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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 12 March 2012

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12 March 2012

THE PARLIAMETARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 18 MAY 2010]

SIXTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 542

THIRTY-THIRD VOLUME OF SESSION 2010-2012

House of Commons

Monday 12 March 2012

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Council Tax

1. **Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con): What steps he is taking to help reduce the cost of council tax. [98950]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles): Under the last Government, council tax more than doubled. This Government are working with councils to freeze council tax for two years. A recent survey by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy indicates that council tax bills this April will go up by only 0.3%. I would have preferred that amount to be zero, but it is a real-terms reduction for hard-working families and pensioners.

Julian Sturdy: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. What does he make of City of York council's decision to reject a £1.8 million grant from the Government, and instead to needlessly raise council tax instead by 2.9%, thus increasing financial pressures on York residents?

Mr Pickles: I would certainly be willing to take an away-day trip to York, if only to listen on the doorstep while a canvasser explains why getting an additional sum of £294,000 justifies rejecting a £1.8 million grant from the Government. This is clearly not in the interests of York; the council has not protected its council tax payers. I am afraid that, unlike the 300-odd authorities throughout the country that have taken the freeze, this council is going to find itself in a very difficult position.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): What would the Secretary of State say to constituents of mine in Westminster such as the 90-year-old gentleman with glaucoma who is blind in one eye and unable to walk, and a gentleman I met last weekend with Parkinson's disease, who have had their taxi cards removed by Westminster city council and correspondingly have to pay £40 for every single journey they make? As they point out, the amount for every single journey is twice the saving they make from the council tax freeze.

Mr Pickles: I do not know the precise circumstances of the hon. Lady's constituents, but if she would care to write to me with the details, I would happily take up the matter with Westminster council.

Local Suppliers

2. **Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab): If he will encourage local authorities to increase their use of local suppliers in the provision of goods and services. [98953]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill): It is clear that there is significant scope for major savings in local authority procurement from the £62 billion spent each year. By making these savings, we can enhance front-line services, save taxpayers' money and help to pay off the deficit. To encourage that, we are cutting red tape to open up procurement, especially to small and medium-sized firms. While it is up to a local area to decide from whom to procure, local authorities clearly have significant spending power, which should be used to help drive local growth.

Rosie Cooper: Leeds city council has the charter for procuring community benefits, which encourages all current or potential council suppliers to commit to providing added benefit to the local community, particularly in disadvantaged parts of the city. What action will the Minister take to encourage local authorities to take up schemes such as that seen in Leeds to encourage buyers to use local businesses? That would certainly benefit the towns and villages in my area and businesses in West Lancashire.

Robert Neill: The Government have supported the local productivity programme, which has been developed by the local government sector, led by the Local Government Association. We are looking at ways to improve access to tenders and procurement, especially for small and medium-sized firms, including promoting greater use of the online contract finder tool, which is a potential benefit for local British firms.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): The supply of phonic books for Her Majesty's Government is a 95% monopoly of the Oxford University Press and Pearson between them. Does the Minister agree that there would be positive merit in encouraging remaining companies such as Phonic Books Ltd in my constituency to be able to compete with those huge quasi-monopolies by physically seeking to assist them to do so?

Robert Neill: I agree with my hon. Friend. To that end, the Government have been cutting unnecessary procurement red tape—for example, by removing the pre-qualification questionnaires for procurements below £100,000, as I know those requirements have considerably discouraged small businesses from tendering. I hope that councils will follow that lead and will continue to look to other sizes of contracts to improve procurement.

Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): I was recently reading ConservativeHome, as one does. I noticed that the Secretary of State uses it to advise councils to make the best use of taxpayers' money, so what assessment has his Department made of the amount by which council tax payers could benefit from increased local procurement, which could create local jobs and support local businesses?

Robert Neill: I congratulate the hon. Lady on her reading—I was about to say bedtime reading, but I do not know what time she looked at ConservativeHome, although I am sure that the experience was encouraging and enjoyable.

As I have said, we are working on a raft of schemes. We have introduced a new code of recommended practice on data transparency, we are introducing new checks and balances on procurement cards, we are working with the local government sector to encourage initiatives such as the Welland procurement unit in the east midlands, and our Spend Pro analysis can identify areas of comparative spend and areas for efficiencies and savings.

Universal Credit (Housing)

3. **Margot James** (Stourbridge) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on direct payments to tenants for the housing element of universal credit. [98954]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Stunell): We are working with the Department for Work and Pensions, local authorities and housing associations on direct payment demonstration projects, and developing a successful process for paying universal credit directly to tenants which will encourage tenants to manage their own budgets.

Margot James: There are 23,000 local authority-owned homes in my borough of Dudley, and the local authority is extremely concerned about the resources that will be required for the collection of payments once housing benefit is paid directly to tenants. Will my hon. Friend seek guidance from the Department for Work and Pensions on what help can be given to authorities?

Andrew Stunell: I can reassure my hon. Friend that the pilot projects are designed precisely to establish whether those concerns are justified or not. Members representing the five areas involved will have received a letter about the projects from the Department for Work and Pensions. Paying tenants directly eases the transition into work, and is already happening in most cases in the private rented sector.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I believe that some 20,000 local authority employees are currently involved in the delivery of housing benefit. What will happen to them when housing benefit is absorbed into universal credit in 18 months' time?

Andrew Stunell: In October 2013 a start will be made on the transfer with new claimants, and there will then be a progressive integration until 2017. There will be a series of steps as claimants move to universal credit. The demonstration projects will assess all aspects of the delivery of the scheme, and will be reported on to the House in due course.

Mr David Ward (Bradford East) (LD): Is the Minister aware that registered social landlords are already threatened with an increase in borrowing costs as a result of arrears and the cost of collection of the direct payments?

Andrew Stunell: As my hon. Friend will know, housing benefit expenditure has been rising rapidly, from £14 billion 10 years ago to £21 billion now. The reform of that benefit is included in the social security measures that have just been approved by the House.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): It is not just Dudley borough council and the black country that are concerned. So is Birmingham city council, which is the largest authority in Europe. Given that the Minister is running pilots, can he tell us how he will define success?

Andrew Stunell: The pilots are taking place in five different local authorities, including both urban and rural authorities. The purpose of the demonstrations is to ensure that we get the mechanisms, support and financial tools right, so that landlords' financial position is protected and tenants receive the right support.

Unauthorised Development

4. **Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): What plans he has to increase the powers of local authorities to tackle unauthorised development. [98955]

7. **Gavin Williamson** (South Staffordshire) (Con): What plans he has to increase the powers of local authorities to tackle unauthorised development. [98960]

11. **Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): What plans he has to increase the powers of local authorities to tackle unauthorised development. [98964]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles): The Government take the problem of unauthorised development very seriously. Strong powers already exist to enable local planning authorities to take action. Provisions in the Localism Act 2011 will strengthen local planning authorities' powers to tackle the issue, and will come into force on 6 April this year.

Rehman Chishti: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. Planning appeals are costly and bureaucratic, which does not encourage the local planning authority to pursue breaches, and the process frustrates both the community and elected representatives alike. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to address this problem?

Mr Pickles: The new Localism Act makes five substantial changes. The first, and most obvious, is that it will no longer be possible to appeal an enforcement and make a retrospective planning application at the same time. Secondly, the issue of permission being granted when there has been concealment beyond the normal period will be addressed, so that, for instance, if somebody builds a bungalow behind a haystack, the fact that it has been there for longer than three years will make no difference in respect of enforcement. We will also be able to offer letters of comfort to landowners who are not involved in unauthorised action, and we are increasing penalties—and we are increasing penalties with regard to fly-posting and unauthorised advertising, too.

Gavin Williamson: We in South Staffordshire have to deal with the problem of illegal Gypsy and Traveller sites. Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that these powers will help local councils such as mine deal more effectively and quickly with such sites?

Mr Pickles: Certainly, these powers will help, along with the new planning guidance on Gypsy and Traveller sites, but it is important to understand that the new measures will help not only the planning authority, but Gypsies and Travellers, the vast majority of whom are on legal sites, obey the law and do their best to integrate with their neighbours. Unfortunately, however, a small minority have abused the system, and I get complaints about that from both sides of the House. From 6 April, these new powers will help, and it is to be hoped that we can once again have a much more level playing field.

Mr Marcus Jones: I have always believed in the right to protest, but does my right hon. Friend agree that nobody should have the right to set up permanent squats, such as those we have seen in Parliament square and at St Paul's over recent years?

Mr Pickles: My hon. Friend makes a very reasonable point. As he will be aware, we recently amended legislation to give councils stronger powers to use byelaws to tackle tent encampments such as those that blighted Parliament square. I am engaged in discussions with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and am actively looking into other ways in which councils and police practice and powers can be strengthened.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): In Bristol, the problem is not so much that the planning department lacks the powers; rather, it is that it lacks the willpower to take enforcement action. Many constituents come to me utterly frustrated that dwelling houses are being built in people's back gardens, clearly by flaunting the planning guidance. What can be done to address this problem?

Mr Pickles: The hon. Lady makes a very reasonable point about these so-called beds in sheds. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Local Government recently had a meeting with a number of local authorities to look into ways in which the problem might be effectively dealt with. The hon. Lady will be pleased to know that there are more than adequate existing powers to deal with it, and as she rightly points out, the issue has been a lack of willpower. One authority—I shall not name it—has, frankly, let this get out of hand in a two-year process, so that the problem is now very difficult indeed to deal with.

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State update the House on when we will receive version two of the national planning policy framework, so that we in this Chamber can enjoy the massive, 180° copper-bottomed U-turn at the same time as the press?

Mr Pickles: The hon. Gentleman may find himself spinning alone on that—but the answer is very soon.

Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): What comfort can the Secretary of State give my constituents, who, like those in Bristol, are affected by a blizzard of small extensions that the local authority never seems to be able to deal with? Surely there must be powers at the centre to get local authorities to take this matter seriously?

Mr Pickles: The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) was referring to the new phenomenon of sheds in people's back gardens, whereby people are often paying over the odds for substandard accommodation in very cramped conditions, and are largely being exploited by their landlords. There is permitted development for some extensions. If the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr Love) feels that there are developments in his constituency that exceed what is permitted, perhaps we could have a word about them outside the Chamber.

Private Rented Sector

5. **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the (a) affordability, (b) length of tenure and (c) standards of housing afforded to tenants in the private rented sector. [98957]

10. **Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the (a) affordability, (b) length of tenure and (c) standards of housing afforded to tenants in the private rented sector. [98963]

The Minister for Housing and Local Government (Grant Shapps): The latest report of the English housing survey was published on 9 February. It shows that rents in the private sector have reduced in real terms, that standards have improved and that only 8% of tenancies are terminated before the tenants chose so choose.

Mr Cunningham: Leaving aside the report, may I ask the Minister what he is doing to drive up standards in the private sector, particularly in relation to rogue landlords?

Grant Shapps: As was indicated in the previous exchange with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I have just held a meeting with the interested parties about rogue landlords. They are a matter of considerable concern, and I will be pulling together all the powers and issuing a booklet on that shortly. The hon. Gentleman rightly asks about the standards, and I can tell him that the number of non-decent homes in the private rented sector has fallen from 47% in 2006 to 37%.

Andrew Gwynne: Given what the Minister has just said, why do his Government seem intent on removing further protections from private tenants, who, in my constituency in particular, are at the mercy of rogue landlords? Should he not be protecting those hard-working tenants and driving up standards in the private rented sector?

Grant Shapps: Although he speaks with great passion, the hon. Gentleman is fundamentally wrong, because I am not removing any of the protections from landlords or tenants in the private rented sector. It is worth remembering that actual measures consistently show that people are happier in the private rented sector than in the social sector, which might surprise him. I can also tell him that 90% of tenancies are ended by the tenant, not by the landlord.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Both the Housing Minister and the Prime Minister, out of touch with reality, have asserted on the Floor of the House of Commons that rents are falling in the private rented sector. An analysis conducted by the House of Commons Library reveals that in 90% of local authorities in England, in all nine regions, rents are rising or staying the same. Will the Housing Minister now admit to the 1.1 million families struggling to pay their rent that he got it wrong?

Grant Shapps: The LSL survey shows that in the three months through to January rents actually fell, but we do not have to believe LSL—[*Interruption.*] There was rightly some scepticism there—LSL measures only buy to let—so let us instead look at the absolutely authoritative figures recently produced by the English housing survey, which show that in real terms rents have fallen in the past year.

Council Tax Benefit Localisation (Stretford and Urmston)

6. **Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of council tax benefit localisation on families in Stretford and Urmston constituency. [98959]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill): An impact assessment is on my Department's website. These reforms will create stronger incentives for councils to get people back into work and will help to pay off the budget deficit we inherited from the previous Administration. This Government are committed to supporting the most vulnerable in society. We have made it clear that pensioners should be protected and that any changes should help to support work incentives.

Kate Green: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. However, the budget for council tax benefit is being cut by 10% from 2013-14, so how can he guarantee that every hour of work will pay for the working poor in my constituency and that they will not be impacted by this budget cut?

Robert Neill: I have made it clear that we intend to protect the most vulnerable, but, equally, the hon. Lady has to recognise that spending on council tax benefit more than doubled between 1997 and 2010. That needs to be reduced as part of the strategy to lower the deficit that we inherited, in order to get the country back on track. We intend to do that in a proportionate and measured fashion, to protect the most vulnerable.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): Is the Minister prepared to apologise to the more than 10,000 people in the local authority area of my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), many of whom are families with children, whose council tax will rise as a direct result of his policy? Given that families in Stretford and Urmston will, like other families, lose an average of £580 a year as a result of changes to be introduced in April and that, scandalously, 930 adults in that constituency alone risk losing all their tax credits if they cannot find extra hours of work, is it not about time the Government abandoned this tax increase for the poorest families, instead of obsessing about cutting tax for those on more than £150,000 a year?

Robert Neill: The apology should come from those who created the record deficit in the first place. The hon. Lady might also like to apologise for the inconsistency in standing at the last general election on a manifesto that promised to cut housing benefit when she says nothing now about how she would make reductions and nothing about how one can reform housing benefit without reforming council tax benefit, which goes hand in hand with it.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I point out to the Chair of the Select Committee that the question relates exclusively to Stretford and Urmston, from which Sheffield South

East is a little distant. The hon. Gentleman is an experienced Member and I am sure that he will tailor his question accordingly.

Mr Betts: I am sure that the Minister will be aware that his proposals on council tax benefits potentially affect Stretford and Urmston and other constituencies up and down the country. The Minister is aware that Capita wrote to local authorities on 12 January, saying it had real concerns about its ability to deliver IT systems in time to meet the changes proposed for April next year. Is the Minister not aware that authorities could end up with a real risk of system failure, affecting tens of thousands of low-income families? Is not the real answer to delay these measures for at least 12 months?

Robert Neill: I have in front of me the letter that Capita sent to all local authorities in the country, and it points out that the reforms are deliverable if we can bring forward the regulations and detailed schemes in time. To that end, we have set up an officer-level working group to discuss these matters with officials from the local government sector.

Private Rented Sector (Young Homebuyers)

8. **Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of the number of properties in the private rented sector on young people attempting to purchase a home. [98961]

The Minister for Housing and Local Government (Grant Shapps): In 2011, in terms of value, buy-to-let mortgages accounted for just 8% of total loans for home purchases. The biggest barrier to home ownership for many young people is not that, but the need to raise a deposit. That is why I know that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the NewBuy scheme, which we launched this morning.

Graham Jones: Obviously, I am aware that over the weekend the Government announced the home buy scheme for new build, which is a shadow of the sub-prime lending that went on previously, so I advise caution. The private rented sector, however, has added about 6% to the value of properties. Does the Minister agree that the issue is rising house prices and the cost of housing, not the availability of mortgages?

Grant Shapps: Just to clarify one point, sub-prime lending happened when people who could not afford to pay a mortgage back were lent money, sometimes as much as 120% of the value of the property. That is nothing to do with today's NewBuy scheme. I know that the hon. Gentleman takes a keen interest in the private rented sector in particular. He makes a lot of very good and serious points about it and I can inform him that this Friday I intend to come and see him in his constituency to see the problems for myself.

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): I wonder what will shake the Housing Minister out of his complacency. Surveys show that 90% of private sector tenants would prefer to be living under another form of tenure, but his policies are trapping more and more people in private rented accommodation, paying ever-increasing rents. Despite his rhetoric, the Housing Minister is failing those tenants and failing to achieve his claims

that this Government would build more homes than Labour achieved. When will he get a grip on this housing crisis and stop making empty announcements that fail to live up to expectations?

Grant Shapps: I have certainly been shaken out of any sense of complacency by that question, given that it came from a member of a party under whose government we saw house building crash to its lowest level since the 1920s. I can report to the House this afternoon that in the past year alone house building starts in England went up by 25% compared with those in 2009.

Empty Homes

9. **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): What steps he is taking to promote the refurbishment of empty and vacant homes. [98962]

12. **Stephen Gilbert** (St Austell and Newquay) (LD): What plans he has to bring empty homes back into use. [98965]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Stunell): Last week we announced £70 million of funding that will bring more than 5,600 homes back into use as affordable housing. That is part of our wider strategy for bringing empty homes back into use, which was set out in the Government's housing strategy for England last autumn.

Peter Aldous: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. The housing department of Waveney district council is doing great work with limited resources, working with the private sector to bring empty homes back into occupation. Will my hon. Friend meet the department and me to find out more about that scheme with a view to its being rolled out across the country?

Andrew Stunell: According to the reports from Waveney district council to the Department, it currently has 983 long-term empty homes, so it certainly has work to do. I would be delighted to meet council representatives in due course to see what they are doing. I encourage every local authority to take full advantage of the new homes bonus that is available for bringing empty homes back into use and of the funding streams of £70 million and a further £50 million that we have announced, details of which will be announced shortly.

Stephen Gilbert: Although I welcome the £120 million that my hon. Friend has just mentioned, he will know that there are 10,000 empty properties in Cornwall, 40% of which have been empty for more than six months. Will he meet me and a representative of Cornwall council to make sure that local and national Government can work together to tackle this scandal in Cornwall?

Andrew Stunell: It looks as though I am in for a few journeys to different corners of the country. I would be delighted to go to Cornwall—or for the hon. Gentleman to bring representatives here. Cornwall has 3,800 long-term empty homes and I very much hope that Cornwall council will take advantage of the incentives that we are offering and that we propose to offer through the empty homes premium.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Your Homes Newcastle tells me that of the 4,000 properties standing empty across the city, 99% are in the private sector. Private landlords often prefer to let them stand empty rather than let them to local families at lower rates than they have demanded from students. Constituents raise this with me all the time; how do I explain to them why the Government have decided to extend to two years the period before which local authorities can take action?

Andrew Stunell: The system for empty dwellings management orders remains in place and they can be brought into effect after two years, but there has been limited use of them so far. However, there are other incentives and penalties that we believe will be more effective more quickly. There is certainly an incentive on local authorities to work hard to bring empty homes into use because they will get a new homes bonus for that. If the consultation we are carrying out moves ahead in the right direction, the empty homes premium will be a strong incentive for home owners to bring their homes into use rather than paying that premium.

Local High Streets

13. **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support local high streets. [98966]

14. **Simon Hart** (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support local high streets. [98967]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles): The independent Portas review covered many issues affecting high streets. We will publish our response in the spring, but in the mean time we have introduced measures to support high streets through business rate relief, and local authorities have new powers to levy business rate discounts.

Andrew Bridgen: As in many town centres across the country, retailers in Coalville in my constituency have struggled in recent years to compete with out-of-town shopping centres. To tackle that decline the North West Leicestershire chamber of commerce has been established to breathe new life into the town. Does my right hon. Friend have any advice or help from central Government for such groups to aid them in their worthy task?

Mr Pickles: That is an excellent undertaking. We sometimes forget that shopping centres are what makes home and are what communities tend to gather around. We have set up a competition to select pilot areas to bring new life into town centres and I hope that my hon. Friend's authority will apply.

Simon Hart: Tenby and Pembroke in my constituency are absolutely critical to the economic recovery in the area but do not always have access to the Government initiatives that are available in England, particularly the Portas pilots. Is the Minister working with the Welsh Assembly to make sure that Welsh high streets are not left behind English high streets?

Mr Pickles: Yes, indeed we are working with the Welsh Assembly and there is a reasonable indication that the Welsh authorities might take up the scheme.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): The Secretary of State will recognise that Mary Portas recommended changing the planning use category for betting shops. There is a mini-Las Vegas appearing across our cities, with teenagers ending up in our betting shops. Will the right hon. Gentleman take the opportunity to do something about it?

Mr Pickles: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. We had an opportunity to walk down the high street together, where he showed me the problem. We are taking action. We are currently consulting on user class and I hope he will take the opportunity to make a powerful case.

Ann Coffey (Stockport) (Lab): Stockport is bidding to become one of the Portas pilots. I am sure the Secretary of State will agree that, with its ancient market and other historic heritage sites, it is uniquely placed to develop a new offer to shoppers, so may I urge him to give his fullest consideration to Stockport's bid?

Mr Pickles: Stockport is indeed close to my heart. It is the very gem of the north-west and I hope it puts up a very good bid, as nothing would give me greater pleasure than to grant that status to this magnificent town.

Duncan Hames (Chippenham) (LD): The Minister can also expect an enthusiastic bid to be a Portas pilot from Chippenham in my constituency. In order to maintain the creative momentum from the Portas review, what plans does he have to reinvest in town centres and high streets more of the business rates that they earn?

Mr Pickles: Chippenham is the apple of my eye, a wonderful town. My hon. Friend makes a reasonable point. Although the Portas review will help, we are giving local authorities the chance to be in the driving seat, to see that where they generate income they will be able to apply that locally. Increasingly, the Government have demonstrated localism, not just by words but by deeds, by shifting the power and particularly by shifting the finance closer to the people.

House Building

15. **Huw Irranca-Davies** (Ogmore) (Lab): What estimate he has made of the number of new homes which will be built in 2012. [98968]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Stunell): The Government do not make forecasts of house building, but we look carefully at what has happened in the past. In 2007 there were 178,000 housing starts. By 2009, the last full year of the previous Government, that had crashed to 78,340. In 2011, the first full year of the coalition Government, it had risen to 98,250—a rise of 25%.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I thank the Minister for that array of facts, but the Housing Minister said that the gold standard by which this Government would be judged was building more houses than Labour, yet,

according to the recorded figures, in the first 18 months of this Government new housing completions are down 11% compared with the last 18 months of the Labour Government. Has the Minister devalued his own gold standard?

Andrew Stunell: In 2011 the figure included 1,500 local authority starts. Interestingly, in 2009 there were only 150 local authority housing starts. Since September the Homes and Communities Agency has completed agreements on 112 social and affordable housing projects worth £1.6 billion. The first of the homes will start on site in April.

New Homes Bonus

16. **Mr Nick Raynsford** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the difference between the number of (a) new homes being built and (b) units qualifying for the new homes bonus; and if he will make a statement. [R] [98969]

The Minister for Housing and Local Government (Grant Shapps): The new homes bonus is calculated in respect of net additions to the effective housing stock, including new build, conversions and empty homes brought back into use.

Mr Raynsford: I draw attention to my interests in the register. I am glad the Minister is beginning to look at the discrepancy in his figures. According to the written answer he gave me on 29 February, in nine local authority areas in England the number of homes qualifying in 2011 for the affordable housing component of the new homes bonus exceeded the total number of homes for which new homes bonus was awarded. As this is clearly total nonsense, will the Minister explain what is going on? Were his statisticians having an off day, or is this another case of the Government not having a clue what they are doing?

Grant Shapps: Unless the right hon. Gentleman is accusing local authorities of being misleading in the paperwork they return, the new homes bonus must surely be, through the council tax base form, the single most accurate way of knowing how many new dwellings there are in this country. I know that he insists that it is something to do with D to H band homes being deregistered and then reregistered as smaller homes, so I have checked the figures and can tell him that they have been falling; the number of deregistrations has gone from 19,000 to 16,000 to 15,000-plus in each of the past three years, categorically disproving his theory once and for all.

Right to Buy

17. **Mr Rob Wilson** (Reading East) (Con): What plans he has to promote the right to buy for tenants of social housing. [98970]

The Minister for Housing and Local Government (Grant Shapps): I have today announced that we will increase the maximum right-to-buy discount cap for tenants to £75,000 across England from 2 April this year, subject to parliamentary approval. The Government are on the side of those who aspire to own their own homes.

Mr Wilson: The previous shadow Secretary of State slammed home ownership as “the English disease”, which is probably one of the reasons right-to-buy sales fell significantly under the previous Government. Does my right hon. Friend agree that home ownership, whether stimulated by the NewBuy guarantee or the right to buy, is not a disease but something that fosters pride and aspiration in our communities?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to explain that the right to buy was savagely cut under the previous Administration, to the point where very few sales went through each year. Today, the coalition Government are reinvigorating and rebooting the right to buy, which will now help up to 100,000 people purchase their own home, with discounts of up to £75,000, and with the money being used to replace them with new homes on a one-for-one basis. That, together with the NewBuy guarantee, will ensure that a further 100,000 people will be able to buy their own home. We are on the side of aspirant people who wish to buy the roof over their heads.

Alison Seabeck (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab): Will the Minister explain and clarify his recent announcement on the £75,000 cap? He spoke today of replacement on a one-for-one basis. Does that mean that he does not mean like-for-like replacement in the same area?

Grant Shapps: Where local authorities can provide the new homes in the same area, we will certainly look to keep the money locally and build in the area. The hon. Lady, as a previous shadow housing Minister—one of the eight I have faced—knows that the money will be used for the affordable rent programme, which will enable us to build 170,000 affordable homes for rent, and this will give us another 100,000 on top of that—far more than the previous Administration built over 13 years.

Mr Ward *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has already asked a question. He cannot have forgotten the fact, because I certainly have not.

Economic Growth

18. **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): What steps he has taken to encourage local authorities to promote business and economic growth. [98971]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles): Local authorities have a key role in supporting local economic growth and promoting business in their areas. We have ensured that local places will receive the benefits of growth with the retention of business rates from April 2013. We will also pay £432 million to local authorities through the new homes bonus in 2012-13. We have also established 39 local enterprise partnerships, in which local authorities work with businesses to promote economic growth.

Neil Carmichael: I thank the Secretary of State for that encouraging set of policies. Does he agree that local authorities must make planning decisions connected with business development quickly, and that they should be underpinned by rigorous and timely economic analysis?

Mr Pickles: My hon. Friend makes a very reasonable point. Local authorities will now be able to apply the proceeds of that growth, so their local populations will expect them to make timely decisions. Now that power has moved closer to local authorities, they have much greater responsibility to deliver these decisions on time.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Mary Portas review will help with business growth. In my constituency, Formby has a parish council and Maghull has a town council. Will the Secretary of State confirm whether parish and town councils will qualify as accountable bodies for funding bids under the Portas review, or will the bids have to go through the borough or district councils?

Mr Pickles: I am afraid to say that, despite Formby being the apple of my eye and a wonderful place to invest, the process will be at borough level.

Social Housing

20. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What plans he has to tackle the abuse of social housing tenancies. [98973]

The Minister for Housing and Local Government (Grant Shapps): We have set out proposals to give social landlords the tools to identify and recover properties that have been subject to fraudulent activity via sub-letting.

Henry Smith: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his answer. What support can his Department give to local authorities to stop the abusive activity of illegal sub-letting and of those who over-occupy their social tenancy homes, perhaps with friends or family?

Grant Shapps: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point to the scale of the problem, which is enormous, perhaps a multi-billion pound per annum scandal, and this Government are absolutely determined to crack down on it. I introduced a consultation on sub-letting, stating that our preferred option is to criminalise the activity. We intend to do exactly what is outlined in the consultation and, in doing so, to end the scandal that means that such homes do not go to the people who rightly need them.

Onshore Wind Farms

21. **Nigel Adams** (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): What guidance his Department has issued to the Planning Inspectorate on planning appeals concerning onshore wind farms. [98974]

The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): The Planning Inspectorate has received the same advice as local authorities: the Government's commitment to abolish the regional spatial strategies, including the targets for renewable energy, can be taken into account as a material consideration in planning decisions.

Nigel Adams: Has the Planning Inspectorate been instructed to take into account the views of local residents, campaign groups and communities during the appeal process?

Greg Clark: As I suggested, the Localism Act 2011 abolishes top-down imposition and releases local communities to have their say, and with the new planning framework it will be unambiguously clear that it is local communities that do things their way.

Topical Questions

T1. [98975] **John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles): Last week we announced that the abolition of the Audit Commission will save councils £250 million over the next five years in lower audit fees, so cutting quangos does save money; we have finally abolished Labour's ports tax, which threatened to scupper England's export trade, so cutting taxes saves jobs; and, finally, we have welcomed more than 3,500 applications so far for diamond jubilee street parties, promoting our guide to organising a street party, so it shows that cutting red tape allows more bunting to be put up.

John Pugh: I thank the Minister for that welcome news, but as part of his duties as Secretary of State will he defend the right of Christian local authority workers discreetly to wear crosses or crucifixes at work, just as he would I hope defend the right of Sikhs to wear the turban, given a pending European judgment?

Mr Pickles: It is certainly my view that, provided any object does not get in the way of someone doing their job, a discreet display of their religion is something that we should welcome.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Given the great public interest in the national planning policy framework, we would all like to know which construction and property companies the Secretary of State and Communities and Local Government Ministers have met in the past few months, especially as the Electoral Commission revealed that firms in the sector gave just over £500,000 to the Conservative party between July and December last year. The public unfortunately cannot find out that information because no details of meetings between CLG Ministers and others have been published since June 2011. May I ask the Secretary of State, who is responsible for publication, why that is?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill): All matters will be published in due course. The My right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), the Minister responsible for planning and decentralisation, made clear the persons who are members of the practitioners group and with whom we openly consulted. Nothing is hidden, and I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman chooses to bark up such a completely fictitious tree.

Hilary Benn: That will not really do, and I am sorry that the Secretary of State has once again ducked answering a question, because he is very keen to lecture people on transparency but, it seems, not so keen on it himself. The Housing Minister promised the House a month ago that the information was about to appear, but as of midday today—nine months on from the

previous disclosure—there was still no sign of it on the Department’s website, even though the ministerial code clearly states that such information must be published “at least quarterly”. When is the Secretary of State going to start practising what he preaches, especially on something as important as the future of our towns and countryside?

Robert Neill: I have consulted my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and information on the matter will be published very shortly. I point out that this Department was the first to publish online all spend over £500, so our record bears comparison with anyone’s.

T2. [98976] **John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): The Department is currently consulting on changes to building regulations. In order to help to reduce energy costs for home owners and to create a proper market in renewables, will the Minister consider making solar panels compulsory for all new builds?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Stunell): I share my hon. Friend’s desire to make sure that homes are more energy efficient and that energy bills fall. We have already raised building standards by 25%, and we are consulting on the next step; I hope that he will contribute to the consultation. If we implement the proposals in the consultation, we will need people to use renewable energy sources in building schemes, and that will go a long way towards what he is seeking to achieve.

Mr David Crausby (Bolton North East) (Lab): We all want house building to get moving again and first-time buyers to get on to the housing ladder, but is it not true that 95%, and even higher, mortgages were what went wrong with the housing market in the first place? Will not any attempt artificially to prop up house building with Government subsidy come back and bite us at some point?

The Minister for Housing and Local Government (Grant Shapps): As I said earlier, the problem with the housing market was sub-prime lending, or lending to people who could not afford to pay back the mortgages, not 95% mortgages, which operated perfectly well in this country for many decades. The criteria for lending are now much stricter, and nobody will get a mortgage who is not properly able to pay it, not only with today’s low interest rates but with interest rates that are clearly likely to rise at some point in future.

T3. [98978] **Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): With the London elections on the horizon, should Londoners elect a Mayor who has frozen the Greater London authority’s share of council tax, keeping more money in people’s pockets, or a man who is more concerned with finding ways of dodging paying his own taxes while increasing everybody else’s taxes?

Mr Pickles: Personally, I am backing Boris. I was very shocked to find out about Ken Livingstone’s tax arrangements. It seems very odd for somebody who is standing for Mayor to have a way of avoiding paying tax. In particular, I hope that he has a reasonable

explanation about the two people he employed and why those matters were not properly reported to the Electoral Commission.

T9. [98984] **Emma Reynolds** (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in Wolverhampton live in appalling conditions in the private rented sector. Self-regulation is not working, and the Housing Minister’s booklet is unlikely to change anything. When are the Government going to recognise that this sector needs regulating, with, in particular, a national compulsory register of landlords?

Grant Shapps: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to be concerned about the conditions that people live in, and I share that concern very strongly. It is interesting that Labour never introduced a compulsory register in 13 years. It is also interesting that when I came into office and asked to see the sum of work that had been done by my predecessors, the answer was none. There are good reasons private registers would not work. There are 1.5 million landlords, many of whom are, for example, private individuals letting out one or two rooms. It would be an unworkable system requiring an enormous quango. The answer is to use the existing legislation properly. I will help to advise the hon. Lady’s local authority on precisely how to do that if that is helpful.

T4. [98979] **Tony Baldry** (Banbury) (Con): Since the reign of Mary Tudor and throughout the vicissitudes of history, Banbury council has started all its meetings with prayer and a recitation of the 84th Psalm. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the general power of competence he has granted local councils will enable those that wish to continue to start their meetings with prayer to do so?

Mr Pickles: My hon. Friend is a very distinguished man, and perhaps only someone of his greatly distinguished nature could regard the reign of Mary Tudor as topical. Nevertheless, he makes a good point. We enjoy the power of prayer in this Chamber under the Bill of Rights 1688, and what is good enough for us should be good enough for councils. That is why I was pleased to introduce the general power of competence. The authorities that do not qualify will make arrangements very soon.

Hazel Blears (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): I believe that the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), the Minister with responsibility for fire and rescue services, is an eminently reasonable man. In the Adjournment debate last week, he will have heard the strength of feeling expressed on behalf of metropolitan fire and rescue authorities. The grant for Greater Manchester has been cut by 12.5%, whereas the grant for Cheshire has increased by 2%, when Greater Manchester has more fires, more deprivation and more poverty. I believe that settlement to be grossly unfair. Will the Minister, as a reasonable man, change the settlement for years three and four to protect people in metropolitan areas?

Robert Neill: It is impossible for me to approach the right hon. Lady other than in a spirit of reason. I gently point out to her that the funding results come from the application of a formula that essentially we inherited from the previous Government. It assigns significantly

more money to metropolitan fire and rescue authorities than to those in the counties, and we have adjusted it to give greater weight to density, which advantages urban areas. We are looking to make further reforms when we bring in business rate retention, which will fund all fire authorities.

T5. [98980] **Julian Smith** (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): Communities across north Yorkshire are being hassled, bullied and, in some cases, bribed by wind developers that are carrying out scoping exercises. Following the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams), will the Minister confirm that the revised national planning policy framework will give communities, such as those in north Yorkshire, the absolute final say on where wind farms should be situated?

The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): The problem at the moment is that there is imposition from the regional strategies. We are getting rid of that. We take the view that if communities are involved in decisions, there can be a far better outcome than if planning decisions descend on them from above.

Jim Sheridan (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): Erskine is a charitable organisation in my constituency that provides work for and looks after disabled ex-service personnel. Unfortunately, due to the current financial difficulties, it is struggling to compete with the private sector. Will the Secretary of State meet representatives from Erskine to explore how local or central government procurement processes could be used to help these poor soldiers?

Mr Pickles: I will certainly organise meetings for the hon. Gentleman with the Local Government Association. Of course, 80% of charities receive no money from the state. I have noticed that the top five authorities for extending their funding for charities are Conservative authorities and that no Labour authority appears in the top 20. [Interruption.] I say to the hon. Gentleman that if they are not looking for money, the meeting will be even quicker.

T6. [98981] **Jonathan Lord** (Woking) (Con): I welcome what the Secretary of State said about unauthorised development by Travellers on green-belt land. May I press him a little further? In the village of Normandy and the surrounding area in my constituency, a spate of temporary permissions have been given on appeal to unauthorised development on green-belt land. Will his new rules ensure that the land is returned to green belt in due course?

Mr Pickles: The old planning guidance gave Gypsies and Travellers certain exemptions with regard to the green belt. It is our intention to repeal those exemptions.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Will the Minister help me with the problems facing private tenants in my constituency? Almost a third of my constituents are private tenants who pay very high rents in flats and houses that are expensive to heat and often badly maintained. Does he not think that it is time that we had much tougher regulation of the private rented

sector, including rent regulation, because rents are astonishingly high for people who are unable to save or to move on from the private rented sector?

Grant Shapps: I had a lot of sympathy with the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. He and I have discussed this matter before. If we introduce rent controls, which seems to be what he and other Opposition Members are calling for, we know exactly what will happen. Rent controls were introduced after the war and the private rented sector shrunk from 50% of the market to just 8%. When rent controls were removed, that doubled to 16%. The latest figures from the English housing survey show that it is on its way up from there. Rent controls would restrict the market and make it more expensive for exactly the constituents whom the hon. Gentleman is trying to protect.

T8. [98983] **Brandon Lewis** (Great Yarmouth) (Con): As a result of poor contractual arrangements set up by the Labour Government, the East of England Development Agency has received bonuses of more than £250,000, despite it being scrapped. Does the Minister agree that local enterprise partnerships are already showing that not only are they less bureaucratic, but they give a much better return on public investment?

Greg Clark: They certainly are. The local enterprise partnership in my hon. Friend's constituency is chaired by Andy Wood of Adnams who, without any bonus, gives fantastic leadership from the private sector to a very successful local enterprise partnership.

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Lab): Everybody knows that Rochdale is the birthplace of co-operation and has been at the forefront of retail innovation. Once again, it has the potential to create a fantastic town centre. Does the Secretary of State agree that Rochdale is right to work towards being a Mary Portas pioneer?

Mr Pickles: The Rochdale pioneers were of course immensely important in retailing. If I may confide in the hon. Gentleman, I can tell him that Rochdale is the apple of my eye in the north-west. I hope, if only for the sake of romance, that it can put up a very good case. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to award the pilot scheme to Rochdale.

Mr David Ruffley (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): Residents of Westbury avenue in Bury St Edmunds want to hold a jubilee street party, but local council officers have told them that road signs will have to be erected in that very quiet suburban road at a cost of £396. Will the Secretary of State please assure me that he will do everything to slash such pointless pettifogging bureaucracy?

Mr Pickles: I can assure my hon. Friend that those regulations have gone. The bunting police have gone, and there is no need to put up expensive signs or do a traffic survey. Why to goodness cannot we simply get on with celebrating the Queen's diamond jubilee and recognising that such roads can be closed with the minimum of disruption? Let us just enjoy the day.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): We now know that black and minority ethnic groups are being disproportionately affected by the

flatlining economy. According to the Office for National Statistics, the unemployment level for young black men now stands at more than 56%. Will the Secretary of State explain how his integration strategy and programmes such as the big lunch and community music days will address that?

Andrew Stunell: The integration strategy is far wider than that. I point the hon. Lady to the Government's social mobility and equality strategies and the Youth United project, and I remind her that important announcements are coming about ensuring that every young person, regardless of their ethnic background, has access to education or employment.

Sir Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): Further to Questions 13 and 14, which were about Government support for town centres, will the Secretary of State take under his wing corner shops and neighbourhood shopping parades by lowering business rates and offsetting that through a levy on out-of-town retail stores' car parks?

Mr Pickles: We have indeed reduced business rates and, as the hon. Gentleman will know, there is a discount available for small businesses. In the Localism Act 2011,

we have given local authorities the ability to offer a discount and removed car parking restrictions. In case he is in any doubt, I should say that Colchester is the apple of my eye.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): Do Ministers agree that spending £80,000 on changing a logo, as Conservative-controlled Nottinghamshire county council has, is an irresponsible use of cash when money is so tight?

Grant Shapps: The good thing about Nottingham county council is that we can see what it is spending. It is a shame that the same cannot be said of Nottingham city council, the only council in the country that refuses to publish its expenditure.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am afraid demand has exceeded supply, as is often the case. We must now move on.

Afghanistan (Civilian Killings)

3.33 pm

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on what discussions he has had with his US counterpart over the killing of civilians in Afghanistan.

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Nick Harvey): The hon. Gentleman is of course referring to the very regrettable events in Kandahar on Sunday morning. We are all deeply shocked and saddened by the killing and wounding of Afghan civilians in Kandahar province. It was undoubtedly an appalling tragedy, and I know the House will join me in sending our deepest condolences to the victims and their families. We support the investigation into the attack.

The Secretary of State is currently overseas on official business but has regular contact with a number of Defence counterparts, including Secretary Panetta in the United States. The Secretary of State last spoke to the US Defence Secretary on Saturday about other matters, prior to this incident.

At this tragic time, I can only echo the words of General Allen, commander of the international security assistance force, and inform the House that the attack “in no way represents the values of ISAF and coalition troops or the abiding respect we feel for the Afghan people.”

These have been a difficult few weeks in Afghanistan, with the Koran-burning, the tragic loss of six of our own soldiers in a Warrior and now this. I was able to see for myself the week before last the progress that we are making, and that the UK and ISAF remain resolute in our purpose.

Mr Winnick: As the Minister says, we are all deeply shocked and horrified by the news that an American soldier—a staff soldier, I believe—went out in the night and murdered 16 innocent civilians in cold blood. Is it the case that the murders were in fact carried out in the night, and that the victims were asleep in their beds? Of the casualties—the victims of this mass murder—will the Minister confirm that nine were children and three were women? It has been reported—perhaps the Minister has the latest information—that some of the children were no older than two or three years of age. Were the bodies burned by the murderer? Perhaps we could have information on that too.

Obviously, as the Minister has said, all hon. Members are deeply saddened and send our sympathy to the families of the victims. I accept entirely that this is not in any way the policy of the NATO forces and certainly not that of the United States. Nevertheless, as he said, this follows other incidents and tragedies in which civilians have been killed by US troops, and US troops have urinated on dead Afghans and burned the Koran. That was a despicable act in itself, but it also took the lives of other innocent people who were killed by the Taliban in revenge.

Will the Minister accept—he mentioned the six brave British soldiers who died last week—that, overall, there is a growing feeling in this country, and no doubt in the United States, that this is an unwinnable war? People

certainly no longer accept the official line that our security depends on our military continuing its military role in Afghanistan.

President Obama and the Prime Minister meet this week. Would it not be wise for them to accept the strong feeling that this war has gone on for more than 10 years and is not winnable? Apart from the tragic incidents that we are referring to, the need is for the Afghans themselves to find a solution to their political and military problems. After 10 years, outside military intervention is much more the problem than the solution.

I again make the point that so many people, including me—I do not know how many in the House of Commons feel the same, but I suppose I am not alone—simply no longer accept the official line, which I accept was also the previous Government’s official line, that our security depends on British troops fighting in Afghanistan. That will not help the fight against terrorism; it perhaps even helps the terrorists.

Nick Harvey: In answer to some of the factual questions the hon. Gentleman asked at the beginning, ISAF has confirmed that 13 Afghan citizens were killed in the attack. However, open source reports indicate that up to 16 may have been killed. As he said, I understand that nine children were killed in the attack. I have no further information on the age of those children. It is understood that a further five civilians were wounded and are being treated in the military hospital at Kandahar.

On the broader points that the hon. Gentleman makes, at the Lisbon summit ISAF drew up a time scale for the remainder of the combat operation in Afghanistan, which was reconfirmed at the NATO ministerial meeting two weeks ago. I believe that that is a realistic timetable for the remainder of our operation in Afghanistan.

The progress that is being made in building up the Afghan national security forces is impressive—not only in scale but in their competence. They are developing a culture of leadership and planning more of the operations in which they are involved. The process of transition from ISAF security lead to ANSF security lead is progressing well so far. I believe, therefore, that we are on the right course and have the right security strategy. I think what the hon. Gentleman is getting at, though, is the widely held view that we need to find a political solution to the future of Afghanistan. Although progress on that has been disappointingly slow, there are now encouraging signs, and there is a realistic prospect that a political process will be under way within the time scale I am talking about.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD): These are devastating events for the victims and their families which may well have long-term implications for ISAF between now and 2014. Does my hon. Friend accept that these events remind us of the fact that we ask our young men and women to deploy to circumstances that are difficult, dangerous and stressful? In our recruitment, we lay great stress on physical attributes, but is he satisfied that we are equally searching when it comes to the psychological component of recruitment? If not, is it not time for a review?

Nick Harvey: My right hon. and learned Friend is right to say that we demand exacting standards from our new military recruits, and they certainly have to

pass physical tests, among others. We are always on the lookout for signs of people suffering psychological stress—that occurs at every point—and considerable progress has been made in recent years on removing some of the stigma that attaches to anybody in those very exacting circumstances suffering from the effects of stress. There should never be any shame attached to that. We are making progress in identifying it, in extending a sympathetic arm to those suffering from stress and in improving the long-term assistance given to them when they return to the UK, because the sorts of incidents that some of them will have witnessed will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): The killing of 16 innocent civilians in Afghanistan yesterday was an appalling act, and I join the Minister in rightly sending our thoughts to the families of the victims of this incident. The information we have so far is that it was the act of an isolated individual outside the chain of command, and it is important that we do not draw any wider conclusions about the conduct of US or other ISAF forces, who act with unparalleled bravery and professionalism in the conduct of their mission in Afghanistan.

We have all heard the warnings from the Taliban of reprisal attacks on coalition forces. In the light of that, may I ask the Minister what assessment the Government have made of the increased threat posed to UK armed forces and civilian personnel working in Afghanistan? Have any operational changes been made—notably on ending the use of night raids—and has additional security been put in place to protect diplomatic and civilian staff working on behalf of the UK Government?

The influence of ISAF forces in stabilising Afghanistan depends on the trust of the Afghan people. This act has clearly put that trust, carefully built over the past 10 years, in jeopardy. Will the Minister say what discussions the Government have had with ISAF counterparts on measures that can be put in place to build trust in the light of this appalling incident? The post-2014 planning will determine the success of our mission in Afghanistan, so will he say a little more about what early assessment ISAF has made of the impact of these events on negotiations over ISAF's presence post 2014?

Although the tragedy is undoubtedly a blow to the ISAF mission, what about the UK's mission and British public opinion? Will the Minister tell the country more clearly what the UK's long-term commitment to Afghanistan will be and what type of nation he expects to leave when the draw-down takes place post 2014?

We have always approached the issue of Afghanistan from a bipartisan standpoint, which it is important to do while we have our forces in harm's way there. We welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to raise the issue of Afghanistan at his meeting in Washington with President Obama this week, and we look forward to seeing greater details of the plans for post 2014.

Nick Harvey: It is important to stress that there is a US and Afghan investigation now under way into exactly what happened. However, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this would appear to be the action of one isolated individual, completely outwith the control of the chain of command, and he is also absolutely right that it is in no way indicative of the behaviour of the rest of the ISAF forces who are there.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about force protection. We were already operating on an enhanced set-up for force protection in the light of the Koran-burning incident; following this incident, vigilance will be even greater, and at a local level, commanders on the ground will be making whatever sensible arrangements they think are necessary. Operations in the night are increasingly led by Afghan forces, and I think this is likely to be the case even more so in the foreseeable future.

The hon. Gentleman quite rightly raised the issue of trust. It is absolutely essential to what we are doing that there is trust between the international forces, and the Afghan authorities and the Afghan people. There is no doubt whatever that that trust will have been tested severely by the incidents of the last few weeks. Of course, this is not one-way traffic, because we have seen incidents where both British and French troops have been killed by Afghan troops they were mentoring. These are delicate relationships, but I was impressed when I was there two weeks ago that the commander of ISAF took this aspect of his work extremely seriously and had been very quick to get on the front foot and go to President Karzai and the Afghan authorities to apologise and make clear the profound regret that he and the west felt for the incidents that have happened.

As for the post-2014 situation, it is important that everybody understands—both in the west and in Afghanistan—that the end of western troops being in Afghanistan in a combat role does not mean the international community walking away from Afghanistan. It is certainly the case that we will continue to have troops stationed in Afghanistan, providing training and mentoring for Afghan troops. Specifically, we have made a commitment, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, to take the lead internationally in running the officer training programme from 2013 onwards. However, as we begin and continue the process of transition, we expect to see a greater number of international partners coming in and helping Afghanistan to build up, in terms of both aid and, increasingly, ordinary trade and economics. We cannot allow the setbacks of the last few weeks to put us off that overall objective, which in my view, notwithstanding all the pressures, remains on course.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): We have got two years and about nine months left of combat operations in Afghanistan, and we have lost 404 soldiers so far. The idea that we can start challenging the plan to withdraw early worries me a great deal, because soldiers need certainty. It is needed for the officers to plan and for the soldiers to get used to it. It is going to be increasingly challenging for our soldiers over the next two years, as we move towards withdrawing from combat operations. Does the Minister agree with that assessment? We have got to support our soldiers utterly and completely. The plan is set and must now remain set.

Nick Harvey: Let me assure my hon. Friend that the internationally agreed plan remains firmly in place. It was reiterated two weeks ago at the NATO ministerial conference. It is important for all those who are engaged in the operations in Afghanistan to understand that the plan remains in place and that there is no question whatever of our cutting and running early because of these events or any others. Two out of five phases of

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transition—area by area, district by district—have so far taken place, and both appear broadly to have gone off very well. The three remaining phases will take us through this year and into next year. Within the time frame between now and 2014, the nature of the work that our troops are doing will increasingly shift to a supportive role, but they will still be there bearing arms until the end of 2014. It is important, particularly for those who grieve for the losses that we have suffered, that they should not believe that those losses have been in vain. We are not going to give up; we are going to see this through and finish the job off according to the internationally agreed plan.

David Miliband (South Shields) (Lab): May I return the Minister to the question of a political strategy, which he rightly says is the key to ending any insurgency? The Defence Secretary wrote in *The Daily Telegraph* last week that a political strategy could not succeed until the Afghan Government had established a position of strength. May I put it to the Minister that the difficulty with that is that the Afghan Government are seen by many Afghans as a significant part of the problem, and that the search for a position of strength defies the logic of a counter-insurgency, which is that one can achieve tactical advances in one part of a country while the insurgency strikes back elsewhere? Does he acknowledge that the best approach would be for the international community to appoint an international mediator with United Nations Security Council backing who could talk to those on all sides and frame the political strategy, both internal and regional, that is so desperately needed? Does he also acknowledge that, if we do not start working on that now, every day that passes will weaken the chances of establishing a stable Afghanistan that we can leave?

Nick Harvey: I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman's stress on the need for a political solution. During his time as Foreign Secretary, he did his best to promote such processes, but unfortunately he did not meet with a great deal of appetite elsewhere for getting them under way. Frankly, it has remained pretty tough going until relatively recently. Thankfully, some of the key stakeholders now seem to be showing a greater appetite for sitting down and participating in a political process. The Afghan Government are certainly more willing to do so than they have been in the past, and it looks as though the Pakistan Government might also be more willing to engage in such a process. The proposal to open a Taliban office in Qatar has served as a catalyst to focus people's minds. The right hon. Gentleman was paraphrasing the Defence Secretary slightly; I do not think a political process has to await a situation in which the Afghan Government achieve a position of strength. Applying military pressure to the Taliban has probably made it more likely that they will be willing to sit down and join a political process, but any such process must be inclusive of all the elements in Afghanistan who need to buy into a long-term settlement, as well as all the elements in the region who will be vital to the delivery of peace on the ground in the years to come. We are a long way from achieving that, but progress is at last being made.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Accommodating the level of interest in this subject, given that there is important time-limited Back-Bench business to follow, will necessitate brevity, which will now be exemplified by Dr Julian Lewis.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I thought you might pick me for that, Mr Speaker.

The Afghan Government and the Afghan people are rightly outraged by this atrocity, but does the Minister agree that the one bunch of people who have no right to promise revenge are the Taliban? It was their hosting of an international terrorist organisation that murdered thousands of men, women and children that led to the invasion of Afghanistan in the first place.

Nick Harvey: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. In addition to their past atrocities, the Taliban are also responsible for the great majority of civilian deaths in Afghanistan—77% in the past year.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): Two years and nine months is half the length of the second world war, and a plan that cannot be changed in the light of circumstances is barely worth the paper it is written on. The Minister has a hard job, and we are not here to criticise, but these incidents and atrocities are typical of the end of an occupation or a conflict. We cannot justify British soldiers dying between now and withdrawal. Does the Minister agree that we should honour the sacrifice of our men by ensuring that no more are sacrificed?

Nick Harvey: Nobody has said that we are adhering to a plan that cannot be changed. The point I have been at pains to make is that the plan has not been changed as yet. Of course we follow closely, as do the ISAF commanders, the situation on the ground. The plans will reflect the realities as we go forward. This is a process of transition. I said that we have gone through two of the five phases of transition—and it is broadly working. I have to say that the rate of casualties on our side has come down markedly. I simply do not think that the right hon. Gentleman is right: if we were to pack up and leave now, it would make a mockery of everything that has been done to date.

Patrick Mercer (Newark) (Con): History has a way of repeating itself. Not only did six British soldiers die last week within miles of where 1,000 perished in 1880, but the garrison of Kandahar in the same year also carried out a series of isolated unpleasantnesses against the civilian population. Armies reflect society. Regrettably, we have to expect more of these sorts of isolated instances. Will the Minister therefore comment on the rumour that this incident is related to alcohol—exactly as it was with the incidents in 1880—and on what is being done in respect of our Muslim allies and on how we will control the consumption of alcohol among allied troops?

Nick Harvey: The hon. Gentleman raises some interesting historical points, but asks me specifically whether we know of any connection between this incident and alcohol. I know of absolutely no such connection. It is, of course, the case that our forces in Afghanistan operate entirely dry; alcohol is not provided for them. I have no knowledge of alcohol having anything at all to do with this appalling incident.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): The whole House is shocked by this terrible event, as are members of the British Afghani community, thousands of whom have settled in my Leicester constituency. This is the slaughter of the innocents. I understand that the father and son of this family survived these atrocities. In our discussions with the Americans over the next few days, we should urge on them the importance of supporting those who remain and the community they come from. I know there is going to be an investigation, but before that happens we need to do something to help this local community.

Nick Harvey: The right hon. Gentleman makes a very good point—that the sense of grief that will grip communities in Kandahar will, of course, be felt by the diaspora of Afghan and Pashtun people, not least here in the UK. He is absolutely right that there is no need to await an investigation of exactly what happened before we begin to repair relations with those communities as far as we possibly can and to offer every possible support to the families and those grieving in the wake of this appalling incident. It is certainly the case that we will urge our allies to crack on and do that.

John Hemming (Birmingham, Yardley) (LD): The Minister will be aware that a minority of the House, including myself, voted for withdrawal some time ago.

In an asymmetric conflict, emotions are very important in driving people's behaviour. Will the Minister agree to review the current strategy to identify whether that fact in itself could make it harder rather than easier to achieve our objectives in the long term?

Nick Harvey: The ISAF strategy is kept under constant review. I can reassure my hon. Friend that it will continue to be so, but I do not think it would make sense for us to be in a great hurry this week, in the aftermath of these incidents, to spring into some fundamental review. I can assure him, however, that the temperature is read constantly and that progress is assessed all the time. We will take stock of everything that happens as we continue to plan on an international basis what we will do for the remaining two and a half years.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): This is a terrible tragedy. It is not the first, and it will probably not be the last. Equal tragedies—such as the killing of wedding parties by drone aircraft, and so many others—compound the results of this the 11th year of the war. As neither the Minister nor his Secretary of State is able to say what success would be in Afghanistan, is it not time to bring forward the date of withdrawal, and to recognise that this has not been a profitable or a successful operation?

Nick Harvey: We are able to say what success would be. Success would be an orderly and successful handover of security to a competent and able Afghan national security force by the end of 2014. Many challenges will face us between now and then if we are to achieve what remains an ambitious target, but that is what success would look like, and that is the strategic goal in security terms towards which we are working. However, I repeat the point made by the former Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for South Shields (David Miliband): if there is to be a lasting peace in that part of the world,

a political process is needed alongside the security strategy. Unless we have both, we will not secure the lasting peace that I think everyone in the House wants to see.

Mr Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): I share the horror felt by Members in all parts of the House at this ghastly incident, and endorse the policy supported by both Government and Opposition. Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the show of solidarity by Angela Merkel at a time when her Government are suffering from a number of other pressures?

