliver a wholly unprecedented efficiency gain. Against that background, what is the importance of the White Paper?

I ask the House to consider for a moment the counterfactual. Is it possible to deliver that kind of efficiency gain in the health service without effective empowered commissioning driving change? If effective empowered commissioners will not do it, who on earth will? Secondly, is it possible to imagine effective empowered commissioning that does not engage the clinical community in the process more effectively than we have yet done?

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Lab): If there is a requirement for more clinical involvement—for GPs to be more involved in commissioning—why do the Government not simply put GPs on the boards of primary care trusts? That would be a simpler, easier solution and would not cost as much. Is it not the case that the Government would rather open up commissioning to the private sector? Is that not the reality of their proposals?
Mr Dorrell: I cannot summarise the Government’s proposals in the White Paper in three minutes, but one of their key drivers is to deliver far greater clinical engagement in the commissioning process than was achieved in the lifetime of the previous Government, in my time as Secretary of State or at any time in the 20-year history of health service commissioning. We want to achieve a step change in the engagement of the clinical community in the commissioning process. As long as commissioning is something that is done to clinicians by managers, it will fail. It has to engage the clinical community on both sides of the argument. That, as I understand the Secretary of State’s White Paper, is one of his core objectives, and if it is, it has my full-hearted support.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): In advancing that idea, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the power to commission is being given to clinicians only in primary care, and that clinicians who work in a hospital setting are not being empowered or involved in the commissioning process at all?

Mr Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is a fellow member of the Select Committee and I know from our discussions that the principle of clinical engagement in commissioning is broadly supported in the Committee. It is fair to say that none of us would support the view—I suspect the Secretary of State would not either—that clinical engagement means only GP engagement. We should see the GP as the catalyst for broader clinical engagement in the commissioning process if we are to deliver our objectives.

To deliver the Nicholson challenge, we must have strong commissioning, with clinical engagement, and we have to remove unnecessary processes that do not add value. We cannot afford to waste money on them. We must have greater local accountability for the commissioning process in order to embrace public support for change on this unprecedented scale.

Dr Pugh: Glib?

Mr Dorrell: I have only 40 seconds left for my speech, so if my hon. Friend will forgive me I should like to conclude.

My key message is that as we look at the lifetime of this Parliament, I do not see the White Paper as the linchpin of reform, but as a key tool in the delivery of the reforms that are neatly encapsulated in what I have described as the Nicholson challenge.

2.38 pm

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab): I often comment that when I became an MP I did not get two items that would have made life so much easier—tarot cards and a crystal ball. In considering the coalition Government’s health policy, they would be essential tools for the job, because before the general election, the statements of the Leader of the Opposition—now the Prime Minister—gave us the impression of a future for the NHS that was completely different from the one we are now faced with. He said:

“We are the only party committed to protecting NHS spending…I’ll cut the deficit, not the NHS.”

He spoke about a period of organisational stability in the NHS. Those were broken promise No. 1 and broken promise No. 2. Instead, we are faced with a vision from the Secretary of State which could set us back 20 years. I say so not as political rhetoric, but from 30 years’ direct involvement in the NHS, including 10 years as chair of a hospital.

The press seems to share that pessimistic view—“extraordinary gamble,” “cocktail of instability,” “accident waiting to happen”—hardly a ringing endorsement of the Government’s health policy. For me, it is a recipe for disaster: one part reduced financial resources, two parts structural reform and three parts break-neck speed—

Lyn Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that the estimated cost of £2 billion to £3 billion for the reorganisation could be far better spent on outcomes for our citizens and treatments for our children?

Rosie Cooper: Absolutely. I am sure the Secretary of State will give due cognisance to the comments being made, especially about putting resources right there on the front line, delivering for the very people who are paying the wages.

In his evidence to the Select Committee on 20 July, the Health Secretary set out five aims of the White Paper, and he went through them here today. I shall review some of those in the light of the dribbles of information that we have received, and see how they stand up. The first aim was creating a patient-led NHS. Let us start with the Secretary of State’s glib catch-phrase, “No decision about me without me”—

Mr Lansley: Glib?

Rosie Cooper: Yes, glib. Where is the substance? Will it make any difference if the GP consortiums do not agree with the Secretary of State? Will those consortiums meet in private or in public? Will he listen to those patient voices? Will he be able to hear them?

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Does the hon. Lady agree that when it comes to prevention and early diagnosis of diseases, the GP and what happens at the clinic and the surgery is critical? Money can be saved in the long term. Perhaps that is what the Government should be doing—making sure that money is there on the front line, in the GP surgeries and in the clinics.

Rosie Cooper: Nobody could disagree with that.

The NHS will be one where the area and street where people live will determine whether they have access to certain drug treatment, because of the weakening of NICE and a shift back to value-based pricing, placing drug companies back in control, and a return to postcode prescribing—an NHS where people may or may not get certain operations. Already in my area, across Lancashire, primary care trusts are reviewing funding for 70 procedures, so if patients require an endoscopic procedure for their knee or back, or a hysterectomy, those may no longer be available.

How far people travel to their hospital depends on whether they have a hospital close by that offers the treatment that they need. On 26 October at the Select Committee, various witnesses gave evidence that hospital closures will be necessary to release moneys back into
the wider health service. How many patients would agree that such a state of affairs is part of a patient-led NHS? Not many, I bet.

Improving health care outcomes was the Secretary of State’s second aim. It seems highly unlikely, given that the ability to deliver improved outcomes is reliant on front-line services and the availability of the staff to deliver them. The Royal College of Nursing expects to lose 27,000 front-line jobs. That is the equivalent of losing nine Alder Hey children’s hospitals. The work of the RCN suggests that under the guise of 45% management cuts, the NHS will lose health care assistants, nurses and medical staff—front-line cuts by stealth.

All this must be set in the context of what was said to be the lowest financial settlement since the 1950s, reputed to be 0.1%—as we heard today, that is already disputed—together with massive pressure on NHS budgets from increased VAT costs—redundancy payments, budget short-falls and hospitals having tariffs frozen.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State does not need to shout across the Chamber. He has had his time.

Rosie Cooper: It would help if I could hear the right hon. Gentleman, but never mind.

The difficulties are topped up with increasing demand for services, an ageing population, an increase in the number of people with complex illnesses and the rising cost of treatment. That is all very worrying.

At the Select Committee the Secretary of State spoke about increasing autonomy and accountability in the NHS. I have raised that with him on a number of occasions and I tried to intervene today. It is a further example of the two health policies of the Administration, one mythological and the other the reality. Perpetuating the myth, the Secretary of State said at the Select Committee that

“the conclusion that we reached was that we could achieve democratic accountability more effectively by creating a stronger strategic relationship between the general practice-led consortia and the local authority.”

We might imagine that that meant patients and elected representatives at the heart of decision-making, and that the consortia would operate with councillors on the board, who would be able to vote, but no. Scrutiny will come from well-being boards, which means that patients and councillors will not be there offering their opinions and able to vote. Well-being boards, like the current NHS overview and scrutiny arrangements, may as well not exist because they will be nothing more than a focus group.

I said at the Select Committee that those arrangements were nothing short of throwing snowballs at a moving truck—they would make little or no difference. The Government are giving a budget of more than £80 billion to GPs who just want to practise medicine and not get involved in the experiment.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): May I mention the issue of GPs and safeguarding, the key role that GPs play in keeping children safe, and the fact that if they are spending time commissioning services, who will fulfil that vital function?

Rosie Cooper: We need to get more GPs to do that, and I think that is what the Secretary of State is trying to say.

The Government plan no testing or pilots, just a big bang, using consortia as a shield to deflect criticism from them, rather than as they currently use the Liberal Democrats.

The fourth aim was promoting public health. Everybody agrees that prevention is key to easing the cost burdens further down the health pathway, so if we were serious, we would be doing more about promoting public health. Simply allocating 4% of the NHS budget and giving it to cash-strapped local authorities does not seem the best and most effective way of promoting public health. We await more detail, although that might be as difficult to follow as the Department of Health’s £1 billion allocation to social care.

That brings me to the fifth aim of the White Paper. Following the publication yesterday of “A Vision for Adult Social Care” by the Department, the foreword gives us a sense of where we are heading with the Government’s policy. Under the third value, responsibility, it states:

“Social care is not solely the responsibility of the state. Communities and wider civil society must be set free to run innovative local schemes and build local networks of support.”

I wonder whether that is code for “We’ve got no real money to invest. Local authorities are not going to be able to meet the demand. Oh well, you’d better get on with it yourself.”

It is no use the document quoting Frederick Seebohm from 1968, as that might not reflect the world of today. As an ideal, it is great, but not every family and every individual can offer the help and support that are required. There are incredible strains on hard-working families and individuals trying to make ends meet while struggling to provide care for ill and elderly relatives—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

2.48 pm

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): I support the Opposition’s motion in one respect: their call on the Secretary of State

“to listen to the warnings from patients’ groups, health professionals and NHS experts”.

I want to address particularly the issues affecting those in integrated health care. I speak as the chair of the integrated health care group—the old complementary medicine group—and as someone who has the honour of serving under my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr Dorrell) on the Health Committee. I wish to look at the regulation of herbal medicine, the possibility of complementary medicine leading to cost reductions in the health service and the choice of services.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knows, we will have a problem next year with the implementation of the traditional herbal medicines directive, about which many colleagues have been approached by constituents. From April, practitioners will no longer be regulated under section 68 of the Health Act 2009, so my first plea to my right hon. Friend is to come up with a solution to this problem ahead of time—ahead of Christmas, I hope. Otherwise, from April, practitioners will be unable to prescribe the herbs they have been
prescribing under the section 68 derogation. The best course of action is the Health Professions Council, because that is the only body—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I should remind the hon. Gentleman that we are not discussing the directive, amendments to the directive or herbal medicine. We are discussing the reorganisation of the health service, to which he needs to direct his points to make them relevant to the motion.

David Tredinnick: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. What I am talking about is relevant to cost savings, choice and the use of existing practitioners. I hope that my right hon. Friend will deal with that issue; otherwise it will cause him major problems next year. I will now move on.

The other, related problem is that, under this arrangement, unless my right hon. Friend acts, we will lose many available products from the shelves, which will affect health service costs and what practitioners can do. Yesterday, I went to Brussels to discuss the issue as it affects health service, which we are discussing, and related cost savings. I spoke to Elena Antonescu, a Member of the European Parliament, who advised me that if the health service is to continue with traditional Chinese and Ayurvedic medicines, the Secretary of State will have to lobby Members of the European Parliament to go to the Commission to produce a report that they first proposed in 2008.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is pushing at the margin. We are not discussing European directives; we are talking about reorganisation of the health service in line with the White Paper. He must put his comments in that context.

David Tredinnick: I am most grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your help. I have made my point about Europe having to be involved.

I also want to comment on the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) and others about cancer care. Cancer patients can be much helped by integrated health care practitioners. I could cite many different hospitals, but I shall mention just one—Royal Surrey County hospital, which is a national health care award-winning hospital. It includes St Luke’s cancer centre, which offers a wide range of complementary therapies in support of the health service. I pay tribute to all NHS staff, clinical, non-clinical and administrative, who do their best and work very hard for patients. One of the most upsetting things I have heard since May is Government Front Benchers’ denigration of our NHS managers and administrators. That is very wrong.

My main starting point is to look at whether the coalition’s proposals will improve the health of my constituents in Hull. I do not think they will. I am absolutely appalled that the Government are to spend £3 billion on reorganisation when there is such a tight financial settlement for the NHS. Their focus should be on ensuring that patient care is maintained over the next few years, not on reorganisation.

Hull has a very good primary care trust. I pay tribute to the excellent and innovative work of Chris Long, the chief executive, and of Wendy Richardson, the jointly appointed director of public health with the local authority. As a spearhead PCT, Hull received additional money under the previous Government. It introduced projects such as the health trainers who have done so much in working with communities that have high levels of health inequality, for which different ways of working must be adopted. It has also done work on domestic violence and worked with its perpetrators.

The reason I am such a fan of Hull PCT is that, unfortunately, we have a Liberal Democrat-controlled council that does not seem to have any focus on its responsibilities for public health. The previous Labour council introduced free healthy school meals in all the city’s primary and special schools, rather than wait for an evaluation after three years of the pilot project, but the Lib Dems came in and scrapped it. The project was trying to do something about the high levels of obesity and poor performance in schools—to get to our youngsters early to ensure that they eat well. When that Lib Dem council is given the agenda for public health, I do not have much faith in it taking it seriously.

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Hon. Members will recall the introduction of the free swimming initiative in the previous Parliament, which got our young people active through swimming and engaged our councils. Of course, Lib Dem-controlled Hull city council said, no, it was not going to get involved, and at the same time it put up the costs to our youngsters of attending sports clubs in the city. I am therefore very sceptical about the proposed public health agenda being taken on by Lib Dem local authorities.

Lyn Brown: My hon. Friend will know about the health needs in Newham, where the incidence of TB is rising and the rate of HIV is very high. The people who
have helped me and my constituents most in managing these health needs have been the people at the PCT, who have been very responsive to my requests and requirements. Has she found the same in Hull?

**Diana Johnson:** Absolutely. Although not all PCTs have operated as we would like, there is good practice throughout the country. We should focus on that and see what we can learn.

I am concerned about the coalition Government's approach to public health, because the junk food industry seems to be helping them to make policy, as some of our national media have reported in the past few days.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Government have decided to abolish the health in pregnancy grant, which would further assist pregnant mothers with healthy eating and preparing for the birth of a healthy baby?

**Diana Johnson:** Absolutely. My hon. Friend campaigned long and hard for families, especially low-income families, in a previous occupation. The health in pregnancy grant is going and the Sure Start grant will now be paid only for the first pregnancy, so we are starting to see what the Government really think about improving people's health, especially that of women.

Of course, we must not forget that during the election campaign in May the Liberal Democrats made it very clear that they thought NHS funding should not be ring-fenced. The right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable) said that the NHS should not be treated as a sacred cow. Again, we see the Liberal Democrats being the more regressive part of the coalition.

I wish now to concentrate on GP commissioning, because there are major issues on which we need to focus. Many specialist groups, particularly the muscular dystrophy group in Yorkshire, have been in touch with me to say that they are concerned that local GPs will not understand their health needs. I have talked to patients in the local hospital and other people receiving health care locally, who are anxious about their particular needs being met.

For me, a bigger issue is the performance of GPs. PCTs have been particularly successful in holding to account GPs who do not perform as well as they should, and I am particularly concerned about who is going to hold the ring. Who will deal with GPs who do not meet the needs of their communities?

A number of hon. Members have mentioned the bureaucracy in the new system of GP consortiums. I believe that there will be more administrators, and I say to the Secretary of State that, if we are to focus on health outcomes, bureaucrats will be needed to put together information and statistics and we will not, therefore, see the massive reduction in backroom staff that the Secretary of State expects.

A lack of accountability at local and national level is a major problem. The new national board—the largest quango that we have ever seen—is being created, but to whom will it be accountable? It is not acceptable for the Secretary of State and his Ministers to come to the House and say, “That is for the national board”, or “That is for local decision making”. We need control over what happens to our NHS. As I asked in my intervention on the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr Dorrell), why cannot we have some pilot projects? If the change is to be so great, let us pilot it, see what happens and take a considered approach. Let us have some evidence to back up the White Paper.

I do not believe that any of the Government's proposals will improve the health care of the people I represent. Of course we believe that clinical involvement is important, and of course doctors and other health care professionals should be involved. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) made the point that we should use the PCT structure to provide more clinical information and advice—we can have that involvement without throwing out the whole structure.

The Government must also consider other health care professionals, such as pharmacists. There are pharmacists on the high street in my constituency who really contribute to the health care of my constituents. People such as Mr Hall on Beverley road and Cath Boury on Newland avenue do face-to-face work to encourage people to give up smoking or reduce their weight. If we want to get clinicians involved, let us get all the clinical practitioners involved.

I finish with the “any willing provider” model in the White Paper. The Labour Government made it clear that the NHS was the provider of choice. That was exactly the right thing to do, because it recognised the important role the NHS has played over the past 60 years. It has staff with specialism and dedication, but the idea of “any willing provider” is just code for the private sector, is it not? The attitude is, “Let’s just roll it out and have the private sector run our NHS”. Most people in this country, particularly those who vote for the Liberal Democrats—I point to their Benches in saying this—will be shocked to know that their MPs are standing up for the private sector. It is disgraceful, and I hope very much that the White Paper will be amended to state that the Government support the NHS as the main provider of choice, rather than going down the road of the private sector and the Americanisation of the NHS.
where this country lets itself down is that our figures are poor compared with other countries when it comes to the one-year survival rates figures. That suggests that the NHS is as good as, if not better than, any other health service when it comes to treating cancer once it is detected, but falls down badly in detecting the cancer in the first place. That was why the all-party group's report recommended the introduction of a one-year cancer survival rate measure, to encourage earlier diagnosis. Late diagnosis makes for poor one-year figures, hence our recommendations. I was therefore delighted that the Government picked up on that point and introduced one-year cancer survival rates as well as five-year survival rates in the White Paper.

**Lyn Brown:** I am following the hon. Gentleman's excellent speech with care, and I totally agree with what he has said so far, especially about early diagnosis. In poorer areas, early diagnosis does not occur so often, for myriad reasons. In his view, what is set out in the reorganisation White Paper that will make early detection of cancer easier in areas such as mine?

**Mr Baron:** The answer to the hon. Lady's question was supplied by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in answer to my question earlier. The one and five-year cancer survival rate figures will be published and presented, although how that will happen is in the melting pot. I very much welcome the work of the Office for National Statistics, the National Cancer Intelligence Network and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Whatever form the figures take, they will be in a performance table, not a league table, to ensure that all PCTs and then GP consortia are tasked with improving performance, irrespective of how they compare with others. That will obviously include PCTs in deprived areas across the country.

I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the focus on outcomes must include patient experience measures and longer-term quality of life measures, such as whether patients are able to return to work. That, too, is very important from the point of view of cancer patients.

As an aside, I suggest that there is a question mark about process-based targets such as waiting times in general. To return to the point made by the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), the real problem when it comes to late diagnosis is not whether it takes one, two or four weeks for a patient to see a cancer specialist. It is how long it takes for the suspicion to be raised that cancer exists in that patient in the first place. Perhaps we should incentivise GPs to detect cancer earlier.

**Kate Green:** I absolutely appreciate the expertise that the hon. Gentleman brings to the debate, but I should like to ask his views on the issue of anxiety while waiting for an appointment. Whatever the physical outcomes of early treatment, there is a peace of mind issue for patients who are anxious to see their doctor as quickly as possible.

**Mr Baron:** I accept what the hon. Lady says. Lady, says, and I hope that the focus on outcomes will include matters such as patient experience surveys, which will incorporate that very point. It is an integral part of a patient's experience, and it should be picked up when we start focusing on outcomes.

I return to GPs being incentivised to detect cancers earlier. In that vein, I very much support Cancer Research UK's campaign to encourage greater access for GPs to diagnostic testing. That will be terribly important when it comes to detecting cancers earlier.

Moving on to GP commissioning of cancer services, there is no doubt in my mind that there is room for improvement in this area, and it would be naive of Members to believe otherwise. There is often frequent confusion between the roles of strategic health authorities, cancer networks, PCTs and hospital trusts. The priorities of the cancer reform strategy are often not aligned with those of the PCTs.

I should like to play devil's advocate and suggest to the Secretary of State that we need to tread carefully in dealing with the challenges ahead. The Secretary of State will be aware that GPs see only about eight new cancer cases a year, and that cancer is a set of 200-plus diseases with often complex care pathways. The GPs are often involved in the early and late stages of that care pathway, but the complex bit in the middle is often conducted by clinicians in hospitals.

Challenges lie ahead. We need to ensure that the responsibilities of the NHS commissioning board, the PCTs and the GP consortia are clearly defined to avoid fragmentation of treatment across the cancer pathway. The reforms must help and not hinder the close working relationship between primary and secondary care doctors. The role of cancer networks in supporting GP consortia needs to be clarified before those networks are broken up and their expertise is lost.

Furthermore, we must consider whether we need to redistribute the financial incentives to encourage more focus on the earlier and late stages of the care pathway. In other words, we must ensure that reward matches responsibility. Should a qualities and outcomes framework be realigned so that early diagnosis, survival and people dying in their place of choice are included?

In the last minute left to me I shall mention the cancer drugs fund. I have raised the issue with the Secretary of State before. There appears to be early evidence of disparity of access. When it comes to the cancer drugs fund, access should always be clinician-led. In some regions, approaches can be made to the PCT, and in others they are made to the cancer network, which, in turn, has access to the fund. Elsewhere, GPs are forming panels. May I suggest that best practice from the interim drugs fund is applied uniformly before the main drugs fund kicks off next spring? We do not want to add to cancer inequalities when it comes to access to treatment and drugs.

In the past, rarer cancers have had a very raw deal. I know that the Secretary of State is conscious of that and will ensure that those who suffer from rarer cancers will be treated much more fairly than in the past.

There is no time for the Secretary of State to answer all my questions now, but I hope that he will address them when he speaks at the Britain Against Cancer conference on 14 December, and I look forward to hearing what he has to say.

In short, the refocusing on outcomes is the greatest innovation and benefit to patients since the NHS began. However, that must not be undermined by the problems over GP commissioning.
Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this debate. I want to take up a few of the points made by the Secretary of State. First, he talked as if the previous Labour Government had done nothing for the NHS and had shown no concern about how people were treated. It is worth reminding the House that Labour inherited in 1997 after a number of years of Conservative mismanagement. We used to have waiting lists of more than two years. Now, waiting lists are down to less than six months. A record number of nurses, doctors and porters have come into the hospital system. Many hospitals have been built and many others have been refurbished. Therefore, we will not listen to the Government telling us that we did nothing or that we did not take care of the NHS. We spent more than £80 billion on the NHS, which benefited many people. The Government state that they will protect the NHS and will not reduce the funding. That is just not correct. They talk about billions of pounds going into the NHS, but the money will actually go to the social care fund, which does not directly benefit people in hospitals. In real terms, there will be a 17.5% cut over four years. There is a decrease in the budget and services will be affected.

Lyn Brown: My hon. Friend must have noticed the chuntering taking place on the Government Front Bench. The same happened during the speeches of a number of other Opposition Members. Does she not think that that is really poor form, especially when the Secretary of State did not seem able to take interventions when it was his turn?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a matter for the hon. Lady. She must control her speech. I am sure that all Members of this House, including those on both Front Benches, will behave appropriately in this debate.

Yasmin Qureshi: We are told by the Government that the reorganisation is not ideologically driven, but is somehow a way of maximising efficiency and making the systems better. At a time when we are being told that there is not enough money, commentators and experts are saying that this reorganisation will cost at least £3 billion. We are not talking about a small amount of money; we are talking about £3 billion.

Lisa Nandy: In my constituency of Wigan, despite the extreme and visible progress that we have made in the past 13 years of Labour Government, there are still significant health inequalities. In fact 129 per 100,000 people in my constituency die of coronary heart disease, compared to 90 nationally. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) said, there have been no trial programmes or pathfinders. The money could be spent without a shred of evidence that it will make one bit of difference.

Yasmin Qureshi: I agree. I was about to discuss the impact of the reforms, with GP consortiums replacing PCTs. We know that there will be huge differences in the arrangements for health care in different areas. With the formation of up to 500 GP consortiums, all free to set their own priorities, a highly visible two-tier service will develop. Patients will be forced to move GPs or be reallocated to another area to get the care that they need.

The financial success of each consortium will also affect the service that patients receive. It will influence of the type of care provided and how long it lasts. Some patients who need hospital treatment will inevitably be told by their GP, “Sorry, you’ll have to wait until next year.” Evidence has shown that making providers compete for patients and providing more choice to patients has done little to improve quality. Most people who are offered a choice of hospitals opt for their local provider. Choice may be important, but for patients, it comes below the quality, speed and accessibility of care.

The proposals do not make it clear whether the patients of the commissioning GP do the choosing. However, the GPs’ new contract will have a powerful incentive to hit commissioning targets. How, therefore, do patients know whether they have been prescribed the best or just the cheapest treatment going?

Again, there is no evidence to show that the restructuring would reduce the bureaucratic load. Hospitals alone will have at least three times the number of commissioners with whom to communicate and contract. Five hundred GP consortiums, each with its own set-up and administrative costs, will replace the current 150 PCTs. Huge differences in the arrangements for health care will emerge between areas. A postcode lottery will develop.
Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the description of a consortium of GPs—a loose affinity of people with whom they get on rather than a geographical boundary—and the loss of co-terminosity will affect patients? Indeed, it will not simply be a postcode lottery, but, across the board, a matter of whom a patient is registered with.

Yasmin Qureshi: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Some years ago, when that sort of process was introduced in the legal system, with solicitors able to apply for franchises, the big firms benefited and the smaller, local firms went bust. A similar thing will happen. Some GPs, who run small surgeries in the heart of a community, will not be able to form consortiums. What happens to them? Does it mean that patients in parts of Kearsley in my constituency will have to travel seven miles to go to a big GP consortium rather than being able to walk down the street and speak to their GPs, as they currently do?

The reform means that private patients will have a chance to pay for faster care in the NHS. Now that the restriction on the income that can be made from private patients is being lifted, cash-strapped hospitals will find it difficult to resist that income stream. Patients could routinely be offered that route to faster treatment. Thus patients is being lifted, cash-strapped hospitals will find it difficult to resist that income stream. Patients could routinely be offered that route to faster treatment. Thus wealthier people can queue jump, while NHS patients will linger on a lengthening waiting list.

I know that the Secretary of State—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but time is up.

3.24 pm

Mr Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I shall be brief as I know that many hon. Members wish to speak. I am pleased to speak in the debate as someone who is about to see rather a lot of our national health service. My wife and I are due literally any day now—some may say tomorrow—to have our second child at the Royal Hampshire county hospital in Winchester, so all, including my Whips, will forgive me if I miss the Adjournment debate tonight.

Perhaps I am a little biased, but the Royal Hampshire in my constituency is in many ways the sort of institution that I see as the cornerstone of our national health service. It is a classic district general hospital, with a full service, and maternity and A and E departments at its heart. Elderly care services are first rate and infection rates are among the lowest in the NHS. We have a neonatal baby care unit, for which many similar sized institutions would give their right arm, and a bustling out-patients unit. Of course, the hospital would like to do more, but it sits at the heart of the community in Winchester and the surrounding areas because it is continually strengthened by the fact that the people who work there—the nurses, the midwives, the consultants and the cleaners—live in and around the city of Winchester. Of course, the NHS is more than its physical hospital buildings, but I view the Government’s equity and excellence White Paper in the context of institutions such as the Royal Hampshire and the locally connected NHS services that cluster around it.

My local NHS trust will undergo many changes in the coming years as it prepares, with its partners, to make the gear change to foundation status. That is absolutely right in my view to liberate our NHS. As I have often said to my trust and to the people I represent, I am not hung up on the name at the top of the wage slip for individual employees of the NHS in Winchester or anywhere else; I am merely concerned about the services that the NHS in Winchester offers the people I represent. I suspect that no hon. Member would disagree with that.

Equally, I am concerned about protecting the services in the financial context in which we find ourselves and the enormous national debts under which we labour. I am proud that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister put the NHS at the heart of his programme for government. He must have been watching closely because I did the same in Winchester. I am especially proud to be elected as a new member of the new Government, who made the political choice—it is a choice; we did not have to do it—to protect health spending in the recently announced spending round. I know that Labour Members do not believe that and that at every turn they will try to rubbish it, as we have seen from part of the motion’s wording today. I guess that part of me, were I in their position, would do the same. It must really rangle. There is a new coalition Government, led by a Conservative Prime Minister, who are pledged to protect the NHS and put it at their heart. I am proud of that.

Jonathan Reynolds: Does the hon. Gentleman think that the terrible cuts that our local authorities will face in adult social care and other core services will absorb the ring-fenced money for health simply because they will not be able to provide in future the sort of services that they currently provide?

Mr Brine: No, there is absolutely no reason for them to do that. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government will make an announcement on council funding, but the Secretary of State for Health has already announced in the comprehensive spending review that the Government have allocated moneys for social care.

I know that the Labour party will try to rubbish our proposals, and that is their choice. My point is this: the people I represent do not care much about how the NHS is structured, but they care a great deal about ensuring that their NHS is there when they need it. They pay their money, and they expect the NHS to be there when they need it, free at the point of use. That is the cornerstone of what we are proposing.

I am very happy to defend outcome-focused, GP-led commissioning for my constituents. Every health care system in the world worthy of the name has the GP-patient relationship at its heart, and our proposals for GP consortiums seek to strengthen that for the sake of all the people we represent. Why on earth would we propose anything different? GP consortiums are an enormous opportunity for the NHS, and the perfect way to further the “Like it or lump it—this is the service you’re going to get” view that we have heard for far too long in our health service.

Rosie Cooper: I would like to state on the record that the expression is glib when it is uttered by a Secretary of State who does not back it up, who does not place
patients at the centre, who will not have patients or their
elected representatives serving on consortiums and who
makes grand statements that are baseless and meaningless.

Mr Brine: I am sorry I gave way: I expected something
else. I do not think for one minute that it is glib. We are
not suggesting that every single patient will be involved
in every single element of their care, but how could
anybody disagree with “no decision about me without me”?

GP consortiums are an opportunity for the health
service finally to realise one of its original aims—the
sophisticated management and prevention of illness
through the intelligent use of the patient list. That is
still a largely untapped resource in our national health
service.

I see my job as a Member of Parliament as being an
important link in helping GPs to answer some of those
questions about consortiums that are coming down the
line. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of
State has met groups of GPs in other areas of the
country, and I ask him today to check his inbox because
an invitation from me is coming his way.

As we know, following the establishment of GP
consortiums, primary care trusts will no longer have
NHS commissioning functions. It would be nonsense to
create GP consortiums and keep two other tiers of
management commissioning alongside them. Investment
in the NHS has not been matched by reform. Yes, we
will protect NHS investment, but our reform agenda
builds on the best of the reform process over the previous
20 years. An Opposition Member said that we reject
everything that went on under the previous Government,
but of course we do not. We have made that very clear.
These proposals build on Labour Government measures
such as practice-based commissioning and NHS foundation
trusts, and rightly so.

I sometimes hear it said—I heard it put to my right
hon. Friend the Secretary of State yesterday morning on
the “Today” programme—that the Government’s
health policy was a bit of a surprise to everybody. I do
not know why that would be. I mentioned earlier that
the Health Secretary visited the Royal Hampshire county
hospital. That was in May 2008, and he discussed the
policy with people there then. He will remember the visit.

Jonathan Reynolds: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Brine: No, I want to finish my remarks. My right
hon. Friend will remember discussing with those
professionals his ideas, which were published. He referred
to those ideas in 2006, and they eventually made it
through to our manifesto and the coalition agreement.
They certainly should not have been a surprise to anyone
who was watching.
What will be the role of the public health director, who will be placed within the local authority? I am keen to know how that public health role in the local authority will evolve and relate to those at the sharp end in all health settings—those who provide front-line care. I hope that the Minister can fully explain that in his winding-up speech so that my constituents can be clear about it.

My constituents and I are concerned about how the wider drivers of health inequalities—income, education, employment and so on—will be addressed in the new structure, particularly when so many national policies seem to be taking us in the opposite direction, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) pointed out earlier.

Lisa Nandy: Does my hon. Friend agree that as well as the vast inequalities in life expectancy, the lingering issue of care for those who live longer and longer with chronic illnesses needs to be addressed? Those people are suffering now. Does she agree that it is an absolute disgrace that the Government have decided to tinker with the structures rather than put in urgent investment to help those people, including people in my constituency of Wigan?

Kate Green: Labour Members want to know whether the money spent on the restructing of front-line care in our communities is the best use of that money. As the Health Secretary himself pointed out, we continue to have poor health outcomes and standards compared with our European neighbours, so why does it make sense to put more money into reorganisation and less directly into front-line care? I look forward to hearing what the Minister says about that.

The second issue that I want to address involves patient voice: That, too, has been raised in my constituency. A particular concern of mine is to ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable are heard. I am concerned about the lack of voice of those who do not have the sharp elbows and the articulacy to speak up for themselves to secure the best for themselves and their families. We know that that is the fate of many in our poorer communities, and especially of those with mental health problems.

I have been told a number of times in my constituency, including by GPs, that GPs are not particularly expert in, or equipped to deal with, mental health needs. How will those patients’ needs be identified, recognised and responded to in the new structure? What help will be available to enable patients to articulate such needs? There is uncertainty in my constituency on the future structure. How will patient voice, choice and opinion feed into the new model?

The Trafford patient LINk—local involvement network—service is uncertain about its future role and status. I very much hope that Ministers will be able to give us more information about how we will get a clear opportunity for advocacy, so that every patient’s voice can be properly heard, and for proper support for patients who are perhaps less able to articulate their needs and secure services for themselves.

I am concerned also because I know—not just from my constituency, but from my long experience of supporting and working with vulnerable families—that different values pertain among different doctors and practitioners. I am particularly concerned, for example, for the young woman who may present herself to a GP who does not feel it appropriate to offer her advice on contraception or abortion. How can those minimum standards be protected, so that everybody—wherever they live, whoever their doctor is and whatever the structure is—knows that they will be guaranteed the care that they need.

Thirdly, I would like to raise with Ministers the issues that have been raised with me by health practitioners and professionals—and which have been highlighted in this afternoon’s debate—relating to GPs’ ability and willingness to take on the management aspects of their commissioning role. Many GPs have said to me—that perhaps the Minister will be able to reassure them this afternoon—that what they see banking towards them is a heavy burden of management, albeit without the additional resource with which to manage it. Many GPs have said to me that they have not really had the training—they lack the expertise—to be health managers as well as good-quality health practitioners and providers of front-line health care. I am interested to know whether Ministers have plans for training GPs and developing those skills and abilities in GP practices, or whether, as many of us on the Opposition Benches fear, the proposal will in fact be used as an opportunity to privatise that management function. If that is the case—this is not an ideological point, but an efficiency point—I shall be keen to know what financial model Ministers expect to operate if a substantial amount or even a proportion of the money that would otherwise be held in GP practices will go to fund the profits of private providers.

Those are the issues being raised with me in my constituency. They are issues that I am afraid I do not feel equipped to answer, because I do not fully understand how the new structures will work well in practice and, in particular, how they will work well for the poorest.

In concluding, I would like to highlight a point that has been made by a number of my hon. Friends this afternoon. The injection of extra uncertainty and disruption into our national health service at this time is further—and considerably—stretching our capacity to deliver excellent front-line care. I would urge Ministers to listen to the many GPs who have said to me—and who I am sure are saying to them—that what is proposed represents an element of change and disruption that they cannot yet see the benefits of. What they can see is that there is considerable uncertainty in the way that they are now working. There is certainly concern in my primary care trust. I hope that Ministers can offer some reassurance on that point, because at the moment there is considerable instability, and that cannot be good for any patient outcomes.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): This is a period of great challenge for the national health service, and it would be whoever was in government. However, Government Members accused us of not having a care for staff and patients. In fact, it is precisely because we are concerned about staff and patients that we are using this debate to point to all that is problematic—and potentially even disastrous—about the Secretary of State’s proposed NHS reorganisation.

In exploring the gap between what those in government said while in opposition and what they are saying now, we can do no better than refer to a speech that the
present Prime Minister gave to the King’s Fund in 2006, in which he set out the five key components of his approach to the NHS—components that, to my knowledge, he has not altered. His first component was that he wanted to guarantee the NHS the money that it needs. Who believes that now? Certainly not the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which has noted that not since the 1950s—from April 1951 to March 1956, to be precise—has there been such a small increase in NHS funding. And not the chief executive of the Royal College of Nursing, who said:

“A huge range of services and jobs are earmarked for cuts against this urban myth that the NHS is being protected. The evidence is quite clear…this is simply not the case”.

Hon. Members, who, as the weeks turn to months, will see the cuts in their own constituencies, will not believe it either.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) talked about what is happening to children’s hospitals. What has not been factored in is the cost of reorganisation, which experts have said will be £3 billion. Ministers have said that their estimate is £1.7 billion, but when asked about the number of redundancies they cannot answer. We know that the cost—

Mr Baron: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: No, I must get on.

The cost of redundancies, when they are factored in, will be hundreds of thousands of pounds. We believe that the figure of £1.7 billion will be overshot, and bring greater financial pressure on the NHS.

The second point that the Prime Minister made in 2006 was that he wanted to end the damage caused by pointless and disruptive reorganisation of the NHS. He said:

“We will not mess around with existing local and regional structures”.

So the Secretary of State’s big idea for the NHS was a pointless and disruptive reorganisation.

What do the people who work in the NHS think about that? The Royal College of General Practitioners says:

“our members are not convinced that the scale of the changes proposed is justifiable, especially in the context of cost reductions”.

The British Medical Association

“questions whether a less disruptive, more cost-effective process could have achieved the aims of reducing bureaucracy”.

The Royal College of Midwives says that it is

“very disappointed that despite pre-election promises to end…top-down reorganisation…the White Paper focuses far more on structures than it does on care delivery.”

The reorganisation is high-cost, high-risk and contrary to everything that was said by those who are now Ministers in the run-up to the election. They have accused us of being confused and incoherent, but it is their reorganisation that is confused and incoherent. Every professional body echoes that thought.

The Prime Minister said that he wanted to

“work with the grain of the Government’s reforms…So we will go further in increasing the power and independence of GPs and PCTs”.

He has gone so far that he has left GPs behind, and only one in four believe that the reorganisation will improve patient care. As for PCTs, contrary to the Government’s promises when in Opposition, they have abolished them.

What was the Prime Minister’s fourth point about his main driving aims for the NHS? He said that he wanted to “take the politics out of the management of the NHS”.

There could not be a more political reorganisation. It is driven by ideology and a belief in free market ideology. As the chair of the BMA, Hamish Meldrum, said, “If the Government is truly committed to reducing waste and inefficiency, their proposals for NHS reform should focus less on competition and more on a co-operative approach on delivering health care.”

Finally in his 2006 speech the Prime Minister said that his main commitment on the NHS was “fair funding to the NHS…We will end political meddling…removing the scope for fiddling”.

We will see how much the scope for fiddling is removed when money is moved from the NHS budget to local authorities for social care.

My hon. Friends the Members for West Lancashire (Rosie Cooper), for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) and for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) all expanded on what is problematic about the reorganisation. The Secretary of State began by posing as the friend of patients and those who work in the NHS. I will not take lectures from him on that. My mother came to this country as a pupil nurse from Jamaica in the 1950s. She was part of that generation of West Indian women who helped to build the national health service. Government Members cannot talk to us about the people who work in the NHS. As for patients, are Ministers listening to the patient groups—people who represent children, people who represent the elderly, and people who represent those with mental health problems—about their concern about what the reorganisation will mean for them?

This reorganisation is ill thought out and, at a time of tremendous financial stress in the national health service, ill timed. We believe that Government Members have been lulled into a false sense of security about what is to come. They believe that although students might be marching and the Church might be in uproar, the NHS is safe. I put it to them that, as the weeks turn to months and we move through the winter, and as we begin to see winter bed pressures, the consequences of this ill-thought-out, unnecessary, top-down reorganisation will reverberate not only in this Chamber but in the surgeries of Government Members and of all Members of this House. I am proud to support the motion.

3.50 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Paul Burstow): This has been a revealing debate. Labour has come to the House today to make the case for the status quo—the case for standing still. Labour is here defending a failed status quo. We have heard Labour Members presenting to the House a number of extraordinary claims and grotesque caricatures of the Government’s plans. They want to defend a failed status quo in which the NHS has been spending at European levels but has been so tied up in red tape that it has not delivered European levels of quality health care.
For 13 years, Labour tested to destruction the idea that the NHS was best run from Whitehall. The record speaks for itself. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) talked about cancer survival rates, and it is nothing short of a scandal that cancer survival rates in this country lag so far behind the best in Europe. If the status quo is right, as Labour Members seem to be arguing, why are a staggering 23% of cancer patients diagnosed only when they turn up as emergencies? Why is that an acceptable outcome?

John Healey: The hon. Gentleman is right, of course; there is still more to do to improve health and to improve the NHS, but can I just check something? Did I hear him right? Did he say that the NHS had failed?

Paul Burstow: No, I said that the Opposition had failed and that they were defending a failed status quo. Let me give the House an example of a failed status quo. If the NHS were performing at the level of the best in Europe, 10,000 more lives could be saved every year. This is what our focus on outcomes is all about. It is what patient-reported outcomes are all about, too.

We all agree that elderly patients should be treated with dignity and compassion, yet for far too many, that is not what happens in practice. Just last week, a report on patient deaths found that 61% of older people received “inadequate” care in their final days. After 13 years of a Labour Government, the NHS is in the bottom third in Europe in dealing with dementia—way behind Ireland, Spain and Portugal.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): As the Minister will know, the independent public inquiry into Stafford hospital is taking place in my constituency at the moment, and the matters that he has just mentioned are highly relevant to that. Will he give the House an undertaking that the evidence given to that inquiry will inform the debate on the forthcoming Bill?

Paul Burstow: We will, of course, follow the inquiry closely and ensure that we learn lessons from it. We would not have set up the inquiry if we did not intend to learn lessons.

Labour’s legacy is a demoralised and disempowered work force. Reforms have been half implemented, and billions of pounds have been wasted on a flawed NHS IT programme. This Government are clear that the NHS can be so much better than it is today—spending better and doing better both for patients and for the taxpayer. It is this Government’s purpose to liberate the NHS so that it can deliver health care that is among the best in the world, to learn the lessons of Labour’s top-down target-driven approach to health care, to reverse the obsessive focus on process that has stifled innovation and created dependency in the system, and to move away once and for all from a culture that measures success by ticking boxes, hitting the target but missing the point.

Labour talked about reforming the NHS and making it more patient centred, but its reforms were half-hearted, lacking coherence and a clear purpose. Reforms such as the introduction of foundation trusts, practice-based commissioning groups and patient choice, which promised so much, did not deliver under Labour.

Frank Dobson: If the hon. Gentleman is genuinely committed to getting away from top-down impositions, will he now formally abandon the top-down proposal to take £16 million away from the Great Ormond Street hospital for sick children?

Paul Burstow: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising that issue, as I was coming on to deal with the comments of the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield). We are all here to say, rightly, that we want the best from our NHS—dedication from our staff of professionals and creativity from front-line staff. Both the right hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson) and the hon. Member for Sheffield Central talked about that, but I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the review of top-up tariffs started under Labour.

Our proposals build on reforms such as practice-based commissioning, patient choice, foundation trusts, tariffs and social enterprise, and they hold true to the founding principles of the NHS—that it is free at the point of delivery, and not based on ability to pay.

Freening front-line staff from the tyranny of process targets is another issue. The hon. Member for Winchester (Mr Brine) was right to talk about the need to build on the knowledge of general practices and help them to shape services to fit local need and deliver quality outcomes.

The hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) talked about health inequalities and how they had widened in her constituency under Labour. That is why the Government are forging new relationships between the NHS and local government, making common cause on public health so that we can see it not only as a matter of medical health but as part of a far wider attack on the determinants of ill health in the first place. That makes local government entirely the right place to start.

We must ensure that collaboration takes place. The right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr Dorrell) talked about that, but I remind the right hon. (Frank Dobson) and the hon. Member for Sheffield Central of professionals and creativity from front-line staff. That is why the Government are forging new relationships between the NHS and local government, making common cause on public health so that we can see it not only as a matter of medical health but as part of a far wider attack on the determinants of ill health in the first place. That makes local government entirely the right place to start.

We must ensure that collaboration takes place. The right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr Dorrell) talked about the need to stop the top-down reorganisations of the past and to emphasise the importance of having patient-centred structures. In that light, if a local area preferred to graft in clinical engagement in the management of the existing PCT and greater patient involvement in the structure, would he accept that as an alternative to the sort of top-down reorganisation that the Government currently propose?

Paul Burstow: It will be very much up to the consortia to decide how to configure their governance. What we have said is that this is about the devolution of power.
My hon. Friend was not against the devolution of power to the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales, yet this is about the same thing—shifting power away from this Front Bench and Whitehall and putting it back into the hands of patients and clinicians. Those clinicians will be engaged in commissioning, as we need them to be.

Much has been made of accountability. Under Labour, the NHS lacked it. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) really should reflect more on what was done under Labour, because there was a huge democratic deficit. We will have greater transparency and, through our new council health and well-being boards, genuine democratic accountability.

In the Labour motion before us today, it is wrongly claimed that the NHS has not been protected and that promises have been broken. The hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) referred to the 1950s, but I would refer her to the 1970s, when Labour was busily cutting back—

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Paul Burstow: No. The hon. Gentleman arrived very late and was not in his place for much of the debate.

We heard a breathtaking attack from Labour Members who argued against ring-fencing. Indeed, just a few weeks ago, we heard the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) saying:

“It is irresponsible to increase NHS spending in real terms within the overall financial envelope”.

That was, and is, Labour's view—cuts to the NHS. That is not the coalition's view. That is why the NHS will get real-terms growth. Yes, it is a tough settlement; yes, management costs in the system need to be reduced.

The Government, however, are determined to ensure that we reform the national health service, deliver the clinical engagement and deliver the change that will make the service better for our public. I urge the House to reject the motion.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 239, Noes 317.

Division No. 120 [3.59 pm]

**AYES**

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Tellers for the Ayes:
Lilian Greenwood and
Jonathan Reynolds

Dinenage, Caroline
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Mundell, r David
Munt, Tessa
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Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah

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(Monmouth)
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Davies, Philip
Davies, r Mr David
de Bois, Nick

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Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Mundell, r David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Question accordingly negatived.
Mr Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is obviously going to explain why he thinks that the reforms proposed by the coalition Government are incorrect, but is he no longer one of the reformers on his Benches? If he is still a reformer, will he say, however briefly—I know that he quite rightly wants to focus on the Government—how he would seek to reform and improve an education system that lets down too many children?

Andy Burnham: As the hon. Gentleman sees more of his Government, he will perhaps come to understand the difference between real reform and reckless reform. Indeed, the House has just been hearing about the achievements of a reformed national health service under my watch and I can tell him that I am very proud of them.

Let me start with Building Schools for the Future and the charge that I lay at the Secretary of State’s door. He has got into a mess and the allocation of capital is no longer driven by educational need but by ideology. Building Schools for the Future was a needs-led approach to the allocation of capital. Instead, he wanted to use capital as bait to lure schools into his new structural models, but then came the spending review.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): Why were fewer than 100 schools rebuilt under Building Schools for the Future under the last Labour Government?

Andy Burnham: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has ever been to any of those schools, but if he has seen the transformation in those communities and the messages that the schools send to children in areas that have, frankly, been let down for decades, I am surprised that he rises to his feet to say that that investment is not worth making. Let us talk about his poker face on now—but, as with sport in schools, he has played much poker in his life—although he has none on schools? There are those of us who can

Mr Dave Watts (St Helens North) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend surprised at the Government’s announcements, given the fact that the previous Tory Government spent nothing on schools? There are those of us who can remember tumbling buildings that leaked and needed the massive repairs that were put in by the Labour Government.

Andy Burnham: In the 1980s, I had the misfortune to go to a comprehensive school in my hon. Friend’s constituency—a Merseyside comprehensive. It was not a great deal of fun. School sport had dried up and the buildings were appalling. It fills me with dread that my children will go to secondary school under a Tory Government. We on the Opposition Benches will campaign to ensure that another generation is not failed as others were.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am sure my right hon. Friend will not let this occasion pass without putting right the gross calumny against our Building Schools for the Future policy. It was not a school-building policy; it was a policy to let every local authority in our land have a vision of the transformation of education right across their community. That is what the Government are killing and that is why it is important to oppose them.

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend is right. It was a new approach and we must give credit to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (David Miliband), who said when he was a schools Minister, “Let’s do it differently—let’s not give out capital in a piecemeal fashion.” My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) is nodding because he was in the Department at the time. Our approach was to go to the places where aspirations were lowest and young people did not have a great expectation of what life might give them, and build the best possible learning environment. That is why we should not listen to the nonsense that is spoken from the Government Benches. Building Schools for the Future has transformed many communities. It could have done more if the Government had stuck by its needs-led approach to capital allocation.

The sad thing about the Secretary of State’s negotiating failure is that it has direct and unpleasant consequences for schools and councils. Within hours of the Chancellor’s sitting down, there were panicked phone calls asking for 40% cuts to projects that only weeks before had been approved by the Secretary of State as unaffected. Why? Because what was left of his capital budget was needed to push towards his pet projects—or as we should now more accurately say, his pet shop projects. The losers, yet again, are schools in some of the most deprived parts of the country: Sandwell, Birmingham, Salford, Leicester and Nottingham.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): And Rotherham.

Andy Burnham: I could go on. There are more.

Last week, I went to the Wodensborough technology college in Sandwell—a great school, battling against the odds. The Secretary of State is nodding, but he has not been to Sandwell. Since the summer, he has promised many times that he will go there, so I hope he is nodding because he will actually do so. When he was at his conference in Birmingham he was not far away. We hope he will go to Sandwell.
The college has been thrown into limbo by the 40% demand that is now being made of local authorities. After all the chaos to Building Schools for the Future that the Secretary of State caused in such authorities back in the summer, it is barely believable that he is coming back for another bite of their funding.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Can my right hon. Friend imagine the reaction in schools in my constituency, such as Birley and Handsworth Grange? They heard the Secretary of State’s announcement before the recess and believed that their school programmes would go ahead, yet in October, only a few weeks later, they were told to find a 40% cut in schemes that had already been designed. That does not merely destroy the aspirations and hopes of young people; it is ridiculous and a complete waste of money to have a school designed to such an advanced stage and then cut the programme at the last minute. People cannot find 40% efficiency savings at the drop of a hat.

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend puts it well. Let us get to the facts. Those schools were told in the summer that they were unaffected. We can work out what “unaffected” means to most people, but the effect of what the Secretary of State has done by coming back for another bite is that he is asking schools in my hon. Friend’s constituency to abandon their ambitions for their children so that the right hon. Gentleman can fulfill his ideological ambitions to give funding to whichever schools come asking for it because it ticks the box—it comes forward with the structural form of which he approves.

That is very wrong. Today, if nothing else, I want the Secretary of State to come to the Dispatch Box and honour a moral obligation, as he has just heard, to the 600 schools that he approved as unaffected. That must mean what it says. Let them get on without the requirement to make unwelcome savings. Instead, the phone calls from his officials have made them scrabble round for cuts. I heard that one school was thinking of stopping all new furniture. Is that what the Secretary of State really wants schools to do? It is mean-spirited. I hope he will honour the commitments that he has made and let them get on and build a better future.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): Can the right hon. Gentleman tell the House of any academic or empirical study which directly links the capital expenditure under Building Schools for the Future with enhanced educational attainment? If not, why does he think that that is the case?

Andy Burnham: It is depressing to hear such nonsense from the Government Benches after all these years. Is the hon. Gentleman saying to me that it is acceptable for a school to have leaking roofs or to have no playing field? Is he saying that office blocks are fine for schools? I disagree. I believe that we can do better for our children. If that is a call to cut off the funding to deprived authorities, he should be utterly ashamed of himself.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Perhaps the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) could enlighten the House by pointing us to any private schools that have outside toilets and leaking roofs.

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend makes the point. We should aspire to the best possible environment for every single child in this country. We should start where aspiration, expectation and ambition are lowest and transform what those children have. I remember a child in my constituency going into a new school and saying, “It’s too good for us.” That is what we need to challenge and break down. The depressing comments from the Conservatives show that they have no understanding of the message that the environment sends to a young person.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Aintree Davenhill primary school in my constituency is near where my right hon. Friend used to live. Phase 1 of the rebuild is nearly completed, but phase 2 is yet to be approved by the Government. If phase 2 does not go ahead, the children there will be left to learn in a corrugated iron hut, which is freezing at this time of year and boiling hot in the summer. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is not the kind of facility in which our children should expect to learn?

Andy Burnham: It most certainly is not, although the Conservatives do not seem to mind, as far as I can tell. Such a facility is too good for our children, as far as I can make out.

Schools all over the country are in chaos because the Department promised a capital review to clear up the problems and give clarity to schools. Instead, schools all over the country are in limbo, waiting to hear. I hope they will hear some clarity from the right hon. Gentleman today. It is clear that he has made a mess of the capital budget, but I hope he will acknowledge today the anxiety in schools right now about revenue budgets for next year.

“Schools protected” was the headline that schools wanted on spending review day, but here is the second charge that I lay at the door of the Secretary of State: has he not raised expectations that he now cannot fulfil? As the Institute for Fiscal Studies said, when rising pupil numbers are taken into account, the “Schools protected” headline turns into a 2.25% real-terms per pupil cut. Further changes to funding may mean it is far worse for some schools. Specialist schools fear losing the extra money that comes with their status. I hope that today the Secretary of State may provide them with some clarity on that.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Can there be any worse con perpetrated on parents than the cast-iron guarantee that the Lib Dems and the Secretary of State gave on the pupil premium? Is not that a classic example of a promise that did not last until the ink had dried?

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend anticipates me, because that is precisely the issue that I was about to come on to.

The big issue facing all schools is the effect that the pupil premium will have on their budgets. The rush to bring in this new system could cause real volatility in budgets. I hope that the Secretary of State will tell us how he is planning to avoid that. It happened to us when we made changes to school budgets; these things need to be done carefully. We acknowledge that problems can arise, but I hope that he will give me, and schools,
some reassurance that the Department will have measures in hand to protect schools from very marked swings in their budgets.

As I told the House on Monday, experts are predicting that schools in the most deprived parts of the country stand to be the biggest losers from the much vaunted pupil premium—amazing, given all the claims made for it by the Liberal Democrats, but, it would seem, true. Today I visited a secondary school in Walthamstow which, by any measure, faces some of the biggest challenges of any school. It has double the national average of pupils on free school meals and with special educational needs. It is very important that the House hears what the pupil premium might mean for them—might mean, because we do not know yet. The school estimates—[Interruption.] I do not know what the Minister of State, Department for Education, the hon. Member for Brent Central (Sarah Teather), is chuntering about. This is coming directly from schools. If she listens to this, she might be able to change things and do something about it. The school estimates that it is set to lose hundreds of thousands of pounds under the pupil premium. That is supported by the IFS, which has calculated that the pupil premium could be 2.5 times higher in Wokingham than in Tower Hamlets. It says that schools in more deprived areas would receive noticeably less in percentage terms than similarly deprived schools in less deprived areas.

May I ask Liberal Democrats to examine their consciences before final decisions are made on this issue? Is this really the effect that they wanted for their pupil premium—to take money off kids for whom life is already hardest?

Dan Rogerson (North Cornwall) (LD): I have been listening closely to the right hon. Gentleman’s comments about what may or may not be in the pupil premium based on the suppositions that he is making. After more than a decade of his Government, pupils in my part of the country were getting much less than the national average despite its having the lowest wages in the country. What did his Government do about that when they had the chance? At least the pupil premium is an attempt at a better suggestion.

Andy Burnham: The hon. Gentleman cannot say that the Labour Government did nothing for education funding in Cornwall—that is an astonishing claim. I hope that he accepts that the needs of schools vary in different parts of the country. I am not arguing that we had perfection, but we did take steps to improve funding for schools all over the country.

Let me deal, right now, with what the pupil premium will do to schools, including those in the hon. Gentleman’s area.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): We hear a lot about fairness from this coalition. It would be completely unfair if a school in a deprived area were to miss out in order to shift money to another school in another area. We should not be playing one school off against another. Should we not hear from the Secretary of State that there will be a minimum by which no school will miss out, and that the pupil premium will be additional money that does not come at the expense of other schools?

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend has made a very important point. I have invited the Secretary of State to set out how he will ensure that no school sees a huge loss of funding to the pupil premium with that then causing a problem in terms of service continuation.

As I said, I ask the Liberal Democrats to examine their consciences, and I got the impression that the hon. Gentleman was thinking about it. If they do not, for goodness’ sake they should speak up and show that they have some influence in the Government. They should speak up for the kids in the school that I went to this morning. We need to hear their voice to ensure that the pupil premium is what we were told it would be. At the moment, it is nothing more than a con.

The real trouble is that we do not have a new and additional pupil premium at all. The danger for the Liberal Democrats is that this issue goes to the very heart of the politics of the coalition. In the post-election talks with Labour, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws) told my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls) that he had secured from the Conservatives a pupil premium additional to a schools budget protected in real terms. Let there be no debate about that—that was what the Liberal Democrats said they had secured.

The Minister of State, the hon. Member for Brent Central, told the House many times that that would indeed be delivered. Well after the coalition talks, on 7 June, she told us that it would involve “substantial extra money from outside the education budget.”—[Official Report, 7 June 2010; Vol. 511, c. 15.]

That was meant to be the Liberal Democrats’ big win, and it was paraded as the consolation prize on the day of the tuition fees announcement. The painful truth for them is that they have failed to deliver it. They have been chewed up and spat out by the Tories. We are now looking at a pupil premium that will take money off her constituency in Brent, where more than 20% of kids are on free school meals, and give it to the Secretary of State’s constituency in Surrey, where less than 10% of children receive them. That Liberal Democrat fig leaf of credibility for staying in the coalition has been snatched away.

Because the education budget is not rising—it is falling in real terms—the pupil premium is simply a relabelling of existing funding. There will be more losers than winners. The IFS estimates that 60% of primary school children and 80% of secondary school children will be in schools whose real budgets are cut.

On the day when the budgets for those schools land, the “Schools protected” spin will be wearing very thin indeed.

The problem with this ministerial team is that they simply have not got a grip on the detail. They simply do not know what the changes will mean for schools. However, the situation is still worse than that. They are also obsessed with costly, untested structural reform. That lethal combination of incompetence and ideology is toxic for our schools. The Government’s preoccupation with structures risks a loss of focus on standards. Under Labour, school standards rose year on year, with some of the highest ever results at every stage and the best ever results this year in GCSEs and A-levels. In 1999, half of all schools fell below the basic benchmark of 30% of students getting five good GCSEs and A to C. [Interruption.] I hear Conservative Members
speaking up, but those were our schools and our children in our constituencies that were being failed. Many children were leaving school without any hope of a better life—that was the reality.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): Is it not accepted that in science, for instance, the UK has gone from fourth to 14th position? In literacy we have gone from seventh to 17th, and in mathematics from eighth to 24th. That has to mean we have less, not more.

Andy Burnham: I must say, the hon. Gentleman’s literacy was very impressive there when he read the Whips’ handout. He almost read it word for word, and he did not have any help.

The hon. Gentleman cannot deny the figures that I have just read out, which show a transformation in our secondary schools. Half of schools were not achieving the basic benchmark in 1997, but today it is fewer than one in 12. Just think how many thousands of kids have hope of a better life because of that transformation in our schools, particularly in our most deprived communities.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I will tell the right hon. Gentleman what the reality was in some of the most deprived schools, because I was teaching in some of them. Children were forced on to courses that they did not want to be on simply to shove up standards, and the gap between the best and worst-performing schools widened over Labour’s time in office. The reality is that in the area in which I used to teach, children are less likely to progress socially than those from schools elsewhere. Statistics and figures are one thing; the reality is something very different.

Andy Burnham: The reality is very different. Is the hon. Gentleman really saying that head teachers and teachers in primary schools in his constituency would say that there has been no change in primary schools in the past 10 years? Is he really saying that secondary schools have not improved? The figures tell us what has happened. Am I saying, “It’s all perfect”? No, I am not, because more needs to be done. We turned failing schools into good schools and I am very proud of what we as a Government achieved for some of the most deprived children in our country.

It is encouraging that the right hon. Gentleman told the national children and adult services conference recently that he will set new minimum standards for schools—we welcome that continuation of Labour’s successful national challenge programme—but he is about to take huge risks with all the progress that we made. One area on which we should both agree is that excellent teaching is the surest route to the highest standards.

It was with some surprise that I heard the Secretary of State confirm to the House on Monday that his free schools will be able to use public money to hire whomever they like to teach, with no teaching qualification requirement. When he took up the job, he said that teachers should have a good 2:1 degree. He should be consistent in this important area: investing in our teacher work force is of fundamental importance to good school standards.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): My right hon. Friend mentioned the record of higher standards under the Labour Government. Like me, I am sure that he welcomes the fact that young people from the poorest areas are 30% more likely to go on to higher education than they were five years ago. Does he agree that not only higher standards but education maintenance allowances played a significant role in encouraging people to stay on at school, perhaps for the first time in a family? What will be the effect of the Government’s plans to abolish education maintenance allowances?

Andy Burnham: I am glad that my right hon. Friend raises that issue. I will spend a moment on EMAs. As we heard at education questions on Monday, the EMA is the subject of huge concern among Labour Members. It is feared that it will be pared back or, worse, taken away.

The Secretary of State is good with words and is good at making big commitments, but I want to see some follow-through—I want him to stand by what he says. Young people will look to what he or I say, so that they can have trust in politics and in this place. In an interview in The Guardian on 2 March—just before the election—he said:

“Ed Balls keeps saying that we are committed to scrapping the EMA. I have never said this. We won’t.”

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove) indicated assent.

Andy Burnham: The right hon. Gentleman nods, because he obviously acknowledges the veracity of the quote. Why is such a move acceptable now? Before the election, he made that statement to the young people who receive EMA, some of whom might be watching these proceedings. What are they to make of such a statement? It sounded commendably clear before the election, but now that crucial support is being removed. Throughout Education questions on Monday, his Minister spoke in an offhand way of the dead weight cost of EMA. If I understood him correctly, he meant that 90% of young people would have gone into post-16 studies anyway. For young people who come from homes where incomes are low and do not have much support, this allowance can mean the difference between having to get a part-time job or having to walk to college because they cannot afford the bus fare. The EMA allows them to focus on their studies, which gives young kids from backgrounds where life is hardest the chance to exceed expectations and excel in further and higher education. When I heard the Minister on Monday, I did not feel he had any appreciation of the fact that the EMA makes it easier for those young people to fulfil their potential and be the best that they can be.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Since 2004, more than 22,000 people in Tower Hamlets, where my constituency is, and nearly 500,000 people across London, have received the EMA. Only last night, a constituent, who is now reading law, told me that he could not have studied without the EMA. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, throughout the country, those on low incomes will be prevented from taking up higher education places if the matter is not reconsidered? I make a plea to the Government to think again.
Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Labour Members have been struck by the concern among young people about the EMA. Taken with the tuition fees announcement, the one on the EMA is having a depressing effect on the aspirations of young people who have least. That is the great worry about what is happening. I hope that the Secretary of State has heard my hon. Friend's words.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): Given those young people's anxiety and the increase in tuition fees to £9,000, does my right hon. Friend think it acceptable that the schools Minister seems happy to sit on her BlackBerry?

Andy Burnham: That is not acceptable, nor is it acceptable to chunter and object throughout when many of the points that have been made should be listened to. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) did so much work on the EMA and on lifting young people's hopes in constituencies such as his.

We must also take into account the changes in child benefit for families with a higher earner because, although they may not be eligible for the EMA, some give the child benefit to the young person in further or higher education, which helps young people get through. The removal of child benefit will further damage staying-on rates.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I am interested in the right hon. Gentleman's comments about the EMA. Will he give me some statistical evidence that directly relates improvement in educational attainment to the EMA?

Andy Burnham: I am looking through my notes—I do not want to cite the wrong figure. There is evidence that 18,500 young people stayed on at school, who would not have done so without that financial support. That means 18,500 young people with the hope of a better life because of the EMA. Why do the Government want to abolish it? I am lost for words.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): If Government Members are looking for evidence, a collection of college principals in north-east England wrote to me asking me to point out to the Government at every stage the real dangers that they perceive to youngsters going into further education from the abolition of the EMA. That applies across the board in the north-east.