Nick Harvey: It is important for us to retain an international view. The ISAF strategy is one that we have drawn up together, so expressions of support from the German Government are of course very welcome. Essentially, the conclusion that was reached at the Lisbon conference was that we had gone in together and should come out together. That is what I mean when I say that we will agree with our ISAF partners exactly what the strategy and the timelines should be, and that we will act together according to our collective judgment of the progress that we are making.

Mr Dave Watts (St Helens North) (Lab): Does not the recent tragedy demonstrate that we need to speed up the process of transferring as much of Afghanistan as we can to Afghan control? Will the Minister give some indication of how many Pashtun soldiers will be in charge of Pashtun areas once the takeover has happened?

Nick Harvey: I do not think that the lesson to be drawn from this is that we should speed up a process which is moving as fast as it possibly can already. The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that the Afghan national security forces are being grown from a cold start. I think that the progress they have made is remarkable: they have grown in number, but, far more impressively, they have grown in competence, in their quality of leadership, and in their ability to plan and execute operations. I think that hurrying the process at this stage, or passing the baton to them prematurely, would undermine all the progress that has been made. We are pushing the process of handover as fast as we possibly can, and if we were to cut and run now, we would risk undoing the progress that we have made.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I echo what has been said about the improvements to the Afghan national army. We should not forget that that is due not just to British forces, but to the American forces who have trained them. We should also not forget that this was an isolated incident, and that more than 2,000 Americans have been killed. There will be some who call for urgent withdrawal, but I stress what has already been said by Members on both sides of the House. This is not just about security; it is also about governance, and I hope that that will be discussed at the forthcoming summit in Chicago.

Nick Harvey: The Chicago summit will provide an opportunity for the international community to make long-term commitments both to the future security of Afghanistan after the combat role has ended and to its future prosperity. We will look to countries around the world—countries that have been involved in ISAF, but also many others that have not—to come forward and

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make commitments to Afghanistan's long-term future. We want all stakeholders in the equation to understand that the international community remain committed to the future of Afghanistan, and that simply ending a combat role at the end of 2014 does not mean in any sense that we are walking away or leaving them to it.

Mr Nick Raynsford (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Apart from the horror of the latest incidents, by which we have all been rightly shocked, a number of other issues have been raised during these exchanges about the conduct of our combat mission during the remaining period in which we will deploy a combat role in Afghanistan. They are difficult issues, and I wonder whether it would be sensible for the House to have the opportunity to take part in a full and serious debate on the conduct of our mission. I see that the Leader of the House is present, and I wonder whether the Minister might recommend an early debate on the subject.

Nick Harvey: The right hon. Gentleman should, perhaps, raise that issue at business questions. I agree that it is important that we debate these matters, which is why the Government make quarterly statements on progress in Afghanistan and why, in between them, we have monthly written statements. If the House wishes to debate these issues further, we would welcome that, and I have no doubt whatever that there will be an opportunity to do so before too long.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): At morale-sapping moments such as these, our troops need to know that the standard operating procedures, and the checks on those whom they fight alongside, are as good as they possibly can be. Will the Minister assure the House that the lessons learned will be shared fully with the UK, and that we will be able to reflect upon the report on this terrible tragedy as soon as possible?

Nick Harvey: My hon. Friend's constituency has been in the eye of the storm in the last couple of weeks, and it will feel more acutely than anywhere else the pain of the six losses we took in the earlier Warrior incident. He is right that there are broader issues at stake in the incident under discussion. We have a very open relationship with the Americans and the other ISAF allies, and we have the opportunity to reflect upon everything that happens and to learn from that. I assure my hon. Friend that everybody in ISAF is absolutely determined to learn from these incidents, and to ensure, to the extent that we can, that nothing like this happens again.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Given the differences that there are between the Taliban and al-Qaeda and the increasing amounts of intelligence suggesting that very few al-Qaeda remain in Afghanistan, if we are to remain true to our original mission, does not this incident underline that the Americans, as the lead force, should open non-conditional talks with the Taliban in order to explore possible common ground, particularly given that the Taliban have recently sent signals that they are willing to talk?

Nick Harvey: Many more parties in addition to the Americans and the Taliban will need to be party to any lasting political settlement. There are other elements

within Afghanistan who might not be at all comfortable with a simple two-way arrangement between the Taliban and the Americans. I believe that on all sides there is a genuine and growing openness to the idea of having a political dialogue, and I believe that that will begin to happen in time. However, I have to say that the way to ensure that al-Qaeda does not come back into Afghanistan and become an element in the future is for us to ensure that the future Afghan forces are able to look after their own security, including their own borders.

Sir Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): Although this was an appalling atrocity, does the Minister agree that, in recognition of what has been achieved by Her Majesty's armed forces—those who have served, those who are currently serving and those who will serve—we should make it clear that it is in neither Britain's nor Afghanistan's best interests to follow the line argued by the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), who tabled the urgent question?

Nick Harvey: I could not agree more that the extraordinary investment that has been made in Afghanistan over the past decade—the money, the time, the patience, the bloodshed and everything that everybody who has gone out there and served so bravely and so valiantly has done—would be wasted if we were to cut and run now, when we can clearly see the remainder of the task that stretches out before us and we know what needs to be done to finish the job.

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): This incident raises broader questions about the general responsibility to the civilian population. Will the Minister confirm that infinite care is taken to ensure that everyone in the British Army—from the most senior commander to the most junior private soldier—is fully aware of their duties, responsibilities and obligations under the law of war? This is, perhaps, more relevant now than at any time since we have had a standing army, and there are probably currently more members of the army legal services advising throughout the British Army than there have ever been at any time in military history.

Nick Harvey: My hon. Friend makes some very good points. I would like to reassure him that, as part of the pre-operation training before going to Afghanistan, British troops are indeed given detailed tuition in the legal and moral aspects of warfare. I wish to put his mind at rest on the fact that they understand exactly where their obligations lie. Every time I visit Afghanistan, I am struck by the extraordinarily thoughtful way in which our troops go about their operations. If one has any sort of discussion with them, particularly with officers who plan and execute operations, one finds that there is nothing remotely gung-ho about what they do; it is all extremely thoughtful and it is always conducted with a keen appreciation of the legal and moral framework in which they operate.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): Despite the terrible events of the weekend, does the Minister agree that it is more imperative than ever that we stick the course in Afghanistan to produce the stable country that we all need and want?

Nick Harvey: I entirely agree. We will still face many challenges in the remaining period of combat operations in Afghanistan, but we have identified a clear strategy and it is essential that we stick to it and create the space within which a political dialogue of the sort we have been discussing can take place.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Three of the six British servicemen who died last week were constituents of mine. Over the weekend, I met the parents of Corporal Jake Hartley and the grandparents of Private Anthony Frampton—Private Danny Wilford was the third of my constituents. Many other constituents have legitimately been asking me this weekend why we do not just withdraw now, so that there are no more young losses. However, after their deaths and those of their colleagues from the Yorkshire Regiment and the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, and after these horrific killings of innocent civilians, it is important that we do not let their deaths be in vain and that we withdraw in an orderly and calm way, as we had planned with ISAF forces.

Nick Harvey: I commend my hon. Friend's words, as he is absolutely right in what he says, and I know from the contact we have had with other bereaved families that that is exactly their view, too. They feel that the sacrifice that has been made and the valour that has been shown will be rewarded only if we stick to the task and finish the job that we can see clearly before us. That is what we are determined to do.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): This was a terrible incident, but the whole House will be aware that our young men and women put their lives at risk every day to protect Afghan civilians. There is a group of people in this country who are always worried about those people overseas: their family and friends. Given the heightened danger that our troops must be in at the moment, what reassurance can we give to those people?

Nick Harvey: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to pay tribute to the personal commitment made by all those whom we ask to go out to serve on our behalf, and of course we must recognise the stress and worry that this puts on their families behind them. We will continue to do everything we can to support them, and I know that everyone in this House is very proud of what they do, no matter what our policy differences might be. It is right that, after we have had casualties of our own, we grieve and acknowledge the sacrifice that has been made, but of course the reason why we have had this question this afternoon is to recognise also that the Afghan civilian population is making a terrible sacrifice. Our thoughts and our prayers remain with those Afghan villages and the families there, who have been on the wrong end of an appalling tragedy, which I know we all profoundly regret.

Mr Speaker: We are grateful to the Minister. I call Mr Eric Joyce to make a personal statement.

Personal Statement

4.13 pm

Eric Joyce (Falkirk) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Hon. Members will be aware of the events in the Strangers Bar on 22 February, during which the standard of my conduct fell egregiously below what is required of a Member of this House or, indeed, of anyone, anywhere. I am grateful for this opportunity to apologise without reservation to the House, and, in particular, to the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson), the hon. Members for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) and for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), Councillors Luke Mackenzie and Ben Maney, police officers on the night and, indeed, everyone else affected by my actions that evening; clearly that will not be an exhaustive list. They have all shown considerable grace in their public comment, for which I am very grateful. I do, of course, have other apologies to make, including to my constituents, and I will take other opportunities outside this place to do so at greater length.

Sir, I would like to express my thanks to Members on both sides of the House, and indeed the other place, who have contacted me to express concern, however undeserved it is on my part. Clearly, I have a number of personal issues to address and you can be assured that this will take place. In the meantime, Members will know that certain short-term constraints have been quite rightly placed on me by the court. I will, of course, observe them strictly within the parliamentary precincts as well as elsewhere.

I would also like to inform the House that I have today tendered my resignation as a member of the Labour party to my party leader. Thank you, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he has said and for the commitments that he has made.

Backbench Business Committee

Mr Speaker: Before I call the Deputy Leader of the House to move the motion, I should inform the House that I have selected amendments (a), (b) and (c) in the name of Natascha Engel and amendments (g) and (h) to amendments (a) and (b) in the name of Mr John Hemming. I have also selected amendments (d), (e) and (f) in the name of Mr Peter Bone. The amendments will be debated together with the main motion and the questions necessary to dispose of the motion will be put at the end of the debate.

4.16 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath): I beg to move,

That—

(1) this House endorses the principle that parties should elect members of the Backbench Business Committee each Session and thereafter when a vacancy arises in a secret ballot of all Members of that party by whichever transparent and democratic method they choose.

(2) Standing Order No. 122D (Election of Backbench Business Committee) shall be amended as follows—

(a) line 7, at end, insert—

‘(ba) No Member may be a candidate for the chair of the committee if that Member’s party is represented in Her Majesty’s Government.’;

(b) in line 12, leave out from second ‘of’ to end of line 14 and insert ‘a party represented in Her Majesty’s Government and no fewer than ten shall be members of a party not so represented or of no party’;

(c) line 28, leave out paragraph (2);

(d) line 64, leave out sub-paragraph (b); and

(e) in the Title, after the word ‘of’, insert ‘chair of’.

(3) Standing Order No. 152J (Backbench Business Committee) shall be amended as follows—

(a) line 7, leave out paragraph (3) and insert—

‘(3) The chair of the committee shall continue as chair for the remainder of the Session in which that person is elected as chair unless the chair is declared vacant by the Speaker under the provisions of Standing Order No. 122C (Resignation or removal of chairs of select committees) as applied by paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 122D (Election of Backbench Business Committee).’;

(b) in line 12, leave out ‘and members’;

(c) line 21, at end, insert—

‘(6A) The Committee shall have power to invite Members of the House who are not members of the Committee and who are of a party not represented on the Committee or of no party to attend its meetings and, at the discretion of the chair, take part in its proceedings, but—

(a) no more than one Member may be so invited to attend in respect of the same meeting;

(b) a Member so invited shall not move any motion or amendment to any motion, vote or be counted in the quorum.’.

As the House will be aware, the Select Committee on Procedure, which is chaired with such distinction by the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight), is conducting a review of the Backbench Business Committee. The Government look forward to contributing to that review and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House looks forward to giving oral evidence. I am sure that the whole House will look forward to the conclusions set out in the review and the Government will certainly consider any recommendations very carefully.

Mr Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): I am grateful to the Deputy Leader of the House for his preamble. In the light of what he has said, why do the Government consider it inappropriate to leave this motion until after the Procedure Committee has reported?

Mr Heath: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that question. Having already said what a splendid fellow he is, I am happy to address the issue that he raises. We expect the Procedure Committee’s conclusions to be of great value, as they have been on a number of other topics. I want to emphasise that today’s motion is not intended to pre-empt the review—[*Interruption.*] Well, it simply does not. It makes three changes that need to be made this Session in order to take effect before the next elections for members of the Backbench Business Committee and therefore before the completion of the review. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, those changes arise in part from points made in evidence to the Procedure Committee’s inquiry into the 2010 elections and that Committee itself envisaged changes as regards minority parties being made in advance of the review.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I thank the Deputy Leader of the House for giving way and I apologise as I am chairing a Committee upstairs at 4.30 pm and will therefore be unable to stay and listen to the end of his remarks. As a member of the Procedure Committee, I thought I would raise the notion that the question of whether the Committee should be elected on a party basis is a difficult matter that I shall be considering very carefully during the forthcoming proceedings of the Procedure Committee. In the meantime, given that he is proposing to make that change without such consideration having taken place, I have no option other than to vote against the Government this evening.

Mr Heath: I am sorry to hear that, obviously, but it is for the House to make that decision in the light of today’s debate. There would be very little point in our determining that we should have made a change to the process of election after the elections had been held for the next Session. It seems appropriate to me that the House should have the opportunity, as it does today, to consider the matter and come to a conclusion. The will of the House on whether it wishes to make the suggested changes will then prevail.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it is for the House to make its decision as this concerns House of Commons business. Will he tell us whether Government members and parliamentary private secretaries are being whipped on this business and if so why?

Mr Heath: The right hon. Gentleman will have to ask his right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary about the position on whipping. There are motions on the Order Paper for debate later today that very much reflect the Government’s position on the conduct of business. On those matters, it is quite clear that right hon. and hon. Members who are members of the Government will be whipped to support the Government view, and they are of course here as a consequence.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Given what the hon. Gentleman has just said, it is perfectly possible that the Government will get this motion through, without any of the amendments that have been tabled, on the back of a payroll vote. Will he undertake that if that does happen and the Procedure Committee then decides that it wants to take the House down a slightly different route, he will table motions to allow that to happen in the next Session?

Mr Heath: I have already indicated that we will want to see the Procedure Committee's conclusions. It has been the practice of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and myself to bring forward motions to allow the House to consider the Procedure Committee's recommendations. I do not think we have anything to be ashamed of in that respect as we have been very careful to ensure that the House has opportunities, where possible, to determine these matters. Obviously, we shall have to wait and see what emerges from the Committee in due course.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): My hon. Friend is being generous in giving way but he still has yet to explain why he and the Government are pre-empting the Procedure Committee's findings, particularly given one of its last-known findings, at paragraph 59 of its latest report, which stated:

"We have received no adverse comments on the arrangements for the elections to the Backbench Business Committee".

Can the Government justify their position?

Mr Heath: There was limited scope for complaints about elections to the Backbench Business Committee because, certainly on the Government side of the House, there were no elections: the Members who serve on the Committee were elected unopposed. However, the Procedure Committee proposed that we needed to consider the position of minority parties and I assured Members from the minority parties when we first debated this matter that we would look into this and come back with proposals. I think we would be deficient in our response to the House if we were not to have that debate before the opportunity arises to vote again on the Backbench Business Committee.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for using the word "deficient" because his proposals for the minority parties are clearly deficient and unsatisfactory. Our being given observer status on a Backbench Business Committee—a Committee of the House—as though we were second or third-class citizens of the House is totally unacceptable to us, so if this is all about the minority parties and the smaller parties, he can forget it.

Mr Heath: I am rather minded to forget it. I went to a great deal of trouble to address the specific issue that the hon. Gentleman asked me to consider when we first debated this. He asked for his party and the other minority parties to be allowed to put up candidates for election as the Chair of the Committee. That is what we are proposing today and he says, "Forget it." Well, we shall see whether he supports the contention when it comes to the vote.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Heath: I think I should make a little more progress as I have yet to explain what the proposal is, but I will come back to right hon. and hon. Members who wish to contribute.

The motion aligns the method of election to the Backbench Business Committee with that for other Select Committees. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) might feel aggrieved that he does not have representation on all the Select Committees of the House, but he does not because, on the basis of the formula, he does not have enough party members in the House to have that level of representation. The motion provides protection against unwarranted interference by a future Government in the election of the Chair—something that some hon. Members were very concerned about. We propose to give the House an opportunity to determine that issue today. The motion provides also for participation by the minority parties, however ungrateful they may be, in the Committee.

Nearly a month ago, the Government's response to the Procedure Committee's report was published. It stated quite explicitly that

"the Government believe that it would be appropriate for the House to address the anomaly whereby members of the Backbench Business Committee other than the Chair (unlike those of other select committees) are elected by the House as a whole rather than by Members of the political party to which they belong before the next elections of members. The Government propose to allow time for consideration of proposals to this effect towards the end of the current Session."

Mr John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Should not a strong and confident Government accept whatever kind of scrutiny the House thinks is appropriate? Does the hon. Gentleman not get the mood of the House today? Everyone who has spoken so far today and, I think, those who have not spoken believe he should withdraw the motion and await the proper conclusions of the Committee?

Mr Heath: I prefer to hear the preponderance of voices in a Division, rather than take a snapshot of how the House may feel before it has had a chance to hear the debate. It is for the House to determine which way it wants to go on the proposals—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Heath: I shall make a little more progress. I have been reasonably generous in giving way to hon. Members, and I will no doubt be sufficiently generous again.

The Government could not have been clearer about their intentions. There has been some suggestion that the motion has been sprung on the House without notice or at the wrong time. I suggest that that contention is without merit.

When moving the motion which led to the establishment of the Backbench Business Committee on 15 June 2010, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House pointed out that

"For the first time in over a century, the House will be given control over significant parts of its own agenda."—[*Official Report*, 15 June 2010; Vol. 511, c. 779.]

That shift in control is one which this Government facilitated and to which they remain fully committed. The subjects of debate and the form that motions for

[Mr Heath]

debate take on the equivalent of 35 days a Session, including at least 27 days on the Floor of the House, are now properly a matter for the Backbench Business Committee. The debates chosen by the Backbench Business Committee have helped to raise the public profile of the House of Commons, and increased public awareness of the crucial role of the House in holding the Executive to account. The subjects chosen might well not have been chosen by the Government, or indeed by the Opposition, and have been challenging for us. That is part and parcel of the switch of power that the Wright Committee envisaged.

The Government are committed to the continuing role of the Backbench Business Committee, and to providing the time to that Committee in a Session of normal length which is set out in Standing Orders. The motion before us today does not affect in any way the Committee's powers or its role.

The first change addresses an anomaly in the method of election of members of the Backbench Business Committee. At present, all members of the Committee are elected by the whole House. This is wholly appropriate for the Chair of the Committee, who represents the whole House, but it may not be appropriate for the other members. It is wrong in principle that, for example, the choice of Opposition Members on a Committee could be decided by the votes of Members on the Government Benches, who will inevitably outnumber them.

I read a comment in the electronic media earlier today—because of the anomaly, why do we not change the rules for all the other Select Committees to match those for the Backbench Business Committee? The reason is obvious. If we were to do that, the Government of the day would control who the Opposition parties put on Select Committees. The House would rightly be outraged if that were the position, yet that is the position that we currently have with the Backbench Business Committee.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Heath: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin), the Chair of the Public Administration Committee.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): No doubt my hon. Friend has seen the evidence submitted by Dr Meg Russell to the Procedure Committee, in which she expressed her view that to go down the route he has chosen

“would be very much contrary to the spirit of what the Wright Committee intended.”

Is not the answer that the Backbench Business Committee is a special committee, not like an ordinary Select Committee, and that its Chair should be selected in the same manner as the Speaker and represent the whole House, as indeed should its members? That is what Wright intended. Why is he departing from Wright?

Mr Heath: As I said when responding to the debate on the original motion to set up the Backbench Business Committee, Wright is not holy writ and should not be treated as such, not least because there are internal contradictions in the Wright report, just as there are sometimes in holy writ. Therefore, the House has to take

a view on what is in the best interests of its procedures. That will be for the House to decide. I simply contend that it is a strange situation where the biggest party represented in the House can override the interests and decisions of other parties in deciding who its representatives on the Committee will be. I would have thought that my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex had confidence in the ability of his own party's procedures—I am afraid I have no specialist knowledge of them—to make a proper determination of who should serve on the Committee on its behalf.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex that different considerations apply to the Chair of the Committee, as he set out, which is why we propose that the Chair should continue to be elected by the whole House, with one proviso: we think that the Government should not provide the Chair, for perfectly obvious reasons. The situation is exactly analogous to that of two other Committees—the Standards and Privileges Committee and the Public Accounts Committee. There is a strong argument in favour of the Committee's decisions not being seen as the result of some sort of internal collusion between the Government and the legislature, and I think that the clearest way of indicating that they are not is to ensure that the Chair comes from a party that is not represented in Government.

Mr Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): So, the Deputy Leader of the House can of course give us an assurance that the Government are not seeking to change the rules now because existing members of the Committee have proved too independent.

Mr Heath: I can give that clear assurance, because I have absolute confidence that the members elected by the party groups will be every bit as independent as those elected by Committee of the whole House, and perhaps even identical in person. What I am trying to do is prevent the potential abuse of that process, which could clearly happen under the present rules. I hope that each of the parties, through their internal mechanisms, will have sufficiently robust structures in place to ensure that the Whips, if they come running to Back-Bench Members to have a particular Member elected to the Committee, will be robustly told where to go. But we shall see, because that is internal to the various parties and their internal democratic processes.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I am struggling a little to follow the argument the Deputy Leader of the House is making. If it is the case that the present Chair and members of the Committee have been conducting themselves excellently, why change now in a hurry when we are still waiting for a report? If the Government are so concerned about this—perhaps there is a point I have overlooked—why did he not bring in the arrangement he is proposing at the beginning of the process? Why are we bringing it in when the process is well underway, given that the people who have been running the Backbench Business Committee appear to be doing such a splendid job?

Mr Heath: I have already said why. We are doing that now because we are about to have elections, and we do not change the rules of elections after elections. It is normal practice, and normally more constructive, to change the rules before elections, rather than afterwards.

The hon. Gentleman asks why we did not start from a different basis. I accept, and the House is fully aware, that we started with the draft proposals from the Wright Committee, and it was obvious then that what applied to the Backbench Business Committee was different from what applied to any other Select Committee. The precautionary principle in elections to other Select Committees exists for a reason: to stop interference—in a party political way, between the parties—as to who on Select Committees should represent Members. I think that is quite an important principle, but the House must decide whether it considers it to be an important principle. If the House considers it to be nugatory, the House will vote accordingly.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): I realise that my hon. Friend is keen to bring the rules of the Backbench Business Committee into line with those of other Select Committees, so why does he not propose to bring it into line with Standing Order No. 151(11) so that its members are elected for the whole Parliament, rather than for a Session at a time?

Mr Heath: The hon. Gentleman raises a separate issue, one that we explored at length when we set up the Committee. The answer is that the Committee is a Committee of the House which deals with the topical issues before it, and it is right that Back Benchers have a regular opportunity to express their view on its performance; I make no apologies for that. It is sensible that the House has such control, because if we were to elect the Committee's members for an entire Parliament, the House would lose that opportunity to reflect on, or to see, whether the Committee was conducting itself as the House had hoped.

That is entirely different in kind from the responsibilities, within a Select Committee, of Select Committee members, who need such continuity in order to do their job effectively of holding to account the Department in question. To my mind there is a clear separation, but the hon. Gentleman may take a different view. I am simply confident that the House is capable of making decisions about the way in which it conducts its affairs, and of doing so without the benefit of distortions of any kind in the system. That is what is proposed today.

Mr Baron: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Heath: I am going to have make some progress very soon, because I have gone very little distance in explaining the tenor of my comments, but I will give way once more to the hon. Gentleman, as I am a very generous man.

Mr Baron: My hon. Friend is being very kind, but in all these exchanges he has singularly failed to answer one simple question: why are the Government pre-empting the findings of the Procedure Committee?

Mr Heath: The hon. Gentleman says that I have singularly failed to answer the question, but I have answered it several times; he simply does not like the answer I have given. There is a subtle distinction between not answering and others not accepting the answer. As I have said, the answer is that this is the opportunity we have before the elections.

The Procedure Committee will not report before the elections are due, and I do not want to put any further pressure on it to complete its report in a hurry, because these are very important matters on which we want the full benefit of its advice. It is no good crying after the event if it proves that we have made an error in our election of Members to the Backbench Business Committee. That is why the House has been given the opportunity today to consider whether it wants to make the changes that I have suggested.

The motion achieves that—

John Hemming (Birmingham, Yardley) (LD): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Heath: Yes, but this will be the last intervention for some time.

John Hemming: On that point, the problem so far in getting Procedure Committee debates on to the Floor of the House has been the Government allocating time for the Backbench Business Committee so that the Committee can allocate time to debate a Procedure Committee report. If the Government were to promise to allocate time immediately to debate a Procedure Committee report, there would be no difficulty in getting that through in time for the elections.

Mr Heath: There is one small difficulty with that, which is that the Backbench Business Committee is precluded from putting forward time for amendments to its own constitution. That is why it has to be a matter for the Government and why we are providing time today, and would provide time in future, to consider the results of the Procedure Committee report.

The motion achieves what I have been describing by a simple endorsement of the principle that parties should elect members of the Backbench Business Committee each Session, and thereafter when a vacancy arises, in a secret ballot of all Members from that party by whichever transparent and democratic method they choose, following the same approach as that agreed for other Select Committees on 4 March 2010. In consequence, we are, if the House agrees, removing the provisions in Standing Orders for elections of members of the Committee other than the Chair. The amendments in the name of the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) and others would remove the provisions whose purpose I have described and retain the current arrangements. Given what I have said, it will be no surprise that I will not support those amendments, but it is open to the House to do so if it wishes.

The second element of the motion relates to the Chair of the Committee, and I have already indicated why I believe that it introduces a beneficial change. The Government believe that it would not be appropriate for a Member from the governing party, or parties, to be nominated for the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, because to do so might give rise to the Government's appearing to seek to influence a key position in the House in an improper way. Having an Opposition Member chairing the Backbench Business Committee headlines the Committee's independence not only from the business managers—of whom I am one, on behalf of the Government—but the influence of the Government party generally. My right hon. Friend

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the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst) stood for the post of Chair in 2010, when the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel) was elected, and his wisdom and experience have subsequently been deployed in his service as Chair of the Administration Committee. However, conventions evolve over time, and we think the time is now right to recognise that the Chair should be held by an Opposition Member.

At the same time, we are taking the opportunity to remedy an anomaly in the Standing Order that was identified by my hon. Friend the Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) and referred to by the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire during the debate on 15 June 2010—namely, that at present no Member can be nominated for the Chair unless he or she belongs to a party with at least 11 Members of this House. I acknowledged on that occasion that my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman had identified a possible defect in the Standing Order that needed to be considered, and I am pleased to move this motion to remedy it—[*Interruption*—despite the protestations of the hon. Gentleman who, it seems, is never satisfied. We propose to replace it with a provision that requires cross-party support of comparable strength but allows Members from minority parties to stand for Chair of the Committee.

Finally, the motion makes provision for hon. Members from parties not represented on the Backbench Business Committee to participate in its work. The motion allows the Committee to invite an hon. Member who does not belong to a party represented on it to participate in its proceedings, including deliberative sessions, but not to vote. It would be for the Committee to decide whether to invite one hon. Member for a Session or a shorter period or to invite different hon. Members to different meetings. [*Interruption.*] The Government believe that this effectively addresses minority party concerns—although clearly, according to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire, it does not—in a manner consistent with the principle that the composition of the Committee should reflect the party composition of the House. The hon. Gentleman protests from a sedentary position that it does not reflect it because he wants full membership of the Committee, but that is not the way in which this House has determined its membership of Select Committees, whereby such membership reflects the composition of the House as a whole. It seems to me that that principle of proportionality is something that the House would wish to maintain, because otherwise it becomes open to the House to distort the composition of the House as represented in the membership of its Select Committees, and I am not sure that the Backbench Business Committee should be separate from that consideration.

We made it clear in our response to the Procedure Committee, which was published last month, that we do not agree with the proposal for full membership for a minority party Member. Our proposal allows for the participation of hon. Members from different parties, as and when the Backbench Business Committee considers it appropriate, whereas the amendments would provide for only a single hon. Member to participate. That is why we oppose the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire and others.

The amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (John Hemming) would apply the principle of whole-House elections to the election of a minority party Member. That is instructive about the conduct of this whole debate. Were the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire and the amendments to them tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley successful, the larger parties in the House would determine not only which Member from the minority parties would appear on the Committee, but which party would be represented. That would put the larger parties in the inappropriate position of deciding whether it should be a Member from the Democratic Unionist party, the Scottish National party or Plaid Cymru who was selected for the position. That amply demonstrates what is wrong with the current system of elections.

In conclusion, the motion will change the elections for the membership of the Backbench Business Committee and how Members participate in its work in a way that enables the Committee to continue to work effectively. It will make those changes at the right time—in fact, the only possible time—before the membership is settled in the next Session. The motion will facilitate the Committee's effective operation in the future and I commend it to the House.

4.46 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): It is appropriate that I start my comments, which I promise will be brief, by drawing attention to the success of the Backbench Business Committee so far. That needs to be put on the record. A wide range of topics has been introduced to the House via this mechanism, some of them as a result of the e-petitions process, with which we are now all familiar. Of course, one particular subject was not allowed to be debated in the Chamber and the reasons for that are well known.

There have been 39 days of Back-Bench debate in the Chamber and 16 in Westminster Hall. The impact has been considerable and has outweighed the number of days that have been allocated. There have been challenging debates on a range of issues and there have been six votes, including two on Afghanistan, one on contaminated blood, one on the regulation of financial advisers and one on accountability to the House. All those are important topics that would not have been debated or voted on if we had not had the Backbench Business Committee. The House would therefore not have been able to express its view.

One of the two most memorable debates was last year's debate on wild animals in circuses. The decision of the House, without a vote, was that wild animals should be banned in circuses. The view of the Opposition is that the wild animals in circuses may die of old age before they are banned if the Government have their way.

Perhaps the biggest and most profound debate was on the Hillsborough disaster, which was held in the House last autumn. I was proud to take part in that debate, and in my view, it showed the House at its finest. It was a moving debate that consolidated the growing view that the Hillsborough disaster requires open and transparent examination, especially in relation to the records that are given over to the inquiry, and that no stone should be left unturned in revealing the truth

of what happened on that day. The House played an important part in confirming the view of the establishment, if one wants to call it that, on that point.

The Backbench Business Committee is clearly a useful new mechanism for strengthening the effective scrutiny of Government by the Commons. We support the motion because it follows the example set by the new arrangements for Select Committee membership, which were hard fought for. Those arrangements determine that the membership of Select Committees should be decided by elections of all Members of the House. The new Select Committee procedure, which will apply to the Backbench Business Committee if the motion is passed, gives Back Benchers on both sides of the House the opportunity to determine their own representation on Committees. Equally importantly, it allows them to do so without interference by any other party.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): The hon. Lady says that the motion will give parties on both sides of the House the ability to select their Committee members without interference by anybody else. In fact, it will give three parties in the House the ability to select their members. It ignores the representatives of the other six parties. The Social Democratic and Labour party, Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National party, the Alliance party, the Green party and the Democratic Unionist party will have no ability to select members. Does she not think that she should have thought the matter through a little more carefully, or is this just about the Labour party Whips controlling their Members, in the same way as it is about the Tory Back Benchers being controlled by their Whips?

Angela Smith: Perish the thought. I would argue, actually, that the motion gives minority party Members more right to representation on the Backbench Business Committee.

Mr Nuttall: Does the hon. Lady agree that there would be a problem if the motion were accepted, in that two elections would take place, one among Government Members and one among Opposition Members? The rules provide that two female Members have to be elected to the Committee. How would that work in practice? How would it be determined who the two female Members should be?

Angela Smith: It is a minimum of two women, and the Opposition have plenty of very good women who would put their names forward. In my view, women on the Labour Benches are equally likely to be represented on the Committee as our male colleagues, if not more so.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Angela Smith: Very briefly, but then I must make progress, because I want to give Back-Bench Members time to make their contributions.

Mr Bone: As I understand it, the Government's proposal will do away with the gender balance on the Committee. Does the hon. Lady support that?

Angela Smith: The Opposition will have a quota to provide gender balance on the Committee, because we are committed to equality when it comes to gender representation in the House. We are proud of the fact that we follow that principle.

The motion will also abolish the prohibition on members of minority parties standing for the position of Chair of the Committee, which is an important improvement. That is provided, of course, that they are not members of any governing coalition, which is an equally important improvement.

A Procedure Committee inquiry on the Backbench Business Committee is ongoing. We seek assurances that there will be an opportunity at the appropriate time for the House to take a view on any recommendations arising from that report, with adequate time provided. I believe that the Government have already conceded that point to some extent, but I should like to hear more about it when the Minister concludes the debate.

We cannot support the amendments, because they are incompatible with the Select Committee membership arrangements that are already in place.

I shall conclude now, because I wish to give Back-Bench Members adequate time to contribute.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. It is clear that several Members wish to speak, and we have, I think, only 53 minutes for them to do so. There is no formal time limit on Back-Bench speeches at this stage, but a certain self-denying ordinance would be widely appreciated.

4.53 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I rise to speak against the motion, largely in sadness and regret, because I will have to criticise those on the Government Front Bench, particularly the Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House. I could do that in 10 seconds, because as we have already heard, Government and Opposition Front Benchers support the motion on the Backbench Business Committee, so we could almost say, "When the two Front Benches agree, it's a clearly a stitch-up and can't be right for the House"—and sit down.

This attempt to alter Standing Orders on the Backbench Business Committee to suit the Executive is absolutely outrageous. It is an attempt by the Executive to ignore Parliament and to impose their will on the House. What is particularly shocking is that they are trying to interfere with business that is exclusively Back-Bench business. Such business has no relevance whatever to the Government.

The Government's actions fly in the face of the House of Commons Reform Committee report, "Rebuilding the House", HC1117, which proposed what are known throughout the House as the Wright reforms. Those reforms were designed to restore trust in Parliament and to reduce the power of the Executive. They were the very reforms that the Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House supported so vigorously when they were in opposition. I am sad to say that it has taken less than two years for the Government to do a U-turn and go back to the bad old days of the Executive trying to tell Parliament what to do. There have been several signs over the past few months that the Government

[Mr Peter Bone]

are adopting the policy of always knowing right and of assuming that Parliament is there only to rubber-stamp their decisions. This motion is the clearest and most obvious breach of their commitment to put Parliament first.

One of the most shocking and shameful aspects of the debate is its timing. The Leader of the House put the motion on the Order Paper without any consultation with the Backbench Business Committee. Even more significantly, he did so only hours after the Committee met, so that it could not formally consider the issue. He has also tabled the debate and vote prior to tomorrow's Committee meeting. He has deliberately slighted the Committee, which meets weekly, by putting the motion on the Order Paper hours after last Tuesday's meeting and before tomorrow's meeting.

What is even more reprehensible is that the Committee is reviewing its operation so that it can report to the House and provide evidence to the Procedure Committee's inquiry. The Government's timing is the most disgraceful discourtesy to the Backbench Business Committee. The Leader of the House is saying to the Committee: "I want to sneak this through before your Committee can formally protest." That is devious, undemocratic and a disgrace to the Government.

I shall now turn to the crux of the matter—this is why the motion should be defeated. The Procedure Committee, chaired so ably by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight), who is in his place, announced on 21 February 2012 that it was launching a review of the operation of the Backbench Business Committee in accordance with a previous motion agreed by the House of Commons. The review was

"in particular to inquire into...issues relating to the membership of the Committee...the amount of time available to the Committee and the way in which the Government allocates that time...the powers of the Committee, and the process by which the Committee determines the matters to be debated in backbench time."

The closing date for submissions was Thursday 8 March. Let us dwell on that for a moment. Thursday 8 March was two days after the Government tabled their motion and decided what the House would do. At best, that was a shoddy attempt by the Government to ignore a Select Committee; at worst, it was an attempt by the Government to interfere with a Select Committee, which could give rise to a number of issues for the Minister, possibly including a breach of the ministerial code and referral to the Standards and Privileges Committee. The Government might think that they can ignore the will of Parliament, but this is a different Parliament to previous ones. This Parliament is willing to stand up to an all-powerful Executive.

As the House is aware, Members were requested to send representations to the Procedure Committee by last Thursday. The first three things they were asked to consider were:

"The composition of the Committee and the process for electing its members; whether the Chair of the Committee should be reserved for an opposition Member; whether a place on the Committee should be reserved for the minority parties."

The top three issues, then, that we were asked to consider and report on to the Procedure Committee by last Thursday are exactly the three issues that the Government are trying to shoot through Parliament today.

The Executive have decided, without waiting for the Procedure Committee report, that Committee members will be elected by party groups and that the Chair of the Committee will be an Opposition Member, and they have completely fudged the issue of the minority parties. The Government have predetermined the Procedure Committee's inquiry before it has had time to collate the written evidence, take oral evidence and consider its report.

Mr Baron: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government's explanation—that they had to push this through prior to an election—runs rather shallow given that, unlike for other Committees of the House, elections are every Session, so these proposals could quite easily have been postponed for a year until the next elections?

Mr Bone: Of course that is the case. These elections will determine the Backbench Business Committee not for the term of the Parliament but for a year. If the Procedure Committee happened to report after the next elections and there was a change to procedure, the elections afterwards could be run on the new system. There was absolutely no need to prejudge the Select Committee report, apart from the fact that it might have resolved matters differently from what the Government wanted.

Mr Knight: May I place it on the record that the Procedure Committee will in no way feel inhibited by what is determined today? Does my hon. Friend agree that what the House decides today it can later decide to undo or amend?

Mr Bone: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's comments. Nobody who knows him will think that this sort of ploy could possibly affect what his Committee does.

I turn to one of the most appalling aspects of today—the whipping on the Conservative Benches. There is no question but that this is House business, and there is no question but that it is Back-Bench business. By convention, such votes should not carry a Whip; they should be free votes. There is no way that the Executive should try to instruct the House how to organise Back-Bench business affairs, but Conservative Members were told last week that we would be on a three-line Whip to vote for this outrageous motion. After protests, the Whips Office reduced it to a one-line Whip. [Laughter.] The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) laughs, and of course he knows why the Whips Office did that: to keep Back Benchers away from the House. I have received a very nice text from a Member saying, "I'm out working in my constituency. Aren't the xxx Whips very devious?" That is very true.

After our protests, then, the Whips Office reduced the vote to a one-line Whip, but that is not a genuine free vote, because Members here will still be instructed how to vote. This is wrong, should not be happening and flies in the face of the coalition Government's pledge to restore trust in Parliament. Even worse, I understand that Ministers and Parliamentary Private Secretaries are on a three-line Whip to vote through this despicable motion. The very people who should have no interest in Back-Bench business are the ones who are being told to vote for the changes. I am more than happy to take an intervention from the Leader of the

House if that is not the case. *[Interruption.]* I see he does not want to intervene. This really is going back to the bad old days.

Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con): Is my hon. Friend aware that some years ago, in an extremely important book called “The Commons In Transition”, a former Clerk of the House said that the root of all the trouble with Standing Orders and whipping was collusion between the two Front Benches in the 1880s in order to take control of Standing Orders away from the Speaker? In those days it was the Speaker who determined these questions, which preserved the integrity of the House.

Mr Bone: I am grateful for my hon. Friend’s intervention, but I think you would admonish me if I went down that route, Mr Speaker, as it is a little wide of today’s debate, although I must say that it has much merit.

Mr Speaker: I might not.

Mr Bone: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I turn to the amendments in my name and five of the seven other members of the Backbench Business Committee, including the Chairman. The purpose of amendments (d), (e) and (f) is to leave out the Government’s proposed changes to the election of Backbench Business Committee members. The Government are proposing that future members of the Committee will be elected by party group. There are two distinct disadvantages to that proposal. The first—I suggest that this is the reason for it—is that it will give the Government, as well as the shadow Government, greater influence in deciding who is elected to the Backbench Business Committee. Through their Whips Offices, they will try to engineer more pliable Members to be elected to the Committee. I believe that this will make the Committee much more divided on party lines. In all the time that the current Committee has met, there has been only one vote, and that did not divide it along party lines. The Government’s proposal will reduce the likelihood that independent parliamentarians will be elected to the Committee.

Secondly, the authority that members of the Committee hold is greatly enhanced by their being chosen by the whole House. Their mandate comes from Back Benchers of all political persuasions, not by a narrow party group. The Wright Committee was clear on that issue, saying in paragraph 180 of its report on page 54:

“We therefore recommend that a Backbench Business Committee be created. It should be comprised of between seven and nine members elected by secret ballot of the House as a whole”.

So there we have it: the Wright report recommends that individual members of the Committee should be elected by the whole House, not by party groups. That is what the House agreed when setting up the Backbench Business Committee—the House agreed with the Wright Committee. Now the Government want to change Standing Orders while a Select Committee is looking into the matter, and against the wishes of the Wright Committee and an earlier decision of the House.

In conclusion, I therefore wish to press my amendments, and if they are not accepted by the Government, I will seek your leave to divide the House, Mr Speaker. I will also be supporting the amendments in the name of the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel). I would urge Members both to support the amendments and to vote against the motion.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Several Members are seeking to catch my eye, so I give notice to the House that after the next speaker whom I intend to call—namely the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee—I will impose a time limit of four minutes on Back-Bench contributions, because I am keen to facilitate as many Back Benchers as possible. However, that will not apply to the next speech.

5.8 pm

Natascha Engel (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): I will keep my comments brief, in order that Back Benchers are given a bit more time.

I am deeply disappointed that the Government have tabled this motion without consulting either the Procedure Committee or the Backbench Business Committee. It goes absolutely against the spirit of the sort of relationship that has grown up between the Backbench Business Committee and the Government. The fact that motions affecting the Backbench Business Committee’s operation have been tabled while the Procedure Committee is still looking at that matter in detail and asking for their ideas people far and wide, inside the House and beyond, means that today’s debate cannot be as informed as it should be. Furthermore, to allocate one and a half hours for such a debate is laughable. Members are being asked to make decisions on matters that require much more information.

The Backbench Business Committee will produce its report either this week or next week. The Procedure Committee could work much more quickly on its review of the operation of the Backbench Business Committee if it needed to, and could report very quickly on it. If the Government were willing to withdraw the motion, I am certain that we would benefit from a debate informed by the end-of-term report from the Backbench Business Committee and by the Procedure Committee’s report, well before the end of the Session and timed to coincide with the elections to the Backbench Business Committee. Will the Minister tell us whether the Government are willing to consider withdrawing the motion and having a debate on these matters on another day? I am sure that the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight) and I would work very quickly to produce our Committees’ reports in order to facilitate such a debate.

The amendments tabled in my name deal with the minority parties. This matter has been a running sore to the Backbench Business Committee. We are, by accident, a Committee of Members from England. We have three members from the east midlands region, and we are an entirely English Committee. We could be far more representative not only of Back Benchers but of the country as a whole if the minority parties were more actively involved.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): As a Member from Wales, I endorse what the hon. Lady has just said. She will be aware that the leading characters from Wales came to her to put their case for a St David’s day debate, and I am happy to report that the English members of the Committee yielded to that request, but it took two years to achieve that. The point that she makes about geographic spread is an important one.

Natascha Engel: Indeed. Such representation would give added flavour to the Backbench Business Committee.

Pete Wishart: It is more than that; the Committee must be for Back Benchers of the whole House, not just those of the Government parties and the Labour Opposition. There are five other political parties in the House; surely they should be represented if it is to be a Back-Bench Committee of the whole House.

Natascha Engel: That goes to the heart of the amendments. The minority parties are Back Benchers. They can never really be Front Benchers. It is very unlikely that we will ever see a member of one of the minority parties at the Dispatch Box.

Using the principle of proportionality is also wrong. The Committee has four members from the Conservative party, one from the Liberal Democrats and two from the Labour party, plus the Chair, who has a casting vote. An additional member from one of the minority parties would not automatically lose the Government their majority—certainly not during a coalition Government, and I see no reason why we should not consider expanding the number of members of the Committee if there were not a coalition.

The Backbench Business Committee is different from other Select Committees, in that it represents all Back Benchers of the House. At the moment, however, we do that very poorly by not having representation from the minority parties. The Procedure Committee's report of October 2011 recommended that these changes be made, and that an additional place on the Backbench Business Committee be created in order that the minority parties be given representation. The right hon. Member for East Yorkshire has just made the point that, after the Procedure Committee had reported, we could table motions to amend what had been decided today. That is sort of true, but only the Government are able to table motions that affect the Backbench Business Committee. Quite rightly, we as a Backbench Business Committee cannot table motions that affect our own operation. What the right hon. Gentleman says is rather difficult unless it is within the Government's agreement that the motions are tabled. That worries me. That brings me back to why the Government cannot simply wait until the Procedure Committee has produced its report and the Backbench Business Committee has told the House about its experiences in the one and a half years of its existence.

Let me briefly support the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) that deals with the issue of the whole House participating in the elections. This goes back to the point that the Backbench Business Committee is somewhat different from other Select Committees, in that it represents all Back Benchers. Therefore, the whole House should have a say in who it wants on the Backbench Business Committee.

Mr Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): The hon. Lady and I both served on the Wright Committee, and I am sure that she remembers, as I do, that it was very much that Committee's deliberate intention to achieve a cultural change in the House of Commons. Part of that was precisely the issue of the Backbench Business Committee being elected by and representing the whole House, not individual parties.

Natascha Engel: That is absolutely right. We should not throw away that important principle today. I am worried by the fact that the Government have tabled these motions. There has been inadequate time to look at them and inadequate time to explore all the different consequences arising from them. We are dealing with something that is not broken, so I do not understand why the Government want to fix it.

Mr Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Apparently, some people in the Government think that under the current arrangements the Labour party can gang up to ensure that so-called troublemakers are on this Committee. Is that not to politicise the whole issue? The fact is that members of the Committee are independent. They are not troublemakers; they are independent-minded people. We should keep party politics out of this.

Natascha Engel: That goes back to my point that the Backbench Business Committee is not broken. We do not vote on party lines and the discussions we have are not on party lines. Its members are independent-minded. They are members of different political parties, but the wider issue is about how we best represent Back Benchers as a whole. We currently have a spread on the Committee, with every type of Back Bencher in today's Parliament represented.

I urge Members to vote for the amendment that includes the minority parties as full voting members. We do not want them to be there only as a result of some kind of patronage of the Chair which allows them to attend and listen to the Committee's words of wisdom. We want them to have full membership and full voting rights. I also urge support for the amendment tabled to allow the entire House to vote on who should represent Back Benchers on the Backbench Business Committee.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. A four-minute limit applies, but I remind Members that they are not obliged to speak right up to that limit.

5.17 pm

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I find the proposals in the Government's motion to be very unfortunate, as they are bringing party politics into this place when dealing with Back-Bench business matters. That is, as I say, most unfortunate—and, more importantly, it will be viewed as unfortunate by people outside this place, too.

I suggest that a key aspect of the reassertion of Parliament was the formation of the Backbench Business Committee, which has proved—neither the Government nor Opposition Front-Bench Members have been able to suggest otherwise—to be an excellent method of holding the Executive to account, ensuring that matters of importance are debated here, at times against the wishes of the Government. I have heard no evidence from anybody that the Backbench Business Committee is not working well.

I have my own reasons to be grateful to the Backbench Business Committee. The full-day debate that I led on Iran on 20 February was the first time that the subject had been debated for many years. Whatever the views across the House, it was a good day for parliamentarians.

It was a packed debate; we ran out of time; we heard many excellent contributions, including from former Foreign and Defence Secretaries. It was deemed by everyone who participated in the debate to be well worth while. At the time, the Government opposed it; they opposed even the wording of the motion, as we saw.

It is therefore very regrettable that the Government have pre-empted the findings of the Procedure Committee's inquiry into the operation of the Backbench Business Committee by producing their own recommendations today. The response from those on the Front Bench that they had to do it now, because if they did not it would be too late for the election, is complete and utter nonsense. The elections come round every Session: they come round every year. There is no real reason why the Government's suggestions could not have waited until the Procedure Committee had presented its recommendations, and perhaps they could then have influenced the elections next year.

I am afraid that, whatever my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House may say from the Dispatch Box, the justification does not stack up. There can be no doubt that implementation of the Government's proposals would result in a weakening of the Committee. It would take power away from the Back Benches and Parliament and hand it back to the Executive, and that cannot be right. This is all about control.

Finally, let me say something about the question of who selects the Chairman and Committee members. Surely all those who are selected as members of the Committee would have far more authority if they were elected by the whole House, rather than by party groups. That would enable the Committee to perform its role even better, with greater justification and, I would suggest, with greater credibility and integrity as well.

5.20 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): You will recall, Mr Speaker, the sense of disappointment, outrage and anger two years ago, when we first learned of the membership of the Backbench Business Committee. We had been excluded, as though we did not exist. We were not entitled to a place on the Committee. That would not have been so important had it been just another Select Committee of the House—we expect to be excluded from those, because that is what the arithmetic does—but for us to be excluded from the Backbench Business Committee, a Committee of Members acting for other Members, was absolutely and utterly ridiculous.

When we complained, we were reassured. I was told, “Don't worry, Pete, it will be fine. As soon as we have the first opportunity to review this, we will put it right and ensure that it is fixed. We will have a place for you on the Committee.” And what did we get? Observer status. This is not the United Nations; this is the House of Commons, one of the Houses of Parliament. We do not do observer status in this place. What a ridiculous and utterly fatuous notion! We demand a place on this Committee.

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I am sorry; I do not have enough time.

I could stand for the position of Chair of the Committee, but I have as much chance of becoming its Chair as the Deputy Leader of the House has of becoming the SNP

Member for Somerton and Frome. There is no chance whatsoever of a member of one of the minority parties being allowed—

Mr Heath: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I will give way briefly to the Deputy Leader of the House.

Mr Heath: If it is of such little consequence that the hon. Gentleman could stand for the position of Chair, why on earth did he make such a song and dance about it two years ago?

Pete Wishart: What we were making such a song and dance about was membership of the Committee. I should be delighted to be able to stand for the position of Chair of the Committee as a member of the Committee, but for me to be able to stand for that position without having a place on the Committee is utterly and absolutely ridiculous.

We in the minority parties will have to have a think about this. We cannot have a Backbench Business Committee of some of the House; it must be a Backbench Business Committee of the whole House. We decided that we would involve ourselves with the Committee over the last two years, despite our great disappointment about what happened. We were reassured by the Chair, who has been fantastic with the minority parties, and who has been able to work with us to ensure that we could at least secure some of our debates. However, we will now have to take a good long look at our relationship with the Committee. I suggest to other members of the smaller parties that we should be saying, “If you, the House, do not want us, why on earth should we have anything to do with you?” If this is to be a Back-Bench Committee consisting exclusively of members of the Government parties and the Labour Opposition, why should we have anything to do with it at all?

We must ensure that the Backbench Business Committee is a Committee of the whole House. The present arrangements are nonsense, the idea of observer status is absurd, and I appeal to the House to back the amendments and ensure that we have equality in the House. There are five other political parties here. There is more than just a Labour Opposition; there are other members, there are other parties, and we must ensure that we are properly represented in the House. The Wright Committee has been a disaster for the smaller parties. We have effectively been turfed out of Select Committees, and now the same is happening with other Committees in the House.

I urge Members to back the amendments. I urge them to ensure that there is justice for the smaller parties, and to ensure that we have a Backbench Business Committee that represents the whole House.

5.24 pm

John Hemming (Birmingham, Yardley) (LD): I am a glutton for punishment, because as well as being a member of the Regulatory Reform Committee and the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, I serve on the Backbench Business Committee and the Procedure Committee, so I follow the deliberations on these matters through the entire process.

[John Hemming]

I agree with the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) that the BBC should be a Committee of, as it were, the whole House. The Member who communicates with the minority parties should be a full Committee member and be elected by the whole House. I drafted a couple of technical amendments that would have ensured that the election for Committee members of the minority parties would have been the same as the election for those of the other parties, so that all are elected by the whole House. One reason for suggesting that is that not all political issues are party political.

Essentially, the Government and Opposition Front-Bench teams are trying to shift the balance of power back towards the Executive. Let us consider the elections at the start of this Session. I was uncontested as the Liberal Democrat representative, and the four Conservatives were also uncontested. There were three candidates to be the two Labour representatives, but there have not been any by-elections since. We could therefore argue that the proposal under discussion may not make any difference. In practice, however, it is still moving away from the recommendations of the Wright report, which state that Parliament should operate as a Parliament, and not do everything divided along party lines. We need representatives from the parties to make sure that systems of communication are in place and that Members know that there is somebody they can talk to.

Dr McCrea: Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge the following fact: every other region of the United Kingdom can be represented—there can be a member from Wales, a member from England, a member from Scotland—but none of the three major parties have representatives from Northern Ireland? Who will speak with authority for the people of Northern Ireland?

John Hemming: That is why I think it is important to have somebody from the minority parties elected by the whole House as a full member of the Committee. There has been one vote on one issue, and the rest of the decisions have, in effect, been made by consensus. In a House business committee, there would, obviously, have to be a Government majority. In this case, however, there is clearly no need to add an extra Member of the Government parties when adding a full Member communicating with the minority parties.

My point is that the idea of having a BBC representing the Back Benchers of the whole House and elected by the whole House has worked very well and should not be changed.

5.26 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I think the Leader of the House has, in general, been an excellent Leader of the House; since he took up his post after the general election, he has, broadly speaking, done a good job, as has the Deputy Leader of the House. I therefore feel sorry that today is not a day when we are able to praise the Leader of the House, as I think the proposals he has come up with are ill-considered and ill-timed. I think that he has let himself down, to be honest.

I say that because we are now coming to the end of a two-year Session. This will, I believe, be the longest parliamentary Session since 1643. That has given additional

power to the Government, as they have been able to keep on having a go at getting legislation through in the other place. That is why we are still having a row about the health service Bill. If we had not had a two-year Session, many of its elements would have been ditched long ago—and likewise in respect of many other pieces of proposed legislation.

The Backbench Business Committee has been a genuine success, however. As has been said, the timing of this proposal is wrong because the Procedure Committee has not yet completed its business. The proposal is therefore a bit of an affront to it. Also, the Government had plenty of time to organise for today. They could have set about this process months ago, because we always knew that another set of elections was going to be held at the end of the second year. We could have started this process six months ago rather than recently.

I also point out to the Leader of the House that the coalition agreement says that there will be a House business committee by the third year, which starts in a few weeks' time. We therefore should, in fact, be debating the House business committee tonight, not the Government trying to seize a bit of power in relation to the BBC.

The amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) and my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel) go to the heart of what it is to be a Member of Parliament. Every single one of us can be partisan. I can be extremely partisan on occasion. [Interruption.] Indeed, other hon. Members can be partisan, too. That is not wrong, as we were all elected on party tickets. My constituents in the Rhondda do not vote for me because I am a lovely, decent chap. [Interruption.] I think I have carried the House on that. They vote for me because they want a Labour Government and a Labour person to be elected.

Of course, that partisan element of how we do our business and the way we tussle in the Chamber is part of making sure that the Government do a better job. I have no problem with being partisan, but we also have to rise above being partisan on occasion. We have sometimes let ourselves down on that and it is where the Leader of the House is doing so on this matter. It was a sadness that Robin Cook never managed to get some of these things through previous whipping organisations when we were in government, but it was a delight when people who were standing for election by the whole House—the Chairs—were lobbying all Members of the House; they actually wanted a mandate and wanted to understand what all the Members of the House thought. Surely that is why it is better that the members of the Backbench Business Committee should be elected by the whole House, not just by their individual parties.

I launched my “save the backbench three” campaign last Friday because of a concern. The Committee has done a good job, having given us the best debates this year, whereas the Government have given us some pretty poor debates during the past year and for the past few months they have given us hardly anything to do at all. I fear that next year's business will be a waste of time, unless we keep the “backbench three”.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Five Members are seeking to contribute and I would like to accommodate them all. I do not know that I shall succeed, but brevity is of the essence.

5.30 pm

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): It is a good thing that Chief Whips are not required to speak in these debates. We have heard some full tributes to the work of the Backbench Business Committee from the Deputy Leader of the House and his shadow, and I would be very surprised if the Government Chief Whip would be able to utter the same words of praise and thanksgiving for the work of the Backbench Business Committee, because the Committee has been an utter pain for the Government Whips Office. It is no good the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) nodding her head, because the Committee has been bringing to the Floor of the House issues that very often neither Front-Bench team wanted brought here—they wanted to suppress them. That has been the great strength of this Committee.

If the coalition Government have a problem with who was elected to the Backbench Business Committee or how it was elected, they have nobody to blame but themselves, because some posts went uncontested. That shows a remarkable lack of assiduousness, given how the Whips Offices usually try to influence such elections. We should have no doubt that this operation today is an exercise designed to reduce the accountability and responsiveness of the Committee.

Let us briefly consider the detail of the motion. Most important is the proposal that the regularity of elections will be reduced: they will be held once per Parliament. If this motion through, the election in the new Session will be the last this Parliament—

Mr Heath: No.

Mr Jenkin: I beg my hon. Friend's pardon if I misunderstood things, and I stand corrected.

The motion is also determined to reduce the way in which the membership of the Committee reflects the views of the whole House, on the basis of the spurious idea that parties voting for Members of other parties have a malign intent. The Chair is to be chosen from the Opposition, but that will reduce the Chair's authority. The great authority that the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel) has is that she was elected as much by the votes of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats as by the votes of the Labour party. She was not a choice predetermined by the Standing Orders of this House and it was not a predetermined choice that she was chosen from her party.

For all those reasons, we should want to defend the existing system, not least because the Wright Committee intended the election of the Backbench Business Committee and its Chair to be carried out on a different basis from the elections to the other Select Committees. The Deputy Leader of the House keeps saying that he has given a reason for needing to pre-empt the findings of the Procedure Committee. He may have given a "reason", but it is an excuse and a motive; it is not a justification for pre-empting the findings of the Procedure Committee.

I wish to conclude by making a brief point. Those of us from the previous Parliament who went through—how shall I describe it?—the purifying fire of the expenses debacle came out of it determined that things should change in this House, that politics should change and that at least some of what happens in this House should

be taken out of the ghetto of the Westminster political parties talking to themselves. Are we now seeing this House reverting to type? Are we seeing the vested interests beginning to reassert themselves? I urge this House to be ever-more vigilant to make sure that that does not occur and ever-more vigilant because we are seeing today how determined the forces of darkness in politics can be.

5.34 pm

Mr John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): This debate is about power and those on the Front Benches are misguided in thinking that it will enhance ministerial power to seek to influence the way in which Back-Bench business is conducted against the interests of all the Back Benchers who have turned up and spoken in today's debate. It is wrong of those on the two Front Benches to impose a Whip on Ministers and shadow Ministers—[*Interruption.*] I accept, then, that there is no such Whip on shadow Ministers, but we will see. We will study the Division results with great interest to see the view that shadow Ministers take. It is wrong for Front Benchers to seek to stop Back Benchers continuing with their arrangements in a timely way.

I share a common cause with my Front Benchers as I happen to think, as they seem to, that Ministers do not have enough power. I think that there is a danger that under any Government we could have Ministers in office but not in power, but the reason is not our powerful Backbench Business Committee and the fact that it makes them come to this House to discuss things that they do not wish to discuss. If Ministers do that well, it enhances their stature. The reason is that too many decisions are taken by the European Union, overridden by the European Court of Human Rights or taken by independent quangos. We have the Environment Agency, the Bank of England and United Kingdom Financial Investments; Ministers are very limited in what they can do. I would happily make common cause with those on my Front Bench in getting Ministers more power and think that many of my colleagues would take the same view. We would be cheering them if they came to this House and said that Ministers needed more power to settle our borders, sort out the problems with prisoners, deal with taxation or money supply and so on. We want it to be accountable power, however, which is why we want Ministers to have more power but think that they should come to the House of Commons to answer for how they exercise it.

Ministers should get real. They are in danger of being in office but not in power because they will not take the accountable power they need to improve our country and to make the necessary changes. Their problem is not the Backbench Business Committee; their problem lies elsewhere. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to wake up and smell the coffee, as the phrase goes these days, and to understand that people want a strong, proud and independent Parliament and that people want their Ministers to come here to talk about the difficult issues on any day. They want Ministers to talk about the issue that they do not want to talk about today, because that is what matters and that is what is topical. A strong and confident Government can debate anything at any time about their conduct, their views and their policies and the more we make them debate it, the stronger their case should be. I want the Opposition to challenge them, I want the Backbench

[Mr John Redwood]

Business Committee to challenge them and, above all, I want the decisions that matter for our country to be made here by accountable Ministers.

5.38 pm

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): There is absolutely no clamour from Back Benchers for any change in the method of election to the Backbench Business Committee. Let us be clear about that. I pray in evidence paragraph 59 of the fifth report of the Procedure Committee of this Session, which states:

“We have received no adverse comments on the arrangements for the elections to the Backbench Business Committee but there are two issues which have been raised in evidence to us which we now consider.”

One related to the representation of the minority parties and the Procedure Committee suggested adding a member to the Backbench Business Committee,

“to be elected by the whole House.”

The second issue was a rather technical matter relating to by-elections. There was no suggestion that the whole Committee and the nature of its members' election should be changed.

I submit as evidence Standing Order 152(1), which states:

“Select committees shall be appointed to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the principal government departments as set out in paragraph (2)”.

Paragraph (2) then lists 19 Departments; obviously, the Backbench Business Committee is not on that list. The Government have suggested today that the changes in the motion are needed to bring the Backbench Business Committee into line with other Select Committees. Incidentally, however, they also seek to differentiate the Committee from Select Committees when it comes to the length of membership. I understand why some Members might be confused about this. The Backbench Business Committee is and should be regarded as a Committee of the House and should be treated differently from Select Committees. On that basis, elections to it should be by the whole House and I urge Members to support the amendments of my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone).

5.40 pm

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): This has been a passionate debate and I agreed with much of what my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) and the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel) had to say. Perhaps they gave their case a little less credit by resorting to elements of hyperbole—indeed, there were hints of hysteria coming from the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart)—but I agree fundamentally with what they said. This Executive, like every other Executive and—this is even sadder to see—shadow Executive, have an unhealthy tendency to meddle in matters that are best left to Parliament. That should rightly be resisted and it is through the Backbench Business Committee that we try our best to resist.

Unlike any other Member who has spoken, perhaps, I think the motion is more of a curate's egg. I believe that the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee should be an Opposition Member. As has been pointed

out, in the initial election, my right hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Sir Alan Haselhurst), who is a very good friend of mine and a distinguished parliamentarian, was pitted against the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire. I thought it would be very unhealthy for that role, particularly initially, to be in the hands of a former Deputy Speaker of 13 years' standing who was therefore very much part of the establishment, so I voted with my head rather than my heart. Like every other Member who has spoken I have been extremely pleased with the outcome and I pay great tribute to the wonderful work that the hon. Lady does in chairing the Committee.

Let me pick up on the contribution of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire. The Leader of the House would do well to recognise that every single party in the House of Commons is a minority party, and I think it is quite wrong that we are prescribing the rights of the minority parties. The suggestion in amendment (a), which I think would have come through with the Procedure Committee, that there should be a special member for all the minority parties, is something we should follow.

I also believe there are very good reasons why the Backbench Business Committee should have some anonymous rules, as has been suggested by Ministers, for the election of its members, because it is by its nature an anonymous Committee: it is a Back-Bench Committee looking at Back-Bench business. I say that as a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee, which, alongside the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, has different election arrangements. Those anomalies are open to a certain amount of criticism but are, none the less, rightly tolerated. If we do not adopt that approach, we run the risk of having approved party candidates rather than those who have the broadest party support. I shall be supporting amendments (a) and (d). There are elements of the motion with which I agree, but I regret the way in which it has led to the rancour we have seen in the past hour or so in this debate.

5.43 pm

Mr Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I recall that the Leader of the House was one of the most eloquent advocates of Dr Tony Wright's proposed reforms in this area. I also remember a famous conference speech in which he said that we would not resort to guillotines in the manner that had happened in the past. I also remember that when I was a student, the constitutional writers of the time used to discuss and describe the role and function of the Leader of the House. Fifty years ago they would argue that it was the most important role in the management of the House of Commons. The Leader of the House brought the views of the House to the Government and would try and influence them in the interests of the House and in the interests of the Government. It is a divided position; it is not an easy one. Yet here we see on the Order Paper, in the name of the Leader of the House, a motion that clearly has not been the result of any form of consultation, but has come from the very bowels of Government to assert their own primacy yet again.

The debate is about the Backbench Business Committee. This is Back-Bench business, in a sense, yet we know the apparatus, as has been described by many Conservative

Members, through which the motion has come about. It is not to the credit of the Leader of the House that his name is the first of the proposers.

The reforms have not been bad. They have been rather successful, and maybe it is their success that arouses fear. After all, we had a debate on a referendum. That is something that no Government—Labour or the present Government—would have tabled. We were able to discuss matters on which debate had been denied to Members for a very long time. I support much of the work of the Backbench Business Committee. It is essential that it carries on in future. I have always supported—

5.46 pm

One and a half hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the motion, the Deputy Speaker put the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Order, 7 March).

Amendment proposed: (d), leave out paragraph (1).—(Mr Bone).

The House divided: Ayes 105, Noes 186.

Division No. 485]

[5.46 pm

AYES

Ali, Rushanara	Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Anderson, Mr David	Jones, Mr Kevan
Bacon, Mr Richard	Lammy, rh Mr David
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Leigh, Mr Edward
Baron, Mr John	Lewis, Dr Julian
Barron, rh Mr Kevin	Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn
Beith, rh Sir Alan	MacShane, rh Mr Denis
Berger, Luciana	Mactaggart, Fiona
Binley, Mr Brian	McCartney, Jason
Blunkett, rh Mr David	McCartney, Karl
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	McCrea, Dr William
Brady, Mr Graham	McIntosh, Miss Anne
Brake, rh Tom	Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Brennan, Kevin	Miller, Andrew
Bryant, Chris	Mills, Nigel
Buck, Ms Karen	Mitchell, Austin
Buckland, Mr Robert	Morris, Grahame M.
Byles, Dan	(Easington)
Cable, rh Vince	Mulholland, Greg
Carswell, Mr Douglas	Nuttall, Mr David
Cash, Mr William	Offord, Mr Matthew
Cooper, Rosie	Ottaway, Richard
Cryer, John	Percy, Andrew
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Pugh, John
Davies, Philip	Qureshi, Yasmin
Davis, rh Mr David	Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.	Reckless, Mark
Dorries, Nadine	Redwood, rh Mr John
Efford, Clive	Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Evans, Chris	Reynolds, Jonathan
Farron, Tim	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Field, rh Mr Frank	Rosindell, Andrew
Field, Mark	Ruffley, Mr David
Gardiner, Barry	Sanders, Mr Adrian
George, Andrew	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Glass, Pat	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Goggins, rh Paul	Shepherd, Mr Richard
Goldsmith, Zac	Simpson, David
Gray, Mr James	Smith, Sir Robert
Halfon, Robert	Stewart, Bob
Hemming, John	Streeter, Mr Gary
Hopkins, Kelvin	Stringer, Graham
Horwood, Martin	Stuart, Ms Gisela
Hosie, Stewart	Stuart, Mr Graham
Jackson, Mr Stewart	Swales, Ian

Timms, rh Stephen
Tomlinson, Justin
Turner, Mr Andrew
Twigg, Stephen
Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Weir, Mr Mike
Wheeler, Heather
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Williams, Hywel

Williams, Mr Mark
Williamson, Chris
Winnick, Mr David
Wishart, Pete
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Peter Bone and
Natascha Engel

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Aldous, Peter
Alexander, rh Danny
Allen, Mr Graham
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Baker, Norman
Barclay, Stephen
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Boles, Nick
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Bray, Angie
Brennan, Kevin
Bridgen, Andrew
Bruce, Fiona
Burns, rh Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Lorely
Cable, rh Vince
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Chishti, Rehman
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Crabb, Stephen
Davey, rh Mr Edward
Davies, Glyn
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Thomas
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Graham
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Featherstone, Lynne
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Foster, rh Mr Don
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Garnier, Mr Edward
Gauke, Mr David
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl

Glen, John
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Graham, Richard
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, Mr John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Mr David
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Howell, John
Hughes, rh Simon
Huppert, Dr Julian
Hurd, Mr Nick
James, Margot
Javid, Sajid
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lancaster, Mark
Lee, Jessica
Lee, Dr Phillip
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lloyd, Tony
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Macleod, Mary
Malhotra, Seema
Maude, rh Mr Francis
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
Meale, Sir Alan
Miller, Maria
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, rh Michael
Morgan, Nicky
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Munn, Meg

Munt, Tessa
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr Brooks
 Newton, Sarah
 O'Brien, Mr Stephen
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Paice, rh Mr James
 Parish, Neil
 Penning, Mike
 Penrose, John
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Pritchard, Mark
 Randall, rh Mr John
 Riordan, Mrs Linda
 Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
 Rogerson, Dan
 Russell, Sir Bob
 Rutley, David
 Sandys, Laura
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Simmonds, Mark
 Simpson, Mr Keith
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Miss Chloe
 Smith, Julian
 Soubry, Anna
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline

Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, Mel
 Stunell, Andrew
 Sturdy, Julian
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swinson, Jo
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Teather, Sarah
 Timpson, Mr Edward
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Walter, Mr Robert
 Watkinson, Angela
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Webb, Steve
 Wharton, James
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Roger
 Williamson, Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wright, Jeremy
 Wright, Simon
 Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:

**Mark Hunter and
 Mr Philip Dunne**

Horwood, Martin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Hughes, rh Simon
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Lamy, rh Mr David
 Lewis, Dr Julian
 Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn
 MacShane, rh Mr Denis
 Malhotra, Seema
 McCartney, Karl
 McCrea, Dr William
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Miller, Andrew
 Mills, Nigel
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morris, Grahame M.
(Easington)
 Mulholland, Greg
 Munn, Meg
 Munt, Tessa
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Mr Matthew
 Onwurah, Chi
 Ottaway, Richard
 Percy, Andrew
 Pritchard, Mark
 Reckless, Mark
 Redwood, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey

Rosindell, Andrew
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Shepherd, Mr Richard
 Simpson, David
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Mr Andy
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sir Robert
 Straw, rh Mr Jack
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Swales, Ian
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Twigg, Stephen
 Tyrrie, Mr Andrew
 Weir, Mr Mike
 Wheeler, Heather
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whittingdale, Mr John
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Williams, Roger
 Winnick, Mr David
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wright, David

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Pete Wishart and
 Dr Eilidh Whiteford**

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Aldous, Peter
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Andrew, Stuart
 Baker, Norman
 Baldry, Tony
 Barclay, Stephen
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Mr Henry
 Berry, Jake
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Birtwistle, Gordon
 Blackman, Bob
 Boles, Nick
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Bray, Angie
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Mr Robert
 Burns, rh Mr Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burstow, Paul
 Burt, Lorely
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Carmichael, Neil
 Chishti, Rehman
 Clark, rh Greg
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Crabb, Stephen
 Creagh, Mary
 Davey, rh Mr Edward
 Davies, Glyn
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Thomas
 Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Evans, Graham
 Evens, Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Featherstone, Lynne
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 Garnier, Mr Edward
 Gauke, Mr David
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Hames, Duncan
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, Matthew
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harper, Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harvey, Nick
 Hayes, Mr John
 Heald, Oliver
 Heath, Mr David
 Herbert, rh Nick

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment proposed: (a), at end of paragraph (1), after 'choose', insert:

'; and that the members of those parties who would not otherwise be represented on the Committee, or of no party, should choose one Member to represent them on the Committee by a secret ballot of those Members'.—(*Natascha Engel.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 101, Noes 166.

Division No. 486]

[6.00 pm

AYES

Anderson, Mr David
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Baron, Mr John
 Barron, rh Mr Kevin
 Beith, rh Sir Alan
 Berger, Luciana
 Blunkett, rh Mr David
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brennan, Kevin
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Bryant, Chris
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Cash, Mr William
 Chapman, Mrs Jenny
 Clark, Katy
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Efford, Clive
 Engel, Natascha
 Esterson, Bill
 Farron, Tim
 Field, rh Mr Frank
 Field, Mark
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Andrew
 Glass, Pat
 Goggins, rh Paul
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Gray, Mr James
 Green, Kate
 Halfon, Robert
 Hamilton, Mr David
 Hemming, John
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Kelvin

Hinds, Damian
 Howell, John
 James, Margot
 Javid, Sajid
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr David
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kirby, Simon
 Laing, Mrs Eleanor
 Lamb, Norman
 Lancaster, Mark
 Lee, Jessica
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leslie, Chris
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Luff, Peter
 Macleod, Mary
 Maude, rh Mr Francis
 McCartney, Jason
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 Miller, Maria
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, rh Michael
 Morgan, Nicky
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Mosley, Stephen
 Mundell, rh David
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr Brooks
 Newton, Sarah
 O'Brien, Mr Stephen
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Paice, rh Mr James
 Parish, Neil
 Penning, Mike
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Pugh, John

Randall, rh Mr John
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
 Rogerson, Dan
 Russell, Sir Bob
 Rutley, David
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Simmonds, Mark
 Simpson, Mr Keith
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Miss Chloe
 Smith, Julian
 Soubry, Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Mr Graham
 Stunell, Andrew
 Sturdy, Julian
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swinson, Jo
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Teather, Sarah
 Timpson, Mr Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Walter, Mr Robert
 Watkinson, Angela
 Webb, Steve
 Whittaker, Craig
 Wiggan, Bill
 Williamson, Gavin
 Wright, Jeremy
 Wright, Simon
 Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mark Hunter and
Greg Hands

Burrowes, Mr David
 Burstow, Paul
 Burt, Lorely
 Campbell, Mr Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Carmichael, Neil
 Chishti, Rehman
 Clark, rh Greg
 Collins, Damian
 Colville, Oliver
 Crabb, Stephen
 Cunningham, Alex
 Dakin, Nic
 Davey, rh Mr Edward
 David, Mr Wayne
 Davies, Glyn
 Denham, rh Mr John
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Thomas
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Evans, Graham
 Evens, Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Featherstone, Lynne
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 Garnier, Mr Edward
 Gauke, Mr David
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Glendon, Mrs Mary
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Hames, Duncan
 Hamilton, Mr David
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harper, Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hayes, Mr John
 Heald, Oliver
 Heath, Mr David
 Hendrick, Mark
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hilling, Julie
 Hinds, Damian
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Howell, John
 Hughes, rh Simon
 Irranca-Davies, Huw
 James, Margot
 Javid, Sajid
 Johnson, Diana
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr David
 Jones, Graham

Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kirby, Simon
 Lamb, Norman
 Lancaster, Mark
 Lee, Jessica
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Luff, Peter
 Macleod, Mary
 Maude, rh Mr Francis
 McCartney, Jason
 McKechn, Ann
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Menzies, Mark
 Michael, rh Alun
 Miliband, rh David
 Miller, Maria
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Nicky
 Morris, David
 Mosley, Stephen
 Mundell, rh David
 Munn, Meg
 Munt, Tessa
 Murray, Ian
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr Brooks
 Newton, Sarah
 O'Brien, Mr Stephen
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Owen, Albert
 Paice, rh Mr James
 Parish, Neil
 Penning, Mike
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Randall, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Riordan, Mrs Linda
 Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
 Rogerson, Dan
 Roy, Lindsay
 Russell, Sir Bob
 Rutley, David
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Simmonds, Mark
 Simpson, Mr Keith
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Miss Chloe
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Owen
 Soames, rh Nicholas
 Soubry, Anna
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, Mel
 Stringer, Graham

Question accordingly negated.

Main Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 203, Noes 82.

Division No. 487]

[6.13 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
 Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Baker, Norman
 Baldry, Tony
 Barclay, Stephen
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Mr Henry
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana

Berry, Jake
 Birtwistle, Gordon
 Blackman, Bob
 Blears, rh Hazel
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Blunkett, rh Mr David
 Boles, Nick
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Bray, Angie
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Mr Russell
 Bruce, Fiona
 Burns, rh Mr Simon

Stunell, Andrew
 Sturdy, Julian
 Swales, Ian
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swinson, Jo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Tami, Mark
 Teather, Sarah
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Timpson, Mr Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben

Walter, Mr Robert
 Watkinson, Angela
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Webb, Steve
 Whittaker, Craig
 Wiggan, Bill
 Williams, Roger
 Williamson, Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wright, Jeremy
 Wright, Simon
 Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Greg Hands and
Mark Hunter

NOES

Anderson, Mr David
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Baron, Mr John
 Barron, rh Mr Kevin
 Beith, rh Sir Alan
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brennan, Kevin
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Bryant, Chris
 Buckland, Mr Robert
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Cash, Mr William
 Chapman, Mrs Jenny
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
 Efford, Clive
 Esterson, Bill
 Field, rh Mr Frank
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Andrew
 Glass, Pat
 Goggins, rh Paul
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Gray, Mr James
 Green, Kate
 Halfon, Robert
 Hemming, John
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard

Jones, Mr Kevan
 Lewis, Dr Julian
 Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn
 MacShane, rh Mr Denis
 Malhotra, Seema
 McCartney, Karl
 McCrea, Dr William
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 Meacher, rh Mr Michael
 Mills, Nigel
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morris, Grahame M.
(Easington)
 Mulholland, Greg
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Mr Matthew
 Onwurah, Chi
 Ottaway, Richard
 Pugh, John
 Reckless, Mark
 Redwood, rh Mr John
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Shepherd, Mr Richard
 Simpson, David
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sir Robert
 Straw, rh Mr Jack
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Stuart, Mr Graham
 Turner, Mr Andrew

Twigg, Stephen
 Tyrie, Mr Andrew
 Weir, Mr Mike
 Wheeler, Heather
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whittingdale, Mr John
 Williams, Hywel

Williamson, Chris
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wright, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr Peter Bone and
Natascha Engel

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That—

(1) this House endorses the principle that parties should elect members of the Backbench Business Committee each Session and thereafter when a vacancy arises in a secret ballot of all Members of that party by whichever transparent and democratic method they choose.

(2) Standing Order No. 122D (Election of Backbench Business Committee) shall be amended as follows—

(a) line 7, at end, insert—

‘(ba) No Member may be a candidate for the chair of the committee if that Member’s party is represented in Her Majesty’s Government.’;

(b) in line 12, leave out from second ‘of’ to end of line 14 and insert ‘a party represented in Her Majesty’s Government and no fewer than ten shall be members of a party not so represented or of no party’;

(c) line 28, leave out paragraph (2);

(d) line 64, leave out sub-paragraph (b); and

(e) in the Title, after the word ‘of’, insert ‘chair of’.

(3) Standing Order No. 152J (Backbench Business Committee) shall be amended as follows—

(a) line 7, leave out paragraph (3) and insert—

‘(3) The chair of the committee shall continue as chair for the remainder of the Session in which that person is elected as chair unless the chair is declared vacant by the Speaker under the provisions of Standing Order No. 122C (Resignation or removal of chairs of select committees) as applied by paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 122D (Election of 25 Backbench Business Committee).’;

(b) in line 12, leave out ‘and members’;

(c) line 21, at end, insert—

‘(6A) The Committee shall have power to invite Members of the House who are not members of the Committee and who are of a party not represented on the Committee or of no party to attend its meetings and, at the discretion of the chair, take part in its proceedings, but—

(a) no more than one Member may be so invited to attend in respect of the same meeting;

(b) a Member so invited shall not move any motion or amendment to any motion, vote or be counted in the quorum.’.

Committee on Standards and Committee of Privileges

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): With the permission of the House, we will deal with motions 2, 3 and 4 together. I inform the House that Mr Speaker has selected the amendments to motion 2 in the names of Sir Alan Meale, Sir Paul Beresford and Natascha Engel. The amendments will be debated with the main motion and the questions necessary to dispose of the motion will be put at the end of the debate. We have approximately 45 minutes.

6.27 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir George Young): I beg to move,

That—

(1) The following new Standing Order be made, to have effect from the date specified in paragraph (6) of this order—

‘Committee on Standards

(1) There shall be a select committee, called the Committee on Standards—

(a) to oversee the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards; to examine the arrangements proposed by the Commissioner for the compilation, maintenance and accessibility of the Register of Members’ Financial Interests and any other registers of interest established by the House; to review from time to time the form and content of those registers; and to consider any specific complaints made in relation to the registering or declaring of interests referred to it by the Commissioner; and

(b) to consider any matter relating to the conduct of Members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged breaches in any code of conduct to which the House has agreed and which have been drawn to the committee’s attention by the Commissioner; and to recommend any modifications to such code of conduct as may from time to time appear to be necessary.

(2) The committee shall consist of ten Members, and at least two and no more than three lay members.

(3) Unless the House otherwise orders, each Member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a member of it for the remainder of the Parliament.

(4) The committee shall have power to appoint sub-committees consisting of no more than seven Members, and at least two lay members, and to refer to such sub-committees any of the matters referred to the committee.

(5) Lay members may take part in proceedings of the committee and of any sub-committee to which they are appointed and may ask questions of witnesses, but lay members may not move any motion or any amendment to any motion or draft report, and may not vote.

(6) The quorum of the committee shall be five members who are Members of this House, and the quorum of any sub-committee shall be three members who are Members of this House.

(7) The committee and any sub-committee may not proceed to business unless at least one lay member is present.

(8) The committee and any sub-committee shall have power—

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House and to adjourn from place to place;

(b) subject to the provisions of paragraph (9) of this order, to report from time to time;

(c) to appoint legal advisers, and to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee’s order of reference.

(9) Any lay member present at a meeting at which a report has been agreed shall have the right to submit a paper setting out that lay member’s opinion on the report. The Committee shall not

consider a motion that the Chair make a report to the House until it has ascertained whether any lay member present wishes to submit such a paper; and any such paper shall be appended to the report in question before it is made to the House.

(10) The committee shall have power to order the attendance of any Member before the committee or any sub-committee and to require that specific documents or records in the possession of a Member relating to its inquiries, or to the inquiries of a sub-committee or of the Commissioner, be laid before the committee or any sub-committee.

(11) The committee, or any sub-committee, shall have power to refer to unreported evidence of the former Committees on Standards and Privileges and to any documents circulated to any such committee.

(12) The committee shall have power to refuse to allow proceedings to which the public are admitted to be broadcast.

(13) The Attorney General, the Advocate General and the Solicitor General, being Members of the House, may attend the committee or any subcommittee, may take part in deliberations, may receive committee or subcommittee papers and may give such other assistance to the committee or sub-committee as may be appropriate, but shall not vote or make any motion or move any amendment or be counted in the quorum.’

(2) The following new Standing Order be made—

‘Lay members of the Committee on Standards: appointment, etc.

(1) Lay members shall be appointed to the Committee on Standards by a resolution of the House on a motion made under the provisions of this order and shall remain as lay members in accordance with the provisions of this order.

(2) No person may be first appointed as a lay member if that person is or has been a Member of this House or a Member of the House of Lords; and any person so appointed shall cease to be a lay member upon becoming a Member of this House or of the House of Lords.

(3) No person may be appointed as a lay member unless that person has been selected on the basis of a fair and open competition.

(4) A person appointed as a lay member may resign as a lay member by giving notice to the House of Commons Commission.

(5) A person appointed as a lay member shall be dismissed from that position only following a resolution of the House, after the House of Commons Commission has reported that it is satisfied that the person should cease to be a lay member; and any such report shall include a statement of the Commission’s reasons for its conclusion.

(6) Subject to the provisions of paragraphs (2), (4) and (5) of this order, a person appointed as a lay member shall continue as a lay member for the remainder of the Parliament in which that person was first appointed.

(7) A person first appointed as a lay member who has been a lay member for the remainder of one Parliament may be re-appointed by a resolution of the House in the subsequent Parliament, and the provisions of paragraph (3) of this order shall not apply to any such re-appointment. The period of re-appointment shall be specified in the resolution of the House for reappointment and shall not exceed two years from the dissolution of the Parliament in which the person was first appointed as a lay member, and a resolution under this paragraph shall cease to have effect on the dissolution of the Parliament in which the resolution of the House for reappointment was made.

(8) No person may be re-appointed as a lay member other than in accordance with the provisions of paragraph (7) of this order.

(9) No motion may be made under the provisions of this order unless—

(a) notice of the motion has been given at least two sitting days previously, and

(b) the motion is made on behalf of the House of Commons Commission by a Member of the Commission.

(10) The Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on motions made under the provisions of this order not later than one hour after the commencement of those proceedings.

[*Sir George Young*]

(11) Business to which this order applies may be proceeded with at any hour, though opposed.’

(3) The following new Standing Order be made, to have effect from the date specified in paragraph (6) of this order—

‘Committee of Privileges

(1) There shall be a select committee, called the Committee of Privileges, to consider specific matters relating to privileges referred to it by the House.

(2) The committee shall consist of ten Members, of whom five shall be a quorum.

(3) Unless the House otherwise orders, each Member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a member of it for the remainder of the Parliament.

(4) The committee shall have power to appoint sub-committees consisting of no more than seven Members, of whom three shall be a quorum, and to refer to such sub-committees any of the matters referred to the committee.

(5) The committee and any sub-committee shall have power—

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place and to report from time to time;

(b) to appoint legal advisers, and to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee’s order of reference.

(6) The committee shall have power to order the attendance of any Member before the committee and to require that specific documents or records in the possession of a Member relating to its inquiries be laid before the committee or any sub-committee.

(7) The committee shall have power to refer to unreported evidence of the former Committees on Standards and Privileges and to any documents circulated to any such committee.

(8) The committee shall have power to refuse to allow proceedings to which the public are admitted to be broadcast.

(9) The Attorney General, the Advocate General and the Solicitor General, being Members of the House, may attend the committee, may take part in deliberations, may receive committee papers and may give such other assistance to the committee as may be appropriate, but shall not vote or make any motion or move any amendment or be counted in the quorum.’

(4) From the date specified in paragraph (6) of this order—

(a) Standing Order No. 121 (Nomination of select committees) shall be amended, in line 12, by leaving out ‘the Committee on Standards and Privileges’ and inserting ‘the Committee of Privileges, the Committee on Standards’;

(b) Standing Order No. 149 (Committee on Standards and Privileges) shall be repealed;

(c) in Standing Order No. 150 (Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards), in each place where the words ‘Committee on Standards and Privileges’ occur, there shall be substituted the words ‘Committee on Standards’.

(5) From the date specified in paragraph (6) of this order, the Order of the House of 19 July 2010 (Liaison Committee (Membership)) shall be amended by leaving out ‘Standards and Privileges’ and inserting, at the appropriate place in alphabetical order, ‘Privileges’ and ‘Standards’.

(6) The date specified for the purposes of paragraphs (1) and (3) to (5) of this order is the first sitting day of the first month after the month in which the House agrees a resolution under Standing Order (Lay members of the Committee on Standards: appointment, etc.) appointing two or three lay members of the Committee on Standards.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, we shall discuss motions 3 and 4 on pay for Chairs of Select Committees.

Sir George Young: On 2 December 2010, the House agreed, without Division, to a motion agreeing with the principle set out in the twelfth report of the Committee

on Standards in Public Life that lay members should sit on the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges. The House invited the Select Committee on Procedure to bring forward proposals to implement that.

The Procedure Committee published its proposals in its sixth report of the current Session, which was published on 7 November last year. The Government, and I am sure the whole House, are very grateful to that Committee for its work. The motion draws extensively on the work of the Procedure Committee, and follows consultation with that Committee, the Standards and Privileges Committee and others. I am pleased to say that the Procedure Committee has written to confirm that it broadly accepts the approach that we propose to take, and the support of the Standards and Privileges Committee is apparent from the welcome decision of the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr Barron) to add his name to the motion.

Before turning to the provisions of the motions, I will remind the House briefly of the background to the proposals. I need hardly remind Members that the expenses scandal rocked public faith in the House to its foundations. One part of that crisis lay in the House’s approach to disciplining Members, which, as the Committee on Standards in Public Life observed, did not command full public confidence. As Chair of the Standards and Privileges Committee at the time when the Committee on Standards in Public Life inquired into these matters, I said that the then Standards and Privileges Committee: “would be very happy to consider having outside members sitting on the Standards and Privileges Committee... particularly to assist us in coming to judgments where people may feel at the moment we are possibly too lenient.”

The Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended in November 2009 that

“there should be at least two lay Members who have never been Parliamentarians on the Standards and Privileges Committee”,
who

“should be chosen through the official public appointments process and formally approved by the House”.

The House endorsed that recommendation after its debate on 2 December 2010. I will not attempt to summarise all that was said on that day, but the most powerful case was made by the right hon. Member for Rother Valley. He said:

“Lay members provide the public with reassurance that the Committees are not cosy gentlemen’s clubs, where deals are stitched up and scandals are hushed up. They can also bring valuable outside experience and expertise with them.”—[*Official Report*, 2 December 2010; Vol. 519, c. 999.]

He referred to the lay members of the Speaker’s Committee for the Independent Parliament Standards Authority. As a member of that committee, I can assure the House that the contribution of lay members is invaluable.

I have already referred to the specific recommendation of the Committee on Standards in Public Life that lay members should never have been parliamentarians. That is reflected in the motion, which also mirrors the statutory definition of lay members used for the Speaker’s Committee on IPSA.

Amendment (b), tabled by the hon. Member for Mansfield (Sir Alan Meale), runs contrary to the letter and, more importantly, the spirit of the Kelly recommendations. I invite him to consider whether it would really enhance the credibility of the House’s

disciplinary procedures to appoint as a lay member a former hon. Member who left the House in 2005. I fear that that might be portrayed not as a fresh start but as a return to the bad old days, and of course public perception is part of the issue that we are seeking to address. I urge him not to move his amendment and invite the House to reject it if it comes to a vote.

Of course, there is a difference between agreement in principle that a change should take place and agreement on how it will operate in practice. A number of significant issues have been raised about lay membership of a Select Committee, and I will explain briefly how those issues have been tackled in the motions.

The first issue, identified by the Procedure Committee, was that although there had been no suggestion that lay members were appropriate for the consideration of privilege matters, there was no straightforward way to exclude them from such business within the structure of a single Committee. The solution proposed by that Committee, which the main motion today incorporates, was to create two separate Committees, one on standards and one on privileges. That is actually a reversion to the position that existed until 1995.

As the Procedure Committee recommended, provision has been made in motions 3 and 4 for the Chair of the Committee on Standards to inherit the pay now received by the Chair of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. The Government have also made it clear in their response that the Chair of the Committee on Standards, like that of the current Committee, should be drawn from the Opposition Benches. In accordance with the current arrangements, that does not need to be set out in Standing Orders.

Our intention today is not to change the composition of the Committees. The two Committees may have a common membership, and they may choose to elect the same Chair. Even if that is not the case, the Committee of Privileges is likely to meet less often and will be able to consider only matters referred to it. In those circumstances, and following the precedent of the Committee on Members' Expenses, pay for the Chair of the Committee of Privileges is unlikely to be appropriate.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I wholeheartedly support what the Leader of the House is doing in separating the two Committees, which is long overdue. Will the process remain that a matter of privilege is raised through the Speaker and then in a three-minute speech, before going to the Privileges Committee? Will that Committee also be able to consider any draft legislation on privilege that the Leader of the House publishes? I believe he told me earlier this year that he would publish draft legislation before Easter.

Sir George Young: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the explanatory memorandum, he will see that the terms of reference of the new Committee of Privileges will be the same as those of the relevant part of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. There will be no change to the process by which a matter is referred to the Committee, or to its remit. The position will remain that it can consider only things that the House refers to it and that are within its terms of reference.

Chris Bryant: I am grateful. The other bit of the process that has always worked well thus far is that whenever the Committee on Standards and Privileges

has produced a report, Government time has been provided to debate it. Will that be true of both Committees in future?

Sir George Young: Again, the hon. Gentleman anticipates something that I may say a little later, but if he looks at paragraph 176 of the Wright Committee's report, he will see what is deemed Back-Bench business and what is deemed business that the Government should schedule. It states:

"Backbenchers should schedule backbench business. Ministers should give up their role in the scheduling of any business except that which is exclusively Ministerial business, comprising Ministerial-sponsored legislation and associated motions, substantive non-legislative motions required in support of their policies and Ministerial statements".

It may help the hon. Gentleman if I say that the Government will ensure that there is adequate time to debate on the Floor of the House any matter referred to the House by the Committee on Standards or the Committee of Privileges. I suspect that there will be a dialogue with the Backbench Business Committee to ensure that time is available at the appropriate moment.

Amendment (c), tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), would set down in Standing Orders a requirement that the membership of the two new Committees should always be the same. The Procedure Committee examined the case for a requirement of identical membership in paragraph 63 of its report, and concluded that the case had not been made. I recognise that there is a case for an element of shared membership, and possibly even for identical membership, but the Government, like the Procedure Committee, do not support the notion that there should be an inflexible provision to that effect in Standing Orders. With that assurance, I hope he will not move his amendment. In splitting the Standards and Privileges Committee, the Government do not intend to revisit the decisions taken at the beginning of this Session on appropriate Committee membership.

The second issue that has been raised about lay members is their status. The Committee on Standards and Privileges has stated that

"if the proposed external members of the Standards and Privileges Committee are to carry credibility, they need to have full voting rights."

The Procedure Committee considered the matter carefully and in great detail, and it invited the House to study with care the arguments for and against full voting rights. As the Government made clear in our response, we have carefully considered the arguments about whether lay members should have full voting rights. We have concluded that it would not be appropriate to grant such rights in the first instance, in view of the authoritative evidence given to the Procedure Committee that it would create a risk that lay members' participation would not have the protection of parliamentary privilege.

Lay members will be able to participate fully in evidence taking and informal consideration of draft reports. In addition, there will be two specific protections for their position. The first is the requirement that any written opinion of a lay member present at the relevant meeting on a report agreed by the Committee must be published as part of its report. The second is that the Committee cannot conduct any business unless at least one lay member is present.

[*Sir George Young*]

A decision to proceed on that basis will provide a guarantee of the effective participation of lay members in the decision-making processes of the Committee, and can be taken without prejudice to subsequent consideration of full voting rights. The Government will consider the case for legislation that would place beyond doubt the position of a Committee on Standards including lay members with full voting rights, as part of our work on preparing the forthcoming draft parliamentary privilege Bill and the accompanying Green Paper.

The third and final issue that has been raised about lay members was voiced in the debate in December 2010 and echoed in the Procedure Committee's report. It relates to the selection of lay members and control over how they subsequently carry out their work. The motion proposes to entrust that matter to the House of Commons Commission, which would also take responsibility for a motion for dismissal in the unlikely eventuality that it should prove necessary. I believe that the Commission, chaired by the Speaker, is the best way to ensure that there is a fair and open process that leads to the House being asked to appoint only excellent candidates.

I know that some concern has been expressed about the term of office of lay members. The Procedure Committee recommended single five-year terms. However, it also acknowledged uncertainty about appointments straddling two Parliaments. The motion therefore provides for appointments for the remainder of one Parliament and reappointments for a period of up to two years in a new Parliament. Although I understand the advantages of a single term, the Government remain to be convinced that it is appropriate for lay members to be appointed for a period that, by definition, lasts longer than the appointment of hon. Members. There will be a very strong presumption indeed that lay members will be reappointed for a further term at the start of the subsequent Parliament. If they were not, the Committee on Standards would find it difficult to operate. I offer my commitment that the Government will assist in such a process.

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I accept that there is a general demand for lay members, but I am sceptical as to how independent-minded they will be—I have in mind the less-than-independent IPSA as a guideline. I will not detain the Leader of the House on that.

There is a more detailed issue: cost. If lay members are involved in the Committee on Standards, especially lay members with a legal background, surely any Member of the House before it will demand expensive legal representation. Will the cost of that representation be met by the Committee, or will an individual Member be expected to meet it through his own resources?

Sir George Young: There are no changes to the resources available to hon. Members who appear before the Standards Committee. We are suggesting a per diem remuneration for independent members—£300, I believe, which is parallel to what independent members of SCIPSA are paid. In putting lay members on the Standards Committee, we are not making any other changes to how the Committee operates. As I said earlier in answer to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), the

memorandum says that all the basic rules for the two separate Committees remain unchanged apart from the addition of lay members.

Mark Field: There might be no desire to change the Committee's procedure, but I suspect that there will be a different approach outside, particularly among the media. There will be much more scrutiny of a Committee that has lay members, particularly if they are high-profile legal figures. What protection will there be for MPs who find themselves subject to an investigation under the new regime, so that they have what they consider to be essential legal advice, which might come extremely expensively?

Sir George Young: My answer now is the same one I gave to my hon. Friend a moment ago: there is no change in the resources available to hon. Members. Currently, some decide to take legal advice and pay for it out of their own pocket; others simply represent themselves. We are not proposing changes to the way in which Members interface with the Committee, but seeking to ensure that the Committee's decisions have greater credibility in the outside world by adding lay members to it. That is the only change that we propose to make.

Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Following on from the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), who said that high-powered legal figures might be appointed, I would be very concerned if judges were appointed to the panel as lay members, because that would be against the separation of powers. Will the Leader of the House give an indication as to whether judges would be appropriate?

Sir George Young: We are trying to get lay members. Whether a judge is a "lay member" is an interesting question. Speaking off the cuff, I do not think we propose to exclude any particular profession. Whether a high-powered judge would want to put his name forward to the House of Commons Commission for this interesting post I am not sure, but it will be a matter for the Commission to consider the candidates that come forward. Some might have a legal background. I am not quite sure that it would be appropriate to appoint a serving judge as a lay member, but somebody with a legal background might not be wholly disqualified.

May I move on to safer territory, namely amendment (a), which was tabled by the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee? The amendment would exclude business arising on a report from the Committee on Standards from the definition of Back-Bench business. It would thus prevent the Backbench Business Committee ever scheduling business arising from the work of one Select Committee and return exclusive control over that business to the Government, which is contrary to the spirit of the Wright recommendations—I read paragraph 176 a few moments ago.

The hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel) envisages that the establishment of a Committee on Standards to accommodate lay members should be an occasion to reopen the settlement reached in 2010 on the scope and calculation of Back-Bench business. Although there may be a dialogue on that matter in due course, I do not think this is the right forum in which to

consider it. It could certainly be considered in the review currently being conducted by the Procedure Committee. I would invite the hon. Lady not to move her amendment. If she does, I urge the House to oppose it if it is pressed to a Division.

Natascha Engel (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): I put my name down to speak in the debate, but my point is such a small one that I can make it in an intervention. The issue is not whether reports from the Committee on Standards are defined as Back-Bench business, but time. Thirty-five days a Session are allocated to Back-Benchers, but that is limited, and time for debates on such reports will be scooped out of Back-Bench time in an unpredictable way. If the Leader of the House confirms that any time taken by debates on those reports is in addition to the 35 days, I will be more than happy not to move the amendment.

Sir George Young: The overall settlement of 35 days included an allowance for standards and privileges matters. As I have said, what the Government are left with does not include such business. The amendment is an ingenious shop-steward bid—if I may say to the hon. Lady—for extra time. If a matter comes before the House from the Standards Committee, or indeed from the Privileges Committee, there will be a debate in the House on that matter at the right time, whoever provides the allocation. That is the assurance that the House wants, and we can have a dialogue offline, as it were, on how that is accounted for in the annual tally between the Backbench Business Committee and the Government.

Chris Bryant: But actually, that is not quite how the process works now, is it? First, privilege issues, as opposed to standards issues, must go through the Speaker, who then forcibly makes time available, normally on the next day, and therefore always in Government time. The Leader of the House obviously thinks that he has made some improvements on Wright today, but perhaps another improvement he could make is to guarantee that time to debate privilege matters will come out of Government time.

Sir George Young: There is a distinction between a debate when a matter is referred to the Privileges Committee, which is normally relatively short, and a debate on a report from the Privileges Committee or the Standards Committee when they have concluded their consideration, but I accept what the hon. Gentleman says: if the Speaker decrees that a matter should be debated, it is debated. In response to the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire, I said that it is important that the House debates such reports once we have them. The business managers and the Backbench Business Committee can have a dialogue on whether the time comes out of the Committee's quota, which, I should say in passing, we have generously exceeded in the current Session—we have gone way over 35 days to somewhere near 50 days.

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): The Leader of the House will be aware that we have had only a single “defence of the realm” debate this Session. The time for that debate was eaten into because the Backbench Business Committee had to find time for a European debate ahead of it. Does he not see that there is a real danger that such important debates will be curtailed if he does not guarantee the time?

Sir George Young: This risks becoming a general debate on the role of the Backbench Business Committee and whether the time allocated to it is generous enough. I have sought to address the proposition put by the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire. My case is that the putting of lay members on the Standards Committee is not an opportunity to revisit the balance of time between the Government and the Backbench Business Committee. My assertion is that that is best done in the context of the review of the Committee currently being undertaken by the Procedure Committee. When we have that review, we will be in a better position to take that dialogue forward. In the meantime, I give an assurance that any report that comes from the Standards Committee will be debated promptly.

To conclude, I believe the motion provides an effective and appropriate means of giving effect to the principle agreed by the House on 2 December 2010. It represents one more step to ensure that public confidence in the conduct of hon. Members is maintained and strengthened, and I commend it to the House.

6.48 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): The Opposition support the principle that lay members should sit on a newly constituted Committee on Standards. We also understand and support the pragmatic solution of splitting the current Committee in two to avoid the complications and uncertainty that could arise if non-MPs were to sit on the Privileges Committee.

When the issue was first considered at the end of last year, we did not seek to divide the House on the approach suggested. Although it is not directly analogous because all MPs are elected—and therefore ultimately accountable to their constituents—the principle of appointing lay members to a standards Committee is widely adopted in other areas of public life. For example, both the Bar Council and the General Medical Council have lay members.

On the other hand, the Press Complaints Commission also has lay members, and given the mess that it now finds itself in, perhaps we should take this opportunity to remind ourselves that lay membership of any committee is not in itself a complete answer to the challenges of upholding the standards of conduct and behaviour expected of any particular group of people, be they lawyers, doctors, MPs or—dare I say it—journalists. Undoubtedly, however, the presence of lay members should reassure the public that the Standards Committee is not some kind of cosy stitch-up but is there to deliver a rigorous and robust process that is fair to all and therefore credible. That is obviously in the public interest.

I congratulate the Procedure Committee on its work on this issue since the House's resolution last year and on bringing this change about. I note, however, that the Government have ignored the Committee's recommendation to give the House a further opportunity to vote on the principle of lay membership. Although the Opposition are in favour of the principle, it is noticeable that in evidence to the Procedure Committee a number of Members raised concerns about the appointment of lay members. Those Members included, from the Government Benches, the right hon. and learned Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) and the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin).

[Ms Angela Eagle]

In its report, the Procedure Committee states that

“it is right to register our concern at the level of unease felt by many Members about the House’s decision of 2 December. It may well be that, having considered the examination of the practical and privilege implications as set out in our report, the House may wish to reconsider its view of the principle of adding lay members to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.”

Will the Leader of the House explain why the Government have chosen not to tackle this unease head-on and do as the Procedure Committee suggested? Perhaps it is because of the decision to split the current Committee, but I would like to hear the Government’s explanation for their decision not to have a further vote on the principle itself.

We support the appointment of lay members to the Standards Committee. The Procedure Committee has found that the appointment of lay members is not completely without precedent—it cites a 1933 committee on the future government of India. I must say, however, that that is a rather particular example and not one likely to be replicated any time soon. It must not be assumed that simply appointing lay members to the Standards Committee will do the trick. It is clearly not a panacea.

Moreover, how lay members should take part in Committee proceedings needs to be clearly defined. This the Procedure Committee has done. It has recommended that Members of the House make up the majority of the new Standards Committee—after all, it will be a Committee of the House—and the proposals outlined in the proposed new Standing Orders, which adopts the recommendations of the Procedure Committee, suggests appointing at least two but no more than three lay members. That strikes a sensible balance.

We also agree with the proposed powers of lay members as outlined in the motion. The Standards Committee will be a Committee of the House, and the Members of Parliament who serve on it will be able to do so first and foremost because they successfully stood for election. Therefore, they are ultimately accountable to their constituents for their actions, as are all of us, and following the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, they submit themselves to that judgment every five years. Lay members of the Committee will not be elected but will be appointed, and they will not have to justify their actions at the ballot box.

The Procedure Committee therefore had to consider how that difference could best be accommodated in the day-to-day workings of the Committee. It considered two options: whether members of the Committee should have full voting rights or whether they should be appointed with more limited rights. In its impressive survey of the history of Committees of the House and the operation of committees in Parliament’s around the Commonwealth, the Procedure Committee came across few examples of lay members voting. In its survey of the Commonwealth, only the New South Wales Legislative Assembly had given lay members of a Committee voting rights. But that practice, confined to one Committee in New South Wales, has now ceased.

To give lay members voting rights would also raise difficult questions of privilege, as the Leader of the House pointed out. He also pointed out that the Procedure Committee outlined the issues, as set out in the evidence of the parliamentary Clerk to the Procedure Committee.

For those reasons, like the Government, we support the second option, which would mean that lay members could fully participate in the Committee by questioning witnesses but could not vote.

The proposed new Standing Orders require the Committee to publish any paper from a lay member setting out that lay member’s opinion on the report. We recognise that a balance has to be struck if lay members of the Committee are not to have voting rights. Nevertheless, we recognise the concerns raised by some Members, including the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex, about the publication of dissenting reports. I note that the right for a lay member to publish a dissenting report was described in the Government’s weekend spin on our proceedings today as a “golden share”, which is a nicer name for a veto. Perhaps the Leader of the House could let us know in more detail how he sees that power working.

Amendment (b) suggests that ex-Members should be eligible for selection as lay members after only five years out of the House. That seems like a way of ensuring that lay members are not quite lay members and runs the risk of undermining the credibility that the reforms will bring about. Amendment (c) suggests that the membership of the soon-to-be-separated Standards and Privileges Committee should be the same. That runs the risk of undermining the separation, and we believe that the membership of these important Committees could easily be different and certainly should not be made the same by changing the Standing Orders.

I do not want to spend too much time intruding on the debate between the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee and the Leader of the House, but her amendment raises an extremely important issue about the number of days allocated to her Committee. That is one of those issues that will rumble on. Suffice it to say that I have considerable sympathy with what she says.

We support the other proposals in the proposed new Standing Orders. They are a welcome advance designed to improve public confidence, but they are not a panacea. The PCC, for example, had lay members, and that did not make the body effective or ensure that the organisation retained public confidence. Public confidence in Parliament, as the Leader of the House said, was significantly damaged by the expenses scandal. The appointment of lay members will not in itself restore that confidence, but it is one of many steps taken since then to repair the damage done.

I have been a Member of the House for 20 years, and I believe that, overwhelmingly, Members are committed to public service, strive to serve their constituents and seek at all times to uphold the Nolan principles.

Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): The hon. Lady mentioned the Nolan principles. I am a member of that committee, in its latest guise, and I wonder whether she agrees that over the years the Committee on Standards in Public Life has done some useful work in scoping out the code of conduct and the work of the commissioner as a fully independent investigator, for example, and of course in proposing lay membership.

Ms Angela Eagle: I am more than happy to agree with the interjection that the hon. Gentleman made just as I was about to finish my remarks. The Nolan committee clearly has a lot to be proud of for how it has developed

the code of conduct—we will have a debate on that later. It has done a great deal to codify and put in good order the standards that should be expected of every single Member of the House.

As I was just about to say, the Opposition support the proposed new Standing Orders and will not seek to divide the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. I inform the House that there are 18 minutes left before the debate expires. I think I saw four Members standing. I do not want to set a time limit, so I hope that each Member will make a brief contribution, enabling all four to participate.

6.58 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): I shall be antipodeanly succinct; I shall be minutes.

I merely want to thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. There has been discussion in the Standards and Privileges Committee, and between the Committee and him, following which some positive changes have been made. In particular, we mentioned whether the lay members may, or have to, produce a report. The reason behind my amendment (c)—this was picked up and covered by the Leader of the House—is that there is a logic and a bureaucratic advantage to having the same Members on each Committee. However, as was said by the Leader of the House—and, to my amusement, by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle)—there is also the opportunity, if required and if appropriate, for that to be altered. For that reason, I shall not press my amendment.

7 pm

Sir Alan Meale (Mansfield) (Lab): I commend the work of the Chair of the Standards and Privileges Committee and its members for the excellent work that they do on our behalf. We know that their work is arduous and at times difficult. Let me state at the outset that it is my intention not to challenge but to improve the proposed Standing Orders.

If accepted, my amendment (b) would in no way undermine the Committee's excellent work. As many in the Chamber will realise, I and another Member, who sits on the Government Benches, act as co-opted representatives of the retired Members association, a body that was established to represent the interests of retired Members, of whom there are hundreds, many very elderly indeed. When these Standing Orders are approved, they will undoubtedly affect ex-Members of Parliament, or at the very least are likely to affect them. For instance, the proposed Standing Orders would quite rightly deal with the register and any reviews of it. That could be of interest to ex-Members, not least ex-Ministers, given the role they play after leaving office. The Standing Orders will also allow papers and records to be sent for that are more than likely to involve ex-Members and their time in this place.

Importantly, my amendment does not ask for someone from the ranks of ex-Members to be appointed as a lay member; indeed, I fully accept the principle of free and open competition involved in any such appointment.

However, I feel strongly that ex-Members should not be excluded from the process, although I accept the need for a certain period of time to elapse. That is why I propose that any ex-Member would have had to have left Parliament a minimum of five years previously—it would probably be longer than that—before being even considered as a lay member. They could not be a Member in this place or the House of Lords, and if they became a Member at any time during their lay membership, that would mean their ceasing to be a lay member.

I was interested to hear what the Leader of House said about those who left this place in 2005. Like the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), I think we need to cut this debate short, but I have to say that ex-Members of Parliament, like current Members, are not pariahs. They are not the unclean or the unwashed; they are people who have given many, many years of loyal public service in this place. Most of the people who retired at the last two elections—indeed, the vast majority—were guilty of no impropriety and left with no challenge whatever to their characters. This is an important matter: these changes to standards will affect ex-Members, and it is really quite wrong to introduce Standing Orders just so that we can be clear about the public and press perception of those Standings Orders in future. Those ex-Members have the right to be represented.

I accept what the Leader of the House said about this probably not being the right time to pursue such an amendment. For that reason, I will not press my amendment to a vote. However, I say this to the Leader of the House: in future years this issue will have to be dealt with, because we cannot have a situation where hundreds of ex-Members—indeed, there might be thousands by that time—are affected by Standing Orders that they are not able to challenge or play any part in whatever.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Lorely Burt?

Lorely Burt (Solihull) (LD): I just want to speak briefly to the amendment standing in my name on the revised code of conduct—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is speaking to the wrong group of amendments. I have her down to speak in the next debate; that is why I hesitated when I called her.

7.4 pm

Mr Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): I welcome this motion standing in the name of the Leader of the House; indeed, as Chair of the Standards and Privileges Committee, I appended my name to it. As he said, the Committee has long called for lay members, and I personally have no doubt that having them will be of worth.

The House has accepted that principle. Indeed, in the debate back in December, I said that for a number of years I had been a lay member of the General Medical Council and that I felt that I had brought some experience to the table—albeit not experience of clinical decision making, but experience that doctors and others could

[Mr Kevin Barron]

consider in sitting in judgment on their fellow professionals and in assessing whether their decisions were the right ones.

In an ideal world, the Committee would have liked lay members to have had full voting rights and single, non-renewable terms to guard their independence, very much as the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards has. He has five years and that is it; there is no reappointment. As a consequence, there is no way that he might be looking for any preferment for a second term, from this House or anybody within it. However, we are not in an ideal world. There are significant constitutional barriers and uncertainties about giving lay members full voting rights, and the Leader of the House has made the Government's position on fixed terms clear. However, this motion still represents a significant step towards ensuring that the House's disciplinary processes are fair and seen to be fair, and that we benefit from outside experience and expertise. I welcome the change to Standing Orders wholeheartedly.

As for the other matters that have been discussed—how the Committee will be split up, the timing, the membership of both Committees, and everything else—these are matters for the House. However, what we are doing is the right thing for the House to do and embodies the right principle for us to be establishing, so that people outside this place can have confidence that when we sit in judgment over our peers, people are not looking after the interests of fellow professionals—if that is indeed what we are—but passing right and proper judgment on someone who may have breached the rules.

7.7 pm

Natascha Engel (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): I rise briefly to say that I shall not press my amendment (a), simply because I do not want to detain the House further on Back-Bench business when we are discussing important matters of standards and privileges. However, I will pursue the matter through the Procedure Committee—the Chairman is in the Chamber and will have heard my intervention in this debate—as long as the Leader of the House does not think that the matter rests here, because it does not.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Lorely Burt.