Andy Burnham: There is evidence, so we will write to the hon. Lady with it. There is supposedly a successor scheme, but, if the Government are to replace the EMA, will she and others on the Government Benches ensure that it is with something that gives young people some hope? If the proposal is simply to cut support to the poorest, she will set back the cause of opportunity for all in this country.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): If my right hon. Friend is looking for evidence, I suggest the case of one young woman in my constituency whom I helped during the election campaign. She came to me, worried about her EMA, which she had trouble getting from the school. I helped her with the head teacher. I later found out that she was the sole carer for her mother, who was blind. She would have gone to school anyway, because she was utterly determined, but the EMA gave her and her mother a quality of life that they did not know previously.

Andy Burnham: Listening to the responsible Minister on Monday at Education questions, one would have come to the conclusion that he had no appreciation at all of the effect the EMA could have on a young person's life in those circumstances. I said that the Government should listen to students. I hope that they will, and that they will meet some young people who currently benefit from the EMA such as the person about whom my hon. Friend just spoke. The EMA is a lifeline. For young carers, who have been in the news this week, it represents the hope of a better future, and I hope that the Government will not wipe away their hopes and dreams.

Mr Sheerman: One of the big consultancies—I believe it was PricewaterhouseCoopers—conducted a full evaluation of the relationship between the EMA and improvements in rates of staying on and entering university, and in evidence given earlier this year to the Children, Schools and Families Committee, which I chaired, made it clear that that relationship was very positive.

Andy Burnham: I hope that the Government will take account of my hon. Friend's words. I am looking through my notes—I do not want to cite the wrong figure. There is evidence that 18,500 young people stayed on at school, who would not have done so without that financial support. That means 18,500 young people with the hope of a better life because of the EMA. Why do the Government want to abolish it? I am lost for words.

Mr Watts: Is my right hon. Friend as depressed as I am about the fact that the Government seem to be saying that financial assistance to families does not matter, the poor state of school buildings does not matter and the overall funding package for education does not matter? What seems to matter is that both the Liberals and the Conservatives are determined to cut education spending and push people back into deprivation.

Andy Burnham: That is the inference that people will draw. There is an obsession with structures, not with standards or with helping young people to be the best they can be. I would like to hear the Secretary of State talk a little more about that and a little less about free schools and whatever structural ideas he is dreaming up. Let us focus on standards and on the aspiration of kids from a working-class background. Let us give them some hope rather than introducing organisational reforms that may or may not offer them anything. That is the problem the Secretary of State is facing.

Steve McCabe: I would like to help the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main), who asked about the EMA. Did not the Institute for Fiscal Studies publish a report showing a rise of six percentage points in the number of EMA recipients getting level 2 qualifications? That is hardly a Labour party assertion, is it?

Andy Burnham: Not at all, and the report also showed specific improvement among groups who have traditionally under-achieved in post-16 education. The Government seem to be saying that this evidence is simply to be disregarded because a political decision has been made. At times, I get the feeling from this Government that if
a reform was introduced by Labour, they just want to wipe it away, even if it was successful. They want to do something different. [Interjection] Well, we shall talk about school sport in a minute, and I think they are also guilty of the charge on that issue.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Evidence from the IFS and the CfBT Education Trust clearly demonstrates that the EMA has benefited students. As a former principal of a sixth-form college, I have seen the impact on students. We did our own evaluation, which showed higher attendance among students on the EMA than among those who were not, and a direct correlation between their attendance and attainment.

**Andy Burnham**: My hon. Friend makes an important point. His experience matches exactly that of my brother, the vice-principal of a sixth-form college in St Helens. The change to EMA needs to be looked at alongside potential changes to the funding of post-16 education—the funding available to sixth-form and FE colleges—because it could have a very damaging effect. There is also a rumour—I do not know whether it is true—that people will no longer get free A-levels beyond the age of 18. Will the Minister for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning address that point today? All those proposals will combine to take away opportunities.

**Damian Hinds** (East Hampshire) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Andy Burnham**: I am now going to wind up my remarks. Some of his colleagues will be happy about that, even if he is not.

The Government’s policy is an ideological gamble. Schools will be able to use money to employ whomsoever they like, even if that person has no qualifications, in any premises, which, as we have heard, might include converted prisons, bingo halls, hairdressers and pet shops.

What guarantees do parents have that the Secretary of State’s free schools will have the highest standards? What guarantees do they have that they can hold those schools to account if they do not meet such standards? The truth is that free schools are a risky ideological experiment being pushed through at speed with a lack of reliable evidence. Is not there a real danger that one person’s decision to create a free school will undermine existing good provision in an area and a school’s ability to improve?

Should not access to safe outdoor space and sports facilities be a right for every single child?

**Mr Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will know that I have the misfortune that the local authority in my area is one of the ideological dustbins of the Conservative party. It adopts all these initiatives, so we have three of the 16 new free schools, but there are no suitable sites for them. Existing community organisations are being evicted from their premises so that a few free schools can take them over, despite the fact that their catchment areas are outside the borough and the area. How is that localism or parent choice? Is it not the triumph of ideology over education standards?

**Andy Burnham**: I had the good fortune to meet head teachers from my hon. Friend’s constituency very soon after I came into this job. They told me how that cluster of free schools could undermine other local schools. I am at a loss, and I wonder whether the Secretary of State can help me. Why is a school specialising in Latin exactly what Acton needs? I am yet to be persuaded that that is the best route for modern education in west London.

I mentioned outdoor space. A good example of schools achieving more together than they can alone is sport. School sports partnerships are a wonderful example of schools working together. The Australians have described our system as world class. I urge the Secretary of State to think again on that. School sports partnerships, which created a new delivery system for school sport, have worked well and given more opportunities to young people. I hope that he is open to the arguments of Darren Campbell and others who are pleading with him to keep that infrastructure rather than dismantle it.

My worry is that in the long term the free school experiment will lead to a much more segregated schools system—a splintered system in which narrow social groups impart a narrow world view. Are we heading towards an unaccountable free-for-all in our local education systems? Experience in Sweden suggests that the Secretary of State’s schools will have a negative impact on standards.

**Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Andy Burnham**: I will not.

I have never heard how that negative impact will be addressed in the Secretary of State’s world view, in which schools are free to fail. I am worried that he is creating a world where each school exists within a walled garden, with no obligation to other schools. The local authority co-ordinating role is important, and I cannot see why the Government want simply to wipe it away with a national funding formula. Local authorities look out for the needs of all children within an area, including the vulnerable and the voiceless. Who will speak up for them in his brave new world?

My vision is of a truly comprehensive education system, in which there is diversity of provision, and in which we help all children to be the best that they can be. I want a collaborative rather than a competitive system, and I want all schools to recognise their obligations to each other. I am worried that the Secretary of State is creating an elitist education system.

We fear that Sure Start centres are about to close, and we heard today that the pupil premium will take money from some of the most deprived communities in our country. We have just had a debate on how the Government’s policy on EMA could depress aspirations, particularly those of working-class kids. We have heard that the Secretary of State, in closed meetings in Westminster, has nodded and winked to the effect that his foot is hovering over the pedal when it comes to allowing more selection and allowing grammar schools to use the free school route to set up more grammar schools. He needs to come clean on those things. Does he want to create a more elitist system, where opportunities exist for the few but not the many?
That is the Opposition’s critique of the Secretary of State. We have had broken promises and free market reforms with no evidence, and there is a whiff of elitism in everything the Department introduces. That spells danger for our schools. We need a plan not just for some schools, but for all schools. That is what our motion is about, and I commend it to the House.

4.59 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove):

May I offer a few words of heartfelt thanks to the shadow Secretary of State? Today we announced a radical extension of academy freedoms for many more schools, allowing weaker schools to be supported by stronger schools, in a culture of collaboration that drives up standards for all. This afternoon, in No. 10 Downing street, I along with the Prime Minister met hundreds of head teachers in the state system who have taken advantage of academy freedoms to drive up standards not just for their children, but for others in their local areas. After that morning good-news announcement and that afternoon celebration, I ask myself: what could we do to top it? I am so grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving me this opportunity to explain to the House of Commons the radical, comprehensive reform programme that we are introducing that will help to transform opportunity for the very poorest.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: There are three Opposition Members who are eager to intervene. It is difficult to know to which of these young lads I will now give the opportunity to shine.

Mr Watts: May I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman go to Specsavers? The Secretary of State has said that he has met a group of head teachers from academies. Will he meet the other hundreds of head teachers who are desperately waiting to see whether their schools will be modernised and the holes in their roofs fixed? Will he be as keen to meet them as he has been to meet the academy heads?

Michael Gove: I am always keen to meet head teachers, and the more head teachers I meet, the more I find that they say the same things: that under this Government, they are at last being treated properly. At last, in the words of Mike Spinks, a head teacher from Stretford and Urmston, the baseball batting of bureaucracy has ended. At last, in the words of Patricia Sowter, a head teacher from the Labour constituency represented by the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), we have a Government who are on the side of extending academy freedoms. I talk to head teachers all the time. When I do, the one thing I say to them is: “You’ve got a Government who’re on your side,” and the one thing that I hear from them is: “At last.”

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab) rose—

Michael Gove: Later.

The right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) asked whether I played poker. I have to confess that when I was growing up and learning card games, poker was somewhat frowned upon at the Kirk socials that I attended, although we did play the odd game of knockout whist. One of the things that I learned in card games is that one has to play the hand that one is dealt. What was the hand that we were dealt by the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues? Credit agencies ready to downgrade our debt; a £150 billion deficit; and a letter, left by the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, saying that there is no money left. I know that that is painful for Opposition Members to hear, but it is even more painful for the people in our school system who have been let down by the profligacy, arrogance and extravagance of a party that still does not have the humility to say sorry for debauching our finances.

Mr McFadden: The Secretary of State mentioned the academy programme. I am a supporter of the academy programme that the Labour Government introduced. It gave hope and higher standards to children who had not been given the opportunities that they deserved under what went before. Earlier this year, he issued his list, which said that the Building Schools for the Future programme in the city that I represent would be unaffected by the changes, and that programme includes two city academies, one of which is in my constituency. However, they are now being told that there will be a cut in that programme of up to 40%. How can he say that the programme is unaffected and that that will not have an impact on opportunity for those children who need it most?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, for whom I have a great deal of respect. He was a very good Minister, and it is a pity that he is not on the Opposition Front Bench now. I absolutely share his commitment to improving academy provision, not just in the west midlands, but across the country. I can reassure him that all those schools that were recorded as being unaffected will have their building work backed. The money will be there, but we have a duty, to both the taxpayer and those schools, to ensure that when we negotiate with the contractors—with the private sector—we get the best possible value for money. The more money we can save in our negotiations with contractors, the more we can invest in education elsewhere to ensure that the many, many school buildings that are in a state of dilapidation and extreme need receive additional support. I know that the right hon. Gentleman—when he was a Minister, he always sought to secure value for money for taxpayers—will appreciate that that tough negotiation on behalf of the public is exactly what a responsible Government should do.

Hon. Members know that education standards should not just be measured against the past. Countries across the globe are improving relative to the past. We need to measure ourselves against the best in the world. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) said, the grim truth is that the statistics produced by the OECD show that over the past 10 years, educational standards in this country, relative to other nations, have fallen. We have moved from being fourth in the world for the quality of our science education to 14th, from seventh in the world for the quality of literacy to 17th, and from eighth in the world for the quality of mathematics
to 24th. Those are facts that we cannot deny. At the same time as we have fallen behind other countries, the gap between rich and poor, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) said, has grown wider.

In the last year for which we have figures, the number of children who were eligible for free school meals, bearing in mind that every year 600,000 children attend state schools, was 80,000, of whom just 45 made it to Oxbridge—[Interruption.]. It is absolutely the measure. The right hon. Member for Leigh might not like to hear it, but on his and his Government’s, watch the poorest children were denied opportunity. He made it to Cambridge; why should not more children from poor homes make it to Cambridge and Oxford? Why do children from Westminster, St Paul’s, Eton and such bastions of privilege make it to Oxford and Cambridge but not our poorest children in state schools? This Government—the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats united together—are at last investing in social justice, and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that that figure is a scandal and that at last the investment is going in to secure reform.

Andy Burnham: I am grateful that the Secretary of State acknowledges that I have some knowledge of these matters. He lays all the blame for that figure at the door of the school system in England. Why does he not place any of the blame at the door of Cambridge university and Oxford university? Is he saying that there is no talent in state schools?

Michael Gove: The talent is there, but such children do not get in because they do not have the opportunities that they deserve. The school system has failed them. They do not get in because in the school system children from poorer homes fall behind their wealthier compatriots at every step of the way. At key stage 1, the gap grows wide; at key stage 2 it grows wider still. Children from wealthy homes are twice as likely to get five good GCSEs as those who are eligible for free school meals. That is one of the root causes of inequality in our school system. The Labour party had 13 years; they did not take action, and now they blame others instead of taking responsibility.

Andy Burnham: I am disappointed that the Secretary of State lays all the blame at the door of our schools. When I went to Cambridge in the late 1980s, the proportion had just changed, and the majority had just become children from state schools at 51% with 49% from the independent sector. The figures today are around 55% from state schools, 45% from the independent sector. I am not saying that schools cannot do more to encourage the highest level of aspiration, but is he saying that the Russell group and the most elite universities in our country can do nothing more to open their doors and to operate less elitist admission policies?

Michael Gove: The right hon. Gentleman is taking no responsibility for what happened on his watch, for the inequality in the school system, and for taking no steps to deal with the mess that was left to us. We are the party that is saying to Russell group and elite universities that they must do more to ensure that talented children can go to top universities. Unfortunately—this is a fact that he cannot run away from—social mobility went backwards on his watch. This country is less equal as a result of a Labour Government. There were 13 years of shame and 13 years of hurt, and the Labour Government were responsible.

In place of the Labour Government’s failure, we are introducing a wide range of reforms, all of which are based on best international practice and all of which have been proven, in other nations, to drive up standards. We are ensuring that we learn from all the best performing education nations. We are improving teacher recruitment and training. It is our Government, not theirs, who have doubled the number of students entering Teach First, to ensure that we have top graduates going into the most challenging classrooms. It is our Government, not theirs, who have changed the rules on discipline and behaviour to provide teachers with stronger protection and to ensure that we no longer have the absurd situation in which teachers have to wait 24 hours before issuing a detention to an unruly pupil. It is our Government, not theirs, who are changing the national curriculum and introducing an English baccalaureate to ensure that all students, from whatever background, have access to an academic core by the age of 16.

It is our Government, not theirs, who are reforming key stage 2 tests to ensure that all students have accurate information on their progress at primary school, and that we end the damaging “teaching to the test” that has characterised those tests in the past. It is our Government, not theirs, who have given head teachers in all schools the degree of autonomy and independence for which they yearned for 13 years. So it is unsurprising that, in the 37 minutes of the right hon. Member for Leigh’s speech—[HON. MEMBERS: “Forty-seven!”] Forty-seven? Just see how numeracy went down on Labour’s watch. In the 47 minutes of the right hon. Gentleman’s speech, there was not a single new idea on how to improve our state education system. He is an IFZ: an ideas-free zone. Those beautiful eyelashes might flutter, but behind them there is a dusty plain where a single idea has yet to take root.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: Talking of beautiful eyelashes, I am happy to give way to the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna).

Mr Umunna: I find it quite extraordinary to hear the Education Secretary’s comments about increasing the participation of people from deprived backgrounds, in the light of his reforms of higher education financing. Can he tell us how introducing tuition fees of up to £9,000 will increase the participation in higher education of people from deprived communities—[Interruption.] The right hon. Gentleman has been talking about Oxford and Cambridge, and other universities, and he should answer my question.

Michael Gove: The debate today is about schools, not about higher education. However, I would be delighted to have a debate about higher education. It would be interesting to know who would represent the Opposition in such a debate. Would it be the Leader of the Opposition, who believes in a graduate tax, or the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, who denounces such a tax? Would it
be the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden)—who is no longer in his place—who backs the Browne reforms, or would it be the hon. Member for St Helens North (Mr Watts), who opposes them? The truth is that, on higher education, there is a split in the Labour party as wide as the River Jordan between those who are genuinely progressive and back our reforms and those who are regressive and oppose them—[Interruption.] Hon. Members ask who introduced tuition fees. The Labour party did that, and in so doing, broke a manifesto promise—[Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I must remind hon. Members that this is a debate on schools, and not on higher education. I am sure that the Secretary of State would not want to open up another debate.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson).

Mr Stewart Jackson: I hesitate to derail my right hon. Friend’s peroration, but related to his point about the badge of shame and ignominy attached to the record of the last Labour Government is the number of children in care and the fact that the educational attainment of the most vulnerable in society actually went backwards under their time in office. Should not those on the Labour Front Bench hang their heads in shame about that?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. His commitment to looked-after children and children in care has been consistent, both before he entered the House and now that he serves with such distinction here. One of the reasons that the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) is taking such pains to change the rules on, for example, adoption and to work with looked-after children is that the vulnerable and the voiceless need our support. I hope that the efforts that we are all making to ensure that they enjoy a better future will be backed across the House.

Fiona O’Donnell (East Lothian) (Lab): If the right hon. Gentleman is really serious about increasing social mobility, will he explain how the double whammy of getting rid of the child trust funds and the education maintenance allowance will achieve that?

Michael Gove: We are increasing social mobility by reforming our school system. Let me mention one striking thing about the changes we are making. According to the right hon. Member for Leigh, these changes are an ideological experiment, so who is backing these changes? Who are the extremists who support what the Government are doing? Who are the figures with whom we are ashamed to be associated, who are saying that our ideas are right? Well, what about Arne Duncan, Education Secretary in Barack Obama’s Administration? The other week, he said:

“I just have tremendous respect for the educational work and the leadership that I’ve seen coming from the UK and we’re all working on the same issues and have the same challenges.”

He also said that the coalition Government were “pushing in all the right areas” on education policy. He said that I am “working very, very hard, and I love his sense of urgency, I love his willingness to challenge the status quo when things are not working”.

So we are backed by Barack Obama. [Interruption.] It was his Education Secretary, but we all know that he speaks for the President.

Talking of international statesmen—[Interruption.] Not Toby, but Tony—Tony Blair. The former Prime Minister, who knew about winning elections and how to lead the Labour party to victory, wrote:

“In many areas of domestic policy, the Tories will be at their best when they are allowed to get on with it—as with reforms in education.”

We shall come back to some striking things about the former Prime Minister’s words. I remember when the right hon. Member for Leigh was a Blairite—although that was before he was promoted by the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), but there we are. [Interruption.] Oh, yes, he was one of the plotters, but we will come back to that later. It is striking that the arguments that the former Prime Minister made at every stage in favour of educational reform are now rejected by the Opposition. In 2005, Tony Blair said:

“In our schools… the system will finally be opened up to real parent power… All schools will be able to have Academy style freedoms… All schools will be able to take on external partners. No one will be able to veto parents starting new schools or new providers coming in, simply on the basis that there are local surplus places. The role of the LEA will change fundamentally. There will be relentless focus on failing schools to turn them round… schools will be accountable not to government at the centre… but to parents, with the creativity and enterprise of the teachers and school leaders set free.”

I agree with those words, but I do not know whether the right hon. Member for Leigh does, as he opposes every single one of the points made in that quote. He opposes extending academy-style freedoms to all schools. He wants to veto parents from starting new schools. He does not want the role of the local authority to change fundamentally, and he does not want the creativity and enterprise of teachers and school leaders set free. Why is that? Why are the real conservatives now sitting on the Opposition Benches?

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): What safeguards are there against extremists, including Islamists and creationists, setting up free schools?

Michael Gove: As the hon. Gentleman will know, I have a consistent record of opposing Islamic extremism. One thing we have done is to set up a new due diligence unit within the Department in order to ensure that the threat of extremism—not just from anyone who might wish to promote a free school, but from anyone who wishes to infiltrate our state school system—is dealt with. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that in both Surrey and Birmingham there were genuine dangers due extremist influence in state schools. I take the issue very seriously and I am delighted to work with others such as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood) in helping to counter it.

That brings me to another key point on which I agree with Tony Blair—no slouch when it came to opposing Islamist extremism. If we automatically assume that any parent who believes it is right to set up new schools
[Michael Gove]

is an extremist, we are saying to the overwhelming majority of people in this country who want better state education, “I am sorry; you are outside the mainstream”.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The Secretary of State refers to deprivation and how to tackle it. He will know that the inheritance of teenage pregnancy is an issue that affects deprivation and the poverty of ambition of many families. If we look at the map of teenage pregnancy in this country, we see that it is also the map of deprivation. I acknowledge that we did not have complete success on this issue, although we had partial success. We cut the numbers. They had risen dramatically under Mrs Thatcher’s era. They fell in ours, but not as much as we would have liked. I think that was partly because we did not learn the lessons from countries such as Holland—where the figure is five times lower than it is in this country—and introduce statutory sex and relationship education. Will the Secretary of State think again about his opposition to that?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman has been a consistent proponent of better sex and relationship education, but I have to tell him that it is a statutory part of the present curriculum. The critical question is how we can improve the quality of guidance and the quality of teaching. The hon. Gentleman is passionate, and in this respect his passion is in a good cause, but I fear that he has got his facts wrong. Sex and relationship education is already compulsory; personal, social and health education, which is a broader issue, is not yet compulsory in the national curriculum. Now that I have cleared up that confusion on the hon. Gentleman’s part, I hope that we can work together to ensure that our sex and relationship education reflects 21st-century values. I have been delighted to work with Liberal Democrat colleagues to achieve just that.

I have quoted politicians who back our reforms, but it is important for us to hear from teachers as well. I mentioned head teachers earlier, but let me run through the lessons from countries such as Holland—where the figure is five times lower than it is in this country—and introduce statutory sex and relationship education. Will the Secretary of State think again about his opposition to that?

Headmistress Lesley Grace, of Seaton primary school in Cumbria, says that as a result of our changes “to deliver an outstanding environment” for his students, adding “I don’t understand why anyone would not want to do it.”

As a result of academy status, the headmaster of the Premier academy in Milton Keynes can “employ two or three more teachers to cut class sizes.”

While we are talking about smaller class sizes, let me cite Paul Gazzard, head teacher of St Buryan school in Penzance, who has been able to bring the average class size in his school down to 18 by introducing academy reforms.

The question for the right hon. Member for Leigh is this: will he reverse these changes? He opposed them, which is fair enough. It is understandable. A new, keen, young Opposition spokesman is entirely entitled to fly an opportunist flag, but now that real schools and real pupils are benefiting, the question for him is this: will he turn the clock back?

I have more confidence in the right hon. Gentleman than in his predecessor. I think he will see that our changes are bringing real improvements, and I do not think he wants to turn the clock back. However, that is the test for Labour Members. Are they ready to embrace reform and to acknowledge that it is now the coalition Government who are delivering improvements in state education, or do they want to go back to where they were in the 1980s? Do they want to go back to being the voice of the conservative teaching establishment? Do they want to be the voice of those individuals in trade unions who are opposed to reform and opposed to change?

We should bear in mind the words of Tony Blair. When he was introducing his reforms, there were Labour Members—although not many—who opposed them. He said:

“Parts of the left will say we are privatising public services and giving too much to the middle class.”

That is broadly the case made by the right hon. Member for Leigh; but Blair continued:

“both criticisms are wrong and simply a version of the old ‘levelling down’ mentality that kept us in Opposition for so long.”

If we are to extend opportunity more widely, we need to ensure that the head teachers whom I have cited, and the others who are anxious to take advantage of these reforms—to invest in improving teacher quality, to invest in better discipline and behaviour, and to invest in higher academic standards—are given the freedom to do so.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): The Secretary of State has spoken passionately about extending opportunities for the poorest children in our country, but let me tell him something. On Friday I shall be meeting the head teacher of Our Lady and St Chad Catholic sports college in my constituency. She is deeply concerned about what we suspect is the Secretary of State’s intention to withdraw the specific budget for specialist sports schools. That school is in a deprived area of my constituency, and it has both raised educational standards and improved health conditions for young people in the area. Will the Secretary of State reconsider?
Michael Gove: The hon. Lady makes a strong case on behalf of her constituents and that head teacher, who I am sure is doing a superb job, and I can assure all head teachers whose schools enjoy specialist status that what we are doing is removing the bureaucracy which had attended specialist status. All schools will now receive the money through the direct schools grant, and as a result they will be able to spend it as they think fit, not as bureaucrats decree.

On the subject of funding, I want to pay particular tribute to my Liberal Democrat coalition partners. They came under attack from the right hon. Member for Leigh, but I think it is only fair to say the following. Before the general election, Liberal Democrat coalition partners made the case for the pupil premium passionately, fluently and effectively. It was a policy I supported, but it had been developed with particular attention to detail by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws), and it was first promoted by the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Sarah Teather). As a result of the case that was made by Liberal Democrat members of the coalition, this Government are now delivering a pupil premium that is worth £2.5 billion in additional spending after four years.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: Just a second. That £2.5 billion of additional money is on top of another £1.1 billion of additional spending to deal with demographic changes, so there is £3.6 billion in additional spending on schools, targeted towards the very poorest—spending that the right hon. Member for Leigh and others consistently opposed, and which they rejected during coalition negotiations. It is spending that has been delivered by a coalition Government—two parties united in pursuit of social justice—after one party had let those children down.

Annette Brooke (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): I greatly welcome the fact that children in my constituency who come from disadvantaged backgrounds will be supported in their education. However, I would like an assurance from the Secretary of State that this is extra money, and that it does not involve taking money away from schools in deprived areas.

Michael Gove: I am delighted to be able to give the hon. Lady that assurance, and I can do so because the case for the pupil premium was made so passionately by her parliamentary colleague the right hon. Member for Yeovil, and because it was then delivered thanks to the hard work of the Minister of State, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Deputy Prime Minister. [Interruption.] All of them worked together to ensure that we have £2.5 billion extra.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: Labour Members are upset and annoyed and are heckling because it is this coalition Government who are delivering for those poorest children and they hate that. We can see on their faces their anger and annoyance that it is the coalition parties that are at last delivering on social justice and progressive reforms, and that are improving the school system.

Andy Burnham: It was Labour that gave local authorities funding to raise standards in the poorest areas. The Institute for Fiscal Studies said we had an implicit pupil premium; the Secretary of State might care to read its research.

Let us stop shifting the ground. The commitment the Liberal Democrats said they had was for a pupil premium additional—on top of—a schools budget protected in real terms; that is not just the dedicated schools grant, but the entire schools budget. Have they got that? This is fundamental. Let us have no fine words from the Secretary of State; he must get to the heart of that question. Have the Liberal Democrats got what they told the former Education Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls), they had during those post-election talks? We need to know.

Michael Gove: I think the right hon. Gentleman is talking about schools rather than education, but the truth is, yes, the Liberal Democrats have got a fantastic deal—and more to the point, so has the country. There is £3.6 billion extra; £2.5 billion extra spent on schools, and £1.1 billion extra spent on demography, so there is a real-terms increase in education spending, and delivered over four years, whereas the right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls) was going to deliver additional spending only for two years, not four years. More than that, he was not going to deliver, as we have, additional pre-school learning for the poorest two-year-olds. He was not going to deliver, as we have, an extra £150 million to help students from poorer backgrounds to go to universities. He was not going to deliver, as we have, an additional £7 billion over the lifetime of this Government to help the very poorest children. The reason why all Labour Members are so anxious to try to attack this proposition is that they hate the fact that progressive policies are being delivered by a coalition Government.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: I am conscious that many Back Benchers, on both sides of the House, wish to contribute. I am also aware that the Opposition motion asks us all, but particularly the Government, to “work with families, teachers and communities to deliver improved standards of learning and teaching in all local schools.” But how? Nothing in what the shadow Secretary of State said today, what he said in his speech to the Association of Directors of Children’s Services or what he has said in any interview that he has given constitutes a new or fresh, radical or reforming idea to improve our education system. What do the Opposition offer? How are they going to work with schools, local authorities and parents to improve education? Are they just going to hold hands and sing “Kum ba ya”? Are they going to close their eyes and wish really hard? Are they going to work with schools, local authorities and parents to improve education? Are they just going to hold hands and sing “Kum ba ya”? Are they going to cross their fingers and hope that Tinkerbell will somehow magic a better education system into place? Why can the Opposition not give us a single solid idea for reforming our schools system? It is because they have abandoned reform and instead prefer the opportunism of opposition.

Mr David Ward (Bradford East) (LD): Now will the Secretary of State answer the question: is it £2.5 billion on top of cash balances or is it £2.5 billion in real terms on top of what schools are now receiving?
Michael Gove: It is £2.5 billion on top of the cash settlement that schools have been given. It is a real-terms increase in schools spending and £3.6 billion overall. I think that the hon. Member for Bradford East (Mr Ward) is probably off to celebrate the good news. The truth is that this spending could not have been delivered by the Opposition, because they were not committed to taking the tough decisions that we have taken in order to invest in schools spending.

Bill Esterson: Is the truth not that the Institute for Fiscal Studies figures clearly show that because of increasing pupil numbers this will amount to a 2.25% cut in real terms—not an increase, but a cut—and that the most disadvantaged areas will lose out as a result of the proposals that the Secretary of State wants to introduce on the pupil premium?

Michael Gove: Absolutely not. Schools spending will rise in real terms over the lifetime of the coalition Government. That was not a promise that the Opposition were able to give; they could promise only to increase spending over two years. As I say, we are also extending 15 hours of pre-school learning to all disadvantaged two-year-olds—the Government of the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath were not able to deliver that. We are also giving £150 million to help disadvantaged students from poorer backgrounds to make it to university.

Mr Graham Stuart: The Opposition are complaining about any possible changes to areas of deprivation, but it is not areas that we need to be concerned about—areas of Sheffield that were some of the wealthiest in the country were getting additional money. What we need to do is ensure that money follows the pupil. The gap between children on free school meals and the rest is wider in the East Riding of Yorkshire, including my constituency, than in any other part of the country. We need a pupil premium that follows children wherever they live, so that we have a more just system that does narrow that gap, which sadly widened under the previous Government.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a good point and we need to narrow the gap. The gap between children who are eligible for free school meals and other children across the country is far too wide. We need to ensure that disadvantaged children receive additional funding, and under the coalition Government they will receive such funding on top of the dedicated schools grant that was not going to be delivered by the Opposition.

Several hon. Members rose—

Michael Gove: I am conscious that a number of Back Benchers want to contribute, so I shall now draw my remarks gently to a close.

The change in Opposition policy since 2005 has been remarkable. A party that was once committed to education reform is now committed to putting the clock back. It is those on this side of the House who are investing more money in the education of the poorest, who are recruiting more great teachers into our most disadvantaged schools, who are changing the policy on discipline, who are reforming the allocation of funds for children with special educational needs, who have ensured that academies admit children with special educational needs on a level playing field, who have extended the Freedom of Information Act to academies, and who are ensuring that vulnerable children at last receive the opportunities they deserve. It is those on this side of the House who are at last trusting teachers and head teachers to do what they have yearned to do for 13 years—to take control of the education system and to transform it in the interests of all our children. For those reasons, I invite the House to reject the Opposition motion.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. A large number of Members want to take part in the debate and, as usual, time is our enemy. I have therefore decided to reduce the length of Back-Bench speeches from seven minutes to a maximum of six minutes from now on.

5.36 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I support the Opposition motion. The Secretary of State evaded interventions from me and from several others on the Labour Benches after he said that we were “angry” that the coalition Government were introducing a pupil premium. May I inform him that the Labour Government had a pupil premium? I do not know if it was as well worked through as it should have been; it was an early policy introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Mr Blunkett) that was absorbed and no longer ring-fenced when Charles Clarke became the Secretary of State. There was a pupil premium, but I would challenge the Secretary of State. He knows that the Opposition want more resources to follow people from deprived backgrounds. If he is honest with the House and in his intellectual engagement with the debate, he also knows that the most difficult thing is to find a method of ensuring that the money tracks the right people.

The Secretary of State will find it difficult, as we did with Sure Start children’s centres. We started, as he knows, with 500 in the 500 most deprived communities, but we then discovered that that left out most of the deprived children in our country so we moved the number up to 3,500. One of my concerns—and a concern of Members on both sides of the House when they talk frankly in private—is that we might see a drastic cut in the number of children’s centres, based on the idea of going back to the original intention of having 500, which would exclude most children from deprived backgrounds. That has a parallel in the pupil premium. The Opposition are arguing that the way in which the Government propose to introduce the premium means that it will fail to reach the children who are most deprived, because it is not well crafted. We understand that it is difficult for any Government to ensure that such methods work.

The one thing in the Opposition motion that I found difficult to swallow was the mention of ideology. I honestly fail to see what the Government’s ideology is. I do not see a consistent theme running through their education policy. There are bits and bobs of ideas, some of them refreshing and interesting, but when it comes to others I, and other people who have been in education for a long time, do not understand where they are coming from or where they are leading us.
As Chair of the Select Committee for nearly 10 years, I found it refreshing when a Minister came before the Committee and said that the reason for introducing a policy was that it was evidence-based. One of the most refreshing things about Tony Blair in his 1995 conference speech, in his Ruskin speech in 1996 and when he put that speech into operation in 1997, was that he was both pragmatic and open to evidence-based policy. We saw that across a raft of policies, but when the Committee looked at how policies evolved, we found that when Ministers left the evidence base they got into trouble.

The present Government seem to be basing their whole education policy on something called the big society. Many people have talked to me about what the big society means. It is very difficult to find out. What is the big society? Is it localism? It is a funny sort of localism that jumps over and disregards locally elected education authorities. That is a very different kind of localism.

How do we know that people who want free schools represent the community? We have already heard evidence that there have been some strange bids. I am not sure that the answers we heard today about faith schools were entirely convincing.

Graham Evans: Before the general election, Labour Members supported co-operative schools. Can the hon. Gentleman tell me the difference between the co-operative schools project and the Government’s free schools project?

Mr Sheerman: I was, and am, a great supporter of co-operative partnership in academies. I was a great supporter of academies, but I understood exactly what the argument for academies was under the previous Government. Under Tony Blair, it was to take first 200, and then a further 400, schools where everything else had been tried; they were usually in areas of great deprivation and everything that had been done to try to raise standards had failed. We introduced academies where we thought it was worth trying something because nothing else had worked, but now the academy model has been inverted. It is no longer about where schools are failing and real help is necessary for kids, who get only one chance for education—where we need to act quickly because we cannot wait for a laggardly local authority to get its act together. We now have a system in which any school can become an academy, and I am not sure what its theme, goal or arrival point is.

The big society does not seem to be a substitute for evidence-based policy, or to involve a clear notion of what the arguments for, and against, academies is. The argument for academies is that in the previous Government’s voucher system, the academy model was not true, however, that we do not yet know how successful our expenditure on reducing such inequality might be because, for example, children who started in a Sure Start centre when those first opened in my constituency are not yet 16, so we do not know what choices they will make?

Mr Stuart: The hon. Lady makes a fair point. Many of those initiatives, such as Sure Start, are being supported by this Government. The hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) has been an ardent champion of early intervention and has helped Members in all parts of the House to recognise the need to intervene early in order to make sure that children arrive ready for school, and that they have a decent vocabulary so that they can engage with learning. There is merit in what the hon. Lady says, but even the most ardent supporter of the Labour Government would hardly suggest that the improvements that were wished for have genuinely been delivered.

I am pleased to follow my predecessor, the highly distinguished former Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), who said that he could not see an ideological base. I hope it is a practical evidence-based approach by the Government. It is clear that they believe that giving greater trust, responsibility and control to front-line professionals is more likely to lead to an improvement in standards than central prescription, however well-meaning. It is as obvious to me as the River Jordan that that is the key insight of this Government.
We must ensure that that process is well thought through, that we support front-line professionals, that capability is developed where it does not currently exist, and that it is put in place in time to match any withdrawal of support from local authorities or others who may previously have delivered it.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op):
The hon. Gentleman is speaking about the Government’s wish to push more resources towards the front line, but in his opening remarks the Secretary of State talked about some of the most intractable areas of poverty and deprivation in the UK. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that directing resources to the front line and reconfiguring budgets alone will solve those problems, or that bigger, bolder schemes such as education maintenance allowances are required to tackle the deep-rooted poverty that causes that deprivation?

Mr Stuart: That, too, is a fair intervention. This is not the Government’s sole policy area. They are also considering doubling the size of Teach First over the next three years, and have been in negotiation with Teach First about that. The essence of improving education standards is higher-calibre, better supported, better motivated, better led teachers in the classroom. That is what it is all about. That is the prism through which we should look at every decision that we make—which is why I welcome the Teach First approach.

It is not necessarily contradictory, though I can see that it may look hypocritical, to talk about reducing central prescription on what teachers may have, on the one hand, and on the other, raising the bar to those whom the state supports to go into teacher training so that the people coming in are better qualified.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) is right to ask those questions. Tools alone will not deliver. What is needed, and what we have heard from head teachers and from the profession over the years, is that too much prescription, too much teaching to the test, too much narrowing of the curriculum—in other words, too much of what want on under the previous Government—took away the joie de vivre and the empowerment of front-line professionals.

If we can bring that back, plus Teach First, put the tools in place, encourage ever better school leadership and school governance, which I hope the Select Committee will examine over time, we can move our education system on to a higher plane, and deliver what Members in all parts of the House want.

Knockabout—trying to suggest that Tories eat babies, or whatever those on the Opposition Front Bench seem to suggest—is not helpful. I believe that everyone in this House, regardless of party, came into politics because they would like to create a more just and fair society. This is not only about social justice. The forces of globalisation, which we cannot stop, and the suggestion in the Leitch report that there will be fewer and fewer jobs for people who do not have skills, make it an absolute economic necessity that we improve the skills for our young people. In response to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mrs Chapman), the truth is that we failed to make the progress that we should have done, and this Government feel that autonomy, plus their other measures, represent a better way to achieve that.

I want to make some brief remarks about Building Schools for the Future. My predecessor, the hon. Member for Huddersfield, who is chatting at the moment, knows full well that there is not the evidence to show that capital investment in schools leads to educational transformation. There is a link, but it is pretty small. Obviously, we all regret the fact that we cannot have brand-new schools where schools are not in an ideal state, but under BSF the allocation of money was out of proportion to the benefit given. Under this Government, more money will be spent on capital in schools in this Parliament than in the first two Parliaments of the Labour Government. Let us keep this in perspective. We need to recognise that nobody wants children to be in a school that is not in a good condition, but equally there is no evidence to show that the building itself, however inspiring the children may initially say it is when it opens, leads to the educational transformation that is at the real heart of improving outcomes, particularly for the poorest.

I should like to touch on the education maintenance allowance, which many other Members have mentioned. In the case of the EMA, unlike BSF, there is material evidence to show that it has helped young people from certain backgrounds to stay in education. I hope that Ministers will take that evidence very seriously and ensure that whatever they put in place does not artificially stifle that opportunity for people.

On the move from the current position to autonomy, we need to consider issues such as school sports trusts. I hope that Ministers, while generally believing in giving autonomy to schools and passing it down, will be careful to ensure that transitional arrangements, and sometimes funding, are in place so that things of value are not unnecessarily lost before they grow again from the grass roots.

Most of all, what we must have for this country is aspiration—aspiration to raise standards overall, and aspiration in believing that we can do so much better. So far, the shadow Secretary of State has been far more critical of how well we are doing than in the first two Parliaments of the Labour Government. Let us keep this in perspective.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op):
I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr Stuart). I welcome the measured tone of his remarks, particularly his final comments on the education maintenance allowance and school sports partnerships.

It is incumbent on Members in all parts of the House, but particularly Labour Members, to respond to the Secretary of State’s challenge on continued inequality in education. It is clearly a scar on our society and our economy that someone’s social background is still such a key determinant of how well they will do later on in life. However, I would appreciate it if he would acknowledge the serious efforts that Labour in power made to enact reforms that would make a difference to the situation, not least the academies programme. The Labour version of the academies programme was very much about dealing with deprivation and struggling and failing
schools in some of the poorest communities. The record in those academies since they were established over the past decade has been overwhelmingly positive and successful.

The education maintenance allowance also provides an excellent example of a Labour programme that has made a real difference, with more young people from poorer backgrounds achieving higher qualifications as a result of it and, crucially, more young people from those backgrounds staying on into higher education than previously. There is no question of Labour Members abandoning reform, and we now have an opportunity to consider the reforms that best take forward our principles in seeking a more equal society in future.

I want to address a couple of the specifics in the motion moved by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham). Labour’s record on capital investment is an overwhelmingly positive one. It is a matter of concern that while the average cut in capital investment by Government Departments over the next period in the comprehensive spending review is 28%, the average cut for schools is more than double that, at 60%. That has real implications in constituencies such as mine. Schools that were going to benefit from wave 6 of Building Schools for the Future were let down in the summer and are still waiting to see what will happen in future. Liverpool city council has taken the sensible approach of trying to devise a plan B, and I urge the Secretary of State and his officials to work closely with Liverpool so that we can have such a plan. In the summer he gave an undertaking that he or one of his Ministers would come to Liverpool, and I repeat the invitation so that we can work together to secure the very best capital support for schools in my constituency and across the rest of Liverpool.

The principle behind the pupil premium is good. There is a genuine problem, which the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Annette Brooke) mentioned, with pockets of deprivation in otherwise affluent areas. Sometimes, local government fails to redistribute funds to ensure that the affected schools get the money that they deserve. Our concern, as my right hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State set out, is whether the pupil premium is to be additional money, and particularly whether schools in constituencies such as mine will directly lose out as a consequence of its introduction. Liverpool has the highest level of deprivation in England, and we need to ensure that our funding is properly protected so that we can build on the remarkable improvement in standards in Liverpool’s schools since 1997.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is discussing the pupil premium eloquently. Would he like to comment on a situation in my constituency? During the general election campaign the Liberal Democrat candidate was championing the pupil premium, at the same time as the Liberal Democrat council was closing schools in the most deprived areas.

Stephen Twigg: It is obviously shocking and unprecedented to hear an example of the Liberal Democrats saying one thing in one place and doing the opposite elsewhere. I am certainly very concerned by the example that my hon. Friend gives.

My concern is that there will be a triple blow for the poorest communities, including the one that I now represent: the loss of capital investment through Building Schools for the Future, potential revenue cuts because of the creation of the pupil premium, and the abolition of the EMA.

I wish to address two other specific matters in my remaining time. The first is the impact of the Government’s decisions on sports, to which my right hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State referred. There has been fantastic work by the Youth Sport Trust and school sports partnerships in the recent period. Moving away from specialist sports colleges is a fundamental error. It is wrong for the academic chances of the kids who go to those schools, bad for participation in sport and physical education and bad for health and the campaign against obesity.

In my constituency is the excellent Cardinal Heenan school, which is a specialist sports college. My right hon. Friend will be delighted to hear that it works closely with Everton football club to promote sport and PE not just in that school but in local primary schools. We need to learn from the positive examples of such schools. I recognise that removing ring-fencing can often be popular with schools in principle, but there is always a fear that if we move away from a national strategy and a targeted approach completely, the original objective of that strategy will be lost and we might see a reduction in participation in sport and PE. That would come at a time when, for health reasons, we need more participation, not less.

My final point is about citizenship education. As a Minister, I was proud to launch that as part of the core national curriculum. I know that the Government are reconsidering the national curriculum, and I should like to make a plea for citizenship to remain a core part of it. Members of all parties can unite in sharing concern about the decline in active involvement in communities and political literacy among young people.

The evidence suggests that the impact of citizenship education has been patchy, without any doubt, but Ofsted has shown that the best citizenship lessons are those taught by teachers with a specialist subject knowledge. My fear is that if citizenship education ceases to be part of the core national curriculum, fewer teachers will train in it and there will be a decline in its quality in our schools. I hope that the Minister who responds to the debate will be able to provide some reassurance that this Government, like the previous one, see citizenship education as a very important part of the curriculum.

All parties can agree that education is important for social justice and for our economic future. There is a real fear that the Government’s policies could further widen the gap between the deprived and less deprived parts of the country through cuts in capital investment, the loss of the EMA and the impact of the pupil premium. I urge them to think again in those key policy areas.

Karen Lumley (Redditch) (Con): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this very important debate. Education is vital not only to the future of our children and young people, but to the future of the UK as a whole. Our economy depends on nurturing the best
and brightest talents, and we should ensure that each and every child, no matter their background or social situation, has access to the very best education that we can provide.

I should like to declare my interest in this debate. I am chairman of governors of Vaynor first school, which is one of the largest first schools in the country with 408 pupils. The Secretary of State may remember visiting Vaynor with me a couple of years ago. Yesterday, I received an e-mail from its head teacher. She wrote:

“I could kiss Michael Gove! He has cancelled Financial Management Standards in Schools.”

Although it would not be proper for me to echo both sentiments in that statement, I firmly support the Government’s move to cancel needless micromanagement. As chairman of governors, I fully understand the issues surrounding fairer funding for our schools. The Government’s long-term plans for a simpler funding system are welcome. There is a definite need to tailor funding for schools in each area, not base funding allocation on a complicated and arbitrary system that overlooks local needs.

There is also a large disparity between the funding allocated to similar schools in different areas of the country. It has not escaped my notice that the constituency of the Leader of the Opposition receives per pupil funding of £4,083; the constituency of the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham) receives per pupil funding of £4,265; and even higher is the guaranteed per pupil funding of £4,317 for the constituency of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson). Redditch, on the other hand, receives only £3,864. Those right hon. Gentlemen who put forward today’s motion receive on average almost £300 more than schools in my Redditch constituency.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a powerful point on behalf of the schools of Worcestershire. May I add one more statistic to her figures? There is a £760 per pupil gap in funding between pupils in Worcestershire and the neighbouring authority of Birmingham. Her constituency in Redditch and mine in Worcester include some of the most deprived wards in the country. Both were represented by Labour Members in this House for 13 years, and people in those communities were on a 13-year promise of fairer funding. Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming this Government’s intention to review the funding formula? If Opposition Members turn their backs on funding reform, they will be turning their backs on some of the neediest communities in Worcestershire.

Karen Lumley: I agree with my hon. Friend. I urge the Government to ensure that funding is fair and that schools across the country have equal access to the piggy bank. I also welcome the Government’s plans for the pupil premium and the £2.5 billion that has been found in these difficult economic times to support educational development of the most disadvantaged pupils. That shows a real commitment by this Government to reduce the attainment gap and ensure that each and every school pupil reaches their potential. However, we must ensure that the pupil premium goes to those who are most in need, and I urge the Government not to overlook the pockets of deprivation that exist in Redditch and Worcester, the constituency of my hon. Friend. Will the Government clarify how the pupil premium will reach those pockets of deprivation?

Finally, I should like to say a few words about standards in schools. I should like to see standards raised in Redditch over the course of this Parliament. I firmly believe that the Government should focus on school standards—not just in a few schools but in all our schools. We need to ensure that teachers are free from the increasing bureaucracy and incessant form filling so that they can concentrate on teaching our children.

When I meet teachers and head teachers, one of the first things that they mention is the endless amounts of paperwork that they have to deal with. We need to move away, and stay away, from the bureaucratic procedures imposed on our school system and make sure that it is replaced by teachers spending more time with the pupils. I received another e-mail yesterday, from another head teacher in my constituency, who wrote:

“Just to say I applaud the Government for abolishing this bureaucratic burden on schools. It is good to finally have a Government that listens”.

On that note, I will finish my contribution. We in Redditch are trying hard to improve our schools and get the very best education for our children. I applaud the Government’s proposals and hope that all hon. Members will make their schools and our nation’s children their top priority.

6.4 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I welcome the contribution of the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr Stuart), the Chair of the Select Committee, and his comments about the importance of investment in improving attainment and standards, but it is also important to recognise that the previous Labour Government not only put in the money but achieved results. I did not recognise the hon. Gentleman’s characterisation of what happened. GCSE results and others improved, and there was a big increase in further and higher education results.

My family was fortunate enough to have access to Sure Start when a centre opened where we lived. It benefited not just my family but the other families who used it. They told me in great detail the difference that it had made to the younger children, when compared with older children who had not had such an opportunity in a Sure Start centre or in any other pioneering family centres that preceeded it. The difference can be seen many years later in the attitudes, behaviour and achievement of the younger children, who are now teenagers, compared with their slightly older brothers and sisters, who had no such support in the early years. I know from that evidence the importance of Sure State to children who live in deprived areas, which explains people’s concerns about Sure Start’s future.

The Secretary of State did not answer the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) made about concerns regarding the future of Sure Start, but perhaps he will do so in his closing remarks. I know from my experience and that of many others who have benefited that, of all the previous Government’s achievements, the improvement in the quality of lives and the outcomes for children and families, just through Sure Start, is beyond measure.

Karen Lumley: [Interruption]
The education maintenance allowance benefited many young people who stayed in education. Indeed, the Liberal Democrats suggested in their manifesto that they understood that. They promised to support the EMA, as did the Conservatives, because they saw the improvement in staying-on rates, and the predicted decline by some organisations in staying on of 10% or 12% is worrying. In Sefton, 80% of young people receive EMA, and from talking to them I know the number who say that they will not bother going to college any more without the £30 or £50 a week is frightening. I hope the Government reconsider the limits they are placing on support to young people.

Earlier, I asked the Secretary of State about the pupil premium, about which the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Library make similar points. The rise in the numbers of children going to school means that, despite the pupil premium and the increase in the overall money for schools, the real terms effect is a cut for 87% of secondary schools and 60% of primary schools. That cannot be what the Secretary of State intended, and the impact on areas of deprivation, to which the hon. Member for Redditch (Karen Lumley) referred, is worrying.

I accept that we need to look after people in pockets of deprivation in the more affluent areas, but it is important to ensure that people in the larger areas of deprivation, such as those in Merseyside and our other large cities, are protected. Unless we do that, the outcomes of Merseyside and Cheshire. I want to address the needs of those in pockets of social deprivation, which you have just brushed aside. Those numbers add up. I appreciate, and have a lot of sympathy with, the issues that you have in Merseyside—and I support your case—but you cannot ignore those numbers because when you put them into the comprehensive—

Graham Evans: My constituency is on the periphery of Merseyside and Cheshire. I want to address the needs of those in pockets of social deprivation, which you have just brushed aside. Those numbers add up. I appreciate, and have a lot of sympathy with, the issues that you have in Merseyside—and I support your case—but you cannot ignore those numbers because when you put them into the comprehensive—

Mr Speaker: Order. First, the hon. Gentleman should not, by now, be using the word "you". Secondly, interventions should be brief, not mini-speeches. Other Members are waiting to contribute to the debate.

Bill Esterson: I shall close by addressing that point. I did say it is important that we look after those in pockets of deprivation, but it is crucial issue that we do not do so at the expense of much larger areas where, historically, we have had to invest money to support people because of the extreme deprivation.

6.11 pm

Eric Ollerenshaw (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Con): Like others, I declare an interest. I was, until 2000, a teacher, having taught in three state comprehensive schools, two of which were classed as social priority. I was a member of the Inner London education authority, the mention of which calls to mind not only political battles of the past but, perhaps, the importance of those battles in changing education structures and of what that can do to raise standards.

I want to cover three points: spending, teaching in deprived areas and ideology. Although the Labour party does not like it, the sad truth is, as the Secretary of State underlined, that for the next couple of years everything that we do must be seen in the context of the financial mess we have been left with—not only the huge budget deficit and the record national debt, but the fact that Labour went into the last election with blank cheques, on which, for me, Building Schools for the Future was the last. Those are Labour's legacies, and, although today we have been told that we are making cuts, they were phantom legacies with no money to back them up. I congratulate the Secretary of State on what he achieved in the comprehensive spending review—the increase of £3.6 billion over the next four years and the pupil premium, which other Members have mentioned.

On Building Schools for the Future, we accept that in certain areas there is obviously worry and panic, but the Labour party's suggestion that the capital programme has entirely disappeared and there will be no repairs to schools and no new schools built is a fallacy. In Fleetwood, which has an extremely good Conservative county council that looks after its money, seven primary schools in some of the most deprived areas in my constituency will have been rebuilt and refurbished by the end of this financial year. That work is still going on, whatever Labour claims.

For me, the learning environment is not just about teaching. It is more than bricks and mortar and, these days, steel and glass. We need quality teaching, good leadership from heads and legislation that allows professionals the freedom to innovate and get on with what they do best.

I remember starting out as a young teacher—we were all young once—in the 1970s when there was another “building schools for the future” programme under a Prime Minister called Jim Callaghan. My first teaching post was in Tottenham, a deprived area then and now, which is perhaps a comment on a series of Governments in between. One could not imagine this today, but we were offered a purpose-built comprehensive for 11 to 18-year-olds, with eight-form entry, on a brand-new site behind Spurs football club. Northumberland Park school, as it was called, was designed by the latest 1970s architects—hon. Members can imagine the result—and had a theatre and a swimming pool. We moved into the school with its first first-years—we had first-years in those days; I think they are called year 7s now—and a bunch of new, enthusiastic and excited teachers. That is where I learned my trade as a history teacher, and I have three anecdotes about my experience.

First, 10 years down the line, that school was in serious trouble, so the building was not the problem. Secondly, I was asked, as a history teacher, to choose the European A-level module, and I chose France and Louis XIV because that is what I knew, it was my specialism, and I could bring my best talents to bear on it. However, there was stiff opposition from the so-called education advisers. This is when I tuned into politics, because that opposition was all about questioning the ability of children in Tottenham, whatever their background, to achieve what other schoolchildren could achieve. I was sorry to hear the shadow Secretary of State's comment about teaching Latin in Acton. Why should every child not get the best that other schools—even independent schools—provide? I can tell him that the students who studied Louis XIV have ended up in good jobs because they were well taught, not just by me, but by others.

My third anecdote is about social deprivation and poor schools. In that same school, I wanted to put on extra classes when we first had a sixth form, and I did
so, for children going for their pre-university application. They were the first from that school to do so, but I was told by the local National Union of Teachers activist that I should perhaps not put on extra classes. Why? Because the school might expect other staff to do the same. I was naive enough to believe that getting a job in a socially deprived area and school involved going the extra mile. Through his reforms, the Secretary of State is attempting to allow teachers who are perhaps a bit younger than I am now to go that extra mile and to achieve for every single child.

6.17 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Eric Ollerenshaw), who drew on his experience at the chalk face to make his points. I agree with him that every child ought to have the best.

I have been privileged to spend my life in education, working with the most fantastic young people in schools and colleges as well as with wonderful fellow professionals. Professionals have not always got it right, nor have politicians. However, when the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, said that his priorities were “education, education, education” he at least put his money where his mouth was. We saw investment in education at all levels—from Sure Start to higher education—the like of which I had not seen in my lifetime.

That is why the Secretary of State was right to begin his speech by celebrating successful school leaders who prospered under the previous Government. That does not mean the previous Government got everything right, because they could have done some things better, but, sadly, this Government, rather than learning from and building on the success of their predecessor, are doing what politicians too often do: gambling on organisational change. They are starting again with structures, but that is a distraction from the core issues of the quality and teaching and learning, and the capacity and quality of leadership in schools and colleges, which the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr Stuart) rightly emphasised.

Nationally, schools with the highest number of children who receive free school meals have seen the biggest rise in educational attainment. There has been phenomenal investment in information technology and other modern equipment in our schools, and the role of support staff has been transformed so that the focus is more effectively on the needs of our young people. Teachers are now specialised in teaching and learning, and the outcomes that they have achieved at all levels of our education system have improved year on year. Exciting and innovative things are happening in our comprehensive classrooms, yet, at the very moment when there is a momentum towards greater success, what do this new Government do? With no electoral mandate, they decide to turn everything upside down and gamble with our children’s future.

We need look no further than the Government’s approach to EMA to see how they have strayed from their mandate and gambled with our young people’s futures. Over the past few years, EMAs have been a spur to widen achievement and raise aspiration. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) quite rightly quoted the Secretary of State when, putting our right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls) in his place, he said, “I have never heard of us scrapping EMAs. We wrote, “It is pleasing to see that the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr Gibb) said as recently as June:

“The Government are committed to retaining the educational maintenance allowance”.—[Official Report, 14 June 2010; Vol. 511, c. 307W]

Sadly, we now know that not only is a pledge not a pledge, but a commitment is nothing more than a throwaway line.

Research conducted by CiBT—the Centre for British Teachers—gives robust evidence that EMAs have increased participation and achievement among 16 and 17-year-olds and contributed to improved motivation and performance. As the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness recognised, when effectively focused on the target groups, EMAs are restricted to low-income households and disproportionately taken up by those with low achievement at school, those from ethnic minorities and those from single-parent families. Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows that attainment at GCSE and A-level by recipients of EMAs has risen by 5 to 7 percentage points since their introduction.

I know all that from my own experience as the principal of a sixth-form college. Indeed, only this week the principal of North Lindsey college in my constituency wrote to me expressing alarm at the impact of the Government’s plans to scrap EMAs on young people’s aspirations. He urged me to raise the matter in Parliament and to argue the case for retaining EMAs, so that is what I am doing this evening. I am appalled by the way in which the Government have abandoned EMAs, breaking the promises that they made to young people as recently as June, as well as before the election. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh pointed out, this Government are taking a reckless gamble with our children’s futures.

Sure Start is being reduced and diminished. The pupil premium appears to mean no more than raiding money from other pots and distributing it in a different way—a way that may turn out to be more unfair. That is why a Liberal Democrat colleague—the hon. Member for Bradford East (Mr Ward)—left the Chamber so peremptorily earlier on. He was not satisfied with the answer that the Secretary of State gave to his quite proper question. There will be a real-terms cut per pupil in the schools budget. BSF is a shambles, with schools, communities and students being let down. Support for school sport is being dismantled, thereby betraying our commitment to an Olympic legacy. EMAs are being cancelled and tuition fees trebled. So much for aspiration.

This is a casino Government, gambling with the economy, gambling with our nation’s health service and gambling with our children’s future. It is a gamble that is uncosted, unhelpful and unnecessary. I urge all hon. Members to support the motion before the House this evening.

6.23 pm

Mr Rob Wilson (Reading East) (Con): The Opposition’s motion today accuses the Government of “pursuing a reform agenda in education that represents an ideological gamble with successful services” but Labour needs to acknowledge all its past, if it is to be taken seriously on education in future.
In my constituency, after 13 years of a Labour Government and a Labour council, and with two Labour MPs between 1997 and 2005, the latest local figures available show that nearly 40% of pupils fail to achieve the basic standard of five good GCSEs, including maths and English. The national figures show that nearly half of all pupils failed to meet that basic standard last year. I am therefore not sure how those on the Labour Front Bench can claim any success, especially when so many thousands of young people are leaving compulsory education without achieving even the most basic of standards. Nor can they claim that the issue is expenditure. In real terms, public expenditure on education increased by £35 billion over Labour’s 13-year period in office, which is an increase of some 72%, although the increase in my constituency was only 50%. Essentially, 50% of children are failing to reach the basic standard, and that is as good as it got in 13 years of a Labour Government. The minor improvements that took place in later years—the introduction of academies, and things like that—were unfortunately far too little and far too late, leaving many children failing in our schools.

Although there are still too many bad teachers in our schools, a large majority are committed and doing a wonderful job in very difficult circumstances. As with so many other parts of the public sector, teachers have been tied up with bureaucracy, and constrained by an over-supply of rules and an under-supply of common sense. I see that week in, week out in schools in my constituency, and I therefore welcome the fact that my Government are introducing truly radical reforms to improve innovation and diversity of approach in our schools. After years of failure by a Labour-run council, I welcome the fact that the Government’s academy policy is handing powers to the people who are best placed to understand the needs of education in their local areas: teachers, head teachers and governors.

In my constituency, there has been a stampede to academy status. Highdown school has already announced its intention to gain such status, and Reading boys school and Kendrick girls school, both grammar schools, will follow shortly. I am sure that others, such as Reading school and Kendrick girls school, both grammar schools, which are both going to say. I shall stick to the main points. I have the privilege of being able to comment on the Government’s proposals and on how they are likely to impact on schools and on outcomes for children.

For my right hon. Friend will be aware that under the last Government, grammar schools were, unfairly, not allowed to expand their numbers. It is clear that people in my constituency are voting with their feet, and schools are taking advantage of academy status and all the freedom that that brings, instead of staying with the failed system of central planning of the shadow Secretary of State’s Government.

I hope that very soon there will be another massive step forward for education in my constituency with the announcement of a brand new school. I have been particularly taken with the success of city technology colleges and university technical colleges to support education for 14 to 19-year-olds. They would add real diversity and choice for parents in my constituency.

Before it was popular and before it was Conservative party policy, I often wrote about and campaigned for a pupil premium. It is gratifying that the Government are implementing such an important and radical policy, which could see some schools with a particularly high concentration of poor pupils receive as much as £1 million in additional funding to deal with the particular disadvantages associated with poorer pupils. That could make such a difference, and help to close the attainment gap between rich and poor pupils, although I accept that on its own it will not be enough.

The Opposition should recognise that the coalition Government are taking on the most successful policies of the last Government, such as the Teach First scheme to bring outstanding graduates into teaching. But they must also face up to the reality that 13 years of a Labour Government and local authority-run education services have left a legacy where, despite massive investment, almost half of pupils fail to make the best or even the most basic grade at school. We owe it to our children to try radical new approaches that have had great success both here and in other countries. It is time to break the cycle of under-achievement.

Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con): In addition to welcoming the success of the academies in my constituency, there has been a stampede to academy status. Highdown school has already announced its intention to gain such status, and Reading boys school and Kendrick girls school, both grammar schools, will follow shortly. I am sure that others, such as Reading girls school, will take advantage of today’s announcement by my right hon. Friend that any school may now apply for academy status if it teams up with a stronger school that will help to drive improvement.

Mr Wilson: Of course I welcome that. My hon. Friend has done a great deal to help that process.

I want to make one further remark about my two excellent grammar schools, and I say this gently. I have had conversations with head teachers to the same end. Their catchment areas need to be looked at carefully. Kendrick school in particular is recruiting pupils from far and wide, and is becoming too remote from the local community that it serves. I would like my local grammar schools to re-engage with the task of aiding social mobility for clever, poorer local Reading children rather than being regional schools. I hope that my right hon. Friend will ensure that those schools can expand their numbers to recruit more local Reading children as that may help the situation.

My right hon. Friend will be aware that under the last Government, grammar schools were, unfairly, not allowed to expand their numbers. It is clear that people in my constituency are voting with their feet, and schools are taking advantage of academy status and all the freedom that that brings, instead of staying with the failed system of central planning of the shadow Secretary of State’s Government.

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Before it was popular and before it was Conserva
I find it inconceivable that any Government could consider allowing just about anyone to open a free school in any type of building, without outdoor play areas, recreational space, or qualified teachers. I am sure the Secretary of State will be aware of the recent Institute of Education report, which clearly demonstrates that the more time a child spends with a support assistant, as opposed to a teacher, the less progress that child will make. It is the strength of the pedagogical environment, the specialist knowledge of the subject and the confidence and quality of the teaching experience that deliver progress. That can only come from a qualified teacher working in a qualified environment.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Pat Glass: I am sorry, but we have very little time.

The Government are proposing a relaxation of the accountability framework in schools, so that academies and schools judged to be outstanding will be inspected only every seven years. I have to ask whether that is going to improve outcomes for schools. I have many criticisms of Ofsted, but I do not criticise its relentless pursuit of an upward trajectory in school improvement. We are all swiftest when we are chased, and that applies as much to head teachers, teachers and schools as to anything or anyone else.

The Government are seeking to abolish independent appeals panels for exclusions. I understand from my discussions with schools that that is not what they want. Head teachers and chairs of governing bodies are telling me that, while it can be very uncomfortable to appear before those independent panels, they provide valuable checks and balances in the system. The heads and chairs are concerned that, without them, they could find themselves defending their actions in court. That would not be good for schools.