Lorely Burt: Regarding the amendment standing in my name and that of others on the revised code of conduct—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not on the code of conduct yet; we are on the motions relating to the pay for Chairs of Select Committees and amendments to Standing Orders about standards and privileges. The code of conduct is the next business, and I will definitely call the hon. Lady at the right time—unless she wants to speak in this debate.

Lorely Burt *indicated dissent.*

7.8 pm

Sir George Young: Briefly, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), the shadow Leader of the House, asked why we had put back to the House the original proposition

about lay members. We dealt with that in our response to the Procedure Committee's report. Basically, what we said was that on 2 December, the House of Commons agreed without Division to a motion that endorsed the principle that lay members should sit on the Standards and Privileges Committee. The Government do not believe it necessary for the House to be asked to restate its acceptance of a principle that it has already agreed without Division. Indeed, there has been broad acceptance of that principle in the debate this evening.

I am obviously grateful that those who have tabled amendments have said that they do not propose to press them to a Division—a tribute to the eloquence that I must have used at the beginning of this debate.

The final question that I was asked was about the so-called golden share. I am convinced that the Chair of the Standards and Privileges Committee will continue to do what has been done in the past, namely to secure unanimous reports on the matters that come before him—or, indeed, her. While I chaired the Committee, I do not think we ever had a vote. I therefore very much hope that it will not be necessary for anybody to table a minority report. However, the fact that the lay members have that option will reassure people outside that the Committee has a broader base than it has had so far, and will avoid the accusation that this is some sort of gentlemen's club that deals leniently with its members. On that basis, I hope that we can agree the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

PAY FOR CHAIRS OF SELECT COMMITTEES

Resolved,

That—

(1) this House expresses the opinion that, from the date specified in paragraph (2) of this resolution, the Resolution of the House of 30 October 2003 (Pay for Chairmen of Select Committees (No. 2)), as amended by the Resolution of the House of 13 July 2005 (Pay for Chairmen of Select Committees (No. 2)), should be further amended in paragraph (1) by leaving out 'Committee on Standards and Privileges' and inserting 'Committee on Standards'.

(2) The date specified for the purposes of paragraph (1) is the first sitting day of the first month after the month in which the House agrees a resolution under Standing Order (Lay members of the Committee on Standards: appointment, etc.) appointing two or three lay members of the Committee on Standards.—
(*Sir George Young.*)

PAY FOR CHAIRS OF SELECT COMMITTEES (NO. 2)

Queen's Recommendation signified.

Ordered,

That—

(1) From the date specified in paragraph (2) of this resolution, the Resolution of the House of 30 October 2003 (Pay for Chairmen of Select Committees (No. 2)), as amended by the Resolution of the House of 13 July 2005 (Pay for Chairmen of Select Committees (No. 2)), be further amended in paragraph (1) by leaving out 'Committee on Standards and Privileges' and inserting 'Committee on Standards'.

(2) The date specified for the purposes of paragraph (1) is the first sitting day of the first month after the month in which the House agrees a resolution under Standing Order (Lay members of the Committee on Standards: appointment, etc.) appointing two or three lay members of the Committee on Standards.—
(*Sir George Young.*)

Code of Conduct

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): We now come to the debate on the code of conduct and on all-party groups. Motion 5 relates to the report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges on the revised code of conduct, which will be debated together with motion 6, which relates to all-party groups. Mr Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of Mr Charles Walker—

Mr Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): And Lorely Burt.

Madam Deputy Speaker: And Lorely Burt. I call Mr Kevin Barron to open the debate.

7.11 pm

Mr Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As you rightly say, there are two motions on the Order Paper in my name. The first is the more important: it invites the House to approve a revised code of conduct. The House of Commons has long had resolutions covering conduct, but the idea of a code of conduct is relatively recent. It was not until 1995 that the House endorsed the principle of such a code. Since then, the code has been revised, in 2002 and in 2005. This is only the fourth version of the code since the first version was approved in 1996.

In approving the code of conduct today, the House will be setting the framework for the rules that will, I hope, last for the remainder of this Parliament and into the next. It is important to be clear about what the code is for. It is not a rule book that sets out precise instructions about what is and is not permissible in each case. As the commissioner has set out in a memorandum attached to our report, it is a document that establishes

“broad high-level principles in relation to the main areas of a Member’s conduct”

and

“provides a high-level statement of the specific rules to which Members will be held to account”.

All those who responded to the commissioner’s consultation supported this approach. Relying on detailed rules designed to meet every eventuality creates the risk that people will be encouraged to game the system. We have only to look at the creativity of tax avoidance schemes to see that. The code has a broader function: it helps us to ensure that we behave in a way that is consistent with the seven principles of public life—the Nolan principles, which are part of the code and which underpin its provisions. Where appropriate, the code is supplemented by more detailed statements of some of the rules, such as the guide to the rules, and the rules on the use of House facilities, but Members have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that they abide by the principles of the code.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards has the task of reviewing the code and making recommendations to the Committee. In 2002, the Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended that this should be done once in each Parliament. Following the expenses scandal, we judged it better to defer a review of the code in the last Parliament, in order to give Members of the new Parliament an opportunity to review it in the light of experience.

The commissioner’s memorandum to the Committee sets out all the changes to the code clearly, and explains the reasoning behind each of them. Our report focuses on all the provisions that we consider most significant. Broadly speaking, the commissioner’s proposals have the effect of making the code clearer and removing some repetitions and infelicities. The most significant proposed change is in paragraph 2 of the code. The current code

“does not seek to regulate what Members do in their purely private and personal lives”,

but it does extend to their wider public lives. Our proposal is that the code will no longer apply to Members’ wider public lives. As the commissioner points out, Members’ behaviour in their wider public life will be policed by other regulatory bodies, and there will be no need for the House to intervene.

There is an important proviso to the exclusion from the code of private and personal lives or wider public life. Those areas should be excluded unless

“such conduct significantly damages the reputation and integrity of the House of Commons as a whole or of its Members generally.”

That is not an entirely new provision. Paragraph 15 of the present code stipulates that Members should

“never undertake any action which would bring the House of Commons, or its Members generally, into disrepute.”

Personal life is currently excluded from the code, but a Member’s wider public life is not. The code will extend only to conduct which

“significantly damages the reputation and integrity of the Commons as a whole or of its Members generally”.

That is a very high hurdle indeed.

Lorely Burt (Solihull) (LD): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the amendment that also stands in my name would prevent the commissioner from becoming involved in issues that were entirely private, while leaving scope for the investigation of breaches in which a personal matter crossed over into a political matter?

Mr Barron: The hon. Lady makes an interesting point. I was about to move on to talk about the amendment, and we can look at that question in a moment.

The amendment is also in the name of the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), and I am sure that he will explain it later in the debate. It raises significant questions. As I understand it, the amendment would mean that matters relating to a Member’s private and personal life which damaged the reputation and integrity of the House or of Members generally would remain within the scope of the code, but that the commissioner would be precluded from investigating complaints about such matters.

That raises a number of difficult questions. How would the boundaries of private and personal lives be defined? Would a matter remain private and personal if, for example, it had led to criminal behaviour or a failure to comply with civil obligations? Does something remain purely private and personal when it has been running all over the press and the internet for six or seven days? What is an investigation? Would the commissioner be precluded from giving a Member the chance to put his or her side of the story in private, rather than before the

[Mr Barron]

Committee as a whole? If the commissioner were unable to investigate extreme cases involving a Member's personal and private life, would the Committee be expected to investigate them? If so, the Member's safeguards would be reduced, as the Committee would investigate and pronounce sentence. I would feel uncomfortable about that. We are an adjudication Committee; we do not carry out investigations. The amendment seems to suggest that we might do so, however.

I understand colleagues' fears that complaints could flood in about private lives, and that the commissioner might have to investigate matters that were properly no one's business but that of the Member concerned. That is not what is intended. The House should have trust in the commissioner, in the Committee and in itself. Serious cases of a fall in standards should be decided on the Floor of the House, and not by the commissioner or by the Committee.

I am confident that the commissioner will not investigate purely private matters. If some future commissioner did so, I am confident that the Committee would take a robust approach, and that any serious sanction recommended by the Committee would come to the House, which would decide whether it was merited. I ask Members to have faith that all those involved, including the House, would use common sense if these measures were ever applied. I, for one, hope that they never will be.

The new provision is intended only for extreme circumstances, described by the commissioner as those in which a Member's conduct in certain extremely limited circumstances is so serious and so blatant that it causes significant damage to the reputation of the House. In my judgment, it would be even more damaging to the reputation of the House and to the public's confidence in the code of conduct—which is one of its key purposes—if the House were unable to take action to express its disapproval and uphold its standards in such circumstances.

Mr Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give an example of something “purely private and personal” that he believes would fall within the scope as he has just defined it?

Mr Barron: Yes. Let us say a Member had committed fraud, not against the public purse—

Mr Brady *rose*—

Mr Barron: This is a hypothetical example, but let me carry on with it. Let us say that a Member committed fraud, not against the public purse but against a family member, and it was argued that this was a purely personal matter. Let us say that this Member was sentenced in a criminal court for six months; would that not be a matter for this House?

Mr Brady: I am grateful—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. After putting a question to a Member, Mr Brady should wait for the answer before intervening again; otherwise, we lose the flow.

Mr Brady: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way again. He has answered my question in one sense, in that the only example he has adduced is one that is patently not “purely private and personal”, but criminal. By definition, then, it would not fall within the scope of the amendment.

Mr Barron: I have to say that I am not too sure about that, as I do not know the intent behind the amendment, which does not make things as clear as the change in the code does. It could be argued on a point of law that the action taken was not a matter for Parliament because it was a personal action. It might be a criminal action—

Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Barron: Wait. Under the circumstances I described, when someone was sentenced to six months in jail, according to the law and according to the current rules of this House, that individual concerned—obviously, I hope this never happens—would remain a Member because we do not have the legal provisions to get rid of him at present. That is something that we need to consider.

Mr Cash: We are looking at paragraph 15 of the current code of conduct and paragraph 16 of the amended code of conduct. It is curious that the wording has been changed. Paragraph 15, which is where we are at the moment and seems to me to be sensible, says:

“Members shall at all times conduct themselves in a manner which will tend to maintain and strengthen the public's trust”—that is good—

“and confidence in the integrity of Parliament and never undertake any action which would bring the House of Commons, or its Members generally, into disrepute.”

The key is “into disrepute”, and it is well known; everyone understands it. Now, for some reason—I would be grateful if the right hon. Gentleman would be good enough to explain it—paragraph 16 says simply:

“Members shall never undertake any action which would cause significant damage to the reputation and integrity of the House of Commons as a whole, or of its Members generally”,

but leaves out the whole question of disrepute. What is the difference and why the change?

Mr Barron *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. First, interventions should be brief. Secondly, I can see that many Members have the code of conduct with them, so the hon. Gentleman could have simply referred to the two paragraphs and the pertinent words in them.

Mr Barron: I will come back to that, if I may, but I want to carry on citing what the commissioner said in the memorandum, which the Committee accepted. He continued:

“But the conduct would need to be so serious and so blatant as to make it imperative that the House be given the opportunity to consider the damage done to the reputation and integrity of the House of Commons as a whole or of its Members generally.”

The code does not seek to judge the behaviour as right or wrong—only the effect it has on the reputation and

standing of the House. In my view, that is a hugely important thing to defend in our democracy, particularly after the events of the last four years.

Let me deal with other issues that we need to look at. The Government are currently consulting on proposals to allow the House to decide whether or not to permit the opening of a recall petition in cases where the House considers a Member's conduct warrants it. Does that mean purely in respect of their public life, or does it mean in their private or personal life as well? I think that we stray into these issues with the amendment, which is why I think the House would be better to stand back from it and have a look at things in the round at a later stage. Without a provision such as the one I am proposing, the House risks being either ineffectual, because the code does not allow it to deal with behaviour that everyone agrees is reprehensible, or arbitrary because it takes action even though such behaviour is not covered by the code. That seems to be the intention. The alternative is that we end up relying on legal semantics to decide whether something is still "purely personal and private", which is absolutely not how the code should operate.

As our report says, this is a provision for extreme circumstances. It does not invite the Committee or the House to judge a Member's purely private and personal relationships and will not be used to do so. This is not to turn the House into a moral arbiter, but to allow it to protect the integrity of Parliament. It is a judgment on the effect of a Member's conduct on that vital objective, not a judgment on the Member's morals.

I cannot support the amendment, but I can suggest an alternative, more appropriate, way forward. The commissioner consults the Committee on certain matters. For example, if someone is referred to the police because the commissioner is concerned about a police investigation that might have implications for the criminal law, the commissioner comes to the Committee and provides evidence to show why the referral should take place. We are then asked either to agree it or reject it. Paragraph 104 of the guide to the rules also makes it clear that the Committee expects to be consulted before accepting an investigation of a complaint against a former Member, a complaint that goes back more than seven years, or one where a member has asked the commissioner to investigate allegations without being the subject of a specific complaint. With a self-referral, the commissioner has to come before the Committee and ask our permission for this to take place. The commissioner is currently consulting on revisions to the guide to the rules.

Let me say to the House and to those who tabled the amendment that I would be happy to ask the Committee to consider adding consideration of complaints relating to a Member's private and personal life to the category of matters for which the commissioner should not accept investigation without first consulting the Committee.

Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr Cash), I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman would want to point out that the commissioner has tried in the new version to separate what are aspirations for us all to behave well from things that we really should not do. If my hon. Friend were to look at page 42 of the review of the code, he would see that paragraph 15 is now different because of the separation in part 2 of certain aspirational requirements of the code from those

things that we really must not do, which appear in the later parts of the code. It is largely a stylistic matter. I wondered whether the right hon. Gentleman might want to make that point.

Mr Barron: Well, I thank the hon. Gentleman for the speech. He is a hard-working member of the Committee, as well as a member of other Committees that look into standards in public life. He is well worth listening to.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD): I apologise for not being in my place for the start of the debate; I was rather taken aback by the speed of previous proceedings. Let me try to put it this way. Building on what the right hon. Gentleman said a few moments ago, would he accept that the purpose of paragraph 16A is to create a presumption against investigation of private life unless the Committee determines in its judgment that such an investigation should take place?

Mr Barron: Yes, I understand that point, but I fear that the intention could be misinterpreted. I fully understand the issue that the right hon. and learned Gentleman raises, and I hope that the hon. Member for Broxbourne will tell us about the amendment in more detail. If it is withdrawn, it will be perfectly possible to return to the issue when the revised guide to the rules comes before us in the not-too-distant future. That revision to the guide will be more detailed than what appears in the current three-page code of conduct, which is out for consultation. If the Committee itself has not proposed that the commission should consult before opening an inquiry into personal and private matters, the House could insert such a provision, but I feel that the provision would be more helpful in the guidance than in a code of conduct that tends to contradict elements of it.

The other important clarification is the introduction of a new paragraph 15 making it clear that Members are personally responsible for the extent to which their use of expenses and allowances accords with the rules. Clearly there is nothing new in that. The current Members' handbook warns Members that the facilities and services of the House are provided to assist Members in their parliamentary work and should be used appropriately.

Defining parliamentary purposes is, of course, not easy. Members' roles are various, and we are, with very rare exceptions, elected as party candidates and uphold our parties in Parliament. That is very different from using public funding for party campaigning, or to support party organisations. Having considered the definition extremely carefully, the Committee recommends that the rules make it clear that public money should not be used to

"confer undue advantage on a political organisation".

Most of the other changes consist of clarifications and re-ordering to make the code more coherent. One change that has attracted some comment is the proposal to remove paragraph 12 of the code, which refers to the need to be open and frank with Ministers, Members and officials. We suggest that it should be included in a new paragraph 13, which would also cover the declaration and registration of interests in the House. That would make it clear that Members should

"always be open and frank in drawing attention to any relevant interest in any proceeding of the House or its House or its Committees, and in any communications with Ministers, Members, public officials or public office holders."

[Mr Barron]

That is a clarification rather than a substantive change. Its roots lie in one of the more painful cases that the Committee has had to consider: the so-called Lobbygate, in which Members were drawn into discussing jobs that they might undertake after they had left the House. One of the cases arising from that involved the failure of my good friend Mr Richard Caborn to declare an interest in a meeting with the chairman of a health authority. At the time, it was argued that the rules governing declaration did not cover such cases, as the person concerned was not a Minister or a civil servant. Our judgment was that the spirit of the rules was clear: their purpose was to ensure that Members were transparent in their dealings with people who might be in a position to influence public policy or the spending of public money. However, we believed that the rules could be better expressed, and these changes achieve that.

One of the great sadnesses involved in dealing with standards cases is that we must deal with what comes before us. The Committee cannot simply refuse to look into a matter because it was a case of entrapment or a single transgression in a distinguished career, and there are a limited number of sanctions that it can recommend to the House. It is a mark of the respect and affection in which Richard Caborn is held that extremely senior people have asked the Committee to reconsider his case. We have considered the matter carefully on more than one occasion, but ultimately we decided that we had considered the rules carefully at the time of our original finding.

It may help, however, if I discuss some of the matters that were set out clearly in the original report and debate. The commissioner and the Committee agreed that the breach of the rules was inadvertent. As I said at the time, the penalty that we proposed was

“intended to be light, because we recognised that Mr Caborn did not intend to breach the rules or to bring the House or its Members generally into disrepute.”

An inadvertent slip should not obscure Mr Caborn’s long record of distinguished public service, and I hope that it does not do so.

Mr David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): As one of those who made representations to my right hon. Friend on behalf of my former colleague the then Member of Parliament for Sheffield, Central, I welcome the tenor and nature of his speech. Does he agree that in future, and specifically in the guidance that is to be offered, there should be absolute transparency about the operation of the Committee and about basic rules of fairness? For instance, should the guidance not make clear what is a constituency matter and what is not? Richard Caborn has rightly argued that that was a problem in the interpretation of the previous rule.

Mr Barron: I do not want to go into any great detail, but the changes in the code are intended to do precisely that. They are intended to clarify areas so that they are not open to interpretation—or, some would argue, misinterpretation—in years to come.

The code does not need radical revision, but it does need to evolve to meet the changing expectations and circumstances of not just the House of Commons but

the public outside, and, as I have said, it needs to be as clear as possible. On behalf of the Committee, I thank the commissioner for his thorough consideration of the code and the work that he has done to produce a clearer, more coherent document, which I commend to the House. I hope that those who tabled the amendment will reconsider their position, but we will be able to revisit it. The guidance will reassure the House that no commissioner will be able to forage into areas that would be unfair on Members of Parliament, and I hope that that will be acknowledged.

I also hope that the second motion will prove entirely uncontroversial. It introduces an additional register to record the interests of those who provide secretariats for all-party groups. It will deal with an anomaly between the registration requirements for staff of all-party groups and those for Members’ staff. It will make the arrangements easier to administer, and will reduce the risk that, owing purely to inadvertence, interests will not be registered. The proposal is the result of a paper from the Registrar of Members’ Financial Interests, and the Committee is grateful to her for it. The staff of all-party groups are currently required to register only income from employment, whereas secretaries and research assistants are also required to register gifts, benefits and hospitality. The motion proposes that the registration requirements should be the same for both groups.

The motion also proposes the transferring of the requirement to register to the staff member from the Member who is the registered contact for the all-party group, who may not be closely involved in the group’s administration. That would make it easier to ensure that the registration requirements are complied with, as the relevant forms can be issued with pass applications, and it will not be necessary for an officer of the group to take such action. As Members may know, the Speakers of the two Houses have set up a bicameral working group to consider all-party groups. I am a member of it, as are others who are in the Chamber this evening. There may be more changes to come, but there is no need for us to delay this change.

I trust that the House will approve my modest proposal to streamline and tighten the registration requirements for staff of all-party groups. Indeed, I hope that it will agree to both motions. I look forward to ending any misgivings relating to one of the reports at a later stage in our proceedings.

7.37 pm

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr Barron). Let me begin by paying tribute to the work of his Committee and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. A great deal of thought has gone into their review, and much of what is suggested makes perfect sense. However, my amendment seeks to address and limit the no doubt well-intentioned recommendation that will allow the commissioner to broaden his remit into investigating and adjudicating on Members’ conduct in their wider private and personal lives. I believe that that proposed intrusion into Members’ private and personal lives is a step too far, and I am worried about where it may lead the commissioner and the House if left unamended.

Justifying an extension of the commissioner’s powers, the Committee states on page 11 of its report, paragraph 2, that

“The Code does not seek to regulate the conduct of Members in their purely private and personal lives or in the wider conduct of their public lives unless such conduct significantly damages the reputation and integrity of the House of Commons as a whole or of its Members generally.”

If deconstructed, however, that statement, far from limiting the new powers of the commissioner in the area of Members’ private and personal lives, gives him almost unlimited scope to investigate any action committed in this space on the basis that it is potentially damaging to the reputation of Parliament and its Members. A less generous, but accurate, interpretation of paragraph 2, page 11, would read as follows: “The code will seek to regulate the conduct of Members of Parliament in their purely private and personal lives, if it is the view of the commissioner and the Committee that their actions could be deemed significantly to damage the reputation and integrity of the House of Commons as a whole, or of its Members generally.”

I worry about where this new activism by the commissioner might lead. Over the weekend, I wracked my brain to try and imagine scenarios in Members’ private lives that would trigger the interest of the commissioner, and I could only come up with two topics: the bedroom and the bottle. In common with most people, these are the two weaknesses that seem most likely to compromise Members of Parliament in their private lives.

On page 24 of the report, the commissioner argues that his interest is warranted on the basis that

“a Member of Parliament is never off duty. Once elected, a serving Member is likely always to be seen as a Member of Parliament, with the duties and obligations that go with that position, wherever they are and whatever they are doing.”

I dispute that view. Despite living in his constituency full-time, the Member of Parliament for Broxbourne—namely, myself—is, on occasion, most certainly off duty, and be assured, Mr Deputy Speaker, if I were not off duty on occasions, I would slowly, but surely, go mad. Perhaps that point has already been reached.

Mr Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): I find it refreshing that the commissioner thinks we are never off duty. I wonder whether that will be reflected in the Senior Salaries Review Body review of our salaries.

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend is leading me into territory into which I should not stray in this debate.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): May we think about a recent case that the Committee considered? A Member might have had a private meeting, perhaps with another family member who was a businessman, and in which there was a discussion about funding and payment. During that meeting, the Member might have utilised his position as a Member, and that might have become public knowledge, although the meeting was private. I am sympathetic to where my hon. Friend wants to go, but I am bothered that we have not looked at this issue properly and I would like him to consider putting his point but—as the Committee Chairman, the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr Barron), said—then allowing us to look at it carefully later, to ensure that we do not err.

Mr Walker: I will take that into consideration, and I acknowledge the spirit in which the point has been made.

Oliver Heald: May I return to the theme I was developing earlier, in what was described as a very long intervention—I shall try to be briefer this time? The commissioner suggests that some of the new rules might be split. We used to have rule 2, stating that the rules do not

“seek to regulate what Members do in their purely private and personal lives”,

whereas rule 16 said Members must not bring the House into disrepute, which was, in a sense, a mop-up rule. Matters are set out in a more coherent way now, but there is no real change.

Mr Walker: I disagree with my hon. Friend about that. The commissioner is clearly trying to give himself powers to investigate Members’ private and personal lives, which is why this amendment has been tabled.

The commissioner’s interpretation of a Member’s status is at odds with that of another regulatory body, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, which states in its consultations and press releases that a fundamental principle of its scheme is that MPs

“should be treated...as far as possible like other citizens.”

The various regulatory bodies that oversee and adjudicate on our activities cannot reasonably expect to have it both ways. The public now rightly demand that Members of Parliament should face the same rigours that they do in their daily lives. The flipside of that must be that parliamentarians, “like other citizens”, also have the right to a private life and private space—and in this private space people will, on occasions, make mistakes.

It is in the nature of our job—this vocation—that if these mistakes are large enough, they will be picked up and reported by the press, with all the opprobrium, shame and upset that goes with having our private calamities played out on a national stage. I look back at the personal agonies that the former hon. Members for Croydon Central and Winchester went through in the last Parliament, and I shudder to think how much worse things would have been for them if the parliamentary commissioner, however well intentioned, had been conducting his own forensic investigation into their actions, dragging in family, friends and perhaps other aggravating parties. There would have been months and months of investigation, all in the name of protecting the notional honour of the House.

The Committee does not dismiss the possibility of such investigations. It offers a well-meaning but vague assurance on page 6 of its report that

“like the Commissioner, we do not think the Committee or the House should be drawn into judging a Member’s purely private and personal relationships.”

Why is that sentence not worded more forcefully? Why does it equivocate when it could say that “the commissioner and the Committee will not allow the House to be drawn into judging a Member’s purely private and personal relationships”? Why is that assurance not given by the commissioner and the Committee? The reason, I believe, is that it cannot be given because the commissioner knows full well that, almost exclusively, personal scandals and misfortunes are where the action lies.

Oliver Heald: Does my hon. Friend’s amendment not create the same problem? If the matter in question were not only to relate to a Member’s conduct, but also affected their ability to be an MP—rank dishonesty

[*Oliver Heald*]

falling short of crime, for example—the commissioner would be able to investigate. Does my hon. Friend's amendment make any difference, therefore?

Mr Walker: In his usual helpful way, the broad-minded Leader of the House made it clear in his response to the consultation that he was not aware of any recent cases where a Member's conduct in their purely private and personal life had been so outrageous that the House or the general public would have wanted action to be taken against the Member. Those pushing this proposal cannot come up with any sensible examples.

The Leader of the House has been in this place for almost 40 years, but while it seems he cannot think of anything worth investigating, the commissioner clearly can. That is why he is promoting this change to the current code of conduct.

Mr Cash: This issue boils down to how the provisions are drafted. No one has any serious doubt about the intentions and the parameters, but problems do arise. The code states that it does not

“seek to regulate what Members do in their purely”—

I emphasise that word—“private and personal lives”, or in the conduct of their wider lives. Rule 16, however, says:

“Members shall never undertake any action which would cause significant damage.”

Therefore, on the one hand we are told the code does not seek to “regulate”, yet on the other hand we are told Members shall “never” undertake certain actions. I do not think there is any real doubt about what is intended, but I am worried about the interpretation that might be drawn if this proposal is passed. That is the problem. This is more an issue of drafting than of intention.

Mr Walker: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention.

I appreciate that the Committee and the commissioner are at pains to point out that it is not their intention to create a “red top” charter. I accept that that may not be their intention, but the fact remains that real reputational threat to this place is contained in this flawed proposal.

Sir Paul Beresford: My hon. Friend said he wanted an example. I did give him one, but he has not responded to it. It is a financial, not a lurid, example, and I would like him to consider it.

Mr Walker: The example given was fraud, and it was also extraordinarily tortuous.

The Leader of the House, whom I do not often pray in aid of my arguments—as he knows—has been here for 40 years and he cannot think of anything in that time that would have required this power to have been exercised. We in this place are brilliant at inventing new misdemeanours and crimes with which to beat ourselves.

Mr Syms: My hon. Friend talked about bed and the bottle. I have never been asked to go on a billionaire's yacht, although it is something that one would perhaps look forward to, but some Members of this House do stay with important people when on holiday. Does he

think that this proposal will give another hand to those who want MPs to have to declare where they are going on holiday?

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend leads me into the final part of my speech. Let us be clear that however well intentioned the power the commissioner is seeking, it will mean that Members' private and personal lives will be in the ambit of investigation. Their actions will be scrutinised by the commissioner and a subjective view will be taken of whether or not those actions could cause significant damage to the reputation of the House. Every sexual peccadillo, domestic dispute or unguarded cross word would lead to tabloid calls for the commissioner to take action—“Something must be done”, the headlines will cry. The commissioner argues that in the event of an undefined personal scandal, the House's status would be diminished if it

“were unable to take action to express its disapproval and uphold its standards in such circumstances.”

In a sense, that sounds like a return, after 17 years, to “back to basics”. We know what a disaster that was; we had all these moral judgments applied to the activities of Members. The one example that my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) did provide would be covered by criminal law in any case, so it is not relevant to this debate.

In conclusion, I am fully aware that Members of Parliament can do bad and unethical things in their capacity as Members of Parliament, which is why these standards and the code of conduct are so important. As importantly, I am also aware that people can do silly and stupid things regardless of who they are, because none of us was born an angel or a saint. So I strongly believe that the House should confine itself to worrying about the matters that directly pertain to the job of being an elected representative, and not those that relate to general human weakness or stupidity. For that reason, I urge the House, the right hon. Member for Rother Valley, for whom I have a huge amount of time, and my hon. Friends the Members for North East Hertfordshire (Oliver Heald) and for Mole Valley, of whom I am extraordinarily fond, despite our little spat this evening, to support my amendment. On this occasion, it is time that the House recognised that the Member of Parliament for Broxbourne is arguing for the virtuous and should carry the day.

7.52 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): We welcome the review of the code of conduct by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and the report by the Committee on Standards and Privileges commenting on the draft code and the changes that the commissioner has suggested. May I also say at the outset that Labour supports the changes that he has suggested for all-party groups?

As the Committee notes, the code was last revised in 2005 and several areas of it could be usefully clarified, so there is much that we welcome in the review. It is sensible that the code of conduct has remained one of high-level principles, rather than detailed rules. As the chairman of Standards for England noted in his consultation response, there is a danger that having a set of rules

“which is too tightly defined can lead to a complexity which makes understanding of the rules too difficult to grasp which is therefore counter-productive”.

We welcome the fact the commissioner has rejected such an overly prescriptive rules-based approach. There is much that we can welcome in the report, so rather than go into great detail about that, I wish to concentrate on areas where we have some concerns, one of which has been pointed out by the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker).

Labour Members believe that the existing code of conduct is working well. That is not only a tribute to the work done by my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr Barron) and his Committee, but it is reflected in the responses to the consultation, which did not throw up any major concerns with the status quo. Therefore, any suggestion that the code should be extended into areas not currently covered would need to be backed up by a convincing argument.

In his consultation, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards asked:

“Should the scope of the Code extend to some aspects of a Member’s private and personal life? If so, how should that be expressed in the Code?”

The parliamentary Labour party’s response to the consultation said no to that, as we feared that it would turn the code of conduct into a code of morals. That remains our view, and we are puzzled by the commissioner’s recommendation on this point. The proposed revision to the code states:

“the Code does not seek to regulate the conduct of Members in their purely private and personal lives”.

We agree with that approach, because the code should not seek to do that. However, the proposed new code would go on to state:

“unless such conduct significantly damages the reputation and integrity of the House of Commons as a whole or of its Members generally.”

That is the point that we have all been wrestling with in the debate.

That extension appears to suggest that we, as Members of this House, are entitled to a private life—we are all human, so we are entitled to one under article 8 and the Human Rights Act 1998—unless the commissioner rules that we are not. As the Leader of the House pointed out in his response to the consultation,

“extending the scope of the Code explicitly to cover Members’ private and personal lives could, as you note in the consultation paper, lead to their human rights being infringed.”

What threshold would result in the code coming into action? We are not told. The commissioner’s response to the consultation says that it would be “extremely limited circumstances” that are

“so serious and so blatant”.

However, he gives no further indication of what those might be. Such comments cause further confusion, rather than illuminate what the new situation might be. He gives no clues as to what he thinks those circumstances should be.

So what are these “extremely limited circumstances”? Some attempts have been made in the debate to define them, but those have been unsatisfactory. I am sure if we stood on Westminster bridge and canvassed the views of those who passed by, we would find as many views on what those circumstances should be as people we spoke to. The current commissioner may take a narrow view of what constitute his “extremely limited circumstances”, but his successor may take a more or

less narrow view. This is an unsatisfactory situation. The Leader of the House noted in his response to the consultation that we should be

“wary of extending the Code to deal with a purely hypothetical eventuality.”

I agree with that.

As I said at the outset, the existing code is working well. What was needed was tweaking and clarification, not mission creep. Most of the proposed changes to the code are sensible and can easily be supported.

Oliver Heald: I rather agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr Cash) was saying earlier. I do not think there is any intention to extend the scope of the code here. The existing code, before the amendments, did not apply to private conduct, but there was a general provision that no Member must act in a way that brought the House into disrepute. This is about clarifying what those two provisions mean in the amended code. I would have thought that that was something that should happen, even if the hon. Lady is not happy with the exact wording.

Ms Eagle: The hon. Gentleman makes a particular point, but I do not think that what the commissioner has suggested is clear either and that is what we are struggling with at the moment. I may be alone in this, but I did not think that we faced a problem that needed the kind of revision that has got us into the confusing situation we are now in.

Members of Parliament are rightly accountable in the courts of law and under the code, as are people in other walks of life. But unlike lawyers, general practitioners or people in any of the other professions, Members of Parliament are accountable at the ballot box for their actions and they are accountable to their political party. The electorate are entitled to make a judgment about a Member’s private life, and about how effectively they pursue their constituency duty and how they treat their constituents—that is how democracy works—but I trust the common sense of the British people to make such judgments; we should leave judgments about morals to them.

7.58 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir George Young): I welcome the chance to intervene briefly in this interesting debate, and I commend the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr Barron) for his speech in moving the motion and for his work on the Committee on Standards and Privileges during his time as Chair, including his work in producing the two reports we are considering today. The House will have noted what he said in response to the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker).

I also commend the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, John Lyon, for his work as commissioner. His term of office concludes at the end of this year, and it is possible that this will be the last debate on the work of his office, in general terms, during it. He has faced a work load that neither he nor anyone else could have foreseen when he was first appointed, he has discharged his responsibilities conscientiously and effectively and been a source of wisdom and good sense for the Committee on Standards and Privileges and its successive Chairs. I say that with added conviction as the Chair at the time of his appointment.

[*Sir George Young*]

The review of the code that the commissioner has carried out reflects the experience he has gathered during his term. The overwhelming majority of the changes he has proposed represent sensible changes, improving the clarity and structure of the code without affecting its overall scope and meaning. In particular, the changes help to distinguish the aspirational parts of the code from the adjudicable part.

I want briefly to touch on four areas that have attracted particular interest, namely the application of the code to hon. Members' private lives, the code in relation to constituency responsibilities, personal responsibility for the use of resources and the principle of equal application to all hon. Members.

On the first matter, the commissioner, the Committee and the House have wrestled, and are wrestling, with the vexed issue of how far the code applies to hon. Members' private lives, which is the subject of the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne and others. In my submission to the review, which has already been quoted, I said that the distinction between private and public lives was

"important, even if it is not always clear".

I noted that an extension to private lives might lead to an infringement of human rights, a point also made in the submission by the chair of Standards for England.

I further pointed out that any such extension

"could also be used to justify intrusive and prurient media interest in Members' private lives, on the basis that if the House chooses to concern itself with Members' personal lives—however sparingly—then there should be no limits to the media doing likewise".

Sir Menzies Campbell: As my right hon. Friend will know, the code must be read as a whole. Has he had time to look at paragraph 18, which provides:

"The Commissioner may investigate a specific matter relating to a Member's adherence to the rules of conduct under the Code" and the following sentence, which states:

"Members shall cooperate, at all stages, with any such investigation by or under the authority of the House"?

If the investigation is into private life, that necessarily means that if a Member refused to answer a question on his or her private life, he or she could be regarded as breaching that part of the code.

Sir George Young: My right hon. and learned Friend is right. Once an inquiry has been started by the commissioner, Members are obliged to co-operate and if they do not, they will face consequences from the Committee on Standards. That paragraph would then kick in.

The commissioner has concluded that being an hon. Member is a way of life. As he put it, an hon. Member "is never off duty. Once elected, a serving Member is likely always to be seen as a Member of Parliament, with the duties and obligations that go with that position, wherever they are and whatever they are doing."

I personally paused at the assertion that I am never off duty, and I think my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne and other colleagues might have had the same reaction. I think that there are times when I am off duty. The commissioner's conclusion is that an hon. Member's conduct in both their private and wider public lives is excluded from the provisions of the code

"unless such conduct significantly damages the reputation and integrity of the House of Commons as a whole or of its Members generally".

This is a very high hurdle for investigation, and that approach was endorsed by the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

The amendment, if the subject of a complaint related only to the conduct of a Member in his or her private and personal life, would have the effect of providing that it could not be investigated. I am confident that the Members who have proposed the amendment have no wish to argue that Members should be subject to special treatment that is not available to others. The issue at stake is simply whether there would ever be circumstances in which it would be appropriate for the commissioner to undertake an investigation into a matter that did not intersect at all with an hon. Member's conduct in his or her public capacity. That is a matter for the House and each hon. Member to consider and it is not an issue on which it is appropriate for the Government to take a collective view, although I am personally sympathetic to the case made by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne.

The House will also want to reflect on the offer made by the Chair of the Standards and Privileges Committee to take the House's concern and address it in the revised guide, which, as I understand it, would leave the code unamended and insert an additional step in the process, in that the Committee would have to agree to the commissioner conducting an inquiry in this particular domain. I am sure that the House will welcome those offers and will want to reflect on them.

Another potential matter of contention is the application of the code to constituency matters. In his memorandum, the commissioner makes it clear that the way an hon. Member handles constituency business should not be adjudicable by the commissioner, and I agree. He suggests that the House would only wish to consider an instance that was

"so serious and blatant as to cause significant damage to the reputation of the House".

I agree that it is very hard indeed to envisage these criteria being met.

On the third issue, in my submission to the review I supported proposals for redrafting the code in line with recommendations by the Committee on Standards in Public Life

"so that the House has a clear basis to take action against any Member who has abused the IPSA scheme".

The commissioner proposed to do that by means of a provision that stated that the use of public resources may not confer a political benefit. The Committee on Standards and Privileges has suggested a change, arising from its observation that it is unrealistic to expect that parliamentary activities legitimately funded from the political purse might never confer an indirect political benefit. The new code rightly makes it clear that Members should be clear that the use of public resources must always be in support of their parliamentary duties and should not confer any undue personal or financial benefit on themselves or anyone else or confer undue advantage on a political organisation. I agree that that formulation is in line with the original proposals of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which used the phrase "undue advantage".

Finally, the commissioner considered and rejected a number of proposals that would involve separate rules for hon. Members who were former Ministers or who were Opposition Front Benchers. He did so on the basis that of the principle that

“the Code should apply equally to all Members”.

That is a principle that I wholeheartedly support.

The second motion, as the right hon. Member for Rother Valley said, is more straightforward. It seeks the approval of the twenty-first report from the Committee on Standards and Privileges, which recommends extending the scope of registration to individual staff of all-party groups who hold passes and to transfer the onus of registration from the registered contact of the group to the staff member him or herself. As my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House stated in the debate on all-party groups on 7 February last year, all-party groups can play a valuable role provided they are transparent. That measure seems sensible and does not represent an abdication of responsibility by hon. Members who are officers of all-party groups. Instead, it reflects the proper situation whereby individuals who have the benefits of being a pass holder in this place should personally accept the responsibilities that flow from that.

I look forward to the rest of the debate and to the House coming to a decision on these vexed matters.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Mr Walker, do you intend to press your amendment to a Division?

Mr Charles Walker: I would be delighted if the Government would accept it, if they could, but otherwise I would like to press it to a Division.

8.8 pm

Mr Barron: With the leave of the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, before the amendment is pressed, I ask Members to remember my offer to look at the code of conduct and ensure that any commissioner—this current one or any in the future—would have to come to the House before considering any of the issues referred to in the amendment.

The current code states in paragraph 15:

“Members shall at all times conduct themselves in a manner which will tend to maintain and strengthen the public’s trust and confidence in the integrity of Parliament and never undertake any action which would bring the House of Commons, or its Members generally, into disrepute.”

There is no mention in that paragraph of personal and private lives, or, indeed, of public lives, although they are mentioned in other parts of the code. The provision has never been enacted in such a way and I fear that if the House goes down the route of accepting that people’s personal and private lives are not covered by the code of conduct, that will be a step back. It seems to me that the House would be better advised to consider the genuine proposals that any body wanting to look into someone’s private and personal life would have to come to the Committee to do so. This House should have confidence in its Members who sit on Committees and in the fact that we have an independent commissioner whom we appoint, whose terms and conditions we set and who is independent of us. It should have confidence in a Select Committee on Standards and Privileges that operates in a non-party political way that was unanimous in saying

we should accept the paper before us. We certainly are not unanimous in accepting the amendment. The House should have confidence in itself that if the commissioner or the Committee ever did something wholly wrong, the House could reject that.

Let me finish by saying to hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) on the Front Bench, who mentioned morals, that this is not about morals. I can tell the House, as the Chairman of the Committee, that if the commissioner came to me with a report about morals I would go around the Committee first before I would discuss the memorandum before us. It is not something we should do or that would be acceptable to Parliament or the general public. However, there are circumstances and occasions on which Members have gone overboard but have not been covered by the code. I genuinely think it would be wrong for us to agree to the amendment today. We can look at the guidance and these issues more widely if needs be, but what is proposed would be a backward step. If the amendment is accepted the code will be weaker than the code I have in my hand. I genuinely think we should not do that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Mr Walker, do you intend to press this to a vote?

Mr Charles Walker: I do: one’s personal and private life is one’s personal and private life.

Amendment made: (a), at end, add

‘, subject to the following amendment: After paragraph 16 of the Code, there shall be inserted the following new paragraph:

“16A. The Commissioner may not investigate a specific matter under paragraph 16 which relates only to the conduct of a Member in their private and personal lives.”.—(*Mr Charles Walker.*)

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the Nineteenth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (HC 1579), and approves the revised Code of Conduct set out in the Annex to the Report, subject to the following amendment:

After paragraph 16 of the Code, there shall be inserted the following new paragraph:

“16A. The Commissioner may not investigate a specific matter under paragraph 16 which relates only to the conduct of a Member in their private and personal lives.”.

ALL-PARTY GROUPS

Resolved,

That

(1) this House agrees with the recommendations in the Twenty-first Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, on Registration of Staff All-Party Groups (HC 1689); and

(2) accordingly the Resolution of the House of 17 December 1985, as amended on 10 March 1989, 29 July 1998 and 7 February 2011, relating to the registration of interests be further amended by:

(a) leaving out paragraph 3 (f); and

(b) inserting a new paragraph 4:

“Holders of permanent passes as staff of All-Party Groups be required to register:

- i. any paid employment for which they receive more than 0.5 per cent. of the parliamentary salary; and
- ii. any gift, benefit or hospitality they receive, if the gift, benefit or hospitality in any way relates to or arises from their work in Parliament and its value is over 0.5 per cent. of the parliamentary salary in the course of a calendar year.”.—(*Mr Barron.*)

Localism Act 2011

8.12 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath): I beg to move,

That—

(1) The following new Standing Order be made—

‘Localism Act 2011, etc.: scrutiny of certain orders and draft orders

(1) The Regulatory Reform Committee shall examine and report on—

(i) every draft order laid before the House under or by virtue of section 7 of the Localism Act 2011 or section 5E of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004;

(ii) every draft order laid before the House under section 19 of the Localism Act 2011.

(2) In the case of every draft order referred to in paragraph (1)(i) the committee shall consider the Minister’s recommendation under section 15(1) of the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006 (‘the 2006 Act’) as to the procedure which should apply to it and shall report to the House any recommendation under that Act that a different procedure should apply.

(3) In its consideration of a draft order referred to in paragraph (1)(i) the committee shall include, in addition to such other matters as it deems appropriate, whether provision in the draft order—

(a) appears to make an inappropriate use of delegated legislation;

(b) has an effect which is proportionate to the policy objective intended to be secured;

(c) strikes a fair balance between the public interest and the interests of any person adversely affected by it;

(d) does not remove any necessary protection;

(e) does not prevent any person from continuing to exercise any right or freedom which that person might reasonably expect to continue to exercise;

(f) is not of constitutional significance;

(g) has been the subject of, and takes appropriate account of, adequate consultation;

(h) gives rise to an issue under such criteria for consideration of statutory instruments laid down in paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 151 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee)) as are relevant.

(4) In its consideration of a draft order referred to in paragraph (1)(ii) the committee shall include, in addition to such other matters as it deems appropriate, whether provision in the draft order—

(a) appears to make an inappropriate use of delegated legislation;

(b) gives rise to an issue under such criteria for consideration of statutory instruments laid down in paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 151 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee)) as are relevant.

(5) In relation to every draft order laid under section 7(2) of the Localism Act 2011 or section 5E(2) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 subject to the negative or affirmative procedure under section 16 or 17 of the 2006 Act, the committee shall report its recommendation whether the draft order should be made (in the case of the negative procedure) or approved (in the case of the affirmative procedure), indicating in the case of the latter whether the recommendation was agreed without a division. (6) In relation to every draft order laid under section 7(2) of the Localism Act 2011 or section 5E(2) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 subject to the super-affirmative procedure under section 18 of the 2006 Act, the committee shall report its recommendation as to whether—

(a) the draft order should be proceeded with unamended under section 18(3) of the 2006 Act; or

(b) a revised draft order should be laid under section 18(7) of the 2006 Act; or

(c) no statement under section 18(3) of the 2006 Act or revised draft order under section 18(7) of the 2006 Act should be laid.

(7) In relation to every draft order or revised draft order referred to in paragraph (1)(i) of this order that is subject to the super-affirmative procedure and is being proceeded with under section 18(3) or 18(7) of the 2006 Act, the committee shall report its recommendation whether the draft order or revised draft order should be approved, indicating in the case of draft orders which it recommends should be approved whether its recommendation was agreed without a division; and in respect of such draft orders or revised draft orders the committee shall consider in each case all such matters set out in paragraph (3) of this order as are relevant and the extent to which the Minister concerned has had regard to any resolution or report of the committee or to any other representations made during the period for parliamentary consideration.

(8) It shall be an instruction to the committee considering draft orders referred to in paragraph (1)(i) of this order and being proceeded with under section 18(3) or 18(7) of the 2006 Act that it report not more than fifteen sitting days (in the case of an order under section 18(3) of the 2006 Act) or twenty-five sitting days (in the case of an order under section 18(7) of the 2006 Act) after the relevant statement is laid.

(9) In relation to every draft order or revised draft order referred to in paragraph 1(i) of this order, the committee shall report any recommendation under section 16(4) of the 2006 Act that the draft order be not made, or under section 17(3), 18(5) or 18(9) of the 2006 Act that no further proceedings be taken in relation to the draft order.

(10) In relation to every draft order laid under section 19 of the Localism Act 2011, the committee shall report its recommendation as to whether—

(a) the draft order should be proceeded with unamended under section 19(3) of that Act; or

(b) a revised draft order should be laid under section 19(7) of that Act; or

(c) no statement under section 19(3) of that Act or revised draft order under section 19(7) of that Act should be laid.

(11) In relation to every draft order or revised draft order being proceeded with under section 19(3) or 19(7) of the Localism Act 2011, the committee shall report its recommendation whether the draft order or revised draft order should be approved, indicating in the case of draft orders which it recommends should be approved whether its recommendation was agreed without a division; and in respect of such draft orders or revised draft orders the committee shall consider in each case all such matters set out in paragraph (4) of this order as are relevant and the extent to which the Minister concerned has had regard to any resolution or report of the committee or to any other representations made during the period for parliamentary consideration.

(12) It shall be an instruction to the committee considering draft orders being proceeded with under section 19(3) or 19(7) of the Localism Act 2011 that it report not more than fifteen sitting days (in the case of an order under section 19(3) of that Act) or twenty-five sitting days (in the case of an order under section 19(7) of that Act) after the relevant statement is laid.

(13) In relation to every draft order or revised draft order referred to in paragraph 1(ii) of this order, the committee shall report any recommendation under section 19(5) or 19(9) of the Localism Act 2011 that no further proceedings be taken in relation to the draft order.’

(2) Standing Order No. 141 (Regulatory Reform Committee) be amended as follows—

(a) in line 5, at end, insert ‘, other than one laid under section 18 of the Act as applied by section 7 of the Localism Act 2011 or by section 5E of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004’;

(b) line 12, at end, insert ‘; and to carry out its functions under Standing Order (Localism Act 2011, etc.: scrutiny of certain orders and draft orders)’;

(c) in line 78, at end, insert ‘referred to in paragraph (1)(i) of this order that is’;

(d) in line 79, after ‘procedure’, insert ‘and is’;

(e) in line 92, after ‘orders’, insert ‘referred to in paragraph (1)(i) of this order and’;

(f) in line 97, after second ‘order’ insert ‘referred to in paragraph (1)(i) of this order’;

(g) in line 134, at end, insert ‘or within paragraph (1) of Standing Order (Localism Act 2011, etc.: scrutiny of certain orders and draft orders)’; and

(h) in line 148, at end, add ‘or under section 19 of the Localism Act 2011’.

(3) Standing Order No. 18 be amended as follows—

(a) leave out from ‘under’ in line 2 to ‘should’ in line 6 and insert ‘paragraph

(4) of Standing Order No. 141 (Regulatory Reform Committee) or paragraph (5) of Standing Order (Localism Act 2011, etc.: scrutiny of certain orders and draft orders) that a draft order subject to the affirmative procedure should be approved, or has recommended under paragraph (6) of Standing Order No. 141 or paragraph (7) of Standing Order (Localism Act 2011, etc.: scrutiny of certain orders and draft orders) that a draft order’;

(b) leave out from ‘under’ in line 14 to ‘be’ in line 16 and insert ‘paragraph

(4) of Standing Order No. 141 or paragraph (5) of Standing Order (Localism Act 2011, etc.: scrutiny of certain orders and draft orders) that a draft order subject to the affirmative procedure be not approved, or has recommended under paragraph (6) of Standing Order No. 141 or paragraph (7) of Standing Order (Localism Act 2011, etc.: scrutiny of certain orders and draft orders) that a draft order’;

(c) in line 25, after ‘141’, insert ‘or paragraph (5) of Standing Order (Localism Act 2011, etc.: scrutiny of certain orders and draft orders)’;

(d) in line 28, leave out ‘Act’, and insert ‘Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006’; and

(e) in the title, at end, insert ‘etc.’.

(4) Standing Order No. 151 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee)) be amended, in line 21, after ‘2006’, by inserting the words ‘any draft order laid before the House under or by virtue of section 7 or 19 of the Localism Act 2011 or section 5E of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004’.

The motion may be rather long and complex—at one point in its gestation it was even longer and more complex—but it should not be controversial. Essentially, it provides for certain draft orders which are akin to draft orders under part 1 of the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006 to be subject to Commons scrutiny in the same way as the draft orders under the 2006 Act. This will involve detailed consideration by the Regulatory Reform Committee followed by proceedings on the Floor of the House, with the nature of those proceedings reflecting the views of the Committee. The proposals follow consultation with the Liaison Committee, the Procedure Committee and the official Opposition. No objections have been voiced to the proposed method of proceeding. I have also spoken to the Chair of the Regulatory Reform Committee, the hon. Member for Poole (Mr Syms), who has confirmed that he is content with the proposed approach.

Mr Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): What we now have is rather longer and more comprehensive but I think it does the job and I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he has done.

Mr Heath: I am most grateful for that endorsement.

I shall confine my remarks to two matters—the drafting of the Standing Orders and an account of how the procedures will work. As I have already admitted, the proposals before us are complex, but the complexity flows from the complexity of the current provisions in Standing Order No. 141. An earlier version of the motion on which I consulted was even more complex

and I was asked to describe this version of the motion as the “simplified” one. Although I am confident that this motion will work, and its provisions are explained in further detail in an explanatory memorandum, I am not convinced that it is as simple as the House would wish. The Procedure Committee has indicated a willingness to consider the overall approach enshrined in Standing Order No. 141 and in the new Standing Order, and I know the Regulatory Reform Committee will also have an interest in the matter. If those Committees were to propose a simpler approach that delivered the same outcome, I believe it would be welcomed by the House.

The nature of the order-making powers covered by the motion is described in the explanatory memorandum, so I shall not describe them now. Because the powers are broad and can involve change to primary legislation, the Localism Act 2011 provides for enhanced scrutiny arrangements, including a so-called super-affirmative procedure, by direct application of or by analogy with the scrutiny arrangements under the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006. Commons Standing Orders currently assign the additional scrutiny powers under the 2006 Act to the Regulatory Reform Committee and we propose that the Committee should have the same role in respect of the new orders.

The Committee’s powers are extensive. It considers the merits of each order and the appropriateness of the proposed method of proceeding. It can conclude that a particular measure should not be proceeded with or should be subject to different proceedings. Its conclusions help to determine the procedures that are then followed on the Floor of the House. The motion enables the House to consider the new orders in the same way as orders under the 2006 Act. The proposals are complex and we have an open mind on their being simplified in due course. For the immediate future, to enable proper scrutiny to take place, I commend the motion to the House.

8.15 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The motion establishes the arrangements necessary for enacting the necessary scrutiny by this House of certain orders and draft orders. It is my understanding that the Liaison Committee attempted to find a simpler method for such scrutiny but could not arrive at a satisfactory way forward. It is therefore necessary to adopt the procedure used by the Regulatory Reform Committee for the scrutiny of these orders. The procedure is complicated, as Members will realise, but Members also recognise that effective scrutiny is important. On that note, will the Deputy Leader of the House confirm that the Government will be willing to review the arrangements if weaknesses in these arrangements become apparent?

We do not object to the adoption of Regulatory Reform Committee arrangements for the scrutiny of orders and draft orders arising from the provisions of the Localism Act 2011. That is not to say that we have changed our view of the Localism Act. We voted against it on Third Reading and think it wrong that the Secretary of State should have gathered so many extra powers to himself via its provisions—142 in fact. However, the Act is now passed into law and, on the scrutiny of some of the actions arising from its provisions, we have no objection to the adoption of arrangements that mirror exactly the procedures followed by the Regulatory Reform Committee.

8.17 pm

Mr Heath: With the leave of the House, I will say a few more words. I am most grateful to the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) for her comments. I assure her that if a new and better procedure is developed we will of course put it before the House. Alternatively, if there are major difficulties with what we propose, we will wish to look at it again. In the mean time, I hope that the House will agree to the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Traveller Sites (Dorset)

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

8.18 pm

Mr Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): I am pleased that the House has disposed of its business rapidly so that we can have a proper debate on Travellers in Poole, Bournemouth and Dorset. In a minute, one or two of my colleagues might run into the Chamber having been caught by the collapse of business.

Before I start, let me say that I have just emerged from hospital, having had appendicitis, and I would like to thank Oliver Allenby-Smith, his team and all the nurses on ward B4 of Poole hospital, who have been nursing me for five days. I am now on the mend and able to represent here my constituents in Dorset.

We all recognise the importance of making provision for Travellers. My experience throughout my political career is that if we make proper provision we have the legal powers to move people on from inappropriate places. It was a retrograde step when the John Major Government decided to move away from paying for pitches, because that diminished the infrastructure for many of the Traveller sites and has caused us problems ever since.

The difficulty in Dorset is that in 1996 Bournemouth and Poole both realised their aspirations of becoming unitary authorities again, and therefore strategic authorities. However, consideration was not given to the boundaries of either authority, so both remained fairly tightly drawn. From central Poole or central Bournemouth one can get to rural Dorset in about 10 or 15 minutes, so there is logic in having a policy for Travellers that encompasses not only Dorset county council, but the two other strategic authorities, Poole and Bournemouth.

Under the Housing Act 2004 Poole undertook a review of the housing need of Travellers. It carried out a consultation on the number of sites and came up with 20. It reduced that to three sites within its boundaries. One of the joys of having a local authority with no overall control is that the committee then decided to consult on all 20 sites. So I have many concerned and worried constituents who think they may well have a Travellers site in their own back yard.

I would like more co-ordination and co-operation among the three authorities. They all want to work together, but there are certain things that are causing a problem. One of the issues relates to policing, which does not impact directly on the Department for Communities and Local Government. The issue of joint transit provision is not one that strategic authorities are able to consider because the Criminal Justice Act 2004 does not give the police powers to move Travellers across strategic authority boundaries. In Dorset, joint provision between lower-tier authorities is possible because under Dorset county council the higher tier is the strategic authority. Poole and Bournemouth do not have this opportunity because they themselves are both strategic authorities. Those authorities therefore have to provide facilities within area. That is not necessarily an easy fix. It seems bizarre that Dorset has one police force, the Dorset constabulary, yet under the law as it relates to policing, the force cannot move Travellers across Poole, Bournemouth or Dorset because they have to be unitary authorities. That needs to be dealt with.

I would like a Minister to set out when we are likely to get the Travellers review. It would be helpful to see what obligations the local authority has. Does the Localism Act 2011, which introduced the duty of co-operation in plan-making, set out whether that will override other duties? What we need is co-operation among the three authorities. It is logical and it follows from our history and our geography that they should work together. Both Bournemouth and Poole are happy to make their contribution in financial terms, but the very tight geographical boundaries that both have make it extremely difficult to identify sites which do not have another purpose. In my constituency in Poole, for example, the only green area we have is Parkstone golf club. To the west is water, and to the north is an area of outstanding natural beauty and green belt, so identifying an efficient site within Poole will be extremely difficult.

Then there are the issues of permanent sites and transit sites. It is important that there should be transit sites. The advantage of Poole is that the transit site could easily be only a few miles up the road in rural Dorset, yet at present we seem to be precluded from taking action. I should like more information on what is envisaged. Earlier this year the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) replied to a written question on Travellers from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Annette Brooke). My right hon. Friend said that he understood that there was widespread concern about rules and guidance on Travellers sites. He stated that the Department for Communities and Local Government had published the new draft planning policy for Travellers sites for consultation in April 2011, but I still do not think we have clarity.

On a number of occasions I, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole and my hon. Friends the Members for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns) and for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) have tried to pin the Government down to give us more specifics, but the Government have not been able to do so. The situation is difficult. Logic demands a collaborative approach among Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth in discharging our duties towards Travellers. We have not been able to do so because of slight legal impediments, the police impediment that I set out, and the lack of clarity.

I hope that the Minister will be able to set out clearly the requirements under the Localism Act 2011. I had great hopes of the Act. This is the great new dawn for local government. The Act specifically introduces a duty to co-operate in plan-making, although there are no definitions of what the duty consists of. The authorities are meant to come together to agree a plan strategically. This is, in effect, what is happening between the three strategic authorities, Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole, with the joint Gypsy and Traveller work. However, that does not mean that we can offload our responsibility to provide appropriate sites, and we would not wish to do so.

We are in a state of flux. The borough council wants to do the right thing, but because there is no overall control, it has consulted on too many sites and there are many worried people. Our geography and our history mean that identifying appropriate sites is very difficult. As I stated, we went from 20 sites down to three and

consulted on the three. One of the three sites under serious consideration, which was in the Branksome triangle, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West, is already being used for car parking for Liverpool Victoria and is therefore in employment use. It is very difficult for us to identify a site that could be used as a permanent or a transit site without losing employment land. We want to do the right thing, but that is extremely difficult because of our history and our geography. That is why I hope for some answers from the Minister.

Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the Adjournment debate. Does he agree that one of the major issues that we face is uncertainty, which is upsetting and unsettling many members of the local communities that we both serve across the Bournemouth and Poole conurbation?

Mr Syms: I agree. That is an important point. As a local politician, I am trying to get some certainty, as I am sure is my hon. Friend, so that there is a much clearer sense of direction. Therefore, we need a few more answers from Ministers. If we do not get them tonight, clearly we might need to have further meetings with the Minister concerned. The uncertainty means that people are becoming much more worried than they need to be, not least because Poole is consulting on rather too many sites, some of which are not appropriate, and worrying a lot of people. My postbag is filling up with letters from people who have genuine concerns, as I am sure is my hon. Friend's. Poole wants to do the right thing.

Conor Burns: One thing that is causing considerable anxiety locally is the fact that our councils are being forced to do the consultation that they are now undertaking. My understanding is that the consultation is part-funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government and that it is a central Government requirement on local government. The point my hon. Friend made a moment ago about definition and clarity around the Localism Act 2011 is extremely important in relation to the Minister's response.

Mr Syms: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I think that the 2011 Act is a landmark piece of legislation, and we have high hopes that it will transform local government. He is right that we need a little more clarity on whether it will offset some of the other requirements that the Government have put on Poole. We want to do the right thing and provide sufficient sites. We want to provide what we have a duty to provide and to pay for it, but the difficulty is that he and I have extremely compact constituencies. It is difficult to find appropriate sites in our constituencies, yet there might be appropriate sites five or 10 minutes away from the conurbation. However, because we have unitary and strategic authorities it is very difficult to do that and leave Dorset constabulary in a situation where it can move Travellers on if it has to.

I know that Bournemouth has problems with Travellers on occasion and a number of temporary sites to deal with them at certain times of the year. Later in the debate I would be interested to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West set out his constituents' concerns on what is a difficult and worrying subject, but

[Mr Syms]

one on which we as politicians need to get more clarity. Essentially, we want three authorities to work together on this, which is the whole thrust of the 2011 Act and which they want to do. We want to combine financially and make provision for Travellers in the appropriate way; the most appropriate way might be for the three authorities to make that provision on a collective basis. That might mean not necessarily having the sufficient number of sites within the boundaries of Bournemouth or Poole.

We need more clarity, and I hope that we will get it from the Minister. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West has similar views and concerns to me and I would be interested to hear them, so that the Minister may reply with conviction and give us more reassurance on this very difficult policy issue that our local councillors have to comply with. That is really all I have to say. I am pleased to see the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Andrew Stunell) in his place and am sure that he will respond brilliantly to the debate. If we do not get the answer we demand tonight, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West and I will look forward to further meetings with Ministers so that we can meet our objectives of providing for Travellers, safeguarding our constituents and getting efficient and effective local government.

8.32 pm

Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con): I begin by again congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr Syms) on securing this debate and apologise for arriving a moment late. This afternoon I travelled up from the constituency of Bournemouth West, which I have the honour of representing, after attending the opening of a visitor facility in a café at the Cherry Tree nursery by Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal. That is relevant to the debate only because the nursery is surrounded by a large amount of greenfield land that has previously been occupied by illegal Gypsy and Traveller encampments, causing enormous distress to the people who work there—some wonderful young and old people who suffer from severe learning difficulties. The presence of those communities, often unannounced, has been a great source of concern to those people.

My hon. Friend is putting on the Minister responsible, who is yet to be with us, an extraordinary expectation in hoping that he will respond in detail to all the points that we are making, but I am sure that his colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Andrew Stunell), who will reply to the debate, is taking all these points on board. My hon. Friend the Member for Poole went to the heart of the problem we face, which is that the previous Government's policy remains in place. Before Christmas I spoke with the head of Gypsy and Traveller policy at the Department for Communities and Local Government, a lady called Nicola Higgins, who confirmed that the previous Government's policy is still in place.

In the run-up to the most recent general election, we raised our local electorates' hopes and expectations that the matter would be a priority of the Government who are now in office. Ministers still make the point that the

Localism Act 2011 will give our local authorities the powers that they need to get together in groups and remove from them the requirement that each must have their own, separate, single-authority provision. My hon. Friend who secured this debate and I want the Government to complete that unfinished business and to move with some speed to reassuring our local communities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) told the Bournemouth *Daily Echo* that he had been assured—according to my hon. Friend, by the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, our hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill)—that

“once the Localism Bill becomes law, councils will have an opportunity to re-submit their local plans without the obligation to automatically identify gypsy traveller locations.”

In a letter to me, however, the Under-Secretary indicated that

“every local housing authority is required under section 8 of the Housing Act 1985 to carry out an assessment of the accommodation needs of travellers.”

The ongoing consultation throughout Dorset is being funded in part by money from the Department, so there is a great urgency about the Government's clarification of when the powers that we promised local authorities will become available to them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole mentioned that there are a couple of proposed sites.

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): The hon. Members for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns) and for Poole (Mr Syms) are making compelling and straightforward arguments, and it is good to see so many Members on the Treasury Bench to hear them, but does the hon. Member for Bournemouth West think that the problem is a lack of transparency or a lack of urgency from the Department?

Conor Burns: I am delighted to see the hon. Gentleman back in his place after his no doubt successful visit to the Falkland Islands—and this on Commonwealth day. As he knows, sometimes Governments of all persuasions need a little push, and it is our constituents who are giving us a push as those sites go out to consultation.

The current consultation, which is being carried out by Baker Associates throughout Dorset and funded to the tune of some £300,000 by the Department, is profoundly unsettling the communities that my hon. Friend the Member for Poole and I serve. One proposed site out to consultation at the moment is Lansdowne, right at the heart of Bournemouth, known locally as the gateway to Bournemouth and visible from the Wessex way.

Mr Syms: As I said in my contribution, the real problem is that Bournemouth and Poole local authorities became unitary without the boundaries being looked at. Both areas are very compact, and finding suitable sites is difficult unless we do so on the basis of the Dorset way.

Conor Burns: My hon. Friend makes a valid and compelling point which I wholly agree with and endorse.

My final point is that those communities, which include some elderly, vulnerable and frail people, are worried that our councils have gone out to consultation on specific sites. There is an excellent campaign being

run on the Lansdowne site by a lady called Alex De Freitas, who has mobilised local traders and residents to put across their concerns.

We really want to hear tonight a compelling answer of some urgency from the Minister as to when our local authorities will be able to move away from that consultation and take up the very sensible powers that they were presented in both governing parties' pre-election offerings to the British people: the opportunity to come together and to make provision across multiple-authority areas, thereby giving the police the powers to move on the illegal encampments that do so much damage to the communities that my hon. Friend and I serve.

I, like my constituents, look forward with eager anticipation to the words of reassurance that will doubtless now flow from the Minister at the Dispatch Box.

8.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Stunell): First, let me say what an unexpected pleasure it is to have the opportunity to address the House on a matter that is of genuine significance and importance to my hon. Friends the Members for Poole (Mr Syms) and for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), who spoke with eloquence about the situation that they face in Dorset and in their unitary authorities of Poole and Bournemouth. I congratulate the hon. Member for Poole on having secured the debate. I am delighted to respond to at least some of the points that he raised, although he will understand that I may not be able to respond to them all, including those that refer to specific sites and specific planning applications and situations, because ultimately they might finish up on the desk of the Secretary of State, and in those circumstances it would not be appropriate for me to offer a view from the Dispatch Box.

Mr Syms: May I say how very pleased I am to have my hon. Friend the Minister here replying to the debate? Sometimes greatness is thrust on people at the last minute. I look forward to his response, but my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns) and I will find it perfectly understandable if he cannot respond to all the points raised.

Andrew Stunell: This debate is being conducted in a generosity of spirit that we could perhaps export to other parts of our proceedings at other times.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole said that he was disappointed that a previous Government had withdrawn funding for the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites and expressed the view that that had made the situation more difficult. I remind him that this Government have recently announced a grant programme that will enable some 700 Gypsy and Traveller sites to be refurbished and built across England. There is still some money left in the fund, and we are open to receiving bids for the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites to take advantage of that funding. I understand his point about the added difficulty created by the various planning constraints that arise if it is also thought that significant amounts of money have to be spent, but the Government have responded to that. I appreciate his request for the Government to provide additional encouragement for the three authorities to work together, particularly in the potential co-ordination of police action. I will come to those points in a few minutes.

I want to make it clear that the Government are committed to encouraging sustainable development, and it is extremely important that local authorities plan for the future of their communities, within which there will be Gypsies and Travellers. My hon. Friend will be aware that the Government have taken steps to abolish the regional spatial strategies, and we have published the draft national planning policy framework on which a consultation has concluded and on which a further announcement can be expected shortly. That clearly states that local authorities have a duty to provide a housing supply for residents living in their area, including those within the Gypsy and Traveller community. I welcome the fact that both my hon. Friends said that they recognised the commitment to provide sites.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I apologise for being a bit delayed in joining the debate, which I was expecting to take place at 10 o'clock. It is always a delight to start these debates earlier, particularly today, as it gives us another hour and 15 minutes to debate this subject. *[Interruption.]* Not in an intervention, I am reminded.

The Minister talked about councils' obligations to the community. Does he agree that councils also have an obligation to defend and support the green belt, of which they are the custodians for future generations? Three permanent sites inside the green belt have been earmarked for north Bournemouth. This is not against Travellers per se, but against any form of development on the green belt, which is believed to be sacrosanct. Will the Minister endorse the line that councils must be given the duty, responsibility and power to make sure that green belts are protected?

Andrew Stunell: I welcome my hon. Friend as another late arrival at the ball tonight. He makes a valid point relating to the consultation that we have carried out on the planning circulars on Gypsies and Travellers. Indeed, he puts his finger on one of the central concerns that led to the initiation of the consultation. I will come on to the next stages of that process in a little while.

There is an obligation on housing authorities to provide for all their residents, including Gypsies and Travellers. They must therefore make an assessment of what that need is and ensure that their local plan includes appropriate sites. The statutory guidance that we inherited implied that different planning rules should apply when sites were being allocated for Gypsies and Travellers. It is that incongruity between the planning constraints on the development of housing for the settled community and for the Gypsy and Traveller community that has often created difficulties and that the consultation is designed to address.

In providing the funding for new sites, responding to the consultation and developing a new planning framework, we must ensure that we do not simply drive the problem to another place, but that there is adequate provision for Gypsies and Travellers where it is needed. Central to the case of my hon. Friends the Members for Poole and for Bournemouth West is that they want there to be co-operation between the three planning authorities of Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset to ensure that that provision is delivered in the right place in an appropriate and timely fashion. To respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Poole, the Localism Act 2011 places a duty

[Andrew Stunell]

to co-operate in planning matters on local authorities. I am sure that he will want to draw that to the attention of the local authorities and ensure that it is delivered.

Our aim is for the new draft policy to be short, light touch and fair; to put the provision of sites back into the hands of local councils, in consultation with communities; and to protect green-belt land. We are considering the response to the consultation and intend to publish our new policy as soon as possible. Although this goes a little beyond my brief, the House will understand that that is likely to be linked to the publication of the national planning policy framework. The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), has put it on record that we intend to publish the framework before the end of this month. I hope that that is some reassurance that we are very close to producing the final version of the policy that my hon. Friend the Member for Poole seeks.

It is important to put it on record that, like the rest of the population, the majority of Travellers are law-abiding citizens. They should have the same chance to have a safe place to live and bring up their children as anybody else. What is not acceptable is for anybody to abuse the planning system, for instance by trespassing and setting up encampments or other unauthorised developments. Another purpose of the planning circular, on which we have consulted and which will be published, is to ensure that some of the rule-bending that has taken place will be ruled out in future. The Government are developing a package of changes, including the use of incentives, through the planning system to provide a better balance between site provision and enforcement.

To ensure fair treatment of settled communities and the majority of Travellers, we are putting in place a range of measures including the abolition of the architecture of regional planning through the Localism Act 2011—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] I appreciate my hon. Friends’ support for that measure. We are putting in place stronger enforcement powers for local authorities to tackle unauthorised development and setting out measures to limit the opportunities for retrospective planning permission. My hon. Friends might not be aware that we are setting aside £50,000 to support a training programme run by Local Government Improvement and Development, which is aimed at raising awareness among councillors of their leadership role in relation to Traveller site provision and planning applications.

Thomas Docherty: How many councillors will that £50,000 provide training for?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath): Lots.

Andrew Stunell: My hon. Friend helpfully says “Lots.” I would be quite happy to provide further information, but it will provide councillors with day-long seminars at local authority level.

I have already mentioned that we have included in the Localism Act a duty on local councils to co-operate. That will require them to engage constructively in the planning process. We have included Traveller sites in the new homes bonus, to reward councils that deliver additional

sites. That will mean that councils get financial benefits for building authorised Traveller sites where they are needed.

I have mentioned that we have allocated £60 million of Traveller pitch funding to help councils and other registered providers to build new sites. So far I have signed off bids totalling £47 million, which were announced in January and will lead to the setting up of more than 750 new and refurbished pitches for Travellers. Hon. Members may be interested to know that Dorset county council was a successful bidder for £1.75 million of support.

It is important to rise above the simple planning context, which is what we have mostly concentrated on, and recognise that the Gypsy and Traveller community suffers a very high level of discrimination and deprivation. It has some of the poorest social outcomes in education, health, access to financial services and of course housing.

Conor Burns: May I gently put it to the Minister that neither my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr Syms) nor I has in any way sought to denigrate members of the Gypsy and Traveller community or be alarmist about them? We are interested in pushing the Government towards a position in which our local authorities can respond to legitimate need but at the same time give the police the power that they need to move on illegal encampments, which are often positioned in sensitive areas and have an impact on tourism and other matters in our communities.

Andrew Stunell: I fully understand my hon. Friend’s point, and I hope to get to that in a sentence or two.

I can report to the House that a cross-Government ministerial-level working group has been preparing proposals on how we can address the discrimination and poor social outcomes that Travellers experience. We have applied the Mobile Homes Act 1983 to authorised local authority sites, to give residents of local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites better protection against eviction.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West has once again brought to the House’s attention the question of unauthorised developments and what happens next. As a matter of definition, an unauthorised development is land owned by Travellers but developed without planning permission. The Government are getting tough on unauthorised development. We will not tolerate abuse of the planning system by anyone. Local authorities have a range of powers to deal with unauthorised developments, but the fact of the matter is that planning enforcement remains a problem. The powers include temporary stop notices, which do not normally allow the removal of a caravan that is a person’s main residence. In addition to the measures set out in the Localism Act 2011, the Government are considering strengthening temporary stop notice powers. The measures in the Act include increasing penalties for non-compliance with a breach of condition notice, from a maximum fine of £1,000 to one of £2,500, and limiting the opportunities for retrospective planning in relation to any form of unauthorised development.

Unauthorised encampments—Travellers trespassing on land not owned by Travellers—can be tackled not just through the planning system, but through the criminal justice system and civil courts. The police and local authorities have a range of powers to deal with such

encampments. The full range of powers can be used when an alternative site is available in the local authority area. My hon. Friends have pointed out that because of the tight constraints and small geographical areas of both Poole and Bournemouth, it is difficult to establish the availability of such sites in the local authority areas. Their plea is for the Government to consider widening the scope of that measure, possibly using the duty to co-operate. I have taken note of what they said on that point and undertake to respond to them more fully.

Mr Ellwood: I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way. With an hour and five minutes left, he has been extremely generous in allowing hon. Members to elaborate on aspects of this important debate. Will he clarify an important issue that affects both Poole and Bournemouth? The regional spatial strategy has been removed and regional development agencies are disappearing, with the 2011 Act replacing them. I understand that Bournemouth borough council now offers in the submission of its core strategy a different paragraph on where Gypsy and Traveller sites can be—it can make the case that Bournemouth is not appropriate and that those people should be placed elsewhere. Will the Minister confirm that? If he cannot do so now—I understand that he stepped in for another Minister—I would be grateful if his Department could write to me.

Andrew Stunell: I should make it clear to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I do not feel any deep obligation to keep going for another hour and a quarter.

I would not want my hon. Friend to be too premature. The final version of the national planning policy framework has not yet been published. As I said earlier in my remarks, the Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells, has told the House that the intention is that the national planning policy framework should be published before the end of this month. At that

point, there will also be a statement on how it comes into force. Until that moment, it would not be appropriate for a planning authority to proceed—indeed, the authority could not proceed, because our proposals of last year have not yet been confirmed. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East and I might have a reasonable expectation that when the framework is in force, the words he has used would be the appropriate ones to apply.

Mr Syms: I thank the Minister for responding to this debate. He deserves time off for good behaviour. I am sure that any points that he has not covered can be dealt with later by the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill).

Mr Heath: He will visit my hon. Friend's constituency.
[Laughter.]

Andrew Stunell: Yes, it has been suggested that I mention that my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst will be only too delighted to visit the constituency of each Member who has spoken. If it is thought appropriate, I will give that commitment on his behalf.

We have discussed matters of real significance and importance to the constituents of the Members who have spoken. I do not seek to trivialise that at all. They have generously said that if there are points that I have failed to cover appropriately, they will give my hon. Friend the Minister another chance. On that basis, I hope that the House will be satisfied with my responses and that in due course the matter can be drawn to a full conclusion.

Question put and agreed to.

9 pm

House adjourned.

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 12 March 2012

CABINET OFFICE

Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Mr Francis Maude): On 20 December I reported to the House on the heads of agreement on the principal civil service pension scheme to be introduced in 2015, which set out the Government's final position on the main elements of scheme design. Since 20 December, my officials have been engaged in detailed discussions with the civil service trade unions over the remaining details of the principal civil service pension scheme. I can now report to the House that discussions on these final details of the scheme design for the principal civil service pension scheme to be introduced in 2015 have now concluded. The Government have made it clear this sets out our final position on scheme design, which we are asking unions to take to their Executives as the outcome of negotiations.

This is the proposed final agreement which reflects the conclusion of discussions on the final details with the civil service unions since I made my written ministerial statement on pension reform, on 20 December 2011, *Official Report*, column 150WS. The headline elements of the proposed final agreement remain unchanged from those reached on 20 December and the provisional accrual rate has been finalised.

The core parameters of the new scheme are set out below:

- a. a pension scheme design based on career average;
- b. a provisional accrual rate of 2.32% (equivalent to (1/43.1) of pensionable earnings each year;
- c. revaluation of active members' benefits in line with CPI; (any change in the method of indexation will be subject to consultation)
- d. a normal pension age equal to state pension age, which applies both to active members and deferred members (for new scheme service only). If a member's SPA rises, then NPA will do so too for all post-2015 service;
- e. pensions in payment to increase in line with prices (currently CPI);
- f. benefits earned in deferment to increase in line with prices (currently CPI);
- g. average member contributions of 5.6%;
- h. optional lump sum commutation at a rate of 12:1, in accordance with HMRC limits and regulations;
- i. spouses/partner pension of three-eighths pension, in line with the current open scheme;
- j. lump sum on death in service of two times salary;
- k. ill-health benefits in line with those in the current open scheme;
- l. actuarially fair early/late retirement factors on a cost-neutral basis;
- m. an employer contribution cap and floor to provide backstop protection to the taxpayer against unforeseen costs and risks. This floor will also allow for an improvement in member benefits if the value of the scheme falls beyond a fixed level;

n. abatement will not apply for post-2015 service in the new scheme when members return from retirement. Abatement rules for the current schemes will remain unchanged;

o. partial retirement rules for service in the new scheme will follow existing partial retirement rules. Members with service in both the existing and the new scheme will be able to apply for partial retirement under each scheme, under the limits that exist in current schemes;

p. members will be able to take any pension they have accrued under their existing schemes without having to also take any new scheme pension at the same time, under the limits that exist in current schemes;

q. for members wishing to retire before their state pension age, there will be an opportunity to pay additional contributions to fund earlier retirement of up to three years without an actuarial reduction. Contributions will ordinarily be payable by members, but individual employers will be able to choose to provide a contribution in very limited and exceptional circumstances, that must be approved by the Cabinet Office;

r. existing added years contracts will continue in the new scheme;

s. added pension arrangements will continue;

t. members who leave the new scheme and return within five years will have their deferred benefits increased as if they had been an active member. (The rate of dynamisation for active and deferred members will however be the same, as set out in points c and f above); and

u. the Public Sector Transfer Club will continue, and consideration will be given to the best method of operation in the reformed schemes, following further discussion with trade unions;

The scheme actuary has confirmed that this scheme design does not exceed the cost ceiling set by the Government on 2 November. Copies of the heads of agreement and scheme actuary verification have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

TREASURY

ECOFIN

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Mark Hoban): The Economic and Financial Affairs Council will be held in Brussels on 13 March 2012. The following items are on the agenda to be discussed:

Financial transaction tax (FTT)

The presidency will update Ministers on the state of play of discussions on the financial transaction tax, and in particular the technical work that is being undertaken on this file. Ministers will then exchange views. The Chancellor has made it clear on a number of occasions that the UK does not support the Commission's recent proposal for an FTT. As it stands, the proposal will have significant negative impacts on jobs and growth. To avoid a damaging relocation of financial trading, FTTs would need to apply in all financial centres, and not just the EU.

Alert Mechanism Report (AMR)

Ministers will be asked to agree to Council conclusions on the AMR and hold an exchange of views. The AMR is based on a "scoreboard", where each member state is assessed against 10 macroeconomic indicators, and an accompanying analysis. These are designed to indicate where potential external and internal imbalances may exist. The UK exceeds the threshold values on four indicators: real effective exchange rate, export market share, private sector debt and public sector debt.

The Commission will then conduct in-depth reviews on 12 member states, to assess whether imbalances or excessive imbalances exist. These member states are: the UK, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. These reviews will be published in May. Greece, Ireland and Portugal and Romania are already under enhanced economic surveillance as part of their payment assistance programmes and are therefore not subject to in-depth reviews.

The Government support the macroeconomic imbalances procedure, on which the AMR is based. They are taking determined action to rebalance the UK economy and ensure a return to sustainable growth, including through: tough and credible action to tackle the deficit; a new strategy to increase house building and stabilise the housing market; and boosting exports and rebalancing the economy towards regional growth.

(Possible) Follow-up to the European Council on 1-2 March 2012

The presidency may inform Ministers on the follow-up to the March European Council conclusions. Ministers will then exchange views. On growth, the Council conclusions set out an appropriate time line for addressing the EU-level growth agenda, in line with the Prime Minister's letter with 11 other member states. The Government are content with the Council conclusions. The intergovernmental treaty was signed by 25 member states in the margins of European Council. The Government welcome the signing of the treaty: it is in the UK's interest for the euro area economies to achieve stability and growth, and for the treaty to work to achieve this.

Follow-up to the G20 Meeting of Finance Ministers and Governors on 25-26 February 2012 in Mexico

The Commission will debrief Ministers on the main outcomes of the G20 Finance Ministers' and Central Bank Governors' meeting in Mexico City on 25 and 26 February. The main items on the agenda were the global economy and framework for growth, IMF resources, financial regulation and commodities. The issue of IMF resources dominated the discussion, and the G20 agreed that euro area countries will reassess the strength of their support facilities in March. This will provide essential input into the G20's ongoing consideration to mobilise resources to the IMF. At the G20, the Chancellor stressed that IMF resources to support individual countries cannot be a substitute for further credible steps by the euro area to support their currency. The next G20 Finance Ministers' meeting will be in the margins of the IMF spring meetings in Washington.

Implementation of the Stability and Growth Pact

Following the Council decision on 24 January that Hungary has taken no effective action to sustainably correct its excessive deficit, the Commission has proposed that the Council suspend €495 million of cohesion fund (CF) commitments to Hungary in 2013. Ministers will be invited to adopt the Council decision. The suspension of CF commitments to Hungary represents 0.5% GDP and 29% of total CF commitments for the year. The Commission believes this to be both an effective and proportionate amount. The UK will not oppose the Commission's proposal.

Information on the informal ECOFIN on 30-31 March 2012

The presidency will inform delegations about the informal ECOFIN which will be held in Copenhagen on 30 and 31 March.

ECOFIN Breakfast

Eurogroup will be meeting on 12 March. Ministers will be debriefed on the Eurogroup discussions, before formal ECOFIN starts. Ministers are likely to discuss the economic situation. Ministers may also discuss the issue of the next president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The UK supports the need for an open and transparent process in selecting the president.

EDUCATION

Teacher's Pension Scheme (England and Wales)

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb): On 20 December the Secretary of State for Education reported to the House on the heads of agreement on the teachers' pension scheme to be introduced in 2015, which set out the Government's final position on the main elements of scheme design. Since 20 December, Ministers have been engaged in detailed discussions with the teacher and lecturer unions over the remaining details of the teachers' pension scheme. I can now report to the House that discussions on these final details of the scheme design for the teachers' pension scheme to be introduced in 2015 have now concluded. The Government have made it clear this sets out our final position on scheme design, which unions agreed to take to their Executives as the outcome of negotiations. This includes a commitment to seek Executives' agreement to the cessation of any industrial action on pension reform. The final scheme design outlined is conditional on acceptance of this proposed final agreement.

This proposed final agreement reflects the conclusion of discussions on the final details with teacher and lecturer unions since the Secretary of State made his written ministerial statement on pension reform, on 20 December 2011, *Official Report*, column 157WS. The headline elements of the proposed final agreement remain unchanged from those reached on 20 December.

The core parameters of the new scheme are set out below:

- a. a pension scheme design based on career average;
- b. an accrual rate of 1/57th of pensionable earnings each year;
- c. revaluation of active members' benefits in line with CPI + 1.6%;
- d. normal pension age equal to state pension age, which applies both to active members and deferred members (new scheme service only). If a member's SPA rises, then NPA will do so too for all post-2015 service;
- e. pensions in payment to increase in line with prices index (currently CPI);
- f. benefits earned in deferment to increase in line with CPI;
- g. average member contributions of 9.6%, with some protection for the lowest paid (subject to the detailed arrangements for determining future contribution structure, as shown in annex A of the proposed final agreement);
- h. optional lump sum commutation at a rate of 12:1, in accordance with HMRC limits and regulations;

- i. spouses/partner pension in accordance with current provisions;
- j. lump sum on death in service of three times FTE salary;
- k. ill-health benefits the same as those in the current open scheme;
- l. actuarially fair early/late retirement factors on a cost-neutral basis except for those with a NPA above age 65 who will have early retirement factors of 3% per year for a maximum of three years in respect of the period from age 65 to their NPA;
- m. an employer cost cap to provide backstop protection to the taxpayer against unforeseen costs and risks (as set out at paragraph 5 and annex B of the proposed final agreement);
- n. the public sector transfer club will continue, and consideration will be given to the best method of operation in the reformed schemes;
- o. phased retirement arrangements which reflect those in the current scheme, with the additional option of a third drawdown of benefits after a member's 60th birthday;
- p. abatement will not apply to service in the reformed TPS. Abatement rules for the current scheme will remain unchanged;
- q. members who leave the scheme and return within five years will have their accrued service in the current (NPA 60/65) scheme linked to their final salary at retirement; and
- r. flexibilities to allow members to elect to pay a higher contribution rate in return for a higher accrual rate for a particular year, at full member cost, within existing limits on additional pension.
- s. members who in the new scheme have a normal pension age higher than 65 will have an option in the new scheme to pay additional contributions to reduce or, in some cases, remove any early retirement reduction that would apply, if they retire before their normal pension age. Only reductions that would apply in respect of years after age 65 can be bought out and the maximum reduction that can be bought out is for three years (that would apply to a member with a normal pension age of 68 or higher).

The Government Actuary's Department has confirmed that this scheme design does not exceed the cost ceiling set by the Government on 2 November. Copies of the proposed final agreement and GAD verification have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Radioactive Waste Management

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Charles Hendry): I am pleased to inform the House of three announcements from my Department—the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC)—with regard to the safe management of radioactive waste. First, DECC is today publishing its response to the public consultation on the “Desk-based Identification and Assessment of Potential Candidate Sites for Geological Disposal”.

Alongside the response we are also publishing a high-level framework—informed by our consultation—that sets out the process for identifying and assessing potential candidate sites within volunteer areas in England. The framework more clearly defines stage 4 of the Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS) process for implementing the geological disposal of higher-activity radioactive waste.

The consultation, which ran from June to September last year, considered how desk-based studies would be used by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA)

to identify potential sites following a decision to participate by a local community at the end of stage 3 of the MRWS process. It also set out how potential sites would be assessed against agreed criteria and how decisions would be made—both at the local and national level—on which potential sites should go forward for detailed geological assessment in stage 5.

Having considered all responses received during the consultation the Government have concluded there was general support for our proposals for site identification and assessment and for the criteria which will be used to identify and evaluate potential candidate sites.

To accompany the Government response we have produced a framework document which contains the agreed criteria and a high-level description of the desk-based site identification and assessment process for England. It reflects the proposals presented in the public consultation including a number of additions and clarifications to the criteria, in response to comments we received. It confirms that sites will be assessed using multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA) as a tool to aid decision making and it sets out the next steps to develop this methodology, including the development of scoring scales and the weighting of the criteria.

The Government are committed to a staged siting process based on voluntarism and partnership and the invitation for more communities to come forward to find out more about the siting process remains open. The documents published today demonstrate continuing progress in the process for siting a geological disposal facility for the long-term management of higher-activity radioactive waste. I am placing copies of the documents in the Libraries of both Houses. The documents are also available on the DECC website at:

http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/consultations/mrws_siting/mrws_siting.aspx.

Secondly, I am announcing today the triennial review of the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM). Triennial reviews of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are part of the Government's commitment to ensuring accountability in public life. In common with all such reviews, this has two aims:

- to challenge the continuing need for an NDPB to carry out this role—both its functions and form; and—if it is agreed it should remain as an advisory NDPB;

- to review its control and governance arrangements to ensure it is complying with recognised principles of good corporate governance.

I will announce the findings of the review later this year. If you would like further information, or to contribute to the review, please contact my Department at: radioactivewaste@decc.gsi.gov.uk.

Thirdly, I am publishing today a strategy for waste planning bodies, regulators and waste producers on solid low-level radioactive waste (LLW) from the non-nuclear industries (such as hospitals and universities). The strategy provides further guidance on our policy to encourage the disposal of such low-level waste locally where suitable permitted facilities exist. It complements an existing strategy on LLW from the nuclear industries which was published by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority in 2009. The new strategy is available on the DECC website at: http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/meeting_energy/nuclear/radioactivity/waste/low/low.aspx.

HEALTH

NHS Pension Scheme (England and Wales)

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Andrew Lansley):

On December 2011, I reported to the House that a heads of agreement had been reached on a new NHS Pension Scheme for England and Wales for introduction in 2015. The heads of agreement set out the Government's final position on the main elements of scheme design.

Following this, my Department has been engaged in detailed discussions with health sector trade unions and employer representatives over the remaining details for the new NHS pension scheme. I can now report to the House that these discussions have concluded and the outcome reflected in a proposed final agreement. The headline elements of the proposed final agreement remain unchanged from those set out in my previous statement to the House concerning pension reform on 20 December 2011.

The Government have made it clear that the proposed final agreement represents our final position on scheme design. The final scheme design is conditional on acceptance by trade unions of the proposed final agreement. Trade unions have agreed to take this proposed final agreement to their Executives as the outcome of negotiations. Furthermore, the proposed final agreement includes a commitment by trade unions to seek Executives' agreement to the cessation of any further industrial action on pension reform.

The core parameters of the new scheme are set out below:

- a. a pension scheme design based on a career average revalued earnings methodology;
- b. an accrual rate of 1/54th of pensionable earnings each year with no limit to pensionable service;
- c. revaluation of active members' benefits in line with the consumer price index plus 1.5% per annum;
- d. a normal pension age equal to the state pension age, which applies both to active members and deferred members (new scheme service only). If a member's state pension age rises, then their normal pension age will do so too for all post-2015 service. Those within 10 years of their current normal pension age are excluded and accrued rights will also be related to current normal pension age;
- e. pensions in payment to increase in line with inflation (currently consumer price index);
- f. benefits to increase in any period of deferment in line with inflation (currently consumer price index);
- g. member contributions on a tiered basis to produce a total yield of 9.8% of total pensionable pay in the scheme;
- h. optional lump sum commutation at a rate of £12 of lump sum for every £1 per annum of pension foregone up to the maximum limit on lump sums permitted by HM Revenue and Customs;
- i. the current flexibilities in the 2008 section will be included in the 2015 scheme—early/late retirement factors on an actuarially neutral basis, draw down of pension on partial retirement and being able to retire and return to the pension scheme;
- j. ill-health retirement pensions to be based on the current ill-health retirement arrangements but with enhancement for higher tier awards to be at the rate of 50% of prospective service to normal pension age;

k. spouse and partner pensions to continue to be based on an accrual rate of 1/160th. For deaths in retirement, spouse and partner pensions will remain based on pre-commuted pension;

l. the current arrangements for abatement (for service accrued before and after 2015) will be retained;

m. the lump sum on death in service will remain at twice actual pensionable pay;

n. for members who in the new scheme have a normal pension age higher than 65 there will be an option in the new scheme to pay additional contributions to reduce or, in some cases, remove any early retirement reduction that would apply if they retire before their normal pension age. Only reductions that would apply in respect of years after age 65 can be bought out and the maximum reduction that can be bought out is for three years (that would apply to a member with a normal pension age of 68 or higher);

o. added years contracts in the 1995 section will continue on compulsory transfer to the 2015 scheme;

p. arrangements to purchase additional pension will continue;

q. the public sector transfer club will continue and further consideration will be given to the best way of operating it in the reformed schemes; and

r. there will be an employer contribution cap.

The Government Actuary's Department (GAD) has confirmed that this scheme design does not exceed the cost ceiling set by the Government on 2 November 2011. The proposed final agreement and GAD verification have been placed in the Library. Copies are available to hon. Members from the Vote Office and to noble Lords from the Printed Paper Office. The documents are also available at:

www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_133003.pdf

TRANSPORT

Light Dues

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Penning): The appropriate provision of marine aids to navigation preserves life at sea and protects our coasts from pollution, a task the Government entrust to the three general lighthouse authorities for the United Kingdom and Ireland. However, we must balance this responsibility against the efficiencies demanded of all public sector organisations and our continued drive to minimise cost.

In my written ministerial statement of 26 July 2010, *Official Report*, columns 75-76WS, I stated my desire to provide the shipping industry with long-term stability in the level of light dues paid for marine aids to navigation. In December 2010, I made a commitment not to increase light dues for at least three years; the industry welcomed it, and I remain committed to it, *Official Report*, column 24WS.

Over the last year, I have continued to work with the general lighthouse authorities to identify where it is prudent and appropriate to rationalise services, enlisting the expertise of the authorities' joint strategic board to examine the question of pension liabilities and ever-closer working between the general lighthouse authorities themselves. We have identified and exploited considerable opportunities for greater efficiency, the most notable relating to aids to navigation monitoring centralisation,

buoy yard reorganisation and staffing reductions. These have succeeded in lowering running costs substantially, against a targeted five year reduction of 17% the general lighthouse authorities now expect to achieve 19%.

Furthermore, the Department for Transport tendered and replaced part of the general lighthouse fund investment portfolio to facilitate its use for a general lighthouse authorities staff pension reserve; the new portfolio reduces investment risk and facilitates stability.

These initiatives and efficiencies have enabled me to freeze light dues this year. Since I became shipping Minister, there has been a real terms light dues reduction of around 10%.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Personal Independence Payment

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Miller): During consideration of the personal independence payment (PIP) clauses of the Welfare Reform Bill on 17 January, the Government announced their intention to have a graduated introduction

of the new benefit. To ensure a smooth introduction, the launch will be undertaken through a phased approach, commencing initially with a subset of new claimants. This will ensure processes and procedures are working fully before moving to process all new claims and then reassessing existing disability living allowance (DLA) claimants.

Bootle benefit centre (Bootle BC) will administer the first new claims from spring 2013, from areas including Merseyside, north-west England, Cumbria, Cheshire and north-east England. People in these locations will be the first to claim the new benefit. The primary reason for selecting the Bootle BC is that it handles DLA new claims in volumes that will provide a robust test of PIP processes and new computer systems. During this period, new claimants in all other parts of the country will continue to claim DLA as now.

The remaining network of benefit centres currently administering new claims for DLA will start to take on new claims for PIP from summer 2013, once evidence is in place that processes are working as intended. In addition this network will handle continuing DLA claims for children. Blackpool benefit centre will undertake PIP reassessment activity for existing DLA claimants aged 16 to 64.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 12 March 2012

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Arts Council England: Finance

Mr Virendra Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how much Arts Council England has at its disposal to give in grant supplied by (a) his Department and (b) the national lottery for the period from 2012 to 2015. [98748]

Mr Vaizey: Arts Council England's settlement for this spending review period was set out in a letter of 23 February 2012 that will be available on the Department's website in due course. The Department does not specify the precise amount to be paid out in grants.

Our lottery projections issued last week suggest that £243 million, £260 million, £262 million and £265 million may be raised for Arts Council England in the year 2012-13 to 2015-16 respectively, though actual income in those years will be dependent on the level of ticket sales in those years.

Arts: Scotland

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what recent estimate he has made of the number of people employed in the creative industries in Scotland. [98332]

Mr Vaizey: The Scottish Executive Creative Industries Key Sector Report (2009), estimated Scottish Creative Employment to be 60,700 in 2007. The report has been published online and can be found in full at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/11/24133819/0>

The figures on employment can be found in 'Annex A' of the report, or by using the following link:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/11/24133819/6>

They are also given in the 'Overview' section.

Creative Scotland are in the process of producing new estimates, to bring them in line with the most recent "Creative Industries Economic Estimates" report produced by this Government, which uses data taken from National Statistics sources, produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Broadband

Mr Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what recent progress has been made by the devolved administrations and local authorities in submitting draft local broadband plans. [98146]

Mr Vaizey: The Government aim to stimulate commercial investment in broadband for 90% of all premises and standard 2Mbps universal broadband. At 29 February

2012 Broadband Delivery UK had received 46 local broadband plans and had approved 20, including one from the Welsh Government in support of those objectives. There were two local broadband plans outstanding (from north and south Tyneside). In addition, the Scottish Government have published their Digital Infrastructure Action Plan and The Northern Ireland Executive had already achieved 90% superfast coverage.

Broadband: Northern Ireland

Mr Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how much funding he has allocated to support broadband implementation in Northern Ireland in the last two years. [98065]

Mr Vaizey: The Secretary of State announced an allocation of £4.4 million to Northern Ireland on 15 August 2011. The Secretary of State also confirmed in a letter to the First and Deputy First Ministers for the Northern Ireland Executive that he was prepared to fund in addition to the £4.4 million a pilot in Northern Ireland subject to receipt of an acceptable proposal. The level of funding has not been confirmed and is also subject to the receipt of an acceptable proposal.

Mr Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what meetings have been held with the Northern Ireland Executive on support for broadband delivery since September 2011. [98100]

Mr Vaizey: Officials from this Department met with officials from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Northern Ireland (DETINI) to discuss broadband delivery in Northern Ireland, on 30 September 2011. A conference call on the same subject also took place on 30 October 2011.

An official from DETINI attended a workshop in London on 10 January 2012 for cities eligible to bid for the Urban Broadband Fund.

Departmental Ethnic Minority Staff

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how many and what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department were from an ethnic minority in March (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; and if he will make a statement. [98876]

John Penrose: The number and proportion of senior civil servants from an ethnic minority recorded by the Department, in the months you have requested, can be found in the following table.

<i>As at March each year</i>	<i>Number declaring ethnic minority status</i>	<i>Non-respondents</i>	<i>Proportion of total SCS</i>
2010	2	12	4.08
2011	2	19	3.85
2012	1	26	1.85

Film

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what consideration he has given to the effect on cinema exhibitors and film distributors of the different licensing regimes for film classification in (a) England and Wales, (b) Scotland and (c) Northern Ireland. [98759]

Mr Vaizey: As were made clear in the Government's recent consultation on reforms to the entertainment licensing regime, we will not deregulate the exhibition of film without maintaining the film classification regime. We are currently considering the responses to the consultation, including views on the options for retaining the classification system should we decide to deregulate the exhibition of film.

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what enforcement mechanism the Government intends to use to ensure adherence to BBFC classifications when the entertainment licensing requirement for cinemas is repealed under the Licensing Act 2003. [99142]

Mr Vaizey: As were made clear in the Government's recent consultation on reforms to the entertainment licensing regime, we will not deregulate the exhibition of film without maintaining the film classification regime. We are currently considering the responses to the consultation, including views on the options for retaining the classification system should we decide to deregulate the exhibition of film.

Music

Mr Virendra Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what information his Department holds on how much funding has been allocated for the promotion of musical activities to (a) South Asian and (b) other Asian organisations by (i) National Portfolio organisations and (ii) the National Lottery for the period from 2012 to 2015. [98749]

Mr Vaizey: Government funding for the arts is routed to the sector via Arts Council England (ACE), which is responsible for arts funding decisions and makes these decisions independently of Government. The Department does not therefore hold such detailed information on how money has been allocated. However, I understand that ACE will be able to determine which of its National Portfolio organisations to be funded from 2012 to 2015 are Asian-led or south Asian-led when these organisations have returned the "National Portfolio organisation annual submission". I understand that this data will be received by ACE in mid-to-late 2013.

Applications for lottery grants are made independently of Government and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The DCMS lottery grants database holds details of successful lottery grants. The database is searchable at

www.lottery.culture.gov.uk

and uses information on lottery grants supplied by the lottery distributors.

Olympic Games 2012

Graham Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what steps the Government has taken to encourage companies producing official merchandise for the London 2012 Olympics to manufacture products in the UK. [98763]

Hugh Robertson [holding answer 8 March 2012]: The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) is responsible for the London 2012 licensing and retail programme, which contributes significantly to its privately-financed budget. LOCOG is a private company operating independently of Government, and has run an open tender process for each license opportunity and promoted them via the online business network portal CompeteFor, to make sure that businesses across the UK had a fair and open chance to bid.

More than 90% of licensees are UK companies, and where they can take advantage of UK manufacturing they do so, such as Royal Mint, Royal Mail, Letts Diaries and Wedgwood, Waterford and Royal Doulton.

Graham Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport if he will estimate the proportion of official memorabilia for the London 2012 Olympics that will be manufactured in the UK. [98901]

Hugh Robertson [holding answer 8 March 2012]: The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) is responsible for the London 2012 licensing and retail programme. More than 90% of its appointed licensees are UK companies, with all design and development managed locally. Where there are opportunities for licensees to take advantage of UK manufacturing they do so, such as Royal Mint, Royal Mail, Letts Diaries and Wedgwood; Waterford and Royal Doulton.

Sir Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport when he or the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games will give guidance on the interpretation of the Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Act 1995 for the purposes of allowing magazines and periodicals to include editorial and advertising related to the London 2012 Olympic Games that is not intended to claim an official relationship to the Games. [99116]

Hugh Robertson: The Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Act 1995 confers exclusive rights in relation to the use of the Olympic and Paralympic symbols, the Olympic and Paralympic mottos, and certain Olympic- and Paralympic-related words. The Act contains express exemptions relating to the publication or broadcast of reports and information about the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Those exemptions do not apply to advertising material which is published or broadcast at the same time as, or in connection with, a report or information. The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Limited (LOCOG) has published detailed information about the Act which includes information about those exemptions. It is available at the following web address:

www.london2012.com/brandprotection

Sir Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport when he or the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games will provide guidance to the magazine publishing industry on carrying editorial and advertisements related to the London 2012 Olympic Games which are not subject to the Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Act 1995. [99117]

Hugh Robertson: The Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Act 1995 confers exclusive rights in relation to the use of the Olympic and Paralympic symbols, the Olympic and Paralympic mottos and certain Olympic- and Paralympic-related words. The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Limited (LOCOG) has published detailed information about the Act which includes information about material that is not subject to the Act. It is available at the following web address:

www.london2012.com/brandprotection

Sir Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games on interpreting the Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Act 1995 and the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Act 2006 relating to editorial and advertising content in print media. [99118]

Hugh Robertson: Officials from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport had extensive discussions with the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games Limited (LOCOG) in 2005 and 2006 about legislation that would amend the Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Act 1995 including by adding exemptions to it relating to the publication or broadcast of reports and information about the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Following the enactment of that legislation, LOCOG published detailed information about the Olympic Symbol etc. (Protection) Act 1995 which includes information about the exemptions in the Act. It is available at the following web address:

www.london2012.com/brandprotection

Olympic Games 2012: Voluntary Work

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what assistance with (a) travel and (b) accommodation expenses he plans to provide to volunteers for the Olympics living in the north-east; and what information was provided to potential applications during the application process as to the nature of expenses provided to volunteers. [98753]

Hugh Robertson [*holding answer 8 March 2012*]: Volunteering schemes connected to the Olympic Games are the responsibility of the organisation operating them. The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) is responsible for the official Games Maker volunteer scheme. LOCOG will provide Games Makers with refreshments during their shifts, a uniform and—for those volunteering within London—a zone one to six travel card. Free transport will also be provided in Newcastle for Games Makers volunteering at the Olympic Football tournament, with similar arrangements for volunteers at other venues

across the UK. An independent bursary scheme has been launched to support Games Makers in financial need from the north-east.

LOCOG has always been clear that it could not provide central funding for accommodation and transport expenses for the up to 70,000 Games Makers that will help to stage the Games. A quarter of a million people from communities right across the UK applied to be Games Makers on the clear understanding that they would need to arrange their own accommodation and transport to the Games. This has been reinforced throughout the selection and training process.

PRIME MINISTER

Computer Software

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the Minister for the Cabinet Office about the development of a personal iPad application for his use. [99138]

The Prime Minister: None.

WALES

Departmental Ethnic Minority Staff

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what proportion of senior civil servants in her Department were from an ethnic minority in March (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; and if she will make a statement. [98863]

Mr David Jones: None of the five people who have covered the four senior civil servant posts during the periods listed have been from an ethnic minority group.

Education

Dr Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education on the potential effect of his education reforms on educational priorities in Wales; and if she will make a statement. [98938]

Mr David Jones: The majority of the changes that are proposed by the Secretary of State for Education, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), will not apply in Wales.

I am committed to ensuring the best possible outcomes for school children and young people in education in Wales, and will continue to work with both the Department for Education and the Welsh Government to help achieve this.

NHS

Dr Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions she has had with the First Minister of the Welsh Government on the impact of the Government's NHS reforms in England on health provision in Wales; and if she will make a statement. [98942]

Mr David Jones: While the NHS in Wales is a matter for the Welsh Government, there has been close engagement between the Department for Health, the Wales Office and the Welsh Government to ensure that the changes the UK Government are making in the Health and Social Care Bill that relate to Wales will have a positive impact in Wales.

Regulation

Gordon Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which regulations her Department repealed between 1 June 2011 and 31 January 2012; and if she will estimate the likely savings to the public purse in each case. [97315]

Mr David Jones: The Wales Office did not repeal any regulations between 1 June 2011 and 31 January 2012.

Welfare Reform

Dr Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what recent discussions she has had with the First Minister of the Welsh Government on the potential effect of the Government's welfare reforms in England on the Welsh people; and if she will make a statement; [98936]

(2) what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the potential effect of welfare reform in England and Wales; and if she will make a statement. [98939]

Mr David Jones: The Secretary of State for Wales, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan), has regular discussions with both the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), and the First Minister about a range of matters relevant to Wales. These have included discussions on welfare reform.

The Welfare Reform Act, which received Royal Assent on 8 March, will introduce the most fundamental reforms to the social security system for 60 years, and will deliver a system throughout Britain, that is simpler, fairer and ensures that work always pays.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Ethnic Minority Staff

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department were from an ethnic minority in March (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; and if he will make a statement. [98866]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office has only a small number of senior civil servants. As the numbers are small, such information would not be published to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Ann McKeichin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland pursuant to the answer of 6 March 2012, *Official Report*, column 629W, on Equality and Human Rights Commission, on what date he met the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Commissioner for Scotland. [99437]

David Mundell: The Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (Michael Moore), met the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Scotland Commissioner on 14 July 2010.

Regulation

Gordon Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which regulations his Department repealed between 1 June 2011 and 31 January 2012; and if he will estimate the likely savings to the public purse in each case. [97317]

David Mundell: Each year, the Scotland Office takes forward a programme of Orders under the Scotland Act 1998. Between 1 June 2011 and 31 January 2012 one of these Orders, the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 (Consequential Modifications) Orders 2011 (S.I. 2011/1740), was brought forward and revoked the following two existing Orders:

The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 (Consequential Provisions) Order 2010 (S.I. 2010/2469); and

The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 (Consequential Provisions) (Amendment) Order 2011 (S.I. 2011/1345).

Due to the replacement of these Orders by the new 2011 Order, there are no identifiable savings.

DEFENCE

Departmental Procurement

Alison Seabek: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many contracts awarded by his Department to management consultants (a) since publication of the Strategic Defence and Security Review and (b) in 2011-12 were awarded after competitive tendering; and how many competing providers there were for each contract awarded after competitive tendering. [82198]

Peter Luff: [*holding answer 23 November 2011*]: The Ministry of Defence is at present conducting a review of its management consultancy contracts. I will therefore write to the hon. Member with further details once the review has been completed.

Substantive answer from Peter Luff to Alison Seabek:

I undertook to write to you in answer to your Parliamentary Question on 13 December 2011 (*Official Report*, column 752W) about the number of contracts awarded to management consultants.

Between 19 October 2010 and 31 October 2011, 72 contracts with a total value of £9.931 million were awarded to companies providing services to the Ministry of Defence under the Government Procurement Services definition of management consultancy. Of these contracts, 20 (valued at £5.903 million, 59% of the total value) were placed by stand alone competitive tendering, 41 were awarded competitively through a pre-competed government framework (valued at £3.899 million, 39% of the total value) and five were placed non-competitively (valued at £0.099 million, 1% of the total value). Data for the remaining six contracts, valued at £30,000 could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

In respect of the above data that falls in this financial year 2011-12, of a total of 38 contracts placed with a total value of £8.965 million, six (valued at £5.475 million, 61% of the total value) were placed by stand alone competitive tendering, 28 were awarded competitively through a pre-competed government

framework (valued at £3.439 million, 38% of the total value) and four were placed non-competitively (valued at £0.051 million, 1% of the total value).

The number of competing providers for each contract awarded could only be provided as disproportionate cost.

Joint Strike Fighter Aircraft

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent estimate he has made of the through-life costs of the carrier variant Joint Strike Fighter; and if he will make a statement. [98538]

Peter Luff: We update our through life cost estimates for Joint Strike Fighter annually as part of our departmental planning round process.

MOD Bicester

Mr Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many failed courier deliveries, where the courier failed to make the delivery resulting in the consignment being taken back to the base, there have been from MOD Logistics Bicester since 2008. [99139]

Peter Luff: This information is not held.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers: Iran

Shabana Mahmood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps she is taking to support failed Iranian asylum seekers (*a*) to obtain travel documents given the closure of the Iranian embassy in London and (*b*) whilst returns to Iran have been suspended through the Choices programme. [99355]

Damian Green: Refugee Action Choices has not suspended support to Iranian nationals who need assistance to return home.

However, as there is no Iranian diplomatic mission in the United Kingdom, there are limits to what support we can provide where they do not hold a valid passport to return.

Iranian nationals who do not hold passports should contact the Interior Ministry in Tehran, or any other Iranian diplomatic mission in another country, in order to obtain a travel document to enable them to return to Iran.

Bail

Richard Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people detained by the UK Border Agency were granted bail in each of the last five years; and how many (*a*) absconded and (*b*) failed to keep to bail conditions in each year. [96635]

Damian Green: In order to answer this question the UK Border Agency would need to analyse a large volume of electronic records, which would incur disproportionate cost.

There are currently 3,940 foreign national offenders released into the community following completion of their custodial sentence who are subject to deportation action. Around 10% of these release decisions are made by the UK Border Agency, having assessed the risk of harm posed to the public and the prospects of removal in a reasonable timescale. The remaining 90% of release decisions are made by the courts.

Foreign national offenders in the community awaiting deportation are subject to stringent reporting restrictions while every effort is made to remove them from the country.

In some cases foreign national offenders fail to adhere to the conditions of their licence and do not report as necessary. As such they become absconders.

The UK Border Agency works closely with the police and probation services to locate these individuals. The UK Border Agency has a specialist trace and locate team who scrutinise external databases in order to track down absconders.

British Nationals: Entry Clearances

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British Overseas Territory nationals were refused entry to the UK in each of the last five years. [99207]

Damian Green: British overseas territories citizenship does not attract the right to enter and live in the UK. However, as many British overseas territories citizens are also British citizens it is more likely than not that they would enter the United Kingdom on presentation of a British citizen passport. Those British overseas territories citizens who are not also British citizens would be required to enter the UK under visa arrangements.

During the past five years, 2007 to 2011, there were only two British Overseas Territory citizens refused entry to the UK, both in 2007. Neither were British citizens.

The Home Office publishes quarterly and annual statistics on the number of persons refused entry to the United Kingdom. Data on those refused entry are available in tables be.08 to be.08q from the Library of the House and from the Home Office Science, research and statistics web pages at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/science-research/research-statistics/migration/migration-statistics1/>

In published tables, be.08 and be.08.q, 'British Overseas Territory nationals' is not a separate published nationality. We publish this nationality under a broad category of 'British overseas citizens'.

Coinage: Counterfeit Manufacturing

Stephen Phillips: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps her Department is taking to tackle the counterfeiting of (*a*) the pound sterling and (*b*) the euro in the UK. [98540]

Miss Chloe Smith: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Treasury.

The National Central Office for the Suppression of Counterfeit Currency and Protected Coins, which sits within the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA), is the UK's centre for identifying trends in counterfeiting

activity. It analyses thousands of reports from police forces and the Bank of England each year to help protect the UK against the damage caused by counterfeit bank notes and coins.

Levels of counterfeit euros discovered in this country are very low compared to countries which have adopted the euro as currency. However, where they are identified SOCA will take appropriate action including liaising with European counterparts.

Everybody convicted of producing counterfeit currency in the last five years in the UK has received a substantial custodial sentence and on each occasion a serious crime prevention order has been issued, which inhibits their ability to procure material and machinery that could be used in the production of counterfeits.