The Government are also proposing a national funding formula that is distributed from central Government. However, I am more concerned with what that resource will drive into schools than with where it comes from or who delivers it. The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State have repeatedly said that they will protect schools funding, but when asked direct questions, they have given very few direct answers. I was pleased to hear the Minister of State, Department for Education, the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr Gibb) advise the Education Select Committee this morning that schools budgets would grow by subsuming the standards fund and the educational needs grant into the formula that is distributed from central Government. However, I am more concerned with what that resource will drive into schools than with where it comes from or who delivers it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): The next speaker will be Damian Hinds. I ask him to sit down at 6.40 pm.

6.35 pm

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I appreciate that we are running on a somewhat reduced timetable, but I want to spend a little time metaphorically to reach across the Floor, if I may, and express some sympathy for the fact that Labour was the party that Opposition Members joined.

[Interruption.] Most Labour Members may not have been on the Front-Bench team or even in this House during the previous Labour Government, but this is the party they joined and they looked to it to be progressive and ambitious for every child in this country. I am sure they still do, but when they look back on the 13 years of Labour Government, they will see our decline in the international league tables and a widening gap on social mobility, not to mention the 900,000 young people not in education, employment or training. They must be disappointed. The real disappointment, however, is that when faced with a bold and truly ambitious programme such as the one put forward by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, those on the Labour Front Bench have nothing positive to say.

Ian Mearns rose—

Damian Hinds: I would love to give way, but given the tight timetable, I am strongly advised not to—I apologise.

Far from being the ideological gamble suggested by the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) in the Opposition motion, I believe that our programme of change is measured, responsible and genuinely based on evidence. One refreshing aspect of the new Government is that whenever discussion of education policy arises, it always starts with the international evidence and considers where in the world something is done best—whether it be in Norway, Sweden, parts of the United States, or Singapore. Further confirmation of the coalition Government’s evidence-based approach is that they have not proceeded in an ideological way, as they have continued with some policy elements that have not yet started or are only just beginning, such as, for example, increasing the participation age to 18 or the extension of free entitlement in early education. If schools in the poorest communities receive less funding next year than they did this year, and if we add that to more unemployment and poverty as a result of Government cuts, that will equal poorer standards and outcomes, not better ones.

I have looked at the reforms very carefully, and if they are going to produce better outcomes for schools, I will welcome them. However, it is my considered view that they will lead to improved outcomes for some children but poorer outcomes for most. The strap-line of this Government will be less “Every child matters” and more “Actually, some children don’t matter very much at all”. That would be a tragedy for the majority of children and schools in this country. The Government appear to be following an ideological experiment with other people’s children, and it is the poorest and the most vulnerable who will lose out most.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. The
years. That, if nothing else, provides absolute evidence that our approach to education is not about salami slicing, cheese paring or any other kind of food cutting-up that could be described.

There are good and great things happening in any period, and some occurred under the last Labour Government. I am thinking of the academy programme, in particular, which was the baby of the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair. The former Chairman of the education Select Committee, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) said that he understood the approach towards the first wave of schools in the academy programme under the last Government, but it was always Tony Blair’s ambition that, eventually, to use his own words, “every school” could be an academy.

The new coalition programme is about focusing on the elements that can make the most difference, prioritising the areas, the people and the children that most need help at the most pivotal times in their lives, and then trusting professionals to get on and do the job. When it comes to spending money where it can make the most difference, I believe in people, not palaces. Of course the school environment makes a difference, but what makes an even bigger difference is the person standing at the front of the class—the person who can inspire and lead those young people, helping them to learn. That is why I welcome the extension of Teach First, the introduction of Teach Now and new initiatives such as Troops to Teachers.

It is often said that no one forgets a good teacher, but I have met many people who have forgotten a good smart board. In the Building Schools for the Future programme, the £1,625 spent per pupil on IT would have been much better spent in investing in our human resources and our people.

As to focusing on the people who need help most, there is the pupil premium, supplemented by the education endowment fund. Although it is right to debate how that formula works and how the transition to the pupil premium will work, I would love to hear any Labour Member challenge the principle of the pupil premium and say that it is the wrong way to go about funding education. There should be an amount per pupil and then a supplement—[Interruption.] I am talking about the structure. The supplement will go to those who need it most. It puts the money where it is most needed and it will incentivise schools to take on the most needy pupils rather than have the top-skimming about which people rightly complain.

I have virtually no time left so I shall conclude by saying that focus on the most formative times is important. That is why I particularly welcome the extension of the early-years free allowance and the extension to the neediest children at age two. Every piece of academic evidence that I have ever seen says that it is most important to focus on the very earliest years to help children’s futures. That will affect their ability to read and their behaviour and discipline, which affects all those around them.

We thus have diversity and choice in respect of school types and we have progressivity in respect of the pupil premium and other measures. We also have an evidence-based, financially responsible approach that will enable schools to flourish and more children to become everything they possibly can be.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): We have had a very good debate, which has included contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr Stuart), my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), the hon. Member for Redditch (Karen Lumley), my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Eric Ollervodshaw), my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), the hon. Member for Reading East (Mr Wilson), my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass) and the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds). The debate has been well informed, with Back Benchers in particular bringing their expertise to the subject.

The Government are embarking on an ideological experiment with the children of this country. Let us look at some of the measures that have been discussed this afternoon. The pupil premium has featured quite largely. It is supposed to be the Liberal Democrats’ flagship contribution to the coalition Government, so important that any funding for it would be in addition to planned spending on schools. That is what the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws) said was the benchmark, and that is what the Prime Minister said. He said that it would be additional. That is what a premium is; after all: something on top. Then along came George, and the Treasury boffins.

I know that the Secretary of State is a very cultured man. I would say that he is a very literary man. Some might say that he is sometimes a self-dramatising man. However, no one would ever be so vulgar as to suggest that he is a man with an eye for detail, or with his finger firmly on the figures. How else can we explain the fact that he was popping open the champagne when he received his settlement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, despite having just been done up like a kipper?

Let me give the Secretary of State some advice. If the Chancellor offers the same amount of cash next year as this year, that is a cut in real terms. If he then offers to top it up so that, per pupil, it does not keep up with cost increases over the next few years, that is not a pupil premium, but a real cut per pupil. It is not a pupil premium, but an old Treasury con. The Secretary of State should have known better.

Dan Rogerson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Kevin Brennan: I have not enough time, I am afraid. Well, I might give way in a minute.

One can accept that the Secretary of State, with his challenged grasp of numbers, might be beguiled by the Chancellor, with all his confusing charts and tables—that is perfectly possible—but how can we explain the reaction of his Liberal Democrat chum in the Department? How does the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Brent Central (Sarah Teather), respond to this absorption of the supposedly additional flagship pupil premium into a schools budget that has been reduced per head in real terms? Answer: she brags about it. She will have trouble bragging about it when she starts trying to explain to head teachers in Brent Central why their budgets have
been cut despite the introduction of the so-called pupil premium. She will have to use all the expertise that she has built up over the years in preparing dodgy bar graphs for Liberal Democrat focus leaflets.

We can all imagine the scene. Brent head teacher: “But my budget has gone down! Where is the pupil premium?” The hon. Member for Brent Central: “Let me just show you this bar graph. It clearly demonstrates that although you have less money, you have more money than you would have had if we had cut the budget more deeply. You have therefore benefited from the pupil premium.” Brent Head Teacher: “Oh, well, that’s all right then.” Come off it! The hon. Lady must think that head teachers in her constituency were born yesterday. It is a con. When the final budget figures land on head teachers’ desks across the country, it will take more than a few dodgy bar graphs from the hon. Lady and a few flowery flourishes from the Secretary of State to con professional school leaders into swallowing this nonsense.

It is no wonder the hon. Member for Bradford East (Mr Ward) walked out when the Secretary of State admitted that this was simply an increase in cash terms. [HON. MEMBERS: “Stormed out!”] Stormed out, indeed. According to the hon. Gentleman’s website, he fights for schools in his area. I believe it, after his reaction to the Secretary of State’s announcement to the House. I know that the Minister who will be winding up the debate loves a bit of poetry, so I will give him some Yeats. It was a case of “I will arise and go now” when the hon. Member for Bradford East heard what the Secretary of State had to say.

Dan Rogerson rose—

Mr Graham Stuart rose—

Kevin Brennan: I will give way to the Chairman of the Education Committee.

Mr Stuart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way in what is a witty and well-presented speech, although he is using paltry facts to great effect. The truth is that with funding for the NHS protected—unlike under Labour—along with funding for international aid, the threat to education was significant. People were talking about cuts of 10%, 20% and possibly higher than that. Therefore it must be seen as a good result that, in an extremely tough overall financial round, the education and schools budget, including the pupil premium, is being increased in real terms.

Kevin Brennan: The hon. Gentleman knows that it is not increasing in real terms per head over the next few years, but that is not the point. I would accept that if that were the Government’s explanation for what they are trying to do, but they are trying to con people into believing that the pupil premium is truly a premium, an additional sum of money. That is what they promised; that is what the Prime Minister promised, but it is not what is being delivered.

What else do the Lib Dems get out of this?

Dan Rogerson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Kevin Brennan: I have not got much time, but I might give way before the end of my speech if the hon. Gentleman is lucky.

What else do the Lib Dems get out of this deal? They get free schools that bypass local democracy, which they used to be so keen on, and that can be set up without any planning permission. They can be set up in an undertaker’s if that is what people want, which would make for an interesting school run. The Lib Dems also get a 60% cut in the capital programme, with resources diverted to the Conservatives’ peripheral ideological experiment, and a systematic dismantling of any system or programme that promotes collaboration and working together within the family of schools. No school is an island. Yes, by all means give schools freedom and autonomy from unnecessary bureaucracy, but let us please acknowledge that, without any structure for co-operation, standards ultimately suffer.

Let us look at school sports partnerships, which were mentioned in the debate. This morning at a meeting in the House of Commons we heard from Jo Phillips, a school sports co-ordinator in the Prime Minister’s Witney constituency, who is about to be made redundant by the Secretary of State. Along with others, she described the transformation that school sports partnerships have brought in Oxfordshire and across the country. She absolutely dismissed the guff we heard from the Under-Secretary of State at Education questions on Monday, and said she could not believe that the Prime Minister could possibly have told what the full consequences of the complete withdrawal of funding would be for his constituency and the country as a whole.

I hope the Secretary of State has explained to the Prime Minister what he is doing with school sports partnerships. We all saw his dramatic transformation from Dr Jekyll to Mr Hyde when the Prime Minister walked into the Chamber in the middle of Education questions on Monday, so powerful was his zeal to please his boss. Perhaps the Government were a bit hasty in getting rid of those relaxation pods they lampooned before they came into office, because the Secretary of State looked badly in need of a place for a nice lie down at the time. I hope he has explained to the Prime Minister that, for the sake of funding a peripheral ideological programme, he has cut a system that has enjoyed near-universal support among teachers, sports people, parents and pupils, and that has transformed pupils’ lives—and that he did so on a day when the International Olympic Committee was visiting London means he has also greatly endangered Britain’s Olympic legacy.

Dan Rogerson rose—

Kevin Brennan: I will briefly give way to the hon. Gentleman before concluding my speech.

Dan Rogerson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Along with his colleague the hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass), he might want to stay behind for some extra tuition about how to square the cuts proposed by the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Edinburgh South West (Mr Darling), with the situation that all Departments would be facing had Labour got back into office, unlike what we have secured in this coalition, which will be extra money for education.
Kevin Brennan: If the hon. Gentleman examines the record, I think he will find that when his party colleague, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws), was discussing this with the previous Education Secretary, the schools budget had been protected and the right hon. Gentleman refused to do a deal because he claimed the Conservatives had already protected that sum of money for schools and he could get a pupil premium on top. As I said, stitched up like a kipper.

Much progress has been made since the days when I, like many other hon. Members, taught in leaky portakabins under the Tories. A lot of progress has been made since those days of inadequate facilities, inadequate resources and inadequate pay for teachers. The Government seem determined to take us back to a fragmented, underfunded future. They should change course now.

6.50 pm

The Minister for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning (Mr John Hayes): I thank all hon. Members who have spoken in this interesting and timely discussion. The shadow Secretary of State began it and I listened to him with some sympathy, because it is not easy to bounce back from coming last of the serious candidates in one’s party’s leadership election—I exclude the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for obvious reasons. The right hon. Gentleman may be a loser, but he is a trier and a trier deserves a hearing in this House. He said that the Government are ideological in their pursuit of excellence, and that was repeated by the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan). If that is the charge—that we are resolute in our determination and unstinting in our efforts to do the best by our children—I, for one, plead guilty.

The right hon. Gentleman also complained about capital funding so let us put the record straight on that. The level of Department for Education capital funding for the next four years is by no means low. The Department’s average capital budget over the forthcoming period will be higher than any single year’s figure before 2004-05. Yes this was a tough spending round, but he knows that he is comparing these figures against an exceptional year and that in fact they are higher than the ones for any period during the first term of the Labour Government from 1997.

Andy Burnham: Can the Minister offer us one word of convincing explanation as to why, in a spending review when we were told that schools were protected, the Department got a minus 60% capital settlement when the average for the rest of government was minus 30%? Why were schools singled out for double punishment?

Mr Hayes: The right hon. Gentleman was not listening to the argument. The truth of the matter is that the capital deal secured by the Department is tough compared with the previous year, but it is by no means exceptional when one examines capital spending over the lifetime of the Government of whom he was a part. Let us also deal with this issue of revenue spending. He knows that combined the pupil premium and school funding, which is protected, means an increase in funding for the schools budget of £3.6 billion in cash terms by the end of the spending review period, which is a 0.1% real-terms increase in each year of the spending review.

Kevin Brennan: Can the Minister just give us the per pupil figure, as he has given us all those other figures?

Mr Hayes: The hon. Gentleman knows that we are protecting school funding in the system. I am talking about flat cash per pupil before adding the pupil premium. He knows what flat cash per pupil means. It means that as the number of pupils increases, the overall budget increases in line.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the education maintenance allowance, so let us get to the bottom of that. I have the research here, although I know he has not read it. It clearly shows that the EMA did increase participation at the margin: 90% of pupils in receipt of it said that they would have participated in education regardless of the EMA. We are going to target resources more effectively at disadvantage. We are going to help people the previous Government failed to help. I do not need to take any lessons from the right hon. Gentleman—Cambridge-educated and pulled up on the shirt-tails of Lord Mandelson and Mr Blair—about what it is like to move from a council estate to a decent education to this place. When he lectures us—

Clive Efford rose—

Mr Hayes: It could be a council estate in Eltham; I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Clive Efford: I recommended an amendment to our education legislation on the pupil premium and the then Government did not accept it, but nor did I have the support of the Liberal Democrats at that time. The pupil premium was meant to be additional. In addition, it was meant to follow the pupil, which would mean that even schools in affluent areas could take pupils that need additional help and get additional money. That is not what the Minister is offering.

Mr Hayes: That is exactly what we are doing. The three things mentioned by the hon. Gentleman are all part of the pupil premium: it is additional, it is targeted at the pupil and it allows the local discretion that he cites. The hon. Gentleman’s amendment was not supported by those on his Front Bench—it was not supported by those who were in government and who had power over these things when they were prepared to let the dead-weight cost of the EMA disadvantage learners across the country.

I welcome the opportunity to debate these matters, because the Government understand that it is time for fresh thinking. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, young people’s education today will have a profound social, economic and cultural impact on what Britain becomes tomorrow. A person’s learning, however, does not—indeed, must not—end with their compulsory schooling. Much of what has been said by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other hon. Members resonates with the Government’s agenda for further education.

I have just returned from the Association of Colleges conference where yesterday we launched a new strategy for skills that sets out a profoundly optimistic vision for the future of further education and practical learning. I know that the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) will welcome that positive approach to practical learning from the burning fire of ambition to the warm glow of
achievement, a future nurtured by professional guidance from an all-age careers service with clear routes for progression; a future for colleges in which their primary responsibility and accountability will be to their learners; and a future in which colleges are free to meet the needs of learners, building confidently on what has been achieved by a better, fairer schools system driven by learners’ needs and teachers’ skills with standards raised ever higher through diversity and choice.

That is why we are pushing ahead with opening more academies, including, for the first time, primary academies. A record 144 academies have opened so far during this academic year and there are many more to come. That is indeed record progress—it took four years for the first 27 academies to open. We know that academies are working, as results continue to rise faster than the national average. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) told the House, academies, specialist schools and other reforms across the world have shown that giving schools autonomy and allowing teachers and head teachers, rather than politicians and bureaucrats, to control schools is what drives up performance.

The early focus has been on outstanding schools, as we want the best schools to lead by example, sharing best practice and working with other schools to bring about sustained improvements to all schools in their area. We will do much more in our determination to tackle the problem of endemic disadvantage that we inherited from Labour. Our pupil premium will rise progressively to £2.5 billion by 2014-15, supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and incentivising good schools to take on pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds. The pupil premium will target extra funding specifically at the most deprived pupils to enable them to receive the support they need to reach their potential and to help schools to reduce inequalities, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) urged us to do.

We trust schools to make good decisions about how to spend the money to support deprived children and to narrow attainment gaps, and we need to, because the gaps that we inherited from the previous Government—the widening gap between rich and poor and the failure to address social mobility—were shocking. They were a damning indictment of that Administration and of the people sitting on the shadow Treasury Bench.

I respect all Members who contributed to this debate. I respect the experience of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), the knowledge of my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Karen Lumley) and the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Mr Wilson). I know that people across the House want the best for our future and for our children. However, although some Opposition Members have spoken up to the truth that the way to get the best is to put power in the hands of the teachers and to drive the system through the needs of learners, some are wedded to a failed past orthodoxy and we heard it again tonight. I hope that, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) is not one of those who will defend the failures of the past. I hope that he will embrace reform and that he will come on the journey with us to a better schools system and a better future for our young people. I do not say that all those on the Opposition Benches are without heart. No party has a monopoly on concern or compassion, so I do not say that Labour Members are heartless—I say that their Front Benchers are witless.

Mr Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Lab) claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put. Question agreed to.

Main Question accordingly put.

The House divided: Ayes 223, Noes 312.

Division No. 121] [6.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bain, Mr William
Balls, rh Ed
Banks, Gordon
Barron, rh Mr Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, rh Hilary
Benton, Mr Joe
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Roberta
Blears, rh Hazel
Blenkinis, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, Mr Russell
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Byrne, rh Mr Liam
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Mrs Jenny
Clark, Katy
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crausby, Mr David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Tony
Curran, Margaret

Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Mr Wayne
Davidson, Mr lan
Davies, Geraint
De Piero, Gloria
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, rh Frank
Docherty, Thomas
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Doran, Mr Frank
Dowd, Jim
Doley, Gemma
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natasha
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Mr Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goggins, rh Paul
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hain, rh Mr Peter
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Mr Tom
Havard, Mr Dai
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mark
Hebden, Mr Stephen
Hillier, Meg
Hilling, Julie

Dakins, Alan
Davidson, Mr lan
Davies, Geraint
De Piero, Gloria
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, rh Frank
Docherty, Thomas
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Doran, Mr Frank
Dowd, Jim
Doley, Gemma
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natasha
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Mr Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goggins, rh Paul
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hain, rh Mr Peter
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Mr Tom
Havard, Mr Dai
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mark
Hebden, Mr Stephen
Hillier, Meg
Hilling, Julie
Bagshaw, Ms Louise
Hood, Mr Jim
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda
James, Mrs Siân C.
Jamiesson, Cathy
Johnston, rh Alan
Johnston, Diana
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Jowett, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeley, Barbara
Kee, Alan
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Lammy, Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Chris
Lloyd, Tony
Long, Naomi
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian
MacShane, Mr Richard
MacTaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Shabana
Mann, John
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCann, Mr Michael
McCarty, Kerry
Mclymont, Greg
McFadden, Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKeehan, Ann
McKinnell, Catherine
Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Meale, Mr Alan
Meams, Ian
Michael, rh Alun
Milliband, rh David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme (Livingston)
Morris, Grahame M.
(Massingberd)
Mudie, Mr George
Murphy, Mr Paul
Murray, Ian

Nandy, Lisa
Nash, Pamela
O'Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Osborne, Sandra
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Perkins, Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Qureshi, Yasmin
Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Roberts, John
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Roy, Mr Frank
Roy, Lindsay
Ruddock, rh Joan
Sanwar, Anas
Seabeck, Alison
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shuker, Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Mr Andy
Smith, Nick
Spellar, Mr John
Straw, rh Mr Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, Velice
Walley, Joan
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, rh Malcolm
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wood, Mike
Woodcock, John
Wright, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Mr David Hamilton

Huntingdonshire, James
Brooke, Annette
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
Bruce, rh Malcolm
Buckland, rh Mr Robert
Burley, Mr Alan
Burns, Conor
Burrowes, Mr David
Burston, Paul
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cairns, Alun
Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cash, Mr William
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clappison, Mr James
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Mr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Oliver, Oliver
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, Stephen
Crockart, Mike
Crouch, Tracey
Davey, Mr Edward
Davies, David T. C. (Monmouth)
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Philip
Davies, rh Mr David
de Bois, Nick
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donnell, rh Mr Stephen
Dorries, Nadine
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Mr Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip

Tellers for the Noes:
Baker, Norman
Baker, Steve
Baldry, Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Binley, Mr Brian
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Boles, Nick
Bottomley, Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brake, Tom
Bray, Angie
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridge, Mr Andrew
Brine, Mr Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brooke, Annette
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
Bruce, rh Malcolm
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burley, Mr Alan
Burns, Conor
Burrowes, Mr David
Burston, Paul
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cairns, Alun
Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cash, Mr William
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clappison, Mr James
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Mr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Oliver, Oliver
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, Stephen
Crockart, Mike
Crouch, Tracey
Davey, Mr Edward
Davies, David T. C. (Monmouth)
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Philip
Davies, rh Mr David
de Bois, Nick
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donnell, rh Mr Stephen
Dorries, Nadine
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Mr Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Featherstone, Lynne
Field, Mr Mark
Foster, Mr Don
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fullbrook, Lorraine
Fuller, Richard
Garnier, Mr Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
George, Andrew
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Greening, Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hands, Greg
Harpur, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, Mr John
Heald, Mr Oliver
Heath, Mr David
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Charles
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Holtoborne, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Horwood, Martin
Howell, John
Hughes, Simon
Huhne, rh Chris
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Huppert, Dr Julian
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, Sajid
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kelly, Chris
Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
Kirby, Simon
Question accordingly negatived.
Northern Ireland

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): With the leave of the House, we shall take the two motions on Northern Ireland together.

7.13 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I beg to move,

That the draft Local Elections (Northern Ireland) Order 2010, which was laid before this House on 25 October, be approved.

Mr Deputy Speaker: With this we shall take the following motion:

That the draft Northern Ireland Assembly ( Elections) (Amendment) Order 2010, which was laid before this House on 25 October, be approved.

Mr Swire: These orders update the law governing elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly and to district councils in Northern Ireland in advance of elections in 2011.

I will deal first with the Assembly order, which is much the smaller of the two. That is because the law governing elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly was substantially amended as recently as 2009. Since then, some minor procedural updates have been applied to European and parliamentary elections that, for consistency, should also be applied to Assembly elections. For example, article 3 of the order makes provision to allow a candidate standing in the name of two or more parties to have one of those party’s emblems on the ballot paper.

It also enables a person who cannot sign his or her signature to use a mark in place of any signature required at the nomination stage. Article 4 requires individuals to give reasons if they request their absent vote to be sent to a different address from that at which they are registered. Those are clearly relatively small changes, but they nevertheless mirror updates made to the law since 2009 that apply at other elections in Northern Ireland, and they will provide for greater consistency.

The draft Local Elections (Northern Ireland) Order 2010 is the more substantial order, and provides a much-needed update of the law governing local elections in Northern Ireland. The Electoral Administration Act 2006 made a considerable number of changes to the law governing parliamentary elections across the United Kingdom. As I have indicated, those changes were applied to Northern Ireland Assembly elections and European elections in 2009, but have not yet been applied to district council elections in Northern Ireland. They are set out in schedule 1 to the order, and they include allowing returning officers to correct procedural errors and supply documents in other languages and formats.

Schedule 1 also makes provision for the control of donations to candidates in local elections in Northern Ireland, in line with the donation controls that apply at all other elections in Northern Ireland and across the UK. Schedule 2 makes changes to absent voting procedures, which again already apply at other elections in Northern Ireland. They include adding registered social workers to the list of those who may attest absent vote applications on the grounds of illness and disability, which will make it easier for people with disabilities who live in the community to apply for an absent vote. Schedule 3 aligns the law relating to access to and inspection of documents at local elections with procedures at all other elections in Northern Ireland.

The order also amends the local election rules contained in schedule 5 to the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962. That includes updating the list of acceptable forms of photographic ID that can be presented in order to vote in Northern Ireland, which is of course crucial to ensure consistency of approach for all polls in 2011.

The order is substantial, and I would not wish to detain the House by providing an in-depth description of each provision. I hope the House is satisfied that it contains small but important changes to the law that will provide much-needed modernisation of local election procedures in Northern Ireland and greater consistency with other elections across the UK.

Finally, article 3 of the local elections order sets the date of the next district council elections in Northern Ireland as 5 May 2011. Hon. Members will be aware that in 2008, the previous Government agreed to a request from the Northern Ireland Executive to postpone the local elections that were scheduled to take place in May the following year. The House subsequently approved legislation to postpone the election until 2011, on a date to be specified nearer the time. The postponement was to allow time for new local government boundaries to be redrawn as part of the overall review of public administration that was taking place in Northern Ireland. That review was to provide, among other things, for the number of district councils in Northern Ireland to be reduced from 26 to 11.

I regret to report that that reduction did not proceed as planned. Although the local government boundaries commissioner reported to the Executive with proposed new boundaries on time in 2009, an order has still not been brought before the Assembly to give effect to them. This June I made it absolutely clear to the Executive that there could be no prospect of further postponement of the elections beyond the two years previously agreed. I was also advised that further delay in passing the order to give effect to the boundaries would seriously jeopardise planning for elections in May 2011. The Executive therefore needed to take an urgent decision on whether the proposed new councils could be delivered in time to allow for elections to them in May 2011.

On 15 June I received confirmation from the Minister of Environment in the Executive that the reorganisation would not now go ahead in 2011. I announced shortly afterwards that there was now no option but to hold elections to the existing 26 councils in May 2011. The local elections order will provide for that. I know that some hon. and right hon. Members may have concerns about those elections being combined with both Assembly elections and a potential referendum on the alternative vote. I have received the advice of both the Electoral Commission and the Chief Electoral Officer on this matter, and both are confident that a combined poll in May 2011 can be successfully delivered if the risks are properly managed.

My officials are working closely with the commission and the Chief Electoral Officer in the run-up to the polls to ensure that there is an early identification and resolution of any potential problems.
Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): The Minister alludes to the difficulties that could be presented, with the distinct possibility—or probability—of our having three elections, using two different voting systems, on the same day. Will he ensure that as much co-ordination and co-operation takes place to ensure that after this legislation passes, which it undoubtedly will, the people of Northern Ireland get the maximum amount of information to ensure that they are fully prepared for what will be an unprecedented voting day next May?

Mr Swire: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: we must do that. In fact there are two elections, which will be held in the normal way for the people in Northern Ireland, and the third is just a straight yes/no vote. I hope that the people of Northern Ireland will vote in the same way as I will.

Naomi Long (Belfast East) (Alliance): The Minister mentioned that in his meeting with the Electoral Commission, it had indicated that it was happy to facilitate all the elections taking place on the same day, provided that the risks were properly managed. Will he also agree that the commission said that it needed to ensure that it is properly resourced, given that there will be complications involving, for example, the number of ballot boxes available, and a number of other logistical issues, which will require more expenditure than a regular election?

Mr Swire: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Of course this needs to be properly resourced, and the necks of both the Secretary of State and myself are on the line if anything goes wrong. What we all want to avoid, on both sides of the House, are scenes such as those that we saw in the recent general election, when people were turned away from the polling stations. The matter is further complicated because some polling stations in Northern Ireland are quite small. There is also the issue of screening, and, as the hon. Lady said, of ballot boxes. I understand that the ballot boxes are being sourced at the moment. She is right to say that we must get it right, and to do that requires proper planning and funding.

As I was saying, my officials are working closely with the commission and the Chief Electoral Officer in the run-up to the polls to ensure that there is early identification and resolution of any problems such as the ones that we have just heard about.

I hope that the House is satisfied that the vast majority of provisions in these orders will make small but important changes to provide for greater consistency with elections elsewhere in the UK. I also hope that hon. and right hon. Members are reassured that the necessary steps will be taken to ensure successful combined polls in May 2011, and will therefore agree that the date of the next local elections should be set for 5 May next year. I commend these orders to the House.

7.22 pm

Eric Joyce (Falkirk) (Lab): Northern Ireland has made remarkable political progress, and that has been integral to the whole peace process. There are many people both inside and outside Northern Ireland who deserve great credit for that. Enormous efforts have been made, as is reflected in the celebrated success to date. For the first time in a generation, the overwhelming majority of people can live peaceful lives free from violence. Nevertheless, Northern Ireland still has a particular political ecology and the situation remains fragile. That is why any proposals to change the way in which the electoral situation works in Northern Ireland require great scrutiny, consultation and forethought. It is clear to us, however, that in the Government’s rush to gerrymander Scottish, Welsh and Irish parliamentary seats, they are failing to listen to the deep concerns of Northern Ireland politicians about how ill-considered changes could have negative consequences for Northern Ireland.

Clearly, the motivation and rationale behind the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill, which will apply to Northern Ireland, are questionable. We support the principle of an AV referendum, yet the Government have refused to split it from the much more contentious matter of constituency design. The Government claim that over-representation is a primary driver of the changes, yet the UK sits in the middle of the EU table, with one MP per 110,000 people.

The Government have also said that the reduced number of MPs will save money, but it is hard to see how that can be true. There is no evidence that reducing the number of MPs will cut case loads, so unless the Government intend to make MPs less accessible to their constituents, they will have to resource MPs for the relative uplift in constituency size. It is worth noting that this week, the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly) suggested that people who will no longer qualify for legal aid because of the changes that the Government are about to implement should go to their local Member of Parliament. It is therefore clear that the Government are intent on increasing MPs’ case loads in any case. That will need to be resourced, so savings seem unlikely.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his position. Will he explain the relevance of his comments to the orders?

Eric Joyce: Yes, of course. The votes will take place on the same day, so the arguments that apply to the rest of the UK also apply to Northern Ireland. A particular complication is that, as a consequence of the orders, Northern Ireland will also have local government elections on the same day.

Indeed, taken together with the Government’s plan for fixed-term Parliaments, the Parliamentary Voting and Constituencies Bill appears to be designed simply to assure the coalition a five-year term, with constituency redesign giving it the best chance of re-election. We therefore believe that it sits outside the margins of acceptable democratic practice.

The House of Lords has narrowly decided that the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill is not hybrid, yet it is strange that the Government should decide that two Scottish constituencies will be treated as special cases and exempted, while Northern Ireland, where the Assembly may be directly affected by the measure, is not to be a special case. The strength of Northern Ireland’s democratic institutions is crucial to the peace process, and the legislation governing the running of Northern Ireland Assembly elections was constructed specifically to ensure wide community representation. In his winding-up speech, will the Minister
assure the House that the changes that he intends to make will not affect the delicate balance in the Northern Ireland electoral system, especially for smaller parties?

Another primary concern is that the strict 5% thresholds, which are explicit in the Bill, will reduce the scope for the boundary commissioners to take local variables into account. Arithmetic will trump all other considerations and local communities will be split between constituencies. Professor Ron Johnson of Bristol university, for example, said that splitting some wards between constituencies will be inevitable. The Boundary Commission has confirmed that. Wards will no longer be the building blocks of constituencies. In many cases, natural geographical boundaries such as rivers will have to be ignored, as will community links and historical factors, which are so important in Northern Ireland.

According to the Boundary Commission, the threshold is also likely to lead to frequent reviews, which means that some constituencies will change with each review. That will further destabilise the relationship between local communities—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The orders do not relate to thresholds. Can we please focus on the orders?

Eric Joyce: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

In the context of the reduced sensitivity to local variables, we believe that the constraints on local inquiries are especially serious. At a time of such significant changes, that is particularly important. The political ecology in Northern Ireland is particular; it is different from that in the rest of the United Kingdom. The Government plan to change the electoral system and the constituencies in Scotland, England and Wales, and they are not taking sufficient account of the peculiar variables that apply in Northern Ireland. As a consequence of the orders, local elections will take place on the same day as other elections, and there could be additional complexity. It is important for the Government to take into account the different nature of Northern Ireland. We do not believe that they are doing that. Consequently, the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland, and of the United Kingdom as a whole, will not be served.

7.28 pm

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): We do not often get three hours to debate Northern Ireland business. It is good that we will be here possibly till 10 o’clock.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. As the orders are being taken together, we have just an hour and a half.

Mr Dodds: May I express my great frustration and annoyance at our being denied time to debate these important matters? However, I am sure that your statement will come as a great relief to other hon. Members, Members, Mr Deputy Speaker.

In all seriousness, as the Minister said, the orders are technical, although they flow from significant primary legislation, which we have already debated at some length since we returned from the summer recess.

On the issue of having the three elections on one day, the orders are designed to make the elections run smoothly and prevent difficulties in the conduct of the elections for the chief electoral officer, his officers and, not least, the electorate. That is welcome, particularly on issues such as making sure that the timetable is consistent for both the council elections and the Assembly elections. There has been some criticism in previous years in Northern Ireland about the rather strange timetable adopted for council elections compared with Assembly and parliamentary elections. If my memory serves me right, when I served in local government and had to submit nomination papers, that had to be done four and a half weeks before election day, so there seemed to be an inordinately long campaign for local government elections compared with others.

Obviously it is important that the timetable is synchronised and that issues such as postal and proxy votes are properly managed so that people applying for them receive one package through the post containing the necessary forms and one containing the three ballot papers. I am glad to hear that there will be three separate, differently coloured ballot papers. I am sure that we have all learned the lesson from Scotland—this never happened in Northern Ireland—when there was an attempt to have two different kinds of ballot on one paper. That was a big mistake and I am sure that it will never happen again.

We are where we are as far as the coincidence of the council and Assembly elections and the referendum is concerned. Obviously, it is preferable that, where possible, there are not so many choices on so many matters before the electorate on any given date, but people in Northern Ireland are used to having joint elections. Indeed, the council elections in 2001 and 2005 coincided with a Westminster general election. If memory serves me right, it may have happened before that. I know that at one time elections were deliberately brought together by the then leader of the Ulster Unionist party, which is no longer represented in this House, because he thought that it would increase turnout and support for his party. As with so many of his calculations, it did not quite work out that way on the day.

This is a sensible set of provisions for 5 May next year. The Minister referred to the date of the council elections for next year, and said that it was the result of the Executive not acting on the recommendation to proceed with the reform of local government. He did not go into the reasons for that, of course, but I would not want the House to be under the impression that this was the result of a lack of desire among most of the parties in the Assembly to make progress on the issue. Even if the reform did not lead to a reduction in the number of councils, other reforms were proposed, such as greater collaboration among councils and the various departments for which they are responsible. Unfortunately, it was not possible to achieve the major cost saving that would have accrued to councils in Northern Ireland because of the intransigence of one party, Sinn Fein, which rejected that constructive proposal. Therefore we are left having to proceed with the election with no real reform to local government due.

When costings were carried out for the council reforms, it became clear that there would have been considerable up-front costs. Given that the Northern Ireland block grant has been severely hit as a result of the recent comprehensive spending review, and the already severe restrictions, difficulties and challenges facing the Northern Ireland Executive on public expenditure, it was felt that
this was not an appropriate time to proceed with that particular reform. Obviously, when it comes to choosing between council reform and health expenditure, education and so on, people are right to choose the latter. That is the background to the reason for the proposals for the date of the election and why they will involve the same number of councils as previously.

Mr Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): The hon. Member for Falkirk (Eric Joyce), who spoke for the Opposition, referred to the reduction in the number of constituencies in Northern Ireland that may result from legislation going through Parliament at the moment and wondered what would have happened had there been a reduction in the number of councils. Is there not a danger in Northern Ireland that the larger we create constituencies and councils, the more removed government becomes from the people?

MrDodds:

MrDodds: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to that. The previous Government proposed reducing the number of councils to seven. I am the first to support a reduction in governance and the number of elected officials and all the rest of it, but a reduction to seven councils would have meant that Northern Ireland councils would be bigger than any other region of Europe. I am sure that the former Minister, the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Paul Goggins), will go into considerable detail on that in his speech.

The lack or inadequacy of consultation on the primary legislation with parties in the Assembly and the Executive has been mentioned. I do not want to go over that, but consultation on Assembly and local elections with the chief electoral officer of Northern Ireland is mentioned in the orders and the explanatory memorandum. I recently met the new chief electoral officer. He is a very impressive officer and I think he will do an excellent job, but it is clear that he sought, during consultations on both the primary legislation and the secondary legislation that we are debating, some changes to the way in which elections are carried out that were not proposed by the Northern Ireland Office.

I am thinking in particular about the removal of polling agents from Northern Ireland polling stations. The Minister is nodding his head, so perhaps he has held discussions on polling agents. This is an important matter. Commendably, we have a sophisticated and elaborate system to tackle identity fraud and the abuse of the electoral system. As has been said, people must now produce certain types of photographic identification or sign postal votes, and their signatures are carefully examined. Postal and proxy vote abuse has been considerably reduced from the large-scale abuse that took place in previous elections. Our system is a model for dealing with postal votes for the rest of the UK. If the rest of the UK wants to cut out the abuse of postal voting, people should look at the administration and regime in Northern Ireland. Clearly, our system is now without any kind of abuse at all.

However, why do we still need polling agents—representatives of political parties—sitting in polling stations in Northern Ireland? The NIO, which is still responsible for elections, should address that, because it is clear that one or two parties—I am thinking of one in particular—clearly abuse that for purposes not in keeping with the legislation. Information is taken out of polling stations, so that voters who have not voted can be identified and then, of course, visited. They will be asked, “Why have you not voted?” and told to get out to vote. In certain parts of the Province and in certain circumstances, people will feel intimidated by that, so polling agents are being used for nefarious purposes. I urge the NIO to take that seriously when it next gets a legislative opportunity.

Naomi Long: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one difficulty is that when people are approached in those circumstances and they realise that the information has been garnered at the polling station, they fear that the fact of how they have voted is also available? People are often quite intimidated by the notion that the ballot is less than fully secret.

MrDodds:

MrDodds: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. We might sit in the comfort of this Chamber and know that the ballot is secret and that the information cannot get out, but for a lot of people, exactly the scenario that she has painted is what they believe to be the case. They believe that because information has been gathered on whether they have voted thus far, people will be able to find out how they have voted, and the people who call at their doors make no effort to disable them of that notion either. This is an important matter. Nowadays there is no reason at all for that provision to remain, if we really are going to ensure that we have fair and clean elections in Northern Ireland. As has been mentioned on a number of occasions, the ecology of the electoral system is different—and it is different: people are more easily intimidated by the way certain parties operate—so removing that provision would be a step towards improving the democratic process and making people less concerned about exercising their franchise.

The management of elections by the chief electoral officer and the issue of resources, which is an important point, have already been mentioned. In my discussions with the chief electoral officer, the point that he laid most emphasis on was resources. The matter of ballot boxes has also been raised, which is another issue that I know has been discussed. All sorts of imaginative suggestions have been canvassed, and I hope that it will be possible to find a sensible solution that minimises costs.

There is also the issue of polling stations. The Minister referred to the fact that polling stations in Northern Ireland were sometimes smaller than they are elsewhere. Again, I would urge him in his discussions with the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland to do what I have done, which is to urge the authorities to be a bit more imaginative when it comes to the buildings and premises that they use as polling stations. People are too fixated on the traditional buildings—“We’ve always used this building and we can’t depart from tradition”—whereas new premises have sprung up, and many people are used to doing things differently. Sometimes the electoral officers are far too hidebound by the past in managing this issue, so I would again urge the Minister in his discussions respectfully to ask the chief electoral officer to be much more flexible. There is a consultation under way—certainly in my constituency, and I am sure in
those of other hon. Members—that is closing in December on the very issue of polling stations, so this is an opportune moment for the matter to be pursued.

Finally, so as to leave plenty of time for others who wish to contribute to this debate, let me say something about enforcement. The local elections order is fairly substantial, as the Minister said, as is the Assembly order. When I read through the detail of all the rules, what struck me was this: what happens when those rules, particularly those applying to the conduct of the election by candidates and parties, are breached? In my experience, it seems that we can prescribe all sorts of rules, from rules on the colour of ballot papers to rules on whether the X or the “1” should be marked in black pen or in pencil—we debated that in the primary legislation—or what would constitute a clear preference, all of which are matters of great detail. Indeed, the forms are set out in incredible detail in the legislation, so the issue is extremely important. Yet I have found that when matters are drawn to the attention of the authorities—the chief electoral officer and then the people responsible for prosecuting such matters—very little is ever done about breaches of the rules.

I want to refer to a matter that I raised during the debate on the primary legislation on the parliamentary voting system. One party in Northern Ireland—Sinn Fein—seems to be adept at producing detailed replicas of polling cards and other official material. On one side they appear to be authentic, but the other side has party political propaganda, some of it of a vicious nature, designed to persuade people that not only is Sinn Fein recommending voting in a certain way, but that the electoral authorities are also doing so.

There were examples of that practice during the last Westminster election. One was in the constituency of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan), and there was another in my constituency. There were also other illegal practices. The matter was drawn to the attention of the then chief electoral officer, who took the matter seriously, and it has been referred on to the authorities to consider what action should be taken. We know that there are serious consequences, and we will watch carefully, as will the electorate and the media, to see what happens about a clear and flagrant breach of electoral law.

I do not expect the Minister to respond in any shape or form on the specifics of a case, but I raise the matter because it concerns me that from time to time in Northern Ireland elections, whether local, Assembly or Westminster elections, all sorts of illegal practices go on. Vast amounts of money are spent, but the election returns show that only a small amount was spent when everyone knows that tens of thousands of pounds have been spent but never declared. Such matters should be taken seriously.

It is all very well to pass legislation, regulations and rules. We debate them at length, and scrutinise them properly, but we must ensure that there is effective and proper enforcement, otherwise people will take the signal that at the next election they can push the boundaries even further, and get away with it. That is insidious, and it needs to be stamped on. I am happy to lend my support and that of my right hon. and hon. Friends to the orders.

7.47 pm  

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds), but I hope that I do not disappoint him with the length of my speech, which will be very short. As the Minister who, in January last year, took through the order to postpone the elections in 2009, I thought I owed the House at least one or two brief comments.

First, I thank the Minister for keeping the promise that I made in Committee in last January that the Northern Ireland council elections would be held in 2011. Members of the Committee questioned what guarantees there would be that council elections would be held that year, and I asked them to back my judgment, which they did. I am not in a position to deliver on that judgment now, but the Minister is, and I thank him for following through my commitment.

The Minister explained that the reason for the delay was connected with the review of public administration, an initiative that began with the Executive in 2002. Direct rule Ministers took it over, but it then quite rightly returned to the Executive as their responsibility in 2007. Indeed, I remember that in 2007 Ministers in the Executive took the up the issue with some relish because they could see the merits of greater efficiency by reorganising public bodies, whether health, police or local government.

In April 2008, the then Minister of the Environment, Arlene Foster, wrote to the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Ribbleton (Mr Woodward), with a request that the council elections be delayed for two years to 2011. She made the compelling case on behalf of the Executive that the complexity of reorganising the local council structure and boundaries was quite a challenge: the single transferable vote system would require new council wards, new districts and new grouping of district electoral areas. Although we were reluctant to take the dramatic step of cancelling elections, we felt that, in view of the exceptional circumstances, it was justifiable and introduced the necessary legislation.

I had further extensive discussions with Arlene Foster’s successor, the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), and his successor in the role, Edwin Poots. It is of course a matter of regret that Edwin Poots wrote to the Minister in June this year to say that, for various reasons, it would be impossible to proceed with the changes to the local council boundaries. Great frustration was expressed about that, not least, I am sure, by the Minister himself because he will be able to see the advantages involved. None the less, these challenges must now be tackled by the Executive Members and by the Minister for the Environment in Northern Ireland, rather than by this House. Indeed, if I were to stray and to offer any more opinions to the right hon. Member for Belfast North and his colleagues, they would soon intervene on me.

Some concerns remain, however, and I should be interested to hear the Minister’s comments. Having now set the date for the council elections in 2011, the pressure for local government reform is off, in a sense, which is a pity because I am sure that the Minister in the Executive will want to see the reforms put in place, as will other Members of the Executive. There would be great dividends if that were possible. Will the Minister tell us tonight
whether there are any signs of progress? If reform were to pick up pace, would he be prepared to come back to this House with a proposition to bring forward the date of the next local council elections in Northern Ireland, which would otherwise happen in 2015?

Mr Dodds: The right hon. Gentleman was much respected for the work he did as a Minister for Northern Ireland, but any notion of bringing forward the date of the next council elections from 2015 would not find favour with the parties in Northern Ireland, not least because it would be deeply unfair on those who had been elected on the basis of a four-year term suddenly to say to them, “Your term is going to be truncated.” So although I understand where he is coming from, and the sentiments that he has expressed, I urge him to rethink that proposition.

Paul Goggins: The right hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, but I am sure that he will share my concern, given his deep knowledge of the electoral system in Northern Ireland, that the council boundaries are way out of date. There is therefore some urgency in trying to move to new council boundaries that reflect a more modern approach. I do not expect a positive answer from the Minister about bringing forward the date of the next local council elections after 2011, but I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to see this as an urgent matter and not one that can simply be left on the shelf. I am concerned that, with the introduction of the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill, attention will now be focused more on constituencies and away from local government structure in Northern Ireland, and anything that will maintain the sense of urgency about the need for the local government reform will be a good thing. I repeat, however, that these are no longer matters for this House; they have now quite rightly been devolved to the Executive in Northern Ireland.

There is also the question of the practical implications of holding the various elections on the same day. I know that the Minister said he had consulted on this, and that he was confident they could all be held on the same day. I pay tribute to all those who administer the elections in Northern Ireland professionally and effectively, and I do not call into question their ability to conduct those elections one bit, but there is a debate about the various issues that are at stake: elections to the Assembly, elections to local councils and, probably, the question of whether to have an alternative vote system or not. That has been debated endlessly elsewhere. We are talking about elections using the single transferable vote system for councils and for the Assembly, which is very complicated and takes time. I urge the Minister to keep up the pressure on those who will administer the system to make sure that all the right questions are asked and answered.

There is the further point—I am sure that Minister will have considered it—that if the Fixed-term Parliaments Bill is passed as drafted, in 2015 we will have council elections, a general election and Assembly elections on the same day, using different—possible very different—electoral systems and under new boundaries. This will be the height of complication. Again, I urge the Minister to pay close attention. He said in the course of his remarks that his neck is on the line. I well know that feeling, but I am sure he will do a fine job.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): Surely the height of complication would be the situation in American states such as Montana, where people voted for the American President, for the Congress, for the state governor, in state elections and sometimes even in local elections—sometimes with additional propositions as well. They seem to manage it in Montana, so surely they could manage it in Northern Ireland.

Paul Goggins: I am not saying that those who administer elections in Northern Ireland would be incapable of doing so. I am simply making the point that this will place a burden on the system in Northern Ireland that it has never faced before. There are also implications for the electoral cycle. In perpetuity—unless the Minister offers alternatives—council elections and Assembly elections will always be held on the same day in Northern Ireland on a four-year cycle. Again, I think that should be a cause for reflection. However, I have nothing but good wishes for the Minister in ensuring that all these issues are dealt with. I am sure he will do very well. In so far as he ensures that these elections are held properly in 2011 and subsequently, he will have my full support.

7.57 pm

Naomi Long (Belfast East) (Alliance): I support the orders. I would like briefly to raise a number of issues, some of which have already been touched on by other Members.

First, I express my disappointment that greater progress has not been made with the review of public administration in Northern Ireland, particularly as the local government elections were postponed to facilitate that process. It has become something of a political soap opera—not quite as long running as “Coronation Street” and certainly not as entertaining. It has not reached a satisfactory conclusion as yet, and there seems to be little prospect that it will—despite the fact that it has cost a lot of money. Most people would have liked to have seen this issue brought to a more satisfactory conclusion.

Given that the last local government elections were held almost six years ago there is a democratic deficit, so it is important to give people the opportunity to refresh their mandate in local government. It is disappointing that this is being done in the absence of reform.

I noted what the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Paul Goggins) said about the possibility of bringing the elections forward, but I concur with the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds) as I do not believe that further tampering with the electoral cycle is the best way of dealing with the issue. I agree that there is an urgency about taking the review of public administration forward in Northern Ireland. However, local government has demonstrated in the past its ability to co-operate even under its current structures—through arc21, for example, which deals with a number of councils’ waste. At the very least, we should expect enhanced co-operation so that some savings can be made without having to tamper with the cycle further.

I seek the Minister’s reassurance about photographic identification. In May, Westminster elections and council by-elections were held on the same day in my constituency. People turned up to vote, only to find that their
photographic ID was admissible for one election but not for the other. This caused extreme distress, particularly for older people, who were relying on transport passes to get the correct photographic ID. They were not able to vote in both elections, as they had expected. I hope that the arrangements involving identification documents can be simplified so that when people turn up at polling stations, they are fully confident that they will be able to cast their votes.

I hope that the Minister will reflect on another issue, although I do not expect a full answer from him this evening. Given that the qualification to vote is established when the electoral register is compiled, which means that people who are on the register and duly marked down for an election have the right to vote in it, the purpose of ID is simply to establish exactly who they are. However, there remains a restriction for foreign nationals who have a right to vote in elections, but no right to use their passports from their home nations as a means of identification. They experience significant difficulties when they try to vote in elections in which they are entitled to vote, but cannot obtain valid identification documents. Given that the purpose of the documents is simply to prove that individuals are the individuals listed in the register, I think that the matter should be dealt with to ensure full participation in the community by those who wish to vote.

Along with other Members, I have already raised concerns about the holding of three elections on the same day next May. The Minister made quite a brave statement when he said that his neck would be on the line if the logistical issues were not handled well. It remains to be seen whether people will want to hold him to that commitment, but I have to say that this is not just about the logistical issues, although they are hugely important. Of course we want the Electoral Commission to be properly resourced to ensure that the elections can be discharged fairly, but we should also consider the democratic deficit that may result from the holding of elections at the same time.

There is always a risk that the Assembly elections and the issues connected with them—I think that it usually happens this way round—will obscure important debates about local governance in relation to local government elections. We need to consider how much media coverage is given to the local government debate, which has a direct impact on people’s lives but tends to be less glamorous—for want of a better word—than the issues dealt with in the Assembly. However, there is a chance that both issues could be overshadowed by the national campaign on the referendum. In Northern Ireland, particularly, for obvious reasons, people might focus on the Assembly election, given its importance, rather than on the impact of electoral reform and local government.

A number of Members have said that we could surely cope with these complex elections, and it is true that ours is a very sophisticated electorate. There was a period during which we had an election, if not two, almost every year. People have become accustomed to voting and to how to cast their votes. The electorate are sophisticated in terms of being able to manage the electoral process, and, as others have pointed out, we have had two elections on the same day before. Nevertheless, the additional complication caused by a third election on a very different issue causes me some concern.

I believe that the combination of the local government and Assembly elections, while not ideal, may be manageable. I seek the Minister’s reassurance that he will do all in his power to ensure that people are fully informed about the issues on which they are voting and the consequences of their votes, particularly with respect to the referendum and the two elections that will take place on the same day, and to ensure that the Electoral Commission is properly funded in order to be able to notify people.

Mr Dodds: The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, or perhaps the Electoral Commission, has a responsibility to urge people to vote much earlier in the day. We have already experienced problems with queuing, and given that there will be separate ballot boxes, the process will take much longer on this occasion. It is therefore vital for a press and media campaign to be organised officially at an early stage. People must be told, “Do not do what you normally do and wait until the last minute, or after teatime; get out and vote earlier.” That would be a very profitable campaign on the part of the commission.

Naomi Long: I entirely agree. I think it hugely important for people to be encouraged to cast their votes at the earliest opportunity. When people have turned up with the wrong documentation, it has been useful for them to be able to revisit the polling station if necessary. However, it would be beneficial generally if we could prevent what tends to be a post-teatime rush, with queues forming late in the day. I hope that that can be impressed on the Electoral Commission, and that the commission can be properly resourced so that its campaign is foremost in people’s minds. People have become accustomed to voting at times of the day that are convenient for them. On this occasion, there will be three different elections with three different ballot papers, and it is important that people recognise how much time will be consumed in filling them in.

I seek the Minister’s reassurance particularly in respect of photo-ID and ensuring that people are properly informed about the nature of the elections taking place on the day.
very early date. That has been held back because of the review of local government, but the boundaries are now significantly out of date and there are disparities in ward sizes—and, as I have mentioned, in at least one case a ward is split between two parliamentary constituencies. We would be interested to hear what proposals the Minister has in respect of the urgent need to review ward boundaries in Northern Ireland.

My second question relates to the counts that will follow the two elections and the referendum in Northern Ireland next year. What will be the order of precedence for those counts? Will the referendum be counted first, because it is a UK-wide referendum? Will the Assembly election count take place before the local government election count, as has been the case in the past? Will the Minister give us some idea as to what will be the order of the counting of votes following these three separate ballots, and will they all take place in the one counting centre in each of the local areas, or will the referendum ballot be counted separately? I seek clarity on these matters.

8.7 pm

Mr Swire: This has been an interesting debate and a number of interesting points have been raised. The shadow spokesman, the hon. Member for Falkirk (Eric Joyce), touched only lightly on the proposed legislation under discussion, and seemed to refer rather more to the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill. He talked about various topics including the House of Lords, Scotland, the boundary commissions and a number of MPs, none of which related to what we are discussing tonight, but his comments were nevertheless interesting for my ministerial colleagues who are present in the Chamber, as they have been discussing that Bill for many days.

The hon. Gentleman said that the changes to the Northern Ireland electoral system are confusing. The changes we propose ensure consistency across all elections in Northern Ireland, making the electoral system clearer for candidates, administrators and voters, and the changes are minor and principally administrative.

The right hon. Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds) asked a number of interesting questions. He talked about electoral law offences. It is worth putting on record that if a person is suspected of committing such an offence, the chief electoral officer should refer the matter to the police and the prosecuting authorities. Prosecutions are a matter for the Public Prosecution Service, of course. He also talked about the timetabling of local elections. Local election procedures regarding the timetable will now be aligned with the Northern Ireland Assembly timetable by virtue of this order.

The right hon. Gentleman also talked about a subject that I discussed: polling agents. As the former Northern Ireland Minister, the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr Donaldson) talked about outdated boundaries. We would very much hope that the Executive have agreed new boundaries to ensure that they are updated well in advance of 2015, but in any case, I am proposing to write to the Minister of Environment to take forward a considerable interest in this point and am more than happy to discuss it with the right hon. Member for Belfast North over the coming months.

Mr Dodds: I look forward to those discussions. The Minister mentioned a lack of consensus. Obviously we will not get consensus across all the political parties, for the very reasons that I outlined. Would he not put a lot of weight on the views of the chief electoral officer, who surely has an independent view on all this in terms of the conduct of elections?

Mr Swire: I do not think that I am breaking any confidences by saying that I have discussed this matter with the chief electoral officer and his predecessor. I can only say that I am more than happy to discuss it with the right hon. Gentleman. I have considerable interest in this and considerable sympathy with where he is coming from. He also raised the issue of political donations. As he will know, the consultation on the provision for donations to political parties in Northern Ireland to be made confidentially concluded on 25 October, and we are considering how best to take that forward.

The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East spoke, as usual, intelligently and with tremendous knowledge. I know that he shares my frustration that things have not moved along as much as we would have liked on local government reorganisation. He asked whether there are signs of progress, and one hears from time to time various rumblings coming from the hill. The answer is that we must not relax on this matter and we must keep up the pressure, and he was right about that. I shall return to that in a moment, if I may. He also spoke about the combined elections in 2015 and he will not be surprised to hear that no decision has yet been taken—we are trying to get through next year first. I would prefer to await the outcome of the combined polls in 2011 before taking a decision on whether it is desirable to combine elections in 2015 or whether a provision should be made for their separation.

I was asked what the Government are planning to do about the coincidence of elections in 2015. I am writing to all Northern Ireland parties setting out our proposed approach and requesting their views. It should be remembered—we have been discussing this recently in terms of other legislation—that the Secretary of State already has a power to alter the Assembly election date by two months. We will see whether we need to do that at that time.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr Donaldson) talked about outdated boundaries. We would very much hope that the Executive have agreed new boundaries to ensure that they are updated well in advance of 2015, but in any case, I am proposing to write to the Minister of Environment to take forward such a review immediately after the 2011 elections. I believe I am right in saying that the current boundaries are 19 years old, which is not at all acceptable, so clearly this is something that they need to get on with, regardless of local government reorganisation.

The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East asked whether we would bring forward elections. We have received no request and we would need to consider such a proposal carefully, as we would want to ensure that the transition to new councils and the new set-up was in its final stages. We do not want to chop
and change dates without good reason. He would probably support that approach, given that he said that it was with extreme reluctance that he postponed the date of the original election; I believe he said that he did not do that lightly. Nor should we tamper with this. We will have elections in May, but we need to keep up the pressure.

The hon. Member for Belfast East (Naomi Long) raised some interesting points about ID, which I had raised with officials today. It is true to say that this order ensures that requirements at all elections are now consistent in Northern Ireland. I am told that people will be able to use the Translink smartpass, provisional driving licence and other smartcards. She also asked about foreigners and foreign ID. It is true that someone can now use an EU driving licence or an EU passport to vote in Assembly and local elections.

**Naomi Long:** One example that we had a problem with was non-EU documentation, such as that from Commonwealth countries. For example, people who are resident ordinarily in Northern Ireland and have Canadian or Indian passports cannot use them as a document to vote, even though they are entitled to vote in that election.

**Mr Swire:** The hon. Lady raises a good point. We should make it perfectly clear well in advance of the elections what photo ID will be acceptable. There could be nothing more frustrating than queuing to take part in three elections, arriving almost as the clock is striking 10 o'clock, only to be told that one has the wrong form of ID. That is something we should consider and, again, we need to be properly prepared. We would not want people in any great numbers—or, indeed, any individual—to feel that they had been disfranchised because they were not aware that their ID, which they thought was quite proper and which could be used on airlines and so on, was not appropriate for an election. We heard loud and clear what the hon. Lady had to say.

The hon. Lady also asked about the Assembly election dominating debate, leading to local issues being ignored. It is worth pointing out that, as the right hon. Member for Belfast North mentioned, local elections were held successfully alongside Westminster elections in Northern Ireland in both 2001 and 2005. The hon. Lady said that Northern Ireland has a sophisticated voting population, and it is up to the individual candidates to set fire in the minds and hearts of their potential electorate—[Interruption.] Not literally, but in terms of trying to get interest in the election. I think the hon. Lady is probably wrong on this point because having three elections, albeit two voting one way and another being a straight yes or no, will mean that people will talk about the elections much more. I would not be at all surprised if we had a very good turnout. I do not think that one issue should eclipse the other—I think that we are going to have a very political new year.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley mentioned ward boundaries. Again, that is a matter for his colleague the Environment Minister in the Executive, but, as we have said, we cannot go on working on boundaries that are nearly 19 years out of date. He also asked a specific question about the electoral night, and I am looking forward to the morning after, which I hope will be one without too much trouble. I am told by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), that the Electoral Commission’s recommendation is that the Assembly election should be first, the referendum second and the local government election third, on the Monday. I believe that that has already been published.

It has been an interesting debate, but not a controversial one. The legislation is necessary to tidy up some anomalies. The contributions made by right hon. and hon. Members of all parties will be listened to by the Electoral Commission and the chief electoral officer. Let us hope that we have a good day next year.

**Question put.**

The Deputy Speaker’s opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 24 November (Standing Order No. 41A).

**NORTHERN IRELAND**

**Motion made, and Question put,**

That the draft Northern Ireland Assembly (Elections) (Amendment) Order 2010, which was laid before this House on 25 October, be approved.—[Mr Swire.]

**The Deputy Speaker’s opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 24 November (Standing Order No. 41A).**

**Business without debate**

**DELEGATED LEGISLATION**

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

**DISABLED PERSONS**

That the draft Disabled People’s Right to Control (Pilot Scheme) (England) Regulations 2010, which were laid before this House on 12 October, be approved.—[James Duddridge.]

**Question agreed to.**

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

**HEALTH AND SAFETY**

That the draft Justification Decision (Generation of Electricity by the EPR Nuclear Reactor) Regulations 2010, which were laid before this House on 18 October, be approved.—[James Duddridge.]

**The Deputy Speaker’s opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 24 November (Standing Order No. 41A).**

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

That the draft Justification Decision (Generation of Electricity by the API1000 Nuclear Reactor) Regulations 2010, which were laid before this House on 18 October, be approved.—[James Duddridge.]

**The Deputy Speaker’s opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 24 November (Standing Order No. 41A).**

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

**REGULATORY REFORM**

That the draft Legislative and Regulatory Reform (Regulatory Functions) (Amendment) Order 2010, which was laid before this House on 21 October, be approved.—[James Duddridge.]

**Question agreed to.**
EUROPEAN UNION DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith Standing Order No. 119(11)),

EU RULE OF LAW MISSION IN KOSOVO

That this House takes note of the unnumbered Explanatory Memoranda, dated 2 June 2010 and 29 September 2010, from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on two Council Decisions amending and extending Joint Action 2008/124/CFSP on the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX); and agrees with the Government that the mission is making an important contribution to improving the rule of law in Kosovo.—(James Duddridge.)

Question agreed to.

Ward Closures

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

8.21 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I am delighted to have secured the opportunity to debate these issues. The national health service is a national treasure. During any one year, all of us will have cause to visit a GP or hospital or to see a nurse, or we have a family member or friend who will do so. Members of my family have devoted years of service to the health service as GPs, a surgeon or nurses. I record my utmost admiration for all those working in the national health service.

The purpose of this debate is to consider the decision-making process in ward closures and other major service changes. I particularly invite the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Anne Milton), to address in her response the lack of consultation over the closure of Ryedale ward at Malton hospital. I regret both the closure and the lack of consultation.

I shall analyse the reasons for closing Ryedale ward at the end of the so-called pilot project and look at the consultation procedure at that stage. I shall highlight the need for services and care provision in a sparsely populated, deeply rural area, with an increasingly ageing population.

People care passionately about their local hospital and greatly value their general practitioner. Thirsk and Malton are well served by three community hospitals—Lambert hospital in Thirsk, St Monica’s in Easingwold and Malton community hospital. In addition, there are acute hospitals at Scarborough and York and Friarage hospital at Northallerton. What increasingly alarms me is the trend over recent months to remove much-needed services from community hospitals, such as the minor injuries units at Lambert hospital and Friary hospital, in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. Diagnostic services are being removed from Malton hospital, diabetes test strip services are being stopped and there is a rumour that the operating theatre at Malton is due to close within two weeks. Furthermore, there is a threat to decommission all enhanced services in the last quarter of the year—again without consultation.

The local area medical committee has written to the Secretary of State for Health to raise those issues, and particularly to draw my right hon. Friend the Secretary’s attention to the threat to decommission enhanced services locally, including chlamydia screening, smoking cessation, complex drug monitoring and other services. The primary care trust held no consultation about the cuts with local practitioners. The committee believes that the cuts are damaging patient care and that they will undermine the strategic aim to provide services at lower unit cost, nearer to patients in the community. The hard work and good will of GPs are being pushed to the limit by the expectation that GPs will absorb more and more cuts and accept an increased work load. There is a threat that the blinkered goal of financial balance and short-termism, following seven years of unchecked cuts, will cause irreparable damage to primary care and leave GP practices damaged and disengaged.
There is a definite pattern in the way that services at community hospitals are being cut without consultation. The Ryedale ward, which was one of two wards at Malton hospital, the other being the Fitzwilliam ward, had 21 beds. It was recently refurbished at a cost of £1.25 million, a quarter of which was raised locally. It opened in May this year. I had cause to visit the refurbished service during my extended election campaign. Patients in Ryedale ward received intensive rehabilitation after a fall or an operation, allowing them to return safely to their home environment.

The ward closure has been termed a pilot scheme, but I am mindful that once a ward has been closed, it is difficult to re-open it. Importantly, the primary care trust in this instance is both the commissioner and the provider of services at Malton hospital. This is most unusual. It is now frowned on as unacceptable and, I understand, is being stopped through the Transforming Community Services agenda.

The way in which the ward was closed is a textbook example of how not to proceed. First, the primary care trust claimed that there was no question of Ryedale ward at Malton hospital closing. Then, after a decision taken on 23 September, the beds were removed from the ward by stealth until there were none remaining and the ward was effectively closed on 19 October. Even at a private meeting with the Health Minister and me on 12 October at the Department of Health, the PCT could still not admit that the ward was closing. Before the closure there had been almost no consultation of the relevant GP practices across the Ryedale area, or of nurses or patients.

Yesterday I lodged a petition with the signatures of more than 1,800 residents of the Ryedale area, strongly objecting to the way that the bed closures had happened without public consultation. I have had a large mailbag from constituents and heard many testimonies of the excellent care that patients received, to their satisfaction and to that of their loved ones, in the Ryedale ward at Malton hospital. The correspondence has been universally against the closure of the ward.

Many local health practitioners are wary of the so-called hospital at home scheme replacing care on a ward. There is deep concern that no advance warning or training was given before the hospital at home scheme was announced as part of the ward closure. Some patients require hospital treatment, although others might prefer to be treated at home. The scheme may lead to patients being admitted as an emergency to an acute ward, which is distressing and more costly than care on a community ward and deeply worrying to patients and their loved ones.

The Ryedale ward should not have closed without the agreement of the health practitioners and the local community. The Secretary of State has received the conclusions of a study of clinical activity on the Ryedale ward to assess whether identified clinical need could be managed effectively at home by the enhanced community support scheme. Those conclusions, which I should like to share with the Minister, are that, on balance, Ryedale should probably have been kept as a 10 to 16-unit, if not a 21-unit, ward for these purposes. There is general concern that the closure of Ryedale ward flouted the conclusions of that study, which I commend to the Secretary of State and to my hon. Friend. I urge the Minister.

What could be the reasons for closure be? Given the predicted deficit in the primary care trust, my fear is that there is a financial motivation behind the recent trend of events and the subsequent lack of consultation. The budgets are being cut so radically that there might be insufficient funds to run all the services by the time that GP commissioning commences in 2012. I accept that there is a funding issue. The current funding allocation to North Yorkshire and York is the 13th lowest of the 152 PCT areas, and 12% below the strategic health authority average. There might be insufficient funds to run all the services at such time as the GP commissioning service commences.

If the trend of service cuts continues, our community hospitals could be reduced to a size where it is no longer viable to keep them open. In a rural area that is sparsely populated, with an increasingly elderly population, access to a local facility or service is key, and the closure or reduction of services could be disastrous. Scarborough hospital and local hospital trusts are deeply frustrated that there is now a local ward free at Malton hospital, currently unused, which could provide beds for patients entrusted to its care.

I welcome the Government’s policy that decisions should be taken locally, but not before the relevant parties have been adequately consulted. The Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns), wrote to me on 25 August to state that the Government have pledged that, in future,

“all service changes must be led by clinicians and patients, and are not to be driven from the top down.”

In that letter, he underlined that

“the Secretary of State for Health has outlined new, strengthened criteria to be followed before fundamental service changes take place, and said that they must

“focus on improving patient outcomes...consider patient choice...have support from GP commissioners...and...be based on sound clinical evidence.”

In this case, each and every one of those criteria has been flouted, but I understand that Ministers are powerless to act until the end of the pilot scheme. I urge the Secretary of State, the Minister of State and my hon. Friend to look at reviewing this at the earliest opportunity.

We must ensure that any such fundamental change has the support of all those affected by it. Given that the ward is now closed, it will be harder to reopen it. I cannot see how this is simply a pilot scheme, not a reconfiguration of services. I put it to the House that the decision-making process leading up to the removal of these services was defective and has bypassed those who are most affected by the decisions. Patients must be at the heart of our health care. Local clinicians, doctors, nurses, and patients’ loved ones must support the decisions taken.

Moving forward, where do we want to be at the end of this process? Local people must have confidence in the decision-making process. In the case of the closure of the Ryedale ward, they clearly do not. It is vital that at the end of the so-called pilot scheme, there will be a full, transparent and open consultation. I ask the Minister to outline precisely what form that consultation will take. I urge her to ensure that all those most directly affected will be consulted, including GPs, nurses, Ryedale
I welcome the debate, and I hope that the Minister will reassure me that my long-term ambition for the health service, both locally in North Yorkshire and nationally, will be realised and that clinical need will be at the heart of the delivery of health care.

My hon. Friend is right to say yet again—we say it often, but we cannot say it often enough—that the NHS is a national treasure. It is much loved and much relied upon by all of us, and from my own point of view it was my employer for 25 years. As she rightly stated, patients are at the heart of the service, and need to continue to be. I am sad to say that the story she told this evening is not dissimilar to my experiences in my own constituency, and it shows a big gap: what managers in charge of the finances and commissioners are trying to achieve is very distant from what local people feel.

I wish to say a little about where we are, because I think I can reassure my hon. Friend. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh) on securing the debate. I can fully understand her desire to ensure that the future of local health services will not be dictated from the centre. They will not be directed by strategic management by local GPs. The Y ork PCT is currently piloting a scheme of enhanced community service in the Malton area. The PCT believes that treating patients closer to home will provide better outcomes and encourage patients to retain their independence. I am happy for my hon. Friend to come back to me on any points that I may raise. I understand that the Y ork PCT is currently piloting such a scheme of enhanced community service in the Malton area.

The future of local health services will not be dictated from the centre. They will not be directed by strategic health authorities or primary care trusts, they will be designed and commissioned from the bottom up by GPs and their colleagues across the health service, such as clinicians and managers, working in partnership in independent trusts to improve the quality of care. Patients will be armed with unprecedented levels of information and powers of scrutiny, and there will also be input from democratically elected local councillors. That bottom-up approach is important to prevent the present situation from happening again.

8.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Anne Milton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh) on securing the debate. I can fully understand her desire to ensure that the best possible health services exist for her constituents, which came across strongly when she met the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns), on 12 October to discuss Malton community hospital.

My hon. Friend is right to refer to the vital importance of the NHS, is about putting that trust into action and ensuring that local health services and that it has no intention of not being heard, which clearly has not happened in the case that she has described. Thirdly, there must be greater clarity about the clinical evidence base underpinning a proposal. Fourthly, proposals must take into account the need to develop and support patient choice. That is a recipe not for maintaining the status quo but for locally agreed, transparent, evidence-based and clinically led change. Decisions about the services at a local hospital will be driven by local clinicians, with the consent and input of patients and local authorities, not imposed or decided behind closed doors.

I now turn to Malton community hospital. Providing health services in rural areas can be challenging, and I understand that many patients in north Y orkshire have to travel for as long as 45 minutes to reach their nearest large hospital. Local health services can indeed find it difficult to meet national guidelines, particularly those involving clinical mass. I understand that it is against such a challenging backdrop that North Yorkshire and Y ork PCT is currently considering its strategy for health services in Malton and Ryedale, ensuring that they are safe and sustainable for the future.

I am happy for my hon. Friend to come back to me on any points that I may raise. I understand that the PCT’s emerging strategy for future hospital service provision is based on four themes: prompt local access to assessment and treatment for those needing urgent care; local access to a range of rehabilitation services, delivering intensive rehab and support effectively to re-able patients; prompt and local access to diagnostic tests and, where desirable and feasible, minor surgery; and specialist out-patient services to promote access and to support patient management by local GPs.

I am also aware of press speculation that Malton community hospital may be closed. The PCT has made it clear that it sees the hospital as an integral part of local health services and that it has no intention of not having a community hospital in Malton. I do not know whether that will reassure my hon. Friend. Judging by the expression on her face, I fear that it may not.

North Yorkshire and Y ork PCT is currently piloting a scheme of enhanced community service in the Malton and Whitby area. The PCT believes that treating patients closer to home will provide better outcomes and encourage patients to retain their independence. I gather that that pronouncement has been greeted with the same cynicism with which it is greeted in many areas around the country.

Anne Milton: I thank my hon. Friend, who is absolutely right. I will come to that.

As my hon. Friend stated, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has identified four crucial tests that all reconfigurations must now pass. First, they must have the support of GP commissioners. Secondly, there must be arrangements for public and patient engagement—no, I would rather say “involvement”, because “engagement” is not a favourite word of mine. This is about involvement—people being listened to and their voices being heard, which clearly has not happened in the case that she has described. Thirdly, there must be greater clarity about the clinical evidence base underpinning a proposal. Fourthly, proposals must take into account the need to develop and support patient choice. That is a recipe not for maintaining the status quo but for locally agreed, transparent, evidence-based and clinically led change. Decisions about the services at a local hospital will be driven by local clinicians, with the consent and input of patients and local authorities, not imposed or decided behind closed doors.

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Miss McIntosh: No one believes a word that the PCT says any more. There was a cohort of patients—21 at a time—who were treated intensively and given rehabilitation on a ward. They will now not be treated as intensively, and will be less safe when they return home after a fall or a major injury. It is that cohort of patients who will not benefit from hospital at home.

Anne Milton: I understand what my hon. Friend is saying. One of the problems is that we will have to let the pilot run. It is using existing hospital staff to provide hospital care in patients’ homes. I gather that there will be no reduction in nursing staff, but delivering care in people’s homes is a very different process from delivering it on a hospital ward. Because of financial constraints, it is not possible to run concurrent hospital and community services, so as part of the pilot, the wards have been temporarily closed. I understand that there will be deep cynicism about the prospect of their ever opening again. However, I am assured by the PCT that this is a pilot, and that a full assessment will be made at the end of it.

The project implementation team meets each week to assess the ongoing impact of the ward closure and bed reductions, and that team includes community provider staff, community hospital matrons and representatives from the community nursing team. I hope that that will continue, and go some way towards reassuring my hon. Friend. The pilot scheme will finish at the end of March 2011, and a full evaluation will take place in April 2011. The PCT has developed criteria for its evaluation—with, I hope, full consultation of local people.

I reiterate that no final decision has been made about the future of Ryedale ward. If the pilot leads to proposals for permanent service changes, the PCT will need to conduct a full public consultation, underpinned by the principles that I have set out. I hope that that will continue, and go some way towards reassuring my hon. Friend. The pilot scheme will finish at the end of March 2011, and a full evaluation will take place in April 2011. The PCT has developed criteria for its evaluation—with, I hope, full consultation of local people.

The commitment and tenacity that my hon. Friend shows in fighting for local health services is commendable. I note that she is due to discuss the matter further with the PCT on 19 November. I know that she will continue to work with the local NHS and ensure that her constituents’ voices are properly heard and represented, as she always has done.

The list of enhanced services that my hon. Friend described is particularly significant in the light of the publication of the White Paper. The description of the way in which the ward was closed gives rise to concern and cynicism among local people. It is not useful when organisations act in such a way, because it simply fosters a belief that the PCT is trying to drive something through. We have to let the story run and let the pilot be properly evaluated against the criteria that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has outlined.

Miss McIntosh: I am most grateful for my hon. Friend’s full reply from the Dispatch Box. On the particular, indeed unique, point that the PCT is both commissioner and provider of the services, will she give me an assurance that the functions will definitely be separated and that such a position will never arise again? It causes undue confusion for all concerned.

Anne Milton: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the issues surrounding the commissioning and provision of services. We have grappled with that for some time and we will fully address it. The consultation on the White Paper that we published in July is now finished, and we need to guard against exactly that sort of problem. If there is no Chinese wall or division between commissioning and provision, cynicism and deep suspicion of the commissioning decisions ensue.

I know that my hon. Friend will continue to make representations and watch the process closely. I assure her that our door will be open to hear any representations that she wants to make.

Question put and agreed to.

8.47 pm

House adjourned.

Correction

Official Report, Monday 15 November 2010: in column 624, at end of second paragraph, “Reptiles ? Us” should read “Reptiles R Us”.
Westminster Hall

Wednesday 17 November 2010

[PHILIP DAVIES in the Chair]

Sheltered Accommodation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(Mr Goodwill.)

9.30 am

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under you this morning, Mr Chairman. I first wish to thank all Members who have given up their time this morning to debate the very important matter of sheltered housing.

According to the most recent English housing survey, 610,000 mainly older people live in sheltered accommodation. As a sector, sheltered housing has something of a mixed reputation. Some sheltered housing is old and provides bedsit accommodation, which is increasingly hard to let. At its worst, it has provided councils with an opportunity to house hard-to-place tenants—for example, people with drug and alcohol problems—and unsurprisingly that is upsetting for the conventional older tenants for whom the schemes were originally intended. At the other end of the sheltered market there are high-quality flats available for lease purchase and renting. What all those options have in common, however, is the availability of services that are promised as part of the housing entitlement.

I digress for just a minute to remind Members of the next big thing in older people's accommodation: extra-care homes. Some Members might already have such establishments in their constituencies. My own borough of Dudley is opening several extra-care homes next year. These establishments promise services that tenants and owner-occupiers can avail themselves of on a flexible basis, according to their age, mobility and mental state. The important thing is that the services are available; that is what people will buy into. Although they might not, at first, need a carer to visit them regularly or to have mobility aids in their flat, as they age and their needs change they will be able to access that additional support as part of the package. Does that sound familiar?

The important issue. Residents in my constituency are equally concerned about losing warden services, but the problem is twofold. The full service is being taken away, leaving only a nine-to-five service, and people are being asked to pay an additional charge when the service was part of the overall package they had when they moved in. They are losing on both counts.

Research by the Sheltered Housing UK Association found that 97% of residents surveyed said that their decision to move into sheltered housing had been influenced most of all by the presence of a live-in warden. A Help the Aged report, entitled “Nobody's Listening”, found that 67% of Supporting People administering authorities felt that warden services were the most important aspect of sheltered housing for older residents.

Not everyone agrees. Imogen Parry, director of policy for the Essential Role of Sheltered Housing, which represents housing providers, said that her organisation believes that “sheltered housing can be provided through a range of models”

—I am sure it can—

“not just through schemes with resident wardens.” She then quotes from research by Hanover, one of the housing providers:

“Many people neither want nor value 24-hour on-site management services”.

So that will be why tenants in Barnet and Portsmouth have taken their local authorities to court for threatening to move from on-site to floating warden support.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate on this very important issue. Residents in my constituency are equally concerned about losing warden services, but the problem is twofold. The full service is being taken away, leaving only a nine-to-five service, and people are being asked to pay an additional charge when the service was part of the overall package they had when they moved in. They are losing on both counts.

Margot James: I very much agree with the hon. Lady. It is true that elderly people buy into these schemes and originally have an on-site warden service. As she says, not only is that taken away, made off-site and shared by various other housing organisations, but it used to be free and is now chargeable. So, the service is getting worse and the fees are increasing in many cases.

Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con): In Portsmouth, we have an additional problem to the wardens—whom the court case was about—in that bathing and other services are being charged for. This is all happening at once, and many elderly men and women are extremely frustrated at the prospect of their bills going up by £20 a week or more.

Margot James: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. We must not forget that most of these residents and tenants are on fixed incomes. They have bought into the schemes on one basis, and a promise has been broken. I shall come on a little later to some of the options available to people in that position. Judicial reviews of decisions by housing providers have also been sought by tenants in no fewer than 50 housing schemes in 20 authorities. That gives the lie to the assertion by the housing providers that their residents “neither want nor value” on-site management services.

We are talking about a vulnerable group of people, many of whom are on fixed incomes. Many people in that situation are increasingly frail and are no match for large housing organisations and their teams of lawyers,
which is presumably why some companies—charities even, which I find very surprising—have attempted to impose the sort of changes we have heard about this morning on leases and tenancy agreements, without consultation. Although the change that has caused the most distress is the replacement of a live-in warden service with an off-site visiting manager—with whom it is necessary to make an appointment, which is often charged for, even though it was free according to the terms of the original agreement—other changes such as the national procurement of local services and escalating management charges with no associated improvement in the service offered are also a big problem for owner-occupiers in the leasehold sector.

I was first alerted to this problem by two constituents of mine in Stourbridge, who do not wish to be named. They had bought into sheltered accommodation on a leasehold basis. A charity ran the establishment, along with several hundred other establishments nationwide. The charity has substituted the live-in warden service that was free at the point of use with a visiting service shared with other organisations, with which they have to make an appointment and for which they are charged. They have also suffered escalating management charges, and a housing provider that decided to procure nationally every single service. Such a system takes away any local connection and removes the resident’s empowerment and ability to effect improvements by making a phone call or spotting the window cleaner and having a word. Even window cleaning, garden maintenance and lift maintenance are nationally procured, and the excuse given to the residents is that that is under EU law. We have investigated and that is not the case. There is a way round the problem, and EU law does not force national procurement on organisations of that size. Nevertheless, that is what residents are being told.

After I raised the issue during Prime Minister’s questions in July, a family from Folkestone approached me. Their elderly mother was a tenant in an establishment managed by Peverel, which manages a large number of housing organisations country-wide. Again, the issue was the substitution of the live-in warden system. None of the residents wanted that, but Peverel said, “We’re going to sell the flat where the warden lives because we can’t find anyone to do the work. We will donate £10,000 from the proceeds of the sale into your management fund.” That is absolutely derisory, but when the residents challenged it, Peverel turned around and said, “We are under no obligation to do this—take it or leave it.”

Endless complaints appear in the press about Peverel. One of its tactics is to use myriad service organisations of its own, including insurance companies. It then foists the delivery of services by those companies on the residents in its apartments at a charge that is higher than the market rate. That creates a conflict of interest unless there are clear rules of transparency, so that residents can get competitive tenders and ensure that they are not being overcharged for their services.

One gentleman, Neil Healey, managed to take a subsidiary company of Peverel to court over such issues, and he won a case against Solitaire Property Management. Peverel does not exclusively provide sheltered accommodation, and the picture in the paper of Mr Healey shows he is a young man—32 years old. A man of that age is perhaps better equipped to take large housing organisations to court than many of the frail older tenants who are my concern this morning.

A survey by the Bristol older people’s forum showed that more than two thirds of elderly people who live in the Bristol sheltered accommodation sector state that their quality of life is now worse than it was when there was a resident warden. Furthermore, 83% of pensioners in sheltered housing say that the services provided by their council are now worse, and 68% say their quality of life has suffered.

I am pleased to note that the Deputy Prime Minister spoke in support of this cause. Sheltered Housing UK wrote to him a month ago, putting pressure on the Government to introduce rules to ensure that residents and tenants have a right to be consulted when changes to the terms of their leasehold and tenancy agreements are proposed. In response, the Deputy Prime Minister wrote that

“lots of people who move into sheltered housing do expect a 24-hour warden...I rather like the idea Help the Aged has come up with about putting changes to warden services to a vote of affected residents...That’s the kind of good practice I hope more housing associations and councils will use.”

Penny Mordaunt: Certainly in Portsmouth, and I am sure elsewhere, I am concerned that a tactic is being adopted whereby companies that have been taken to court for not consulting people now consult local residents, but still leave them with the bill. In that way they dodge the political bullet for effectively withdrawing the service. I pay tribute to my constituent, Ingrid Savir, who is older than 32 but has been extremely dynamic and has spearheaded the campaign that sued Portsmouth city council.

Margot James: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention, and I am most heartened by her example. I stress that many older people are aware of their rights and are determined to push them through. I am delighted to hear about such cases. The problem is that when consultation requires a majority vote—as it should do—a lot of the frailer, more elderly people in the accommodation in question can be leaned on or bullied by the housing association. That is my point.

Let me turn my attention to what can be done about that state of affairs. In the private sector, many tenants have a legally binding service contract. Most sheltered housing providers subscribe to the code of practice for the provision of retirement housing that was established by the Association of Retirement Housing Managers—ARHM. That code makes it incumbent on providers to consult leaseholders about any changes to the terms of the lease. Some charities and housing associations find ways round that code of practice, foisting service charges on to leaseholders without proper consultation, as we have heard this morning.

Leaseholders should be made explicitly aware of their right to consultation under the code of practice, and their recourse to leasehold valuation tribunals should the code be breached. The statutory elements of leaseholders’ rights—such as the right to enfranchise a lease or, as a leaseholder group, to take over the management of services, away from the housing provider—should be extended to charitable organisations and housing trusts.
In my view, such rights should also be extended to the social housing sector. Age UK argues that tenants should be given proper information about the core services offered in their housing scheme, and the terms of reference for any future changes in those services, before they move in to the retirement housing of their choice.

Tenants in sheltered housing provided by local authorities should have a statutory right to be consulted on and challenge local authority decisions that reduce or significantly vary the provision of warden support and other services. Any changes to support services should be voted on by residents, who should have a say in the most appropriate system of alternative support when changes are proposed.

I am grateful for the expertise provided by Age UK and Sheltered Housing UK. Furthermore, my local authority of Dudley—under the recent rating system, it achieved a four-star rating for all its housing services—has proved an excellent support in my constituency for leaseholders in the private sector. I would like to thank Ron Sims and Theresa Kelly for their help with some of the proposals that I put forward this morning.

I look forward to learning more about this issue from the experiences of other hon. Members present for the debate, and I hope that some of the ideas proposed will merit due consideration by the Government.

9.48 am

Laura Sandys (South Thanet) (Con): It is good to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and I would like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Margot James). The minute that I saw this debate listed in the Order Paper, I felt that I had to participate. For many years, my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr Gale) and I have been running a local campaign. We have formed a group called the Thanet eight. It is eight buildings with over 1,500 residents who live in flats that are owned by one company, and were originally managed by the same company—Peverel.

Those residents are by definition not young, and their objective in buying their properties was to have safe, secure and affordable homes, possibly for the rest of their lives. The reality has been different with increased charges; expensive and sometimes unnecessary renovations; a lack of consultation of residents; the attempt to block the creation of active residents associations; a reduction in services, particularly house manager support; and disproportionate penalties if a property is sold or rented.

Age UK has recently raised this matter and completed a very comprehensive report highlighting four key issues that my local residents certainly experience: unfair transfer fees when a property is sold or rented; escalating service charges, compounded by a lack of transparency about what people are paying for; very expensive rents for house manager flats—mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge—which do not reflect the market value at all; and the use of companies that are owned by the management companies to undertake work or provide services on behalf of residents.

In particular, I should like the Minister and the Government to examine what I call the vertical integration model. These businesses are being run by subsidiary companies where the group company owns the majority of the companies that provide services to these residential blocks. That throws up very interesting and questionable issues. I hope that those companies’ ownership of that vertically integrated supply chain causes concern to the Office of Fair Trading. The method by which they operate the vertically integrated business model is certainly of concern to consumer groups and, as I said, has been the subject of an Age UK report.

In my experience, the freeholders and management companies, which are all owned by the same holding company, own lift maintenance companies, buildings insurance firms—mentioned by my hon. Friend—building and maintenance operators, window cleaners and internal communications fitters. That might on the surface suggest that such a company knows its business well and understands all the different aspects of running sheltered accommodation, but is that really the case or is the vertical business model precluding competition, reducing choice for residents and creating incentives for the management company to propose and sometimes impose renovations, refurbishments or additional services that residents have not requested and do not desire?

Penny Mordaunt: It is not just the Office of Fair Trading that needs to be concerned. If a lift is not fixed or the night warden is not there, that will lead to potentially massive bills for the public purse. I am thinking of more hospital admissions, more people falling over and so on.

Laura Sandys: I very much welcome that intervention; I totally agree with my hon. Friend. We need to consider the holistic cost—the overall cost—of how in the future we will look after people who are getting older. Many years ago I wrote a paper called “How we keep the new old young”. That will be a big challenge for us. I am referring to how we keep people mobile and independent and ensure that they have the resources to be independent for as long as possible.

I now want to talk about the emotional impact and the worries and concerns of my local residents in Thanet, who have put their life savings into these small flats and do not have other resources. There is an emotional and physical impact from their concern about what will drop through their letterbox next week from the management company telling them that they owe another £1,500. That creates more health problems and anxiety and deters older people from making the independent choice and going for what is, on paper, excellent sheltered accommodation and a structure that gives them security for the future.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this matter. The coalition Government are considering the removal of the mobility part of disability living allowance for people in homes. Does the hon. Lady not agree that the removal of such an award puts a financial pressure on people in homes as well? The pressure is not just physical, but financial. Being members of a caring society, as I am sure we all are, does she not agree with me that that would be a backward step?

Laura Sandys: I am talking about sheltered accommodation, not residential care, but I understand that the issue is the component of DLA that relates to mobility. Local authorities do provide those services,
and need to provide them to ensure greater mobility and as much independent living as possible within a care home. We need to consider carefully how we maintain independence, mobility and active life for as long as possible. I have in my constituency one of the highest percentages of people over 60 in the country. They feel that they can and should participate actively in life, but sometimes and particularly when predatory management companies are involved, they and certainly their resources are put under strain. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

I shall give an example of what has happened in my area. Initially, for some of my local buildings, expensive refurbishment projects would be commissioned by the managing agents with the justification of needing to keep the buildings in good condition and ensuring that the residents’ investment was being built on. With no comparative quotes having been produced, those refurbishment projects went ahead, incurring significant additional service charges for the residents. Yes, that was their choice, but it was on the recommendation of someone they trusted—the management agent.

As time has gone on, my local residents have stopped trusting their management agents. They have started to see a pattern as they start to question refurbishment. Now, the management companies are looking to undertake works priced just below the threshold at which they must consult the residents. Over a two-year period, a series of quite similar projects have been priced just below that threshold, so the firms can procure from their own companies at high cost and without consultation of residents. Those costs, which are passed on to residents, total thousands of pounds. The residents are elderly and often on low incomes and have no recourse.

Buildings insurance is also an interesting area. The majority of the buildings in my area that are under management with Peverel have been reinsured in the last four years—not exactly a time when property prices have been rocketing. Those properties have been revalued with increases of between 40 and 60% in the last four years. The insurance company is owned by the holding company of the management company. The premiums have been passed on to the residents. Equivalent quotes obtained by my local residents have brought down the value of the properties in the current market. Some of my residents question whether the building’s value has gone up to support those companies in their market valuation and the presentation of their assets to borrow further money to buy more residential homes.

The vertical integration of these companies, the lack in many instances of competitive tendering and the cumulative cost of small refurbishments that are just under the threshold for consultation make for a very insecure and uncertain future for many residents and must be addressed. Many people from these blocks have taken up the opportunities afforded to them under the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002, but have the management companies made it easy for the blocks to self-manage? In fact, they have stood in the way of the setting up of residents groups and contested the right to manage, citing numerous barriers. My residents have ended up in tribunals and having to employ experts and lawyers. The law is there to liberate those residents, not to wrap them up in red tape or to place on them the expense of lawyers. All those things have been put in the way to thwart their right to self-manage.

I support my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge in the key points that she has put to the Government. I urge the Government to review the regulations on private retirement sector housing and to ensure that the code of conduct is properly enforced. Residents in my constituency should have access to recourse and to the rights enshrined by law. They need the future security that they and their families so deserve.

The problem is perhaps not as acute in Herefordshire as in some other parts of the country, but it is serious and growing. We have a large elderly population that is increasing as a share of the population, and it includes an increasing number of frail people. Most of those in sheltered accommodation are cared for by Herefordshire Housing, which, after a difficult period a few years ago, has made great progress under its new leadership and reconstituted board. But all too often, sheltered accommodation is used for families who do not require it and to accommodate people with mental illness, who would be better accommodated in specialist dwellings designed for their needs.

The removal of the warden service from sheltered accommodation is a serious local issue, on which I have campaigned for three years. I associate myself with the comments of my hon. Friend on that issue. The warden service is vital, not only for its early-warning service, but for the human touch that it provides for those in sheltered accommodation. There has been more than one case in which a resident has been discovered several days after they have passed away because of the lack of a regular on-site warden.

When the housing stock was transferred from the council to Herefordshire Housing, residents were given strong assurances that their rights, and specifically the warden service, would be protected. There is a general duty of care, under which the warden service is provided. Residents were therefore appalled to discover a couple of years ago that the warden service was being removed.

A very good local campaigning group was set up, culled the sheltered housing tenants umbrella group. With my assistance, several members of SHTUG took Herefordshire Housing to court over the removal of the warden service. In particular, I mention Shirley Baldwin, who ran SHTUG at the time, Lil Jones and Nancy Evans, in whose name the group received legal aid to pursue the case. I am sorry to tell hon. Members that the case failed because of a technicality. A statute of limitations, which was very short at some six months, had elapsed and they had neglected to register their concern, in part because they were notified in a modest, non-public way. They had not realised that they had
only six months to register their concern, and it was some time before the impact of the withdrawal of the service became clear. Although the law suit reached the stage of taking the advice of a silk in London, it did not go through. I am sorry to report that, because those people deserve a better deal than they are getting.

What can be done? Hon. Members have made many good suggestions in this debate and I associate myself with those. I wish to emphasise three aspects. First, there should be more vigorous enforcement of tenants’ rights by statutory agencies. Tenants should not be notified in a letter that arrives among a lot of other correspondence that such rights are being ended without proper negotiation and consultation. Such rights should not be ended in any case because of the commitments that were made at the time of the stock transfer. Tenants deserve better than to have to obtain legal aid, which does not even exist in Herefordshire for such cases. The nearest place from which legal aid can be obtained, and where I found it, is Birmingham.

Secondly, there should be proper treatment of those with mental illness. I have residents who are being driven mad by the difficult behaviour of people who require proper treatment and care. Such people should not be left in sheltered accommodation, but they are because of the general crisis in housing.

Jim Shannon: Last week, my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds) introduced the First Reading of a Bill to protect elderly people and those in care, and to ensure that their rights are preserved. Like the hon. Gentleman, I represent an area with a large proportion of people who are coming up to retirement age—I am probably heading that way myself. Will he look at that Bill, which would go a long way towards providing the protection that he speaks about for the vulnerable people who need it?

Jesse Norman: I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s intervention, and I shall look at the proposed legislation with great interest.

My final point is that sheltered housing should be an integral part of a wider attempt to get more housing built in this country. In the past decade, there has been an enormous amount of talk about housing targets, and yet there has been the lowest rate of new housing built in this country. In the past decade, there has been an enormous amount of talk about housing targets, and yet there has been the lowest rate of new housing built in this country. In the past decade, there has been an enormous amount of talk about housing targets, and yet there has been the lowest rate of new housing built in this country.

Sandys) was right about that—and are looking forward to years of life ahead in what is an excellent community. Also, New Oscott Village is a shining beacon of what care for elderly people should look like.

On the other hand, bad examples include the one mentioned by the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman). In my constituency, one old people’s home in Kingstanding moved from on-site wardens, present seven days a week, 24 hours a day, to floating wardens and a call centre. One woman told me, in great distress, of her experience. She had had a mastectomy and at 3 o’clock in the morning on a Saturday night, her wounds burst open. She tried desperately to get help from the call centre, but was told to ring 999. She said, “But I’m soaked with blood from my breasts to my knees.” She could not make any sense of what was happening at the other end of the line and, ultimately, had to call her son, who lived three miles away, to come and get her, at 3 o’clock in the morning, to take her to hospital. Although we celebrate the examples of the outstanding in all constituencies in Britain, what the debate has highlighted is that other examples, to be frank, shame our country.

Among the developments under our own Government was an unhelpful trend in relation to wardens. I will discuss that in a moment, but first let us look at the policy framework, because it is important to where we go from here. In February 2008 the Government published “Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods: A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society”, which set out how sheltered housing is often a positive choice for older people who want to remain independent but who
value that little bit of support and shelter, as well as the sense of security and community brought by sheltered housing. The paper said:

“extra care and care homes at their best can be vibrant community hubs, tackling exclusion and promoting active ageing, even if the accommodation itself is dated.”

It also said—the hon. Member for Stourbridge was absolutely right—that consultation and needs assessment are critical both to the effective management of sheltered accommodation and to reflect the wishes of service users. That was emphasised in 2007, in the Supporting People strategy paper, “Independence and Opportunity”. Central to that paper was the importance of keeping service users, in turn, at the heart of delivering housing support.

A report by Help the Aged, “Nobody’s Listening”, makes it clear that changes in support services for sheltered housing and the replacement of resident wardens by alternative service models are not new phenomena—such changes have been taking place for two decades. An independent study commissioned by the Department last year pointed to various reasons why that was the case. It found, on the one hand, that there was less demand for sheltered housing, as people tended to move into sheltered housing later in life, and, on the other hand, that a significant number of sheltered housing residents said that they did not require support services because they were defined as the active elderly. As a result, some administering authorities commissioned flexible mobile support for sheltered housing tenants, based on assessment of support needs. They extended the notion of mobile support. There were strengths in that approach, because it offered support for people in all types of tenure, but, clearly, there were weaknesses as well, because some commissioning authorities, under my party’s Government, clearly got it wrong and went too far in changing the provision of wardens in sheltered accommodation.

I will touch briefly on consultation, which has been powerfully raised, including by the hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), who has direct personal experience. Consultation is a vital part of any service. My experience is that, if an organisation consults properly with service users, often changes that may not be threatening are seen to be precisely that—not threatening, contentious or frightening. Consultation before changes are made is, therefore, essential. Unfortunately, too many examples of a failure to consult have been evidenced in the debate today, including successful challenges in Portsmouth and Barnet, where there was a lack of consultation, ranging from a failure to take into account the terms of leasehold arrangements to a failure to act in accordance with disability discrimination legislation.

Having acknowledged the trend under the Labour Government whereby some commissioning authorities, for all that their motives were noble, went too far, I shall now look at where we go from here. The debate must take place against the background, inevitably, of resource constraint. As I will say in conclusion, however, what the hon. Member for Stourbridge has done is to put this vital issue at centre stage in the decisions that get made in the next stages by the Government and the commissioning authorities at the sharp end.

The context in which the debate is taking place is that councils will see a 7.1% cut each year for the next four years. Supporting People funding will be cut by 11.5%, to £6 billion. Yes, it is true that an additional £2 billion of funding has been promised to social care by 2014–15, £1 billion of which will come from the NHS, but, set against that, the sheer scale of the cuts that will be made in the field of social care is immense.

We can look at examples of what is already happening in the here and now. Somerset has approved a £3 million cut in its Supporting People programme from April 2011, representing an 18% reduction on its £16.5 million budget allocation for 2010–11. Big cuts have already been made in Isle of Wight; and Cornwall is due to make a decision on, I believe, 30 November on a proposed 40% cut over three years in its overall Supporting People spending. Reports suggest that elsewhere in the country active consideration is being given to major cuts of that kind: Bournemouth, Swindon, North Somerset, Brighton and Hove, and Surrey are all considering proposed reductions of between 20% and 40%. Against that background, and in the spirit of the debate today—so nobly led by the hon. Member for Stourbridge—I would like to put a number of questions to the Minister.

My first question is on the issue of preventive support. The evidence is absolutely clear that preventive support—warden services, in particular—leads to better outcomes for service users and their families, as well as to savings in health and social services budgets. If low-level preventive funding, such as Supporting People moneys, is lost, combined with the end of ring-fencing, that is likely to cost the Government and local authorities more.

My second question relates to the redirection of funding. The Supporting People programme funds housing support services for about 1 million people, but as a result of the dramatic consequences of the reductions in expenditure that are being imposed on them, some local authorities are using it to help fund statutory social care. Does the Minister share my concern that that is likely to accelerate significantly the withdrawal of on-site warden arrangements, in favour of what is all too often an unsatisfactory roaming warden service?

My third question is about social care cuts. The initial relief at the provision of an additional £2 billion for social care by 2014–15 has evaporated in the wider context of the 26% cuts in local government revenue spending. As a result of those swingeing cuts to local government, the extra money promised will do nothing to make up for cuts to social care services. Last year, the Minister of State, Department for Education, the hon. Member for Brent Central (Sarah Teather), who at the time was shadowing the Department for Communities and Local Government, said:

“it is important that ending ring-fencing does not become an excuse for phasing out funding or squeezing budgets, and that local councils do not end up getting the blame for what is, in essence, the removal of money by central Government.”—[Official Report, 20 October 2009; Vol. 497, c. 194.]

Does the Minister agree with his colleague?

My fourth question is on a matter about which hon. Members have spoken eloquently. The Sheltered Housing UK Association, a campaign group, recently wrote to the Deputy Prime Minister because he had said in a pre-election interview with Inside Housing that residents should be able to vote on whether to keep a live-in warden. We have heard that the Deputy Prime Minister
has made an initial response, but can the Minister tell us whether that excellent proposal is under active consideration?

On my fifth question, the Minister signed early-day motion 60 last year, which expressed concern about reductions in funding for Supporting People services. It called on the then Government to take action to ensure that the vital service of warden-supported housing was retained, because reductions were having a “detrimental effect upon the quality of life of many vulnerable people who rely on warden-supported housing”.

The Minister will be fully aware that the Government have announced unprecedented cuts to local government funding. What impact will those cuts have on vulnerable people, and particularly the elderly, who rely on local government services? Crucially, have the Government conducted an impact assessment of the effects on social care services of cuts to local government funding? If so, will the Minister publish it?

In conclusion, the debate has raised a number of serious questions about the treatment of residents in housing schemes and about their concerns over the changes that they face. One strength of today’s debate has been that it has celebrated the good, while expressing concern about the bad. There is concern on all sides to ensure that we maintain the support that the elderly and vulnerable are entitled to expect. I thank the hon. Member for Stourbridge once again for securing the debate, because she is right that this issue is absolutely centre stage in the debate about how we go forward in difficult times. I hope that the Minister will respond to my questions.

10.24 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Stunell): I am very happy to be serving under your chairmanship for what I think is the first time, Mr Davies. Let me tell my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Margot James) that this has been a very worthwhile debate on an extremely important question, and I thank her very much for bringing it to the House.

My hon. Friend made some strong and effective points about the problems in her constituency. Like other Members who have raised a significant issue in the House, she has had, if not the pleasure, the experience of finding that people all over the country hope that she will become their champion and write to her accordingly. Although I am sure that she will fulfil that role very well, I hope—indeed, I am sure—that she will be able to channel her resources towards dealing with her own constituents. She and other hon. Members raised some really important questions, which I will do my best to address.

It is worth repeating, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) properly said in his balanced critique of what went before, that this matter has come before the House previously. There have been two Adjournment debates in the past 12 months, or so, which were initiated by hon. Members with concerns about exactly this issue. The Sheltered Housing UK Association rightly has a strong reputation for getting its point across to right hon. and hon. Members.

Let us go back to where the Government stand on this issue. We are clear that housing needs to be there, and that the support needs of vulnerable and older people should be met wherever they live, whether in their own homes, with their family, in supported or sheltered housing, in the extra-care accommodation mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge—I note her concerns that extra-care homes may be subject in due course to the pressures that she described—or in residential care establishments.

There is a whole range of accommodation. The Government are committed to making sure that people have appropriate accommodation and the support to enable them to live in it. The coalition agreement says: “people deserve dignity and respect in old age, and...they should be provided with the support they need.” It also includes a specific commitment on being able to live independently in later life. It says: “We will help elderly people live at home for longer through solutions such as home adaptations and community support programmes.”

By extension, we will ensure that arrangements are appropriate for people in sheltered accommodation, whether in the private, charitable or public sectors. The Department is looking at how we can help older people to access the practical advice, support and home adaptations that they need to stay in their homes or to move to more appropriate accommodation. We are working with developers and planners to facilitate a wider range of high-quality housing options for older people.

At the heart of what the previous Government did, and what we are continuing to do, is the Supporting People programme. The programme has been protected as far as possible in the spending review. As part of the review, we have secured £6.5 billion for Supporting People over the next four years. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington is not wrong to say that the finances are under extreme pressure or that there will be pressures on local authorities and providers, but I want him to understand that the sum being spent on Supporting People—it will be £1.6 billion this year—will still be £1.59 billion by 2015, which represents an overall reduction of just £46 million over the four years. That shows that we have a very strong commitment, in straitened times and circumstances, to ensuring that the Supporting People programme has the resources that it needs and that front-line services for vulnerable people, including residents of sheltered housing, are protected.

Figures are a little hard to come by, but something like £180 million out of the Supporting People programme goes to support for people in sheltered accommodation at present and, by everyone's account, that is doing a good job. Hon. Members have rightly focused on the sector’s problems, and I want to discuss those in a minute, but let us not forget that there are 600,000 older people in sheltered accommodation, the huge majority of whom are happy and comfortable there and, in the traditional phrase, would not be anywhere else.

How will the Government approach the matter? We have said clearly and strongly that we believe that local authorities are best placed to identify services to meet the needs and balance the priorities in their communities. It is for local authorities to decide how best to design and commission the services that they believe are needed by all parts of the community, and to arrange for and deliver them—or enable them to be provided, perhaps by work with third sector and private sector providers.

Central Government do not dictate to local authorities...
or service providers the details of what local services to provide or how to do it, and we do not want to be in the business of micro-managing service delivery.

Jack Dromey: Have central Government conducted a study of the impact on elderly and vulnerable people of the reductions in expenditure that have been announced?

Andrew Stunell: That is primarily a matter for the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health. I am happy to follow it up and to write to the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members about progress in that respect. We should be quite clear: the Supporting People programme is non-statutory and has always been non-ring-fenced. That has allowed local authorities to draw money into it when they thought it necessary, and to use Supporting People money imaginatively and innovatively to provide good services by bolstering and reinforcing those they already had. It was never a ring-fenced fund and it still is not, and it does not cover a specific statutory duty, but I am happy to follow up on that point by writing to the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members.

Later this month we will publish a localism Bill to devolve greater powers to councils and to neighbourhoods and local communities. It will return to them control over housing and planning decisions and will help to set the foundation for transforming the relationship between central Government, local government, communities and individuals. The philosophy behind the Bill includes the engagement and participation of residents and communities. Several hon. Members have rightly drawn attention to the fact that in some cases providers of sheltered housing are not simply providers and to use Supporting People money imaginatively and innovatively to provide good services by bolstering and reinforcing those they already had. It was never a ring-fenced fund and it still is not, and it does not cover a specific statutory duty, but I am happy to follow up on that point by writing to the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members.

Jack Dromey: Does that mean that the Government intend to honour the pledge given by the Deputy Prime Minister that residents of sheltered accommodation will have the right to vote on whether wardens are withdrawn?

Andrew Stunell: The hon. Gentleman is skilfully gliding over what he said to the House only about 10 minutes ago, which is that the Deputy Prime Minister favoured that approach; he did not give a pledge to introduce legislation, and I am certainly not going to do so. The hon. Gentleman has perhaps slightly gone beyond his very temperate approach, by trying to weave into it something that is not the case.

The localism Bill reforms, taken together, will shift power from the central state back into the hands of individuals, communities and councils. They will give local people, including community groups and residents associations—and why not groups of sheltered housing residents too—more power over local government and how public money is spent in their area, and will ensure that councillors are more directly accountable to them.

They will free local government from central control so that it can ensure that services are delivered according to local needs; and they will let local people drive change through a renewal of confidence in a streamlined, more efficient planning system, encouraging them to get actively involved in planning, housing and local services.

Before I return to the matter of sheltered accommodation I should perhaps mention that I probably got slightly carried away before in saying that Supporting People was never ring-fenced, as it was ring-fenced initially but the previous Government de-ring-fenced it and we have continued with that.

Sheltered accommodation, as has been mentioned, has been evolving for decades. Perhaps 30 years ago the model was somewhat institutional, and there is a hangover from that in accommodation that is really just bedsits with oversight. A decade or so ago, local authorities, including my own, went through an elaborate and sometimes painful process of upgrading their sheltered accommodation. The Help the Aged campaign report, “Nobody’s Listening”, which was published about 18 months ago, charted that progress. Part of the evolution of the way that care is provided has been a move to so-called floating support services. The reasons for that are, first, the changes in demand for sheltered housing, which have been alluded to in the debate; secondly, the fact that the standard of much sheltered accommodation is in need of improvement, which requires investment; and, thirdly, the fact that significant numbers of sheltered housing residents do not require support services. They are the “weldery” or “active elderly”, or are described in other such phraseology. I was interested to hear about the paper entitled “How we keep the new old young” by my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys), and I congratulate her on her practical work.

Other factors are driving changes in the way that services are delivered, including the difficulty in recruiting resident wardens, which can be quite acute and has inhibited schemes in some places. The European working time directive somewhat constrains the hours that wardens work, so that sometimes a 24-hour live-in warden is not, in practice, as one might suppose, on duty for 24 hours seven days a week. Those are the practical realities that must be faced, alongside the direct financial constraints.

My Department receives correspondence from residents of sheltered housing complaining about issues such as being required to pay for services that they do not want. By a twist of fate, it falls to me to answer this debate at a time when I am in active correspondence with one of my groups of sheltered housing residents; they are campaigning against a 24-hour residential service, as they believe that it would not be good value for money or helpful. Perhaps the irony is completed by saying that the organisation that they are campaigning against is Peverel, which insists that they must have residential or helpful. Perhaps the irony is completed by saying that the organisation that they are campaigning against is Peverel, which insists that they must have residential service providers the details of what local services to provide or how to do it, and we do not want to be in the business of micro-managing service delivery.

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Sheltered housing, like all other support services, cannot be immune from the wider demographic, technological and economic challenges and opportunities that we face. We need to encourage innovative ways of caring for and supporting people, so that solutions are more personalised and make the most of emerging technology. There are various ways of doing that, and it does not have to involve bad stories about call centres.

Telecare can bring substantial benefits. It can assist people to remain in their own homes, and it can reduce inappropriate admissions to hospital—although judging
by the story recounted by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington, that is not always the case. It can also provide cover to allow for early discharge from hospital and advance warning of deterioration in a person's condition.

Local authorities are rightly responding to the changes in this market—although market may not be the appropriate word—in care provision. The resources available for housing-related support services are being carefully investigated at the local level, which means that local authorities are reviewing the services that they commission.

I agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington that local authorities sometimes get it wrong. My hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge said that 50 legal challenges are being made against 20 local authorities; and my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) said that that number might be bigger but for the legal barriers and hurdles that people had to surmount. Notwithstanding that, we should recognise that the majority of local authorities are getting on with the job. They are extending mobile support to older people in accommodation in the community, and the Supporting People programme gives them the flexibility to be innovative. Supporting People is tenure-neutral; it can be used to support people in private and charitable accommodation, and in third-sector and social housing. That is important.

What about consultation? Changes to housing-related support services should be designed to meet the assessed needs of service users, and changes to service delivery should take account of those people's views, with proper engagement and consultation with those affected. There are well established ways of doing that.

The Centre for Housing Support has been active in identifying and sharing good practice. In addition to its code, it works in partnership with TPAS, the Tenant Participation Advisory Service. It has provided deliverers of service with its publication, "Effective Resident Participation Advisory Service: A Good Practice Guide for Providers and Commissioners". That is the textbook that I would want all providers to use when delivering those change processes. The code highlights the importance of the genuine involvement and engagement of service users—the people who live in the homes, the householders. Indeed, I am not sure that the phrase "service users" quite captures how important the home is to the people who live there.

Change is inevitable. Providers and commissioners need to be aware that, in preparing and reacting to change, they should involve the users of their service. They must ensure not only that the users are happy but that the changes are appropriate and that value-for-money services can be developed. The TPAS report addresses the barriers to effective engagement, and gives a number of case studies and examples of good practice.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge, for South Thanet and for Hereford and South Herefordshire and others have drawn attention to cases where that engagement is not happening. My hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet was eloquent in her critique of what she called the vertical integration of services provided by a particular company. It would not be appropriate for me to say a great deal about the specifics of that case, but I know that various residents' groups have approached the Office of Fair Trading on some of those matters. We should await the outcome, and a response, before commenting further. However, if issues of substance need to be addressed in relation to private provision, the Government would obviously want to take serious account of the evidence.

When developing and commissioning services, it is important that local authorities should take account of the views and experiences not only of residents but of best practices around the country. Consultation and needs assessment are critical factors in ensuring that changes in service are well managed and reflect the wishes of users, as well as enabling local authorities to meet the needs of all service users and give them value for money.

The importance of needs assessment and consultation with service users are built into the quality assessment framework for the Supporting People programme. The QAF was introduced in 2003, and it set out the standards that are expected in the delivery of Supporting People services. It also identified methods of producing evidence of achievement. Over the past five years, it has been a successful practical tool for ensuring continuous improvement in service delivery, especially for housing-related support.

The QAF was reviewed in 2008, after running for five years, to bring it up to date and to emphasise the need for high-quality individually focused services that aim to improve the outcomes for service users. The majority of administering authorities—local authorities with responsibility for the framework—continue to use it today. Evidence shows that other local authority services, such as adult social care, have adopted the QAF as the standard tool to measure the quality of services being delivered.

We welcome the fact that we are moving away from the centrally driven, target-directed delivery of local services. It is good to see that a tool is available to administering authorities—social services authorities and others—to allow them to monitor themselves, to ensure that they are accountable to those for whom the services are provided and that their services are delivered to a good standard.

The sheltered housing sector has an independent code of practice. It was developed in consultation with practitioners and service users, and is administered by the Centre for Housing Support. That code was devised back in 1993, and its standards have been continually refined and adapted. It is a way of passporting through the QAF and was the first independent code to receive such an endorsement. The code focuses on outcomes rather than processes—not on how one gets there, exactly, but whether the service is good and whether people are happy with it. It encourages providers to create local solutions to better to meet and serve the needs of the community.

I have attempted to respond to the various questions raised during the debate. The Government take seriously the matters that were rightly raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge, which were strongly underlined and reinforced by my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet, backed up by my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire and mentioned in a number of interventions. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington said, there is scope for improvement. It is not the case that the previous Government had a monopoly of wisdom on this issue, although I imagine that the hon. Gentleman would say
that neither do the present Government. There is work to do and progress to be made, and it is a key issue. I hope that I have been able to show the House that the Government take the problem seriously and will be listening hard over the coming months to ensure that residents of sheltered housing get the service for which they have paid and which they thoroughly deserve.

10.50 am

Sitting suspended.

[Andrew Stunell]

10.50 am

Sitting suspended.

10.58 am

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Before making my remarks, I first declare an interest as set out in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

I want to draw attention to the position faced by a constituent of mine, Mr Peter Summers, who visited my surgery a few weeks ago. For many years, Mr Summers operated a business supplying tyres from an industrial unit he had purchased. At 67, he sold his business but retained the premises, and invested in a personal pension fund. He spent some money refurbishing the building, and let it in 2005 at an annual rental of £35,000. In 2008, the tenant occupying the building went into liquidation and vacated the premises, leaving Mr Summers with some arrears and reinstatement costs of some £3,500, but since then he has been unable to find a new tenant.

In respect of the liability to business rates, Mr Summers enjoyed a period of transition for the first six months, from April 2008 to September 2008, but since then he has incurred a significant sum in business rates. In the six-month period from 30 September 2008 to 1 April 2009, he paid £8,628. For 2009-10, he paid full-year rates of £18,066, and for the current year he has paid £16,071. Over that period of two and a half years, during which he has received no services, his total expenditure has been £42,776. At a time when Mr Summers might have expected to contribute £35,000 a year to his pension fund, he has paid net outgoings of £18,000 a year, a difference of £17,000 per annum.

People such as Mr Summers recognise, in holding commercial property as an investment, that by virtue of the economic cycle, which can go up and down, there will be times when such a property may be vacant and there will be no income. Most investors in property must live with that fact. Mr Summers is prepared to live with it, but it strikes me as unfair that in addition to the loss of rental income, he must now bear a further loss in paying business rates when he cannot meet the sum from his income. He is effectively paying for services he is not receiving. He now faces the prospect of selling his industrial unit in a distressed market where prices have been forced down. The downward pressure has been caused partly by other investors’ concern that if they buy the property, they will be liable for the vacant business rate. Mr Summers came to see me to ask for my support in lobbying the Minister to rectify the position, which I believe is inherently unfair. I advised him that I was happy to do so.

The situation arose in consequence of a change to empty property rate relief that took effect in April 2008. For decades until then, the Government had helped struggling businesses through empty property rate relief. Shops and offices received an allowance of 100% relief initially and 50% thereafter, and owners of empty factories and warehouses received a 100% permanent exemption. The Government’s intention in reducing empty property rate relief was to provide incentives to bring vacant premises into use by encouraging rents downward. The change was intended to encourage property owners to re-let, redevelop or sell empty non-domestic buildings
and improve competitiveness for all businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises, in terms of property costs.

Gavin Williamson (South Staffordshire) (Con): I declare an interest as outlined in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. Has my hon. Friend found, as I have, that the changes, combined with the difficult market conditions, mean that speculative development of office or manufacturing property has stopped? Many small manufacturing businesses are concerned about expanding or taking on extra premises, because if the market weakens, they might end up paying rates on empty properties.

Mark Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. I will make that point later in my remarks.

On the Government’s original intentions, they recognised some difficulty with the proposals, and the position was changed slightly in the November 2008 Budget report to exempt from business rates commercial and industrial properties with a rateable value of less than £15,000. Regrettably, that is below the value of Mr Summers’s property.

Lorely Burt (Solihull) (LD): I discussed the repercussions of the change with the previous Government on many occasions. I think that the level is £18,000 now, but in Solihull one cannot rent a broom cupboard for rates of £18,000 a year, as I know to my cost. I criticise the previous Government tremendously for the repercussions. I have constituents in Birmingham who are trying to rent out property for £1 a square foot just to absorb themselves of their problems with the rates. Will my hon. Friend exhort the Minister to consider whether, in this current economic climate, some form of marginal relief might be possible, just for the time being?

Philip Davies (in the Chair): Order. I remind Members that interventions, particularly in a half-hour debate, should be as short as possible.

Mark Pawsey: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her contribution. I know that even in areas where rents have been reduced to the level that she mentioned, there are still no takers. If no businesses are willing to take the premises, the price is irrelevant. We know that the situation must change.

The regulations have been in force for more than two years and have had a number of effects, some of which the property industry expected and warned the Government about at the time of the change. On the failure to provide services, it can be argued in the interest of fairness that business rates are a tax on occupation with the intention of raising funds, in the same way as the council tax. However, clearly, if a property is not occupied, no services are being consumed, and it follows quite reasonably that no tax should be payable.

In many cases, the tax has become a tax on ownership rather than a tax on an income stream. Taxes are usually based on income streams, which means that they can be paid from profits earned. Again, where a commercial property is vacant, there is no income stream on which that tax can be levied.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on making an important and compelling case. Does he agree that the imposition of non-domestic rates on vacant commercial premises has led to an increase in the demolition of serviceable commercial premises and in the number of derelict sites blighting our towns?

Mark Pawsey: My hon. Friend, whose constituency neighbours mine, is entirely right. There have been unforeseen consequences, one of which is that it is more sensible for property owners to develop a property rather than retain it for future use.

The rates are almost a form of wealth tax, levied on ownership of an asset rather than the income derived from it, as was originally intended. In times of recession, many small businesses find themselves occupying properties too large for their immediate needs and look for a tenant to take their surplus space. Where they do so, the rents add to their income and the occupier of the business becomes liable for the business rate, but if they cannot find a tenant, they face the burden of further business rates. For most businesses, business rates make up their third biggest item of expenditure, after wages and rents. Also, business rates are a fixed cost. They do not decrease as turnover declines during recessionary times. I am concerned that in many cases, excessive bills are contributing to business failures and leading to higher unemployment.

A further unfairness is that it often takes a long time to find a tenant for vacant commercial property, a fact reflected in the time limit allowed for the non-application of rates. Even in boom times, an industrial property is likely to remain vacant for between 12 and 18 months. In the current economic climate, the loss of a tenant will almost certainly mean additional liability for business rates that might not have been budgeted for.

The effect on rental values has not been what the Government intended. They hoped that rental values would fall, but an April 2009 report by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors suggested that that objective had not been achieved and that property owners were offering other incentives instead, such as rent-free periods. There has also been a detrimental effect on capital values. The same report found that because empty property rates make fewer investors willing to enter the market, investment levels in the sector have fallen.

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. The point about property values is important. In my constituency, responsible landlords have found themselves unable to proceed with property refurbishments and renewal work because they are paying rates on empty properties in other parts of the same area. The rates have a knock-on effect on the quality of the offer in towns such as Llandudno in my constituency.

Mark Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution; he makes a very good point. The hope that the application of empty business rates would encourage the property owner to accept lower rents in order to keep their buildings occupied, and that it would support businesses in the economy generally, has not been realised. There is a parallel here with the position taken by Opposition parties in respect of welfare reforms. The Opposition say that there is no point in trying to force people to take jobs because there are no jobs available. Similarly, there is no point in trying to
force landlords to let commercial property cheaply if there are simply no occupiers to take up the space. There are absolutely no incentives for property owners to keep their buildings empty and not be active in seeking occupiers. In the case of Mr Summers, his failure over the past two and a half years to find a tenant has not been for the want of trying.

As mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), one way in which property owners can avoid their liability for empty property rates is simply to demolish the property—if there is no building, there is no business rate. The RICS survey shows that the application of vacant property taxes is currently the strongest single factor in determining which buildings are demolished. It is often the older, less attractive properties for which, in times of recession such as now, it is more difficult to find a tenant. However, in most cases such properties are perfectly sound, usable buildings. An unintended consequence of the 2008 changes is that much of such low-cost industrial accommodation will no longer be available. Just as the country starts to emerge from recession, the start-up businesses that will be so important to our future prosperity will not be able to find any premises to operate from.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson) mentioned, given the anxiety of completing a building, not being able to find a tenant and thus becoming liable for empty property rates, it is absolutely no surprise to find that property development companies are no longer developing commercial property on a speculative basis.

Esther McVey (Wirral West) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. During the past couple of years in Liverpool and Merseyside, there has been considerable regeneration both as a result of speculative build and because people really wanted to put their heart into the city to develop and grow it. The tax on empty properties has stopped that process in its tracks because people wanted to look for secondary investors while developing inner-city areas.

Mark Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. Clearly, the redevelopment and stimulation of our town centres has been brought to a halt by this legislation, which has made that process much more difficult. Commercial property development companies are no longer building property speculatively—by which I mean property being built in the expectation of finding someone to occupy it, rather than having an occupier already in place. No new building has taken place and nothing has been left in the pipeline for later. Again, as the country emerges from recession, the consequence of that is that the accommodation needed by our businesses will still be in the form of paper plans, rather than completed buildings.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I declare an interest in line with the declaration of Members’ interests. Business rates are undoubtedly a tax. When a building is empty, there is no rent. The crux of the matter is that this is a tax on an asset that has no income. As my hon. Friend has pointed out, that is distorting the property market and leading people to make strange decisions. The cheaper properties at the bottom end of the market being used by start-up companies will be the first to be demolished.

Mark Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution. That point has been well made. Many years ago, I recall setting up my own business and occupying exactly the kind of property that would, by now, have been demolished. In my business’s early days, secondary, inexpensive space permitted it to get started with relatively low overheads.

In addition to demolishing existing building, we will end up with no new building. My concern is that, as we emerge from recession, there will be no new industrial units for our businesses to occupy as they grow. That will have a significant effect in delaying our country’s ability to emerge from the current recession. I am particularly concerned about the plight of small businesses and small private investors.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): For the record, I would also like to declare an interest in accordance with the register. Is the localism agenda not part of the solution, in that it should be up to local authorities individually to decide what should be charged and what percentage of relief should be given? That would reflect market conditions in different parts of the country.

Mark Pawsey: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, which I am sure will be taken up by the Minister in his response. We are moving into an era of localism and it should be appropriate for individual authorities to make their own decisions on the matter, rather than having legislation imposed on them from on high.

Returning to the case of Mr Summers, the position of small private investors and small businesses contrasts significantly with that of larger, more established property companies that can absorb this cost in the round and are better able to respond. Of course, the business community fully accepts that the coalition Government need to take decisive action to deal with the country’s deficit, and that any proposals such as those articulated by my hon. Friend this morning need to stand up against many other calls on the public finances at this difficult time. However, I contend that the consequences of the abolition of empty property rate relief on a significant proportion of the country’s commercial property estate means that the matter should be given urgent and special attention.

11.16 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill): May I start by saying what a particular pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies? I wish you well in this new elevation.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) on securing the debate. It is an important topic and he put his case very cogently. I also thank hon. Members who intervened for the various points they made. The Government are alert to those points and want to take them on board, subject, of course, to the circumstances I shall set out briefly.

As I said, this is a very important matter, and I am glad that my hon. Friend has brought hon. Members’ attention to it because he has given me the opportunity
to set out the Government’s position on business rates and the issues surrounding empty property relief. An important thread in my hon. Friend’s comments is that I endorse is the importance of the private sector. The Government fully recognise that the private sector is the driver of economic growth. That is why we are committed to rebalancing the economy and supporting business to provide the growth in jobs that the country needs.

Indeed, the Prime Minister’s announcement at the start of this month set out the Government’s plans to help small and medium-sized businesses to flourish and to encourage entrepreneurs. He has appointed Lord Young as his enterprise adviser and asked him to write a brutally honest report on what, as a Government, can do to help smaller enterprises and start-ups, as mentioned in the debate, to prosper. Business rates are an important consideration, along with several others that I am sure my hon. Friends will appreciate the Government also want to address.

Andrew Bridgen: Does the Minister agree that the lack of Opposition interest in today’s debate reflects the callous indifference of the previous Government to the plight of the small business man in the UK?

Robert Neill: My hon. Friend has stolen one of my lines. I appear to have lost any form of shadow. It is interesting indeed—

Philip Davies (in the Chair): Order. We ought to reflect that, in a half-hour debate, one would not necessarily expect anyone from the shadow ministerial team or, indeed, any other Member to be present.

Robert Neill: I understand that, Mr Davies, but there are criticisms of the previous Government’s approach that I intend to make, and it is interesting that it is coalition Members who have attended to support the callous indifference of the previous Government to the plight of the small business man in the UK?

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I would also like to take the opportunity to set out our plans for the local government resource review, which will enable us to look at those longer-term, across-the-piece plans for business rates. We are committed to providing incentives for local authorities to promote economic growth through the business rates system. We outlined our proposals to enable councils to retain locally-raised business rates in the local growth White Paper. The philosophy of that White Paper recognises the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) made in his intervention on the advantage of giving greater local power in the setting of those rates. The proposals are designed to devolve exactly those sorts of freedoms and responsibilities to the local level as part of our decentralisation agenda.

We propose to take the work forward through the local government resource review starting in January, but I would like to reassure Members that that review will ensure that appropriate protections are put in place for businesses. We are clear that businesses should not be subject to locally imposed increases in the burden of taxation. We have made it clear that businesses would have the right to hold a binding vote on any supplementary business rates, as I have already said. A much more significant piece of work on business rates will come along in the new year.

Turning to empty property rates, we recognise that property taxes, in the form of business rates, are among the highest in Europe, and businesses would like us to do more to reduce that burden, which impacts on their growth and investment decisions. Nowhere is that more true than in relation to empty property rates. My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby set out extremely clearly the problems caused by the previous Government’s reforms of empty property rates—problems that we fully recognise. I assure him that the present Government have tremendous sympathy with the position that his constituent, Mr Summers, finds himself in.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, from 2008-09 the exemption periods were restricted to three months for non-industrial property and six months for industrial property, with ratepayers being liable for full rates once the exemption period has lapsed. As he also pointed out, it is true that the previous Government claimed that the purpose of the reforms was to increase the costs of holding empty property, as a way of encouraging owners of commercial property to re-let, redevelop or sell empty properties—or so it was postulated. That argument was based on an economic theory that was not, and is not, fully accepted by the business community or by many Members of this House. The previous Government also estimated that the change would increase net tax yield by £950m.