Crime Prevention

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether she plans to issue further guidance on the use of the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence (DASH 2009) Risk Identification, Assessment and Management Model by police forces in England and Wales. [98544]

Lynne Featherstone: The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Council agreed the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence (DASH) Risk Identification, Assessment and Management Model to be implemented across all police services in the UK from March 2009. Although we understand that the majority of forces currently use DASH, it is for individual forces to decide which risk assessment models to use and the training their officers and staff receive.

Criminal Records

Andrew Bridgen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government plans to announce its response to the Criminal Records Regime review. [98813]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government response to both phases of the review of the Criminal Records Regime which was carried out by Mrs Sunita Mason, the Government's Independent Advisor for Criminality Information Management, was announced on 6 December 2011. Copies of the response and reports were placed in both Libraries.

The Government accepted the majority of Mrs Mason's recommendations, either unconditionally or in principle.

Departmental Ethnic Minority Staff

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of senior civil servants in her Department were from an ethnic minority in March (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; and if she will make a statement. [98870]

Damian Green: The proportion of senior civil servants in the Home Office (including its executive agencies) who were from an ethnic minority was (a) 4.84% in March 2010 and (b) 5.59% in March 2011. The figure for March 2012 will not be available until mid-April

2012. The latest available data are for January 2012, when 6.08% of senior civil servants in the Department were from an ethnic minority.

Departmental Redundancy

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much her Department has spent on redundancy payments in the last 12 months. [98116]

Damian Green: During the period 1 March 2011 to 29 February 2012, £1,880,904.82 was charged to the Home Office in relation to Civil Service Compensation Scheme redundancy.

Deportation: Christopher Tappin

Chris Williamson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions she had with the US Administration on the deportation of Christopher Tappin; and what aspects of the deportation were addressed in such discussions. [98702]

Damian Green: The Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), has had no such discussions about the extradition of Mr Tappin.

Domestic Violence

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will discuss with senior civil servants in her Department how to encourage police forces to improve police response times to incidents of domestic violence. [99023]

Lynne Featherstone: Home Office officials continue to work with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in order to improve the response to domestic violence. The guidance to police on investigating domestic violence is being reviewed by ACPO, with the aim of reissuing it later in 2012. As part of this work, ACPO and the National Policing Improvement Agency are currently scoping a six-month pilot. This is due to commence in the spring of 2012 in two police force areas, and will test out new procedures that streamline and strengthen the service provided by the police in order to ensure that resources are directed appropriately and efficiently when responding to domestic violence incidents.

Drugs: International Cooperation

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Memoranda of Understanding have been established between UK customs and business organisations operating in the EU to combat drug trafficking under the guidelines laid down in EU Council Joint Action 96/698/JHA; and what evaluation her Department has made of the effectiveness of such memoranda. [96750]

Mr Gauke [*holding answer 27 February 2012*]: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Treasury.

12 memoranda of understanding broadly relating to customs-related matters have been concluded between HMRC and the former HM Customs and Excise and business organisations operating in the EU (mainly EU-based airlines and other freight and passenger carriers), the scope of which includes the combating of drug trafficking. Five of these MOUs were concluded after the adoption of EU Council Joint Action 96/698/JHA.

Although these MOUs were signed by HMRC/HMCE, they are principally applied by the UK Border Agency, which keeps their operation and coverage under review to ensure their continued effectiveness.

Entry Clearances

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what her Department's policy is on charging representatives of Chernobyl children's charities for visas to enter the UK. [99146]

Damian Green: As children from Belarus are commonly considered to have been worst affected by the Chernobyl disaster, visa applications to the British embassy in Minsk are processed free of charge for charities that have signed a UK Border Agency (UKBA) memorandum of understanding. Alongside the provision of free visas, this agreement ensures that the proper safeguards are in place and provides for mobile biometric collection facilities and other benefits for the charities.

Unfortunately, in line with a number of other difficult spending decisions, the gratis scheme will cease on 31 March 2013. The charities were informed of this decision in November 2010.

The cost of the gratis visas in Belarus are currently charged to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office by UKBA.

Entry Clearances: Overseas Students

Mr Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the accreditation system for English language schools offering courses which are (a) shorter than 11 months and (b) longer than 11 months; and if she will make a statement. [99136]

Damian Green: No changes have been made to the accreditation system for English language schools for courses shorter than 11 months using the extended student visitor visa route. We shall review the arrangement for the student visitor route later this year.

For courses longer than 11 months, international students must use Tier 4 of the points-based system. The Government are taking a new approach to the licensing of education providers sponsoring international students and have introduced a new system of educational oversight. This will raise standards and benefit genuine international students by ensuring that they receive high quality education wherever they study. They will also help to protect overseas students from unscrupulous providers and support the many legitimate colleges by protecting the excellent reputation of UK education worldwide.

The Government plan to announce in the coming months proposals for inspection arrangements from 2013.

European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been temporarily transferred (a) to and (b) from the UK for the purposes of investigation under Article 9 of EU Council Act of 29 May 2000 (2000/C197/01) in each of the last 10 years. [99433]

Damian Green: The UK Central Authority (UKCA) within the Home Office deals with requests for temporary transfer of persons in custody for the purposes of criminal investigations only in relation to England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In the last 10 years there have been no such transfers under Article 9 of EU Council Act of 29 May 2000 (2000/C197/01).

Extradition: Counterfeit Manufacturing

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been extradited to another EU member state for counterfeiting offences involving the euro in each of the last 10 years. [99465]

Damian Green: The UK's extradition arrangements are divided into two parts. Part 1 concerns the European Arrest Warrant (EAW), which governs extradition between EU member states. The EAW has been in operation since 1 January 2004. Part 2 concerns extradition between the UK and our non-EU extradition partners.

The Home Office has no record of anyone being extradited from the UK to another EU member state for offences involving counterfeiting the euro from 2001 until the EAW came into force.

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). According to SOCA records, the following number of surrenders pursuant to EAWs issued to the UK have taken place where 'counterfeiting' was listed as the principal offence and offences involving the euro were involved:

	<i>Number of surrenders</i>
2009	100
2010	111

Due to the way data was recorded prior to 1 April 2009, it is not possible to provide data prior to this date. This would involve a manual examination of case files and incur disproportionate cost.

Families

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding police authorities will contribute from pre-allocated resources towards the troubled families initiative in (a) 2011-12, (b) 2012-13, (c) 2013-14 and (d) 2014-15. [99177]

Nick Herbert: This is a decision for individual police authorities—and, from November 2012, for police and crime commissioners—and this information is not held centrally.

Foreign Nationals: Bail

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals in police custody have been released on bail as a result of problems with the provision of translation or interpretation services since 30 January 2012. [99244]

Nick Herbert: The information requested is not held centrally.

Foreign Workers: Domestic Service

Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate has been made of the effect the removal of the right to change employer for overseas domestic workers will have on the number of undocumented migrants. [99217]

Damian Green: We do not anticipate that the removal of overseas domestic workers' right to change employer will affect the number of undocumented migrants.

Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the effect of the removal of the right to change employer for overseas domestic workers on levels of trafficking for domestic service. [99218]

Damian Green: We do not believe that removal of the right to change employer is likely to affect levels of trafficking for domestic servitude.

Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how overseas domestic workers will be able to escape abusive conditions of employment when their right to change employer is removed. [99219]

Damian Green: Fewer overseas domestic workers will come here. Those who do will be able, as now, to leave their employer. The National Referral Mechanism for the identification and support of victims of trafficking will remain available, as will support from the domestic workers' embassy and access to the police where the overseas domestic worker may be a victim of a crime. The Home Office will also work with voluntary organisations on support for victims of abuse.

Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the written terms and conditions of employment agreed by overseas domestic workers and their employers referred to in the statement of intent will be enforced following the removal of the right of such workers to change employer. [99220]

Damian Green: The Employment Rights Act 1996 requires that employees in the UK be given a written statement of their particulars of employment. Employees, including overseas domestic workers, who consider that those particulars are not met may make a claim to an Employment Tribunal, provided they do so within three months of leaving the employment.

Gurkhas

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 23 November 2011, *Official Report*, columns 403-04W, on Gurkhas, how many (a) former Gurkhas and (b) dependants of Gurkhas have been allowed to enter and reside in the UK from June to December 2011. [88068]

Damian Green [*holding answer 10 January 2012*]: 276 armed forces settlement visas were issued to Nepalese nationals from June to September 2011.

930 dependant settlement visas were issued to Nepalese nationals from June to September 2011.

These data are based on the number of visas issued to Nepalese nationals as we are not able to identify visas issued specifically for Gurkhas or dependants of Gurkhas.

The data are based on management information. They are provisional and subject to change. Home Office statistics are published quarterly. The data provided are up to the end of September 2011, in line with the period covered by the Home Office published statistics.

Immigration

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time was to reach a decision on in-time applications for (a) further leave to remain and (b) indefinite leave to remain in the most recent period for which figures are available. [98941]

Damian Green: For the period January to December 2011, the average time to reach a decision on in-time applications was (a) 34 working days for leave to remain, and (b) 60 working days for indefinite leave to remain. These figures relate to postal lead applications despatched in 2011.

All figures quoted above are management information which has been subject to internal quality checks.

Immigration Controls

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she received the Vine report on border security checks. [98134]

Damian Green: The Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), received the Independent Chief Inspector's report of his investigation into border security checks on 7 February 2012.

Internet: Fraud

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent estimate she has made of the costs to (a) consumers and (b) businesses of (i) credit card fraud, (ii) intellectual property crime and (iii) unresolved delivery problems for online sales in the latest period for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [97630]

James Brokenshire: The UK Cards Association estimate that losses on UK issued plastic cards as a result of fraud in 2011 were £341 million.

There is no reliable estimate of the costs of intellectual property crime. However the Intellectual Property Crime Report 2010-11, published by the Intellectual Property Office, provides a number of examples from a range of resources, which give an informal indication of its scale and impact. Figures for unresolved delivery problems for online sales are not held centrally.

Members: Correspondence

Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when her Department plans to reply to the letters of 13 and 21 January from the right hon. Member for Manchester Central with T.O. Home Office reference: 0118112. [99144]

Damian Green: The chief executive of the UK Border Agency wrote to the hon. Member on 8 March 2012.

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when a reply will be sent to the hon. Member for Harrow West's letter of 14 December 2011 about Mr Kakar of Harrow. [99222]

Damian Green: The UK Border Agency replied to the hon. Member on 23 January 2012, records show the hon. Member wrote a further letter regarding Mr Kakar on 21 February 2012 and a response to this letter was sent on 7 March 2012.

Police Stations: Lincolnshire

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many companies made bids for the contract to run a police station in Lincolnshire. [98121]

Nick Herbert: The procurement to contract for outsourced services was undertaken by Lincolnshire police. Therefore, we do not hold specific information on the police station elements of their overall contract. This is a matter for Lincolnshire police authority.

Police: Business Partnership Programme

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces in England and Wales have signed up to the Business Partnership Programme; and when she expects the programme to begin. [99153]

Nick Herbert: The Home Office has been supporting Surrey and West Midlands police since January 2011 in exploring the potential value that a business partner could bring to both forces in transforming and delivering support services. The procurement notice published by Surrey and West Midlands police authorities on 24 January 2012 in the Official Journal of the European Union is open to other forces to join, should they decide that this option best supports them in delivering transformation to maintain and improve services to the public. Police forces are already using the private sector to provide staff for control rooms, custody centres and investigations, enabling them to release officers for frontline duties.

Proceeds of Crime: EU Action

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests to (a) identify and trace and (b) confiscate the proceeds of crime in accordance with Article 1 of EU Council Joint Action 98/699/JHA the Government (i) issued to and (ii) received from other EU member states in each of the last 10 years; and what evaluation she has made of the EU Joint Action's effectiveness. [97888]

James Brokenshire [holding answer 5 March 2012]: Information relating to requests to identify and trace the proceeds of crime is not held centrally. The UK central authority for criminal matters holds statistics for England, Wales and Northern Ireland in relation to mutual legal assistance requests. For requests to confiscate the proceeds of crime in relation to EU member states, the information is as follows:

	<i>Confiscation cases for EU countries by year</i>	
	<i>Incoming</i>	<i>Outgoing</i>
2002	2	2
2003	1	5
2004	4	9
2005	4	3
2006	4	1
2007	1	9
2008	0	10
2009	1	9
2010	3	8
2011	2	6
2012	1	1

The UK must decide, no later than 31 May 2014, whether to accept full European Court of Justice jurisdiction over those EU police and criminal justice measures adopted before 1 December 2009 which have not been amended or replaced. This measure falls within the scope of that decision and will be reviewed accordingly.

Sentencing: EU Action

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with reference to EU Council Decision 1999/615/JHA, whether 4-MTA is subject to control measures and criminal penalties in the UK. [98771]

James Brokenshire [holding answer 8 March 2012]: EU Council decision 1999/615/JHA defined a-Methyl-4-(methylthio) phenethylamine (4-MTA) as a new synthetic drug to be made subject to control measures and criminal penalties by member states.

In 2001, the UK brought 4-MTA and a number of phenethylamine derivatives under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, as class A drugs. Since then the possession, supply and production of 4-MTA has been prohibited, unless under lawful authority, and attract class A criminal penalties.

Surrey Police: Redundancy

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many (a) frontline and (b) back office staff in Surrey police she expects will be made redundant in (i) 2012, (ii) 2013, (iii) 2014 and (iv) 2015. [99152]

Nick Herbert: Decisions on the numbers of police staff are for individual chief officers and their police authorities—and, from November this year, police and crime commissioners—within the resource available.

Temporary Employment

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much her Department has spent on employment agency fees in the last 12 months. [98117]

Damian Green: Information on how much the Home Office including its executive agencies spent on employment agency fees in the last 12 months could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

UK Border Agency: Public Appointments

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the salary will be of the new head of the UK Border Force; [98132]

(2) when the position of the head of the UK Border Force was advertised; and for how long. [98133]

Damian Green: We expect the role of Director General Border Force to be advertised in March for a period of at least three weeks. Starting salary will depend on the qualifications, knowledge, and experience of the candidate selected for appointment and is not expected to exceed £140,000.

West Midlands Police Authority

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions she has had with the West Midlands Police Authority on the effect of changes in expenditure by her Department on the reorganisation of (a) front-line services and (b) the Road Traffic Policing Unit. [98041]

Nick Herbert: The ways in which forces deliver transformation in order to maintain and improve services—including roads policing—while meeting the clear requirement to reduce overall spending are the subject of continuing discussions between the Department and the main policing bodies. The Home Office has been supporting West Midlands police and police authority (and Surrey police and police authority) to explore the potential value of business partnering to achieve transformation within those forces to maintain and improve frontline services.

TRANSPORT

Bus Services: Olympic Games 2012

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 9 February 2012, *Official Report*, columns 407-8W on bus services: Olympic Games 2012, if she will place in the Library a copy of the assurances received by (a) the Olympic Delivery Authority and (b) the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. [96197]

Mrs Villiers [holding answer 23 February 2012]: Further to the response previously supplied, the Olympic Delivery Authority's (ODA) contractor has procured 250 new and refurbished vehicles for spectator services that will be cascaded into its fleet after the games, and therefore will not affect its existing bus operations.

A further 70 vehicles are being taken from bus operations around the country, however these vehicles will not be required during the Olympic period due to a normally lower peak vehicle requirement, as school bus services do not operate.

All other vehicles are being sourced from coach fleets, and therefore would not be used to operate bus services.

Copies of the formal assurances sought would form part of the contract tendering process that the ODA and the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG) have gone through to obtain the buses. The Department for Transport was not party to these negotiations, and therefore is unable to provide copies of the assurances.

Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007

Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether she plans to implement the provision in the Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 that bus passes issued in any part of the UK could be used throughout the UK. [98751]

Norman Baker: No.

Crossrail

Andrea Leadsom: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many officials in her Department worked only on the Crossrail project in (a) 2009, (b) 2010 and (c) 2011; and how many hours they spent working on the project in each of those years. [99148]

Mrs Villiers: Taking an average over the calendar year, the number of officials in the Department for Transport working only on the Crossrail project in the requested years, on a full or part-time basis, was as follows:

	Number of officials	
	Full-time	Part time
2009	9	1
2010	7	1
2011	7	1

Cycling: Training

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much funding her Department will allocate for cycling training in (a) each year of the current spending review period and (b) the following spending period. [99447]

Norman Baker: The Department for Transport has made £11 million per financial year available to local highway authorities and school games organiser host schools to deliver Bikeability cycle training to children aged between 9 to 14 years. This funding covers the period between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2015. Funding beyond March 2015 will be reviewed nearer the time.

Dartford-Thurrock Crossing

Gareth Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many consultations her Department undertook in relation to the Dartford Crossing in each of the last 10 years. [99215]

Mike Penning: The Department for Transport has conducted three consultations in the last 10 years in relation to the Dartford Crossing.

In December 2006 the Department consulted on proposals to revise the road user charging regime at the Crossing, which was followed in February 2008 by a consultation on proposals for discounted charges for local residents. In June 2011, the Department published a consultation document on further proposals to revise the charging regime.

Departmental Carbon Emissions

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reduction in carbon dioxide emissions her Department has made under the 10:10 initiative. [97940]

Norman Baker: The Department for Transport did not sign up to the 10:10 campaign.

However, on 14 May 2010 the Prime Minister announced that central Government would reduce its carbon emissions by 10% within 12 months. At the end of this period the Department for Transport had reduced its emissions by 2,369 tonnes of CO₂, a 10.7% saving.

Departmental Ethnic Minority Staff

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many and what proportion of senior civil servants in her Department were from an ethnic minority in March (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; and if she will make a statement. [98865]

Norman Baker: All employees are asked to declare their ethnicity. This process is voluntary and some employees decline to participate in the equality monitoring process. The following information applies to senior civil servants who have declared their ethnicity:

(a) In March 2010 our central Department and its seven executive agencies employed 198 senior civil servants who had declared their ethnicity of whom seven (3.5%) were from ethnic minorities.

(b) In March 2011 our central Department and its seven executive agencies employed 171 senior civil servants who had declared their ethnicity of whom six (3.5%) were from ethnic minorities.

(c) In February 2012 our central Department and its seven executive agencies employed 156 senior civil servants who have declared their ethnicity of whom five (3.2%) are from ethnic minorities.

Our diversity objectives which will be published in April 2012 and our longer term diversity strategy will address representation in the work force at all levels.

Liverpool Port: Finance

Mr Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 1 March 2012, *Official Report*, column 451W, on Liverpool Port: finance, whether she

expects that negotiations on the repayment of UK Government grants by the City of Liverpool Cruise Terminal to be completed by 29 May 2012. [99452]

Mike Penning: Yes, as regards the Department for Transport's decision. The time frame for state aid clearance by the European Commission is not within the Department's control.

Mr Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 1 March 2012, *Official Report*, column 451W, on Liverpool Port: finance, what assessment her Department has made of funding from the EU before removing its objection to turnaround operations at the City of Liverpool Cruise Terminal; and what assessment she has made of the effect of the lifting of this restriction on the level of competition in the ports sector. [99453]

Mike Penning: My Department has taken account of the existence of ERDF funding for the terminal, and of the fact that the local benefits, in respect of which this grant was awarded, would tend to be enhanced rather than reduced by the removal of the prohibition on turnaround. The effect on competition has been of primary concern throughout in considering the appropriate level of repayment, as it was the reason for the original prohibition.

London and South Eastern Railway: Franchises

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when her Department plans to decide whether to change the service level commitment in the Southeastern Franchise Agreement following the trial of diverting 3 am peak existing services from Rochester to London St Pancras and 3 pm existing services from London St Pancras to Rochester/Faversham to start and terminate at Maidstone West; and what consultation will take place on the matter. [99131]

Norman Baker: Following a successful trial in 2011, Southeastern introduced a permanent high speed service between St Pancras and Maidstone West on a commercial basis.

As a commercially operated service the Department has no plans to include it in the Service Level Commitment for Southeastern.

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations she has received on proposals to end the diversion of 3 am peak existing services from Rochester to London St Pancras and 3 pm existing services from London St Pancras to Rochester/Faversham to start and terminate at Maidstone West on the Southeastern franchise. [99132]

Norman Baker: The Department has received no representations on any proposal to end the high speed services between London St Pancras and Maidstone West that Southeastern introduced in 2011.

Luton Airport

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what work her Department has carried out on proposals to expand Luton airport. [99071]

Mrs Villiers: The Department has not carried out any work on proposals to expand Luton airport.

Expansion at the airport is a matter for the airport operator and/or owner.

M1: Fires

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 9 February 2012, *Official Report*, columns 411-2W, on the M1: fires, when her Department will publish the Highways Agency and Network Rail audits to categorise potential sources of fire risk from third party activities at other critical locations beneath, or adjacent to, their respective networks. [99073]

Mike Penning: Both these audit reports are still being reviewed by my Department and a publication strategy is currently being considered.

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Mrs Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what responsibilities the Maritime and Coastguard Agency will have in respect of leisure craft following the reorganisation of the Coastguard Service. [99769]

Mike Penning: The existing responsibilities the Maritime and Coastguard Agency have in respect of leisure craft will not be affected by the reorganisation of Her Majesty's Coastguard.

Network Rail: Compensation

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 21 February 2012, *Official Report*, column 744W, on Network Rail: compensation, which train operating companies (a) do and (b) do not operate the delay/repay compensation system. [99390]

Norman Baker: The information requested is as follows:
(a) Delay/repay is operated on the following train operating companies (TOCs):

Southeastern
Southern
East Coast
London Midland
Crosscountry
East Midlands Trains
First Capital Connect
Greater Anglia
Chiltern Railways (with exclusions).

(b) The following TOCs operate traditional Passenger's Charter discount arrangements:

Arriva Trains Wales
c2c
Chiltern Railways (delay/repay with exclusions and discounts)
First Great Western
First ScotRail
First TransPennine Express
Northern
South West Trains
Virgin Trains.

Details of each TOC's compensation arrangements can be found in the Passenger's Charter on each TOC's website.

Railway Stations: Parking

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information her Department holds on the rate of change in car parking charges levied by Network Rail relative to changes in the cost of living in each of the last five years. [98640]

Mrs Villiers: This is a commercial matter for Network Rail as owner and operator of the national network.

Railways: Franchises

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport with reference to the announcement of 29 February 2012, what the phasing will be for delivery of the new carriages for the First TransPennine Express and London Midland franchises. [99446]

Mrs Villiers: This is a matter for the operators. However, I understand the new carriages for TransPennine Express are due to be delivered from December 2013 through to March 2014 with full introduction into service planned by the May 2014 timetable change. The London Midland new carriages are due to be delivered between April 2014 and August 2014 and will be in service from the December 2014 timetable change.

Railways: Information Services

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps her Department is taking to improve the provision of information to railway passengers during service disruptions. [99072]

Norman Baker: The Office of Rail Regulation has consulted on new licence conditions aimed at ensuring passengers receive appropriate, accurate and timely information. All train operators have signed-up to the new conditions and have committed to delivering them against the rail industry code of practice.

Railways: South West

Alison Sebeck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate she has made of the costs of the consultation exercise on the Greater Western franchise by venue in (a) Exeter, (b) Reading and (c) Bristol. [97609]

Mrs Villiers: The cost of venue hire in each location is as follows:

	£
Bristol	350.00
Reading	552.00
Exeter	425.00
Total	1,327.00

No estimate of other costs has so far been made.

Regulation

will estimate the likely savings to the public purse in each case. [97316]

Gordon Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which regulations her Department repealed between 1 June 2011 and 31 January 2012; and if she

Norman Baker: The following table identifies statutory instruments (Regulations and Orders) that have been revoked between 1 June 2011 and 31 January 2012.

<i>Statutory Instrument containing the revocation</i>	<i>SI number</i>	<i>Made on:</i>	<i>Statutory Instrument revoked</i>	<i>Date of coming into force of revocation</i>
The Air Navigation(Dangerous Goods) (Amendment) (No 2) Regulations 2011	2011/1454	7 June 2011	The Air Navigation(Dangerous Goods) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 SI 2011/650	10 June 2011
The Tonnage Tax (Training Requirement) (Amendment) Regulations 2011	2011/2185	5 September 2011	The Tonnage Tax(Training Requirement) (Amendment) Regulations 2010 SI 2010/2158	1 October 2011
The Carriage of Dangerous Goods and Use of Transportable Pressure Equipment (Amendment) Regulations 2011	2011/1885	26 September 2011	The Classification and Labelling of Explosives Regulations 1983 SI 1983/1140	24 October 2011
The Civil Enforcement of Parking Contraventions Designation Order 2011	2011/2431	5 October 2011	The Road Traffic(Permitted Parking Area and Special Parking Area) (County of Kent) (Borough of Dartford) Order 2001 SI 2001/1855	7 November 2011
The Bus Service Operators Grant(England) (Amendment) Regulations 2011	2011/2448	10 October 2011	The Bus Service Operators Grant(Amendment) (England) Regulations 2003 SI 2003/1036	1 November 2011
The Merchant Shipping (Port State Control) Regulations 2011	2011/2601	31 October 2011	The Merchant Shipping (Port State Control) Regulations 1995 SI 1995/3128	24 November 2011
The Goods Vehicles(Community Licences) Regulations 2011	2011/2633	1 November 2011	The Goods Vehicles(Community Authorisations) Regulations 1992 SI 1992/3077 The Goods Vehicles (Community Authorisations) (Modifications of the Road Traffic (Foreign Vehicles) Act 1972) Regulations 2002 SI 2002/1415	4 December 2011 4 December 2011
The Public Service Vehicles (Community Licences) Regulations 2011	2011/2634	1 November 2011	The Public Service Vehicles (Community Licences) Regulations 1999 SI 1999/1322 The Road Transport (Passenger Vehicles Cabotage) Regulations 1999 SI 1999/3413	4 December 2011 4 December 2011
The Road Transport Operator Regulations 2011	2011/2632	1 November 2011	The Public Service Vehicles Operators (Qualifications) Regulations 1990 SI 1990/1851 The Goods Vehicle Operators (Qualifications) Regulations 1999 SI 1999/2430	4 December 2011 4 December 2011

<i>Statutory Instrument containing the revocation</i>	<i>SI number</i>	<i>Made on:</i>	<i>Statutory Instrument revoked</i>	<i>Date of coming into force of revocation</i>
			The Public Service Vehicle Operators (Qualifications) Regulations 1999 SI 1999/2431	4 December 2011
The Merchant Shipping (Ship Inspection and Survey Organisations) (Revocation) Regulations 2011	2011/3056	19 December 2011	The Merchant Shipping (Ship Inspection and Survey Organisations) Regulations 1996 SI 1996/2908	23 January 2012
The Severn Bridges Tolls Order 2011	2011/3060	20 December 2011	The Severn Bridges Tolls Order 2010 SI 2010/3002	1 January 2012
The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2011	2011/3065	21 December 2011	The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 SI 2011/427	14 January 2012
The Railways(Interoperability) Regulations 2011	2011/3066	22 December 2011	The Railways(Interoperability) Regulations 2006 (SI 2006/397) and the Railways (Interoperability) (Amendment) Regulations .2007.(SI 2007/3386)	16 January 2012

The Impact Assessment for the Bus Service Operators Grant (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 identified savings for the Government of around £17.4 million per year (in 2010 prices) arising from the revocation of the Bus Service Operators Grant (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2003. This revocation is the only one where the Impact Assessment expressly identifies a quantifiable saving to the public purse.

Savings to the public purse associated with the revocation of other Regulations or Orders cannot be identified without incurring disproportionate costs, in particular because of the further analysis that would be required.

Unpublished instruments, such as orders imposing temporary traffic restrictions, have not been considered for the purposes of answering this question as to do so would also incur disproportionate costs.

Rescue Services: Clydesdale

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how the Maritime and Coastguard Agency proposes to cover the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre (MRCC) Clyde Coastguard district during the period between the closure of the MRCC in Greenock and the introduction of the national network. [98814]

Mike Penning: In order to ensure that Her Majesty's Coastguard maintain at least the same quality of search and rescue service as at present the interim arrangements between the closure of Clyde Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) and the introduction of the 'National Network' will use our current systems and existing pairing/quadrant arrangements.

Existing business continuity plans require MRCC Belfast to cover the MRCC Clyde area of responsibility. HM Coastguard will utilize its quadrant capability to enable MRCC Stornoway to take responsibility for part of the current MRCC Clyde area of responsibility in partnership with MRCC Belfast.

Quadrant capability enables each of the MRCCs in Belfast, Clyde and Stornoway to have access to all of the radio sites in the areas covered by the three MRCCs.

These interim measures will be robustly tested prior to the closure of the MRCC Clyde and appropriately resourced when implemented.

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment she has made of the ability of staff at Belfast and Stornoway to cover the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre Clyde coastguard area on a full-time basis. [98815]

Mike Penning: Her Majesty's Coastguard has established a working group of serving coastguards from the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCC) at Clyde, Belfast and Stornoway to support the transfer of MRCC Clyde's area of responsibility.

This will involve the development of procedures, utilizing processes that have been used during previous MRCC closures, to ensure the capability exists at MRCCs Belfast and Stornoway to maintain at least the same quality of search and rescue service as at present.

It should be noted that current business continuity plans require MRCC Belfast to utilize the existing pairing arrangements with MRCC Clyde to cover its area of responsibility.

Current quadrant capability also enables each of the MRCCs in Belfast, Clyde and Stornoway to have access to all of the radio sites in the areas covered by the three MRCCs.

In the future the 'National Network' will enable the Maritime Operations Centre and all other coastguard centres to co-ordinate any incident around the UK coast.

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment she has made of the potential risks

arising during the period between the closure of the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre Clyde and the introduction of the national network; and what steps the Maritime and Coastguard Agency is taking to mitigate any such risks. [98816]

Mike Penning: In order to ensure that Her Majesty's Coastguard minimises risk and maintains at least the same quality of search and rescue service as at present the interim arrangements between the closure of Clyde Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) and the introduction of the 'National Network' will use our current systems and existing pairing/quadrant arrangements.

A working group of serving coastguards from the MRCCs at Clyde, Belfast and Stornoway will enable the transfer of responsibility for the MRCC Clyde work load to be managed by MRCCs Stornoway and Belfast. The transfer to a national concept of operations will be part of the process of changing the technical architecture at all MRCCs.

Travel: Prices

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether she plans to take steps to encourage airlines and travel companies to reduce the price of flights and holidays in the school holidays; and if she will make a statement. [98282]

Mrs Villiers [*holding answer 6 March 2012*]: The Government do not get involved in the level of fares set by UK airlines or travel companies. We recognise that there is an increase in demand during various times of the year and the supply of available seats during these periods is limited and can result in higher ticket prices. This reflects the normal operation of a market where the supply of the commodity, in this case aircraft capacity, is limited.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agricultural Wages Board

Dr Poulter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to consult on proposed changes to the Agricultural Wages Board; and if she will make a statement. [97149]

Mr Paice: DEFRA is currently working on preparations with a view to consultation on the future of the Agricultural Wages Board. I hope to be able to confirm details soon.

Animal Welfare: Pigs

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of the sow stall and tether ban on UK pig providers; and if she will make a statement. [97990]

Mr Paice: The Government have made no assessment of the impact of the EU sow stall and tether bans on the UK pig industry, as pig producers' investment in new systems was completed in 1999, to comply with the UK's unilateral ban that year on the use of tethers and close-confinement stalls for breeding sows.

Bureaucracy

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to include environmental regulations in the Red Tape Challenge. [98363]

Richard Benyon: The Environment theme has been open for comment on the Red Tape Challenge website since April 2011, with a 'spotlight' period in September 2011. The Government expect to announce their proposals on this theme by the end of March 2012.

Departmental Computers

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many tablet computers her Department purchased in each of the last five years. [96206]

Richard Benyon: Core DEFRA has not purchased tablet computers in any of the last five years.

Flood and Waste Management Act 2010

Ann McKechnin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to implement the provisions of the Future Flood and Waste Management Act 2010 relating to bad debt; and if she will make a statement. [99417]

Richard Benyon: We are currently consulting on draft regulations which, if issued, would bring into force the provision on bad debt—in section 45 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. Mindful of the small burden this provision will impose on landlords, we are also consulting on an alternative, voluntary option. We will decide on next steps using the evidence gathered in the consultation.

Food: Supermarkets

Mr Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to encourage supermarkets to redistribute food waste to help reduce food poverty in areas of high deprivation. [97775]

Mr Paice: We strongly encourage supermarkets to work with organisations that redistribute surplus food to help reduce food poverty, to assist the homeless, and to provide access to nutritional meals to those who may otherwise struggle. Some retailers have arrangements in place with charities, such as FareShare, to collect and redistribute their surplus food.

There may be opportunities for redistribution of surplus food from the supply chain, as well as from supermarkets. In December 2011, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my noble Friend Lord Taylor of Holbeach, wrote to organisations representing food producers to encourage them to consider working with redistribution charities.

We will also continue to work with grocery manufacturers and retailers to reduce food waste via phase two of the Courtauld Commitment, a responsibility deal managed by the Waste and Resources Action Programme on behalf of DEFRA and the devolved Administrations.

Lyme Disease

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to eradicate the ticks which cause Lyme disease. [98300]

Mr Paice: Lyme disease is a disease of humans and prevention measures are mainly for the Department of Health to consider. Prevention of disease is by the avoidance of tick bites and this can be achieved with the appropriate use of insect repellents.

As this is not primarily an animal health issue, DEFRA has no plans to eradicate ticks that are capable of transmitting *Borrelia burgdorferi* infection to people. The possibility of successfully eradicating ticks from the wider environment is uncertain and is not being considered.

Animal keepers are recommended to regularly treat their pets and livestock for ticks as part of responsible animal ownership and routine animal health and welfare practice, as ticks can transmit a variety of animal pathogens.

Marine Conservation Zones

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the Government's formal consultation on marine conservation zones will take place before the end of 2012. [98912]

Richard Benyon: DEFRA is planning to hold a three-month public consultation on marine conservation zones starting in December 2012.

Nature Improvement Areas

Mary Creagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether nature improvement areas will be introduced with any guidance for local authorities and communities on their role within the wider planning process. [98428]

Richard Benyon: The natural environment White Paper makes it clear that local authorities will be able to use local planning to support nature improvement areas, including identifying them in their local plans where they choose, while not deterring sustainable development. The Government are considering how to take forward planning guidance across a range of matters. In doing so, the Government are considering carefully all the submissions that have been made in response to the consultation on the draft National Planning Policy Framework which asked for views about supporting guidance.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

Guy Opperman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect on farmers of nitrate vulnerable zones regulations on slurry storage. [98714]

Mr Paice: The implementation date for the increased storage requirements was 1 January 2012, when it became compulsory for farmers in NVZs to have sufficient storage capacity for the slurry their farms produce. The 2008 regulations which set this out were accompanied by an impact assessment.

As part of a review of the implementation of the nitrates directive in England, which is currently ongoing, we have provided evidence on both the environmental and economic effect of the existing NVZ regulations on slurry storage.

Included with the ongoing consultation documents (available on the DEFRA website) is evidence on both the environmental and economic effect of the above NVZ regulations on slurry storage. The environmental benefit of five months storage was estimated as leading to a reduction of leaching by 0.5% to 1.5%. The cost of compliance with the NVZ slurry storage regulations is the dominant cost to farmers of the Action Programme. A case study was included in the evidence to illustrate the cost of increasing to five months storage: a 110 dairy cow herd with only three months slurry storage. The capital costs of providing sufficient storage ranged between £32,470 and £39,843.

The Farm Practice Survey 2011 data on slurry storage illustrate that on dairy farms (not all of which were in NVZs), 26% had less than four months storage, and 61% had four to six months storage, the remaining 13% having more than six months storage. The NVZ Action Plan requirement is five months storage.

Water Charges

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost to (a) the public purse and (b) an individual consumer of water and sewerage services for the next financial year in (i) the UK, (ii) England, (iii) the west midlands and (iv) Dudley borough. [98717]

Richard Benyon: In England and Wales private companies are licensed to provide water and sewerage services and recover the costs of providing those services by billing customers. Ofwat and the Consumer Council for Water are funded through customer bills. There is therefore no cost to the public purse from these services. Ofwat forecasts the average household combined water and sewerage bill in 2012-13 to be £374 in England (£376 in England and Wales) and £326 in Severn Trent Water's area, which serves the west midlands and Dudley. Northern Ireland and Scotland run different systems and figures for the UK are available only at disproportionate cost.

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues in HM Treasury on the effect of the level of the retail prices index level of inflation on the cost of water and sewerage services in the next financial year; and if she will make a statement. [98718]

Richard Benyon: The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman), has frequent discussions with Cabinet colleagues.

As the regulator for the water industry, Ofwat challenges companies' proposed bill rises and approves each company's charges scheme, having set price limits on a five yearly basis. Water companies are obliged to submit their planned price adjustments to Ofwat for approval each year ahead of confirming them to their customers.

The most recent price review was in 2009 and this set price limits at 0.5% above inflation to allow companies to make the necessary investment to secure water supplies and infrastructure. The next price review will be in 2014 and will cover price limits from 2015 to 2020.

Bills have been tied to inflation since privatisation. This makes sense as when inflation is higher, water companies' costs will increase as, for example, the costs of materials, staff, contractors and energy could all increase. By tying bills to inflation Ofwat ensures that companies can raise sufficient finance to meet their promises on service to customers. This has delivered around £90 billion of investment since privatisation. As is the case with all other regulated sectors, Ofwat uses the retail prices index as its measure of inflation.

EDUCATION

Academies

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many officials of his Department work on the brokerage of sponsored academies; and how many such officials are being recruited to such roles. [98159]

Mr Gibb: There are currently 37 FTE officials in DFE in the Department's Brokerage and Underperformance Divisions. There are currently three vacancies in this area of the Department that we are taking steps to fill.

Children: Health

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will assess research into the level of self

control of a child as a predictor of well-being and attainment and its implication for his policies. [98992]

Tim Loughton: There are currently no plans to commission any new research or an assessment of existing research on this specific issue.

Children's Centres

Andrew Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of introducing payment-by-results in children's centres. [98916]

Sarah Teather: We are running a trial to explore the feasibility of introducing payment by results in children's centres. The trial, involving 27 local authorities, began in summer 2011 and will run until March 2013. The trials will generate an evidence base about the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches and will help to inform an assessment of effectiveness.

Departmental Data Protection

Mr David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish details of the six data loss cases which involved either personal data loss or a breach of confidentiality in 2011; and what measures were taken to resolve each such case. [98427]

Tim Loughton [holding answer 6 March 2012]: Details of the six data loss cases in 2011 are given in the following table.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Type of breach (how it happened)</i>	<i>Type of data involved</i>	<i>Measures taken to resolve the loss</i>
<i>Personal data loss incidents</i>			
1 January 2011	Document posted to wrong address	Name, address and financial details for two external individuals making Home Access application	Steps taken to retrieve from recipient. Procedures reviewed and additional quality checks added when posting to applicants
25 January 2011	Document posted to wrong address	Name address and financial details of one external individual relating to a retirement application	Apology sent to recipient. Member of staff sent for retraining
<i>Breach of confidentiality incidents (no personal data involved)</i>			
14 February 2011	Departmental work sent by e-mail to a Hotmail account	Correspondence from the Department for Education to a member of the public	Warning issued to policy official and additional training in data handling planned
13 May 2011	Stolen 3 rd party laptop with Departmental data	Anonymised data on exam results	Reported to police, Advice given about the Department's laptop encryption standards
8 August 2011	Document e-mailed to wrong address	Sensitive project papers	Apology given to recipient and e-mail deleted. Note sent to staff on procedures for e-mailing sensitive material
23 August 2011	Stolen documents. Briefcase stolen in restaurant	Documents with Restricted marking and some staff contact details	Reported to police

Departmental Ethnic Minority Staff

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many and what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department were from an ethnic

minority in March (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; and if he will make a statement. [98878]

Tim Loughton: Figures for the number of SCS members of the Department who declared they were from an ethnic minority are as follows:

Date	Percentage of SCS	Number
31 March 2010	2.5	<5
31 March 2011	4.2	5
29 February 2012 ¹	3.1	<5

¹ Information for March 2012 is not yet available.

Departmental Ministers' Private Offices

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many full-time equivalent staff at each Civil Service grade are employed in his private Ministerial office; and what the cost is of their annual salaries. [97211]

Tim Loughton [holding answer 28 February 2012]: As at 31 January 2012 (the latest published information), the number of staff in the Private Office of the Secretary of State for Education, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), was 10 FTE, at a total annual salary cost of £366,061.

Early Education

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the number of extra early years workers required to deliver 15 free hours of early education to 40% of two-year-olds. [99183]

Sarah Teather: We are pleased that the extension of free early education will make a significant contribution to economic growth through the creation of new jobs in the sector. As part of our planning for the introduction of the new entitlement, we are continuing to scope the workforce implications and how many extra jobs will be created, and no firm estimate is yet available.

We will continue to work closely with our co-production partners and a number of sector organisations, both to check our analysis and to gather their views on the workforce and other delivery issues.

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what funding he plans to provide for recruitment of early years workers. [99184]

Sarah Teather: The recruitment and employment of early years workers is a matter for local employers, including a wide range of public, private, voluntary or independent sector organisations. The Government continue to support employers in this, not least in recognition of the challenging economic climate. We created the early intervention grant (EIG), worth £2,365 million in 2012-13, to give local authorities flexibility in the way they use their funding, including whether or not they choose to provide financial support to employers in relation to the recruitment and/or employment of staff. Local authorities obviously need to make decisions at local level, based on their priorities and the needs of the communities in their area.

In addition, we continue to fund specific programmes at the national level which help recruitment to the sector, for example the Early Years Professional Status and the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership programmes. This will be worth

around £25 million in 2012-13. We are also working closely with the sector through our co-production process to consider how we might support them further.

Education: Non-departmental Public Bodies

Andrew Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what progress he has made on abolishing education quangos. [98917]

Tim Loughton: So far the Department for Education has abolished four non departmental public bodies (NDPBs) including the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency, Teachers TV Board of Governors, School Support Staff Negotiating Body and the Independent Advisory Group for Teenage Pregnancy.

A further seven bodies will cease to be NDPBs on 31 March 2012 including the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, Young Peoples Learning Agency, Training and Development Agency for Schools, General Teaching Council for England, National College for School Leadership, Children's Workforce Development Council and Partnerships for Schools. Four new Executive Agencies are being established which will take on some of the responsibilities of those NDPBs. The Standards and Testing Agency began operating in October 2011. The Education Funding Agency and the Teaching Agency are due to open in April 2012, and the National College for School Leadership will become an Executive Agency in April 2012.

The School Food Trust, a former DFE NDPB, has become a Community Interest Company and an independent charity.

Families

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will commission research on the effects of parents moving to less stressful jobs on (a) the quality of family life and (b) children's subjective well-being. [98988]

Tim Loughton: The Department is not planning to commission research on this topic.

Free Schools

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) whether he plans to measure the satisfaction of parents with the service provided by (a) free schools, (b) academies and (c) local authority-run schools; and if he will make a statement; [98806]

(2) if he will offer (a) free schools, (b) academies and (c) local authority-run schools financial incentives or rewards to improve parent satisfaction with the service provided; and if he will make a statement. [98808]

Tim Loughton [holding answer 8 March 2012]: The views of parents remain an important part of the evidence for Ofsted school inspections. The launch of Ofsted's Parent View website means that views of parents can also be used to inform the timing of inspections. There are no plans for direct financial incentives or rewards to improve parent satisfaction beyond the funding mechanisms that already exist. Achievement of parent

satisfaction is already an expectation of the outcomes of schools alongside achieving the best range of outcomes for their pupils.

GCSE: Denton

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children received A* to C grades

in GCSE (a) mathematics, (b) English, (c) geography and (d) sciences in Denton and Reddish constituency in each of the last five years. [98642]

Mr Gibb: The information requested can be found in the following table:

Numbers and percentages¹ of pupils^{2,3} at the end of key stage 4 achieving A-C grades in mathematics, English, geography and science⁴ GCSEs^{5,6} in Denton and Reddish constituency⁷, north-west region⁸ and England⁹—Years: 2006/07 to 2010/11. Coverage: England*

<i>Numbers and percentages of KS4 pupils achieving A*-C in:</i>	<i>2006/07</i>	<i>2007/08</i>	<i>2008/09</i>	<i>2009/10</i>	<i>2010/11</i>
<i>Mathematics</i>					
Denton and Reddish (number)	806	794	770	791	675
Denton and Reddish (percentage)	57.0	56.6	59.3	63.6	63.5
North West (number)	46,911	48,301	47,147	50,733	51,410
North West (percentage)	52.6	55.1	56.6	62.0	64.5
England (number)	322,941	334,905	338,133	360,233	368,720
England (percentage)	53.9	56.2	58.7	62.5	65.3
<i>English</i>					
Denton and Reddish (number)	776	760	798	800	740
Denton and Reddish (percentage)	54.9	54.2	61.5	64.4	69.6
North West (number)	50,979	52,134	51,267	54,482	55,664
North West (percentage)	57.1	59.4	61.5	66.5	69.9
England (number)	349,086	357,982	358,135	382,870	392,102
England (percentage)	58.3	60.1	62.1	66.5	69.4
<i>Geography</i>					
Denton and Reddish (number)	208	182	140	142	148
Denton and Reddish (percentage)	14.7	13.0	10.8	11.4	13.9
North West (number)	12,874	12,578	11,910	12,085	11,918
North West (percentage)	14.4	14.3	14.3	14.8	15.0
England (number)	103,592	101,350	97,759	98,098	96,364
England (percentage)	17.3	17.0	17.0	17.0	17.1
<i>Science³</i>					
Denton and Reddish (number)	612	735	724	652	576
Denton and Reddish (percentage)	43.3	52.4	55.8	52.5	54.2
North West (number)	40,468	46,888	47,990	46,689	44,752
North West (percentage)	45.3	53.4	57.6	57.0	56.2
England (number)	280,096	328,703	348,685	345,156	333,005
England (percentage)	46.8	55.2	60.5	59.9	59.0

¹ Percentages are based on all pupils at end of key stage 4 in each area.

² Figures do not include pupils recently arrived from overseas.

³ Figures include all maintained schools (including CTCs and academies).

⁴ Pupils who achieved A*-C at GCSE in at least one of the following subjects: Physics, Chemistry, Biological sciences, Single science, Double science, Additional science. Core science and Applied science for the years 2008/09 to 2010/11 and in Physics, Chemistry, Biological sciences, Single science, Double science for the years 2006/07 and 2007/08.

⁵ Full GCSEs only have been included (Full GCSEs, double awards, accredited international certificates and their predecessor iGCSEs). Figures from 2006/07 to 2008/09 exclude iGCSEs, 2009/10 and 2010/11 figures include accredited iGCSEs.

⁶ Including attempts and achievements by these pupils in previous academic years.

⁷ Parliamentary constituency figures are based on the postcode of the school.

⁸ Regional figures are based on the region of the local authority maintaining the school.

⁹ England figures are the sum of all local authority figures.

Source:

National Pupil Database (2006/07 to 2009/10 final data, 2010/11 revised data)

Members: Correspondence

Mr Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he expects to reply to the letter of 1 February 2012 from the hon. Member for Walsall North concerning a constituent, reference 2012/0008558. [97556]

Tim Loughton [holding answer 1 March 2012]: The Department has received a large number of letters

about the Action for Children campaign on child neglect and we will reply as soon as possible.

Ministers' Private Offices

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how much his private office spent on newspapers, periodicals and trade profession publications in the last 12 months; [96936]

(2) how much his private ministerial office has spent on stationery in the last 12 months. [97212]

Tim Loughton [*holding answers 27 and 28 February 2012*]: The overall spend in DFE private office on stationery in the 12 months to the end of January 2012 was £59,460, of which £10,865 was spent on newspapers, periodicals and trade or professional publications.

National Curriculum in England Review

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what contracts have been let in respect of the work of the working group for the National Curriculum Review; which such contracts have been extended; and if he will make a statement. [98700]

Mr Gibb: Professors Mary James, Andrew Pollard and Dylan Wiliam were contracted to be members of the National Curriculum Review Expert Panel. These contracts started on 29 November 2010 and were initially due to end on 30 September 2011, but were subsequently extended to end on 5 December 2011. Tim Oates was seconded to the Department to chair the expert panel. His secondment commenced on 1 September 2010. The work of the expert panel concluded on 5 December and its report was published on 19 December. Tim Oates's secondment has been extended until 31 August 2012 to enable him to continue to advise the Department as the review progresses.

Ofsted: Inspections

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools in (a) the Leeds North West constituency and (b) Leeds received an outstanding result from Ofsted in the last three years. [97738]

Mr Gibb: This is a matter for Ofsted. HM chief inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, has written to the hon. Member, and a copy of his response has been placed in the House Libraries.

Letter from Sir Michael Wilshaw, dated 6 March 2012:

Your recent parliamentary question has been passed to me, as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, for response.

Since 2005, maintained school inspections have been carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 and, more recently, the Education Act 2011. Ofsted records all judgements made by inspectors in section 5 inspections, including the judgement for overall effectiveness of the school.

Maintained schools inspected under section 5 include nursery, primary, secondary (including academies and city technology colleges), special schools and pupil referral units.

Table A below shows the number of maintained schools judged outstanding for overall effectiveness at their section 5 inspection during the academic years 2008/09 to 2010/11 inclusive in Leeds North West constituency, Leeds local authority and England (for comparison).

In September 2009, Ofsted implemented a policy of more proportionate inspection using risk assessment as an aid to scheduling the inspection of good and outstanding schools. We deliberately set out to inspect a greater proportion of previously satisfactory or inadequate schools each year and a smaller proportion of

previously good or outstanding schools. The sample of schools inspected is therefore skewed and means that comparisons between years should be treated with caution as some changes are due to the very different sample of schools inspected during the different periods.

In September 2010, Ofsted deferred the inspections of previously outstanding schools and as a result of the Education Act 2011 is no longer routinely inspecting previously outstanding schools. These schools will not be inspected unless a complaint has been raised or the risk assessment process identifies these schools would benefit from an inspection.

Statistics covering the outcomes of all inspections carried out in each academic year since 2008/09 can be found at:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/advanced-resources-search/results/Maintained%20schools/2/all/any/200/any>

The most recent official statistics release covering the outcomes of maintained school inspections carried out between 1 July 2011 and 30 September 2011 was released on 13 December 2011 and can be accessed at the same link.

A copy of this reply has been sent to Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for Schools, and will be placed in the library of both Houses.

Table A: Schools in England, Leeds local authority and Leeds North West constituency judged outstanding for their overall effectiveness in each academic year, 2008/09 to 2010/11

	Number of schools		
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Leeds North West	1	0	0
Leeds	16	9	3
England	1,327	782	617
Total inspections	7,065	6,171	5,726

Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what funding (a) his Department and (b) its agencies provided for continuous professional development in Personal Social Health and Economic education in each of the last five financial years; and what funding (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies will provide for continuous professional development in Personal Social Health and Economic education in each of the next five financial years. [99186]

Mr Gibb: The Department has provided £4,640,821 over the last five years for PSHE education in schools. This includes continuous professional development, and can be broken down as follows:

	£
2007/08	724,578
2008/09	1,596,260
2009/10	1,028,700
2010/11	1,091,283
2011/12	200,000

The Department is continuing to fund the PSHE Association in 2012-13 financial year which will include continuous professional development. Grants have not been agreed for any future years.

Primary Education: Admissions

Andrew Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much the Government plans to spend on creating extra primary school places in the current Parliament. [98919]

Mr Gibb: For the current spending period we intend to make available over £4 billion to local authorities to support the provision of pupil places. It is for local authorities to decide how best to allocate that funding to meet local needs.

Schools: Admissions

Andrew Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to ensure that more parents secure a place for their child at their first choice school. [98920]

Mr Gibb: Figures from 2011 show that almost 85% of parents were offered a place in their first preference school, with 95% offered a place at one of their top three. That is why we are working to increase the supply of good school places by the rapid expansion of the academies programme, establishing more free schools, and giving all schools more freedom to expand. Our school reforms will raise standards and create more good schools. We are turning around underperforming schools that are failing their pupils and we are encouraging the best and brightest into teaching. It is vital that all parents have the opportunity to send their child to an excellent local school of their choice.

Schools: Assessments

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what provision is made in (a) state and (b) other schools for teaching to prepare students for sixth term examination papers. [96524]

Mr Gibb: The Department does not hold information on sixth term examination papers (STEP) provision as they do not form part of an accredited qualification. According to the Cambridge assessment website, in 2011 the most popular paper was taken by fewer than 1,200 students. We have increased funding for a further mathematics support programme which will provide training for mathematics teachers to enable them to prepare their students for STEP examinations.

STEP examinations are routinely required of students offered conditional places on mathematics courses at the university of Cambridge. Warwick university requires students to sit either a STEP paper or an advanced extension award and some other institutions, including Bristol, Oxford and Bath, encourage applicants to take STEP papers where they are available.

The Faculty of Mathematics at Cambridge organises a four-day course at Easter for students from non-selective, state, UK schools that are unable to provide STEP support. This course is funded jointly by the Cambridge colleges and the Sutton Trust.

Schools: Inspections

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many inspections have been undertaken by Ofsted of services sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions in each of the last five years. [98807]

Mr Gibb [holding answer 8 March 2012]: This is a matter for Ofsted. HM Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, has written to the hon. Member and a copy of his response has been placed in the House Libraries.

Letter from Sir Michael Wilshaw, dated 6 March 2012:

Your recent parliamentary question has been passed to me, as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, for response.

Providers sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were inspected under the Common Inspection Framework under Chapter 3 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Table A shows the number of inspections of DWP-sponsored providers carried out by Ofsted in each of the last five academic years.

Ofsted ceased to inspect DWP contracted employment provision as of 16 August 2010. This was further to a request from Ministers that Ofsted discontinue these inspections from that date.

A copy of this reply has been sent to Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for Schools, and will be placed in the library of both Houses.

Table A: Number of Ofsted inspections of services sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions in England, in each academic year 2006/07 to 2010/11

<i>Academic year</i>	<i>Total inspections</i>
2006/07	49
2007/08	76
2008/09	78
2009/10	54
2010/11	0

Schools: Transport

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent representations he has received on increasing provision of free transport to schools. [97872]

Tim Loughton: The Department does not collect data on the numbers of representations received on individual areas of home to school transport. Decisions on how much provision is required, any charging policy and its implementation, are the responsibility of local authorities. Local authorities already spend more than £1 billion in supporting children, including those with special education needs, in getting to and from school safely. The Department is aware, that some local authorities are now charging for transport to school for non-statutory provision where previously it had been free, as they look to make savings. We are looking for ways to help local authorities to make those savings, more efficiently and effectively, including better use of planning and procurement, while ensuring that those families who need support to get their children to school can get it. The Secretary of State provided £85 million for 2011-12 and 2012-13 to help local authorities meet their legal duties in respect of families on low incomes.

Science: GCSE

Chris Skidmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many and what proportion of pupils were entered for GCSEs in each of the three separate sciences in (a) comprehensive, (b) selective and (c) independent schools in each year since 1997; [97849]

(2) how many pupils entered by (a) comprehensive schools, (b) selective schools and (c) independent schools for GCSEs in (i) biology, (ii) chemistry and (iii) physics obtained a Grade C or above in each year from 1997 to 2011. [98158]

Mr Gibb: The information requested has been placed in the House Libraries.

Teachers: Recruitment

Andrew Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to attract the brightest graduates to teaching. [98918]

Mr Gibb: We are committed to recruiting the very best graduates into teaching, securing better value in initial teacher training (ITT), and reforming training so that more ITT is led by schools and teacher training focuses on the most important elements of being a teacher.

We set out the action we will be taking to help attract more of the highest achieving graduates into teaching in "Training our next generation of outstanding teachers: Implementation plan", published in November 2011. These include:

using bursaries of up to £20,000 to attract the best graduates in the subjects where they are most needed;

setting a higher bar for entry to ITT courses, making sure new teachers all have sound English, mathematics and subject knowledge;

expanding the successful Teach First programme which places highly able graduates to work in challenging schools;

encouraging Service Leaders to become teachers through a new Troops to Teachers programme;

placing more emphasis on selection processes and trainee quality in making judgments about a teacher training provider's quality; and

introducing new routes into teaching which will make it easier for schools to employ the qualified teachers with the range of skills that they need.