Faced almost immediately after the introduction of the reforms with deteriorating economic conditions, the previous Government recognised, perhaps surprisingly, that the reforms made things more difficult for owners of commercial property. That is why they introduced the temporary £18,000 rateable value threshold, below which empty property was exempt from business rates. As Members will be well aware, that threshold is due to revert automatically to £2,600 on 1 April 2011.

The economy is coming out of recession and growing again, thanks to this Government’s policies. That should improve prospects for landlords seeking tenants for empty properties, but we recognise that ratepayers would like us to undo the previous Government’s changes or to continue with the temporary measure. We fully understand and appreciate that view; the difficulty is that our ability to take action on the reforms must be balanced against the high costs involved, the targeted support on business rates that we have already provided, and the overriding need, as my hon. Friend recognised, to reduce public expenditure and support the economy by reducing the deficit.

I assure my hon. Friend that we most definitely recognise the problems caused by the previous Government’s unfair changes. We will certainly keep the matter under review in the light of the work that we propose to undertake, and we will keep in mind the position of Mr Summers and other like him. We want to work constructively with the property industry on this inherited problem that we are trying to sort out, and to take appropriate action as and when our national finances allow. I hope that the major actions that we have already taken on business rates and those that we will be taking through the localism Bill demonstrate our commitment to providing targeted support to businesses through the business rates system. I thank my hon. Friend again for raising the matter.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.
Flooding (West Cumbria)

2.30 pm

Tony Cunningham (Workington) (Lab): It seems rather appropriate to have this debate on a day when floods have hit Cornwall. It is nice to see so many Cumbrian colleagues in attendance. I thought I would begin by doing something that I think is appropriate. On the day of the floods we lost a very brave police officer who undoubtedly saved many lives; he left a wife and four children. We then had a terrible bus crash, in which two young people and the driver lost their lives. On top of that, we had the terrible horrors of the shootings that took place not too long ago in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Mr Reed). I therefore ask Members to stand with me in silence for a few moments to commemorate those losses.

A period of silence was observed.

2.31 pm

Tony Cunningham: I thank hon. Members. The families and friends of those who lost their lives and the entire community of west Cumbria will have greatly appreciated that.

My memories of the floods are almost surreal. I had already spoken with the Environment Agency when river levels were rising, but when I walked into my local in Workington, the Green Dragon, everyone gathered there was, unusually, glued to the television screen, watching with incredulity. They could not believe what they were seeing; lifeboats on the main street of a small market town, and floods that, at their height, were eight or nine feet high. At one stage, the lifeboats could not be launched because of the speed of the river. I rang the then Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who had just got back from Brazil. He agreed to come up, and the following morning I was standing with him on the market place in Cockermouth, just off the main street, and the water around us was still very high. All we could hear were helicopters, and there was a bright yellow RAF helicopter winching someone to safety.

The phrase I used in my first television interview after the floods was not mine. While my right hon. Friend was being interviewed, I turned to someone from the town and said, “This is just unbelievable.” He replied, “Yeah, Tony, it’s like something out of the Bible.” The Sky television interviewer then asked me how I would describe the floods, and I immediately said that they were of biblical proportions. That was copied and echoed by many newspapers and so on, and people said that I was clever to think of it, but the words were those of a constituent who just happened to be standing next to me.

On that first day, we got in touch with Cumbria Community Foundation and launched an appeal. The nuclear industry in particular was extremely generous, giving tens of thousands of pounds to start it off. Cockermouth, Workington and Keswick are relatively small towns, but we raised about £2.5 million in that appeal, which says everything about the generosity of west Cumbrians, of Cumbrians and of the rest of the country. In fact, donations came in from other parts of the world.

The real heroes in the early days were the emergency services. What I am about to say I say not in anger, but in sadness. The police were absolutely superb in those early days, and yet today they are facing 20% cuts. The police community support officers who did such a fantastic job are now threatened with redundancy, and I understand that the number of local neighbourhood policing teams is to be cut from 21 to 10.

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes a powerful point about our local police. Like me, he spends a lot of time speaking with members of the police force, including PCSOs. After the year they have been through, how do they feel they are being treated at the moment?

Tony Cunningham: They feel let down, is the honest answer. I recently received a letter from a PCSO in one of the towns I represent—I will not mention which one—who made just that point. She said, “When the community needed us, we were there. We now need the state, the county council or whatever to help and support us. I hope they will be there for us.”

Turning to the ambulance service, there was recently a vote of no confidence by nurses in both the West Cumberland hospital and Carlisle hospital in the local trust because of cuts, changes to working patterns and so on. They did an incredible job, and not only during the floods. My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland was there for the people he represents after the shootings in his constituency, and we can only imagine what it must have been like for those nurses having to deal with that. In such small communities, the victims were often people they knew, and gunshot wounds, as we know, are particularly horrific. Yet this is where they are now.

With regard to the fire brigade, I would like to ask the Minister to respond to a quote from the Pitt report, which states:

“By a statutory duty.”

That recommendation was published in 2007, and I wonder where we are now. I talked with my local fire officers just a couple of hours ago. The centre where gold command worked during the floods was in Cockermouth, in the fire and rescue service headquarters. That is now going. The service has been offered either a relocation to Penrith, with a reduced number of staff, or outsourcing, which means they would all go. They co-ordinated the entire rescue, with the police, the coastguard and everything else, but that is what they tell me is happening to them.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I sympathise very much with the hon. Gentleman’s points. He listed the three professional emergency services that played such a crucial role a year ago, as they have done many times since. He may be coming to this point, but for many of us in Cumbria there is a fourth emergency service: the mountain rescue teams. His party’s Government refused to give back the VAT and vehicle excise duty that those teams have to pay from their voluntary donations. The present Government have made sympathetic noises about that. Will he join me and other Members
in pressing the Government to release what is a relatively small amount of money to give those teams not only a financial boost, but the formal endorsement that we, the community, recognise the value of their work?

Tony Cunningham: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments and congratulate him—or perhaps offer my commiserations—on his becoming president of his party. It is a great honour for him and for the county, so well done.

The hon. Gentleman can have a look at my speech notes, if he wants, but the next two words on the page are “mountain rescue”. Cockermouth mountain rescue team, in particular, gave immense help. It is unusual for people in my position to apologise, but I will, because we should have done as he suggests and exempted mountain rescue teams from VAT. I fed that into the Government whenever I could, but it was always resisted. I am happy to apologise for the fact that my Government—the Labour Government—did not do that. I fully support what he, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) and others are trying to achieve, because it is important. There is a symbolism associated with it. It would say to the mountain rescue teams that they are recognised, and they should be rewarded and congratulated. As a little aside, in 2001, my very first question at Prime Minister’s Question Time was on mountain rescue teams. I have a great affinity with them, and I am happy to support what the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) proposes.

Something else that is close to my heart is the lifeboat service, and during the floods the Maryport inshore rescue lifeboat in particular did incredible work. Just before the regional development agencies were disbanded, we had agreed a sum of about £1 million to build a new lifeboat station. That service now has a brand-new lifeboat, but nowhere to put it. It had planned to put it into a brand-new lifeboat station in Maryport, but there is no RDA funding.

I could go on discussing the emergency services. The RAF, too, did an incredible job, as did the coastguard and an organisation that many of us did not really expect to see: the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. That sounds strange, but the RSPCA was involved. I can remember being at a barrier set up to keep people away from the danger, and an elderly couple came up to me whose only concern—whose greatest concern—was their pet, which had been left in their flooded house. I got in touch with the RSPCA, its contribution.

The Environment Agency, in particular Glyn Vaughan and his team, did and are still doing a tremendous amount of work. In all the discussions and debates that the Minister will have on budgets, he should ensure that the Environment Agency is protected as much as possible.

Mr Reed: Before my hon. Friend moves on too much further, we do not yet know the cost of the Cumbria floods. I believe that the insurance adjustments are about £200 million so far—I repeat, so far. The RSPCA undertook a fundamental role in protecting livestock. Has he spoken to any farmers—I know that he has spent a great deal of time with them over the past year—who need feed for their herds and cattle about the role of the RSPCA and how much money it may have saved them?

Jim Sheridan (in the Chair): Order. Could I ask Members who make contributions to speak into the microphone, so that the Hansard reporters can pick up what they say?

Tony Cunningham: Thank you, Mr Sheridan. I very much concur with my hon. Friend. Friend’s comments, and farmers are saying that. Let us not forget that hundreds, if not more, of cattle, sheep and other livestock ended up out in the Solway Firth, having come down the Cocker or Derwent rivers and been swept away. The livestock were hugely important, but the fields are still covered by boulders and debris and there is still a huge amount of work to be done.

I also pay tribute to volunteers, of whom there were hundreds during that extremely difficult time. I am not sure how many of us would put up complete strangers. I am not sure how many of us would say to someone we had just met on the street, who had only the clothes that they were wearing, “Come and share my house with me” yet that is what people did. They offered their own homes and bedrooms; they fed others and looked after them.

Another group I pay tribute to—I know that the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale will agree with me—is the churches. We forget at our peril the spiritual side of all of this. When people are going through trauma and difficulties, having lost their home and possessions, it is important to be able to talk things through with others. The churches were on the streets, not just offering tea, coffee, sandwiches and so on, but listening and talking to people, and being there for them. The churches together played a huge role, particularly in Cockermouth.

I also pay tribute to the local authorities, who did a tremendous job, in particular Jill Stannard, the chief executive of Cumbria county council. Other Members here will have known Jim Buchanan, a good, honest and decent man who passed away quite recently. I pay a personal tribute to him. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

I also thank Harry Dyke and Jill Elliott from Allerdale borough council.

While I am thanking people, I should thank the media—I do not do that very often—both national and local. The Sky coverage was excellent, as was that of Border Television, BBC Radio Cumbria, and in particular my local newspaper, The West Cumberland Times and Star, and Nicole Regan and her staff. Their conduct was fantastic.

Mr Reed: I am speaking into the microphone this time, Mr Sheridan.

My hon. Friend mentions the role of the media in the floods last year, and the crucial public service that they performed in informing people about water levels, weather forecasts and the emergency responses that were in place. Was he as saddened as I was to see such a stark contrast between how the media undertook and performed such a fundamental good this time last year, and how they acted in June?
Tony Cunningham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In a sense, the media were with us for the floods, but during the terrible incident of the shootings—we have spoken about this in other debates—elements of the media behaved deplorably, offering people money and so on, so that within days the vast majority of people in west Cumbria wanted them to leave them alone.

I have said that the floods rose to nine feet. I talked about sheep and cows going down the river, but there were also containers—think of the size of a container on the back of a lorry—Ford Transit vans and people's garden sheds swept down. It was incredible. Much of the focus was on Cockermouth, where businesses were devastated and the flooding was horrendous, but I also want to mention Hall Park View, which is in Workington. It was completely flooded—every house under several feet of water. People there felt that the focus was not on them because Hall Park View is just a single street, but they suffered equally. They got a little angry sometimes, and I can understand that. However, I was speaking to a resident from Hall Park View whose house had been flooded by several feet of water and I asked her, "How are things?" She said, "Well, Tony, there are people much worse off than us." I thought that that summed up the spirit.

Rory Stewart (Penrith and The Border) (Con): The hon. Gentleman will also please remember the communities of Eamont Bridge. The suffering of Cockermouth was truly terrible, but even in places such as Eamont Bridge near Penrith, there was terrible devastation of people's lives and families. Perhaps we could look at institutional mechanisms that we can put in place to try to ensure that such things do not happen again. In Eamont Bridge, I noted the huge complexity of dealings with the Highways Agency and the Environment Agency, and trying to measure river flow. What sort of institutional procedures can we put in place to ensure that that does not happen again?

Tony Cunningham: I offer my sympathies to the hon. Gentleman's constituents. As well as Hall Park View, the village of Barepot was completely devastated, but because it was on the other side of the river, people tended to forget about it. In Camerton, people could not bury their dead because the churchyard was flooded. Wives could not be buried next to their husbands and so on—it was horrendous.

On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, there has to be co-ordination by a range of organisations, but the money has to be in place. I shall deal with local models a little later, but we could learn a great deal from the flood action groups—Sue Cashmore's group in Cockermouth and Cecil Thompson's group in Workington. Sue's group, working with Brian Watson, actually has a structure. It has a chair and sub-committees, including ones dealing with the media and the Environment Agency. It is a very professional organisation, from which we could learn a great deal.

We have said that Cockermouth flooded, Workington flooded, houses flooded and so on, but that was only part of the story. The hon. Gentleman mentions Eamont bridge. The bridge was going down in west Cumbria was absolutely devastating. Not only did it result in loss of life, but we lost Harbour bridge; we lost Northside bridge, where PC Barker lost his life; and we lost Navvies bridge. Workington, or Calva, bridge is still not open. On the Saturday, the Papcastle bridge was closed as well, and I talked to a taxi driver the following day. He had already agreed the fare—£5 or £6—to go from Workington to Seaton, which is a journey of about a mile. Someone standing in Workington can see Seaton. That day, the taxi driver did a 180-mile round trip: he drove from Workington to Penrith, Penrith to Carlisle, Carlisle to Maryport, and Maryport to Seaton. He then dropped his passenger off—for a fiver—and drove all the way back. That gives hon. Members some idea of the difficulties that we faced. On top of that, even when Papcastle bridge was repaired, people were still doing 20 or 30-mile round trips, when a mile would normally have done. The forbearance and patience of people in Seaton, Siddick, Northside, Barepot and further afield who were having to travel such huge distances, was absolutely incredible.

Mr Reed: My hon. Friend is giving a moving, telling and detailed description of the events of last year. He has talked about the travel chaos and the absolute devastation that was caused to businesses and to people's ordinary lives, but would he, as a former teacher, care to talk about the effect on the schooling of children in our part of the world—not just the effect on academic achievement and attainment, but the impact of the disruption to their lives, including their psychological well-being?

Tony Cunningham: I am very happy to do that. I spoke to the then Secretary of State and the Schools Minister, and made the point that it might have to be borne in mind that, because of the disruption, some of the students would not do as well in their exams as they could have. They were having to get up two hours earlier and were then stuck in traffic, going round and round. Those who had been flooded out might have been living in a caravan, rented accommodation or a bed and breakfast, and might not have had a computer or been able to do their homework. All that had a massive effect. I was delighted that the Government gave additional funding for extra buses, but having to travel 30 miles to get to school, perhaps arriving late, and then leaving early and missing lessons so as to get back, also had a massive effect.

The big change came within a week of the floods, when we managed to get a footbridge up and running. People said to me, "Why did it take a week?" and I was thinking, "Hang on. We've done very well to get it done in a week." I want to pay tribute to the Army, who did a fantastic job. I think that the footbridge came from Bedford. Getting a footbridge from there to Workington and getting 200 soldiers up there to pile both sides of the river and get a bridge across in a week was a phenomenal achievement, and it said an enormous amount about the armed forces. The local people took them to their hearts and kept going down with pizzas, cakes and sandwiches. After a few days, I spoke to the Army officer in charge and he said, "What is marvellous is that we have to do lots of drills and practices, and it's nice to do something for real that makes a huge difference to the lives of people here."

Tim Farron: The hon. Gentleman rightly pays tribute to the swift work that was done to tackle some of the worst infrastructure problems. The previous Government,
the local authority and the emergency services deserve credit for much of what has happened over the past 12 months. It is worth flagging up, however, that in Backbarrow in my constituency there is still no footbridge. Some 12 months on, the residents who live on one side of the river—the overall majority of the population—have no means of getting easily across it to where Leven Valley post office and primary school are located. Still today, children are being bused in to a school to which they ought to be able to walk. That is a county council responsibility, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman might ask the Minister to intervene, as the case is relatively easy to fix. That community is still rent in two.

**Tony Cunningham:** I am sure that the Minister has taken appropriate note of that. As the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and the other Cumbrian MPs know, in the near future hopefully all six Cumbrian MPs will meet, and one issue that we will look at is flooding and bridges.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): I join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Army, and I also congratulate the reservists on the role that they played in securing the footbridge. The Minister had a bit part in the Government’s response to the Cumbria floods. Does my hon. Friend not worry, as I do, that with the abolition of the Government office for the north-west, which played a key role in co-ordinating not just the Army’s response but that of other agencies, and the abolition of the other RDAs, there will be a gap there for any other future natural, or other, disaster in the English regions?

**Tony Cunningham:** I share that concern. I am delighted to see here the former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend. Friend the Member for Leeds Central, who vividly remembers the floods.

On the first morning, I rang Steve Broomhead, the chief executive of the regional development agency, and said, “There’s devastation here. If you look down the main street you will see that businesses have been flooded beyond repair.” He said, “You can have £1 million,” and not only did he deliver on that, but in the end he delivered £1.45 million to businesses. About 90% of the businesses in Cockermouth are back up and running, due in large part to the care, work and effort of the RDA, and that will be sorely missed.

**Rory Stewart:** This incredibly useful contribution is a fantastic way of raising with Parliament and Ministers the problems with the floods, and with planning for the future. May I push a little, not just on resources but on what we can actually do regarding planning, institutions and training? Looking at the current water levels in my constituency, and at what is happening to the world’s climate in general, what worries me is that we might be moving into a world where this happens far more frequently than we would like. Are there things, apart from providing money, we could do to ensure that this is a priority for the years to come?

**Tony Cunningham:** There are things we can do. I mentioned the Pitt report, which I hope will be implemented. That will give a statutory role to all this planning. I am not saying that lack of maintenance caused the floods—they were created by the huge amount of rain—but dredging needs to take place, and we need to maintain our rivers. Part of the reason why the trees trunks and the branches came thundering down the rivers was that the rivers had not been cleaned out. If the Environment Agency has to make dramatic cuts in its budget, I am worried that one thing it will not do is all the general physical maintenance—the cleaning and dredging. That concerns me, and I am sure it concerns others.

**Thomas Docherty** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Tim Farron** rose—

**Tony Cunningham:** I will give way to my hon. Friend, and then to the hon. Gentleman.

**Thomas Docherty:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. He will probably share my concern that the Government are cutting by a minimum of 20% the flood defences budget—I remember that from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. Does he agree that that will do nothing except increase the likelihood that we will see such tragic events in Cumbria and elsewhere in the country?

**Tony Cunningham:** I agree, and the best example I can give, if you will bear with me, is Carlisle. The flood defences created there cost about £35 million, and at the time of the Cockermouth floods, those defences held—only just, but they held. The estimated cost to the Exchequer—the state—of cleaning up if we had not invested that money was about £70 million or £80 million. Cutting back on flood defences and resilience measures is a short-term approach and does not value the long-term benefits accrued by investing now and in the near future.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Powerful points have been made about maintenance and the need for co-ordination, and although he is right about the flooding in west Cumbria being of “biblical proportions”, does he agree that both co-ordination and maintenance were absent in Ulverston in south Cumbria and in the surrounding areas affected by flooding? There needs to be maintenance of investment and greater co-ordination to prevent buck-passing between agencies and local authorities. We have to grip this now if we are to prevent a repeat of the problem, as we have seen in the past week in Lowick Green, where the Farmers Arms flooded again, almost to the day that it was affected last time.

**Tony Cunningham:** I agree, and co-ordination has to take place. If we do not invest now, we are only storing up problems and difficulties for the future. It is a little simplistic to say, “Well, we’ve got these budget cuts that we need to make”. To cut off or slow down funding now, which will mean a huge loss of investment in years to come, does not make any sense to me.

**Tim Farron:** The hon. Gentleman is being characteristically generous. On the point about co-ordination being so critical, I pay tribute to the right
Tony Cunningham: I agree with my hon. Friend. Sue Cashmore and Brian Watson’s group in Cockermouth has looked again at what happens when they get a flood warning—who goes where and to which high ground and which buildings, and how many people there are. It is all organised and sorted, so if that is what the big society is, they are doing it and have been for some time.

I mentioned the footbridge, which was vital, but we needed a road bridge, and the only bridge that existed was the railway, so we needed a new railway station and a train to run between Maryport and Workington, because that was the only way of getting across the river. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), because whenever I went to him and said, “I need”, he said, “You can have”. There was rarely a hesitation. I said, “Look, the need is desperate. We need a road bridge quickly”. I think we got a road bridge in about three months, which cost about £5 million. That is a lifesaver for people on both sides of the river. The free train cost about £1.5 million, and sometimes it was full and had to do extra journeys, but it kept the wheels oiled and turning. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend is here.

Thomas Docherty: On that point, would my hon. Friend care to comment on the roles of Network Rail and the train operating company, and on how they responded to the situation?

Tony Cunningham: The team of companies that got the new rail station up in, I think, six days, which is an incredible record, won a national award at Grosvenor House. We have all seen when travelling by train the people at the ends of platforms taking the numbers, and one of the funniest things was that they flocked to west Cumbria. There was a new train and station, and they were there taking photographs, which helped the tourism industry enormously. Strangely enough, the chief executive—the top man—of Direct Rail Services Ltd lives in Seaton, so it was useful for him to be able to get backwards and forwards.

Tim Farron: This will be a brief intervention as the hon. Gentleman has been very generous. On tourism, I wonder whether it is worth pointing out that the media, which did a wonderful job during the flood crisis, as has been said, nevertheless also contributed—probably inadvertently—to the general sense that Cumbria was closed for business. When the flood waters went away, perhaps even after a week or 10 days, people as close as Lancaster would not visit the Lake district because they assumed that we were all in complete chaos. As may have been noticed, I have kept out of the resource discussions, but as the hon. Gentleman will doubtless agree, a strong marketing operation is utterly crucial, so that Cumbria can stand up against those problems and ensure that it is clear that it is open for business when such things happen, as they occasionally and inevitably do.

Tony Cunningham: I very much agree, and I want to touch on tourism a little later. There are ongoing problems; there are businesses still not back in operation and people still out of their homes. I want to highlight one particular case that I have been trying to deal with: that
of Mrs Michelle Lockett, who is still not back in her home due to disputes between loss adjusters and the insurance company.

I am sure this is only a coincidence and has nothing at all to do with the debate, but, strangely enough, I got an e-mail this morning—we should remember that this situation has been going on for 12 months. In it, a guy from the National Insurance and Guarantee Corporation—the insurance company—says:

“The current position with this claim is that the majority of the Buildings element of the claim has been settled…With regards to the Contents element of the claim we have agreed to accept this part of the claim subject to the normal terms and conditions”.

I want to send a clear message to NIG and Crawford that I will be watching this case very closely.

Having said that, I am not going to have a go at all insurance companies and loss adjusters. When I meet them, they say that 70 or 80% of people are happy with what went on. There are examples of good practice among such companies. Some people in Cockermouth were back in their homes within a couple of months. I am not, therefore, having a go, but there is still a lot of work to do.

Mr Reed: Does my hon. Friend agree that the insurance industry, of course, also includes practitioners of whom we would not want to see too many? However, the insurance industry and the insurance companies were a pivotal component of the community’s response in getting back on its feet after the floods.

Tony Cunningham: Yes, absolutely. I pay tribute to the insurance companies and the good loss adjusters, but I want to remind people that things are not perfect. If people are still out of their homes after this length of time, something has obviously gone wrong.

I have a few ideas for the Minister from constituents—people such as Sue Cashmore and Michelle—about how insurance can be developed. I will not go through those ideas now, but leave them with the Minister. I ask him to take serious cognisance of them, because local people often have some very good ideas. I also had a visit from the CBI recently. It had concerns about climate change and small businesses, and perhaps I can pass on its comments and questions to the Minister.

In passing, I want to mention the consultation and the idea of a flood tax, which the Minister will no doubt comment on. There is an idea that, on top of having to pay additional—

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): It is a myth.

Tony Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to reply. I have come across examples of insurance premiums being tripled or quadrupled and of people being asked to pay a £10,000 or £15,000 excess. People could now be asked to make a contribution on top of that. In my discussions with people in west Cumbria, that idea has gone down like a lead balloon.

I want to say something that moves slightly away from what I have said so far, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland will talk about this, too, because it relates to the future of the nuclear industry. The one thing the people of west Cumbria—people such as Ron Williams from Bothel, Margaret O’Hare from Tallentire, and the residents of Westnewton—do not want any more of is onshore wind farms. Even the planning inspectorate tells me that the cumulative effect of so many onshore wind farms in such a small area should be considered when looking at planning applications.

I supported offshore wind turbines, which generate enough electricity for about half of Cumbria. However, when people are prepared to put in a field half a dozen wind turbines that generate little electricity and are perceived as an absolute eyesore by those who have to live by them, we have to think again. There must be a balance between generation on the one hand and tourism and the environment on the other.

As Mr Ron Williams also pointed out—I can only concur—the wind blows on some days, but not on other days. However, the tide comes in twice a day, every day. We need to look at that issue, and I hope the Minister will say one or two words about it. There were plans for a barrage across the Solway to generate the electricity we need, but—

Jim Sheridan (in the Chair): Order. I genuinely hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but the winding-up speeches will start at 3.40 pm. If other Members indicate that they want to speak, he will have to wind up pretty soon.

Tony Cunningham: Okay. I will certainly do that, and I thank you for your good grace, Mr Sheridan.

I want to say a couple more things just to finish. Two things stick in my mind. Let me give hon. Members an example of how Cumbrian people reacted to the floods. The bridge had gone down and, tragically, the police officer had been killed. The community of Northside was left without electricity or telephones. Hearing that elderly people in Northside did not have access to telephones—they were elderly so they did not have a mobile phone—someone from Penrith, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border, went into the town, bought 10 mobile phones, put money on them all, drove to Workington and handed them in to the community centre, saying, “These are for elderly people who don’t have access to telephones.”

I have one other little memory, and I will finish on this note. Jennings brewery was badly damaged and flooded. It was not able to produce the wonderful beer that it normally produced, so the beer had to be produced in Burton. Ten pence from the price of the beer was going to the Cumbria flood appeal, and I cannot remember the number of times I was in a pub when someone said, “I think I’ll just have another one. It’s for a good cause.” Those efforts raised about £178,000, which is a lot of 10 pences. It also says a lot about the amount of beer that is drunk.
In conclusion, people might think we are asking for special treatment in west Cumbria. However, I want the Minister to comment on the memorandum of agreement, because what we are asking for is the special treatment that is already provided for. I thank the Minister, and I thank all hon. Members for their comments so far. I will sit down and let others make their contributions.

3.17 pm

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) for securing the debate. He has been after it for some time, and I am glad that, as usual, he has succeeded. He gave me my start in politics—for good or ill—when I was briefly his researcher in the European Parliament and it is a pleasure to work alongside him now. I speak in this debate as the shadow Minister with responsibility for this policy area, but also as a constituency MP directly affected by these issues.

I wish to point to the tireless work that my hon. Friend undertook this time last year, not only for his own constituents, but for the whole of west Cumbria, including my constituents. When the floods hit, my hon. Friend was a Government Whip, so he was unable to take part in any debates. However, his constituents know what he did on the Thursday night, as the rain kept coming down. They also know about the work he threw himself into on the Friday morning, when the devastation became apparent, and about the work that he has continued doing to this very day.

It is often said that the man who is his own advocate has a fool for a client, so I feel duty-bound to say these things on my hon. Friend’s behalf. Frankly, he hides his light under a bushel. I am proud to have him as my neighbour and to work alongside him on so many issues. I am also grateful that many of my friends and family members, who live in his constituency, have him as their MP.

My hon. Friend and I were in constant contact as the disaster unfolded, and I know what he did in the midst of the chaos—no one could have done more. He ensured that skips were made available for people emptying their homes. He went to buy nappies for the child of a young mother who was in desperate need and who did not know where else to turn. In addition—and he has not mentioned this—he was pivotal in establishing the local relief fund and in prising open the Treasury's coffers, with the help of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), who is no longer in his place, for funding for bridges, temporary train services and much more. I passionately believe that he provided a definition of a first-class Member of Parliament, and of leadership. He did what he did because he believes passionately in west Cumbria’s people and potential.

The belief, optimism and hope that pervaded not just west Cumbria but Barrow and other parts of the county in November 2009 are harder to find now, as they are throughout much of the country, because in addition to the floods and the community-wide psychological effects—the trauma and devastation—caused by them, our area, as has been said, has suffered significant further trauma since then. Earlier this year, two school pupils from Keswick school were killed when their bus was involved in a road traffic accident. Such a senseless loss of life caused widespread grief throughout my constituency, throughout my hon. Friend’s constituency of Workington, in Allerdale and further afield. Soon after, as the community was still reeling from that disaster, 12 people were murdered in that quiet corner of England. The community is still dealing with that event and processing its long-term response. My heart goes out to all those who were affected, and I am grateful to all right hon. and hon. Members present today for the recognition and respect that they gave to them at the beginning of the proceedings.

I mention those events because they are relevant. They are issues to which the community must respond and challenges that we must meet. The pattern is clearly one of challenge after challenge. None of us can directly understand the pain caused to those families who were affected by the events, but as a community our response has been typically resilient. However, I must be entirely honest—as my hon. Friend has been and as I am sure other hon. Members will be—and say that that resilience is not helped when the community sees reductions in the number of police officers and hospital services; money for rebuilding its schools taken away; widespread redundancies at the publicly funded Sellafield nuclear facility, which is the cornerstone of our local economy; and now cuts to the national flood defence budget. Our community shows stoicism in the face of tragedy beyond our control, but anger in the face of ideologically driven political choices inflicted by a remote Government with a dubious democratic mandate. I shall move on to those issues later.

I wish to pay tribute again to PC Bill Barker, who lost his life in the floods on 20 November last year. PC Barker was a constituent of mine and few, if any, of us can know what the Barker family are going through now. As the anniversary of his death approaches, it must be particularly difficult. It is a difficult subject to talk about. However, following his ultimate sacrifice, I know that he still occupies the thoughts of our entire community. He is incredibly well thought of and is held in almost unimaginable affection in the town of Workington.

Tony Cunningham: I know that I have just spoken, but I want to pay tribute to Bill Barker’s wife, Hazel, who is a wonderful woman. She lost her husband and has four children. When I meet her or talk to other people about her the one thing that comes through is the incredible dignity of the woman. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees.

Mr Reed: My hon. Friend puts it better than I ever could. Mrs Barker has displayed remarkable integrity and incredible dignity and is a superb mother to her children. I am sure that her husband would have been very proud.

PC Barker gave his life serving others and did it instinctively. Many of us either would not or could not do that. His sacrifice provides a definition of heroism for us all. His heroism was commended by the then Prime Minister and the heir to the throne, but the tributes from his wife, children and colleagues dominate all the others, in my memory. He was a devoted father and husband, an extraordinary friend and a supremely committed police officer. He elicited a rare combination of love and respect from those who knew him. He gave all he had for the people he served and will for ever be remembered by the people of west Cumbria.
[Mr Reed]

Last year, the towns of Workington, Keswick and Cockermouth, and the areas around them, were the places most seriously affected by the floods that hit Cumbria. In Workington and Cockermouth there was devastation that is uncommon in west Cumbria. Streets were swept away, homes were ruined, businesses were badly affected and lives were put on hold. As Alan Irving of the Whitehaven News remarked at the time, the whole community of west Cumbria came together in the wake of the floods. Rivalries were abandoned—my hon. Friend the Member for Workington and I need not talk about rivalry, as there is certainly none between us, but our towns have long been the best of enemies, in a friendly way—and the principles of community were reaffirmed across the whole of our county, with people in Whitehaven, Egremont and elsewhere showing incredible solidarity with their flood-affected neighbours.

On the Friday night after the floods hit, I stood in the Cockermouth sheep and wool centre in my hon. Friend's constituency, helping as best I could, as the then deputy Regional Minister for the North West. I was overwhelmed to see my constituents fetching what food, clothing, toiletries, blankets and, in some instances, toys they could to help the people of Cockermouth and Workington who were stationed there. Those constituents of mine, who had travelled 20 or 30 miles to do so, saw it as their job and duty, and it is typical of them and of the constituents of my hon. Friend that they should have done so.

There are many thank yous and stories from the days when the floods hit, and we will tell them for a long time, but we must first understand what happened. Credit must go to the Met Office for the ability it now has to predict extremes of weather with such precision. The floods affected more than 1,300 homes and left many more without power and water. Of all the towns and villages involved, Cockermouth, as I have said, was the worst affected. Water levels there reached 2.5 metres. The village of Seathwaite set an unenviable record of receiving 314.4 mm of rain in 24 hours—a new UK record for the wettest November on record.

The forecast heavy rain arrived and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Workington said, people were evacuated from Cockermouth by helicopter. It was a surreal experience to see on television Sea Kings hovering just above the Cockermouth main street—something we thought that we would never see and hope never to see again—irrespective of the extraordinary times that we have lived through in west Cumbria in the past 12 months. My hon. Friend was the pairing Whip at the time, and he had not let me off. Therefore fortunately—or unfortunately—I was stranded in London. My hon. Friend let himself off the Whip so he was not stranded, but that has not affected our relationship and I bear no grudges.

The rapid attendance and full attention of the then Prime Minister and the then Secretary of State for the Environment was incredibly important. It gave everybody in the area a sense of solidarity and genuine togetherness. To know that politicians from all parties, but especially the country's leading politician and the relevant Secretary of State, were with us in a time of crisis, was important. It was unprompted and genuine.

Tony Cunningham: Perhaps I can lighten things a little. I was in the sheep and wool centre with the Prime Minister. When he came in, he held the hand of a blind lady in a wheelchair. Somebody said, "It's Gordon Brown, the Prime Minister", and she said, "Y'all right, lad?" It must have been many years since the Prime Minister had been referred to as a lad, but that is typical of west Cumbria.

Mr Reed: I was not there, but I think I saw that on television. By that time, I was safe, warm and dry, and matters were well in hand. I recall that the Prime Minister visited on more than one occasion during those two days. He was exceptionally busy.

I was incredibly pleased at the time to learn that the Government had implemented the Bellwin scheme, and that rather than meeting 85% of costs, which I believe is typical in such incidents, the scheme was introduced in such a way as to allow 100% of costs to local authorities to be met. That was an incredibly wise move. The Government confirmed that 100% of costs would be met, rather than the standard 85% and, as my hon. Friend mentioned, it was made clear that the costs of building the temporary bridge in Workington—the Barker crossing—would be met by the Department for Transport. The Department also contributed other short-term resources to help the county implement its highways recovery plan, and ensure that all affected areas were back in working order as soon as possible.

I pay tribute to all those involved in the logistics of establishing the train service and to those who helped to establish the brand new Tesco overnight, which was adjacent to the train service. It is a tribute to the feats that people can achieve in times of crisis. I pay tribute to Cumbria police, under the fantastic leadership of chief constable Craig Mackey, and to the county council, under the leadership of Jill Stannard, who I believe had been made chief executive that very day. I thank Cumbria fire and rescue service, the local NHS, the Environment Agency and all the welfare charities that have been
mentioned. I also mention British Telecom and other utility companies, our magnificent armed forces and reservists, and many others who acted in superb concert as the floods hit.

The media have been mentioned briefly. Radio Cumbria was absolutely indispensable at the time. It became an irreplaceable service which, in my opinion, immediately demonstrated the value and strength of public service broadcasting—something that no other organisation could have provided. Border Television from the independent sector was also incredibly impressive.

As I went around the flooded areas, it became clear from several conversations I had just how vital the mountain rescue teams had been, especially in Keswick. The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) is no longer in his place, but he is right. For many years he has been a stalwart advocate of the need for mountain rescue teams to have their VAT refunded. When the Labour party was in government, I joined him in that view, both privately and publically, and my hon. Friend the Member for Workington also joined in the debate, privately and often stridently. I certainly agree with the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and I know that the Minister will take note of that point. It is a difficult issue because in our part of the world, and in many other places like Cumbria such as the Pennines, mountain rescue is a vital emergency service.

A number of organisations acted in remarkable concert. After speaking to people in Keswick about the mountain rescue service I was left in no doubt as to what the service provided. The case for financial help from the state is irrefutable. I mention the big society but not in a pejorative sense. Quite simply, if one seeks a definition for the kinds of things that underpin that centuries-old concept, the mountain rescue teams provide one such example. They offer services that no one else can, or will, provide.

Away from the heavily hit areas, many other towns and villages in west Cumbria were affected by the flooding. In some quarters, they were referred to as “the forgotten flooded”—places such as Parton, Cleator, Holmrook, Bootle, Egremont, Lorton and elsewhere. Thankfully, those areas did not witness the same devastation as Workington and Cockermouth, but they endured real suffering that was equally deserving of Government resources and support. At the time, I made the case in the Chamber that such support should have been forthcoming. I saw the effects of the flooding on those communities, and I pointed out that no community should be left behind. As a country, we need to take forward that principle and enshrine it in our flood defence policies.

Ultimately, the costs of recovery in Cumbria are not yet fully known. If we look at the insurance claims that have been made and paid so far, it is in excess of £200 million. However, we do not know what the effect has been on the economy or the tourism industry, and we do not yet know the long-term effects on agriculture and other sectors, so the final figure will be significantly in excess of £200 million.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington paid tribute to a number of ordinary people who were involved in the response to the floods when they hit. I wish to take the opportunity to pay tribute again to a special Copeland borough councillor, Councillor David Banks, when the banks of the River Ehen burst and houses along the banks of that river were flooded, he went to the aid of some elderly people who lived in his patch. With his bare hands, in the deluge and the pouring rain, he tried to rebuild the river bank with stones and baskets as the rain kept coming. That is the kind of people we are. Whenever my hon. Friend and I have taken part in debates such as this over the past 12 months, such statements have almost become a cliché, but it is no less true. That is the kind of people we are in west Cumbria and people such as Councillor Banks are the kind of public servants that we need.

As the people in the village of Parton taught me five years ago, it takes only a little bit of water to cause immense damage and for a flood to have a huge impact on the life of a family and its memories. Just one foot of water can ruin a home and destroy treasured and irreplaceable possessions such as invaluables photographs and mementos of children and other loved ones. Floods take away so much that can never be replaced.

The Environment Agency is among those organisations that have been pivotal in achieving recovery from the floods, not just at the time but since then. In the six months following the flooding, it extended the free flood warning service to an additional 3,000 Cumbrian homes and businesses. It began work with 30 flood action groups and commissioned a £100,000 study to look at the current standards of flood protection and possible options to reduce future flood risk in Cockermouth. In Keswick, it invested more than £700,000 in flood defence walls in the High Hill area, and in Ulverston it repaired existing flood defences and improved other flood defences to certain properties.

Before the floods last year, Carlisle had received significant investment in defences—between £30 million and £35 million—following the floods of 2005. Cockermouth, Keswick and Ulverston had all benefited from some flood defence investment under the last Government, and much more was planned. For example, in Keswick, which is now in my constituency following the boundary change before the last election, the Environment Agency had done a study to justify improvement works and had allocated funding to design works in 2010-11 for construction at an estimated cost of £5 million. I ask the Minister in all sincerity and with genuine respect to ensure that those works proceed. I certainly hope that they do. I have written to the Secretary of State regarding that issue, and I hope that the Minister can today give my constituents in Keswick the assurances that they seek about the flood works that they expect to take place there.

In Ulverston, funding had been allocated for 2010-11 to develop a scheme for Dragley beck, which is programmed for construction in 2011-12 at a cost of £2 million. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Workington will want it to be taken forward as well. The project at Dragley beck would raise the existing once-in-20-years standard of flood protection to once in 70 years. For Cockermouth, indicative funding is in place to begin studying a potential scheme in 2012-13.

The Environment Agency brought forward other schemes for Cumbria under the previous Government, in the light of the cuts, can the Minister notify Cumbrian local authorities about which flood defence schemes will be continued and which will be scrapped? The people of Cumbria have a right to know that as a
matter of urgency. Heavy rainfall has raised the spectre of flooding again in the past few days. Flooding has been a real possibility in Keswick and elsewhere, and we need to know where we stand.

Flooding is one of the most difficult issues facing the nation. It is likely to happen more, not less. Carlisle flooded in 2005, before the horrendous floods in 2007 and the Cumbrian floods in 2009. We need to be able to meet the practical and policy challenges that flooding poses. The nature of that policy challenge for every community at risk of flooding means that it must be properly resourced by Government. The previous Labour Government more than doubled spending on the management of flood risk. That is beyond doubt: it is irrefutable. We are talking about west Cumbria today, but none of us should forget the other communities that have been affected by flooding devastation. I think that the costs of the floods in 2007 were in excess of £3 billion. Thirteen lives were lost. None of us should forget that.

Between 2007 and 2009, the Environment Agency completed 106 flood defence schemes. Will the Minister tell us how many flood defence schemes will be undertaken by the agency under its newly cut budget, year by year for the life of this Parliament? Further to that, will he tell us where those schemes will be? Communities such as those in Leeds and elsewhere need to know what is happening to their flood defence capability.

I genuinely look forward to working with the Government and with the Minister on issues on which we agree. Flooding should not be a party political issue. It should be an issue of national interest, on which we all work in concert to achieve the best results. However, an air of chaos is creeping into flood defence policy and planning in DEFRA. The £170 million cut in flood defence budgets just is not necessary. Indeed, it is fundamentally wrong. We all want to see greater efficiency in how public money is spent. I support the Minister on that, but I cannot support a £110 million cut in capital spending and a cut in excess of £60 million in flood and coastal erosion defence maintenance budgets.

The Association of British Insurers has expressed its disappointment. The insurance company Liverpool Victoria believes that reducing current flood defence maintenance budgets means that “thousands of homes still at risk of flooding may lose home insurance cover.”

The Institution of Civil Engineers has also expressed concerns about the cuts in flood defence budgets. Now, the people of this country who live in areas of flood risk are, as my hon. Friend the Member for Workington mentioned, haunted by the spectre of a flood tax. A Conservative Member said earlier from a sedentary position that that was a myth. I hope so and I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to explain why that is the case when he makes his remarks.

We know that the statement of principle between insurers and Government expires in 2013, which is only a few years away. Negotiation on that issue will be complex, so can the Minister tell hon. Members about the plan? Where are we going on this issue? Will he now publish the road map that was mentioned following the insurance summit in September?

We are used to the English language being assaulted by the present Government. The Prime Minister achieves nothing in Europe, but calls that a “spectacular success”. The Secretary of State for Health claims to match Labour’s spending, yet Conservative MPs from up and down the country tell me that hospital wards are being closed by stealth. Instead of being freed of red tape, police officers are actually being freed of their jobs. The Chancellor of the Exchequer claims to be protecting more homes from flooding by cutting the flood defence budget, and the self-proclaimed “greenest Government ever” will struggle to be the greenest Government of 2010. Welcome to the world of DEFRA-nomics, where we are meant to believe that those most affected by the cuts being imposed are, perversely, the most happy at the prospect. That will not wash.

Tragically—and there is an air of tragedy around this, as I have said—DEFRA Ministers currently occupy one of two positions. Either they actively want the Government to abandon their responsibilities or, as they used to refer to it, “get out of the way” and therefore are happy for these ideological cuts to affect flood defences in an exceptionally damaging way, or they really have no understanding of how the cuts will affect homes, businesses and communities up and down the country. The former is almost worse, because it would suggest that the likely effects of the cuts are understood, but are being disregarded. Which is it? Surely the cuts cannot have been made in ignorance. Surely they cannot have been planned in ignorance and will not be prosecuted in ignorance.

Will the Minister tell us today which flood defence schemes in which areas will be cut and which will proceed? Will he take the opportunity to tell us what discussions he has had with which local authorities about how they should pick up the flood defence burden, particularly in the light of cuts in their own budgets? Will he tell us how many flood defence schemes will go ahead for each year of this Parliament and where those schemes will be located? I hope that if he cannot tell me or other hon. Members that today, he will undertake to write to me or place a paper in the Library detailing where cuts in flood defence projects will be made.

Flood damage costs in England alone are more than £1 billion a year. According to Environment Agency calculations, one in six homes in England is at risk from flooding. More than 2.4 million properties are at risk of flooding from rivers or the sea in England, and half of those are at significant risk. The Minister is aware of the figures. A further 2.8 million properties are vulnerable to surface water flooding. The Environment Agency calculates that in the worst-case scenario, annual flood damage costs could exceed £27 billion across the UK by 2080. Clearly, that is some way off, but it is a rate of increase that none of us would want.

This is no time to be playing fast and loose with our flood defences, no time for DEFRA-nomics and no time for cutting flood defence budgets. If the Government will not change their mind in the face of overwhelming evidence, independent advice and the experiences of very real human suffering that we know flooding causes, they must at least be honest about where their axe will fall and which communities they will abandon. We need transparency and honesty, but most of all, we need the Government to think again.
3.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Richard Benyon): I thank the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr Reed), for the 32 minutes of his speech on this subject. In the 12 minutes that I have left to respond to the many very serious points that have been made in the debate, I will endeavour to answer his questions, but he has not left me enough time. I guarantee that I will write to him.

I start by paying tribute to the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham). On this day, which is almost the anniversary of the tragic occurrences in his and neighbouring constituencies, and on the day that we are thinking of the people on the south coast of Cornwall who have suffered similar disruption to their lives, although, happily, not quite as tragically as in his constituency, he and the hon. Member for Copeland are right to link those events with other tragedies that have happened in their area. I come from a constituency that suffered the flooding of more than 2,000 houses in 2007; it also contains the town of Hungerford. I therefore feel a sense of empathy.

The hon. Member for Workington should be applauded for his reasoned words, for his genuine honesty and for his generosity of spirit. He has shown his pride in the performance of people in his constituency, old and young, those who had a statutory role in the rescue activities and those who did not, who buckled down and did what they could. He has shown a generous appreciation of the efforts of the emergency services, the Environment Agency and the local authorities. It is touching to think of the role played by organisations such as the RNLI, as well. Perhaps the most moving was his tribute to the spirit of the local people.

The hon. Gentleman knows well that, just because a year has passed and his last constituent is, we hope, on the point of going back into a house, the problems are not over. In my constituency, the level of stress reported by local doctors’ surgeries increases when it rains. There is an element of post-traumatic stress related to such incidents that I am not sure we have got our heads around. Given the other tragedies that have occurred in Cumbria, I am sure that he and his colleagues will experience something similar. It is good to see every MP from Cumbria present for this debate. I pay tribute to their cross-party consensus, their pride in their area and their determination to learn from what happened.

I can pay no greater tribute than to Sue Cashmore, whom I must meet. I am sure that hon. Members are keen for me to big up other heroes, but what she is doing for her constituency, old and young, those who had a statutory role in the rescue activities and those who did not, who buckled down and did what they could, is fantastic. The hon. Member for Workington spoke with great feeling at the flood summit about the work being done by local flood groups, and they deserve our appreciation. To answer some of his points, I refer to what has been achieved through the summit. I hope also to dispel the myths that have been propounded by some hon. Members today.

I was asked about Sir Michael Pitt’s recommendations on fire and rescue services. In the Pitt review, it was not categorical on the issue of a statutory duty. It proposed that there should be introduced “as necessary”. There would be significant drawbacks to such a statutory duty. In his review of the response of the fire and rescue services to the floods of summer 2007, Sir Ken Knight, the Government’s chief fire and rescue adviser, concluded that a duty was not necessary. Fire and rescue authorities already turn out to flood events, as evidenced by past flood incidents. It is therefore not clear what difference a statutory duty would make. Moreover, a statutory duty could lead to the fire and rescue service being the only organisation carrying out flood rescue, because other responders, including many skilled and experienced voluntary organisations, such as those that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, might feel that they were somehow subsidiary to that.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman, however, that we are about to announce a substantial sum of money to be spent in fire and rescue services, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and the Red Cross on flood rescue equipment. That announcement will be made tomorrow. It will cover a number of fire and rescue services, although I cannot remember whether the hon. Gentleman’s local service is included; I would be happy to inform him later.

Tony Cunningham: Will it also include independent lifeboat stations? Such services are not run just by the RNLI.

Richard Benyon: I accept that. We will announce £700,000 as the first part of a £2 million fund for flood rescue equipment for fire services.

I will take up with the Treasury the point about mountain rescue services raised by the hon. Member for Copeland about the wonderful role played by mountain rescue teams and the difficulties they face, and I will bear those in mind in relation to our strategies.

Hon. Members have spoken about bridges and of the wonderful and speedy work that was done to return those vital communications links to their communities. We must learn from those processes and consider whether we can perform them even quicker. I understand the problem facing the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), and I will keep him informed. I heard the points made by the hon. Member for Copeland about the wonderful role played by mountain rescue teams and the difficulties they face, and I will bear those in mind in relation to our strategies.

On schools, from my experience of the floods of 2007, I think that local authorities should include a member of the local education authority in their initial emergency planning team. If a flood happens in the day, parents need to know whether it is safer to collect their children or to leave them at school. If it happens in the night, they want to know whether schools are open or closed. It is important that LEAs are kept informed.

On funding, it is important that we understand the points that have been made about the demise of the Government office for the north-west. We are in the throes of rolling out the recommendations of the Pitt review and the important provisions of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. That requires a coherent and cohesive strategy at national and local level. We are testing that seriously in Exercise Watermark, which the Secretary of State and I are going to see in progress tomorrow. The main part of the exercise will happen in March. It will test co-ordination, resilience and strategic risk planning at national and local level. We are determined that every aspect of that part of Sir Michael Pitt’s important report will be seen through.
the funding to ensure that local authorities are properly resourced and to secure all the emergency activities that were so ably and rightly described by the hon. Member for Workington.

I will deal now with the myth of a flood tax. I am probably at fault for the way in which I floated our plans before the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. That allowed for the hon. Gentleman’s comments in the local paper about a lead balloon, which I read. Of course such a proposal would go down like a lead balloon in flood-traumatised constituencies such as his and mine. I am not in the business of introducing a flood tax. However, I want to ensure that we provide for communities that always miss out because they cannot compete with other communities that bring forward plans for flood defences that offer a much better return for the money. Some communities, year after year, are pushed down the list in that way. Through our flood and coastal erosion management strategies, more communities are identifying risk, yet some are constantly pushed down. We want to provide those communities with some comfort, so we are saying that there are ways of unlocking funding that does not necessarily come from the taxpayer. I have seen innovative schemes around the country in which the planning system has been used to unlock additional money which, when added to Government funding, puts a scheme above the line and makes it possible. I assure hon. Members that a considerable number of schemes will go ahead that are fully paid for by the taxpayer, but we have to look for ways to unlock further funding. If the hon. Member for Copeland is honest with himself, he will acknowledge that if his party was in government now, he would be looking at precisely such methods—he would be mad not to.

I would love to go into detail about the many other issues that have been raised in the debate and pay further tribute to the wonderful people of Cumbria and the way they have responded to the terrible tragedy. In particular, I pay tribute to the family of PC Bill Barker. We have an opportunity for the House to work together. I will answer the points to which I was unable to respond in the short time that I was left, but I assure the hon. Member for Copeland that I will work with him, and any other hon. Member, to ensure that the problems faced by communities that have experienced flooding, and those that, sadly, will experience it in the future, are dealt with in a cohesive and strategic way.

4 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.9 pm

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): It is a pleasure, Mr Sheridan, to serve under your chairmanship.

Decarbonisation policies and renewable energy policies, both nationally and internationally, may not be in crisis but they are at a turning point. The Chicago climate exchange ended carbon trading a year ago, and the Copenhagen summit was not a success. Wind farms are increasingly criticised as an environmental blight as well as extremely expensive, and it has been noted that energy companies make three times as much money from wind farms as they do from coal and oil. The debate takes place in that context.

I am rather impressed by the potential contribution that heat pumps could make to our future energy needs. However, we must have complete assurance that the installed technology will actually deliver what it says on the tin. I fear that in 30 or 40 years, many of our energy policies, including wind farms, will be seen in the same way as we now look back on deck-access housing accommodation from the 1960s and 1970s—a good idea at the time, but no more than that. Heat pumps are a big investment for both householder and taxpayer, and both deserve to be assured that they will be worth the money.

Heat pumps extract heat from the ground or the air, and redirect it for space heating and hot water. The efficiency of heat pumps is measured by their co-efficient of performance, which I shall refer to as COP. It is the ratio of heat produced per unit of electricity consumed in generating that heat. A COP value of 3 means 3 kWh of heat output per kWh of electricity used to run the pump. Higher COP values represent relatively more efficient heat delivery.

COP values vary by season; the colder the ground or the air, the more work the pump has to do to raise the temperature to acceptable levels for domestic heating, and the more energy is consumed. Poor design and installation also affect the COP. In well-insulated buildings with low temperature under-floor heating of about 40° C, ground-source heat pumps can be beneficial. Conversely, in poorly insulated buildings, where the pump is required to heat high-temperature radiators and hot water to about 60° C, their performance is less impressive.

The 2009 European directive on renewable energy excludes low-performing heat pumps from making a contribution to renewable energy targets. It states that “Only heat pumps with an output that significantly exceeds the primary energy needed to drive it should be taken into account.” From other data, we can deduce that that the EU implicitly requires heat pumps to achieve a COP of 2.875 before their energy contributes to the renewable energy target. The logic behind the EU requirement for a minimum efficiency level is that replacing a fossil-fuel heating system with a poorly performing heat pump may result in increased CO₂ emissions. That is because the emissions costs in the extra electricity requirement of a heat pump need to be balanced against the emissions of burning a fossil fuel.

The most recent study of heat-pump performance, “Getting warmer: a field trial of heat pumps”, was published by the Energy Saving Trust on 8 September.
The study reveals that the performance of heat pumps installed in the UK is surprisingly poor. It showed that only one of the 22 properties that had ground-source heat pumps achieved the implicit minimum EU directive COP, and that only nine of the 47 sites with air-source heat pumps achieved that standard. Something similar occurred during the Joseph Rowntree Foundation study in Elm Tree mews in York; a communal ground-source heat pump was installed that had a nominal design COP efficiency of between 3.2 and 3.5, but despite a number of interventions throughout the year’s monitoring, the delivered COP efficiency was 2.15. As a result, it failed the renewable test.

The risks are clear. There is the potential for consumer dissatisfaction with technology that fails to deliver on value for money after expensive and possibly disruptive installation; in some cases, it will raise carbon emissions rather than lower them; problems may arise from the EU failing to count the majority of heat pumps in the UK as a contribution to our renewables target; and there is the possibility of failing to qualify or to remain qualified for renewable heat incentive payments.

Mike Weatherley (Hove) (Con): I wonder whether there are any source problems, such as in my constituency of Hove, with chalk-based land. Would that present an additional problem?

Graham Stringer: I understand from my A-level physics—it was a long time ago—that the real problem is the difference in temperature between the ground and the building being heated.

In response to a parliamentary question, the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker), confirmed that

“Heat pumps that do not meet the required average seasonal performance factor, as defined in Annex VII of the use of energy from renewables sources Directive 2009/28/EC, will not count as renewable.”—[Official Report, 21 October 2010; Vol. 516, c. 865W.]

In order for heat pumps to have the correct COP, each installation needs to be inspected and monitored to ensure compliance. How will the Minister monitor that, if it does not do what it says on the tin? I would be grateful if he answered that question today.

The Energy Saving Trust report was bad news for heat pumps, but disappointing COP values are only part of the picture. The threshold for being considered renewable takes no account of the carbon footprint generated by manufacture and the emission of the heat pump’s fluorocarbon refrigerant. Fluorocarbons used as refrigerants can be highly polluting if they leak, because their global warming potential can be thousands of times that of CO₂. The refrigerant R404A, for instance, has a global warming potential 3,800 times that of carbon dioxide. In a written answer, the same Minister said:

“we would expect heat pump manufacturers to avoid using this particular gas wherever possible.”—[Official Report, 19 October 2010; Vol. 516, c. 649W.]

Unfortunately, I understand that 15% of heat pumps use that refrigerant.

A further study undertaken by Atlantic Consulting, “Fluorocarbons’ Contribution to Air-Source Heat-Pump Carbon Footprints”, showed that the contribution of fluorocarbons to the carbon footprint of heat pumps was considerable. Production and disposal of heat pumps made a negligible contribution; however, in power generation, fluorocarbons added 20% to the footprint. The annual operating leak rate was estimated at 6% of rated charge, in accordance with the current estimate of the Refrigeration, Air Conditioning and Heat Pumps Technical Options Committee of the United Nations Environment Programme. Another academic study from 1999 found leak rates as high as 8%. Those rates are significant; they are not negligible, as was claimed in a written answer of 19 October 2010, which was based on information supplied by the industry.

Further, could the Minister obtain independent confirmation of whether the leak rates are negligible or significant, as a lot could ride on that for the future of the industry? There are no current mandated standards on leak rates for heat pumps, but the problems do not end there, because much damage is done when the refrigerants are vented into air at the end of the installation’s life, as all too often happens. I also see from a recent parliamentary answer, on 19 October 2010 at column 647, that no information is held on quantities of HFCs and HCFCs recovered and recycled in the UK. So we simply do not know how much of these dangerously polluting gases, which are controlled under the Kyoto convention, are emitted into the atmosphere at the end of the life of the installation. If emissions are not measured, they cannot be managed.

UNEP’s RTOC, which I mentioned earlier, has adopted a working assumption that end-of-life emissions of refrigerants are on average over 50%. That is not “negligible”. Atlantic Consulting’s findings are supported by a similar, peer-reviewed study published by the university of Delft in the Netherlands, which found that,

“Even though heat pumps are generally considered to be sustainable heating systems because they extract heat from renewable sources rather than by burning non-renewable fossil fuels this research shows that a heat pump is actually not more environmentally friendly than a gas-fired boiler.”

A press release from Atlantic accompanying its report argued that the RHI should be re-targeted, pointing out that,

“Under the proposed RHI, homes and offices in the UK would be subsidised to displace or replace gas- or LPG-fired heating with heat pumps, even though this would, at best, cause a very minor reduction in carbon emissions, and in many cases an increase.”

Currently, the Government are considering the detail of how the RHI will operate. The potential contribution of heat pumps to our renewables target is significant, but some way has to be found of assessing and certifying each installation, so that it makes a genuine and positive, rather than negative contribution. Ideally, minimum fluorocarbon leak rate standards should be mandated for heat pumps, so that these powerful global warmers do not undermine their contribution further.

The key point is that the nominal or certified design coefficient of performance of a heat pump can differ radically from the efficiency after installation; so radically, in fact, that it can detract from rather than add to our battle against climate change. The Department of Energy and Climate Change is to subsidise heat pumps with taxpayers’ money at 5.5p per kWh for 20 years. That is an enormous amount of money committed for a long period, and we must be absolutely certain that taxpayers’ money subsidises only that which is renewable after installation and that which is good, rather inefficient, not renewable and bad.
The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Charles Hendry): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Sheridan.

I thank the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) for securing the debate and for the constructive way he introduced it. We believe this is an area where it is entirely proper there should be constant scrutiny. We are determined to try to do things in the way that is most efficient and effective and to ensure that we always have in mind the needs of consumers and the people paying for the technologies and installations. That must be at the heart of our efforts. I thank him for his contribution today and for ensuring that we saw in advance the article he wrote ahead of the debate.

The hon. Gentleman has raised some important issues to which I hope to respond fully. We will certainly base our decisions on evidence. Consumers expect us to do that and to use public funding wisely, and we are determined to do so. Of the issues he has raised, a number come through most clearly.

We recognise that poor insulation and design would have a significant impact on the performance of heat pumps, to the degree that it might jeopardise whether they could count as renewable under European legislation. That is why we have a microgeneration certification scheme, to ensure minimum quality standards for both microgeneration products and installers; and why we have consulted on whether the renewable heat incentive should, where practicable, be conditional on energy efficiency measures being carried out.

In response to the hon. Gentleman’s question about whether we will continuously assess and monitor the installations, we should recognise that we can set the renewable heat incentive at a level that would essentially require that to be done. We can set it at a level that would assume that the home is properly insulated and that the COP, the coefficient of performance, would be at a level to give us the assurance of efficiency. Otherwise, the consumer would not get sufficient income to justify the investment. There are ways in which the work we are doing to define and refine the renewable heat incentive can be used as a driver of efficiency. Our findings on that will be published over the course of the next few weeks. That will be an important part of the process.

We need to recognise that many different types of technology are included in the concept of heat pumps. There are fundamentally different types, including those that use water, ground-source heat pumps or air-source heat pumps. We are looking at a policy that will drive innovation towards them, because we believe, as the hon. Gentleman does, that they can make an important contribution in the battle against climate change. We can help individual consumers to understand the contribution they can make in their own homes towards tackling some of the problems we are facing.

There is a well-established market for heat pumps, predominantly in the commercial sector so far. More than 90% of the 217,000 heat pumps installed in 2009 were in the commercial sector. There is also a growing number of domestic heat pumps—a technology to which we are paying close attention. Our view is that they are one of the most energy-efficient ways to provide heating and cooling in many applications, as they can use renewable heat sources in their surroundings. Even at lower temperatures, the air, ground and water around us contain useful heat that is continuously replenished. By applying a little more energy, normally from electricity, a heat pump can raise the temperature of that heat energy to the level required. Heat pumps can also use waste heat sources, such as from industrial processes, cooling equipment or ventilation air extracted from buildings.

We have been increasingly interested in heat pumps because the analysis of pathways to 2050 suggests that in almost all scenarios there is a high degree of electrification of heating in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80%. By that stage, the grid is projected to be mainly decarbonised, so electric heating offers a low-carbon alternative to gas. In that context, domestic heat pumps could provide an efficient way to raise the performance of electric heating. The International Energy Agency has estimated that heat pumps might contribute 6% of global CO₂ emissions reductions over the time scale.

By 2020, we also have to increase dramatically, for reasons of security of supply as well as climate change, the proportion of energy that comes from renewable resources such as solar or wind. Our level of ambition is suggested by our proposed contribution to the meeting of renewable energy targets. Those targets cover not just electricity, but heat and transport fuel. Heat pumps in that context, as long as they are efficient enough, count as renewable—or rather, the fraction of heat provided by the geothermal or aerothermal source, minus what the electricity produces directly, counts as renewable.

We aim to ensure that renewable heat plays a robust role in meeting our renewable energy targets for 2020. To help to achieve that ambition, we have announced that from June 2011, we will be launching a renewable heat incentive. Current scenarios suggest it will encourage up to 800,000 domestic or commercial heat pumps by 2020, but we are already supporting the installation of heat pumps to improve household energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty. An estimated 2,245 ground-source heat pumps have been installed through the carbon emissions reduction target. Energy suppliers, who have to meet carbon emissions reduction goals, have increasingly been chosen to meet their goal by the promotion of heat pumps in the domestic sector.

Nevertheless, we recognise that the technology is not yet mature. Much work still needs to be done to answer the sort of questions that the hon. Gentleman has raised. We need to challenge the industry to improve efficiency standards for their products, because we recognise that issues with heat pumps remain. My officials have already met heat pump industry representatives to consider how they can tighten standards.

Turning to the specific issues raised by the hon. Gentleman, some heat pumps use hydrofluorocarbons—a type of fluorinated gas—as refrigerant. Such gases are greenhouse gases that come under the Kyoto protocol. Like stationary air conditioning and refrigeration equipment that also uses those gases—supermarket refrigeration, for example—heat pumps are subject to the provisions of a comprehensive EU regulatory framework, fully underpinned in the UK by domestic legislation. The framework aims to minimise gas emissions by ensuring that equipment is properly installed, serviced and disposed of. We are satisfied that the risk of HFC leakage is very small, but both the Department of Energy and Climate
It is also our understanding that because most small heat pumps are hermetically sealed, the risk of leakage arises not during use but during disposal. The gas is securely contained within the units. However, I will give way if the hon. Gentleman wishes to make any further point on the matter.

Graham Stringer: I am grateful for that answer, which is in line with the answers that I have received, but is the Minister not concerned that studies have found leakage rates of 8% and that there is no mandated level of allowable leakage? Some units clearly leak, and there is no standard or maximum.

Charles Hendry: I will clarify that in writing to the hon. Gentleman, if I may, as I think he wants a very specific response, but I can reassure him that the levels are similar to those in refrigeration. The same emissions issues that apply to standards for refrigeration apply to other devices, including heat pumps.

The hon. Gentleman rightly mentioned efficiency and whether heat pumps are truly renewable. Like electric cars, they rely on electricity, but we are considering how we can be sure that they are renewable. We will work within European guidelines. He pointed out the problems identified in some of the models examined for compliance with European standards. We will continue the work being carried out to gain clarity in the evidence available to us.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the Energy Saving Trust has published results for the first year that were certainly mixed. In some cases, heat pumps performed as expected; in others, they ran so inefficiently that they produced more carbon emissions than a gas boiler. There is a gap, for a number of complex reasons, between design and actual performance. We have therefore decided to hold a second round of field trials to examine those questions in more detail. The project will continue for a further year, and we will then compare this winter’s performance with last winter’s. Given that manufacturers and installers have identified several areas where improvements can be made, we can expect to see significant improvements in most of the very poor-performing sites.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mike Weatherley) mentioned installations on chalk in his constituency. That will clearly be a significant issue for large parts of the south coast. We understand that the technology is more challenging in that area; the chalk base is particularly poor for conductivity purposes, so how ground-source pumps are installed in such areas must be considered carefully. We have therefore requested that people in all parts of the country consider the local geology in order to be certain that the technologies are appropriate for those locations. However, as his is a coastal area, we hope to see development of water-based heat pumps. In addition, the sunny climes of the south coast would ensure that air-source heat pumps have a significant contribution to make.

One thing is becoming clear: no technology can be considered in isolation. There are issues involving control systems, the integration of different technologies in a home or business and how best to co-ordinate a properly managed installation. All those considerations point to the need for better procurement, quality assurance and project management. Consumer behaviour is also an issue: it is most efficient to keep a heat pump running for a long time at a low temperature, but consumers might not realize that. However, the hon. Gentleman clarified it effectively.

We know from experience in other countries that improving standards for product design and installation and building consumer confidence are important to creating a sustainable industry. To support quality and drive standards, we will require installations receiving public money to be certified under the microgeneration certification scheme which is now administered as an independent, not-for-profit accredited certification scheme. The MCS approves products and installer companies against industry-agreed standards and requires that installer companies belong to a consumer code of practice that meets requirements similar to those of the Office of Fair Trading. It is therefore likely that the MCS will be linked to the renewable heat incentive, as it has been to electricity feed-in tariffs, to give consumers assurances about the safety, durability and performance of heat pumps and other on-site heat technologies.

To conclude, I welcome this debate and hope that I have been able to reassure the hon. Gentleman on some of the issues that he raised. What strikes us the most clearly at the moment is the range of new technologies that are emerging at an extraordinary pace to deal with some of the challenges that we face on both the energy and the climate change fronts. We have to be sure, though, that those technologies work well. We believe that heat pumps offer the prospect of an exceptional contribution to meeting the challenges and the goals that we have set, but we must ensure that consumers understand what they are buying, that they get a good deal and an efficient product, and that it makes the contribution that we all hope for.
Lion Trophies

4.36 pm

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Mr Sheridan, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon. I know that the Minister’s diary was rearranged to enable him to be here today. I thank him for that, and hope that he agrees that this is an important debate.

Some issues attract overwhelming public support. One is a call to ban all imports into the UK of lion trophies. Many people are amazed that the UK still allows such trophies to be imported. I became personally interested in the issue during a campaign organised by the charity LionAid to highlight rapidly declining lion populations. With LionAid, I visited the Isle of Wight zoo, where a majestic white lion named Casper served as an ambassador for their message. LionAid works to protect and conserve lions and raise awareness of their plight. One of its trustees, Chris Macsween, is present today. I thank her and Dr Pieter Kat for their help in preparing for this debate.

I would like to outline a few facts about the decline of this magnificent big cat. Lions used to be widespread across Africa—indeed, they used to be found in southern Europe, across the middle east and well into India—but today, they are found only in sub-Saharan Africa, except for one small remnant population left in western India. Everywhere else, they have been persecuted and eradicated.

In the 1960s, it was estimated that there were 200,000 lions on the African continent. Sadly, only 20,000 are left today. In central and western Africa, only a few scattered groups remain, numbering not more than a few dozen individuals. In all Africa, it is estimated that that only six significant populations are left—in Tanzania, northern Botswana, and the Kruger national park in South Africa. Recent surveys in Ghana have shown that lions have become locally extinct. Kenya and Uganda have both announced that they estimate that their lion populations will become extinct in the next 10 years or so. In Nigeria, evidence of lions was discovered in only two of six locations where they were thought to exist until recently.

The causes of the decline are largely attributable to humans protecting their own lives and livestock. Lion habitat is increasingly being given over to agriculture to feed the rapidly growing human population. Where lions come into contact with humans, history has long shown that lions must make way. Realistically, such decline is not preventable and there will never be 200,000 lions in Africa again. However, with the lion population in such rapid decline, it is surprising that sport hunting is still permitted in the wild. We must not underestimate the impact such hunting has on lion numbers. Again, I shall provide some facts on that.

Mike Crockart (Edinburgh West) (LD): Does my hon. Friend agree that the most worrying aspect of trophy hunting is that it concentrates almost exclusively on the male lions? Although total populations may be around 20,000 in Africa, only some 3,000 of those are males, which means the species is even more at risk.

Mr Turner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I will come on to that point later. Between 2000 and 2008, some 4,250 wild lions were exported as trophies. I make that distinction because South Africa specifically breeds lions for captive hunting. Sport hunting refers to animals killed for the prize of an animal trophy, usually the skin or mounted head of the animal. That can be done legally in a few places, such as game reserves. However, illegal sport hunting across Africa and poachers selling on lion trophies to the rest of the world is a real issue.

Sport hunting mostly targets adult male animals. Hunters regard them as the most impressive to kill. Out of the 20,000 lions that remain in Africa, there are lions of all ages and both sexes, from the youngest cub to the most ancient female. However, it is estimated that only 15% at most of any lion population is composed of adult males—the primary trophy targets. Therefore, instead of the figure of 20,000, we must think of 3,000 as the trophy hunting reserve. That figure is further reduced by subtracting the male lions who live in protected areas, such as Kruger national park. That level of specific removal from any population, particularly one in free-fall, is neither ethical nor sustainable. Taking out male lions that cannot be replaced is aptly called “mining”.

Where did all those trophies originate from? Between 2002 and 2007, the number of trophies exported was more than 1,000 from Tanzania, 935 from South Africa, 455 from Zimbabwe, 283 from Zambia, and 97 from Mozambique. Those are the top five exporting countries. Based on lion population estimates for 2002, the percentage of the wild lion population that was exported in that year was 15% in Tanzania, 33% in South Africa, 32% in Zimbabwe, 14% in Zambia and 11% in Mozambique. I stress that those percentages are based on the total population, not the adult male population. I hope we can all agree that such a situation cannot continue.

Lions are social animals. Their family unit is the pride. Pride territories are held long term by the females, while adult males emigrate from their original prides. They become nomadic for some time and then challenge resident males to gain their chance at reproduction. A feature of lion biology is that victorious incoming males will kill cubs belonging to the previous pride males. That ensures that newly won females will raise the cubs with their genes instead of those belonging to their predecessor. Females need at least 30 months to successfully raise cubs. That becomes an issue, given the length of time between the previous males, and loss due to hunting of the incoming males. In other words, a rapid turnover in males can result in no reproduction at all in a pride. Such a rapid turnover is entirely predictable; indeed, it is inevitable when male lions are trophy hunted.

Lions have socially complex lives. There are many reasons why they should not be the target of sport hunting, apart from the simple fact that there are dwindling numbers. Disease is also an important consideration. In 1994, more than 1,000 lions died in the Serengeti in Tanzania alone because of an outbreak of canine distemper. Bovine tuberculosis is a severe threat to the lions in Kruger national park in South Africa. Both diseases have domestic animal origins. Feline immunodeficiency virus—a cause of feline AIDS—is widespread among eastern and southern African lion populations and affects both reproduction and longevity. Such diseases contribute to the overall decline and instability of the few remaining lion populations.

Stronger action should clearly have been taken before now to prevent lion trophy hunting. Relevant international organisations include the International...
Union for Conservation of Nature, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. They have been entrusted with the conservation and regulation of international trade in species to conserve biodiversity. Both organisations have listed lions as vulnerable for many years. However, rather than taking effective action, sadly, those organisations have overseen their decline.

For example, the last time lions were on the CITES agenda was in 2004, when Kenya requested an upgrade on to appendix I. That is the highest list for endangered animals, and being on it would have imposed severe restrictions on all international trade. Such action was watered down by members of the convention and instead it called for regional meetings, so that individual range states with a recognised lion population could agree on lion conservation needs. Those meetings were, in fact, in part financed by the UK. The meeting for eastern and southern African range states has, to this day, failed to meet any significant deadlines or act on any important recommendations.

Lions have not even appeared on the CITES agenda in 2007 or 2010. It should be noted that CITES votes are often influenced by powerful lobbying and special interest groups. That was apparent at the most recent meeting in Doha. Efforts to protect the threatened bluefin tuna—a staple ingredient in sushi—were defeated in the face of staunch opposition from Japan. Significant, powerful so-called pro-sport hunting lobbies have boasted about defeating moves to add lions to the agenda, and they have already announced their intention to block any such consideration at the next CITES meeting in 2013. One such lobbying group, Safari Club International, has pledged financial support to assist CITES with current budget troubles.

What are the individual range states doing? It is a mixed picture. Only Kenya has had a long-standing, anti-trophy hunting stance. Uganda has announced that hunting in reserves will cease by 2011. Botswana announced a reversible moratorium on lion trophy hunting in 2008. Tanzania and Mozambique have implemented stricter controls on the minimum age at which male lions can be killed for trophies, but they have not stopped the practice. Other range states, such as Cameroon, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia, have not implemented specific plans to save their dwindling lion populations. They might have good intentions, but they have yet to take effective action.

I accept that the UK is a relatively minor importer of wild lion trophies overall, having imported about 50 between 2002 and 2008, compared with 317 for Spain, 274 for France, 170 for Mexico, 146 for Germany and a staggering 2,792 for the United States. Britain also imported 11 captive-bred lion trophies during the same period. Therefore, it could well be asked why we are being asked to take a stance, since we are such a minor part of the problem. Could not the issue be much more effectively discussed by the United States? I believe that to take such an attitude would be mistaken for two reasons.

First, the UK is a country, more than any other, where symbolism of lions is important to the public and central to our national identity. Lion symbols are found practically everywhere we turn; in our statues, our emblems and even our sports teams. We, perhaps more than any other nation, have taken lions to heart to stand for attributes that we admire, such as courage, steadfastness, loyalty, and nobility.

Secondly, our voice is a powerful one among nations. We are a leading member of the Commonwealth, the United Nations and even the Common Market. We are signatories to the convention on biological diversity and other international conventions. A leadership position adopted by the British Government would support range states in resisting the massive pressures they face from the trophy hunting lobbyists and help them to implement their good intentions. Our nation should set a strong precedent, rather than meekly following in the footsteps of others and thus allowing the extinction of lions in the wild.

In 2004, my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh) asked what action the Government were taking to save the lion. She was told that the then Labour Government would press for “collaborative action” through CITES to ensure that the lion does not become endangered. However, the fate of the lion was not even placed on the CITES agenda in 2007 or 2010. The next meeting is not until 2013. I hope the new Government will take decisive action to save these majestic animals. The first step is banning the import into the UK of lion trophies and taking a lead on the issue now, before it is too late, and before the wild African lion is lost for ever.

4.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Richard Benyon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) on securing the debate and speaking so passionately on a matter that is clearly of great concern to him. I also pay tribute to LionAid and the conservation work done by the Isle of Wight zoo. The work of such organisations does have an effect, but we must ensure that it does not come too late for some species, and I agree about the urgent need for action. I share his concern and am equally passionate about the subject. I am lucky enough to have seen a considerable number of lions in the wild, and I want my children and grandchildren to have the same experience.

The Government have set out to be the greenest ever, and we carry that ethos into our international dealings. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recently returned from the conference for the parties to the convention on biological diversity in Nagoya, where she played a pivotal role in securing a range of historic agreements that will benefit biodiversity across the globe.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight pointed out, the African lion has been in decline for many decades and has come under increasing pressure as a result of the spread of mankind across Africa. As he acknowledged, most of the animals killed by man have been killed to protect people or livestock, but several countries in sub-Saharan Africa allow people to hunt lions for sport. There is little we can do to control what occurs within another country’s borders, but we can and do seek to influence them when we are concerned about how they are acting. For instance, Ministers can write to their opposite numbers in a country to draw attention to our concerns or raise issues during official visits.
We can also use our membership of international conventions to bring influence or provoke reflection. I have already mentioned the recent successes achieved through the CBD, and my hon. Friend mentioned CITES, a convention that is intended specifically to regulate trade in wildlife, both fauna and flora, to ensure that the survival of species in the wild is not threatened. The UK, along with 174 other countries, is a party to CITES. The convention looks to regulate the import and export of around 33,000 specimens of wild plants and animals through a licensing system. Trade in those specimens most at risk is effectively banned, except in exceptional circumstances, by placing them on its appendix I. The African lion is presently on appendix II, which allows for regulated and sustainable trade.

As my hon. Friend has stated, lion numbers are clearly in decline. In 2008, the International Union for Conservation of Nature declared in its red list assessment that the wild population of African lions was “vulnerable”, and the two most recent assessments of population size declared that the population was somewhere between 16,500 and 47,000. An accurate assessment is, for obvious reasons, notoriously difficult to calculate, but we know that the population is decreasing.

The threats to the species are numerous, but in 2004 the threat of trade was not thought sufficient to uplist the species to CITES appendix I, and no range state felt that it was necessary to make such a proposal at the two subsequent conferences of the parties, where such decisions are taken, in 2007 and 2010. CITES works by range states making such proposals to ensure that there is support from the affected region. Therefore, we would look to countries such as Kenya to take the lead, as it has the most knowledge of the situation and the tools to implement any measures required. Kenya proposed uplisting the lion to appendix I in 2004, but the parties to CITES felt that the preparation and implementation of management plans would suffice, and as a result Kenya withdrew its proposal. I am happy to report that we work closely with Kenya’s wildlife service and are supporting it actively and financially in certain activities, particularly in support for elephant populations. I will continue to build on my relationship with Ministers there and will work with colleagues across Government to take forward the points that my hon. Friend has raised.

I should point out that, as a consequence of the EU single market, CITES has been transposed into European law via regulations that have direct effect in all member states. Those regulations list species in annexes, roughly equivalent to the CITES appendices, and also impose a number of stricter measures, including the requirement for member states to issue import permits in addition to the export permits issued by the exporting country. However, hunting trophies are regarded in international terms as personal and household effects, as the commercial transaction occurred within another country rather than across borders, so no import permit is required for appendix II species, although they are for annex I species.

Trophy hunting is often an emotive subject, but many recognise that, if managed properly, it can actually benefit conservation. Hunters can pay large sums of money for the privilege of hunting, particularly for Africa’s “big five”, which includes the lion. If it is managed properly and the income is fed back into conservation schemes and the local community, trophy hunting can have, and has had, a positive effect. Also, the value that hunting places on wildlife can often mean that some species are viewed differently by locals than they might previously have been, because they have a value and are more than just killers of livestock and a danger to families. Those who hunted those animals for food or their own protection in the past might now view their conservation as a sound investment. It is essential, of course, that such enterprises are managed effectively, with the conservation of the species being of paramount importance. Recent studies published earlier this year have raised some questions about lion trophy hunting.

Lion populations may be sparse in certain areas, but there may be concentrations of them in other areas. Our support for countries, and international operations, must be on the basis of better information about where the animals are, and the support that we can give to communities as a result. For example, until recently, Tanzania had authorised the taking of up to 500 animals per year, although our records suggest that takes have usually been in the mid 200s. Many of those animals are taken abroad as hunting trophies after they have been killed. The recent report into the status of lions in Tanzania makes several recommendations, including a reduction of the quota, but we have yet to ascertain how Tanzania has reacted or will react to the recommendations.

As I have already made clear, it is for individual countries to manage their own wildlife, and, in the case of animals that can be killed, possibly for hunting trophies, to set their own quotas for each species, dependent on the population size. However, if there are concerns that trophy hunting is unsustainable in some places, we and the EU can raise questions and support tighter controls. Where we have such concerns, we would contact the exporting country concerned and normally also pass on our concerns to the CITES secretariat for broader consideration.

As CITES is a matter of EU competence and with the EU being a significant trading block for wildlife as well as everything else, it means that if the EU has concerns about the sustainability of wildlife it can bring considerable influence to bear through wildlife trade. Until the most recent reports voiced concern about the levels of some hunting trophy activities, the international community was not considering whether trade in lion trophies or the use of lion derivatives in medicines—another important point—posed sufficient threat to merit additional protection under CITES.

However, the UK is presently a member of the CITES animals committee and its standing committee. As a result of recent reports and my hon. Friend’s debate today, I have asked my officials to look into the matter to see what opportunities are presented, and I shall report their findings to him. I hope that he is convinced from what I have said that the Government take seriously the conservation of international wildlife, including the lion, and I look forward to working with him on any further concerns that he has.
Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 17 November 2010

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Parliamentary Written Question (Correction)

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Mr Mark Prisk): I regret that my written parliamentary question response of 11 November, Official Report, column 478-79W, which referenced the future direction of the right to request time to train, gave an answer which was premature. The policy is still under active consideration until final decisions can be made.

We have consulted widely on the future of this legislation under our review of regulations introduced by the previous Government since the beginning of 2010. We are considering carefully the differing views expressed and will announce the way forward in due course.

Additionally, I would like to clarify that we are putting an end to the practice of unsolicited credit card cheques through a voluntary agreement with the credit card issuers rather than by legislative means.

EU Extraordinary Competitiveness Council
(10 November 2010)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Mr Mark Prisk): My noble Friend the Minister for Innovation and Skills, Baroness Wilcox, has today made the following statement:

An extraordinary EU Competitiveness Council took place in Brussels on 10 November 2010. This comprised a discussion on suggested amendments by the Belgian presidency to the Commission proposal for an EU patent language regulation in an attempt to overcome the concerns of some member states.

I represented the UK and Andy Lebrecht, the UK’s Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU, represented the UK when a Minister was not in attendance. A summary of the discussions follows.

The UK and the majority of member states supported the presidency compromise amendments subject to the text being acceptable to all member states. The UK also emphasised commitment to an EU patent that works for business.

The presidency proposed a final compromise following the first round of debate and an extended session including bilaterals. The compromise was acceptable to the UK and the majority of other member states; however Spain still considered the language regime proposed would be discriminatory, while Italy and Poland still expressed concerns over the length of the transitional period.

Despite many concessions having been made in an attempt to achieve progress, the presidency concluded that it is not possible to achieve the required unanimity, but that they will now reflect on how to capitalise on the momentum created.

Every Government Department will put in place a “Right to Provide”—a right for public sector workers to take over the running of services.

These rights will not be uniform across Departments because each Department’s requirements will be different. The rights will be as far reaching as possible, but we accept there will be areas where it will not be possible to mutualise, for example, because of security or operational stability concerns. It will be for Departments to set these areas out.

Cabinet Office will work with Departments to explore where public procurement processes allow for staff forming a mutual to be awarded a contract to continue providing services. Mutuals will have to negotiate contracts with the applicable Department or local commissioning body, which show how they will provide services while minimising administration and overheads.

In developing and implementing these new rights it is important that central Government lead by example. I will announce today that the Government will develop a right for civil servants directly employed by Departments to form mutuals. In the wider public sector workforce, it will be necessary for Government to work with local public sector bodies and employers.

The Government will not seek to dictate what is best for employees and for the users of services; rather the precise model of mutualisation should follow the service being provided; this could for example include joint ventures.

I am establishing a “challenge group” in Government to advise me and other ministerial colleagues about how we can best enable the success of this policy. This group will convene key policymakers and experts to drive the changes to policy and process necessary across Whitehall.

From spring 2011, the Government will invest over £10 million to fund a programme of support for some of the most promising and innovative mutuals so that they reach the point of investment readiness. This will build on the work of leading organisations in the sector to develop a network within which public sector employees, investors and public service commissioners can develop viable businesses.

The new suite of Rights to Provide are part of the Government’s broader commitment to ensure that a much wider range of organisations can deliver excellent and efficient public services. The Government will publish a White Paper on reform early next year, setting out where we can go further to shift power away from central Government to citizens, communities and independent providers.

TREASURY

Economic and Financial Affairs Council
(11 and 15 November 2010)

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Justine Greening): I represented the UK at Budget ECOFIN on 11 November, resuming on 15 November. The Council meeting took place alongside a meeting of the Council-European Parliament conciliation committee on the 2011 EU budget.

CABINET OFFICE

Employee-led Mutual Organisations

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Mr Francis Maude): Today, I am setting-out the steps the Government are taking to support workers to establish employee-led mutual organisations.
At a time of unprecedented economic and financial difficulty throughout the EU, the Government had made clear that a 6% increase in the 2011 EU budget above 2010 levels, called for by the Commission and the European Parliament, was unacceptable. In July the UK voted against Council’s position calling for a 2.91% increase in the budget, with six other member states. This position was nevertheless adopted by a qualified majority. At the European Council on 29 October, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister led 12 other EU leaders in stating clearly that we could not accept any budget increase beyond the level agreed by the majority in Council.

The Government’s aim at these Budget ECOFIN and conciliation committee meetings was to agree a budget for the EU in 2011 at the level of a 2.91% increase. The European Parliament said it was prepared in principle to accept this figure. The Government believe that agreement could have been reached on the 2011 budget in these terms, fulfilling the conciliation committee’s mandate.

However, the European Parliament also demanded an outcome on a number of broader, strategic budgetary issues. These included text on an increased role for the European Parliament in discussions of the next financial framework and the EU’s own resources, as well as a provision for flexibility to increase spending in the EU budget in future years.

The Government were not prepared to accept these conditions for agreement to the 2011 budget. At a time of widespread austerity measures, the Government believed that the over-riding priority for these meetings was to agree on next year’s EU budget, and that it was inappropriate to condition agreement to progress on these longer-term political issues. A number of member states expressed similar concerns.

The European Parliament was not prepared to agree the 2011 budget in these circumstances, ending the negotiating session on 11 November and declaring the conciliation committee’s deadline reached on 15 November. The committee therefore ended without agreeing a budget for next year. The Commission must now present a new draft budget for 2011 as a basis for further negotiations.

The Government strongly believe that there was a prospect for agreement on the 2011 budget at these meetings. Both Council and the European Parliament said they could have accepted a budget increase of 2.91% in 2011 compared to 2010 levels. However, the Government were simply not prepared to enter an agreement on the much wider demands from the European Parliament, on issues not immediately related to the 2011 budget. In these circumstances, the Government believe it was better for UK taxpayers not to reach agreement yesterday at all, rather than making a bad agreement which was counter to the interests of UK taxpayers.

The Government will continue to engage constructively in further negotiations aimed at securing agreement to a 2011 EU budget.

**CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT**

**Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council**

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (Mr Edward Vaizey): The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council will be held on 18-19 November in Brussels. Culture, audio-visual and sport issues will be taken on 18 November. The Deputy UK Permanent Representative, Andy Lebrecht, will be representing the UK for the culture and audio-visual section of the Council. The Minister for Sport and the Olympics, will represent the UK for the sport section of the Council.

The first item on the agenda will be a progress report from the presidency on the ongoing negotiations on the proposal for a European heritage label (EHL). The EHL is a proposal that builds on an informal process launched independently by a group of member states in 2007. The designation is intended to focus on the promotion of sites that “symbolise and strengthen European history and heritage”, rather than conservation. Although the UK does not oppose the creation of the EHL in principle, the Government have reservations about the need for a new scheme that presents the potential for duplication of the UNESCO world heritage list. The UK has actively supported the voluntary nature of the scheme; opposed any additional cost burdens; and supported changes to make the scheme as light touch as possible. As this item will only be a progress report from the presidency, no formal agreement on the proposal will be reached at the Council meeting.

The presidency will seek the adoption of a decision on the selection of a city to host the European capital of culture event for 2015. Belgium and the Czech Republic are the EU member states eligible to nominate cities for 2015. Belgium has put forward the city of Mons for the title. The UK will support this proposal. The selection procedures for the Czech Republic are still ongoing and are due to be completed in early 2011.

The Council will be invited to adopt conclusions on the work plan for culture 2011-14. The conclusions take into account the final reports from the culture open method of co-ordination (OMC) groups and the Commission report on the implementation of the European agenda for culture, noting the member states support for continuing the OMC work. The work plan sets out six priority areas. These are: cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and accessible and inclusive culture; cultural and creative industries; skills and mobility; cultural heritage including mobility of collections; cultural external relations; and culture statistics. The implementation of the work plan will be achieved by four new OMC groups, presidency seminars and Commission activity. The UK will support the adoption of these conclusions.

The Council is expected to adopt Council conclusions on the role of culture in combating poverty and social exclusion. The conclusions address the need to consider cultural policies in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The UK welcomed these conclusions especially as this year has been designated as the European year of combating poverty and social exclusion. The UK will support the adoption of these conclusions.

The Council will be invited to adopt conclusions on European film heritage, including the challenges of the digital era. The conclusions focus on the need to safeguard the cultural heritage of film in the light of evolving digital technologies. They invite member states to adapt existing legal deposit arrangements to cover film, to promote voluntary deposit and suitable arrangements for preservation, exhibition and use of films, including digitisation of film heritage and film archive education and training. The UK is broadly supportive of the aims of the conclusions and intends to support their adoption.
The Council is expected to adopt the Council conclusions on the opportunities and challenges for European cinema in the digital era. The conclusions aim to promote the use of digital technologies for film distribution, including for art-house and rural cinemas, to promote access to European works, cultural and linguistic diversity and social cohesion. The conclusions welcome Commission plans to provide funding through the MEDIA programme before the end of 2010 to support digitisation. The UK intends to support the adoption of these conclusions.

There will then be a discussion of a presidency paper on the cultural and audio-visual strands of the digital agenda. The paper asks questions on which cultural and audio-visual strands should be considered a priority in the digital agenda and how this can be reflected. The Deputy Permanent Representative will intervene to outline the two UK priorities. The first priority is the need to address the fragmented state of the European digital market to reduce burdens on business, to make it easier for consumers to get access to legitimate content and to reduce piracy. The UK’s second overarching priority in respect of the cultural and audio-visual strands of the digital agenda is digital literacy and skills.

Under the sport section of the meeting, the Council is expected to adopt a resolution on the creation of high-level structured dialogue between representatives of the sport movement and EU public authorities. The new structured dialogue process will bring together the high-level sports movement and EU public authorities once per presidency, in the margins of the Council meeting. This could potentially be an important and influential group, with senior sport figures taking key seats. The UK will support the agreement of this resolution.

The Council is invited to adopt the Council conclusions on sport and social inclusion, demonstrating the value that it places on sport. The conclusions highlight the power of sport to break down social barriers and promote social inclusion. The conclusions invite the member states to take action at domestic level. The UK has a strong story to tell on sports’ performance in these areas and will support the adoption of these conclusions.

There will then follow a policy debate on social inclusion in and through sport. The presidency has posed questions on specific projects running in member states aimed at promoting sport among socially disadvantaged groups and what priorities member states envisage for work at EU level in this field. The Minister for Sport and the Olympics will intervene to highlight examples of initiatives in the UK and to welcome the new working group on social inclusion in sport in which the UK is taking a leading role.

The Council is also invited to adopt Council conclusions on the role of the EU in the fight against doping. The conclusions intend to recognise officially the need for appropriate co-ordination on issues concerning the EU and member states’ dealings with the World Anti-Doping Agency. The UK intends to support these conclusions.

Under any other business there will be an information point from the Bulgarian delegation on a draft extended partial agreement on the Council of Europe cultural routes programme. There will also be an information point from the Bulgarian delegation on the charity campaign for the recovery of the Triumph Theatre in Haiti. I do not foresee a need to intervene on either of these.

**HEALTH**

**Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (6-7 December 2010)**

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Anne Milton): The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council will meet on 6-7 December. The health and consumer affairs part of the Council will be taken on 7 December.

Legislative items on the main agenda, on which the presidency are likely to ask Ministers for political agreement are: a directive on prevention of the entry into the legal supply chain of medicinal products which are falsified in relation to their identity, history or source and a regulation on provision of food information to consumers. The UK supports the adoption of both of these proposals.

The presidency are also expected to propose the adoption of Council conclusions on the following:

- investing in Europe’s health work force of tomorrow: scope for innovation and collaboration;
- a co-ordinated action for stimulating, measuring and valourising pharmaceutical innovation;
- innovative approaches for chronic illnesses in public health and health care systems;
- supply of radioisotopes; and
- lessons to be learned from the H1N1 pandemic—health security in the European Union.

The UK supports the adoption of these Council conclusions.

Under any other business, information will be provided from the presidency on a recast of the three directives on medical devices, on the fourth conference of the parties at the WHO framework convention on tobacco control, which took place on 15-20 November 2010, and on a number of conferences that took place under the Belgian presidency. In addition, we expect the Commission to provide information to the Council on the proposals for a directive and a regulation on information to the general public on medicinal products subject to medical prescription.
Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 17 November 2010

SCOTLAND

Daylight Saving Bill

Fiona O’Donnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether his Department has undertaken an impact assessment in respect of the Daylight Saving Bill.

Michael Moore: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is responsible for matters relating to summer time. I have written to a number of organisations representing groups most likely to be affected by any change to summer time, to seek their views. As the Prime Minister has already made clear, there can be no change to existing policy without the agreement of all parts of the United Kingdom, including Scotland. That agreement is not in place.

Ministerial Policy Advisers

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many special advisers he (a) has appointed since his appointment and (b) plans to appoint in the next 12 months.

Michael Moore: Since my appointment as Secretary of State for Scotland, I have appointed one special adviser. There is only one special adviser post in the Scotland Office and, therefore, I have no plans to make any further appointments in the next 12 months.

Official Hospitality: Scotland

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what (a) gifts and (b) corporate entertainment and hospitality (i) he, (ii) other Ministers and (iii) officials in his Department have received on each date since 11 May 2010.

Michael Moore: The Government publishes a record of all gifts and hospitality received by Ministers worth over £140 in accordance with Government’s transparency agenda on:
  www.data.gov.uk

All gifts and hospitality received by officials valued over £15 are recorded. In the period since 11 May, one official attended a stakeholders’ dinner organised by the Lloyds Banking Group on 30 September, and two officials attended the annual Scottish Financial Enterprise (SFE) awards dinner on 28 October 2010, one by invitation of SFE and the other by invitation of Standard Life.

Personnel

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full-time equivalent staff at each civil service grade are employed in the private office of each Minister in his Department.

Michael Moore: Under the Government’s transparency agenda, we are required to publish our Organogram. The Scotland Office’s Organogram is now available centrally and from our website via the following link:
  http://www.scotlandoffice.gov.uk/scotlandoffice/14464.html

This Organogram contains the requested staffing information regarding our combined ministerial private office.

Scottish Parliament

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to visit the Scottish Parliament.

Michael Moore: As previously offered, I am happy to attend the Scottish Parliament immediately following the Queen’s Speech or on other occasions as agreed.

Serving Scotland Better: Scotland

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with the First Minister of Scotland on the recommendations of the report Serving Scotland Better: Scotland and the United Kingdom in the 21st Century, published by the Commission on Scottish Devolution.

Michael Moore: I discussed the recommendations of the Commission on Scottish Devolution with the First Minister of Scotland on 16 September 2010. I have also engaged with other Scottish Ministers on the Government’s coalition commitment to implement the recommendations of the Commission on Scottish Devolution.

PRIME MINISTER

BBC

John McDonnell: To ask the Prime Minister what recent meetings he has had with the Director-General of the BBC; and whether the matter of pensions was discussed at those meetings.

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what recent meetings (a) civil servants and (b) special advisers in his Office have had with the Director-General of the BBC; and whether pensions were discussed at those meetings.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the list of official meetings by Ministers with external organisations which is published on a quarterly basis, in accordance with the Ministerial Code. Officials and special advisers have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals on a range of subjects.

TRANSPORT

Bus Services

Mr Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what estimate he has made of the proportion of bus services that are fitted with automatic vehicle location equipment;
(2) how much of the bus service operators grant was allocated to the fitting of automatic vehicle location equipment in 2010-11; and how much will be allocated to these purposes in each of the next three years;

[24577]

(3) whether he has plans to make available composite performance information derived from automatic vehicle location equipment funded from the public purse to (a) local transport authorities, (b) traffic commissioners, (c) Passenger Focus and (d) bus passengers for the purposes of enabling them to monitor the punctuality of bus services.

[24578]

Norman Baker: In 2009-10, 55% of public service vehicles in Great Britain were fitted with automatic vehicle location (AVL) equipment. However, no estimate is available of the proportion of bus services that are operated by vehicles fitted with such equipment.

In April 2010, the Department for Transport introduced an incentive payment to the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) to support the use of AVL systems in the operation of local bus services. There is no fixed budget for this incentive, as the amount paid each year will depend on the number of buses which meet the eligibility criteria. Since April 2010, the Department has paid around £33,000 for this incentive. We expect that this will increase as more operators submit valid claims. The amount of grant paid over the next three years will depend on the take-up of the incentive by operators.

The Department’s approach to improving bus punctuality is based on effective local partnership. Working with local authorities, the Traffic Commissioners, operators and Passenger Focus, the Department has developed a new punctuality regime which recognises the role that local authorities and operators should both play in tackling poor punctuality. The aim is to encourage local authorities and operators to share punctuality data and other relevant information on a voluntary basis to underpin their agreed approach to managing local services. More generally, the Department will work with bus operators to seek to make information on bus punctuality more widely available, but I have no plans to require the publication of composite performance information derived from AVL equipment at present.

Intercity Express Programme

Kelvin Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what alternatives to the Intercity Express Programme are under evaluation by his Department.

[17927]

Mrs Villiers: The Department for Transport is evaluating alternatives to the Intercity Express Programme as follows:

- refurbishing the existing rolling stock;
- purchasing new electric trains, which would be hauled by diesel locomotives on sections of route that are not electrified; and
- purchasing new electric trains and offering interchange, with passengers changing trains if travelling to non-electrified parts of the network.

The Department is also evaluating a revised proposal from Agility Trains for bi-mode trains.
The Attorney-General: The Bribery Act 2010 will come into force in April 2011. Joint legal guidance for prosecutors in the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) is currently being prepared. This guidance will address how the adequate procedures defence should be approached by prosecutors when it is raised. Prosecutors will also take into account the guidance on adequate procedures which will be issued by the Secretary of State for Justice as required by section 9 of the Act. The defence of adequate procedures applies to ‘relevant commercial organisations’ as defined under section 7 of the Act; whether any particular body falls within this definition will be considered on the facts in individual cases.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr Gale: To ask the Attorney-General in how many and what proportion of cases prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service the defendant entered a not guilty plea at each stage of the prosecution and trial in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [24072]

The Attorney-General: The information requested is not recorded centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Central data do not record when a specific plea is entered. Central data will only show whether a guilty plea was entered before the start of a trial or after the start of a trial.

The Ministry of Justice publish some statistics in relation to non guilty pleas which can be found on their website at:

www.justice.gov.uk/publications/judicialandcourtstatistics.htm

Crown Prosecution Service: Leases

Mr Umunna: To ask the Attorney-General in respect of which properties rented for Crown Prosecution Service offices the lease will expire in the next two years with other Government Departments for the following sites:

1. Stocklund House, Carlisle—expired March 2009 (subject to Treasury approval will take new lease from landlord)
2. Riverside Chambers, Taunton—January 2011 (intend to take new Moto will expire 2016)
3. Lysnoweth, Truro—March 2011
5. New Kings Beam House, Southwark—March 2011
6. Western Range, Southampton—March 2011
7. Ralli Quays, Salford—December 2011
8. Elvet House, Durham—March 2012

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Olympic Games 2012

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport which training camps will be used for the London 2012 Olympics by (a) foreign and (b) domestic teams.

Hugh Robertson: A list of Olympic and Paralympic teams that have so far agreed to prepare in approved pre-Games training camps, within the UK, is published on the London2012 website at the following link:


I am arranging for copies of the current list (date correct as of 28 October 2010) to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

British Nationals Abroad: Bereavement

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how much his Department spent on the provision of assistance to British nationals bereaved by murder and manslaughter overseas in 2009;

(2) what provision the Consular Directorate makes for UK nationals who have been bereaved by murder and manslaughter abroad;

Mr Jeremy Browne: The total cost of the provision of consular services in 2009-10 was £132 million. Because of the unique and individual circumstances surrounding the tragic cases of British Nationals bereaved by murder and manslaughter abroad, we are unable to identify the exact amount spent on the provision of assistance in these cases. We have records of 58 British nationals who were murdered or victims of manslaughter in 2009-10.
Consular Directorate does not have provision of funds to assist UK families who have been bereaved by murder and manslaughter abroad. However, Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials can help transfer money from friends and relatives in the UK to pay any necessary costs incurred in-country.

I am reviewing our assistance for victims of terrorist incidents overseas and their families and will submit a written ministerial statement shortly.

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what processes the Consular Directorate follows when contacted by a UK national who has been bereaved by murder and manslaughter abroad; and what support and services are offered those so bereaved. [22476]

**Mr Jeremy Browne:** A member of Consular staff will speak with a family representative to explain what support and assistance the Foreign and Commonwealth Office can offer the family. They will provide the family with copies of two Foreign and Commonwealth Office publications: Support for British nationals abroad guide http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/2855621/english and the Guide for bereaved families http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/2855621/bereaved-families which contain detailed information about the support and assistance available.

**Christianity**

**Angie Bray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on making representations on the treatment of Christians in countries where Christians are a minority religion to the governments of those countries. [24001]

**Mr Jeremy Browne:** The Government condemns all instances of violence and discrimination against individuals and groups because of their faith or belief, wherever they occur or whatever the religion of the individual or group concerned.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)’s overseas missions have a responsibility to monitor and raise human rights in their host countries. They routinely raise our concerns with host governments, including freedom of religion or belief when appropriate and have done so in relation to the persecution of Christians.

The FCO recently produced detailed policy advice for our overseas missions advising how to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief internationally. Drawn up with the guidance of think tanks, academics and non-governmental organisations, the toolkit advises officers on how to promote and protect the right to freedom of religion or belief. The toolkit and more information can be found at:


**European Union**

**Priti Patel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which proposals under consideration by any institution of the EU would involve a transfer of powers or competences from the UK to the EU; and if he will make a statement. [22055]

**Mr Lidington:** There are no formal proposals currently under consideration which would involve a transfer of power or competence from the UK to the EU. We have also promised that there will be no treaty change which transfers competence or power from the UK to the EU in the course of this Parliament.

**Gaza: Human Rights**

**Robert Halfon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received of human rights abuses in Gaza. [24580]

**Alistair Burt:** Human rights organisations and other non-governmental organisations in Gaza are increasingly concerned about restrictions on their own activities and on the wider curtailing of personal freedoms.

We share these concerns, including regarding violent harassment of political opponents, violent retribution—including summary executions—against those Hamas deem collaborators with Israel, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture and a crack down on women’s freedom.

The UK calls on all Palestinian militants to take immediate and concrete steps towards the Quartet principles, unconditionally to release Gilad Shalit, who has been held in captivity for just under four years, and to end its interference with the operations of non-governmental organisations and UN agencies in Gaza.

**Iceland: Whales**

**Mr Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his Icelandic counterpart on whaling; and if he will make a statement. [24064]

**Mr Lidington:** The UK has not had any recent discussions with the Icelandic Foreign Ministry on whaling. Whaling is incompatible with EU membership. The UK continues to encourage Iceland to align itself as soon as possible with the EU’s common position. Whaling will be discussed as part of Iceland’s EU accession process under Chapter 27, Environment. We expect chapter negotiations to begin in spring 2011.

**Kazakhstan: Human Rights**

**Mr Raab:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will lead the UK delegation to the 2010 Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe summit of heads of government in Astana; and whether they will raise concerns about the human rights situation in Kazakhstan at that meeting. [24637]

**Mr Lidington:** My right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister, will lead the UK delegation to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe summit of heads of state of government in Astana. I will accompany him. Human rights issues are among the key topics we will raise at the summit, and in bilateral meetings with Kazakhstan and others.
Middle East: Armed Conflict

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the number of rocket attacks on Israeli citizens by (a) Islamic Jihad and (b) Hamas in 2010; and what assessment he has made of the likely implications of such attacks for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. [24581]

Alistair Burt: According to the Israeli Defence Force since 1 January 2010 there have been 122 rockets and 87 mortars launched from Gaza at the state of Israel.

We have consistently condemned such acts of terrorism. It is clear that those concerned care more about damaging the peace process than about the lives of ordinary Palestinians.

Negotiations are vital for peace. We hope that leaders will stand firm in the face of such provocations.

Redundancy

Ms Angela Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what estimate he has made of the number of redundancies arising from the spending reductions proposed in the comprehensive spending review in respect of (a) his Department and (b) its non-departmental public bodies; [21530]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost to his Department of staff redundancy in each of the next four years. [21531]

Alistair Burt: I refer the hon. Member to my response of 15 November 2010, Official Report, column 632W.

Venezuela: Human Rights

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he (a) has taken since his appointment and (b) plans to take in the next six months at UN level in respect of human rights in Venezuela; and if he will make a statement. [21932]

Mr Jeremy Browne: We have not had discussions with the Secretary General of the United Nations on human rights in Venezuela. However, we do work closely with the UN on the ground. We have helped refugees on the Venezuela-Colombian border in joint projects with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and are in regular contact with them.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan: Peacekeeping Operations

Claire Perry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether an assessment has been made of the potential effects on the (a) mental and (b) physical health of children of the undertaking by a parent of military service in Afghanistan. [24364]

Mr Robathan [holding answer 16 November 2010]: There are currently no plans to conduct a bespoke study into the potential effects on the mental and physical health of children whose parent is deployed on military service in Afghanistan. However, in addition to our Continuous Attitude Surveys, we have strong links with research communities in the UK and allied countries, all of which feed into and help us develop further our welfare policies. The King’s Centre for Military Health Research is currently conducting a study to understand better the impact, both the benefits and drawbacks, of military life on the well-being of children of UK Service personnel. In particular the study, which is funded by the US Department of Defense, will examine whether children of military personnel who are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are disadvantaged as a result.

Armed Forces: Females

Mike Weatherley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what proportion of (a) Royal Navy and (b) Royal Air Force pilots flying (i) helicopters and (ii) aeroplanes were female in the latest period for which figures are available. [24446]

Mr Robathan: As at 1 October 2010, the number and proportion of Regular trained female pilots in the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force flying helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total number of female pilots</th>
<th>Female proportion of total number of pilots (percentage)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Royal Navy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Helicopters</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fixed Wing</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Royal Air Force</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helicopters</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixed Wing</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Due to ongoing validation of data from the Joint Personnel Administration system, armed forces’ data are provisional.
2. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5 and ‘*’ denotes a number less than 5.
3. Percentage based on small numbers present a disclosure risk and are therefore presented as ‘less than 5%’.

Armed Forces: Manpower

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel he expects to be serving in each branch of the armed forces in each of the next five years. [24215]

Nick Harvey: The UK armed forces will be restructured to meet current and emerging threats. The Service Chiefs will set out over the coming months exactly how this restructuring will impact upon current manning levels.

As stated in the Strategic Defence and Security Review, we plan to make total reductions of around 17,000 service personnel by 2015. The Royal Navy will decrease by around 5,000 personnel to a total of around 30,000. The Army will decrease by around 7,000 personnel to a total of around 95,000. The RAF will decrease by around 5,000 personnel to a total of around 33,000.
Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what (a) powers of authority and (b) responsibilities the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator has to undertake assessment and approval of any component of the Report of Assessment submitted by his Department when acting as operator as required by the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001. [23632]

Mr Robathan: The Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator (DNSR) is granted authority and responsibility from the Secretary of State for Defence (via the Defence Nuclear Environment and Safety Board) for the regulation of nuclear and radiological safety, and environmental protection within the defence nuclear programmes.

As part of this, DNSR assesses and approves the Reports of Assessment produced by the Ministry of Defence before they are submitted to the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate in line with the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations (REPPIR) 2001.

Departmental Lobbying

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department’s agencies and non-departmental public bodies spent from the public purse on influencing public policy through (a) employing external (i) public affairs companies, (ii) strategic consultancies and (iii) corporate communications firms, (b) external marketing and (c) other activities in each of the last 10 years. [23758]

Mr Robathan: The Ministry of Defence (MOD)’s on-Vote agencies, trading funds and non-departmental bodies have not sought to influence public policy through (a) employing external (i) public affairs companies, (ii) strategic consultancies and (iii) corporate communications firms, (b) external marketing and (c) other activities.

We employ external help only where we cannot do the work ourselves or can demonstrate value for money. We are making significant reductions in this activity this financial year as a result of the tighter controls introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 24 May 2010.

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of his Department’s non-departmental public bodies have undertaken activities to influence public policy for which they engaged (a) public affairs and (b) public relations consultants in each year since 1997; and at what monetary cost in each such year. [23789]

Mr Robathan: The Ministry of Defence’s non-departmental bodies have not sought to influence public policy through the engagement of external consultancy since 1997. We employ external help only where we cannot do the work ourselves or can demonstrate value for money.

Departmental Official Hospitality

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 28 October 2010, Official Report, column 449W, on departmental official hospitality, if he will provide disaggregated information on the five most expensive hospitality events hosted by his Department in each of the last three financial years; and if he will make a statement. [23827]

Mr Robathan: Information on official entertainment is not held centrally in the format requested that allows individual events to be ranked by cost.

Expenditure on official entertainment is authorised and managed locally where it is aggregated and recorded against a single reporting code for official entertainment on our accounting systems. Disaggregated information at individual event level is therefore held locally by budget managers at the Ministry of Defence’s establishments and units in the UK and overseas.

We have introduced fresh constraints on the approval of official entertainment events to drive down costs, the presumption being that official entertainment will be offered only exceptionally.

MOD Abbey Wood: Redundancy

Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had on job losses amongst his Department’s civilian staff at Abbey Wood; and what recent estimate he has made of the number of compulsory redundancies which will occur. [24437]

Mr Robathan: The Strategic Defence and Security Review stated that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) civilian workforce would decrease by 25,000 as the requirement for civilian support decreases in line with the development of new force structures, restructuring of defence capabilities, rationalisation of the defence estate and realisation of other front-line savings. But we have taken no decisions on where those changes will be made. Detailed proposals to deliver the changes will be made in consultation with the Department’s trade unions as quickly as possible as further work is taken forward.

It follows that we cannot yet say what the impact will be upon Abbey Wood or what level of redundancies might be needed, but the MOD is committed to achieving the reductions by voluntary means as far as possible.

Nuclear Submarines

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which submarine operational berths have been assessed by the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator as being in full compliance with the requirements of the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001; [23626]

(2) whether his Department has conducted COSYMA modelling of the consequences of a release of radioactivity from a nuclear submarine berthed in Southampton; and what estimate his Department has made of the costs to the public purse of the emergency management and remedial actions which would be required in the event of an accident resulting in the release of radioactivity from a nuclear-powered submarine berthed at the Southampton operational berth; [23628]
(3) what mechanisms are in place to ensure that Royal Navy Fleet Command recognises the authority of the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator to (a) regulate submarine operations and (b) ensure compliance with its recommendations; [23628]

(4) by what date he expects each submarine operational berth assessed by the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator as not in full compliance with the requirements of the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001 to be brought into full compliance with these regulations; [23630]

(5) whether the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) was consulted on the recent emergency berthing of HMS Astute at the Loch Ewe operational berth; and under what conditions the NII permitted the berth to be used as an unlicensed emergency berth. [23631]

Mr Robathan: The Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator does not assess operational berths against the requirements of Radiation Emergency Preparedness and Public Information Regulations (REPPIR) 2001. This is the responsibility of the statutory regulator, which is the Health and Safety Executive-Nuclear Installations Inspectorate. All UK Operational Berths in use are fully compliant with REPPIR 2001. Any new berth would be subject to the full approval process as required by statutory regulations. Following her grounding there was no requirement for HMS ASTUTE to use the operational berth in Loch Ewe; she proceeded to Faslane under her own power.

The arrangements for the regulation of the Naval Nuclear Propulsion programme, together with the arrangements by which the Defence Nuclear Regulator ensures compliance with the regulatory requirements, are detailed in internal guidance Regulation of the Naval Nuclear Propulsion programme last updated in September 2010.

Code System from Maria (CSYMA) was used to estimate atmospheric release doses arising from the accident sequences identified in the 2008 Nuclear Plant Hazard Identification and Risk Evaluation and is used to underpin the production of Berth Safety Statement and Emergency Arrangements, but the analysis is not site specific.

There have been no specific costings for emergency management and remedial actions by the Ministry of Defence in the highly unlikely event of an accident resulting in the release of radioactivity from a nuclear-powered submarine berthed at Southampton. Cost benefit analysis methodologies are based on the Health and Safety Executive guidelines but are not site specific.

Strategic Defence and Security Review

Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with (a) the Secretary of State for Transport, (b) the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, (c) trade unions and (d) industry bodies on the likely effects of the outcomes of the Strategic Defence and Security Review on civil (i) manufacturing and (ii) transportation. [23627]

Dr Fox (holding answer 12 November 2010): During the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) I had discussions with other Government Ministers, trade unions, and industry representatives on the industrial implications of the SDSR.

We now plan to enter into an extensive programme of negotiations in the coming months as part of the SDSR implementation process. This will run in parallel with us developing Green and White Papers on our Defence and Security Industrial and Technology Policy.

I have had no specific discussions with these parties on civil transportation. We will be conducting detailed investment appraisals as the SDSR is implemented, including on the civil sector and societal issues.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the likely effects of the outcomes of the Strategic Defence and Security Review on the defence estate in Northern Ireland. [24108]

Mr Robathan: No decision has yet been made on changes to the Defence estate (including that in Northern Ireland) or to the way it is managed.

The Ministry of Defence keeps its estate under continual review to ensure that it is of the right size and quality to meet operational needs. However, estate rationalisation arising from the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) has highlighted the need for a follow-on programme of work: ‘SDSR—Estate Rationalisation and Withdrawing Troops from Germany’ that could lead to a further reduction in the size of the estate and to lower running costs.

Unmanned Air Vehicles

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much funding his Department plans to allocate to the development of remotely-piloted aircraft capability in the period from 2010 to 2015. [23466]

Mr Robathan: We plan to spend around £400 million on the development of remotely-piloted air systems capability in the period from 2010 to 2015.

Warships

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator made to the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate on the standard of the berth safety statement for the submarine operational berth at Southampton; and if he will place a copy of the correspondence between the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator and the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate on that matter. [23632]


This technical assessment included all the submissions for MOD authorised sites and Operational Berths, including Southampton, and concluded that the submissions met the requirements of REPPIR 2001.
A copy of the technical assessment will be placed in the Library of the House following a review to identify whether any information needs to be withheld.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Floods: York

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Environment Agency plans further to consult the public on its plans for the Water End Flood Alleviation scheme in York.

Richard Benyon: The Environment Agency issued a press release on 16 November confirming a public drop-in session to discuss the Water End Flood Alleviation Scheme. It will be held at St Barnabas School, York, on 1 December, between 3 pm and 7 pm. An invitation has also been sent to the hon. Member for York Central today. The Environment Agency will be delivering invitations to the local community on 19 November.

Incinerators: Health Hazards

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 25 October 2010, Official Report, columns 128-29W, on waste disposal: health hazards, for what reasons it was decided that the Environment Agency should undertake a review of the health effects of combustion processes, including incineration, in light of the Health Protection Agency advice that studies of public health around modern, well-managed municipal waste incinerators are not recommended.

Richard Benyon: The Environment Agency regulates incinerators and other large combustion processes. The review referred to will provide additional evidence to underpin the agency’s role in regulating industrial emissions. It will consider all large combustion processes and any potential effects on health. Emissions from waste incineration are included in the review, although they make up only a small proportion of the total emissions from combustion processes. By contrast, the Health Protection Agency 2009 report addresses emissions from incineration only.

Natural England: Pay

Martin Vickers: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many permanent staff employed by Natural England received an annual salary of more than £25,428 in the latest period for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement.

Richard Benyon: Natural England currently has 1,784 permanent staff (out of a total headcount of 2,640 staff) who are paid an annual equivalent salary of £25,428 or more.

Waste Management

Mr Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the merits of alternatives to energy from waste plants as part of her Department’s waste disposal strategy.

Richard Benyon: The Government’s approach to waste management, including energy from waste (EfW), is underpinned by the waste hierarchy, which ranks waste management methods in order of environmental preference. This means that for waste which cannot be re-used or recycled, recovery of energy is a preferable route, and that EfW is almost always preferable to landfill (unless analysis of the overall environmental impact, for specific types of waste, shows otherwise). The waste hierarchy will shortly become law through the revised Waste Framework Directive, which seeks to promote waste prevention, increase recycling, and ensure better use of resources, to protect human health and the environment. This will help to underpin the Government’s vision of a zero waste economy.

A full review of waste policy is currently being carried out, due to report in spring 2011. The role of recovering energy from waste will be considered as part of the review.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

UN Women’s Agency

13. Fiona O’Donnell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department plans to take in support of the developmental objectives of the UN women’s agency in the next 12 months.

Mr Andrew Mitchell: I have held recent discussions on this point with the Head of UN Women, Michelle Bachelet, and the UN Secretary-General. We are putting girls and women at the heart of British development policy. We will announce funding for UN Women when we have completed the Multilateral Aid Review.

Sri Lanka

14. Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what he plans to do to support the Sri Lankan Government’s stated aim of ending landmines.

Mr Duncan: The Department for International Development’s (DFID’s) direct aid programme closed in 2006. In 2008, responding to needs arising from the conflict, DFID committed £13.5 million emergency humanitarian funding. This support ends in March 2011. On Wednesday my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for International Development, announced new support for landmine clearance: Over the next three years, Sri Lanka will be among those receiving assistance under this programme, helping those still displaced return home.

Refugees: Thai-Burma Border

15. Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether he has plans to support a UN initiative to assist refugees on the Thai-Burma border.

Mr Duncan: In 2010-11 the UK Government are providing £1.6 million to non-governmental organisations for food, housing and improved access to legal assistance for Burmese refugees in Thailand.
**Africa: Overseas Aid**

**Richard Harrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he has taken to increase the level of technical assistance to developing countries in Africa; and whether he has assessed the merits of working together with Israel to provide technical assistance to such countries on climate farming. [24638]

**Mr O’Brien:** We are currently reviewing all our bilateral and multilateral programmes to ensure we focus our resources where we can get most impact. This includes a review of where aid is spent and the instruments used to deliver it. We will ensure that only the best development interventions receive support and will maximise value for money in DFID’s development spend. Requirements for technical assistance are led by our country offices and co-ordinated with partner countries. Technical assistance can make a major contribution to poverty reduction. Final decisions will be made in good time to plan programmes for the next financial year.

The UK currently has no direct co-operation with Israel on international development. Israel has recently become a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and we hope Israel will consider joining the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

**Caribbean: Infrastructure**

**Dr Poulter:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans his Department has to allocate funding to infrastructure programmes in respect in the Caribbean. [24028]

**Mr Duncan:** The current Department for International Development (DFID) programme in the Caribbean does not directly support infrastructure delivery. Through the core funding that DFID provides to institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, EU and others, the UK supports a wide variety of infrastructure investments across the region including ports, road building and utility modernisation.

The UK Government are currently reviewing DFID’s aid programme, including aid delivered to the Caribbean through both bilateral and multilateral channels, to ensure UK aid is effective and determine how we can achieve better value for money in DFID’s development spend. Requirements for technical assistance are led by our country offices and co-ordinated with partner countries. Technical assistance can make a major contribution to poverty reduction. Final decisions will be made in good time to plan programmes for the next financial year.

**International Assistance**

**Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much in cash terms and what proportion of his Department’s budget consists of payments to (a) the EU and (b) multilateral agencies. [24025]

**Mr Duncan:** In 2009-10, the Department for International Development’s (DFID) total aid expenditure was £6,629 million, of which total core funding to multilateral agencies was £2,436 million (39%). Of this amount, £1,186 million (18%) was provided to the European Commission (EC); including £397 million through the European Development Fund (EDF) and £789 million through the EC Development Budget.

More details on DFID’s aid expenditure can be found in the annual publication “Statistics on International Development”, which is available on the DFID website and in the Library of the House.

**Overseas Aid**

**Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which 10 countries received the highest amount of bilateral aid from his Department (a) on the latest date for which figures are available and (b) in 2005. [24022]

**Mr Duncan:** Details of the Department for International Development’s (DFID) bilateral aid expenditure are published in “Statistics on International Development”, which is available on the DFID website and in the Library of the House. The top 10 recipients of DFID bilateral expenditure in 2005-06 and 2009-10 are reproduced in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>£ million (2005-06)</th>
<th>£ million (2009-10)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>295</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>90</td>
<td>109</td>
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</table>

**Tony Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of his Department’s budget is spent on programmes in developing countries. [24023]
Mr Duncan: In 2009-10, the Department for International Development (DFID) provided £6,629 million in aid with the aim of reducing poverty in developing countries. Of this total, £3,952 million (60%) was provided directly to support poverty reduction in developing countries. A further £2,436 million (37%) was provided as core funding to multilateral agencies to fund further programmes in developing countries. The remaining £241 million (3%) was spent on administration costs (including £70 million on Programme Funded Admin) and programmes in other countries (for example countries not on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD’s) Development Assistance Committee’s (DAC’s) list of aid recipients).

Further details can be found in the annual publication “Statistics on International Development”, which is available on the DFID website and in the Library of the House.

Palestinians: Overseas Aid

Joseph Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he is taking to prevent UK aid intended for Palestinians in Gaza from reaching Hamas.

Mr Duncan: UK aid to Gaza is primarily delivered through the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). UNRWA has a range of safeguards to ensure that its operations benefit ordinary Gazans rather than Hamas, and that its staff do not engage in political or militant activity. Other UK funding for Gaza since 2007 has supported projects implemented by established and reputable organisations, such as UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and international non-governmental organisations like Oxfam, Save the Children and Islamic Relief. We work closely with all partners on project design to ensure that UK funding complies with European Union and UK legislation on terrorist financing. The monitoring of UK-funded projects which we undertake together with implementing partners has revealed no evidence of any financial benefit to Hamas.

UNRWA: Finance

Joseph Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will increase the level of his Department’s assistance to UNRWA for the purposes of meeting the shortfall in its funding requirement.

Mr Duncan: The UK has a five year (2007-11) core funding commitment to UNRWA worth up to £110 million. In June this year we provided £19 million and in October we provided an additional £8 million; £3 million for meeting agreed performance targets, and a further £5 million in response to UNRWA’s funding shortfall to ensure it can continue to deliver essential services, such as healthcare and education. This brings our total assistance to UNRWA for 2010 to £27 million. This will, among other things, help provide healthcare to 263,000 women and 242,000 children, education for 45,000 children, vocational training for 1,000 vulnerable and disabled people, and food and cash aid for 29,000 extremely poor people.

I recently met UNRWA’s Commissioner General, Filippo Grandi, to discuss UNRWA’s budget funding shortfall. The UK fully supports UNRWA’s fundraising efforts and, in addition to the extra funding we have provided, we are calling on other donors to honour their funding commitments.

EDUCATION

Building Schools for the Future Programme

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what funding (a) Sheffield city council and (b) Barnsley borough council will receive under the Building Schools for the Future programme in each of the next five years.

Mr Gibb: The projected grant payments under the Building Schools for the Future programme are set out in the following tables. The actual phasing of payments may change depending upon the completion of project milestones.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design and build projects</th>
<th>£ million</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capital grant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheffield</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnsley</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private finance initiative projects</th>
<th>£ million</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revenue grant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheffield</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnsley</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Departmental Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent on external consultants and advisers by (a) his Department and (b) each (i) non-departmental public body and (ii) executive agency for which he is responsible in each year since 2005.

Tim Loughton: The Department’s spend on consultancy for each financial year is shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial year</th>
<th>Expenditure (£ million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Department does not hold the requested information for its NDPBs, as they are independent and are responsible for their own data.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will change the system of assessing eligibility for education maintenance allowance to take into account the number of young people in a household who are in education.

[14971]
Mr Gibb: The education maintenance allowance scheme will close at the end of the 2010/11 academic year and no new applications will be processed from 1 January 2011. It will be replaced by an enhanced Discretionary Learner Support Fund. Decisions about which young people should receive financial support from the Discretionary Learner Support Fund will be made by schools, colleges and training organisations, who are in a better position than Government to determine the needs of individual students. They will target support to those young people who most need it to continue in learning.

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much of the budget for education maintenance allowance for 2010-11 will be available in each financial year to 2014-15; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Gibb [holding answer 28 October 2010]: The education maintenance allowance scheme will close at the end of the 2010/11 academic year. The most disadvantaged young people will instead be supported by the enhanced discretionary learner support fund, which will enable closer targeting of resource to individual students in need. £26 million has been invested in 2010-11 in a discretionary learner support fund. With the ending of the EMA, this fund will be increased. We anticipate that in 2014-15 this enhanced fund will be three times greater than current funds. Further details will be announced in due course.

Education Maintenance Allowance: Staffordshire

Christopher Pincher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many and what proportion of students in (a) Tamworth, (b) Staffordshire and (c) England received an education maintenance allowance bonus after attaining A-level results lower than three C grades in 2009-10.

Mr Gibb: The Department for Education and the Young People’s Learning Agency do not collect data about the attainment of young people in receipt of EMA.

Excellence in Cities

Mrs Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when his Department’s Excellence in Cities funding programme ended; and whether any of the funding associated with that programme is still paid to schools.

Mr Gibb: The Excellence in Cities programme ended in March 2006. Since April 2006, the funding for the programme has been included in the school development grant, which can be spent by schools on any purpose to raise standards. The Government announced in the spending review that school development grant will be rolled into the main school budget in 2011-12. It will be for local authorities, in consultation with their schools forum, to decide whether to take account of the previous levels of school development grant when making allocations to schools.

Pupils: Disadvantaged

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether the proposed pupil premium will apply to funding for 16 to 19-year-olds.

Mr Gibb: The pupil premium does not apply to 16 to 19-year-olds. The 16-18 funding formula already has an element that ensures students from disadvantaged backgrounds receive a funding premium. This is the funding linked to the disadvantage uplift within the formula and that for Additional Learning Support. Details of the 16-18 funding formula can be found at: http://readingroom.ypla.gov.uk/ypla/funding_rates_and_formula_v2.2.pdf

Schools: Wolverhampton

Paul Uppal: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has for the refurbishment of (a) primary and (b) secondary schools in Wolverhampton South West constituency.

Mr Gibb: Future capital support for primary and secondary schools in England will be informed by the review of DfE Capital led by Sebastian James, which is due to report by the end of the calendar year. We are aiming to confirm allocations for 2011/12 in early December underpinned by principles emerging from the review.

Special Educational Needs

Mr Buckland: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether his Department’s review of special educational needs plans to address the recommendations of the Lamb Inquiry review of social educational needs and disability information in respect of piloting arm’s length educational psychology services; and if he will make a statement.

Sarah Teather: On 6 July I announced that a Special Educational Needs and Disability Green Paper would be published which would take a wide look at a range of issues for children with SEN and disabilities. This will include ways of making the system more transparent, giving parents more choice and involvement in the decision-making process and producing an assessment system which is more supportive and is seen to be fairer in its allocation of resources. The provision of educational psychology services will be considered within the context of these ambitions.