Teaching Methods

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will commission an assessment of the effectiveness of the Good Behaviour Game programme. [99554]

Tim Loughton: We have no plans to commission an assessment of the Good Behaviour Game programme. This Government believe that strong discipline and good behaviour in schools are essential if pupils are to achieve at school and grow up to be responsible members of society. Our view is that it is for schools to decide for themselves the support and materials that will meet the needs of their pupils.

TED TV

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make an assessment of the potential of TED TV to inform and educate British pupils. [99513]

Mr Gibb: The Department for Education has not carried out a formal assessment of the potential of TED TV in education. However, the Government recognise the value of new online delivery channels, which can offer pupils access to some of the best resources and lessons in the world, both within and beyond the classroom.

The Government encourage schools to use technology in imaginative and effective ways to build the knowledge, understanding and skills that young people need for further study and the workplace. We are committed to giving schools greater autonomy to drive their own improvement. This includes using their professional judgment in implementing new technologies and digital resources, based on local needs and context.

NORTHERN IRELAND**Departmental Ethnic Minority Staff**

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department were from an ethnic minority in March (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; and if he will make a statement. [98867]

Mr Paterson: Since April 2010, when policing and justice functions were devolved to the Department of Justice NI, no senior civil servants in my Department were from an ethnic minority.

EU Grants and Loans

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the (a) Minister for Europe, (b) Irish Government and (c) Northern Ireland Executive on the future of EU funding programmes (i) Northern Ireland Competitiveness and Employment Programme, (ii) European Social Fund Programme, (iii) Peace III Programme, (iv) Interreg IVA Cross-Border Programme, (v) Interreg IVB and IVC Programmes, (vi) International Fund for Ireland, (vii) Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme, (viii) European Fisheries Fund, (ix) Seventh Framework Research Programme, (x) Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme, (xi) Progress Programme, (xii) Lifelong Learning Programme, (xiii) Youth in Action, (xiv) Life + (Environment), (xv) Culture Programme, (xvi) Europe for Citizens, (xvii) Media 2007 and (xviii) EU Health Programme. [99055]

Mr Paterson: I have regular discussions with the Minister for Europe, Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive and Ministers in the Irish Government on a range of issues.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Council Tax

David T. C. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps he is taking to help keep council tax bills down. [98972]

Mr Pickles: Under the last Government, council tax more than doubled. This Government are working with councils to freeze council tax for two years. A recent survey by CIPFA indicates that council tax bills this April will only change by 0.3%. This is a real-terms tax cut for hard-working families and pensioners.

The final out-turn figures will be published by my Department later this month.

Council Tax: Redcar and Cleveland

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the percentage change in band D council tax was in Redcar and Cleveland local authority area in each year since 2001. [99151]

Robert Neill: Details of the average change in band D area council tax (including parish precepts) in Redcar and Cleveland local authority area in each year since 2001 are shown in the following table.

These data are available on the Department for Communities and Local Government website under Related Downloads at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/localregional/localgovernmentfinance/statistics/counciltax/>

Band D area council tax (including parish precepts) in Redcar and Cleveland

	£	% increase
2001-02	1,081	0.0
2002-03	1,108	2.5
2003-04	1,132	2.2
2004-05	1,214	7.2
2005-06	1,273	4.9
2006-07	1,332	4.7
2007-08	1,383	3.8
2008-09	1,459	5.5
2009-10	1,516	3.9
2010-11	1,556	2.6
2011-12	1,556	0.0

Council Tax: Students

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what discussions he has had with (a) other Ministers, (b) local authority leaders and (c) the Local Government Association on reviewing the council tax exemption for students. [99137]

Robert Neill: I refer the hon. Member to the minutes of a meeting, held on 18 October 2011, between Ministers and the Local Government Association, which has been published on the Department for Communities and Local Government website in response to a Freedom of Information request:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/foi/disclosure-log/>

However, as I clearly indicated in my answer of 25 November 2011, *Official Report*, column 605W, the Government have no plans to change the rules governing the long-standing council tax exemption for full-time students. This remains the case.

The sole changes we propose to make to council tax discounts and exemptions relate to empty and second homes, as explained in the written ministerial statement of 31 October 2011, *Official Report*, column 24WS.

For the avoidance of doubt, we do not support the amendments to the Local Government Finance Bill, tabled by the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) to (a) make students liable for council tax and (b) levy business rates on student landlords (Notice of Amendments given on 26 January 2012, New Clauses 17 and 18).

Day Centres: Fees and Charges

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many local authorities have increased charges (a) for the use of day centres and (b) for transport to day centres in 2011-12; and how many local authorities plan to increase such charges in 2012-13. [98857]

Robert Neill: The information requested is not held centrally.

Diamond Jubilee 2012: Medals

John Woodcock: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has to extend eligibility for the Queen's Jubilee Medal to fire service personnel based in control rooms. [99196]

Robert Neill: I acknowledge and pay tribute to the challenging and vital role that fire and rescue control room staff play every day in contributing to the safety of their community. However, for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal, all sponsoring Government Departments are adhering to the same criteria, used for the Queen's Golden Jubilee medal in 2002. Across all emergency services, only those personnel who are called to attend emergencies, potentially placing themselves in danger and with at least five years service as of 6 February 2012 are eligible to receive the medal.

As for the Golden Jubilee Medal, chief fire officers have a degree of latitude to recommend for the Queens Diamond Jubilee medal those individual fire control staff who by virtue of their role meet the criteria.

Employment Schemes: Yorkshire and the Humber

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government which sub-contractors have been employed by the main Work programme contractors in each part of the four unitary authorities in former Humberside; whether each such sub-contractor is a (a) charity, (b) limited company and (c) social enterprise; and on what date each such sub-contractor started its contract. [98629]

Chris Grayling: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions.

The two prime providers in the Yorkshire and the Humber contract package area are G4S and Newcastle College. Their sub-contractors, correct at 30 January 2012, are as follows:

<i>G4S</i>	
<i>Sub-contractor</i>	<i>Sector</i>
Addaction	Voluntary
ADL Environmental	Private
ADS Addiction Dependency Solutions	Voluntary
ATL (Yorkshire) Ltd	Private
Belina Consulting Ltd (Take Three Days)	Private
Business in the Community	Voluntary
Business Training Ventures Ltd	Private
Citizens Advice Bureau	Voluntary
City Works (Construction Hull Works Ltd)	Private
Catch 22	Voluntary
Cleanslate National CiC (Cleanslate)	Voluntary
Debt Advice Network	Voluntary
Dyslexia Action	Voluntary
East Riding County Council	Public
EDUC8 Leicestershire Ltd (EDUC8)	Private
E-Mentoring Ltd	Private
Enterprise Growth Solutions Ltd	Private
Everyday Skills Ltd T/A Ease	Private
Ex-Mil Recruitment Ltd	Private
Future Prospects	Public
Gingerbread	Voluntary
Groundwork Wakefield	Voluntary
Hays Specialist Recruitment	Private
Healthy Cross Community Project	Voluntary
Horton Housing Association	Voluntary
Hull Community and Voluntary Service	Voluntary
ImpAct Universal Ltd	Private
Inspire 2 Independence (Training) Ltd	Private
Ixion Holdings Ltd	Private
Just Education and Training (JET) Ltd	Private
Langley House Trust	Voluntary
Learning Light Ltd	Private
Leonard Cheshire Disability	Voluntary
Meridian Business Support Ltd	Private
Nacro	Voluntary
National Housing Federation	Voluntary
N-ergy Group Ltd	Private
North Yorkshire Learning Consortium	Voluntary
Northern Refugee Centre	Voluntary
NSA for Retail (National Skills Academy)	Private
Outshine Ltd	Private
Pay and Employment Rights (Yorkshire) Ltd	Voluntary
Peach Orator Ltd	Private
People 1st	Private
Pertemps	Private
R2W Ltd (Right to Write)	Private

<i>G4S</i>	
<i>Sub-contractor</i>	<i>Sector</i>
REGO Solutions Ltd	Private
Regular Forces Employment Association (REFA)	Voluntary
Rehab Works Ltd	Private
Remploy	Public
Renovo Employment Group	Private
RNIB	Voluntary
Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI)	Voluntary
Royal Mencap Society (Mencap)	Voluntary
Sanctuary Group (Sanctuary Housing)	Voluntary
Skills for Care	Voluntary
SOVA (Supporting Others through Volunteer Action)	Voluntary
Square Orange Associates Ltd	Private
STAR (Training and Consultancy) Ltd	Private
Stepdirect Ltd	Private
The Mind Consortium	Voluntary
The Minerva Project	Voluntary
The Prince Initiative for Mature Enterprise (PRIME)	Voluntary
The Princes Trust	Voluntary
The Salvation Army Trustee Company	Voluntary
Ufi/Learndirect	Private
Urbanbiz	Private
Voluntary Action North Lincolnshire	Voluntary
WISE Ability Ltd	Voluntary
Yes2Ventures Ltd (South Yorkshire CMP)	Private
Yorkshire Coast Enterprise	Voluntary
Yorkshire Colleges Consortium	Public

Newcastle College Group

<i>Sub-contractor</i>	<i>Sector</i>
3SC	Voluntary
Barnardo's	Voluntary
Business Support and Development	Voluntary
Future Prospects	Public
Igen	Private
Intraining	Private
NFEA	Voluntary
Skills for Communities	Voluntary
Yorkshire Coast Enterprise	Voluntary

The Department does not hold information relating to whether each sub-contractor is a charity, limited company or a social enterprise. Neither can we confirm the dates that each sub-contractor started its contract as arrangements between providers and their supply chains is a commercial matter between the interested parties.

Empty Property

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the 38,000 empty homes brought back into use by (a) former tenure and (b) English local authority in the last year.

[98949]

Andrew Stunell [*holding answer 8 March 2012*]: Figures on the number of empty homes in each English local authority district in each year from 2004 to 2011 are shown in live table 615, which is published on the Department for Communities and Local Government's website at the following link. This table also shows the number of empty homes in the local authority and housing association tenures. Figures on the number of empty homes specifically in the private sector are not available.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingresearch/housingstatistics/housingstatisticsby/stockincludingvacants/livatables/>

These figures give the position at a point in time and make it possible to calculate the net change from year to year but it is not possible to provide data on individual dwellings.

Floods: Insurance

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the potential cost to (a) his Department and (b) English local authorities of the ending of the Statement of Principles agreement with the Association of British Insurers on flood defence insurance. [98922]

Robert Neill: Further to the written ministerial statement of 19 December 2011, *Official Report*, column 140-41WS, my Department is working closely with DEFRA and HM Treasury to ensure flood insurance remains widely available, which is the objective of the existing Statement of Principles. We are working towards an announcement in the spring of a new shared understanding which sets out more clearly what customers can expect from their insurer, and from Government. Accordingly, we cannot yet assess the cost of the successor arrangements to the Department or local government.

Landlords: Registration

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will undertake a national consultation of local authorities to gain their views on the merits of a statutory register of private sector landlords. [99020]

Andrew Stunell: The Government believe that the current legislative framework governing residential renting in the private sector strikes the right balance between the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants. We therefore have no plans to consult on additions to the framework, including a statutory register of private landlords.

Local Government Finance

Karl Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will increase resources available to local authorities to help with the transition to the National Planning Policy Framework. [98952]

Greg Clark: The National Planning Policy Framework will radically simplify the policies that local authorities need to take into account when plan-making. The regime

we inherited was needlessly bureaucratic for everyone involved in the planning system. We are taking steps to make it easier for councils to produce up-to-date local plans.

Non-domestic Rates

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he expects to publish the business rate returns for 2011-12. [98855]

Robert Neill: Details of the amount of national non-domestic rates local authorities in England expected to collect in 2011-12 were published on the DCLG website on 25 May 2011. The statistical release can be found here:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/localregional/localgovernmentfinance/statistics/nondomesticrates/forecast/>

It is planned that a statistical release giving details of the amount of national non-domestic rates collected by local authorities in England in 2011-12 will be published on the DCLG website in August 2012. A precise date will be published on both the UK National Statistics publication hub,

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html> and DCLG websites nearer the time.

Planning Permission: Appeals

Dr Poulter: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if his Department will take steps to ensure that local communities can appeal against planning decisions granted by a local authority. [98747]

Greg Clark: Local councils are representatives of their communities, with local and neighbourhood plans reflecting the views of local people. We want more decisions to be taken locally in line with local plans rather than relying on a system where, as has come to be the case, too many decisions are taken out of the hands of local people and made by a remote appeals system.

Planning Permission: Sustainable Development

Jonathan Ashworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether he applied the definition of sustainable development recommended by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee when drafting the National Planning Policy Framework. [99120]

Greg Clark: We are considering very carefully the recommendations from the Communities and Local Government Select Committee and responses from the consultation on the draft National Planning Policy Framework regarding the definition of sustainable development. We will publish our response to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee and the analysis of consultation responses when the final framework is published.

Urban Areas: Rents

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if his Department will take steps to encourage private sector landlords to offer reduced rents to businesses who wish to acquire an empty high street shop; and if he will make a statement.

[98726]

Grant Shapps: The Government are fully committed to supporting high streets and we recognise the negative impact that empty properties have on the high street and town centres. Rents sought by private landlords are for the most part directed by market forces and it is in the interests of landlords to offer competitive rents in order to lease their property. The Government's response to the Portas review into the future of the high street will be published in the spring. This response will outline the key initiatives that the Government are launching to support the address of empty properties and the high street overall.

Voluntary Organisations: Nottinghamshire

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what powers he has to instruct Nottinghamshire county council to abandon its plans to cut funding to the voluntary sector; if he will take such steps as are open to him to secure the abandonment of those plans; and if he will make a statement.

[99473]

Andrew Stunell: In January 2012, in response to representations by the voluntary and community sector, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the right hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr Pickles), wrote to Nottinghamshire county council. He asked the council to ensure that they properly took account of the statutory Best Value guidance which sets out clearly the way that councils should work with the voluntary sector.

A copy of the council's reply is on its website at:

<http://www3.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/thecouncil/democracy/finance/conversation/voluntarysector/>

The guidance is statutory and related to the duty of Best Value which, introduced by section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999, is a general duty that requires authorities to

“make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.”

It makes clear that authorities should consider overall value—including social value—when considering service provision.

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will publish his communications with Nottinghamshire county council about their plans to cut funding to the voluntary sector; and if he will make a statement.

[99474]

Andrew Stunell: Nottinghamshire county council has published the letter on its own website, along with its response, at:

<http://www3.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/thecouncil/democracy/finance/conversation/voluntarysector/>

Best Value is a statutory duty and the guidance is a statutory document. It is a tool to help communities and the voluntary sector hold councils to account, and councils should be clear in how they are making spending decisions and prioritising funding.

I also refer the hon. Member to my answer of 6 December 2011, *Official Report*, columns 247-48W, on the steps my Department is undertaking to support the local voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

CABINET OFFICE

Charities: Annual Reports

Steve McCabe: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps are taken by the Charity Commission to ensure that all the annual returns submitted by charities are accurate.

[98077]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Charity Commission. I have asked the commission's chief executive to reply.

Letter from Sam Younger CBE, dated 2 March 2012:

As the Chief Executive of the Charity Commission, I have been asked to respond to your written Parliamentary Question on what steps are taken by the Charity Commission to ensure that all the annual returns submitted by charities are accurate [98077].

The majority of the 162,000 charities on the Register simply have to provide the Commission with basic information about changes to their registered details. Our online service automatically checks that the information charities provide is valid at the point at which it is entered. For example, we check dates of birth to ensure that an individual is of a legal age to be a trustee; address details to ensure they are recognised by the Royal Mail; and email addresses to ensure these are in a valid form. In addition, our system ensures that at least one set of trustees' details is provided and that trustees give their full name.

Charities with an income of £500,000 or more have to provide additional financial data to the Commission. Our online service checks that figures provided add up and will flag up information that is potentially incorrect; for example, a charity with a relatively low income that claims to have a large number of employees. Commission staff will examine other potential errors or anomalies in a charity's financial information. We also check a sample to ensure consistency between charity accounts and annual returns.

Furthermore, we may check the contents of annual returns in the event of an ongoing case involving a particular charity.

In general, charity trustees are responsible for ensuring that the information in their annual return is accurate. By displaying the majority of this information on the public register, the Commission encourages charities to check this information before it is placed in the public domain. Although some charities will make mistakes, our online service and manual checking normally identify the majority of errors.

Childbirth

Stephen Lloyd: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how many live births there were in Northern Ireland in each quarter since the first quarter of 2001;

[99110]

(2) how many live births there were in Scotland in each quarter since the first quarter of 2001;

[99126]

(3) how many live births there were in Wales in each quarter since the first quarter of 2001;

[99127]

(4) how many live births there were in England in each quarter since the first quarter of 2001.

[99128]

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 March 2012:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions asking:

1. how many live births there were in Northern Ireland in each quarter since the first quarter of 2001. 99110
2. how many live births there were in Scotland in each quarter since the first quarter of 2001. 99126
3. how many live births there were in Wales in each quarter since the first quarter of 2001. 99127
4. how many live births there were in England in each quarter since the first quarter of 2001. 99128

Figures for live births have been compiled from birth registration data. The following table shows live births by quarter from 2001 to 2011 in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

		<i>Quarterly numbers of live births in the UK by constituent country, 2001-11</i>			
		<i>England¹</i>	<i>Wales¹</i>	<i>Scotland</i>	<i>Northern Ireland</i>
2001	Q1	137,790	7,696	13,535	5,796
	Q2	141,177	7,517	12,897	5,348
	Q3	145,140	7,729	13,166	5,557
	Q4	139,637	7,674	12,929	5,261
2002	Q1	135,920	7,332	12,374	5,304
	Q2	139,805	7,351	12,625	5,334
	Q3	147,114	7,854	13,219	5,542
	Q4	142,870	7,668	13,052	5,205
2003	Q1	139,944	7,457	12,764	5,350
	Q2	147,276	7,817	12,905	5,392
	Q3	154,461	8,327	13,758	5,590
	Q4	148,170	7,799	13,005	5,316
2004	Q1	147,349	7,784	13,459	5,677
	Q2	149,579	7,785	13,341	5,435
	Q3	156,934	8,440	13,832	5,786
	Q4	153,322	8,316	13,325	5,420
2005	Q1	146,383	7,838	13,356	5,530
	Q2	151,798	7,915	13,557	5,700
	Q3	161,425	8,667	14,226	5,918
	Q4	153,422	8,173	13,247	5,180
2006	Q1	151,358	8,118	13,568	5,822
	Q2	157,841	8,281	14,039	5,765
	Q3	166,011	8,835	14,181	6,090
	Q4	160,538	8,394	13,902	5,595
2007	Q1	155,873	8,095	14,209	6,144
	Q2	160,983	8,500	14,269	5,994
	Q3	172,221	9,126	14,929	6,450
	Q4	166,280	8,693	14,372	5,863
2008	Q1	164,954	8,748	15,105	6,534
	Q2	167,944	8,962	14,875	6,333
	Q3	173,189	9,185	15,520	6,450
	Q4	166,722	8,755	14,541	6,314

Quarterly numbers of live births in the UK by constituent country, 2001-11

		<i>England¹</i>	<i>Wales¹</i>	<i>Scotland</i>	<i>Northern Ireland</i>
2009	Q1	160,486	8,419	14,505	6,322
	Q2	166,426	8,633	14,866	6,291
	Q3	172,241	8,947	15,258	6,330
	Q4	171,905	8,938	14,417	5,967
2010	Q1	165,853	8,790	14,669	6,443
	Q2	167,471	8,590	14,742	6,292
	Q3	176,451	9,233	14,910	6,412
	Q4	177,232	9,339	14,470	6,168
2011	Q1 ²	166,300	8,700	14,613	6,698
	Q2 ²	170,700	8,800	14,708	6,156
	Q3 ²	176,800	9,000	15,216	6,481
	Q4 ²	—	—	14,055	—

¹ Provisional figures for England and Wales are rounded to the nearest 100.

² Provisional.

Citizenship: Young People

Gareth Johnson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many children in Dartford constituency participated in the National Citizen Service scheme in (a) 2010 and (b) 2011. [99214]

Mr Hurd: The first Government National Citizen Service pilots were held in summer 2011.

We are currently collating information on number of National Citizen Service participants in the 2011 pilots. This information will be available shortly, including data for Kent.

Employment

Helen Jones: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the net change in (a) public sector and (b) full-time equivalent private sector jobs has been in each region of England since May 2010. [99145]

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 March 2012:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking, what the net change in (a) public sector and (b) full-time equivalent private sector jobs has been in each region of England since May 2010. [99145]

Regional estimates of public and private sector employment are not available from the Office for National Statistics on a full-time equivalent basis.

Official estimates of public sector employment for each region of England, by headcount, are published on a quarterly basis by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) as part of the Public Sector Employment statistical bulletin.

Estimates of private sector employment are not routinely produced by region, but were recently published on a headcount basis on 1 March 2012, as part of an article entitled 'Regional Analysis of Public Sector Employment 2011'.

The requested data are shown at Table 1. Table 1 shows the net change in employment for both the public and private sectors, on a headcount basis, between Q1 2010 (March) and Q3 2011 (December).

Table 1: Net change in public and private sector employment Q1 2010 to Q3 2011¹

All employees	English Region								
	North West	North East	Yorkshire and the Humber	West Midlands	East Midlands	East of England	London	South East	South West
Public Sector	-44	-24	-25	-29	-20	-32	-41	-40	-54
Private Sector ^{2,3}	87	1	11	33	74	116	132	77	98

Head count (thousand), not seasonally adjusted

¹ Estimates calculated based on the change in level of employment between Q1 2010 and Q3 2011.² Estimates are based on where people are employed.³ Estimated as the difference between Labour Force Survey (LFS) total employment (all in employment aged 16 and over) and the data from public sector organisations. LFS data refer Q1 to February to April, Q2 to May to July, Q3 to August to October and Q4 to November to January.

Source:

Office for National Statistics

Fraud

Mr Byrne: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he expects guidance on passing on allegations of fraud to Ministers to be ready. [98523]

Mr Maude: A review of existing guidelines by the Cabinet Secretary is under way.

Homes and Communities Agency: Statistics

Paul Uppal: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) what discussions the UK Statistics Authority have had with representatives of the BBC on the issue of Homes and Communities Agency statistics during 2011; [99333]

(2) what media briefings the UK Statistics Authority gave to the BBC on the issue of Homes and Communities Agency statistics. [99410]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Sir Michael Scholar, dated 9 March 2012:

As Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, I am replying to your questions asking (i) what discussions the UK Statistics Authority have had with representatives of the BBC on the issue of Homes and Communities Agency statistics during 2011 [99333] and (ii) what media briefings the UK Statistics Authority gave to the BBC on the issue of Homes and Communities Agency statistics [99410].

The UK Statistics Authority received one telephone enquiry from a representative of the BBC asking for an Authority view on the release of statistics produced by the Homes and Communities Agency on 22 November 2011. The Authority responded by confirming that it would wish to review any particular statistical issues or concerns that were raised before commenting further. The Authority also received a copy of a letter from the Hon. Member for Birmingham Erdington to the Minister of State for Housing and Local Government dated 24 November 2011.

The UK Statistics Authority independently reviewed the issues raised in BBC news articles published on 23 and 24 November 2011, and in the correspondence dated 24 November 2011. The Authority subsequently wrote to the Minister of State for Housing and Local Government, under section 16 of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, on 6 December 2011. The Authority notified the Minister of the Authority's wish to conduct a formal assessment of statistics produced by the Homes and Communities Agency and the Tenant Services Authority against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Under section 16 of the Act, the Minister, as the appropriate authority, is required to provide the Statistics Authority with a statement as to whether he intends to make a request for such an assessment. No reply has yet been received.

There has also been recent related correspondence on other matters concerning housing statistics.

Correspondence is published on the Authority's website at:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/index.html>

Meetings

Mr Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will publish the minutes and meetings of his Transparency Board since May 2010; and if he will make a statement. [98790]

Mr Maude: Appropriately all minutes of meetings held by the Transparency Board since May 2010 have already been published and are available to view on:

www.data.gov.uk

Public Appointments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office which Government Departments have appointed champions or czars; and what the (a) role and (b) terms and conditions of service are of each. [99070]

Mr Maude: The information requested is not held centrally.

Public Sector: Pay

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many (a) civil servants and (b) other people whose salaries are paid from the public purse in Shropshire earned a basic salary greater than £100,000 per annum in the latest period for which figures are available. [99191]

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:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many (a) civil servants and (b) other people whose salaries are paid from the public purse in Shropshire earn a basic salary greater than £100,000 per annum in the latest period for which figures are available. (99191)

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), carried out in April each year, is the most comprehensive source of earnings information in the United Kingdom. It is a sample of all employees who are members of pay-as-you-earn (PAYE) schemes.

Annual levels of earnings are estimated from the ASHE, and are provided for all employees on adult rates of pay, who have been in the same job for more than a year. ASHE methodology cannot be used to provide estimates of the numbers of employees whose earnings are more than a specific amount, but can be used to provide estimates of percentage of employees in that category.

Reliable statistics cannot be produced from ASHE on the number of public sector employees with gross annual earnings greater than £100,000 in Shropshire due to the relatively small sample size of public sector employees at this geographical breakdown.

The Annual Civil Service Employment Survey provides information on earnings and employment in the Civil Service. This survey shows that there were no Civil Servants in Shropshire earning above £100,000 in March 2011.

Senior Civil Servants: Pay

Mr Nicholas Brown: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what representations he has received from organisations representing the collective interests of civil servants on the use of tax avoidance schemes and personal service companies by senior civil servants.

[98485]

Mr Maude: I have received no such representations.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Africa

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will commission research into the potential effects of illegal fishing in African waters on levels of piracy in that region;

[98365]

(2) if he will take steps at (a) EU and (b) international level to assess the scale and source of illegal fishing in African waters.

[98366]

Mr Bellingham: There are already a number of international studies which are relevant to these questions, such as the UN Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of Somali natural resources and waters, published on 25 October 2011, and the Department for International Development commissioned report entitled the Review of Impacts of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing on Development Countries. A recent UN scoping mission to West Africa also investigated the impact of illegal fishing off the coast of West Africa. The British Government support the publishing of such studies, as they provide an insight into the scale and source of illegal fishing in African waters, and into the impact of this on levels of piracy. At this moment in time, we do not consider additional research into this matter to be necessary.

Bahrain

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the Bahraini Government's policies towards non-governmental organisations.

[99557]

Alistair Burt: I receive regular reports about the situation in Bahrain from our embassy in Manama and officials in London are in regular contact with non-governmental organisations concerned about the situation there. We continue to urge the Bahraini Government to ensure they adhere to international standards on human rights and that access to the country is freely allowed where there is no legitimate reason to refuse entry.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Bahraini Government on non-governmental organisations in Bahrain. [99558]

Alistair Burt: I have recently spoken to both the Deputy Prime Minister of Bahrain and the Bahraini ambassador in London about a wide range of issues including the implementation of reforms and offering our assistance where appropriate. Our ambassador in Manama specifically raised the situation of non-governmental organisations with the Bahraini Foreign Minister during his meeting on 8 March.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on steps taken by the Bahraini Government to act upon the recommendations proposed by the Bassiouni Commission on 23 November 2011. [99559]

Alistair Burt: I receive regular updates on the progress the Bahraini Government have made since the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry report was published. We are encouraged by the steps that have been taken so far. In an act of transparency, the Bahraini Government have established a website:

www.govactions.bh

so that developments can be tracked against each recommendation. In accepting the Commission's findings, the King undertook to act fully on their recommendations and we will hold the Government to this.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with (a) the Bahraini Government, (b) non-governmental organisations in Bahrain, (c) his international counterparts and (d) others on the recommendations proposed by the Bassiouni Commission on 23 November 2011. [99560]

Alistair Burt: We frequently discuss the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry report with the Bahraini Government, non-governmental organisations and other international partners. The discussion between the Prime Minister and the King during his visit to the UK in December 2011 focused on the King's plans to implement reforms in the country. I also held similar talks during my visit to Bahrain that same week with various members of the Bahraini Government and also with members of the opposition and Bahraini civil society.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Bahraini government on the recommendations proposed by the Bassiouni Commission on 23 November 2011. [99561]

Alistair Burt: I raised the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry report (BICI) during my visit to Bahrain in December in meetings with the Crown Prince, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and other key interlocutors. I have subsequently talked to the Deputy Prime Minister on a number of occasions to discuss latest developments and progress made. I welcomed the Bahraini Government's commitment to implement

the report's recommendations and urged them to do so rapidly and in full. I will continue to discuss the BICI report with the Bahraini Government at every opportunity.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received on reports that Bahrain is in violation of a number of articles of international conventions relating to human rights; what assessment he has made of such reports; and what assessment he has made of the effect of such reports on the political and economic ties between the UK and Bahrain. [99562]

Alistair Burt: We continue to raise the importance of Bahrain meeting all its human right obligations and our ambassadors in Manama and Geneva have raised this on many occasions.

As a long-standing ally, we will continue to pursue a policy of direct and frank engagement with Bahrain to achieve our shared goal of long-term stability in the kingdom.

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with (a) his Bahraini counterpart, (b) the Government of Saudi Arabia and (c) others on equality between (i) men and women and (ii) Sunnis and Shias in Bahrain. [99563]

Alistair Burt: We continue to raise a variety of human rights issues with the Bahraini authorities, including gender equality and religious discrimination. Our embassy in Riyadh has also discussed the situation in Bahrain with the Saudi Arabian Government.

British Overseas Territories

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials from his Department have visited (a) St Helena and (b) Tristan da Cunha in the last 12 months. [99237]

Mr Bellingham: British Government officials regularly visit St Helena and Tristan da Cunha. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Director for the Overseas Territories visited St Helena in May 2011.

Colombia

Robert Flello: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which peace and civil society organisations ministerial colleagues will be meeting on the forthcoming visit to Colombia. [99327]

Mr Jeremy Browne: During my visit to Colombia, I am due to meet representatives from Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children, Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear Restrepo (CAJAR) and Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado (MOVICE) to hear their current appraisal of the Santos government and the human rights situation in Colombia.

Departmental Ethnic Minority Staff

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department were from an ethnic minority in March (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; and if he will make a statement. [98872]

Mr Bellingham: 86% of senior civil servants in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have supplied information about their ethnicity. Based on this information, the proportion of senior civil servants in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) who are from an ethnic minority background was as follows:

3.3% on 1 March 2010

3.5% on 1 March 2011

4.0% on 1 March 2012

Egypt

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether (a) Ministers and (b) officials of his Department have had discussions with (i) the United States Department of State, (ii) the US Ambassador to the UK, (iii) other American officials, (iv) the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, (v) the Egyptian Ambassador to the UK and (vi) other Egyptian officials on Youssef Boutros-Ghali; [99027]

(2) whether he has received representations from (a) the United States Department of State, (b) the Ambassador of the United States of America to the UK, (c) other American officials, (d) the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, (e) the Egyptian Ambassador to the UK and (f) other Egyptian officials concerning Youssef Boutros-Ghali. [98028]

Alistair Burt: The Government do not comment on discussions or representations in relation to particular individuals.

EU Accession

Stephen Phillips: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the progress made by Bulgaria and Romania against post-EU accession benchmarks. [98370]

Mr Lidington: The latest interim reports on Bulgarian and Romanian progress were published on 8 February 2012. The report on Romania was broadly positive, noting an increase in the number of convictions for high level corruption, and the adoption of a code of conduct for conflicts of interests in the management of public funds. However, the report pointed to the need to improve the record on recovering proceeds of crime.

The reports noted that the Bulgarian Specialised Court and Prosecution Office on Organised Crime were now up and running, and the Commission for Identification of forfeiture of criminal assets was beginning to deliver significant results. But much more needs to be done, for example in improving transparency in the Supreme Court, and improving accountability within the judiciary and investigative authorities. The full text of the reports can be accessed at:

http://ec.europa.eu/cvm/progress_reports_en.htm

The Council Conclusions adopted by the General Affairs Council on 28 February 2012 reflected the UK's views, and represented a fair assessment of the reports:

http://ec.europa.eu/cvm/key_documents_en.htm

Guatemala

Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on death threats and aggression against members of the Verapaz Union of Peasant Farmer Associations and the communities it supports in Guatemala. [99143]

Mr Jeremy Browne: Our embassy in Guatemala City monitors closely the human rights situation in the country. Our staff there are in contact with both the Verapaz Union and Peace Brigades International (PBI), a non governmental organisation, which works closely with the Verapaz Union about threats made to their members. We also work with PBI in the UK on this issue, as well as with the EU. We welcome the new Guatemalan Government's commitment to upholding human rights. We will continue to monitor the human rights situation in Guatemala and to raise concerns with the Guatemalan Government. We most recently did so on 7 March with Guatemala's Attorney-General, Claudia Paz y Paz.

Lesotho

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials in his Department are responsible for Lesotho; and where they are located. [99409]

Mr Bellingham: There is one London-based desk officer whose responsibilities include covering Lesotho. The non-resident high commissioner and deputy high commissioner to Lesotho are based in the British high commission in Pretoria. Other officials in Pretoria cover Lesotho as necessary.

Libya

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what recent discussions he has had with the Libyan authorities on the release of British journalists held in that country; [98694]

(2) what steps he is taking to secure the release of British journalists held in Libya. [98695]

Alistair Burt: Our ambassador to Tripoli has consistently raised the case with the Libyan authorities at a senior level. We have sought, and received, assurances that the two British nationals will be handed over to the appropriate authorities as soon as possible and that they should be able to seek legal representation should any charges be brought against them. We hope the handover will happen soon and will continue to press the authorities as necessary. Consular staff continue to provide assistance to the detainees and their families, in line with our policy.

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that those responsible for the attacks on a British war cemetery in Libya are brought to justice. [98697]

Alistair Burt: British embassy officials immediately visited the sites and raised this issue with the Libyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Benghazi Chief of Police. Our ambassador also raised our concerns with the Deputy Foreign Minister, the Minister of Interior and the offices of National Transitional Council Chairman Abdul Jalil and Prime Minister al-Kib. In response to these incidents, Foreign Minister Khayyal and Chairman Abdul-Jalil made statements condemning the attacks, and the Transitional Government have published a statement on their official website, describing the damage as "unethical, irresponsible and criminal" and making clear that the Libyan Government "severely denounces such shameful acts and vows to find and prosecute the perpetrators according to Libyan law". The Libyan authorities have instructed the police to make regular patrols to ensure no further attacks occur. We will continue to reiterate to the Libyan authorities the importance of a thorough investigation to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the development of new political parties in Libya; what support his Department is providing to such parties; and if he will make a statement. [99122]

Alistair Burt: After over 40 years without democratic elections or political parties, the development of new parties is still at an early stage, although the enthusiasm for forming groups is high. We are currently funding a number of projects aimed at encouraging women and youth engagement in the political process and are providing a contribution to the UN's electoral assistance programme, which will begin to address some of the issues the Libyans face in holding elections to a National Congress. Full legislative elections are not scheduled until 2013. We will be considering support in this area as part of our programme for assistance in the coming financial year.

Lockerbie: Bombings

Mr MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that the Lord Advocate's letter to the Libyan government on Lockerbie is acted upon. [98285]

Alistair Burt: Our ambassador in Libya has encouraged the Libyan authorities to respond to the Lord Advocate's letter requesting Libyan co-operation with the Lockerbie investigation under the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty between the UK and Libya when he handed the letter over to Libyan Foreign Minister on 21 February. The Government will continue to press the Libyan Transitional Government for a positive and timely response.

Mr MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ask the Libyan Government to publish all documents, letters, records of meetings and other material relating to the Lockerbie bombing. [98286]

Alistair Burt: The Government will continue to urge the Libyan Transitional Government to co-operate with the Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary's open investigation into the Lockerbie bombing, including allowing access to information and individuals relevant to their investigation.

Macedonia

Karen Lumley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment his Department has made of Macedonia's prospects for NATO membership. [98412]

Mr Lidington: The UK is a strong supporter of Macedonia's ambitions to join NATO. We welcome the progress they have made through the Membership Action Plan process and we hope to welcome the country into the alliance as soon as possible. Macedonia is a valued participant in NATO-led operations in Afghanistan. The NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 concluded that Macedonia would be invited to join as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue with Greece had been found. This position was reaffirmed at the Lisbon summit in 2010, and in the NATO Foreign Ministers Communiqué of December 2011.

Maldives

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK nationals requested consular support in the Maldives in the last month. [99206]

Alistair Burt: Between 7 February and 7 March 2012, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office provided consular assistance or advice in relation to 16 British nationals in the Maldives.

North Korea

Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the government of North Korea on (a) human rights and humanitarian concerns, (b) access to that country for the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in North Korea since the death of Kim Jong-il and (c) access to that country for the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organisations. [98902]

Mr Jeremy Browne: Since the death of Kim Jong-il, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), has not had discussions with the Government of North Korea on the issues of human rights and humanitarian concerns, access for the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in North Korea, and access for the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organisations. However, I met the North Korean ambassador to London on 29 February 2012 and raised our concerns on human rights. I also spoke at the Westminster Hall debate on human rights in North Korea in January and made the British Government view on North Korea's human rights record quite clear. We brought this debate to the attention of the North Korean Government.

In March, Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials raised the question of access to North Korea for the UN Special Rapporteur with the North Korean ambassador to London. While we have not recently raised the specific issue of access for the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organisations, we will look for opportunities to do so.

We also remain in close contact with aid organisations operating in North Korea, including the World Food Programme, a Food and Agriculture Organisation.

Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the level of religious freedom in North Korea. [98904]

Mr Jeremy Browne: I met the North Korean ambassador to the UK on 29 February and made clear to him that the UK remains very concerned about the humanitarian and human rights situation, including religious freedom in North Korea. This is why the UK regularly co-sponsors an annual North Korea-specific resolution in the UN General Assembly on human rights. It is also why we welcomed last month's report to the UN Human Rights Council by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in North Korea. We continue to urge North Korea to allow the UN Special Rapporteur to North Korea to be allowed to visit the country to assess the situation.

Palestinians: Prisoners

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise with the Israeli Government the detention of Palestinian prisoners without charge or trial. [99105]

Alistair Burt: We continue to encourage the Israeli authorities to comply with their obligations under international law, including in their policies on detention and the treatment of Palestinian prisoners.

I raised Israel's extensive use of administrative detention most recently with the Israeli ambassador to London on 23 February and the Deputy Israeli Foreign Minister on 27 February. Our officials in Tel Aviv also regularly raise concerns with the Israeli authorities over the use of administrative detention and the treatment of prisoners.

Serbia: Ghana

Mr MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with the Commonwealth Secretariat on the expulsion by Serbia of the ambassador of Ghana. [98289]

Mr Lidington: Despite media reporting regarding the absence of the Ghanaian ambassador to Serbia, I am not aware of official statements from either Government clarifying the situation. I have held no discussions with the Commonwealth Secretariat on the issue.

Serbia: Kosovo

Stephen Phillips: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage Serbia to improve relations and co-operation with Kosovo. [98361]

Mr Lidington: Ministers and officials use every opportunity to encourage Serbia to improve relations and co-operation with Kosovo. We do so in our bilateral meetings, by repeatedly reiterating our strong support for the EU-facilitated dialogue between the two countries,

and by ensuring that the EU conditionality which requires potential EU candidates to ensure good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, is upheld. We also encourage Serbia to demonstrate a constructive and responsible approach to relations with Kosovo in regional and international fora.

Karen Lumley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of recent developments in negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo and the effect of those developments on Serbia's bid for EU candidate status. [98413]

Mr Lidington: A meeting of the EU-facilitated dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo took place from 22-24 February 2012 where agreement was reached on Kosovo's participation in regional forums and a technical protocol concluded on implementation of an agreement on management of the border between Kosovo and Serbia. These developments are very welcome for the benefits they will bring to citizens, stability in the region, and in enabling both countries to realise their EU ambitions.

The 28 February 2012 General Affairs Council assessed that Serbia had met the necessary conditions on Kosovo—part of which included reaching the agreements on regional forums and border management—and recommended granting EU candidate status to Serbia. The 1-2 March 2012 European Council confirmed this decision. We welcomed this outcome and hope Serbia will continue to make further progress in its relations with Kosovo.

Sri Lanka

Mr Virendra Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many unsuccessful asylum seekers have been forcibly removed to Sri Lanka other than by charter flight since May 2009. [97532]

Damian Green: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Home Department.

It is not possible to say what stage in the asylum process the nationals of any country have reached at the time of their removal, including whether their claim has failed at that point and are failed asylum seekers, because those departing voluntarily can do so at any stage without notifying the UK Border Agency. For this reason, the answer can provide only the number of asylum cases removed.

Central management systems do not distinguish the number of enforced removals from the UK from the number of voluntary departures after enforcement action had been initiated.

It is not possible to identify from the available published data how many removals were made by means other than charter flights.

The following table shows the total number of enforced removals and notified voluntary departures of asylum cases from the UK to Sri Lanka from May 2009 to December 2011.

Enforced removals and notified voluntary departures^{1, 2, 3} of asylum cases⁴; to Sri Lanka⁵, May 2009 to December 2011

	Number of departures		
	May 2009 to December 2009	2010 ⁶	2011 ⁶
Enforced removals and notified voluntary departures to Sri Lanka	23	247	413

¹ Due to a reclassification of removal categories, figures include asylum removals performed by UK Border Agency officers using in-country powers of removal and a small number of cases dealt with at juxtaposed controls.

² Figures include people leaving under facilitated return schemes.

³ Removals and voluntary departures recorded on the system as at the dates on which the data extracts were taken.

⁴ Figures include dependants.

⁵ Destination as recorded on source database.

⁶ Provisional figures. Figures will under record due to data cleansing and data matching exercises that take place after the extracts are taken.

The Home Office publishes quarterly and annual statistics on the number of persons removed or departed voluntarily from the UK within Immigration Statistics. The data on removals and voluntary departures are available in the latest release, Immigration Statistics: October—December 2011, tables rv.01 to rv.08, from the Library of the House and from the Home Office Science, research and statistics web pages at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/science-research/research-statistics/migration/migration-statistics/>

St Helena

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his South African counterpart on the provision of broadband internet connection in St Helena. [99209]

Mr Bellingham: The provision of telecommunications is the responsibility of the St Helena Government. We are aware that a South African company has set out plans to lay a fibre-optic cable connecting South Africa and Brazil and that the Government of St Helena has had initial discussions with them about the feasibility and costs of a link to St Helena. If the developers proceed with the project then a full economic assessment would be needed to consider the extent of the economic and social benefits that such a link could bring to St Helena.

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to increase the provision of broadband internet connection in St Helena; and if he will make a statement. [99210]

Mr Bellingham: The provision of telecommunications within the Overseas Territories is an area of devolved responsibility. On St Helena, it is the responsibility of the St Helena Government. In 2010, support from the British Government funded an increase in bandwidth to enable students and teachers at the secondary school in St Helena, Prince Andrew High School, adult students at the Adult and Vocational Education College, and the hospital to benefit from faster internet speeds and distance-learning.

Turkey

Mark Pritchard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss with his Turkish counterpart the number of journalists being held in Turkish prisons without charge. [98741]

Mr Lidington: The UK Government share the concerns expressed by the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe and others over issues surrounding freedom of expression in Turkey.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), and I discussed this issue with Egemen Bagis, the Turkish Minister for European Union Affairs at a meeting on 1 March 2012.

We welcome the Turkish Government's recent proposals on judicial reform as an important step towards improving freedom of expression and are encouraged by the fact that further reforms are planned. Along with our EU partners, we will continue to press for further progress on this urgent issue.

Uganda

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the arrest of Joseph Kony on a warrant issued by the International Criminal Court in 2005; and if he will make a statement. [99431]

Mr Bellingham: The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is an issue of serious concern and we receive regular representations about the need to arrest Joseph Kony so that he can face justice in the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The British Government condemn in the strongest possible terms the atrocities carried out by the LRA. Although much reduced in numbers, it remains an unprincipled and violent threat to civilians and regional security. Britain is a strong supporter of the ICC, and reminds all states of their obligations to co-operate with the Court, in particular on the issue of enforcement of the Court's arrest warrant. Those currently fugitive from the ICC, such as Kony, must be reminded that they will face justice.

Western Sahara

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on those administering power in the (a) unoccupied zone and (b) occupied Western Sahara. [99106]

Alistair Burt: Morocco exercises de facto control over part of the territory of Western Sahara. The UK does not regard any country as administering de facto that part of the territory of Western Sahara not under Moroccan control.

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Government recognises a de jure Administering Power in Western Sahara. [99163]

Alistair Burt: The British Government do not recognise a de jure Administering Power in Western Sahara.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Action for Employment: Fraud

Mr Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he was made personally aware of the allegations of fraud at A4e. [97617]

Chris Grayling: Ministers were advised of these allegations in autumn 2011.

Mr Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when (a) the Minister for Employment and (b) senior officials of his Department were made aware of the allegations of fraud at A4e. [97618]

Chris Grayling: Senior officials were formally notified of the fraud allegations in February 2011. Ministers were advised of these allegations in autumn 2011.

Carer's Allowance: North West

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Denton and Reddish constituency were in receipt of carer's allowance in (a) 2008-09, (b) 2009-10 and (c) 2010-11. [98633]

Maria Miller: The number of recipients of carer's allowance in Denton and Reddish parliamentary constituency is shown as follows:

<i>As at May each year</i>	<i>Total</i>
2011	830
2010	760
2009	800

Notes:

- Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
- Totals show the number of people in receipt of an allowance, and excluded people with entitlement where the payment has been suspended for example if they are in hospital.
- These figures are published on the Department's Tabulation Tool at:

http://83.244.183.180/100pc/ca/tabtool_ca.html

Source:

DWP Information, Governance and Security Directorate Work and Pension Longitudinal Study 100% data.

Children: Maintenance

Mr Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of child support cases that are dealt with manually. [98255]

Maria Miller: The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission is responsible for the child maintenance system. I have asked the child maintenance commissioner to write to the right hon. Member with the information requested and I have seen the response.

Letter from Noel Shanahan:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission, the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Child Maintenance Commissioner.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate he has made of the number of child support cases that are being dealt with manually. [98255]

A number of Child Support Agency cases are maintained on an electronic 'Clerical Case Database' due to technical issues that mean they cannot be processed on the main computer system.

Information about the Clerical Case Database is published on page 13 of the Quarterly Summary of Statistics. The latest version is available at the following link:

http://www.childmaintenance.org/en/pdf/qss/QSS_dec_2011.pdf

which shows the number of cases from the current computer system being managed off system has increased from 101,800 in September 2011 to 103,000 in December 2011.

Whilst the increase in the number of cases which become stuck and need costly handling off system has slowed, the problems of maintaining the two existing Child Support Agency schemes, particularly those relating to the current IT system introduced in 2003, are well documented.

Consequently, we propose to move to a new scheme, replacing the two current schemes and using income data from HM Revenue and Customs tax records, supported by a new IT system. The new scheme will support more efficient and effective administration of child maintenance for those parents who cannot reach their own family-based arrangements.

Departmental Consultants

Mr Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which consultancy reports were produced by (a) audit and (b) management consulting firms for his Department in (i) 2010 and (ii) 2011. [94481]

Chris Grayling: Reports are a key deliverable for all consultancy and audit projects commissioned by the Department.

In 2008-09 the Department spent £72.8 million on business consultancy services. This figure reduced to £18.2 million in 2010-11. This represents a total reduction of 76% compared to 2008-09 spending levels and spending continues to fall. In the first nine months of the current financial year the Department spent £3.51 million on business consultancy.

The Department monitors all expenditure to drive out inefficiencies and deliver value for money for the taxpayer.

Lists of all consultancy and audits projects commissioned in (i) 2010 before May, and (ii) from May 2011 onwards, are provided in the following tables:

Consultancy and audit projects awarded in 2010

<i>Contract title</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>Supplier</i>	<i>Value (£)</i>
Resource Management IT Healthcheck	1 January 2010	30 June 2011	NSG	90,000.00
Jobcentre Plus Financial Information System Capability Review	4 January 2010	12 February 2010	Capgemini	25,000.00
Olympic and Paralympic Legacy Plan	4 January 2010	12 March 2010	Atkins	25,000.00
Undertake a Review of Data Centre Migration Approach	11 January 2010	25 January 2010	PricewaterhouseCoopers	20,000
Organisational Design Project	18 January 2010	29 March 2010	Deloitte	543,000.00
Developing a Business Intelligence Operating Model	18 January 2010	31 March 2010	Deloitte	185,672.00
CIT Software Project Discovery Phase	28 January 2010	30 April 2010	Deloitte	195,528.00
Support to CIT Improvement Programmes	1 February 2010	31 March 2011	Tribal	760,000.00
Information Security Assurance Project	4 February 2010	31 March 2010	Atkins	49,950.00
Assistance with Resource Management System Improvement Plan Programme Phase 2	7 February 2010	30 April 2010	Atkins	72,690.00
Office for Disability Issues TrailBlazer Support—Housing	8 February 2010	15 July 2010	Sitra	51,300.00
Office for Disability Issues—Trailblazer Resource Allocation for Work Choice	8 February 2010	15 June 2010	In-Control	11,750.00
Call Off Framework Agreement for Right to Control TrailBlazers	8 February 2010	31 October 2010	PricewaterhouseCoopers	97,902.00
Commercial Assurance—Automated Delivery Service—Jobseekers Allowance	10 February 2010	5 March 2010	Atkins	47,300.00
Corporate Services Division Cost Optimisation Programme Network and Telephony	12 February 2010	11 April 2010	Xantus	94,370.00
National Registration Authority Audit (tScheme Audit)	1 March 2010	31 March 2010	KPMG	10,727.00
Shingo Prize Pilot	1 March 2010	31 March 2010	The Manufacturing Institute—TMI Pract. Services	11,000
Business Control Strategic Improvements	14 April 2010	30 April 2011	PricewaterhouseCoopers	750,000.00
A review of DWP Vendor Management Activities	19 April 2010	1 June 2010	Procurement Excellence	52,250.00
Assistance with Resource Management System Improvement Plan Programme Phase 3	4 May 2010	30 July 2010	Atkins	94,050.00
Pension Reform Delivery Programme Closure Activity	4 May 2010	31 December 2010	PricewaterhouseCoopers	100,000.00
Benchmarking Hosting Services	10 May 2010	4 June 2010	Gartner	23,456.00
Application Delivery Centre (ADC) Validation Services Requests	7 June 2010	31 March 2011	Atkins	97,500.00
Additional Modelling Support for Dynamic Benefits	1 July 2010	21 July 2010	Oliver Wyman	19,500.00
Strategic Financial Consultancy Support to Help deliver Work Programme	12 July 2010	31 May 2011	KPMG	362,000.00

Consultancy and audit projects awarded in 2010

<i>Contract title</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>Supplier</i>	<i>Value (£)</i>
Shared Services Resource Management Contract (RMOC) Benchmarking	26 August 2010	9 September 2010	Compass	15,000.00
Final assurance of DWP IT Strategy	23 September 2010	1 October 2010	Capgemini	20,000
Research into the Capacity of the Health Care Professional Market	21 October 2010	18 November 2011	Deloitte	48,678.00
Commercial support to the Work Programme	22 October 2010	31 March 2012	Richard Aitken-Davies	45,000.00
Support to DWP Finance and Commercial Function (Organisation Design Review)	22 December 2010	31 January 2011	PricewaterhouseCoopers	20,000.00
Managing the Risk of Financial Loss: Building Capability	24 December 2010	30 June 2011	KPMG	337,000.00

Consultancy and audit projects awarded in 2011

<i>Contract title</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>Supplier</i>	<i>Value (£)</i>
Support to DWP CJT Cost Reduction Programme	4 January 2011	31 May 2012	Bramble	1,065,000.00
DWP Shared Services Delivery Model Options appraisal	24 January 2011	31 March 2011	Deloitte	225,000.00
Benchmarking of DWP Shared Services	9 February 2011	31 March 2011	PricewaterhouseCoopers	19,000.00
Universal Credit Delivery Model Assessment Phase 2	21 March 2011	30 April 2011	McKinsey and Partners	350,000.00
Universal Credit Strategic Support	21 March 2011	30 November 2011	Capgemini	505,000
Review of Transforming Letters Project	30 March 2011	19 April 2011	Deloitte	19,550
Application Delivery Project Independent Market Assessment	8 April 2011	22 April 2011	Compass	19,000
Universal Credit End to End Technical Review	11 April 2011	3 May 2011	IBM	49,240.00
Digital Customer Total Experience Design Requirement	16 May 2011	31 August 2011	Deloitte	16,667.00
Universal Credit Supplier Workshop-Facilitation	18 May 2011	19 May 2011	Xantus	11,399.15
Consultancy Support to develop Flexible New Deal Exit Strategy	19 July 2011	31 August 2011	KPMG	12,000.00
Support of CIT Improvement Initiatives	22 August 2011	22 April 2012	KPMG	250,000.00
Risk Assurance Division Strategic Partner	1 September 2011	31 August 2013	PricewaterhouseCoopers	1,000,000
Benchmarking of the HPES Hosting Contract	1 September 2011	1 December 2011	Compass	172,105.00
Compensating People with Occupational Mesothelioma	24 October 2011	30 November 2011	Deloitte	25,616.00
Specialist tScheme Annual Audit of DWPs National Registration Authority	27 October 2011	31 January 2012	KPMG	33,000

Employment and Support Allowance

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he made of the number of people in receipt of employment and support allowance that would be referred to the Work programme prior to the scheme's commencement; what the actual level of referrals has been since the scheme's commencement; and what assessment he has made of the causes of any difference between these figures. [98885]

Chris Grayling: The forecast volumes for mandatory employment and support allowance (ESA) payment groups over SR10 was 373,000 at the ITT stage and was 373,000 in the latest review of forecasts, published in December 2011.

Between 1 June 2011 to the end of October 2011, there were 20,220 ESA referrals to the Work programme.

A full breakdown of Work programme data can be found at the DWP Tabulation Tool:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=wp>

Two main reasons for the change are:

A reduction in the number of ESA ex IB claimants found in the mandatory referral group, this is due to more of the ESA ex IB claimants having a longer prognosis and more claimants being found fit for work.

Fewer ESA claimants have volunteered for the Work programme than we originally expected.

We have made a series of changes to the programme to ensure more ESA claimants have access to the programme.

From October 2011 we increased the prognosis period from 3-6 months for mandatory referrals which will ensure more of claimants in the Work Related Activity Group are referred on a mandatory basis. From October 2011 we introduced information sessions to allow ESA claimants who are eligible to volunteer for Work programme to make an informed choice whether the Work programme is the right option for them.

Amended estimates for ESA referrals to the Work programme and the latest view on all volumes has been placed in the House of Commons Library

<http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2012/DEP2012-0132.doc>

These estimates will be updated on a regular basis.

Employment and Support Allowance: Complaints

Stella Creasy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints he has received relating to the performance of the employment and support allowance benefit delivery centre in each year since 2008; and if he will make a statement. [98907]

Chris Grayling: Jobcentre Plus does not have specific benefit delivery centres for delivering employment support allowance (ESA).

ESA was introduced in October 2008 but complaints data specific to ESA was only collected separately in the benefit centre directorate from November 2010.

The following table shows the total number of complaints recorded by Jobcentre Plus relating to employment support allowance since November 2010 to 7 March 2012.

	November 2010 to March 2011	April 2011 to 7 March 2012
ESA complaints recorded in benefit centre directorate	1,854	1,322

Employment Schemes

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which Work programme contractors are operating in each area of the UK; and what the local unemployment rate in each such area was (a) when the contract was signed and (b) in the latest period for which figures are available. [98630]

Chris Grayling: Information on the prime Work programme contractors by contract package area is available here:

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/wp-prime-supplier-contact-details.pdf>

Unemployment rates at local level using the International Labour Organisation (ILO) based measure are not currently available for the period covered by the operation of the Work programme.

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he next plans to publish data on the length of benefit claims for people participating in the (a) work experience and (b) mandatory work activity scheme. [99456]

Chris Grayling: I have asked statisticians in the Department to look at publishing further data on people participating in work experience and the mandatory work activity scheme.

Employment Schemes: Fraud

Mr Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many allegations of fraud relating to the Work programme have been (a) reported and (b) investigated; and how many such investigations have resulted in a prosecution. [98524]

Chris Grayling: No allegations of fraud relating to the Work programme have been reported, investigated or resulted in a prosecution.

Mr Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff in his Department are working on the investigation of reports of fraud relating to the Work programme. [98526]

Chris Grayling: As no allegations of fraud relating to the Work programme have been reported no internal investigations staff are working on the investigation of fraud relating to the Work programme.