The overall finding of the Lamb Inquiry was that by addressing support needs early, ensuring parents were listened to and that there was a real focus on outcomes, parental confidence increased. The Green Paper will be informed by the Inquiry’s findings, including those around the operation of different educational psychology service models, such as those at arm’s length of the local authority. We will, for example, be looking with interest at the outcomes of local authority innovative SEN projects which are currently under way. These projects include a focus on the provision of educational psychology services at arm’s length and ways of providing direct access to educational psychology services for parents.
Specialist Schools

Julian Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his policy is on the creation of new specialist schools; and if he will make a statement. [21371]

Mr Gibb: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 20 October that the Government are removing the prescription that has built up around the specialist schools programme and giving school leaders greater freedom to make use of the opportunities offered by specialism and the associated funding. All schools will be free to decide how to develop specialisms in the light of the total resources available to them. Schools are no longer required to seek formal designation as specialist.

Sure Start Programme

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) when he plans to announce his decision on the Sure Start capital grant application for St John's Church Hall, Colchester; [22832] (2) when he plans to announce his decision on the Sure Start capital grant application by Kendall Primary School, Colchester. [22833]

Sarah Teather [holding answer 9 November 2010]: Decisions on Sure Start grant capital funding applications from any individual setting are a matter for the local authority, not the Secretary of State for Education. Ministers are still considering information and evidence from Essex county council concerning its 2010-11 capital programme, as part of the Department’s review of each local authority (LA)’s funding to identify areas where savings may need to be found. When a decision has been made, officials will write to the authority informing it of its revised allocation for the year. Once notification of that allocation has been received, it will be for Essex to determine how to distribute the funding in the light of local needs and priorities.

Teachers Pensions

Julie Hilling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent representations he has received on the effect on teacher (a) retention and (b) recruitment of proposals to (i) increase contributions to the Teacher’s Pension Scheme and (ii) to freeze teacher salaries. [19082]

Mr Gibb: The Department has consulted teacher and head teacher unions, employers and governor representatives on changes to the School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document (the Document) which have taken effect from 1 September 2010. The main changes to the Document result from recent independent School Teachers’ Review Body recommendations, which include a 2.3% pay award as the final element of a three-year pay deal for teachers.

In responding to the consultation on the Document, one of the consultees expressed concern about the two-year public sector pay freeze which for teachers who earn the full-time equivalent of more than £21,000, will take effect from 1 September 2011. The Secretary of State has also received correspondence from a Member of Parliament about whether a pay freeze would discourage individuals from entering or remaining in the teaching profession.

Although there will be a two-year pay freeze for teachers from September 2011, the Document does provide maintained schools in England and Wales with the option of making additional payments or providing other financial assistance, support or benefits to retain an existing teacher’s services or as an incentive to recruit a new teacher. The Government are also considering how they might reform the existing pay and conditions rules to give schools greater freedoms to pay good teachers more.

The Department has not received recent representations on the effect on recruitment and retention from any future increase in the contribution rate for the teachers’ pension scheme (TPS).

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Affordable Housing

Julie Hilling: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for what reasons he decided to reduce funding allocated through regional housing grants by £370 million; what assessment he has made of the likely combined effect on the provision of social housing of the implementation of that decision and the Government’s proposals to reduce housing benefit; what impact assessments he has undertaken of that decision; and whether he has made an assessment of the likely effect of the implementation of that decision on the number of jobs in (a) Bolton at Home and (b) other arms-length management organisations. [24168]

Andrew Stunell: The Government have made clear that our most urgent priority is to tackle the UK’s record deficit in order to restore confidence in our economy and support the recovery. In order to tackle the budget deficit all Government Departments have been required to work within a very tight fiscal settlement. Failure to tackle the deficit would have pushed up mortgage rates and made housing less affordable.

The decision to discontinue funding the Private Sector Renewal programme, which received funding of £308 million in 2010-11, reduced by the previous administration from £376 million, is a direct result of these constraints.

Where Private Sector Renewal activities are a local priority, local authorities may chose to direct other funding to provide support packages for vulnerable private sector households. Neither Bolton at Home nor other ALMO would have been direct beneficiaries of funding from this programme.

DCLG has undertaken an equality impact assessment into the end of funding for the Private Sector Renewal programme, in line with our equalities duties, and will be publishing the assessment shortly.

In the spending review we announced almost £4.5 billion investment in new affordable housing to deliver up to 150,000 affordable homes and a further £2 billion investment in Decent Homes. We are also giving housing associations much more flexibility on rents and use of assets. Our aspiration is to deliver even more homes through our investment and reforms. We will publish details of how these proposals will work shortly.
Homelessness: Temporary Accommodation

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the number of bed and breakfast places needed for homeless people in each London borough in each of the next five years. [24224]

Grant Shapps: No estimates are made by the Department for Communities and Local Government of future demand for bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless people.

Under homelessness legislation that applies to England, bed and breakfast cannot be used by a local housing authority to discharge a duty to secure accommodation for applicants who are pregnant, or whose household includes a pregnant woman or a dependant child, unless no other accommodation is available and then for no more than six weeks in aggregate.

This Government are committed to tackling and preventing homelessness. I have established a new cross-Government working group on homelessness bringing together Ministers from eight Government Departments to address the complex causes of homelessness and rough sleeping.

An additional £130 million will be made available, via the Department for Work and Pensions, to local authorities to administer discretionary housing payments to provide extra support for households where needed. I have also provided a further £10 million in this financial year to London local authorities to help support those families most at risk of homelessness. On 20 October I announced that during the course of the spending review over £400 million of homelessness grant will be made available to local authorities and the voluntary and community sector to support the most vulnerable and tackle homelessness.

Local Government: Voluntary Organisations

Bill Esterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether his Department plans to issue guidance to local authorities on the effects of reduced funding levels on the voluntary sector; and if he will make a statement. [23685]

Robert Neill [holding answer 12 November 2010]: We expect local authorities, as they look to find savings to their budgets, to make reductions to their running costs by introducing new ways of working, including better procurement and more joint working, and by benefiting from the reduction in bureaucratic burdens that are imposed on them from central Government.

As I outlined in my Department’s press release of 14 October 2010, councils should not seek to avoid making the savings described above by targeting instead the voluntary sector. We expect councils to devolve and empower people and maintain strong links with voluntary and community groups.

In a tight economic climate, there is a greater need for the diversity and innovation voluntary and community groups can offer. Reinforcing monopolies of local services by retrenching into the town hall is not the way forward. Opening up more of councils’ budgets to voluntary organisations can improve effectiveness, increase resilience and save costs.

Measures to be taken in the forthcoming Localism Bill will establish new rights for voluntary and community groups to deliver local services.

National Housing and Planning Advice Unit

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) what impact assessment he has undertaken of the closure of the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit; [24045]

(2) what his most recent assessment is of the effectiveness of the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit in carrying out its functions. [24047]

Grant Shapps: A decision was taken to close the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit with immediate effect on 28 June because this helped to achieve cost savings because it consolidated housing and planning analysis within the Department, eliminating the risk of duplication in research and advice.

In the interests of transparency, and in order to maximise value from the units research programme, all research was transferred to my Department at no extra cost and is published on the Department’s website.

National Tenant Voice

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) what impact assessment he has undertaken of the closure of National Tenant Voice; [24046]

(2) what his most recent assessment is of the effectiveness of National Tenant Voice in carrying out its functions. [24048]

Grant Shapps: We did not proceed with the National Tenant Voice as creating yet another central Government quango was not the right way forward for delivering effective tenant empowerment at the local level, and with costs of over £1 million did not represent value for money. Instead, we are giving tenants more power and voice locally through tenant panels, and have provided almost £50,000 for the national tenant organisations to develop proposals for an independent successor body to represent the interests of social tenants.

Regional Planning and Development

Harriett Baldwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what guidance he has issued to local authorities on the timetable for the ending of regional spatial strategies. [24153]

Greg Clark: The Localism Bill will abolish regional strategies, it will be introduced shortly and we hope for Royal Assent as soon as the parliamentary timetable allows. I also refer my hon. Friend to the written ministerial statement of 10 November 2010, Official Report, columns 15-16WS, and I am placing in the Library a copy of the associated letter from the Government’s Chief Planner to local authorities.
Social Rented Housing: Construction

Julie Hilling: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether housing associations will be given flexibility to build new homes for traditional social housing rents in circumstances where they judge application of rents at 80 per cent. of market rate to be inappropriate. [24295]

Grant Shapps: We will publish more detail on the implementation of new ‘affordable rent’ tenure shortly.

Wind Power: Planning Permission

Andrea Leadsom: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) if he will bring forward proposals to require the Planning Inspectorate to refuse appeals from developers of wind farms when there is unanimous community opposition to the proposals; [24648]

(2) if he will bring forward proposals to provide for planning for wind farms as part of the Localism Bill; [24649]

(3) if he will ensure that the views of local residents are taken into account when plans for the development of wind farms are proposed; [24650]

(4) if he will bring forward proposals to require the developer of any wind farm to ensure the developed area is returned to its original state once the development has finished. [24651]

Robert Neill: In reaching a decision on a planning appeal, a planning inspector will consider whether a proposed development is acceptable in terms of the local council’s development plan and other considerations which can include national planning policy and relevant planning issues raised by local communities. The Planning Inspectorate has an important role to play as the arbiter of potential conflicts between the interests of individuals, or local communities, and the needs of the nation. It would therefore be inappropriate to direct the Planning Inspectorate to refuse a planning appeal solely because of community opposition because there may still be strong national or local policy support for a proposal.

We are not proposing to include any specific provisions in the Localism Bill on planning for wind farms. We will publish and present to Parliament a simple and consolidated national planning policy framework covering all forms of development and setting out national economic, environmental and social priorities. We will make an announcement on how we propose to take forward the national planning policy framework and the implications for specific areas of planning policy.

There are requirements on local planning authorities to consult local communities and take their views into account when preparing development plan documents and planning applications must be publicised to allow representations to be made on the planning issues they raise. We will give local people and communities far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which they live by radically reforming the planning system.

Local planning authorities are able to attach conditions to a planning consent to require the restoration of a site as part of the decommissioning of a wind farm when it ceases to be operational.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Equality Act 2010

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities pursuant to the answer of 28 October 2010, Official Report, column 443W, on the Equality Act 2010, when she plans to implement the provisions of that section of the Act. [24486]

Lynne Featherstone: My right hon. Friend, the Minister for Women and Equalities has announced that the Government plan to scrap the socio-economic duty.

Women in Power Summit

Priti Patel: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities how much the Government Equalities Office spent on co-hosting the EU Women in Power summit in February 2010; and how many civil servants attended the event. [22061]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government Equalities Office (GEO) co-funded the EU Women in Power Summit, which the UK co-hosted with Spain during Spain’s presidency of the EU on 3 February 2010. The total cost of the UK contribution was £48,485.

The five former UK Ministers who attended the event were each accompanied by Private Secretaries and were supported by one senior civil servant from the Government Equalities Office. The former Minister for Women and Equalities was also accompanied by one special adviser.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Animal Welfare

Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will take steps to ensure standards of animal welfare are maintained following implementation of the European Directive on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes. [20071]

Lynne Featherstone: I am satisfied that European Directive 2010/63/EU provides a sound and practical framework for the regulation of animal experimentation and testing in Europe and will allow the United Kingdom to maintain its traditionally high standards of welfare and animal protection. At the same time it avoids unnecessary bureaucracy and may offer opportunities to reduce the current regulatory burden in some areas without harming animal welfare.

Arrest Warrants

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many European arrest warrants were issued for UK citizens in (a) 2004, (b) 2005, (c) 2006, (d) 2007, (e) 2008, (f) 2009 and (g) 2010 to the latest date for which information is available. [21326]

Nick Herbert: The Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service for Scotland are the designated UK authorities responsible for processing European Arrest Warrants (EAWs). Information is held on Part 1 cases (persons wanted from the UK by another member state) and Part 3 cases (persons wanted by the UK from another
member state). It is not possible to provide information relating to EAW requests for UK Citizens which are made between two other EU member states.

Between 1 October 2008 and 31 March 2010, SOCA received 191 EAW Part 1 requests for UK Citizens. These are broken down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Range</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 October 2008 to 31 December 2008</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 January 2009 to 31 December 2009</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 January 2010 to 31 March 2010</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures do not include Part 1 requests transmitted directly to Scotland.

Data on the requests made by EU member states in respect of UK citizens prior to 1 October 2008 are currently unavailable and could be recovered only by a manual examination of all SOCA case records. This would incur a disproportionate cost.

For information on the number of UK nationals surrendered to other member states I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 25 October 2010, Official Report, columns 64-66W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel).

Figures for UK Part 3 requests made in respect of UK citizens since 2006 are shown in the following table. Data for 2004 and 2005 is not readily available and could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 (to 31 March)</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Arrests

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who were arrested were subsequently released without charge in each of the last three years. [24391]

Nick Herbert: Data on arrests collected by the Home Office do not include information on the subsequent outcomes of arrests.

Community Policing: Finance

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what her most recent assessment is of the adequacy of the level of funding for community policing in London.

Nick Herbert: The allocation of police resources is a matter for the relevant chief constable/commissioner and police authority.

The spending review set out the overall settlement for policing. There will be an announcement to Parliament in early December setting out the details of allocations of grant to all forces, including any specific grant.

Counter-terrorism

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what timescale she has set for the publication of the findings of the rapid review of counter-terrorism powers. [23051]

Nick Herbert: We will announce the outcome of the review to Parliament when it is completed later in the year.

Departmental Policy

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much her Department’s agencies and non-departmental public bodies spent from the public purse on influencing public policy through (a) employing external (i) public affairs companies, (ii) strategic consultancies and (iii) corporate communications firms, (b) external marketing and (c) other activities in each of the last 10 years. [23762]

Nick Herbert: The Home Office agencies and non-departmental public bodies have not spent any money on influencing public policy over the last 10 years.

Departmental Lobbying

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what departmental policy reviews her Department has undertaken since 6 May 2010; on what date each such review (a) was announced and (b) is expected to publish its findings; what estimate she has made of the cost of each such review; who has been appointed to lead each such review; to what remuneration each review leader is entitled; how many (i) full-time equivalent civil servants and (ii) seconded staff are working on each such review; from which organisations such staff have been seconded; and how much on average such seconded staff will be paid for their work on the review. [21880]

Nick Herbert: The Home Office has announced eight policy reviews since 6 May 2010:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review</th>
<th>Date announced</th>
<th>Date findings due to be published</th>
<th>Estimate of total cost of review</th>
<th>Appointed reviewer and remuneration</th>
<th>Number of FTE civil servants working on review</th>
<th>Number of seconded staff and average cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counter-terrorism and security powers</td>
<td>13 July 2010</td>
<td>December 2010</td>
<td>Undertaken by civil servants in the course of normal duties</td>
<td>Lord MacDonald of River Glaven. Daily rate of £380, and entitled to reasonable expenses. Estimate him working on the review for 20 days.</td>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review</th>
<th>Date announced</th>
<th>Date findings due to be published</th>
<th>Estimate of total cost of review</th>
<th>Appointed reviewer and remuneration</th>
<th>Number of FTE civil servants working on review</th>
<th>Number of seconded staff and average cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultation on limiting migration</td>
<td>28 June 2010</td>
<td>Consultation closed on 17 September 2010. Government expect to make announcement before Christmas.</td>
<td>Undertaken by civil servants in the course of normal duties.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensing Act</td>
<td>19 May 2010</td>
<td>Actions to be taken forward in Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill. Legislative slot to be confirmed.</td>
<td>Undertaken by civil servants in the course of normal duties.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Remuneration and Conditions of Service</td>
<td>18 May 2010</td>
<td>Stage one: February 2011. Stage two: June 2011</td>
<td>Subject of ongoing consideration</td>
<td>Tom Winsor. Daily rate of £300, and entitled to reasonable expenses</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Social Behaviour tools and powers</td>
<td>28 July 2010</td>
<td>December 2010, prior to consultation</td>
<td>Undertaken by civil servants in the course of normal duties.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending Child Detention for Immigration purposes</td>
<td>15 May 2010</td>
<td>Under discussion.</td>
<td>Undertaken by civil servants in the course of normal duties.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Immigration System</td>
<td>24 June 2010</td>
<td>Early 2011</td>
<td>Undertaken by civil servants in the course of normal duties.</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extradition</td>
<td>8 September 2010</td>
<td>Late summer 2011</td>
<td>In the region of £150,000-£250,000</td>
<td>Sir Scott Baker. Paid in accordance with the normal rates of the Royal Courts of Justice and entitled to claim reasonable expenses. David Perry QC and Anand Doobay, two independent lawyers are also working on the review and will be paid in accordance with Treasury Solicitor rates.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Number of civil servants working directly on the reviews (not necessarily full-time). Others will contribute over the course of the reviews.

2 We have interpreted these questions to refer to non-government secondees.

### Departmental Travel

**Ian Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate her Department has made of its expenditure on travel undertaken by (a) her and (b) each other Minister in her Department in (i) September and (ii) October 2010.

**Nick Herbert:** As set out in the Ministerial Code departments will publish, at least quarterly, details of all travel overseas by Ministers. Information for the second quarter will be published as soon as it is ready.

All travel is undertaken in accordance with the Ministerial Code.

### Departmental Work Experience

**Luciana Berger:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many interns her Department has engaged in the last 12 months; and how many were (a) unpaid, (b) remunerated with expenses only and (c) paid a salary.

**Nick Herbert:** The Home Office, including the UK Border Agency (UKBA) but excluding its other agencies, has engaged 31 interns during the last 12 months. Of these, seven were unpaid and 24 were paid at either the administrative assistant or administrative officer wage (both which are above the national minimum wage). We are unable to confirm how many were remunerated with expenses without incurring disproportionate cost.

All of the intern placements were offered and accepted by the applicants prior to the Chancellor’s announcement of a recruitment freeze across the civil service in May 2010.

In addition, the Home Office, including UKBA but excluding its other agencies, appointed 24 undergraduates under the Fast Stream Summer Development Programme (SDP) and Summer Placement Scheme (SPS), and a
further two undergraduates under the Windsor Fellowship. The SDP and SPS are 6-8 week placements offered to undergraduates from ethnic minority backgrounds and with disabilities respectively, and the Windsor Fellowship is a Leadership Programme offering 6-8 week placements for ethnic minority undergraduates who have been identified as having leadership potential. All 26 were remunerated at the executive officer wage.

All 26 appointments relate to the Graduate Fast Stream Programme and were therefore exempt from the recruitment freeze.

**Immigration**

Rehman Chishti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the implications for UK citizens of the implementation of EU Directive 2006/24/EC on the retention of data.

[19259]

Nick Herbert: The Data Retention (EC Directive) Regulations 2009 completed the transposition of the EU Directive 2006/24/EC into UK law. A public consultation was conducted prior to transposition to consider the impact of the regulations and its results were published. The UK is currently contributing to the assessment of the effectiveness of the directive being conducted by the European Commission, as required by the directive.

We believe that the EU data retention directive provides a valuable basis for retaining communications data that is critical for serious crime investigations and to counter terrorism, both in the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

**Institute for Fiscal Studies**

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much her Department spent on services provided by the Institute for Fiscal Studies in each of the last 10 years.

[23394]

Nick Herbert: The available information for expenditure on services provided by the Institute of Fiscal Studies is shown in the following table. This is expenditure on specialist training and development services. Financial records for the period 2001-02 to 2003-04 are not held centrally and the information could not be collected without incurring disproportionate cost.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>£</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>1,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>2,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>1,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>6,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>8,222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Neighbourhood Policing Fund**

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when she expects to take a decision on the future of the Neighbourhood Policing Fund; (2) what recent discussions her Department has had with (a) the Association of Chief Police Officers, (b) the Association of Police Authorities and (c) police forces on the future of the Neighbourhood Policing Fund.

[22777]

Nick Herbert: In recent weeks I have spoken to chief constables, police authorities and others about the Government’s reform plans for policing and the implications of the comprehensive spending review (CSR). Police community support officers (PCSOs) make an important contribution to neighbourhood policing and the visible and available policing in communities the public wish to see. Following the CSR, an announcement will be made to Parliament in early December on the details of police funding, including the specific grant for neighbourhood policing.

**Newspaper Press: Telephone Tapping**

Mr Watso: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will request HM Inspectorate of Constabulary to review the Metropolitan Police Service’s investigation into telephone hacking and blagging; and if she will make a statement.

[23794]

Nick Herbert: The Metropolitan police are currently conducting further inquiries into recent telephone hacking allegations. As we have previously made clear, we believe the right course of action is to await the outcome of those inquiries.

**Police**

Mark Lancaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions the police have entered premises for which they did not possess an appropriate warrant during raids (a) nationally and (b) in Milton Keynes in each of the last three years.

[23954]

Nick Herbert: The information is not available centrally.

**Police: Demonstrations**

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reports she has received from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) on (a) the estimated cost of the damage caused and (b) the estimated number of criminal offences committed in the course of the demonstration in London on 10 November 2010; how many arrests were made; how many people were stopped and searched in connection with the demonstration; what the cost to the MPS was of policing the demonstration; what the policy of the MPS is on recovering policing costs from organisers of demonstrations; and if she will make a statement.

[24008]

Nick Herbert: [holding answer 15 November 2010]: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I gave to the House on 11 November 2010, Official Report, columns 457-468, on public disorder at the National Union of
Students rally. As of 11 November, 47 arrests were made by the Metropolitan Police Service and three arrests by the British Transport Police. The Metropolitan Police Service will be carrying out a comprehensive post-incident investigation and will report to the Metropolitan Police Authority on its findings.

**Police: Helicopters**

*Jack Lopresti*: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the likely effects of the relocation of the Police response helicopter based at Filton Airfield to RAF Colerne on the ability of the proposed National Police Air Service to reduce crime.  [24167]

*Nick Herbert*: A helicopter is one of a number of assets that can be used by the police to tackle crime. The effects of relocating air support from Filton airfield to RAF Colerne have been carefully considered in the development of the proposed National Police Air Service.

The proposal will mean that the Western Counties aircraft is better placed to meet both urban and rural demand for air support, while offering better value for money for the taxpayer.

**Police: Radiation Exposure**

*Paul Flynn*: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what (a) national and (b) local agreements there are in relation to the radiation dose uptake limitation system adopted by each police force when attending a radiation emergency at each of the nuclear powered submarine operational berths maintained by the Ministry of Defence as required by Regulation 14 of the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001.  [23633]

*Nick Herbert*: The Home Office does not hold the information requested. The health and safety of police officers is the responsibility of the relevant chief officer. In relation to potential radiation exposure, local police operational response plans will be informed by appropriate national guidance including for example, that issued by the Health and Safety Executive (including the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001) and the Health Protection Agency, as well as advice provided to local forces by Ministry of Defence personnel regarding any relevant military facilities located within a particular force area.

**Rape**

*Alan Johnson*: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps she plans to take to reduce the incidence of (a) sexual assault on women and (b) rape.  [16056]

*Mrs May [holding answer 11 October 2010]*: Reducing the incidence of rape and sexual assault requires effective prevention, the conviction of offenders and the robust management of perpetrators and serial offenders.

In addition, the Government’s focus is on the rights and welfare of the victim and we are committed to ensuring that every victim of rape has access to appropriate support. In particular, we are looking at putting funding for rape crisis services on a more sustainable basis and looking at establishing new rape crisis centres where there are gaps in provision.

Baroness Stern led an independent review into the way rape complaints are handled by public authorities in England and Wales. The Government will be responding fully to Baroness Stern’s review in spring 2011.

The Government are working to support agencies in the criminal justice system to ensure that the effective investigation and prosecution of rape results in the conviction of offenders, in addition, HM Inspectorate Constabulary and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate are currently taking forward an inspection that focuses on the management of perpetrators, handling of intelligence on suspects and protection of victims from repeat offenders.

**Rescue Services**

*Rory Stewart*: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what division of her Department has responsibility for mountain rescue services; and if she will make a statement.  [24027]

*Nick Herbert*: The Finance and Strategy Directorate has co-ordinating responsibility for queries on mountain rescue services across Government.

The following Departments retain responsibility of aspects of mountain rescue services:

- Ministry of Defence
- Department of Transport
- Department for Communities and Local Government
- Department for Culture Media and Sport
- Cabinet Office
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- HM Treasury
- Department for Health
- Home Office.

**Safer Neighbourhood Teams**

*Conor Burns*: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans she has to assist the work of Safer Neighbourhood teams in the current Parliament.  [24062]

*Nick Herbert*: The Government support neighbourhood policing which provides a dedicated, consistent and visible presence in communities, tackling crime and antisocial behaviour. Neighbourhood policing strengthens the public’s confidence that the criminal justice system is on their side, encouraging them to play their own part in keeping their communities safe. Police community support officers make an important contribution to the visible and available policing the public wish to see.

We will transfer power in policing, replacing bureaucratic accountability with democratic accountability. Police and Crime Commissioners will be directly elected by the public and hold the police to account for their performance, including the quality of neighbourhood policing.

Neighbourhood policing teams will hold regular beat meetings to provide residents with the opportunity to hold them to account and local crime maps will give the public information on crime in their area.
Sexual Offences: Registration

Alun Cairns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps her Department plans to take in response to the Supreme Court judgement on the Violent and Sex Offenders Register and Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. [24319]

James Brokenshire [holding answer 16 November 2010]: On 21 April 2010, in the case of R (on the application of F and Angus Aubrey Thompson) v. Secretary of State for the Home Department (2010) UKSC 17, the Supreme Court declared the present arrangements requiring the indefinite registration of offenders under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, without the prospect of review, to be incompatible with article 8 of the European convention on human rights (ECHR). The effect of a declaration of incompatibility is not to render the relevant primary legislation invalid. Rather, such legislation remains in force until such time as the Government amend it. Protecting the public is a priority for the Home Office and the Secretary of State is considering the judgment carefully and liaising with partners in order to ascertain how best to give effect to the Court’s judgment.

South Yorkshire

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the visit to Penistone and Stocksbridge constituency by a Minister in her Department on 4 November 2010 was classified as an official ministerial visit. [23079]

Lynne Featherstone: There were no official visits to the Penistone and Stocksbridge constituency by Ministers on this date. I visited a local initiative in a private capacity.

Terrorism: Detainees

Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the conclusions of the July 2010 report of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation in respect of the effects on national security of a reduction to 14 days of the maximum permissible pre-charge detention period. [15418]

Mrs May [holding answer 14 September 2010]: The maximum period that terrorists suspects can be detained before charge, including how this period can be reduced below 28 days, is being considered as part of my review of six key counter-terrorism and security powers that I announced to the House on 13 July. The review is taking into account a wide range of contributions, including the reports of Lord Carlile, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation. The outcome of the review will be reported to Parliament.

TREASURY

Charities: Finance

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much Government funding was allocated to charities in each of the last 10 years; and what estimate he has made of the amount of funding to be allocated to charities in each of the next five years. [24211]

Justine Greening: Public funds reach charities through a variety of mechanisms, such as tax reliefs, grants, public service contracts, match-funding etc. It is therefore difficult to calculate total figures for Government allocation of funding to charities and information on this is not held centrally.

The spending review set out a £470 million package of support for the sector including funding for an endowment fund (Community First) to help support local organisations, in addition to a £100 million transition fund. In addition, the Big Society Bank, funded by dormant account funds, will provide a new source of finance for the sector and will leverage in additional private sector resources.

Corporation Tax: Redcar

Ian Swales: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on businesses in Redcar constituency of the reduction in the small profits rate of corporation tax. [23957]

Mr Gauke: No assessment is available on the effect on businesses in Redcar constituency of the reduction in the small profits rate of corporation tax.

Excise Duties: Beer

Stephen Barclay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue is raised from a pint of beer of 4.2% abv.

Justine Greening [holding answer 16 November 2010]: Beer duty is levied according to the alcoholic strength of the product, and the same duty rate applies to all products regardless of their point of sale. In addition to excise duty, alcohol products are subject to VAT. The following table shows average prices and tax revenue on a pint of beer of 4.2% abv.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average price (a)</th>
<th>Duty</th>
<th>VAT</th>
<th>Total tax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-trade</td>
<td>£2.73</td>
<td>£0.41</td>
<td>£0.41</td>
<td>£3.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-trade</td>
<td>£1.11</td>
<td>£0.41</td>
<td>£0.17</td>
<td>£1.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the June Budget a number of measures were announced to boost business, from which pubs will benefit. These include a reduction in corporation tax rates, and reduced employers’ national insurance contributions.

Investment

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the annual change in the level of business investment was in each of the last five years; and what estimate he has made of the likely change in that level in each of the next five years. [24225]
Justine Greening: Business investment growth was 4.5% in 2005, 4.8% in 2006, 12.5% in 2007, -1.1% in 2008 and -18.8% in 2009. On 22 June 2010 the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecast business investment to grow by 1.4% in 2010, 8.1% in 2011, 10.0% in 2012, 10.9% in 2013, 9.5% in 2014 and 8.2% in 2015. The OBR will publish an updated forecast on 29 November.

Members: Correspondence

Mr Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Christchurch of 4 October on Antony Bone.

Mr Hoban: I have replied to the hon. Member.

Poverty: Children

Mr Umunna: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether his assessment that the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review would have no measurable impact on child poverty for the next two years was made in respect of the period ending in March 2012; [24030]

(2) whether his assessment that the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review would have no measurable impact on child poverty for the next two years took account of the provisions relating to the (a) relative low income, (b) combined low income and material deprivation, (c) absolute low income and (d) the persistent poverty target in the Child Poverty Act 2010; and if he will make a statement; [24031]

(3) whether the tax and benefit microsimulation model used as the basis for his assessment that the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review would have no measurable impact on child poverty for the next two years took account of the Government’s proposed changes to (a) housing benefit, (b) council tax benefit, (c) disability living allowance, (d) employment support allowance and (e) in-year income change rules for tax credits; and if he will make a statement; [24032]

(4) what account he took of his estimate of likely reductions in the numbers of public sector jobs in determining that the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review would have no measurable impact on child poverty for the next two years; and if he will make a statement. [24033]

Justine Greening: The estimate that the impact of spending review measures would have no measurable impact on child poverty over the next two years was made in respect of relative low income poverty, and covers the period April 2011 to end March 2013.

The data sources document accompanying the spending review sets out the measures which are included in this assessment.

There is no central target for public sector workforce reductions. Individual employers will determine exact work force implications in line with their overall settlements. In addition, the data underpinning the Treasury’s microsimulation model do not record whether individuals work in the public or private sector, which means that it is not possible to allocate any changes in work force numbers to individuals in the data in a sufficiently robust way. Accordingly, it was not possible to robustly estimate the impact of reductions in public sector jobs on child poverty at spending review.

Public Expenditure: Wales and Scotland

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Barnett consequentials for (a) Wales and (b) Scotland will be of his decision to limit the geographic scope of the Cycling England programme to England; and if he will make a statement. [24515]

Danny Alexander: Barnett consequentials are calculated at departmental, not individual programme, level. Full details of the Barnett formula, together with up to date comparability factors are set out in the 2010 edition of the Treasury publication ‘Funding the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland Assembly: Statement of Funding Policy’.

Public Sector: Employment

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many public sector jobs he expects there to be in each region in each of the next five years. [24229]

Danny Alexander: The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) released, as part of its Budget forecasts on 22 June 2010, projections for whole economy employment to 2015-16.

Further information on its employment forecast, including projections for general Government employment, was released on 30 June 2010 in its document “OBR forecast: Employment”, which can be found on the following webpage:

http://budgetresponsibility.independent.gov.uk/publications.html

A revised forecast will be released on 29 November 2010. The OBR has not published forecasts on a sub-national level.

Tax Evasion

Dr Whiteford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many (a) individuals and (b) organisations HM Revenue and Customs has (i) investigated and (ii) prosecuted for offences related to tax evasion in each of the last five years.

[13418]

Mr Gauke: HMRC does not hesitate to use its criminal investigation powers to pursue a prosecution, however, cost-effective civil settlement procedures are used in the majority of evasion cases. This represents excellent value for the Exchequer, as all undeclared tax is repaid and they also pay a penalty which can be up to 100% of the tax evaded. Every year we collect millions of pounds of evaded tax using these tried, well-established methods.

Compliance officers at all grades are engaged in a wide range of activities, which may include risk assessment, recovery of underpaid tax, the prevention of further tax losses, debt collection and the deterrence of tax evasion through, for example criminal investigation. The number of interventions these officers carried out in 2008-09 totalled approximately 400,000 excluding our education interventions.
A disaggregated breakdown of HMRC’s investigations between individuals and organisations is available only at disproportionate cost.

Details of the number of cases prosecuted for income tax, corporation tax, VAT and excise evasion are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

**Carbon Emissions**

**Joan Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what his most recent assessment is of the effect on the reduction of UK greenhouse gas emissions of carbon sink failure. [23809]

**Gregory Barker:** As indicated in my response to the hon. Member’s question on 15 November 2010, Official Report, column 601W, carbon sink failure at the global level is very unlikely. Any weakening of carbon sinks would reduce the global allowable emissions for a given temperature target, but projections for emissions reductions in accordance with a 2°C target take this factor into account. Because we do not expect that global carbon sink failure is a likely scenario it is not expected to have an impact on UK emissions reductions. The UK’s carbon budgets under the Climate Change Act, combine both emissions and uptake from sinks. These are reported via the UK Greenhouse Gas Inventory funded by my Department, and increases or decreases in sinks are taken into account in measuring how the UK is meeting its carbon budgets.

**Departmental Computer Software**

**Caroline Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment was made in developing the 2050 Energy Pathways calculator tool of the merits of making it operate using Open Source software; what factors underpinned the choice of Microsoft Excel for PCs 2007 and 2010 for the tool; and what evaluation was made of the effects of the cost of obtaining this software on the likely levels of use of the calculator tool. [23890]

**Gregory Barker:** The 2050 Pathways Calculator is open source: the full model is available for inspection, improvement and reuse by anyone. As a result, the Department has received useful suggestions about how to improve the model during the Call for Evidence period which ran between 27 July and 5 October 2010. The file format is .xlsx, which is documented in the ECMA-376 international standard and therefore could be implemented by open source Excel alternatives. Structured references were implemented in the “Excel to Ruby programming language” convertor which was released by the Department under an open source licence as part of the source code for the web version of the 2050 Calculator.

In evaluating the consequences of the use of structured references, it was concluded that the benefit that structured references gave of allowing the model to be implemented and updated accurately within the time available outweighed the drawback of its inability to run on open source alternatives. This drawback was further mitigated by the availability of trial copies of appropriate versions of Microsoft Excel (which were free at the time of the Call for Evidence) and which meant that most people would be able to make use of the 2050 Calculator tool during the Call for Evidence period of the project.

**EU Emissions Trading Scheme**

**Gordon Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (1) whether he has made an assessment of the net effect of the implementation of the European Commission’s proposed hybrid clinker benchmark for phase III of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme on environmental quality standards; (2) what assessment he has made of the likely net contribution of the implementation of the European Commission’s proposed hybrid clinker benchmark for phase III of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme to meeting his Department’s UK carbon budget targets; (3) whether he has made an assessment of the potential for carbon leakage as a result of the implementation of the European Commission’s proposal for a hybrid clinker benchmark for phase III of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme; (4) whether he has had discussions with the European Commission on the methodology it used to determine the reduction factors proposed in relation to the clinker benchmark to be adopted under phase III of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme; (5) what estimate he has made of the cost to businesses of complying with the European Commission’s proposed hybrid clinker benchmark for phase III of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. [23591]

**Gregory Barker:** The European Commission’s proposal for the free allocation rules for phase III of the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) was sent to member states on 22 October. My officials are working closely with colleagues in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to analyse the proposal in detail in order to assess its impact on UK industry. My officials have met with representatives of the UK cement sector in order to discuss the proposal to ensure that we have a full understanding of the implications of the proposed approach. They will also be having discussions with the European Commission on this issue and further discussions with industry before any conclusions are reached.

**Feed-in Tariffs**

**Jack Lopresti:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether feed-in tariffs are guaranteed for 25 years for new installations; and what factors would lead to their withdrawal. [23721]
Charles Hendry: The recent announcements in the comprehensive spending review confirmed any changes to feed-in tariffs as a result of future reviews of the scheme will only affect new entrants to the scheme from that point forward. The Government have no intention of changing tariffs for those already receiving FITs.

Fuel Poverty: Meters

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change if he will take steps to increase the level of awareness among prepayment meter users in or at risk of fuel poverty of the (a) availability of funding from energy efficiency programmes and (b) possibility of carrying out improvement works without a landlord’s permission. [24504]

Gregory Barker: The Government are committed to helping those households who are in fuel poverty. We recognise the need to help more of the most vulnerable to keep their homes warm at an affordable cost. Current schemes, including Warm Front and the carbon emissions reduction target (CERT) promote awareness across all customers, including those who have prepayment meters.

In addition, from late 2012 the new energy company obligation, as part of our Green Deal initiative, will focus particularly on those households who need additional support, including the poorest and most vulnerable and those in hard to treat homes.

Energy efficiency improvement works under the Green Deal will require a landlord’s permission. However, we are seeking to create powers in the Energy Security and Green Economy Bill which could require landlords to honour reasonable requests for energy efficiency improvements, where a financial support package, such as the Green Deal, is available.

Heat Pumps

Mr Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change if he will bring forward proposals to establish a system of independent verification of the average service life of air-sourced heat pumps. [24695]

Gregory Barker: We have no plans to bring forward such proposals. As with other microgeneration technologies, heat pumps are dealt with under the microgeneration certification scheme but this does not cover average service life.

Service life is influenced by many factors including heat pump design, component selection, installation and maintenance, actual use against expected use, number of hours run, reliability of the sub-components and level of manufacturer support. Verification of average life taking account of all these variables would be an extremely resource intensive activity.

Heating: Fluorocarbons

Mr Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what information his Department holds on the proportion of installed heat pumps which use the refrigerant fluorocarbon gas, R404A. [24691]

Gregory Barker: The Department does not hold specific information on the proportion of heat pumps that use refrigerant R404A. A recent study, undertaken by AEA into refrigerant emissions and forecasts, identified only one refrigerant gas emitted from heat pumps—HFC 134.

It might be concluded from this that only a very small proportion of heat pumps use refrigerant R404A. However the authors of the study indicated that it was not easy to locate information about the fluids and refrigerant charge size used in ground and air source heat pumps.

Nuclear Power

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate he has made of the cost of hardening all UK civil nuclear installations against attack from land or sea-launched precision-guided penetrator weapons. [23897]

Charles Hendry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 15 November 2010, Official Report, column 609W. It is important that security measures adopted at civil nuclear installations are proportionate to the threat. Nuclear site licence companies are responsible for meeting the costs of security measures.

Renewable Energy

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps he is taking to increase the amount of electricity generated from renewable sources. [22715]

Charles Hendry: The main financial mechanisms that the Government have to incentivise the generation of renewable electricity are the renewables obligation (RO) and the feed-in tariff (FIT) scheme:

- RO supports large-scale generation of renewable electricity. Since its introduction in 2002, it has tripled the level of renewable electricity in the UK from 1.8% to 6.7%¹ in 2009, and is currently worth around £1.4 billion/year in support to the renewable electricity industry. The spending review of 20 October 2010 announced that this level of funding will continue, confirming the Government’s commitment to the increase of renewable electricity. The Electricity Market Reform consultation document is due to be published next month and will set out proposals for changes to the existing market in order to meet our renewables and decarbonisation goals. But whatever the proposal, the Government understand the need for investor certainty, and are not looking to make retrospective changes.

- The FIT scheme was launched on 1 April of this year and supports small-scale low carbon electricity generation up to 5MW (2kW for microCHP) in capacity. Initial figures for the first six months of the scheme (taken from Ofgem’s online database) indicate that 8,960 installations commissioned since the announcement of the scheme in July 2009 were supported. This amounts to a total installed capacity of 35.8MW.

We are also addressing the non-financial barriers to deployment:

The spending review of 20 October 2010 included an announcement for over £200 million to support the development of energy technologies, of which £60 million has been earmarked for offshore wind manufacturing infrastructure at port locations. By supporting this manufacturing development, we are bringing forward industrial capacity that will help the UK meet its energy policy objectives. The Government are currently developing its detailed plans for the allocation of the remainder of this funding.

Alongside this, we are working to remove grid connection barriers for low carbon energy production. We have already implemented endurig grid access reform in the form of a ‘Connect and Manage’ regime, so that new generation will be able to connect to the grid as soon as their local connection is built.
the UK and Israel are both members of the International Energy Agency's Photovoltaic Power Systems R&D collaboration programme, no specific work has been done by the Department to engage Israel further on either solar or other renewable energy technologies.

**Warm Front Scheme**

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what plans he has for the future of the eligibility criteria for the Warm Front scheme; and if he will ensure that those who are eligible for assistance under the scheme on the sole ground that they may receive disability living allowance continue to be eligible for such assistance.  

**Gregory Barker:** As announced in the spending review, DECC will fund a smaller, more targeted Warm Front scheme over the next two years as we transition to the full role out of the Green Deal.

We will shortly be consulting on proposed changes to Warm Front to ensure the eligibility criteria reflect our determination to focus on the most vulnerable households.

**Warm Front Scheme: Fuel Poverty**

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the likely effects on those in fuel poverty of the proposed reductions in funding for the Warm Front scheme in the next two financial years.

**Gregory Barker:** The spending review commits very significant resources to tackling fuel poverty. DECC will fund a smaller, more targeted Warm Front scheme over the next two years as we transition to the full roll out of the Green Deal and the energy company obligation.

We will shortly be consulting on proposed changes to Warm Front to ensure the eligibility criteria reflect our determination to focus on the most vulnerable households.

We have made permanent the increase to cold weather payments at £25 a week to help low income households during periods of cold weather. In addition, from April 2011, energy suppliers will provide greater help with energy bills to more of the most vulnerable fuel poor households, through social price support.

**WORK AND PENSIONS**

**Care Homes: Boilers**

**Mr Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he plans to take to ensure that hot water tanks heated by heat pumps comply with health and safety legislation designed to ensure control of legionella in (a) residential homes and (b) Government buildings.

**Chris Grayling:** Existing health and safety legislation requires all employers who manage premises with a hot/cold water system to consider the risks from legionella bacteria that may affect their staff or members of the public and to take suitable precautions. These requirements extend to Government Departments. Commercial businesses or public services that provide residential accommodation have the same responsibility as employers.
if, in general, they are responsible for the maintenance and repairs of the water system at the premises. The use of new energy saving technology to heat water, including heat pumps, does not in itself introduce a new legionella bacteria risk. HSE has published guidance to assist employers, which is freely available from HSE’s website.

Carer’s Allowance

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the cost of allowing carers who are enrolled in courses designated as full-time or in training for more than 20 hours per week to receive carer’s allowance in the first 12 months following such a change. [22637]

Maria Miller: No such estimate has been made.

Carer’s allowance provides a measure of financial support for people who forgo the opportunity of full-time employment in order to provide care for a severely disabled person.

The educational maintenance system, via its range of loans and grants, provides financial support for full-time students, including carers. In consequence, people engaged in full-time study are generally precluded from entitlement to income-replacement and income-related social security benefits.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he plans to extend the eligibility criteria for carers allowance to enable more carers who are studying or in training to claim the allowance. [22638]

Maria Miller: The Government recognise that the United Kingdom’s 6 million carers play an indispensable role in looking after family members or friends who need support.

Carer’s allowance provides a measure of financial support for people who forgo the opportunity of full-time employment in order to provide care for a severely disabled person.

The educational maintenance system, via its range of loans and grants, provides financial support for full-time students, including carers. In consequence, people engaged in full-time study are generally precluded from entitlement to income-replacement and income-related social security benefits.

We have set out our commitment to simplify the benefit system in order to improve work incentives and encourage responsibility and fairness. We will consider carefully the needs of carers as we develop our plans for welfare reform.

Child Benefit

Julie Hilling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead of 19 October 2010, Official Report, column 643W, on child benefit, whether there has been a re-assessment of the changes announced to child benefit in relation to the effects on national insurance credits towards state pension; and if he will make a statement. [24130]

Steve Webb: We are still considering the full implications of the changes announced to child benefit to ensure that those entitled continue to receive national insurance credits towards their state pension.

Departmental Early Retirement

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff of (a) his Department and (b) its agencies have been offered enhanced early retirement packages in each of the last three years. [22031]

Chris Grayling: The early retirement benefits that are available to civil servants are set out in the Civil Service Compensation Scheme. Currently there are two categories of enhanced early retirement benefits: flexible early retirement and compulsory early retirement.

Flexible early retirement provides an enhancement of up to six and two thirds years to the reckonable service used to calculate pension benefits. The enhancement cannot take the adjusted reckonable service beyond that which would have been earned by pension age (age 60) nor can it take the total enhanced reckonable service beyond the maximum of 45 years.

Compulsory early retirement benefits include the same enhancement applicable to the flexible early retirement pension calculation plus a lump sum compensation payment of up to six months’ pay.

Central records are not kept of the number of packages offered, however, the following table sets out the numbers of employees who opted to leave the Department for Work and Pensions and its agencies in the last three years under enhanced early retirement packages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Flexible early retirement</th>
<th>Compulsory early retirement</th>
<th>Total enhanced retirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobcentre Plus</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carers Service</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWP total</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobcentre Plus</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carers Service</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWP total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobcentre Plus</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carers Service</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWP total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Departmental Pay

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was paid to officials in his Department and its non-departmental public bodies in bonuses and other payments in addition to salary in each year since 1997; how many officials received such payments; and what the monetary values was of the largest 20 payments made in each such year. [18713]

Chris Grayling: The information has been placed in the Library.

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what allowances and payments in addition to salary were available to officials in his Department and its non-departmental public bodies in each year since 1997; and what the monetary value was of payments and allowances of each type in each such year. [18714]

Chris Grayling: The Department for Work and Pensions was established in 2002 and information can be provided only from that date. DWP has 16 allowances that can be paid in addition to salary, four of which are payable only to employees who hold reserved rights to those particular allowances.

Details of the individual rates of allowances and payments payable since the Department's first harmonised pay award in 2002 have been provided in a separate table which has been placed in the Library. The table also includes 14 allowances that have been abolished; many of which were abolished following a review held in 2005. The Department could provide details of the total amount spent on these allowances only at disproportionate cost.

The rates of allowances across DWP and NDPBs are frozen for two years (2010-11 and 2011-12) as part of the pay freeze. We are currently reviewing all departmental expenditure to drive out inefficiencies and deliver value for money for the taxpayer.

Non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs)

Details of the total amount spent on allowances and other payments for NDPBs are provided in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body</th>
<th>Payment/allowance type</th>
<th>2005-06</th>
<th>2006-07</th>
<th>2007-08</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Pension Regulator (TPR)</td>
<td>Duty Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>48,470</td>
<td>85,277</td>
<td>134,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duty Rota Allowance</td>
<td>1,117</td>
<td>4,549</td>
<td>11,097</td>
<td>15,537</td>
<td>15,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First Aiders' Allowance</td>
<td>3,756</td>
<td>5,121</td>
<td>5,215</td>
<td>4,410</td>
<td>4,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensions Ombudsman (PO) and Pension Protection Fund Ombudsman (PPFO)</td>
<td>Responsibility Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>6,567</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>5,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension Protection Fund (PPF)</td>
<td>Additional Responsibility Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>48,000</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Living Fund (ILF)</td>
<td>On Call Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1,503</td>
<td>2,688</td>
<td>2,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Safety Executive (HSE)</td>
<td>Recruitment and Retention Addition Allowance</td>
<td>171,713</td>
<td>192,428</td>
<td>258,188</td>
<td>253,669</td>
<td>277,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qualification Allowance</td>
<td>6,250</td>
<td>4,250</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>3,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Maintenance and Executive Committee (CMEC)</td>
<td>Emergency Officers' Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Locational Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>4,689</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On Call Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>7,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private Secretary Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2,579</td>
<td>9,103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Procurement Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>9,402</td>
<td>45,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibility Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2,431</td>
<td>16,460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibility on Temporary Duties Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>5—</td>
<td>671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondment Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>5—</td>
<td>7,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shorthand Audio Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skills Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2,257</td>
<td>14,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skills Annual Allowance</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Body Payment/allowance type 2005-06 2006-07 2007-08 2008-09 2009-10
Typing Allowance n/a n/a n/a 858 1,941
Extended Working Hours n/a n/a n/a 969,402 2.3 million
Miscellaneous Allowance n/a n/a n/a 3,413 560

n/a = Allowance was not applicable.
1 Figures for CMEC are from its inception in November 2008 to March.
2 Table excludes Temporary Duty Allowance where a member of staff 2010 is acting temporarily in a higher.
3 Not available.

Departmental Sick Leave

Mr Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what programmes his Department and its agencies have to reduce the number of working days lost through sickness and absence. [23407]

Chris Grayling: The Department has cut average sickness absence by 25%, from 11.1 days per employee per year in 2007 to 8.3 days per employee per year currently. The latter figure is below the rate of 9.6 days per employee per year reported by the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development for the public sector in 2010.

The Department achieved this reduction by applying an ongoing programme to help employees maintain good health, such as providing stress counselling. Where employees do take sick leave, we use occupational health services to support rehabilitation. If, following the provision of all reasonable help, an employee is unable to maintain a satisfactory attendance record, action is taken to dismiss or retire them on ill health grounds.

Other types of unauthorised absence are investigated on a case by case basis. Where appropriate, disciplinary action is taken.

Employment

Mr Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of (a) men and (b) women between the ages of 21 and 60 years have been in employment (i) full-time, (ii) part-time and (iii) in total in each year from 1980 to 2009; and if he will make a statement. [24359]

Mr Hurd: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated November 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking what proportion of (a) men and (b) women between the ages of 21 and 60 years have been in employment (i) full-time, (ii) part-time and (iii) in total in each year from 1980 to 2009. (24359)

Estimates for people in employment are derived from the Labour Force Survey. The table provided shows the information requested from 1992 to 2009. Comparable estimates prior to 1992 are not available.

Employment and Support Allowance

Nicky Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people are claiming contributory employment and support allowance in the work-related activity group; and how many of those cited a mental health condition as their primary reason for claiming; [23305]
(2) how many people are claiming contributory employment and support allowance; and how many of those cited a mental health condition as their primary reason for claiming. [23306]

Maria Miller: The information is provided in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of contributory employment and support allowance claimants under the mental and behavioural disorders category by stage of claim—February 2010, Great Britain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Month of claim start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. ESA statistics by medical condition can be found at http://83.244.183.180/ESA/esa_additional_feb10.xls
3. Benefit type—The type of ESA is defined as pay status at the case load date—this may differ to the status at the start or end of the claim.
4. Employment and support allowance (ESA) replaced incapacity benefit and income support paid on the grounds of incapacity for new claims from 27 October 2008.
5. Stage of ESA claim—The stage of claim is derived from the amount of payment a claimant receives. There are a number of cases where the stage is unknown, these are claimants which do not receive any payment for ESA (those who receive national insurance credits only).
6. ICD (disease) code Causes of incapacity are based on the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision published by the World Health Organisation. Medical condition is based on evidence provided at the start of the claim, this in itself does not confer entitlement to employment support allowance and may not represent a claimant most recent medical condition. For ESA claimants, data on medical condition is only available from February 2010 onwards.

Source:
DWP Information Directorate: Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study 100%

Employment and Support Allowance: Birmingham

Mr Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Birmingham, Hall Green constituency applied for and were refused employment and support allowance in each of the last two years for which figures are available. [23447]

Chris Grayling: This information is not available for individual constituencies.

The following table presents the outcome for all employment and support allowance (ESA) claims received in the Birmingham local authority area for the dates shown. The table presents data between October 2008, when ESA was introduced, to February 2010, the latest data available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month of claim start</th>
<th>Fit for Work</th>
<th>Claims closed before assessment complete</th>
<th>Assessment still in progress</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Employment: Public Sector

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of people were employed in the public sector in each region in the latest period for which figures are available. [24233]

Mr Hurd: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck dated November 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning how many and what proportion of people were employed in the public sector in each region in the latest period for which figures are available. (24233)

Estimates of employment for the UK public sector are taken from the ONS release on Public Sector Employment at www.statistics.gov.uk

The latest period for which figures are available is Quarter 2 2010.

The table attached provides the requested data.

Regional employment: by region and country of workplace Q2 2010, not seasonally adjusted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Headcount¹</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Total employment²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>4,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>3,957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>2,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>2,452</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regional employment: by region and country of workplace Q2 2010\(^1\), not seasonally adjusted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Public sector Headcount(^1)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Total employment(^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thousand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>3,164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>1,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>2,391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Humber</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>1,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>2,566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>1,296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland(^4)</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>2,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland(^5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>4,838</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>24,361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>5,787</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>28,107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United</td>
<td>6,048</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>29,142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom(^6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Estimates are based on where people are employed.
\(^2\) Labour Force Survey—All in employment aged 16 and over. Data refer to May to July 2010.
\(^3\) Public sector estimates include banks reclassified to the public sector—Northern Rock from 9 October 2007, Bradford and Bingley from 26 September 2008, Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds Banking Group from 13 October 2008.
\(^4\) Estimates of PSE for Scotland are supplied by Scottish Government and match those produced by Scottish Government on a quarterly basis.
\(^5\) Estimates of PSE for Northern Ireland will differ to those published by DETINI; ONS figures include HM Forces personnel. In addition, ONS percentage figures use the Labour Force Survey employment as a denominator as opposed to the Quarterly Employment Survey employee estimate used by DETINI.
\(^6\) Includes overseas employees, those who did not state their region of workplace when surveyed as part of the Labour Force Survey and approximately 30,000 public sector employees that could not be assigned to a region.

Funeral Payments

**Jon Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints his Department has received on the funeral payment in the latest period for which figures are available. [22762]

**Steve Webb:** Jobcentre Plus does not collate or record complaints about Funeral Payments separately.

From April 2010 to 9 November 2010 1,060 complaints relating to the Social Fund were received by Jobcentre Plus. This does not include any complaints that may have been made directly to the chief executive.

*Source:* Jobcentre Plus Management Information; Date extracted: 9 November 2010

*Notes:*
1. The information provided is derived from operational processes and systems solely for the purposes of helping the department to manage its business. It has not been subjected to the rigorous quality assurance checks that our published Official Statistics are put through.
2. Scotland is not included in the total from August 2010 as the Scottish region is currently piloting a new method of recording customer feedback. Funeral Payment data will not be specifically recorded under this new method.
3. The figure includes Budgeting Loans, Community Care Grants, Crisis Loans and Sure Start Maternity Grant complaints as well as Funeral Payments.
4. The figure has been rounded to the nearest 10.

Government Ministers receive correspondence about Funeral Payments, to which Department for Work and Pensions Ministers or officials reply. (This does not include letters on purely operational issues which are passed to Jobcentre Plus for response by the chief executive.) Some of this correspondence will be complaints, but without investigating each individual case, it is not possible to say which were complaints. The number of such cases received about Funeral Payments from April 2010 to 9 November 2010 was 50.

*Source:* Department for Work and Pensions records

*Note:*
The figure has been rounded to the nearest 10.

**Dr Whiteford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for the qualifying criteria for payment of funeral payment grant. [23432]

**Steve Webb:** Our plans for reforming the Social Fund were set out in the White Paper “Universal Credit: welfare that works” (Cm 7957) published on 11 November 2010. The reforms do not include any changes to the qualifying criteria for funeral payments.

**Dr Whiteford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost to the public purse of the funeral payment grant scheme has been in each of the last three years. [23436]

**Steve Webb:** The available information is given in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost of the Funeral Payment scheme in Great Britain</th>
<th>£ million</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial year</td>
<td>2007-08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross expenditure</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recoveries</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration cost</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net total cost</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes:*
1. The information provided is management information. Our preference is to answer all parliamentary questions using Official/National Statistics but in this case we only have management information available. It is not quality assured to the same extent as Official/National statistics and there are some issues with the data, for example, gross expenditure does not include claims which were processed clerically and had not been entered on to the Social Fund Computer System by the end of the relevant financial year.
2. The administration costs are the total Jobcentre Plus costs, including re-considerations, but excluding work on appeals.
3. Figures have been rounded to the nearest £0.1 million and may not sum due to rounding.

*Source:* Department for Work and Pensions Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System Jobcentre Plus Activity Based Management Models

**Jon Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what account he takes of the average cost of a funeral in determining the level of the funeral benefit payment. [24056]

**Steve Webb:** Social Fund Funeral Payments are not based on average funeral costs. The specific costs of burial or cremation are taken fully into account when each payment is made. In addition, up to £700 can be paid for other related funeral expenses.
Future Jobs Fund

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many young people in each (a) region and (b) local authority area have taken part in the Future Jobs Fund programme in each of the last six months.

Chris Grayling: The Young Person’s Guarantee statistics were published on 13 October 2010 and cover the period from October 2009 to July 2010. The table shows the number of young people in each (a) region and (b) local authority area that have taken part in the Future Jobs Fund programme in each of the six months from February to July 2010.

The information has been placed in the Library.

Future Jobs Fund: Local Government

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which local authorities have taken part in the Future Jobs Fund programme in the last six months.

Chris Grayling: The local authorities, who have taken part in the Future Jobs Fund in the last six months are detailed in the following list. The local authorities are either the Lead Accountable Body, responsible for the co-ordination and administration of the approved bid on behalf of their partners, or have been communicated to the Department as being partners in a delivering a Future Jobs Fund grant.

Aberdeen City Council
Aberdeenshire Council
Angus Council
Argyll and Bute Council
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Bedford Borough Council
Birmingham City Council
Blackpool Council
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Bolsover District Council
Bournemouth Borough Council
Bracknell Forest Council
Brighton and Hove City Council
Bristol City Council
Buckinghamshire County Council
Burnley Borough Council
Caerphilly County Borough Council
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Cambridge City Council
Cambridgeshire County Council
Camden Council
Cannock Chase District Council
Cardiff Council
Carmarthenshire County Council
Carmarthenshire County Council
Central Bedfordshire Council
Cheshire West and Chester Council
City of Bradford MDC
City of Edinburgh Council
Clackmannanshire Council
Colchester Borough Council
Copeland Borough Council
Coventry City Council
Cumbria County Council
Darlington Borough Council
Devon County Council
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
Dorset County Council
Dorset Police Force
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Dundee City Council
East Ayrshire Council
East Dunbartonshire Council
East Lothian Council
East Renfrewshire Council
East Sussex County Council
Epping Forest District Council
Erewash Borough Council
Exeter City Council
Falkirk Council
Fife Council
Fylde Council
Gamlingay Parish Council
Gateshead Council
Glasgow City Council
Halton Metropolitan Borough Council
Hambleton District Council
Hampshire County Council
Harlow District Council
Hartlepool Borough Council
Hastings Borough Council
Herefordshire Council
Hertfordshire County Council
Hinckley and Bosworth Council
Histon and Impington Parish Councils
Hull City Council
Inverclyde Council
Islington Council
Kent County Council
Kirklees Council
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Lancashire County Council
Lancaster City Council
Leeds City Council
Leicester City Council
Liverpool City Council
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
London Borough of Merton
London Borough of Wandsworth
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
London Borough of Bromley
London Borough of Ealing
London Borough of Greenwich
London Borough of Hackney
London Borough of Haringey
London Borough of Havering
London Borough of Hounslow
London Borough of Lambeth
London Borough of Lewisham
London Borough of Newham
Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the name is of each partner organisation with which each participating local authority has worked to provide placements for young people on the Future Jobs Fund programme in each of the last six months.

Chris Grayling: The information has been placed in the Library.

Housing Benefit: Greater London

Fabian Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent estimate he has made of the proportion of rented accommodation in each London borough which is occupied by recipients of housing benefit.

Steve Webb: My most recent estimate is that approximately 40% of tenants in the private rented sector receive housing benefit. This is a national figure; reliable estimates at a local level are not available.

Industrial Health and Safety

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the likely effects on health and safety standards of the implementation of proposals to combine the roles of food safety and health and safety inspectors in local authorities.
Chris Grayling: Lord Young is working with the Health and Safety Executive, the Food Standards Agency and the Local Government Regulation to take forward his recommendations which were published in his report “Common Sense, Common Safety”. Many local authorities already combine food safety and health and safety inspections or have the capability to do this. The intention is to build on existing good practices which are currently used in food premises. Local authorities will continue to respond to health and safety complaints and incidents with a risk based approach. The system will be more standardised, more efficient and more transparent for the consumer.

Mortgage Payments

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of people resident in the South East in receipt of support for mortgage interest who have mortgages with interest rates higher than 3.63 per cent.; and if he will estimate the proportion of such people who have mortgages with interest rates higher than 3.63 per cent owing to (a) low income and (b) poor credit history. [23799]

Steve Webb: This information is not available because the Department does not collect management information on the actual interest rates that apply to support for mortgage interest customers’ loans.

Mortgages: Government Assistance

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he has made an estimate of the cost to the public purse of providing housing support to those who will no longer have their eligible mortgage interest outgoings fully met by their benefit awards as a result of lowering the rate of interest used to calculate support for mortgage interest.

Steve Webb: The standard interest rate used to calculate support for mortgage interest was fixed at 6.08% by the last Administration. That rate was too generous and resulted in the vast majority of people getting more than their eligible mortgage interest liability, which was unfair to taxpayers.

The plans of the previous Government would have meant that the standard interest rate would have reverted to the formula of Bank of England base rate plus 1.58% from January 2011, which at present would produce a rate of 2.08%.

The Chancellor announced in the June 2010 Budget that the standard interest rate would be based on the Bank of England’s published monthly average mortgage interest rate. Legislation to introduce this change came into effect from 1 October 2010 and the standard interest rate is currently 3.63%.

The Department conducted thorough analysis on the likely impacts of this change, and we have included as much information as possible in the equality impact assessment published on the Department’s website.

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/support-for-mortgage-interest.pdf

Information on the cost to the public purse of providing housing support to those who will no longer have their eligible mortgage interest outgoings fully met by their benefit awards as a result of lowering the rate of interest used to calculate support for mortgage interest is not available.

Support for mortgage interest customers would not usually be eligible for other housing support while remaining as an owner occupier.

The Department does not capture information on reasons for ending a benefit claim, including support for mortgage interest, so does not capture the number of claimants who no longer receive support for mortgage interest payments because they have moved into rented accommodation, or the associated costs to the public purse where these customers become eligible for housing benefit. Furthermore, the relationship between arrears and continued home ownership is a complex one dependent on more than the level of support for mortgage interest payable.

The Department is in the process of developing a model to estimate the impact of changes to support for mortgage interest on the number of repossessions. However any estimates will always be limited since detailed case-by-case information, such as arrears at the start of a claim, is not collected by the department. The Department will consider whether the results can be used publicly once this is work is complete.

The Council of Mortgage Lenders has told the Department that it expects lenders to continue to exercise forbearance where it is fair to do so for the borrower, and the borrower has a chance of paying off any arrears in the future. The Council of Mortgage Lenders thinks that where arrears levels increase for some borrowers as a result of the change in the standard interest rate this does not translate into an immediate possession risk.

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effect on households with disabled residents of changes to the rate of mortgage interest support.

Steve Webb: The standard interest rate used to calculate support for mortgage interest was fixed at 6.08% by the last administration. That rate was too generous and resulted in the vast majority of people getting more than their eligible mortgage interest liability, which was unfair to taxpayers.

The plans of the previous Government would have meant that the standard interest rate would have reverted to the formula of Bank of England Base rate plus 1.58% from January 2011, which at present would produce a rate of 2.08%.

The Chancellor announced in the June 2010 Budget that the standard interest rate would be based on the Bank of England’s published monthly average mortgage interest rate. Legislation to introduce this change came into effect from 1 October 2010 and the standard interest rate is currently 3.63%.

The Department conducted thorough analysis on the likely impacts of this change on different groups, including on disabled people, and we have included as much information on this as possible in the Equality Impact Assessment published on the Department’s website.

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/support-for-mortgage-interest.pdf

At the comprehensive spending review 2010, the Chancellor announced a one year extension to the temporary package of Support for Mortgage Interest
changes that had been due to expire in January 2011. This extension maintains the waiting period for new working age claimants at 13 weeks and the limit on eligible mortgage capital at £200,000, and provides additional support to homeowners facing difficulties.

Unemployment: Cumbernauld

Gregg McClymont: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent estimate he has made of the number of workless households in Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East constituency.

Mr Hurd: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated November 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question for an estimate of the number of workless households in the Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East constituency. [24440]

The latest available data from the Annual Population Survey (APS) show that in 2009, the number of workless households in the Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East constituency was estimated to be 5,200. This was out of a total 31,200 households in the constituency.

As with any sample survey, estimates from the APS are subject to a margin of uncertainty. This is captured in a confidence interval, defined by lower and upper bounds, such as that the interval formed between the bounds would contain the true value for 95% of all possible samples.

A workless household is defined as a household that contains at least one person aged 16 to 64 and where all individuals aged 16 and over are not in employment.

Work Programme

Julian Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to enable small providers to play a role in the Work Programme.

Chris Grayling: All bidders will have access to detailed information about the areas covered by each Work Programme contract package as part of the Specification of Requirements. This will include all Jobcentre Plus services in the locality.

Bidders will be invited to local events to meet representatives from Jobcentre Plus and other strategic partners. This will enable bidders to obtain detailed information about the labour market and about local priorities including the needs of employers and jobseekers, and to ensure that these are addressed in their tenders.

After contracts have been awarded DWP will again facilitate contacts with successful bidders to ensure that Jobcentre Plus is fully conversant with their delivery models and fully engaged in working with providers in planning the implementation of the new service in each locality.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Parliament’s Education Service: Finance

Philip Davies: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the House of Commons Commission how much was spent on the outreach programme in each financial year since it was established; and how much the House of Commons Commission expects to spend on the programme in 2010-11. [24389]

Sir Stuart Bell: The Parliamentary Outreach service was set up following the Administration Committee’s 2007 report Improving Facilities for Educational Visitors to Parliament (HC 434 2006-07), which included a recommendation to develop a parliamentary outreach service including regional outreach officers working throughout the UK. The service is being built up over three years, commencing with a pilot year in 2008-09, when the first of the regional outreach officers were appointed.

Parliamentary Outreach is funded jointly with the House of Lords (70:30 split). Costs to the Commons are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>165,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>457,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>1,575,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[1\] Estimated expenditure

As part of the House-wide savings programme and subject to approval, it is anticipated that there will a reduction in the budget of the outreach programme in future years.

CABINET OFFICE

Citizens’ Advice Bureaux

Ben Gummer: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment he has made of the potential contribution of the Citizens Advice Bureau to meeting the objectives of his Big Society initiative. [24512]

Mr Davey: I have been asked to reply.
The Government value highly the work of the independent charities which make up the Citizens Advice Service. It has both high public awareness and is a much trusted source of advice for people from all backgrounds. It equally values the feedback received from bureaux via case studies which helps to hold Government and others to account and is vital in helping to inform and shape future policy.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) already supports the Citizens Advice Service through the provision of annual Grant-in-Aid to its umbrella bodies in England and Wales and in Scotland (Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland) which it does on behalf of all Government Departments and the Welsh and Scottish Governments. That funding enables both to provide business services to their customers—the national network of Citizens Advice Bureaux in England and Wales and Scotland—which enable them to provide front-line services to the public. Without these national business services (IT infrastructure and content, research, training, and standards), the bureaux would not be able to provide their services to the public.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State also announced on 14 October, changes to the future competition and consumer landscape including proposals to transfer the functions of Consumer Focus and the Consumer Direct helpline, operated by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) to the national bodies for the Citizens Advice service in England and Wales and in Scotland and most of the consumer-related research and advocacy functions, currently undertaken by OFT and Consumer Focus, to the Citizens Advice Service.

http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/consumer-issues

BIS’s proposal, on which it will consult publicly in the new year, would see the Citizens Advice Service, together with Trading Standards as the two groups at the centre of our plans for a better model for the future consumer landscape. This fits with both the Government’s localism and Big Society agendas.

Civil Servants: Ethnic Groups and Disability

Mr Umunna: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion of Civil Service staff was identified as (a) being from black and ethnic minority backgrounds and (b) disabled in (i) 2008-09, (ii) 2009-10 and (iii) 2010-11 on the latest date for which figures are available. [24029]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated November 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning the proportion of Civil Service staff identified as (a) being from black and ethnic minority backgrounds and (b) disabled in (i) 2008-09, (ii) 2009-10 and (iii) 2010-11 on the latest date for which figures are available. [24029]

Civil Service Statistics are published annually by the Office for National Statistics on the National Statistics website.

Statistics for 2010 will be published on 19 November 2010. The requested data for years 2008 and 2009 are attached at Annex A.

Corruption: EU Law

Mr Hurd: The criteria for the selection of economic operators laid down in the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 and the Utilities Contracts Regulations 2006 will need to be updated so as to refer to the new offences that are contained in the Bribery Act 2010.

Mr Hurd: UK Regulation 23 of the Public Contracts Regulation 2006 and regulation 26 of the Utilities Contracts Regulations 2006, which implement the respective European Procurement Directives 2004/18/EC and 2004/17/EC, state that a contracting authority having actual knowledge of an economic operator that has been convicted of the offence of bribery should be treated as ineligible and not be selected in the tendering procedure.

Employment: Clwyd

Chris Ruane: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many people were employed in Vale of Clwyd constituency in each year since 1997. [24234]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated November 2010:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking how many people were employed in Vale of Clwyd constituency in each year since 1997. [24234]
The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles employment statistics for local areas from the Annual Population Survey (APS) following International Labour Organisation (ILO) definitions.

The Vale of Clwyd parliamentary constituency changed to new boundaries at the 2010 general election. Figures for the current Vale of Clwyd parliamentary constituency are only available from 2004.

Table 1 shows the number of persons in employment resident in the Vale of Clwyd parliamentary constituency for the 12 month periods ending in December from 2004 to 2009 from the APS, along with the latest estimate for the period ending March 2010.

As with any sample survey, estimates from the APS are subject to a margin of uncertainty. A guide to the quality of the estimates is given in the table.

National and local area estimates for many labour market statistics, including employment, unemployment and claimant count are available on the NOMIS website at http://www.nomisweb.co.uk

Table 1: Number of persons1 in employment resident in the Vale of Clwyd parliamentary constituency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12 month period</th>
<th>Thousand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 2004</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2005</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2006</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2007</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2008</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2009</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 20102</td>
<td>*30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Persons aged 16 and over.
2 Coefficients of Variation have been calculated for the latest period as an indication of the quality of the estimates, as described below:

Guide to Quality:
The Coefficient of Variation (CV) indicates the quality of an estimate, the smaller the CV the higher the quality. The true value is likely to lie within +/- twice the CV—for example, for an estimate of 200 with a CV of 5% we would expect the population total to be within the range 180-220.

Key:
* 0 = CV<5%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered precise
** 5 = CV <10%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered reasonably precise
*** 10 = CV <20%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered acceptable
**** CV >20%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered too unreliable for practical purposes

Source:
Annual Population Survey

Jobseeker’s Allowance: Tower Hamlets

Rushanara Ali: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many people in (a) Bethnal Green and Bow constituency and (b) Tower Hamlets were in receipt of jobseeker’s allowance for more than a year in (i) 2008, (ii) 2009 and (iii) 2010.

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the Authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated November 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking how many people in (a) Bethnal Green and Bow constituency and (b) Tower Hamlets have been in receipt of jobseeker’s allowance for more than a year in (i) 2008, (ii) 2009 and (iii) 2010.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles the number of claimants of Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) from the Jobcentre Plus administrative system.

Table 1 shows the number of persons resident in (a) Bethnal Green and Bow constituency and (b) Tower Hamlets who were claiming of JSA for more than a year in (i) 2008, (ii) 2009 and (iii) 2010. Data has been provided for September 2008, 2009 and 2010 as the latest data available is for the period September 2010.

National and local area estimates for many labour market statistics, including employment, unemployment and claimant count are available on the NOMIS website at: http://www.nomisweb.co.uk

Table 1: Number of persons claiming jobseeker’s allowance for more than one year resident in Bethnal Green and Bow constituency and Tower Hamlets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As at September</th>
<th>Bethnal Green and Bow</th>
<th>Tower Hamlets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>1,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1,095</td>
<td>2,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>2,345</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
Data rounded to nearest 5.
Source:
Jobcentre Plus administrative system

Local Government: Procurement

Dr Phillip Lee: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will place in the Library a copy of guidance issued by the Office of Government Commerce to local authorities on tendering and small and medium-sized enterprises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Maude: The Cabinet Office, through the Efficiency and Reform Group (ERG), provides a range of tools to promote best practice in public procurement that can be found on the OGC website: http://www.ogc.gov.uk/procurement_- _the_bigger_picture_policy_and_standards_framework.asp

These tools are intended primarily for central Government Departments, including their agencies and non-departmental public bodies, but organisations in the wider public sector may also use them, and many choose to do so.

The website includes specific materials to help public procurers take account of SMEs in procurement exercises.

Lone Parents: Females

Catherine McKinnell: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion of lone parents in (a) the North East and (b) England are female.

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated November 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your request to ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what percentage of lone parents in (a) the North East and (b) England are female (24476).

The number and type of families in the UK can be estimated using the Annual Population Survey (APS). The latest data available are for 2009. Estimates are provided for lone parent families with at least one dependent child.

In 2009, 92 per cent of lone parents with dependent children were female in both the North East and in England.
Older People

Ms Bagshawe: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what estimate he has made of the likely (a) number and (b) proportion of those aged over 85 years in each local authority area in 2020.

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated November 2010:
As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Minister for the Cabinet Office asking what estimate he has made of the likely (a) number and (b) proportion of those aged over 85 years in each local authority area in 2020 (23946)

The most recent subnational population projections for England are based on the mid-year population estimates for 2008. The projected number and percentage of the population aged 86 and above for each local authority in England in 2020 is given in the attached table.

2008-Based subnational population projections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area name</th>
<th>Persons aged 86 and over (thousand)</th>
<th>Persons aged 86 and over (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oldham</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochdale</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salford</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockport</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tameside</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
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### 2008-Based subnational population projections

#### Table 1: Projected number and percentage of persons aged 86 and over in 2020

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</tbody>
</table>
## Table 1: Projected number and percentage of persons aged 86 and over in 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area name</th>
<th>Persons aged 86 and over (thousand)</th>
<th>Persons aged 86 and over (percentage)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Sedgemoor</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Somerset</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taunton Deane</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Somerset</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannock Chase</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Staffordshire</td>
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<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lichfield</td>
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<td>2.8</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Stafford</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
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<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moorlands</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamworth</td>
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<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babergh</td>
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<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Heath</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ipswich</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid Suffolk</td>
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<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffolk Coastal</td>
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<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waveney</td>
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<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elmbridge</td>
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<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epsom and Ewell</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guildford</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mole Valley</td>
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<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reigate and Banstead</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runnymede</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spelthorne</td>
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<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrey Heath</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tangridge</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woking</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Warwickshire</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuneaton and Bedworth</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rugby</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stratford-on-Avon</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warwick</td>
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<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adur</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arun</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chichester</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horsham</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid Sussex</td>
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<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthing</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kennet</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Wiltshire</td>
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<td>Salisbury</td>
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<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Wiltshire</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
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<td>Bromsgrove</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malvern Hills</td>
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<td>4.3</td>
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<td>Redditch</td>
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<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcester</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wychavon</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

- The subnational population projections are demographic trend based projections that indicate what the population of an area is likely to be if recently observed trends in fertility, mortality and migration were to continue. They take no account of future policies or developments which may affect trends.
- For details about the methodology used to produce the 2008-based subnational population projections please see the Methodology Guide at the following web page: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/snpp-2008/2008_based_SNPP_Methodology_Guide.pdf
- For further information regarding methodology please email: snpp@ons.gov.uk
- The data are Crown Copyright. They may be reproduced freely within your organisation, but they must not be used for commercial use. For further information please see Subnational Population Projections Terms and Conditions of Use. Commercial use licences can be obtained from ONS – please email: snpp@ons.gov.uk

**Source:** Population Projections Unit, ONS: Crown Copyright.
Office for National Statistics

### Older People: Females

**Catherine McKinnell:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion of people over 50 years old resident in (a) Newcastle upon Tyne North constituency, (b) the North East and (c) England are female.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area name</th>
<th>Percentage 2007</th>
<th>Percentage 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle upon Tyne North</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Data not available. Source: Office for National Statistics.

### Public Sector: Procurement

**Catherine McKinnell:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps he plans to take to encourage public bodies to observe the 2009 guidance of the Office of Government Commerce, Promoting skills through public procurement, as part of their procurement procedures.
Mr Maude: The primary purpose of Government procurement is to buy goods and services the Government need, at the best combination of quality and whole-life costs to obtain the best value for money.

Departments are free to build skills and Apprenticeships requirements into their procurement exercises, where relevant and consistent with Government procurement policy and EU treaty principles of openness, non-discrimination and proportionality. Decisions on the inclusion of such requirements have to be taken on a case-by-case basis, driven by the imperative of optimising value for money.

Unemployment: Wales

Chris Ruane: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many people were unemployed in each constituency in Wales in each month since January 2010.

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated November 2010:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking how many people were unemployed in each constituency in Wales in each month since January 2010. (24236)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles unemployment statistics in line with International Labour Organisation (ILO) definitions for local areas from the Annual Population Survey (APS). Unfortunately the sample size does not support analyses of unemployment for the requested geography.

As an alternative, in Table 1, we have provided the number of persons resident in each constituency in Wales claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance since January 2010.

Table 1: Persons claiming jobseeker’s allowance resident in each constituency in Wales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aberavon</td>
<td>1,833</td>
<td>1,833</td>
<td>1,722</td>
<td>1,688</td>
<td>1,596</td>
<td>1,537</td>
<td>1,528</td>
<td>1,510</td>
<td>1,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberconwy</td>
<td>1,290</td>
<td>1,341</td>
<td>1,302</td>
<td>1,145</td>
<td>1,072</td>
<td>1,018</td>
<td>1,019</td>
<td>1,027</td>
<td>979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alyn and Deeside</td>
<td>1,910</td>
<td>1,956</td>
<td>1,963</td>
<td>1,870</td>
<td>1,734</td>
<td>1,646</td>
<td>1,676</td>
<td>1,688</td>
<td>1,661</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arfon</td>
<td>1,556</td>
<td>1,592</td>
<td>1,516</td>
<td>1,469</td>
<td>1,402</td>
<td>1,348</td>
<td>1,360</td>
<td>1,336</td>
<td>1,229</td>
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<td>Blaenau Gwent</td>
<td>3,475</td>
<td>3,419</td>
<td>3,246</td>
<td>3,202</td>
<td>2,991</td>
<td>2,850</td>
<td>2,849</td>
<td>2,891</td>
<td>2,838</td>
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<td>Brecon and Radnorshire</td>
<td>1,162</td>
<td>1,155</td>
<td>1,095</td>
<td>1,041</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>916</td>
<td>937</td>
<td>911</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bridgend</td>
<td>1,927</td>
<td>1,982</td>
<td>1,824</td>
<td>1,798</td>
<td>1,672</td>
<td>1,593</td>
<td>1,653</td>
<td>1,735</td>
<td>1,684</td>
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<td>Caerphilly, Cardi &amp; Central</td>
<td>2,976</td>
<td>2,977</td>
<td>2,879</td>
<td>2,840</td>
<td>2,668</td>
<td>2,560</td>
<td>2,521</td>
<td>2,571</td>
<td>2,525</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cardiff North</td>
<td>1,489</td>
<td>1,498</td>
<td>1,433</td>
<td>1,469</td>
<td>1,416</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>1,347</td>
<td>1,410</td>
<td>1,414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiff South &amp; Penarth</td>
<td>3,496</td>
<td>3,586</td>
<td>3,592</td>
<td>3,513</td>
<td>3,473</td>
<td>3,325</td>
<td>3,296</td>
<td>3,354</td>
<td>3,310</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cardiff West</td>
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<td>2,883</td>
<td>2,810</td>
<td>2,736</td>
<td>2,638</td>
<td>2,519</td>
<td>2,514</td>
<td>2,595</td>
<td>2,628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmarthen East &amp; Dinefwr</td>
<td>1,186</td>
<td>1,172</td>
<td>1,149</td>
<td>1,079</td>
<td>971</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>1,007</td>
<td>1,029</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carmarthen West &amp; South Pembroke</td>
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<td>1,605</td>
<td>1,482</td>
<td>1,333</td>
<td>1,270</td>
<td>1,268</td>
<td>1,251</td>
<td>1,272</td>
<td>1,257</td>
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<td>890</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>799</td>
<td>818</td>
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<td>Clywd South</td>
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<td>1,915</td>
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<td>1,770</td>
<td>1,608</td>
<td>1,491</td>
<td>1,494</td>
<td>1,519</td>
<td>1,512</td>
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<td>1,759</td>
<td>1,699</td>
<td>1,591</td>
<td>1,512</td>
<td>1,457</td>
<td>1,451</td>
<td>1,445</td>
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<td>Cynon Valley</td>
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<td>2,362</td>
<td>2,297</td>
<td>2,209</td>
<td>2,058</td>
<td>1,959</td>
<td>1,978</td>
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<td>1,721</td>
<td>1,644</td>
<td>1,534</td>
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<td>1,461</td>
<td>1,454</td>
<td>1,380</td>
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<td>Dywfor Meirionnydd</td>
<td>1,156</td>
<td>1,120</td>
<td>1,002</td>
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<td>748</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>687</td>
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<td>Gower</td>
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<td>1,452</td>
<td>1,403</td>
<td>1,336</td>
<td>1,207</td>
<td>1,124</td>
<td>1,148</td>
<td>1,157</td>
<td>1,131</td>
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<td>Islwyn</td>
<td>2,455</td>
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<td>1,964</td>
<td>1,931</td>
<td>1,929</td>
<td>1,935</td>
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<tr>
<td>Llanelli</td>
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<td>2,065</td>
<td>2,014</td>
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<td>1,840</td>
<td>1,853</td>
<td>1,884</td>
<td>1,870</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merthyr Tydfil &amp; Rhymney</td>
<td>3,310</td>
<td>3,312</td>
<td>3,081</td>
<td>3,029</td>
<td>2,874</td>
<td>2,791</td>
<td>2,808</td>
<td>2,838</td>
<td>2,803</td>
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<td>1,362</td>
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<td>1,174</td>
<td>1,208</td>
<td>1,231</td>
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<td>Montgomeryshire</td>
<td>946</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>884</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>730</td>
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<td>1,884</td>
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<td>1,581</td>
<td>1,595</td>
<td>1,622</td>
<td>1,578</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newport East</td>
<td>2,570</td>
<td>2,605</td>
<td>2,559</td>
<td>2,495</td>
<td>2,094</td>
<td>1,968</td>
<td>1,973</td>
<td>1,954</td>
<td>1,950</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newport West</td>
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<td>2,759</td>
<td>2,695</td>
<td>2,624</td>
<td>2,571</td>
<td>2,423</td>
<td>2,409</td>
<td>2,399</td>
<td>2,335</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of implementing the proposed transition from the conditional fee agreement scheme to the proposed contingency fees scheme; [24161]
(2) what estimate he has made of the likely effect on the number of claims of the implementation of his proposal for a contingency fees scheme; [24162]
(3) what research his Department has commissioned and (b) evaluated on the likely effects on the level of fairness in respect of access to the justice system of the implementation of his proposal for the replacement of conditional fee agreements with a contingency fees scheme; [24163]
(4) what estimate he has made of the average annual saving to the Exchequer consequent on the implementation of his proposals to end conditional fee agreements; [24164]
(5) what estimate he has made of the net effect on Exchequer revenue, taking into account the estimated change in the number of litigation actions against the Government, of the proposed replacement of conditional fee agreements with a contingency fees scheme in each of the first five years of the operation of that proposed scheme. [24165]

Mr Djanogly: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor (Mr Kenneth Clarke) informed the House on 15 November Official Report, columns 659-72, the Government have now published the consultation paper, ‘Proposals for Reform of Civil Litigation Funding and Costs: Implementation of Lord Justice Jackson’s Recommendations’. This includes proposals relating to the reform of conditional fee agreements (CFAs) and damages-based agreements (DBAs) or contingency fees. I should make it clear that Sir Rupert Jackson did not recommend replacing CFAs with contingency fees or DBAs. Rather he suggested that CFAs should be reformed and that DBAs should be permitted in litigation as an additional funding mechanism. That is what we are consulting on.

The intention is to increase the choice of funding options available to claimants to pursue necessary claims. Sir Rupert is of the view that implementing his proposals, particularly those on the reform of CFAs, would deliver significant costs savings including for Government. The consultation paper and preliminary impact assessments are available on the Ministry of Justice website: www.justice.gov.uk

We are seeking further data from those responding to the consultation.

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much his Department’s agencies and non-departmental public bodies spent from the public purse on influencing public policy through (a) employing external (i) public affairs companies, (ii) strategic consultancies and (iii) corporate communications firms, (b) external marketing and (c) other activities in each year since its inception. [23765]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) does not centrally collate data on expenditure on influencing public policy. It would incur disproportionate costs to examine every transaction made relating to public affairs companies, strategic consultancies, corporate communications firms and external marketing.

It is though, possible to provide information relating to the MoJ, its agencies and NDPBs’ total expenditure on consultants since 2007, and the MoJ and its agencies’ expenditure on external marketing since 2008.

The total expenditure on consultants for the MoJ, its agencies and NDPBs (rounded to the nearest million) was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>£</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>61,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>53,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>42,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The MoJ’s definition for consultancy is:

“Professional services provided by, for example, lawyers, surveyors and architects and the employment of specialists on an interim basis to deliver project solutions, providing expertise for a defined period of time that is not available in-house.”

### Table 1: Persons claiming jobseeker’s allowance resident in each constituency in Wales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ogmore</td>
<td>2,358</td>
<td>2,275</td>
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<td>2,108</td>
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<td>1,878</td>
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<td>1,938</td>
<td>1,894</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1,849</td>
<td>1,666</td>
<td>1,564</td>
<td>1,556</td>
<td>1,611</td>
<td>1,545</td>
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<td>1,236</td>
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<td>1,380</td>
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<td>1,439</td>
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<td>Pembrokeshire</td>
<td>2,277</td>
<td>2,279</td>
<td>2,193</td>
<td>2,108</td>
<td>1,989</td>
<td>1,878</td>
<td>1,839</td>
<td>1,938</td>
<td>1,894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhondda</td>
<td>2,277</td>
<td>2,379</td>
<td>2,577</td>
<td>2,461</td>
<td>2,226</td>
<td>2,126</td>
<td>2,196</td>
<td>2,250</td>
<td>2,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swansea East</td>
<td>2,398</td>
<td>2,366</td>
<td>2,344</td>
<td>2,306</td>
<td>2,181</td>
<td>2,091</td>
<td>2,081</td>
<td>2,122</td>
<td>2,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swansea West</td>
<td>2,147</td>
<td>2,075</td>
<td>2,090</td>
<td>2,014</td>
<td>1,909</td>
<td>1,863</td>
<td>1,860</td>
<td>1,953</td>
<td>1,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torfaen</td>
<td>2,810</td>
<td>2,702</td>
<td>2,584</td>
<td>2,513</td>
<td>2,343</td>
<td>2,210</td>
<td>2,164</td>
<td>2,265</td>
<td>2,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vale of Clwyd</td>
<td>2,242</td>
<td>2,229</td>
<td>2,130</td>
<td>1,963</td>
<td>1,836</td>
<td>1,748</td>
<td>1,732</td>
<td>1,764</td>
<td>1,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vale of Glamorgan</td>
<td>2,726</td>
<td>2,766</td>
<td>2,727</td>
<td>2,660</td>
<td>2,516</td>
<td>2,329</td>
<td>2,317</td>
<td>2,370</td>
<td>2,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrexham</td>
<td>1,976</td>
<td>1,963</td>
<td>1,921</td>
<td>1,867</td>
<td>1,740</td>
<td>1,627</td>
<td>1,619</td>
<td>1,676</td>
<td>1,654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ynys Mon</td>
<td>2,144</td>
<td>2,142</td>
<td>2,075</td>
<td>1,934</td>
<td>1,893</td>
<td>1,791</td>
<td>1,780</td>
<td>1,741</td>
<td>1,715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83,174</td>
<td>82,986</td>
<td>80,092</td>
<td>77,157</td>
<td>72,566</td>
<td>68,962</td>
<td>69,210</td>
<td>70,553</td>
<td>69,587</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Jobcentre Plus administrative system.
For external marketing, the expenditure provided is for the MoJ and its agencies but not the NDPBs. Many NDPBs, including but not limited to the Legal Services Board, the Information Commissioner’s Office and the Legal Ombudsman, do not spend any of their budgets on external marketing or informing public policy. Other NDPBs do not record their external marketing expenditure separately from their total communications spend. It would incur disproportionate cost to indentify external marketing expenditure for the NDPBs.

I have provided the information for 2008-09 and 2009-10. Due to changes in the MoJ’s organisational structure it would not be possible to indentify the external marketing expenditure for 2007-08 without incurring disproportionate cost.

The total expenditure on external marketing for MOJ and its agencies (rounded to the nearest million) was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Expenditure (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>4,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Magistrates Courts: Sentencing

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many cases have been brought before each magistrates court in each of the last two years; and how many of those cases resulted in a custodial sentence. [24392]

Mr Blunt: I am placing in the House Library the information requested on how many cases brought before each local justice area in each of the last two years (2008 and 2009 latest available); and how many resulted in a custodial sentence. The tables include defendants proceeded against, found guilty, sentenced and a sentence breakdown, including those given a custodial sentence.

The lowest level at which sentencing data are collected is at local justice area. local justice areas are used to determine which magistrates courts may hear a particular case.

Prisoners: Self-Harm

Mrs Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many incidents of self-harm were recorded amongst (a) male and (b) female prisoners in the most recent year for which figures are available. [24566]

Mr Blunt: The information requested is in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-harm incidents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male and Female</td>
<td>24,114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals self-harming1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male and Female</td>
<td>6,977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5,403</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The numbers of different individuals are based on prison numbers. An individual who was in prison custody on two occasions during a year but with two different numbers would be counted twice if he/she had self harmed at least once each time.

Data Sources and Quality:
These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems. Care is taken when processing and analysing the returns but the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system. Although the figures are shown to the last individual the figures may not be accurate to that level.

NOMS has a broad, integrated and evidence-based prisoner suicide prevention and self harm management strategy that seeks to reduce the distress of all those in prison. This encompasses a wide spectrum of Prison and Department of Health work around such issues as mental health, substance misuse and resettlement. Any prisoner identified as at risk of suicide or self-harm is cared for using the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) procedures.

Prisoners: Taxation

Karl Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what discussions he has had with HM Revenue and Customs on the taxation of the earnings of prisoners who undertake paid work in prison. [24177]

Mr Blunt: I have not had any discussions with HM Revenue and Customs on this matter. The average earnings of prisoners undertaking paid work in prison are £9.60 per week.

Prisons

Mrs Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what proportion of children in (a) England and Wales, (b) London and (c) the South East have at least one parent in prison. [24563]

Mr Blunt: The Ministry of Justice does not hold data on the proportion of children in (a) England and Wales, (b) London and (c) the South East who have at least one parent in prison. However, according to a self-report survey of 1,435 adult prisoners sentenced to between one month and four years in England and Wales in 2005-06, 54% of prisoners had children under the age of 18 at the time of imprisonment.

Prisons: Crimes of Violence

Mrs Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many incidents of attacks on (a) prison staff and (b) prisoners were recorded in prisons where the victim (i) was and (ii) was not hospitalised in each of the last 10 years; [24561]

(2) how many incidents of attacks on (a) prison staff and (b) prisoners were recorded in prisons where (i) a weapon and (ii) no weapon was used in each of the last 10 years. [24562]

Mr Blunt: The information requested is set out in the following tables.
### Recorded prisoner-on-staff and prisoner-on-prisoner assaults by hospitalisation: 2000-09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual assaults requiring hospital visit</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoner on staff: hospital visit</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoner on staff: No hospital visit</td>
<td>2,168</td>
<td>2,673</td>
<td>2,832</td>
<td>2,858</td>
<td>3,154</td>
<td>3,459</td>
<td>3,487</td>
<td>3,236</td>
<td>3,172</td>
<td>2,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total assaults on staff</td>
<td>2,192</td>
<td>2,700</td>
<td>2,851</td>
<td>2,893</td>
<td>3,204</td>
<td>3,502</td>
<td>3,530</td>
<td>3,273</td>
<td>3,211</td>
<td>2,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoner-on-prisoner: hospital visit</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoner-on-prisoner: No hospital visit</td>
<td>7,087</td>
<td>7,862</td>
<td>8,604</td>
<td>8,837</td>
<td>9,280</td>
<td>10,667</td>
<td>11,332</td>
<td>11,845</td>
<td>12,631</td>
<td>11,988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total assaults prisoner-on-prisoner assaults</td>
<td>7,210</td>
<td>7,980</td>
<td>8,742</td>
<td>9,003</td>
<td>9,467</td>
<td>10,892</td>
<td>11,530</td>
<td>12,018</td>
<td>12,834</td>
<td>12,147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The hospital attendances in this table refer to those arising immediately from assault incidents. They do NOT include other types of hospital attendance such as A and E or overnight visits nor do they include any subsequent hospital visits that may be required to continue treatment.

2 The majority of assault incidents do not involve weapons. Of those that do most involve items that may be found to hand. Relatively few involve an actually designed for purpose weapon.

### Recorded prisoner-on-staff and prisoner-on-prisoner assaults by weapon-use: 2000-09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual assaults where weapon was use</td>
<td>1,111</td>
<td>1,093</td>
<td>1,178</td>
<td>1,529</td>
<td>1,380</td>
<td>1,637</td>
<td>1,686</td>
<td>1,786</td>
<td>1,732</td>
<td>1,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoner on staff: Weapon used2</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoner on staff: No weapon used</td>
<td>1,867</td>
<td>2,383</td>
<td>2,543</td>
<td>2,437</td>
<td>2,813</td>
<td>3,053</td>
<td>3,070</td>
<td>2,840</td>
<td>2,777</td>
<td>2,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total assaults on staff</td>
<td>2,192</td>
<td>2,700</td>
<td>2,851</td>
<td>2,893</td>
<td>3,204</td>
<td>3,502</td>
<td>3,530</td>
<td>3,273</td>
<td>3,211</td>
<td>2,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoner-on-prisoner: Weapon used2</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>1,091</td>
<td>1,003</td>
<td>1,189</td>
<td>1,229</td>
<td>1,368</td>
<td>1,326</td>
<td>1,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoner-on-prisoner: No weapon used</td>
<td>6,413</td>
<td>7,190</td>
<td>7,852</td>
<td>7,912</td>
<td>8,464</td>
<td>9,703</td>
<td>10,301</td>
<td>10,650</td>
<td>11,508</td>
<td>10,941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total assaults prisoner-on-prisoner assaults</td>
<td>7,210</td>
<td>7,980</td>
<td>8,742</td>
<td>9,003</td>
<td>9,467</td>
<td>10,892</td>
<td>11,530</td>
<td>12,018</td>
<td>12,834</td>
<td>12,147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mr Blunt: The market value of drugs varies widely between regions and over periods of time. Information on the value of drugs seized in prisons is not routinely available.

### Prisons: Drugs

**Mrs Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps he is taking to reduce the incidence of (a) drug and (b) mobile telephone smuggling in prisons.

**Mr Blunt:** Prisons deploy a robust and comprehensive range of security measures to reduce drug supply. These include the use of drug detection dogs, close working with the police, CCTV, use of more effective intelligence systems and mandatory drug testing.

NOMS has implemented a strategy to 'minimise' the number of mobile phones entering prisons, to 'find' phones that do get in and to 'disrupt' mobile phones that cannot be found.

Drug misuse in prisons, as measured by random mandatory drug testing, has declined by 68% since 1996-97.

**Mrs Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what monetary value of drugs of each class was seized on the prison estate in each of the last five years.

**Mr Blunt:** The market value of drugs varies widely between regions and over periods of time. Information on the value of drugs seized in prisons is not routinely available.

### Prisons: Young People

**Mrs Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many young adults entered the prison system for the first time in each of the last three years.

**Mr Blunt:** The table shows figures for offenders receiving their first immediate custodial sentence at the age of 18 to 20, as recorded on the police national computer. These figures are derived from table 6.3 of “Sentencing Statistics: England and Wales 2009” which was published on 21 October 2010.

Offenders aged 18-20 receiving an immediate custodial sentence for an indictable offence, with no previous custodial sentences, 2007 to 2009, England and Wales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of offenders aged 18-20 sentenced to immediate custody</th>
<th>Number of offenders aged 18-20 receiving their first immediate custodial sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>12,601</td>
<td>5,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>12,524</td>
<td>5,791</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer of 18 October 2010, Official Report, column 541W, on rape: victim support schemes, what funding will be available for (a) existing and (b) new rape crisis centres in the comprehensive spending review period.

Mr Blunt: The commitment to provide long-term, sustainable funding to existing rape crisis centres and to establish new centres where need is most acute remains a priority for the Government.

Following the conclusion of the comprehensive spending review and the allocation of the departmental settlement, work is ongoing within the Ministry of Justice to finalise budgets, including funds allocated to the rape crisis commitment.

An announcement on how we will implement the commitment will be made in the new year.

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he made of the likely effects of the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review on reoffending rates.

Mr Blunt: The Government believe that by introducing more effective sentencing policies and rehabilitative services we can deliver greater reductions in reoffending, deter future crime and protect the public. We will publish our proposals for a new approach to sentencing and rehabilitation, and how we will deliver more for less, in a Green Paper to be published in December. The Green Paper will be open to public consultation. We are conducting a full impact assessment of these proposals.

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the average cost to the public purse was of detaining an offender in a young offender’s institution (YOI) for young people aged 15 to 18. These figures are for the last three financial years.

Mr Blunt: Tables 1 to 3 provides the average cost per place in a young offender’s institution (YOI) for young people aged 15 to 18. These figures are for the last three financial years.

The figures provided are not intended to represent the total cost of providing custody and related services to young people. The calculation is based upon allocated budget funding at the beginning of the relevant financial years, rather than actual expenditure at the close of those years.

While the methodology for calculating costs are the same for 2010-11 and 2009-10, it differs for 2008-09 and therefore caution should be taken when directly comparing the costs for 2008-09 with subsequent years.

Where—due to changes in commissioning and budgetary responsibilities across Government and agencies—the costs include different funding streams, the notes on the bottom of each table detail this.

The figures provided have been rounded to the nearest £1,000.

Notes:
1. These are costs to the Youth Justice Board (YJB) as at 1 April 2010. They are not intended to represent the total cost of providing custody and related services to young people—specific exclusions follow.
2. Differences in the YJB funding streams included for these 2010-11 costs from the costs published for 1 April 2009 (2009-10 costs) are that:
The YJB no longer funds education in public YOIs (see note 6);
YJB funding for Advocacy Services is included (see note 4);
YJB funding for services provided by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation is included (see note 6).
3. These figures do not include VAT on Private YOI places.
4. Advocacy Services funded by the YJB are included in YOI costs.
5. These costs do not include YJB funding to National Offender Management Service (NOMS) prisoner escort management (PEM) for the provision of prison escort and custodial services (PECS) for young people.
6. For the YOI cost:
As of 1 April 2010, the YJB is no longer responsible for the budget for education funding and so this cost is not included in the above;
The YJB is not responsible for health funding budgets—except where specific services are commissioned (i.e. at the Keppel Unit)—and so the cost of health services in not included in the above;
For public YOIs, NOMS estimated that central overhead costs (excluding those for the Young People’s Team) apportionable to the YJB at £7.601 million; the cost above uses the actual funding received from MOJ for these overheads of £5.070 million.
For public YOIs, the NOMS business rates, maintenance charges, capital charges and overheads for these charges have been estimated based upon 2009-10 levels and inflated;
YJB funding for the Lucy Faithfull Foundation is included.

Notes:
1. These figures do not include VAT on private YOI places.
2. The education costs paid to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is the agreed funding amount as at 1 April 2009 and is included. (The contracts were refreshed from August 2009).
3. Contributions to primary care trusts (PCTs) are at 2008-09 rates (no uplift has been applied to these) and is included.
4. The NOMS business rates, maintenance and capital charge elements of the public YOI costs have been included for 2009-10.
5. JASP (Juvenile Awareness Staff Programme) funding is included.
Through the Cancer Drugs Fund, we will give cancer patients better access to the drugs that their clinicians believe will help them, and on 1 October, we allocated £50 million to the NHS to enable cancer patients to access appropriate drugs now. Following the spending review, we have committed £200 million per year for the drugs fund for the next three years, and are consulting on proposals for establishment of the fund.

We are also undertaking a review of the CRS to ensure that we have the right strategy to deliver improved outcomes for cancer patients including survival and mortality. We plan to publish the report later this winter.

Cancer: Health Services

Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his most recent estimate is of the cost to the public purse of an emergency hospital admission for a patient whose primary diagnosis is haematological cancer; [24101]

(2) what his most recent estimate is of the cost to the public purse of an emergency admission to hospital in each NHS trust area of a patient whose primary diagnosis is haematological cancer; [24102]

(3) what his most recent estimate is of the average length of hospital stay for an emergency admission of a patient whose primary diagnosis is haematological cancer. [24103]

Paul Burstow: For 2008-09, the average length of hospital stay for an emergency admission of a patient whose primary diagnosis was haematological cancer was 10.7 days. This is the latest period for which statistics are available.

Information on the average cost to the public purse of an emergency admission for a patient whose primary diagnosis is haematological cancer cannot be provided at national or trust level because the Department does not collect costs to the public purse by primary diagnosis.

The Department collects the costs to national health service providers of providing standard groupings of clinically similar treatments, known as healthcare resource groups (HRGs). Information on the estimated costs, at both national and trust level, of a non-elective admission for the HRGs that represent haematological procedures and disorders in 2008-09 has been placed in the Library. This does not include the costs of chemotherapy, which cannot be separately identified by primary diagnosis.

Childbirth

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many births he expects there to be in NHS facilities in each of the next five years; and what estimate he has made of the number and proportion of such births which will require specialist care. [24226]

Anne Milton: Information is not available in the format requested. Maternity services are planned at a local level, rather than national level, to ensure they are responsive to local need.

In 2009 there were 663,490 maternity episodes in England of which 641,832 (approx 96.7%) were births in national health service hospitals. In 2009, there

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secure estate sector</th>
<th>Average price per place per year as at 1 April 2008 (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YOI (not including private)</td>
<td>59,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. This figure is based upon YJB funding for Prison Service (public) YOI places—it does not include private YOI places commissioned at HMYOIs Ashfield and Parc.
2. The NOMS capital charges and business rates are included, but not maintenance charges.
3. The YJB contribution to PCT funding for health care is included.
4. The YJB contribution towards LSC funding for education is included.

HEALTH

Atos Healthcare

James Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the reasons were for the cancellation of contracts between his Department and Atos Healthcare in the last five years. [24068]

Paul Burstow: The Department engaged Atos Healthcare as its provider of Occupational Health Services from October 2006 to June 2010.

The period of Atos’ contract ended, as planned, and the Department’s Occupational Health provision was re-tendered through a full competitive Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) procurement exercise.

Breast Cancer

Jeremy Lefroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further steps he plans to take to reduce mortality from breast cancer; and if he will make a statement. [24145]

Paul Burstow: Steps to reduce mortality from breast cancer will be taken through our public health strategy, cancer drugs fund and refreshed cancer reform strategy.

Lifestyle behaviours such as smoking, the harmful use of alcohol, drug misuse, poor diet and nutrition, being overweight and physical inactivity are acknowledged risk factors for a number of chronic diseases, including breast cancer. Later this year, we will publish a Public Health White Paper setting out details of our strategy for improving public health and reducing the risk factors associated with developing conditions such as breast cancer.

Diagnosing cancer earlier is also important in reducing mortality. Experts estimate that the NHS Breast Screening Programme saves 1,400 lives per year by diagnosing cancer earlier. The Cancer Reform Strategy (CRS) included the commitment that the NHS Breast Screening Programme would be extended to women aged 47 to 73. In June this year, we confirmed in the “Revision to the NHS Operating Framework 2010-11” that all local breast screening programmes should begin the extension in 2010-11 ensuring that more women have the opportunity to benefit from the screening service.

In September, as part of the National Awareness and Early Diagnosis Initiative, we announced that £9 million would be provided to support 59 campaigns that will work to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of breast, bowel and lung cancers and to encourage early presentation at a general practitioner surgery.
were 43,786 admissions into neonatal care, which amounts to some 7% of the total number of births in NHS hospitals.

**Circumcision**

Andrea Leadsom: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons the NHS funds non-medical circumcisions; and if he will issue guidance to healthcare commissioners on the priority to be accorded to such procedures. [24114]

Paul Burstow: The national health service normally only performs circumcision where medically indicated. However, a primary care trust has a duty to protect the health of the public in their area and may decide to ensure that a safe and affordable male circumcision service is available in other circumstances, where there are concerns about harm to patients. There are currently no plans for the Secretary of State to issue guidance to health care commissioners on male circumcision.

**Dementia**

Hazel Blears: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons his Department’s estimated expenditure on dementia research declined from 2.9 per cent. in 2007-08 to 1.4 per cent. in 2009-10 of expenditure from the research and development revenue budget. [24433]

Paul Burstow: The figures show a decline in dementia research funding which reflects a more transparent and accurate method for assessing disease-specific research and development (R and D) spend.

Prior to the establishment of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) in April 2006, the main part of the Department’s total health expenditure was devolved to and managed by national health service organisations. From April 2006 to March 2009, transitional research funding was allocated to these organisations at reducing levels. At the same time, an increasing amount of NHS research funding was awarded competitively through new NIHR programmes and schemes.

The NHS organisations reported on their use of these allocations in annual R and D reports, and each report included a figure of research spend on degenerative neurological disorders. These figures have been included in the Department’s estimates of total annual spend on dementia research up to 2008-09.

**Departmental Manpower**

Mr Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many members of staff were employed in the Ministerial correspondence unit of his Department in each of the last two years. [24016]

Anne Milton: The customer service centre uses a significant proportion of non-permanent workers within the correspondence teams in order to maintain maximum flexibility to meet the Department’s targets for responding to correspondence. Therefore, the number of staff in post at any one time fluctuates on a daily basis.

At 1 April 2009 there were 56.7 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in post working in the customer service centre correspondence unit of which 32.2 were permanent FTE staff and 24.5 were agency staff filling FTE posts.

At 1 April 2010, there were 57.94 full-time equivalent staff in post of which 33.74 were permanent FTE staff and 24.2 were agency staff filling FTE posts. The correspondence unit processes, on average, 86,000 pieces of correspondence per year.

**Departmental Official Hospitality**

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much his Department spent on hospitality for events hosted by each of his Ministers in (a) September and (b) October 2010; [21783]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of its expenditure on travel undertaken by (a) him and (b) each other Minister in his Department in (i) September and (ii) October 2010. [21855]

Anne Milton: The information held on the Department’s business management system is as shown in the following table. Due to retrospective billing by the Government Car Service, and the procedures employed by the Department which score expenditure on the system in the month in which an invoice is processed and paid, the figures do not necessarily relate to the costs incurred in the months in question.

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1 Of this total, £10,633.15 represents the one-off "early surrender charge" made by the Government Car Service to the Department in response to the current Secretary of State’s decision to give up his allocated Government car, and a further £7,027.38 represents the July monthly charge incurred during the notice period. In line with the new Ministerial Code, Ministers at the Department have given up their allocated cars and drivers and the existing contracts, which were subject to a 90-day contract termination period, ended on the 19 August 2010. However, due to retrospective billing invoices are still being received for this period as is also reflected in the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Anne Milton) and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State’s (Earl Howe) travel and subsistence costs shown above.
Direct Payments

Ms Bagshawe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of adult social care users in receipt of direct payments in (a) each region, (b) each local authority area and (c) total in each of the last three years. [23943]

Paul Burstow: Data on the number of adult social care users and carers in receipt of direct payments are collected and published by the NHS Information Centre for health and social care.

The following table shows the number of service users and carers receiving direct payments at a council, regional and England level for the last three years. The 2009-10 data are provisional with final data expected to be published in early 2011.

Information on carers receiving direct payments was not collected for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008.

Table 1: Estimated number of service users and carers receiving direct payments during the period April to March

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<th>2009-10</th>
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<td>Carers</td>
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<td>All carers caring for a person aged 18 and over receiving direct payments</td>
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### Table 1: Estimated number of service users and carers receiving direct payments during the period April to March

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<th>2008-09</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
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Eastern

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<td>All carers caring for a person aged 18 and over receiving direct payments</td>
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London

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<td>Clients aged 18 and over receiving direct payments</td>
<td>All carers caring for a person aged 18 and over receiving direct payments</td>
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### Table 1: Estimated number of service users and carers receiving direct payments during the period April to March

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<th>Councils with social services responsibilities</th>
<th>Service users</th>
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Consortia are likely to carry out a number of commissioning activities themselves. In other cases, consortia may choose to act collectively, with a lead commissioner negotiating and monitoring contacts with large hospital trusts or with urgent care providers. They may also choose to buy in support from external organisations, including local authorities and private and voluntary sector bodies, which might include analytical activity to profile and stratify healthcare needs, support for procurement of services, and contract monitoring.

We will be working with GPs and other healthcare professionals to look at how GP consortia will ensure any company brought in to support commissioning is both competent and suitable.

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the likely effects of EU legislation on the implementation of his proposals for GP commissioning. [24291]

Anne Milton: The coalition Government will ensure that the reform proposals set out in the White Paper comply with European Union law, particularly in relation to competition and state aid.

Julie Hilling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what processes he plans to put in place to enable patients to raise concerns regarding serious misconduct on the part of their GP following the abolition of primary care trusts; what the process will be for suspending GPs when such concerns are found to be of sufficient (a) merit and (b) importance to warrant suspension; and what arrangements will be put in place to provide care for the patient while investigations are completed. [24293]

Mr Simon Burns: Currently a NHS complaint may be made to either the local practice or the commissioning body. The reformed NHS complaints arrangements were put in place in 2009, following a widespread public consultation, and it is envisaged that the underlying principles will remain as responsibility for commissioning services shifts to commissioning consortiums and the NHS Commissioning Board.

The National Health Service (Performers Lists) Regulations 2004 provide for primary care trusts (PCTs) to manage suspension of general practitioners. Following the abolition of PCTs, it will be the responsibility of the NHS Commissioning Board to ensure that patients continue to have access to primary medical services. The detailed arrangements for the management of Performers Lists are currently being considered by Ministers and departmental officials.

Julie Hilling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what processes his Department will ensure (a) probity, (b) quality of service and (c) cost effectiveness when GPs are commissioning services which they also provide; which body will monitor such contracts; and how his Department plans to report to the House on the probity and value for money of such arrangements. [24294]

Paul Burstow: The NHS Commissioning Board will have the statutory responsibility for commissioning of general practitioner (GP) services. Where GP consortia commission services, the NHS Commissioning Board will hold them to account for delivering outcomes and financial performance. In addition, as outlined in the consultation document ‘Regulating Healthcare Providers’, the Government will set out in legislation the duties of the NHS Board and Commissioners to act transparently and non-discriminatorily in all commissioning activities. This will be particularly important where GP consortia are commissioning services that could potentially be provided by GP practices.

Monitor will have powers to investigate and remedy complaints regarding commissioners’ procurement decisions, or other anticompetitive conduct, acting as arbiter. The NHS Commissioning Board and Monitor will be required to report annually on the effectiveness of commissioning and economic regulation in the national health service respectively. These reports will also be laid before Parliament.

Health Education: Teenage Pregnancy

Amber Rudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to educate young people about the health problems associated with teenage pregnancy. [19000]

Sarah Teather: I have been asked to reply.

Evidence shows that children born to teenage mothers have a 60% higher risk of infant mortality; and 25% higher risk of low birth weight—which is a predictor for poorer health outcomes in later life. The key factors that contribute to these poor outcomes are:

- later engagement with antenatal services, including lower rates of attendance at antenatal education;
- poorer diet during pregnancy;
- higher rates of smoking during pregnancy; and
- lower rates of breastfeeding.

Teenage mothers also experience poorer emotional health and well-being, with rates of post-natal depression three times higher than those for older mothers.

All secondary schools are required to provide sex education. This provides the opportunity to raise awareness of these issues among all young people. But the extent to which schools cover the specific health risks associated with teenage pregnancy will vary, depending on teachers’ assessment of their students’ needs. SRE is a broad topic and curriculum time is limited. The fact that less than 1% of under-16s conceive each year means that schools may not see this issue as a priority for their students.

Once a young woman has become pregnant and decides to have the baby, we would expect them to receive high quality antenatal care, which highlights the importance of a healthy lifestyle during pregnancy and the risk of poor outcomes if, for example, mothers continue to smoke during their pregnancy. In some areas, specially tailored antenatal services are available for young parents, in recognition that they have particular needs that may not be met through all-age services.

After the birth, we would expect vulnerable young mothers to receive support through children’s centres which will be focusing on the most disadvantaged families and through the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) programme in the 56 local areas where it operates. FNP recognises that first-time young mothers are more likely to need additional practical and emotional support to deal with the challenges of parenthood.
Health Services: Terrorism

Dan Byles: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 8 November 2010, Official Report, column 148W, on hospitals: infectious diseases, what estimate he has made of the minimum number of isolation beds required for the UK to respond to a potential biological attack utilising one or more highly infectious diseases. [23868]

Anne Milton: The minimum number of isolation beds required for the UK to respond to a potential biological attack, involving one or more highly infectious diseases, is based in part on the threat outlined in the National Risk Assessment (NRA). The NRA is a classified annual assessment of the risks (accidents, natural events and malicious attacks) facing the United Kingdom over a five-year period. As such, it is not appropriate to publish the details of estimates and available capacity for any given risk.

Hospitals: Waiting Lists

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were on NHS waiting lists in each of the last nine months; and what estimate he has made of the change in the number of patients on waiting lists over the next five years. [24227]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department collects and publishes monthly national statistics data on national health service referral to start of treatment waiting times and the number of patients still waiting to start treatment.

The number of patients who had not yet started their treatment at the end of each of the last nine months is shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Referral to treatment (RTT): Incomplete pathways</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
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<td>December</td>
<td>2,365,316</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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<td>January</td>
<td>2,315,060</td>
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<td>February</td>
<td>2,337,098</td>
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<td>March</td>
<td>2,420,535</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>2,513,586</td>
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<td>May</td>
<td>2,573,895</td>
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<td>June</td>
<td>2,569,098</td>
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<td>July</td>
<td>2,656,614</td>
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<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>2,654,816</td>
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What matters to patients is how long they wait before starting treatment. Latest RTT data for August 2010 show that the median referral to start of treatment waiting times were 8.3 weeks for patients admitted to hospital for treatment and 4.4 weeks for non-admitted patients (patients whose treatment did not involve an admission to hospital).

Clinical priority is—and remains—the main determinant of when patients should be treated. Patients should not experience undue delay at any stage of their treatment and would not expect a return to long waiting times for operations.

Locums: Expenditure

Charlotte Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his estimate is of NHS spending on hospital locum doctors in each primary care trust area in (a) 2007-08 and (b) 2009-10; [24546]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the effect of the EU Working Time Directive on levels of expenditure on hospital locum doctors; and if he will make a statement. [24584]

Anne Milton: This information is not collected centrally. Costs of employing locums can be incurred for a variety of reasons e.g. maternity cover and to cover illness or holiday breaks and it is impossible to identify the reason locum cover is provided.

NHS: Finance

Andrea Leadsom: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to ensure that hospital trusts bill commissioners appropriately for the health care services they provide in order to reduce differential pricing between age groups for the same consultations and procedures. [24110]

Mr Simon Burns: Under Payment by Results, acute hospital trusts invoice commissioners a national tariff, which is a list of fixed prices. For the average acute hospital trust, tariff income represents around 50% of total income. The currency, or unit of payment, for the admitted patient care tariff is the healthcare resource group (HRG). HRGs are standard groupings of clinically similar treatments which use similar levels of health care resource, and where appropriate there are different prices for different age groups. The tariff is explained in ‘A simple guide to Payment by Results’, which has been placed in the Library and is available at: www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_119985

NHS: ICT

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to (a) his Department, (b) NHS Connecting for Health and (c) the National Programme for IT was of employing a team of information security architects in each year since the National Programme for IT began. [24574]

Paul Burstow: Since it came into being in April 2005, NHS Connecting for Health has been responsible, within the Department, both for central expenditure necessary for ensuring delivery of systems and services under the national programme for information technology (NPfIT), and for maintaining the critical business systems previously provided to the national health service by the former NHS Information Authority.

Relevant expenditure in the years for which information is readily available is shown in the following table.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>£000</th>
<th>2006-07</th>
<th>2007-08</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
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<tr>
<td>NPfIT</td>
<td>1,973</td>
<td>3,040</td>
<td>2,103</td>
<td>857</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other NHS</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>517</td>
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<td>Connecting for Health</td>
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4. Information prior to 2006-07 for NPfIT was held by the NHS.

3. Figures exclude office and other employment costs, and expenses (e.g. travel and subsistence) payments.

2. Figures include national insurance and pension contributions for permanent staff, and VAT, where applicable, for expenditure on contractor staff.

1. No dedicated team of information security architects has been employed. Figures relate to staff working in the role of information security architect in the period.

Notes:

1. No dedicated team of information security architects has been employed. Figures relate to staff working in the role of information security architect in the period.

2. Figures include national insurance and pension contributions for permanent staff, and VAT, where applicable, for expenditure on contractor staff.

3. Figures exclude office and other employment costs, and expenses (e.g. travel and subsistence) payments.

4. Information prior to 2006-07 for NPfIT was held by the NHS Information Authority, which was abolished in March 2005.

NHS: Manpower

Nicola Blackwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the likely effect of the outcomes of the comprehensive spending review on the number of NHS (a) managers, (b) frontline staff, (c) junior doctors and (d) nurses. [24091]

Mr Simon Burns: The precise number of national health service managers, frontline staff, junior doctors and nurses required over the next five years will not be known until the new organisations that will underpin the new system have been designed in more detail.

The Department has consulted on how the new organisations should be designed and is analysing responses. Information on how the new organisations should be designed will be announced in due course.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists he expects to be working in the NHS in each of the next five years. [24216]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department is currently undertaking a dental workforce review, which will include a sample survey of dentists’ working patterns and career plans. Initial results should be available next spring.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many midwives he expects to be employed in the NHS in each of the next five years. [24218]

Anne Milton: It is the responsibility of strategic health authorities (SHAs) to commission their work force. SHAs base their decisions for work force planning on assessment of their local national health service organisations. The local NHS organisations are best placed to determine work force needs.

The coalition Government value the contribution by the maternity work force and SHAs are considering the number of maternity staff needed to deliver safe maternity services which extend maternity choice.

A national assessment will be made as part of the operating framework assurance process.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners he expects to be employed in the NHS in each of the next five years. [24219]

Mr Simon Burns: The White Paper makes it clear that accountability for decisions affecting work force supply and demand needs to sit in the right place, with employers having greater autonomy for planning and developing the work force alongside greater professional ownership of the quality of education and training.

The number of general practitioners employed by the national health service in each of the next five years will depend on local plans.

NHS: Social Enterprises

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what conditions applications under the right to request scheme for NHS organisations are granted. [24290]

Paul Burstow: Applications under the right to request scheme are assessed by primary care trusts, and assured by strategic health authorities, against a national assurance framework. The assurance framework includes assessment of service development plans, financial planning and viability, and staff engagement.

Paediatrics

Ben Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to support the development of patient education for children in paediatric wards. [24509]

Anne Milton: Patient education programmes are essential to securing optimal management of illnesses in children, particularly where a clear understanding of ongoing treatment is necessary for the prevention and mitigation of morbidity associated with the illness. The Department is currently supporting production of dedicated patient information leaflets as a key practical guide for parents and young people. The leaflets will be accessible through NHS Choices, and can be an option for downloading in paediatric wards as a part of the discharge procedure.

Palliative Care

Mr Robin Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanism he plans to put in place for (a) commissioning, (b) monitoring and (c) auditing procedures to ensure GP consortia provide high-quality care and support for terminally-ill patients. [24174]

Paul Burstow: The Government’s reform proposals are about placing the power and responsibility to commission health services in the hands of national health service professionals who see and talk to patients every day, and know the most about their needs. As such, consortia will be better placed to efficiently commission high-quality services for all, including terminally ill patients.

An independent NHS Commissioning Board will support consortia, helping them commission for continuous improvements in the quality of all NHS funded services, including those for the terminally ill. The Board will do this by, for example, producing Commissioning Guidance to which consortia should have regard. The Board will also promote choice and patient engagement, help to reduce health inequalities, hold general practitioner consortia to account, directly commission certain services including primary medical care, and allocate and account for NHS resources.
Liberating the NHS was the start of an extensive consultation on how best to implement these changes. A number of supporting documents were published and in particular, “Liberating the NHS: Commissioning for Patients” invited views on a number of areas of the commissioning agenda. The consultation closed on 11 October, and further details are being worked up as a result of this exercise.

Mr Robin Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what changes in NHS end of life services he envisages as a result of his Department’s commitment to 24/7 community nursing to support terminally-ill patients at home; (2) whether the palliative care funding review will publish an interim report. [24175]

Paul Burstow: The Government have confirmed their commitment to improving quality and choice in palliative and end of life care in ‘Equity and excellence: Liberating the NHS’. This includes the commitment to move towards a national choice offer to support people’s preferences about care at the end of their life.

The Department’s end of life care strategy provides our blueprint for improving end of life care for adults. The strategy encourages the development of services such as improved community services, rapid response services, access to services in the community 24 hours a day, seven days a week and specialist palliative care outreach services, which will allow more people to choose where they are cared for and die. How these services are provided and resourced is for local determination.

The independent Palliative Care Funding Review will make recommendations for a funding system that will cover care provided by the national health service, a hospice or any appropriate provider, and which encourages more community-based care, so people can remain in their own homes, or in a care home. The review is to make its interim report to Ministers this autumn. Whether the report is published is a matter for the review team to determine.

Vaccination: Travel

Charlotte Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of NHS spending on (a) travel vaccinations and (b) travel vaccination clinics in each year since 2005. [24547]

Anne Milton: This information is not held centrally.

Certain vaccinations are provided free of charge for travel in accordance with the National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts) Regulations 2004. General practitioners receive remuneration for providing these services within the ‘global sum’ of the General Medical Services Contract. Some vaccines provided free of charge for travel are also used for occupational health purposes. Financial records held centrally do not separately identify NHS expenditure on travel vaccinations. Financial records held centrally do not separately identify NHS expenditure on travel vaccination clinics.

Incinerators: Health Hazards

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to the answer of 30 November 2010, Official Report, column 539W, on incinerators: health hazards, for what reasons it was decided that the Environment Agency should undertake a review of the health effects of combustion processes, including incineration, in view of the Health Protection Agency advice that studies of public health around modern, well-managed municipal waste incinerators are not recommended. [23872]

Richard Benyon: I have been asked to reply.

The Environment Agency regulates incinerators and other large combustion processes. The review referred to will provide additional evidence to underpin the agency’s role in regulating industrial emissions. It will consider all large combustion processes and any potential effects on health. Emissions from waste incineration are included in the review, although they make up only a small proportion of the total emissions from combustion processes. By contrast, the Health Protection Agency 2009 report addresses emissions from incineration only.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Crown Currency Exchange

Jake Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will commission an investigation into the solvency of Crown Currency Exchange while it was trading; and if he will make a statement. [23953]

Mr Davey: Following the administration of Currency Crown Exchange Ltd on 4 October, officials have been in contact with the administrators, and the failure of this company is under active consideration.

Higher Education Innovation Fund

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what estimate he has made of funding allocations to be made by the Higher Education Innovation Fund in (a) 2010-11, (b) 2011-12, (c) 2012-13, (d) 2013-14 and (e) 2014-15. [23612]

Mr Hayes: The Department is currently forecasting to spend £144.3 million on the higher education innovation fund in financial year 2010-11 (which is £150 million in academic year 2010-11). This grant scheme is administered by the Higher Education Funding Council for England on behalf of BIS.

Future allocations for science and research between the years 2011-12 and 2014-15 will be covered by the spending review 2010 which has recently been announced at a departmental level. Decisions on the detailed allocations have not yet been taken.

Higher Education: Admissions

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if his Department will publish the criteria for the access agreements each university will be expected to sign with the Office for Fair Access. [23671]
Mr Hayes [holding answer 15 November 2010]: The numbers and proportions of first-year undergraduate students who were female are shown in the following table for the academic years 2004/05 to 2008/09. Figures for the 2009/10 academic year will become available from the Higher Education Statistics Agency in January 2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>Number who were female</th>
<th>Proportion who were female (percentage)</th>
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<tr>
<td>2004/05</td>
<td>447,160</td>
<td>59.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005/06</td>
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<td>2008/09</td>
<td>492,640</td>
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1 Covers full-time and part-time undergraduates of all domiciliaries.

Notes:
1. Figures are based on a HESA standard registration population and are rounded to the nearest five.
2. Percentages are given to one decimal place and are based on unrounded figures.

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record

Higher Education: Finance

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what proportion of the Department’s capital expenditure was allocated to (a) London and (b) the North West in each of the last five financial years.

Mr Hayes: The data requested are shown in the following tables, based on the HM Treasury Country and Regional Analysis used for the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses Command Paper (PESA 2010, CM 7890).

<table>
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<th>Regional allocation:</th>
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<td>2007-08</td>
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<td>2009-10</td>
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<table>
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<td>2009-10</td>
<td>612.7</td>
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SG First Minister

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what matters were discussed at that meeting.

Mr Davey: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met with the First Minister of Scotland on 1 June. They discussed various energy related issues and banking reform.

Students: Fees and Charges

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment his Department has made of the likely effects on mature students of the implementation of his proposals for the level of tuition fees.

Mr Hayes [holding answer 12 November 2010]: The Government are committed to delivering a high-quality university sector that is more responsive to the needs of students and which is based on a progressive graduate contribution system. No one should be put off from raising their skills because of a lack of access to finance. In 2008/09, 92% (91.6%) 297,080 of UK-domiciled undergraduate entrants to part-time courses at UK higher education institutions, including the Open University, were mature (21+). Under our proposals for higher education funding, for the first time, eligible part-time students studying at at least one-third the intensity of a full-time course, will be entitled to a full loan for tuition, on the same basis as full-timers.
Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 17 November 2010

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT
UK Film Council: Portland

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer to Question 15057, if he will direct the accounting officer of his Department to examine the appropriateness of the UK Film Council’s contract with Portland.


Letter of correction from Mr Ed Vaizey:

An error has been identified in the response given to the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) on 4 November 2010. It has been noted that the reference to APPC has been set out incorrectly.

The original answer was as follows:

Mr Vaizey: The Department has been assured by the UK Film Council (UKFC) that its contract with Portland was appropriate and consistent with Cabinet Office rules.

Portland has advised that it did not carry out any public affairs work for the UKFC, but did assist with media support, and for the purpose of transparency, listed the UKFC on its Advocate Policy and Public Affairs Consulting (APPC) client list.

In light of this clarification, there are no plans for the Department’s Accounting Officer to investigate further the appropriateness of the UK Film Council’s contract with Portland.

The correct answer should have been:

Mr Vaizey: The Department has been assured by the UK Film Council (UKFC) that its contract with Portland was appropriate and consistent with Cabinet Office rules.

Portland has advised that it did not carry out any public affairs work for the UKFC, but did assist with media support, and for the purpose of transparency, listed the UKFC on its Association of Professional Political Consultants (APPC) client list.

In light of this clarification, there are no plans for the Department’s Accounting Officer to investigate further the appropriateness of the UK Film Council’s contract with Portland.
## WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

### Wednesday 17 November 2010

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