Mr Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff in his Department are working on the investigation of fraud relating to contract management arrangements with Work programme providers. [98527]

Chris Grayling: As no allegations of fraud relating to contract management arrangements with Work programme providers have been reported no internal investigations staff are working on the investigation of fraud relating to the Work programme.

Jobcentre Plus

Stella Creasy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost of administration complaints relating to the performance of Jobcentre Plus was in each year since 2008; and if he will make a statement. [98905]

Chris Grayling: 2011-12 is the first year for which the cost of administering complaint handling and resolutions has been separately identifiable.

The costs for complaint handling and resolution activity in 2011-12 are £7.1 million for the 10 months ending 31 January 2012.

Stella Creasy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints he has received relating to the performance of Jobcentre Plus offices in (a) Walthamstow constituency, (b) London and (c) nationally in each year since 2008; and if he will make a statement. [98906]

Chris Grayling: The following tables show the number of complaints recorded by Jobcentre Plus relating to (a) Walthamstow constituency (calendar year data only), (b) London and (c) nationally each year since 2008.

	Total complaints recorded			
	January to December:			
	2008	2009	2010	2011
Walthamstow constituency	n/a	332	136	165

n/a = Not available.

	Total complaints recorded			
	April 2011 to 7 March 2012			
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	
London region ¹	6,147	7,125	7,835	6,954
National	41,181	55,632	58,865	48,463

¹ Now London and Home Counties group.

Jobcentre Plus: Yorkshire and The Humber

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the success of the Archive Operations Management pilot in the Yorkshire and Humber region of Jobcentre Plus. [98380]

Chris Grayling: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave him on 5 March 2012, *Official Report*, column 561W.

Pensions

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of people entitled to pension credit who have not claimed it in (a) England, (b) Cumbria and (c) Westmorland and Lonsdale constituency in each of the last five years; and how many people have claimed pension credit in (i) England, (ii) Cumbria and (iii) Westmorland and Lonsdale constituency in each such year. [99359]

Steve Webb: Estimates of take-up are not sufficiently robust to present below the level of Great Britain. However the latest National Statistics on Income Related Benefits: Estimates of Take-Up produced by the Department for Work and Pensions were released on 23 February 2012.

The Income Related Benefits: Estimates of Take-up report covers Great Britain for the financial year 2009-10. It provides caseload and expenditure estimates of take-up for income support and employment and support allowance (income-related), pension credit, housing benefit (including local housing allowance), council tax benefit and jobseeker's allowance (income-based). The latest release updates

the statistics previously released on 10 June 2010. The figures are available online and can be found here:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=irb>

Figures for Great Britain covering the period 2005-06 to 2009-10 are as follows:

<i>Caseload take-up for pension credit, Great Britain, 2005-06 to 2009-10</i>		
	<i>Range of entitled non- recipients (thousand)</i>	<i>Take-up ranges (percentage)</i>
2005-06	1,170 : 1,740	60 : 69
2006-07	1,180 : 1,730	60 : 69
2007-08	980 : 1,530	63 : 73
2008-09	910 : 1,520	63 : 74
2009-10	1,210 : 1,580	62 : 68

The break in the time series between 2006-07 and 2007-08, shown in the table above, represents the change in the modelling approach as described in the latest report: Chapter 7: Revisions in the latest report.

Details of the take-up methodology and a worked example of how take-up is calculated can be found in Chapter 8: Methods and Data Sources and the Appendix: Construction of take-up ranges, of the latest report.

The information relating to the number of people who have claimed pension credit is in the following table.

<i>As at May each year</i>	<i>England</i>		<i>Cumbria</i>		<i>Westmorland and Lonsdale parliamentary constituency</i>	
	<i>Number of household recipients</i>	<i>Number of beneficiaries</i>	<i>Number of household recipients</i>	<i>Number of beneficiaries</i>	<i>Number of household recipients</i>	<i>Number of beneficiaries</i>
2007	2,286,440	2,793,500	22,320	26,990	3,220	3,880
2008	2,275,670	2,780,470	22,140	26,790	3,190	3,820
2009	2,286,560	2,799,780	22,220	26,940	3,150	3,790
2010	2,292,430	2,811,540	22,060	26,790	3,030	3,650
2011	2,245,190	2,751,280	21,470	26,020	2,970	3,550

Notes:

- Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
- Pension credit household recipients are those people who claim pension credit either for themselves or on behalf of themselves and a partner.
- Beneficiaries represent the number of people that pension credit helps and is the number of claimants in addition to the number of partners for whom they are also claiming.
- Constituencies used for May 2010 and 2011 are for the Westminster Parliament of May 2010. Prior to this, the constituencies used are for May 2005.
- The age at which women reach state pension age will gradually increase from 60 to 65 between April 2010 and April 2020.
- These figures are published on NOMIS at: www.nomisweb.co.uk

Source:

DWP Information Directorate: Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study.

Pensions: Females

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the potential effect on expenditure on state pensions of the Government's proposal that women born in 1951 should not be eligible to receive a state pension until 2013. [99017]

Steve Webb: For women born in 1951 their state pension age remains as set by the Pension Act 1995 and is shown in the following table:

<i>Date of birth</i>	<i>Date state pension age reached</i>
1 January 1951 to 5 January 1951	6 September 2011
6 January 1951 to 5 February 1951	6 November 2011

<i>Date of birth</i>	<i>Date state pension age reached</i>
6 February 1951 to 5 March 1951	6 January 2012
6 March 1951 to 5 April 1951	6 March 2012
6 April 1951 to 5 May 1951	6 May 2012
6 May 1951 to 5 June 1951	6 July 2012
6 June 1951 to 5 July 1951	6 September 2012
6 July 1951 to 5 August 1951	6 November 2012
6 August 1951 to 5 September 1951	6 January 2013
6 September 1951 to 5 October 1951	6 March 2013
6 October 1951 to 5 November 1951	6 May 2013
6 November 1951 to 5 December 1951	6 July 2013
6 December 1951 to 31 December 1951	6 September 2013

The Pensions Act 1995 included provision to increase the state pension age for women born between 6 April 1950 and 5 April 1955 to provide equal treatment

between men and women in compliance with the UK's obligations under EC Directive 79/7 on equal treatment between the sexes in social security matters.

The White Paper "Equality in State Pension Age" (Cmnd 2420) published in December 1993 provided estimates of the total costs and savings from equalisation of state pension ages, but not details for individual years by birth cohorts. Paragraph 1.11 on public expenditure states:

"expenditure on state pensions is set to double in real terms from just under £30 billion now to almost £60 billion by 2025. Equalising at men's pension age will save just under £5 billion from that total."

However, given the passage of time since publication of the White Paper and the subsequent changes to the state pension system the figures quoted in 1993 do not accurately reflect the current fiscal effect of the changes.

Personal Independence Payment

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which organisations are represented on his Department's Personal Independence Payment Implementation Development Group; and if he will make a statement. [98334]

Maria Miller: The Personal Independence Payment Implementation Development Group has a wide range of members, representing disabled people of all ages with a broad range of disabilities and impairments.

The group includes the following listed members, who have agreed to us using their name in DWP publications (although their involvement does not imply endorsement of personal independence payment's introduction, nor endorsement of specific features of the policy/delivery arrangements).

The Personal Independence Payment Implementation Development Group plays a critical role in informing the design and development of personal independence payment delivery arrangements and reviewing progress made to date.

Royal British Legion
Independent Living Fund
Essex Coalition of Disabled People

Papworth Trust
Scope
Frontline Debt Advice
Rotherham Macmillan Welfare Rights
BRAME
Parkinson's UK
Royal College of Nursing
National Autistic Society
LGAs Social Security Advisers Group
Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People
Enfield Disability Action
Surrey Association for Visual Impairment
CLIC Sargent
Welfare and Financial Assessment joint team
Spinal Injuries Association
Mind-In-Enfield
Sense
Citizens Advice
Richmond Aid
Macmillan Cancer Support
Mind
Downs Syndrome Association
Royal Brompton Hospital Welfare Rights
The Children's Society
National Federation of the Blind
Limbless Association
National Deaf Children's Society
AdviceUK

Regulation

Gordon Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which regulations his Department repealed between 1 June 2011 and 31 January 2012; and if he will estimate the likely savings to the public purse in each case. [97361]

Chris Grayling: In response to the first part of the question, namely which regulations the Department for Work and Pensions has revoked between 1 June 2011 and 31 January 2012, these are given as follows:

<i>SI number</i>	<i>SI title</i>	<i>Date made</i>	<i>Date coming into force</i>	<i>Regulations wholly or partially revoked</i>
2011/1349	Employment and Support Allowance (Work-Related Activity) Regulations 2011	26 May 2011	1 June 2011	Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI 2008/794): Regs. 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 53 (revoked by Reg. 11) Reg. 58 (revoked by Reg. 14)
2011/1736	Housing Benefit (Amendment) Regulations 2011	14 July 2011	1 January 2012	Housing Benefit (Persons who have attained the qualifying age for state pension credit) Regulations 2006 (SI 2006/214): Reg. 2(1)—definition of "young individual" omitted (revoked by Reg. 3)
2011/1825	Offshore Installations (Safety Zones) (No 2) Order 2011	20 July 2011	22 August 2011	Offshore Installations (Safety Zones) Order 1997 (SI 1997/735): Entry for Linnhe Protective Structure including its co-ordinates in Schedule 1 omitted (revoked by Reg. 4).

<i>SI number</i>	<i>SI title</i>	<i>Date made</i>	<i>Date coming into force</i>	<i>Regulations wholly or partially revoked</i>
				Offshore Installations (Safety Zones) (No 5) Order 2007 (SI 2007/2198) Entry for Tristan North West Subsea Production Well (49/29b-J) including its co-ordinates in the Schedule omitted (revoked by Reg. 5)
2011/2428	Social Security (Work-focused Interviews for Lone Parents and Partners) (Amendment) Regulations 2011	6 October 2011	31 October 2011	Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI 2008/794): Reg. 2(1)—definition of “lone parent” omitted (revoked by Reg. 5(2)). Employment and Support Allowance (Work-Related Activity) Regulations 2011 (SI 2011/1349) : Reg. 2(1)—definition of “lone parent” omitted (revoked by Reg. 7(2)).
2011/2492	The Offshore Installations (Safety Zones) (No. 4) Order 2011	17 October 2011	14 November 2011	Offshore Installations (Safety Zones) (No 7) Order 2007 (SI 2007/3359) Entry for Shelley including its co-ordinates in the Schedule omitted (revoked by Reg. 3)

I am unable to provide a response to the second part of the question, namely the request for an estimate as to the likely savings to the public purse resulting from the revocations detailed in the table. This is because further research, at disproportionate cost to the Department, would need to be undertaken in order to assess the cost benefit of these revocations. However, I note that, in respect of the partial revocation to the Employment and Support Allowance (Work-Related Activity) Regulations 2011, SI 2011/1349 has a published Regulatory Impact Assessment.

Social Security Benefits

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many awards have been made under the Flexible Support Fund since April 2011. [99454]

Chris Grayling: The number of awards made by advisers from the flexible support fund to help remove customer barriers to work was 170,141 between April 2011 and the end of February 2012.

Payments are also made from the flexible support fund to provide support with incidental costs incurred as a result of attending training designed to obtain skills to improve employment prospects. Data are not available on the total number of these types of payments.

Social Security Benefits: Appeals

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people who were previously receiving incapacity benefit and have been reassessed for employment and support allowance have (a) received the assessment decision and not appealed, (b) received the assessment decision, appealed, and received an appeal decision, (c) received the assessment decision, appealed, and are awaiting an appeal or an appeal decision and (d) terminated their claim prior to a decision. [99065]

Chris Grayling: Data on claimants who were previously receiving incapacity benefit and have been reassessed for employment and support allowance is currently not available. However, the Department intends to publish some data on the outcomes of the reassessment process later this month.

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the (a) mean and (b) median waiting time was for a work capability assessment following the start of a claim or receipt of a reassessment letter for people (i) applying for employment and support allowance and (ii) being reassessed for employment and support allowance from the incapacity benefit caseload in the latest period for which figures are available. [99066]

Chris Grayling: The information requested is not currently available.

Universal Credit

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects all local authorities to participate in the (a) short-term and (b) long-term universal credit local authority pilots he has announced. [98225]

Chris Grayling: We aim to begin the short-term pilot activity during 2012 and will subsequently develop proposals for longer term pilots. In both cases these are likely to involve a small number of local authorities.

Welfare Reform Act 2012: Northern Ireland

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with the Minister for Social Development in the Northern Ireland Executive about the effect of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 on Northern Ireland. [98049]

Chris Grayling: Within the Department for Work and Pensions, Lord Freud is the Minister with lead responsibility for Welfare Reform. He is also the Minister with lead responsibility for liaison with Ministers from the Northern Ireland Executive.

Lord Freud had discussions with the Nelson McCausland, Minister for Social Development regarding welfare reforms on 31 August, 1 September 2011 and 1 March 2012.

The Minister for Disabled People, my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Maria Miller), has also had discussions with the Minister on various issues regarding welfare reform on 16 November 2011. Further ministerial meetings are planned following Royal Assent.

Department for Work and Pensions Officials are in permanent communication with their Northern Ireland counterparts on issues related to welfare reform.

Work Capability Assessment

Teresa Pearce: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have attended a scheduled work capability assessment but have not been seen by Atos even though they had an appointment in the latest period for which figures are available. [99445]

Chris Grayling: During February 2012 there were 5,353 claimants who had been scheduled to attend a work capability assessment (WCA) for employment and support allowance and, although they attended the Medical Assessment Centre, the WCA could not be conducted by Atos Healthcare.

Of this number 2,231 were for reasons which it has been contractually agreed to be outside the control of Atos Healthcare, these reasons are:

- being unfit on arrival to be assessed;
- arrived late (over 10 minutes);
- nurse being unable to continue with assessment;
- inappropriate for HCP to see;
- accommodation problems;
- unable to be seen for health and safety reasons;
- no prior notification of special needs;
- arrived on time but not prepared to wait for up to 30 minutes.

Work Capability Assessment: North West

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in (a) Denton and Reddish constituency and (b) the north west who have attended a work capability assessment have been deemed (i) fit and (ii) unfit for work in the last 12 months. [98632]

Chris Grayling: Data on the work capability assessment (WCA) outcomes for new employment and support allowance (ESA) claims for the Denton and Reddish constituency are not available. However, local authority data for the Tameside and Stockport local authority areas, which cover the Denton and Reddish constituency, are available and are given below.

The following table provides the outcomes at the initial WCA for all new ESA claims assessed between September 2010 and August 2011 for the geographical areas requested. These are the latest available data.

Geographical region	Entitled to employment and support allowance		Fit for work	Total
	Support group	Work related activity group		
Tameside LA	310	640	920	1,870
Stockport LA	270	700	1,150	2,120
North West	8,230	19,560	34,290	62,070

Claimants assigned to the work related activity group are considered capable of moving towards employment and are mandated to engage in work related activity to help them prepare for a return to work. Those with the most severe disabilities or health conditions which mean it would be unreasonable to expect them to engage in work-related activities are placed in the support group. These claimants receive a higher rate of benefit than work related activity group claimants and are not required to engage in any work-focussed interviews or work-related activity, although they may volunteer for support if they wish.

Note that the above figures do not include any claimants undergoing a WCA as part of the incapacity benefit reassessment process. The Department intends to publish data on the outcomes of the reassessment process in March 2012.

The Department regularly publishes official statistics on ESA and the WCA. The latest publication was released in January 2012 and can be found on the departmental website here

http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/index.php?page=esa_wca

The above information is taken from administrative data held by the Department and assessment data provided by Atos Healthcare.

All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10, and so columns may not sum to the totals shown.

Work Programme

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many referrals to the Work programme each job centre has made in each Jobcentre Plus district between June and October 2011. [99450]

Chris Grayling: I have deposited this information in the Library.

TREASURY

Credit: EU Law

Mr Umunna: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on which date a formal request for state aid approval was submitted to the European Commission in respect of his credit easing scheme; [98425]

(2) on what date his Department submitted the formal application to the European Commission for state aid approval in respect of his credit easing scheme. [99444]

Mr Hoban: There has been regular contact between HM Treasury and the Commission since November, with a view to designing a National Loan Guarantee Scheme (NLGS) compatible with state aid as quickly as

possible. This notification was formally submitted to the Commission on 10 February 2012. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced, the NLGS will launch before Budget 2012.

Departmental Ethnic Minority Staff

Mr Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department were from an ethnic minority in March (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; and if he will make a statement. [98864]

Miss Chloe Smith: The proportion of ethnic minority senior civil servants (SCS) in HM Treasury in the years requested:

March 2010: 4.7% of SCS (6 people)

March 2011: 5.5% of SCS (6 people)

March 2012: 7.2% of SCS (7 people)

The 2013 diversity target for the representation of ethnic minority employees in HM Treasury's SCS is 5.0%.

Entrust

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when he will next reassess the role and effectiveness of ENTRUST, the regulator of the Landfill Communities Fund; [98541]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with community groups and associations on the effectiveness of ENTRUST, the regulator of the Landfill Communities Fund; [98542]

(3) if he will take steps to improve the governance and accountability of ENTRUST, the regulator of the Landfill Communities Fund. [98543]

Miss Chloe Smith: HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is responsible for appointing the regulator of the Landfill Communities Fund (LCF) and overseeing its activities. HMRC monitors and assures that the regulator (ENTRUST) delivers its regulatory function effectively.

HMRC holds an annual forum for the LCF community where any issues regarding the scheme can be discussed. In addition, HMRC officials have met with environmental bodies to discuss regulation of the scheme.

The terms under which HMRC appoints the regulator, ENTRUST, are subject to periodic review. This allows HMRC to monitor and consider the regulator's role and effectiveness and agree any necessary improvements.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Stephen Phillips: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the extension of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's scope to cover southern and eastern Mediterranean regions. [98517]

Mr Hoban: Treasury Ministers and officials meet with a wide range of organisations and individuals in the public and private sectors as part of the usual policymaking process. As was the case with previous Administrations, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of all such discussions.

Excise Duties: Alcoholic Drinks

Mark Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the proportion of off-trade sales in financial years (a) 2008-09, (b) 2009-10 and (c) 2010-11 in respect of (i) spirits, (ii) wine and (iii) beer where UK alcohol duty has not been paid; [98170]

(2) what estimate he has made of the level of duty fraud on wine in (a) 2007, (b) 2008 and (c) 2010; and what plans are currently in place to tackle such fraud; [98171]

(3) whether he has made an assessment of the robustness of HM Revenue and Customs' (a) estimate of the scale of (i) spirits and (ii) beer duty fraud and (b) methodology for producing beer tax gap estimates. [98329]

Miss Chloe Smith: Spirits and beer tax gaps were published in September 2011 in 'Measuring Tax Gaps 2011' which is available online at:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/mtg-2011.pdf>

HMRC's estimates of the alcohol tax gap do not differentiate between the on and off-trades, therefore estimates of the proportion of off-sales where UK alcohol duty has not been paid are not available.

Estimates of wine fraud are not currently available. HMRC has a Tackling Alcohol Fraud strategy to counter fraud in all alcohol products.

The tax gap methodologies are open to independent scrutiny and are available online at:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/mtg-annex2011.pdf>

The spirits tax gap has previously been audited by the NAO. The beer tax gap is newer and has not yet been audited by the NAO. It is based on the same principles as the spirits tax gap methodology. HMRC is committed to discussions with the industry in order to improve the beer estimates.

Excise Duties: Fuels

Mr Anderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the findings of the report from the Centre for Economic and Business Research on the potential effects of a reduction in fuel duty; and if he will make a statement. [98829]

Miss Chloe Smith: The Government have noted the conclusions of the report from The Centre for Economic and Business Research. At Budget 2011 and the autumn statement 2011 the Government supported motorists and businesses through a reduction in fuel duty, abolition of the fuel duty escalator, introduction of a fair fuel stabiliser, cancellation of the increase that was planned for 1 August 2012 and deferral of the January 2012 increase to August 2012 to freeze rates for sixteen months. Consequently, as of 1 April 2012 average pump prices could be approximately 10 pence per litre lower than they would otherwise have been.

Foreign Loans: Argentina

Priti Patel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on future votes at the World Bank on loans to Argentina. [98349]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department for International Development.

Britain will look at each individual project at the World Bank with care, assessing each project on its own merits and the context of each individual loan.

The Department for International Development does not maintain an aid programme to Argentina and no UK aid is spent providing loans to Argentina at the World Bank.

Freezing Orders: Libya

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much in frozen Libyan assets has been returned to Libya; and whether any assets are still frozen. [97971]

Mr Hoban: The Treasury is responsible for the implementation of international financial sanctions. The Libya sanctions regime was introduced, and then extensively modified, during 2011. The asset freeze against, for example, oil industry and financial entities was substantially lifted in September 2011, and the asset freeze targeting the Central Bank of Libya and the Libya Arab Foreign Bank was lifted in December.

An asset freeze remains in force against 39 individuals and 22 entities, including the Libyan Investment Authority. A full list of the persons subject to the Libyan asset freeze is available on the Treasury website at:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/fin_sanctions_libya.htm

For reasons of confidentiality, the Treasury is unable to disclose details of the remaining assets frozen in the UK under the Libya sanctions regime. However, as a result of the lifting of sanctions in 2011 approximately four-fifths of the sums originally frozen in the UK were unfrozen.

Housing: Construction

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department will act as a guarantor for smaller developers in the construction sector to enable them to compete for the Get Britain Building Fund; and if he will make a statement. [97731]

Miss Chloe Smith: The Government will not act as a guarantor for smaller developers under the Get Britain Building Fund. However, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) streamlined the first stage of the application process for the programme to make it easier for all developers—including smaller developers—to access funding and unlock development on stalled sites.

Income Tax

Brandon Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many (a) male and (b) female higher rate taxpayers there were in the most recent period for which figures are available. [98850]

Mr Gauke: The number of higher rate taxpayers is estimated at 3.19 million in the tax year 2009-10, as shown in HM Revenue and Custom's Table 3.4,

http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/income_distribution/menu-by-year.htm#34

Of these, 2.4 million are male and 792,000 are female.

These are the latest available outturns, based on the Survey of Personal Incomes 2009-10, a sample survey of taxpayer records for 2009-10.

Projections of taxpayer numbers, based on 2007-08 survey data, were published in April 2011, and show a combined 4.05 million higher and additional rate taxpayers in 2011-12, of which 3.09 million are male and 956,000 are female. Revised projections, consistent with the 2009-10 survey data, and based on the Office for Budget Responsibility's March 2012 Economic and Fiscal Outlook, will be published on 27 April 2012.

Monetary Policy: Pensioners

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on pensioners of quantitative easing; and if he will make a statement. [98915]

Mr Hoban: The independent Monetary Policy Committee's (MPC) policy tools, including bank rate and quantitative easing, are macroeconomic policy tools designed to affect the economy as a whole, in order to meet the 2% inflation target over the medium term. At its February meeting, the Committee judged that without further monetary stimulus it was more likely than not that inflation would undershoot the target in the medium term. The Committee therefore voted to increase the size of its asset purchase programme by £50 billion to £325 billion.

The MPC takes into account many factors in its policy decisions, including the prospects for households, assessments of which can be found in the Bank of England's quarterly Inflation Reports and press conferences, and minutes of the MPC's monthly meetings.

Revenue and Customs: ICT

Andrea Leadsom: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect spending on systems to allow tax offices to communicate would have on levels of (a) service and (b) savings to the public purse. [97768]

Mr Gauke: HMRC's recent investment in its project to modernise PAYE processing connected 12 regional IT databases into one. This has improved the provision of service to individuals taxed under PAYE and is expected to yield benefits of c£0.5 billion over 10 years.

Rural Areas: Grants

Mr Graham Stuart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fiscal steps he is taking to ensure that rural areas receive a fair share of central Government grants. [98399]

Richard Benyon: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Government are committed to ensuring that all areas are treated fairly in the allocation of central Government grants. DEFRA works closely with Departments across Whitehall to help them understand rural needs and opportunities and to encourage them to ensure that their policies and funding schemes benefit both rural and urban communities. As part of their

work on business rates retention, the Government are looking at the cost of delivering services in rural areas and whether this is properly reflected in the current system of funding. The Government will consult on any changes considered appropriate as part of the wider consultation on the final shape of the business rates retention scheme later this summer.

Taxation

Katy Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate HM Revenue and Customs has made of the loss to the public purse arising from tax not being collected from people registered as non-resident who are resident in the UK for either (a) over 183 days in a tax year or (b) over 91 days on average over a four-year tax period; [99029]

(2) how the Government monitors, for the purposes of establishing residency status, how long people have been in the UK. [99107]

Mr Gauke: HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) operates a risk based compliance system to identify those who claim to be non-UK resident but may, in fact, be resident for tax purposes.

Where an individual's residence status is relevant to their UK liability, he or she is required, under the normal tax self-assessment process, to make a return based on their own determination of residence status. How long an individual has been in the UK may be relevant to determining whether or not they are resident here in some cases, but not in all.

Taxation: Energy

Mrs Main: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the change in cost to consumers of the planned introduction of the carbon floor price. [98985]

Miss Chloe Smith: An assessment of the impacts of the carbon price floor is given in HMRC's Tax Information and Impact Note published alongside Budget 2011. This is available online at:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/budget2011/tiin6111.pdf>

Taxation: Multinational Companies

Mr Anderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the effect on developing countries of his proposed changes to the rules on controlled foreign companies; [98643]

(2) if he will ensure that an assessment of the effect on developing countries is undertaken before changes are made to the rules on controlled foreign companies. [98644]

Mr Gauke: The Government have not undertaken an assessment of the effect on developing countries of the proposed changes to the CFC rules as these rules are designed to protect the UK Exchequer by preventing artificial diversion of UK profits.

Any assessment of the impact of CFC reform on developing countries would need to focus primarily on the nature of tax regimes in the developing countries and the interactions of UK headed multinational companies

with those tax systems. The strengthening of tax administration in developing countries is a key issue in tax and development and the Government are committed to supporting developing countries access sustainable sources of revenue. Our priorities for achieving this are capacity building, improving exchange of tax information, and increasing transparency in the extractives sector to address corruption.

Taxation: Nuclear Power

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has considered introducing a windfall tax on nuclear operators for the purposes of mitigating the effect of the proposed feed-in tariff with contracts for difference subsidy for nuclear projects. [97433]

Miss Chloe Smith: The proposed feed-in tariffs with contracts for difference set out in the Government's Electricity Market Reform White Paper aim to create a level playing field for all low carbon generation technologies and do not represent a subsidy for new nuclear projects.

VAT

Susan Elan Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the rise in the level of VAT on the (a) retail and (b) construction sector. [98742]

Mr Gauke: The Government have taken urgent and unavoidable action to tackle the deficit and to put the public finances on a sustainable footing. That is essential for jobs and growth.

The increase in the standard rate of VAT was an important element in the deficit reduction strategy.

In November, the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast, which took full account of all government policies including the VAT increase, was for real household spending to rise by almost 10% from 2012 to 2016.

VAT: Employment

Susan Elan Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the effect of the change in the level of VAT on unemployment. [98776]

Mr Gauke: The Government have taken urgent and unavoidable action to tackle the deficit and to put the public finances on a sustainable footing. That is essential for jobs and growth.

The increase in the standard rate of VAT was an important element in the deficit reduction strategy.

In November, the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast, which took full account of all government policies including the VAT increase, was for the unemployment rate to fall back to 6.2% by 2016.

Working Tax Credit

Ann Coffey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many couples with children working between 16 and 23 hours per week were in receipt of working tax credit at the latest date for which figures are available; and how many such couples (a) have informed HM Revenue

and Customs that their working hours have increased to an excess of 24 hours per week, with one partner working at least 16 hours per week since 6 April 2011 and (b) will cease to be eligible for working tax credit on 6 April 2012. [98716]

Mr Gauke: For the number of couples with children working between 16 and 23 hours per week and who are in receipt of working tax credit we refer the hon. Member to the answer given to PQ 88172 on 10 January 2012, *Official Report*, column 72W.

The rest of this information would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Working Tax Credit: Liverpool Riverside

Mrs Ellman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on families in Liverpool, Riverside constituency of changes in working tax credit eligibility rules to be introduced in April 2012. [99042]

Mr Gauke: For the number of couples with children working between 16 and 23 hours per week and who are in receipt of working tax credit in Liverpool, Riverside we refer the hon. Member to the answer given to PQ 88172 on 10 January 2012, *Official Report*, column 72W.

The measure to restrict eligibility to working tax credit to 24 hours for couples with children is part of a range of reforms to the tax credits system announced at the spending review.

Estimating the effect on families from an individual measure does not give a clear indication of the full monetary impact on an individual household.

The Government published estimates of the distributional impact of the packages of announced tax and benefit measures which can be found at:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/junebudget_annexa.pdf

http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sr2010_annexb.pdf

Working Tax Credit: North West

Helen Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the economy of (a) Warrington and (b) the North West on (i) the freeze in the (A) 30 hour element and (B) the couples or lone parent element of and (ii) the overall freeze in working tax credit and the increase in the taper in each year from 2011-13. [99441]

Mr Gauke: The information requested is not available.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Apprentices: North West

John Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the potential effects of expected trends in apprenticeship uptake on reducing youth unemployment in the North West in (a) 2012, (b) 2013, (c) 2014 and (d) 2015. [98301]

Mr Hayes: No such assessment has been made. In the 2010/11 academic year there were 78,660 apprenticeships starts in the North West Region, up by 66.4% on 2009/10. The apprenticeship programme is demand led and the Government do not set targets on expected delivery in particular areas of the country.

Business: Innovation

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many businesses in each constituency in the North West have received funding under the Business Innovation Scheme since the scheme's inception; and how much funding was allocated in each case. [98899]

Mr Prisk [*holding answer 8 March 2012*]: There are a number of programmes aimed at supporting innovation in UK businesses and these are delivered by the Technology Strategy Board, a BIS sponsored body, which has an annual budget of over £300 million. The schemes include Collaborative R&D, Smart, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and the Small Business Research Initiative.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has never supported a scheme called the Business Innovation Scheme.

Business: Loans

Lorely Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps the Government has taken to promote a range of forms of finance for small businesses. [97917]

Mr Prisk: It is important that businesses can access the finance they need from a diverse range of sources, including bank debt, equity investment and other alternative forms of finance.

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable), has established an industry working group, led by Tim Brendon of the Association of British Insurers to explore how to further develop non-bank lending channels. This group will report by Budget 2012.

The Government itself has undertaken a range of measures to promote a range of finance:

To support equity investment in firms, Government has increased its commitment to the Enterprise Capital Funds programme by £200 million over the four years to 2014-15, providing for more than £300 million of venture capital investment.

Government has encouraged a better environment for Business Angel investment through the establishment of the new £50 million Business Angel Co-Investment Fund, which aims to support angel investments into high growth potential early stage SMEs.

Government has reformed the Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) and Venture Capital Trusts (VCTs), increasing rate of income tax relief for EIS to 30% and increasing amounts that can be invested in qualifying companies and the size of qualifying companies (subject to state-aid clearance). From April 2012 the Seed EIS (SEIS) scheme will provide income tax relief of 50% for individuals who invest in shares in qualifying seed companies, with an annual investment limit for individuals of £100,000 and cumulative investment limit for companies of £150,000.

The Government's Enterprise Finance Guarantee (EFG) is also available until 2014-15, to guarantee, subject to demand, up to £2 billion in additional lending for those firms who lack the collateral or the track record to secure debt finance. From January 2012 this was extended to include businesses with up to £44 million annual turnover and a number of new lenders have been accredited.

To support firms' access to finance the Government has also announced £21 billion of credit easing measures to support smaller and mid-sized businesses which will include £20 billion of guarantees for bank funding to be made available over two years under the National Loan Guarantee Scheme; and the £1 billion Business Finance Partnership which will be deployed to stimulate markets in alternative forms of finance.

As part of the Government's "Business in You" campaign, the Government's Business Link website provides advice and guidance for businesses on the range of finance options available and how to apply. This can be found at

www.improve.businesslink.gov.uk/resources/business-support-finder

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent assessment his Department has made of the ability of small businesses to access finance. [98728]

Mr Prisk: The independent quarterly SME Finance Monitor, most recently published on the 5 March 2012, found that 63% of businesses that had applied for a new/renewed loan were successful, and 79% of those that had applied for a new/renewed overdraft facility now had a facility.

The SME Finance Monitor is an independently edited report, funded by the British Bankers' Association (BBA) as part of their commitments under the BBA Taskforce. It is the most comprehensive regular survey of small and medium sized enterprises' experiences accessing finance. Its reports are publicly available at

<http://www.sme-finance-monitor.co.uk>

Business: Wales

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent discussions he has had with Ministers in the Welsh Government on the Government's industrial vision. [99382]

Mr Prisk: The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable), usually visits Wales about twice a year. His last visit was in December, when he met his counterpart in the Welsh Assembly Government and discussed a wide range of policies that support the Government's industrial vision. In his earlier visit last year, he attended the Welsh Secretary's Business Advisory Group meeting, to which the Welsh Assembly Government were also invited.

Competition

Sajid Javid: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent progress his Department has made in finalising the Government's response to the consultation on A Competition Regime for Growth; and when he expects to publish the response. [98150]

Norman Lamb: We expect to announce our proposals later this month.

Competition Commission: Office of Fair Trading

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when he expects the merger of the Competition Commission and the Office of Fair Trading to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [99221]

Norman Lamb: The Government will shortly announce their plans for reforming the competition landscape including publication of the Government Response to the 'A Competition Regime for Growth: A Consultation on Options for Reform' consultation.

Copyright

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what representations he has received on proposals to change licensing schemes operated by the Copyright Licensing Agency and the Educational Recording Agency. [98858]

Norman Lamb: The Government are currently consulting on a range of proposals to modernise the copyright system. They have received a number of representations from a wide range of interested parties and have hosted consultation events around the country. A summary of responses to the consultation will be published within three months of its close on the 21 March 2012.

East Midlands Development Agency: Pay

Jake Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether any staff employed by the East Midlands Development Agency received retention bonuses after the announcement by the Government of the abolition of regional development agencies. [99344]

Mr Prisk: The eight regional development agencies (RDA) have put in place arrangements to secure the retention of key staff until the agencies are closed. They have made these arrangements with the approval of the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable), and HM Treasury. This is to safeguard the taxpayer's interest in making best use of the significant public assets that the RDAs have owned. A retention payment process had been recommended to be put into place by the National Audit Office.

At the East Midlands Development Agency to date, no member of staff has received a retention payment.

Higher Education

Shabana Mahmood: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what submissions are required to be made by higher education providers in order for their courses to be designated; and if he will publish those submissions. [99050]

Mr Willetts: The arrangements for course designation depend on whether the courses are being provided by a publicly funded or privately funded institution. In most cases eligible higher education courses provided by publicly funded institutions in the UK are automatically designated for student support and institutions input details of eligible courses directly onto the Student Loans Company's (SLC) course database.

All full-time distance learning courses and eligible higher education courses provided by privately funded institutions may be specifically designated at the discretion of the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable). Institutions that wish to have courses specifically designated must submit an application form for each

course they wish to have designated. They must also submit a current prospectus providing details of the course; a validation document from the validating body that demonstrates that a recognised UK award-making body validates the course to be run at the specific private institution; and, for full-time courses a timetable must be submitted providing details of the intensity of study. If the applications are approved the institutions have to complete a data capture form for SLC's higher education institution (HEI) database team to enable the course details to be uploaded on the SLC course database.

We do not routinely publish a list of all submissions for specific designation as there is a public interest in ensuring that the commercial interests of external businesses, such as those who have had their applications for the specific designation of courses rejected, are not damaged or undermined by disclosure of information which is not common knowledge and which could adversely impact on future business.

A list of courses that have been specifically designated is published on the SLC's website.

<http://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/policy-information/designated-courses/full-list.aspx>

Higher Education: Admissions

Damian Hinds: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what information his Department holds on the relative performance at university of students entering university from (a) state and (b) private sector schools. [96986]

Mr Willetts: There is a substantial literature examining the relative performance of pupils from different school types in Higher Education. References to some of the key publications are given as follows.

Partington, 2011, The Predictive Effectiveness of Metrics in Admission to Cambridge University, Cambridge University Admissions website

Parks, 2011, School Background is not a factor in Cambridge degree success, Cambridge University Admissions website

Hoare and Johnston, 2010, Widening Participation through admissions policy—a British case study of school and university performance, “Studies in Higher education”.

Ogg, Zimdars and Heath, 2009, Schooling effects on degree performance: a comparison of the predictive validity of aptitude testing and secondary school grades at Oxford University, “British Educational Research Journal”, 35.5, pp781-807

McCrum, Brundin and Halsey, 2006, The Effect of School Background on Value-Added at Oxbridge, Oxford Magazine

Smith and Naylor, 2005, Schooling effects on subsequent university performance: Evidence for the UK university population, “Economics of Education Review”, 24:549-562

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), 2005, Schooling effects on higher education achievement: further analysis—entry at 19

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), 2003, Schooling effects on higher education achievement

Smith and Naylor, 2001, Determinants of degree performance in UK universities: A statistical analysis of the 1993 student cohort, “Oxford bulletin of Economics and Statistics”, 63:29-60

In addition to these publications, the Department also monitors the unpublished literature and is in contact with key organisations and researchers working on this topic. These include Supporting Professionalism in

Admissions (SPA), the University of Bristol Widening Participation Research Cluster, and the University of Cambridge Undergraduate Admissions.

Higher Education: Standards

Shabana Mahmood: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how often designated higher education courses are audited (a) for quality assurance and (b) to ensure student loans claimed match the number of students studying with the provider. [98842]

Mr Willetts: The quality assurance arrangements for designated higher education courses depend on the nature of the awarding body and of the qualification being awarded. Universities and other bodies with degree awarding powers are responsible for safeguarding the quality of their teaching and the standards of their academic awards, including the quality and standards of any privately funded provider whose awards they validate. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education assesses the way in which universities manage the quality and standards of their partnership arrangements with private providers. Management of collaborative arrangements is assessed as part of Institutional Review, or, where partnerships form a significant amount of provision, through a separate review of partnerships, or a hybrid of the two.

Courses leading a Higher National Diploma (HND) or Higher National Certificate (HNC) can be designated for student support and are regulated by Ofqual. Awarding organisations have to meet Ofqual's formal “Recognition Criteria” which provides assurance to learners about the quality of regulated qualifications, and they are then subject to compliance with Ofqual's “General Conditions of Recognition” which is monitored on an ongoing basis. Providers offering HNDs and HNCs must satisfy criteria set out by the awarding body to demonstrate they are ‘fit and proper’ to offer them.

Payments for tuition are only made to a provider if a student has made an application to the Student Loans Company for a loan to cover tuition costs for their course and the provider has confirmed the student's attendance on the course. Tuition fee loan payments are audited on an annual basis as part of the audit of eligibility and entitlement assessments.

Money Advice Service: Scotland

Ann McKeichin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) whether in the transitional period from April 2012 to March 2013, the Money Advice Service will enter new agreements with existing face-to-face debt advice providers located in Scotland; [99435]

(2) whether he has held any discussions with (a) the Scottish Government, (b) COSLA and (c) Citizens Advice Scotland on the tendering process to be instituted by the Money Advice Service in autumn 2012 for the provision of a new face-to-face service starting in autumn 2013; [99436]

(3) whether it is his intention that any of the provision of a new face-to-face service by Money Advice Services from autumn 2013 will be located in Scotland; and in which locations any such service in Scotland will be located. [99438]

Norman Lamb: On 22 February 2012, the Money Advice Service published 'A Better Deal for Everyone: A New Approach to Debt Advice'. This set out their role in co-ordinating debt advice from 1 April 2012, funded by a new allocation from the levy collected by the Financial Services Authority.

Grant funding of £4.8 million from the Scottish Government and £2.2 million from the Money Advice Service will go towards a jointly funded programme which will be managed by the Scottish Legal Aid Board to help Scots resolve their legal and financial problems. The locations of the funded projects will be determined following an application process that will open later this year.

Additionally, the Money Advice Service will provide £500,000 of financial support to projects run in partnership with the Improvement Service, the Accountant in Bankruptcy and Money Advice Scotland.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has not held any discussions with the Scottish Government, COSLA or Citizens Advice about the tendering process for a new face-to-face service—this is a matter for the Money Advice Service which has had detailed discussions with a wide range of stakeholders in Scotland.

Office for Fair Access

John Glen: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what areas of expenditure in the Office for Fair Access will increase in 2012-13. [98909]

Mr Willetts: This is a matter for the Director of Fair Access. This year we have increased the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) budget from £484,000 to over £700,000. We are discussing OFFA's budget for 2012-13 with the current Director to ensure he has the resources he needs to discharge his responsibilities effectively. The new Director for Fair Access will take up the role later this year and we will want to discuss the issue of resources with him at the earliest opportunity.

The Government have committed through the White Paper to strengthen OFFA so it can provide a more active and energetic challenge and support to universities and colleges. In the White Paper, we said we will make significantly more resources available, increasing capacity up to around four times its original level, and equipping OFFA to use fully its powers to promote access and monitor and review Access Agreements.

Office for Life Sciences

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills pursuant to the answer of 21 November 2011, *Official Report*, column 149W, on Office for Life Sciences, how many full-time equivalent staff in each pay band he estimates will be employed in the Office for Life Sciences in each of the next three years; and what budget he has allocated for the Office for Life Sciences in each such year. [98893]

Mr Willetts [holding answer 8 March 2012]: The Office for Life Sciences (OLS) is currently undergoing a restructure. It is not possible at this time to confirm what the exact grade allocations will be in 2012/13. However, while the balance of roles across grades may alter, the overall headcount is likely to remain broadly the same as for 2011/12.

The OLS staff budget in 2011-12 remains at £692,700. The OLS is staffed as follows:

Grade	Number of staff (at January 2012)
SCS	1
Grade 6	0
Grade 7	5
SEO	4
HEO	0
EO	3
Fast Stream	2
Total	15

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many projects the Office for Life Sciences has completed since May 2010; what projects are underway; and what the budget is of each such project. [98894]

Mr Willetts [holding answer 8 March 2012]: In 2010/11 the Office for Life Sciences (OLS) had a budget of £84,000 covering three projects. The projects were completed as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1

Project	Actual
Clinical Trials Data Phase 1	6,000.00
Extension to the Bioscience and Healthcare Database to include Pharmaceutical Sector	53,735.00
Clinical Trials Data Phase 2	7,100.00
Total	66,835.00

In 2011/12, the OLS had a project budget of £121,000. Completed projects are reflected in Table 2.

Table 2

Project	Actual
Bibliometric Analysis of Regenerative Medicine	23,775.00
Strategy for UK Life Sciences (analysis, publication and communications)	38,728.70
Total	62,503.70

The OLS is currently agreeing its business plan, which is expected to be published in April 2012. Priority projects for 2012/13 will be those that involve implementation of the Strategy for UK Life Sciences. At present a budget has not been confirmed at individual project level, but the OLS programme budget is expected to remain at £121,000 per annum, until the end of the spending review period in 2014/15.

Oxford University: Admissions

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many people from each parliamentary constituency were accepted to study at Oxford and Cambridge universities (a) in the last 10 years and (b) in 2011. [94540]

Mr Willetts: The information provided by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Research: Science

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills which official in his Department has lead responsibility for communicating with the life sciences industry; and which directorate they are part of. [98895]

Mr Willetts [*holding answer 8 March 2012*]: Skills and Life Sciences Directorate is responsible. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills does not believe that release of the name of the individual would be fair under the terms of the Data Protection Act.

Royal Mail

Gavin Williamson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when Ministers in his Department met with (a) the chief executive and (b) the chairman of Royal Mail to discuss the financial and management performance of the business in 2010. [99361]

Norman Lamb: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 6 March 2012, *Official Report*, column 701W.

South East England Development Agency: Incentives

Jake Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether staff employed by the South East England Development Agency received retention bonuses after the announcement by the Government of the abolition of regional development agencies. [99033]

Mr Prisk: The eight regional development agencies have put in place arrangements to secure the retention of key staff until the agencies are closed. They have made these arrangements with the approval of the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable). This is to safeguard the taxpayer's interest in making best use of the significant public assets that the Regional Development Agencies (RDA's) have owned. A retention payment process had been recommended to be put into place by the National Audit Office. At the South East England Development Agency to date, one member of staff received a retention payment on completion of duties when made redundant.

Student Loans Company: Pay

Mr Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills on what dates (a) he, (b) the Permanent Secretary of his Department and (c) the Minister of State for Universities and Science first became aware of the arrangements for remunerating the Chief Executive of the Student Loans Company. [97115]

Mr Willetts: The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable), myself and the Department's permanent secretary approved the appointment and remuneration package for the Student Loans Company (SLC) chief executive, as put forward by the SLC Board, in May 2010 for his interim appointment and in December 2010 for his further two-year appointment.

The Department and the SLC followed the correct processes, gaining approval from across Government, and were satisfied that the package met the relevant guidelines, including value for money.

The SLC's overall performance has improved and continues to improve so that the SLC operates more effectively in the interests of students.

Students: Finance

Shabana Mahmood: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he is taking to increase awareness of the student finance arrangements for academic year 2012-13 amongst parents and guardians of university applicants; and if he will make a statement. [97443]

Mr Willetts: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) considers it essential to ensure that prospective students and their families know about the financial support available to support access to higher education.

BIS ran a communications campaign targeting young people and parents/guardians of young people considering starting university in September 2012. This activity took place in May, June and October 2011 and featured radio, digital and regional press advertising, a media partnership with Channel 4 and a mailing to education maintenance allowance recipients.

Underpinning the campaign was the Student Finance School and College Tour. The tour ran from September 2011 to January 2012 and was delivered by recent graduates. The objective of the tour was to explain the new finance arrangements directly to students in the classroom and to their parents/guardians at parent evenings at schools and colleges. The tour reached 1,956 (85%) of the 2,313 schools and colleges in England, engaging 152,014 students and 8,404 parents.

As the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) application deadline has now passed for 2012/13 entrants, the task now is to ensure that students and their parents know when, how and where to apply for financial support.

The Student Loans Company (SLC) is responsible for administering the student finance service in England. Once a student has applied through UCAS, the SLC will communicate with them via e-mail to encourage them to apply for financial support and provide them with information to help them with this. If it is indicated that parents are required to provide information to support their student's application for financial support, the SLC will encourage parents via e-mail/text to support them in completing the process.

The SLC also uses a range of other channels to increase awareness of student finance arrangements among parents and guardians of university applicants, including:

Videos, downloadable guides and fact sheets designed for student finance practitioners and teachers/tutors to use with 2012/13 applicants and their parents.

Social media activities, including 'surgeries' on social media sites to help address the questions and concerns of parents.

Working with UCAS to providing student finance information for both the UCAS website and Parents Guide.

Media coverage in popular consumer titles.

The Directgov website at:

www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance

Students: Loans

Shabana Mahmood: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the decision not to impose charges on graduates who repay their student loans early. [99051]

Mr Willetts: The decision not to introduce a system of charges for early repayment of student loans was announced on 23 February 2012. The decision was made by BIS Ministers after careful consideration of all the evidence and analysis of responses received from last year's consultation.

BIS Ministers and officials have discussions with a wide variety of organisations and Government Departments, including HM Treasury. As was the case with previous Administrations, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of all such discussions.

Unfair Practices

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills pursuant to question 97635, how many prosecutions were brought under the Consumer Protection From Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 in each year since 2006; and if he will make a statement. [99230]

Norman Lamb: The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPRs) came into force on 26 May 2008. Trading Standards Departments have reported to the Office of Fair Trading the following number of prosecutions brought under the CPRs since the end of May 2008:

	<i>Number</i>
2008	4
2009	149
2010	307
2011	369

JUSTICE

Approved Premises

Nia Griffith: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what his policy is on the safeguards needed on contracts for the provision of bail accommodation that does not meet the definition of approved premises under section 13 of the Offender Management Act 2007. [99324]

Mr Blunt: There is a single contract, with Stonham, part of the Home Group, for the provision of bail accommodation and support. All defendants released

on bail are subject to safeguards set out in the bail conditions determined by the court, regardless of the accommodation provider. Stonham, additionally, assesses all applications for accommodation for eligibility and suitability.

Nia Griffith: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice by what means his Department governs the provision of bail accommodation under (a) the contract with Stonham and (b) other arrangements for the provision of such accommodation. [99325]

Mr Blunt: The National Offender Management Service operates a contract management system which keeps the contract with Stonham under continuous review.

The only other accommodation provided on behalf of the Ministry of Justice that is available to defendants on bail is in Approved Premises. These are regulated by the Ministry of Justice, through the Approved Premises National Rules 2011.

Nia Griffith: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps he is taking to ensure local authorities comply with the joint working protocol on bail and accommodation support services; and what representations he has received on the need for greater local accountability of the operation of the protocol. [99326]

Mr Blunt: Local authorities that have properties in their areas administered by the bail accommodation and support service have their own protocol with the contractor. The joint working protocol drawn up between the Local Government Association and the Ministry of Justice provides a benchmark for liaison on the location of properties under the contract. The contractor may negotiate local variations, as long as the minimum standards set out in the joint protocol are observed. No formal representations have been received on the need for greater local accountability of the operation of the protocol; local authorities have complied with this process in relation to every property currently provided.

Nia Griffith: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what conditions he sets for premises to be used for bail accommodation; and whether local authorities require planning consent for such usage. [99362]

Mr Blunt: The conditions relating to properties provided by Stonham are that they may accommodate no more than four people, each with his or her own bedroom. Planning consent is not required; the houses are the private rented homes of those living in them.

Ashfield Young Offender Institution

Mr Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many incidents of segregation have been recorded at Ashfield Young Offender Institution in each year since 2006; and how many such segregations have been for more than (a) seven days, (b) 15 days and (c) 28 days; [97773]

(2) how many boys in Ashfield Young Offender Institution were subject to (a) one episode, (b) between two and five episodes and (c) six or more episodes of segregation in each year since 2006. [97774]

Mr Blunt: The information is not collated centrally. However, Ashfield YOI has been approached and has provided the following data:

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Number of young people	
						2011	2012
<i>Length of segregation</i>							
Average population	307	336	333	275	237	317	¹ —
Total number of segregations	335	200	188	259	241	377	51
7-14 days	75	54	57	37	76	75	12
15-27 days	36	11	15	36	41	56	1
Over 28 days	10	5	9	23	31	24	9
<i>Incidents of segregation</i>							
1 period	133	105	99	122	123	166	38
2-5 periods	74	38	34	53	44	78	6
6 or more	5	0	1	0	1	4	0

¹ Not yet available

Chief Coroner

Paul Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice when he plans to appoint the chief coroner; and what the functions and responsibilities of the role will be. [98923]

Mr Djanogly: Under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, it is for the Lord Chief Justice to appoint the chief coroner in consultation with the Lord Chancellor. The Ministry of Justice is in discussion with the Judicial Office about the appointment, including timetable and the functions and responsibilities of the chief coroner and will make an announcement as soon as possible.

Closed Circuit Television

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what information his Department holds on the number of people who were convicted where CCTV evidence was a contributory factor in (a) the West Midlands, (b) West Yorkshire, (c) the East Midlands and (d) Essex in (i) 2009-10 and (ii) 2010-11. [98725]

Mr Blunt: Other than where specified in a statute, centrally held information does not include all the circumstances of each case. It is not possible to centrally identify what evidence is produced in court proceedings.

Departmental Ethnic Minority Staff

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many and what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department were from an ethnic minority in March (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; and if he will make a statement. [98868]

Mr Djanogly: Information on the number and proportion of senior civil servants in the Ministry of Justice that declared themselves as being from an ethnic minority in March 2010 and March 2011 is set out in the following table:

As at March each year	Number	Proportion of total senior civil servants in the Ministry of Justice (%)
2010	11	4
2011	9	4

Information for March 2012 is not yet available. The latest available data, which is as at January 2012, is as follows:

	Number	Proportion of total senior civil servants in the Ministry of Justice (%)
January 2012	11	5

Approximately 20% of senior civil servants in March 2010, 27% in March 2011 and 21% in January 2012 chose not to declare their ethnicity.

The information provided reflects the composition of the Ministry which varied between March 2010 and January 2012. In March 2010 and March 2011, the Ministry comprised the Ministry headquarters, Her Majesty's Courts Service, the Tribunals Service, the National Offender Management Service, the Office of Public Guardian, the Wales Office, and the Scotland Office.

In January 2012, the Ministry comprised the Ministry headquarters, Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service, the National Offender Management Service, and the Office of Public Guardian.

The Ministry of Justice is continuing to work to increase representation of minority ethnic staff in the senior civil service, as well as to increase the proportion of women and staff with disabilities at this level.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much funding his Department proposes to allocate to (1) the (a) Policy Group, (b) Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, (c) Corporate Services, Estates

and ICT, (d) Youth Justice Board, (e) Central Funds and (f) other non-departmental public bodies under the Ministry of Justice Headquarters expenditure, in each year of the current spending review period; [99059]

(2) the (a) Criminal Defence Legal Aid, (b) Community Legal Services and (c) Legal Services Commission administration as part of the Legal Services Commission, in each year of the current spending review period; [99060]

(3) the (a) National Offender Management Service Operations (NOMS) and (b) National Probation Services Trust as part of NOMS, in each year of the current spending review period; [99061]

(4) the (a) HM Courts Service and (b) HM Tribunals Service as part of HM Courts and Tribunals Service, in each year of the current spending review period. [99062]

Mr Djanogly: The Department's budget allocations for 2011-12 are outlined in the Supplementary Estimate published on 8 February 2012. The following tables give the break-down of allocations for (a) Ministry of Justice Headquarters; (b) Legal Services Commission; (c) National Offender Management Service; (d) Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service and (e) Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, Youth Justice Board, Central Funds.

(a) Ministry of Justice headquarters expenditure

	Amount (£ million)
Justice Policy Group	172.7
Corporate Services	248.3
Estates ¹	396.0
ICT	197.1
Total	1,014.1

¹ Includes prison capacity estates

The above includes allocation of £45.5 million for 2011-12 to administrative non-departmental public bodies.

(b) Legal Services Commission

	Amount (£ million)
Criminal Defence Legal Aid	1,131.4
Community Legal Services	934.8
LSC administration	107.4
Total	2,173.6

(c) National Offender Management Service

	Amount (£ million)
NOMS Operations	2,775.0
National Probation Trust ¹	820.0
Total	3,595.0

¹ The Probation Trust figure is the total of contract values agreed at the beginning of the year. These amounts vary slightly during the year.

(d) Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service

	Amount £ million
Courts Service	835.0
Tribunals Service	235.0
Total	1,070.0

(e) Allocations for the following are not under the Ministry of Justice Headquarters expenditure.

	Amount (£ million)
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) ¹	437.4
Youth Justice Board	394.1
Central Funds	90.5

¹ CICA's allocation for 2011-12 was increased in the Supplementary Estimate to cover the cost of pre-tariff cases, which will be settled in the year.

The Department has not set budgets for the remaining years of the comprehensive spending review period. Budgets for 2012-13 onwards will be set as part of the Department's regular annual budget allocation process. Allocations will be made on the basis of need and according to departmental priorities.

Driving Offences

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many and what proportion of people whose driving licence was suspended temporarily before trial as a condition of their bail had been charged with (a) causing death by dangerous driving, (b) causing death by careless driving, (c) any offence of causing death through the use of a motor vehicle and (d) drink driving in 2011. [98853]

Mr Blunt: Information on bail and remand collected centrally by the Ministry of Justice and held on the Court Proceedings Database does not record whether conditions were attached to bail, the nature of them, nor whether those conditions were breached.

Annual court proceedings data for 2011 are planned for publication in May 2012.

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the average time was for a defendant to be brought before a court when charged with (a) causing death by dangerous driving, (b) causing death by careless driving, (c) any offence of causing death through the use of a motor vehicle and (d) drink driving in 2011. [98854]

Mr Blunt: Table 1 provides the average length of time in days from the date an offence was committed, to the date of the first hearing in the magistrates court for: (a) causing death by dangerous driving, (b) causing death by careless driving, (c) causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs, (d) causing death by driving: unlicensed, disqualified or uninsured drivers, (e) any offence of causing death through the use of a motor vehicle and (f) drink driving. This is provided for January to September 2011.

These experimental statistics are sourced from the administrative data systems used in magistrates and Crown courts, and have been produced by linking together records held on the two datasets.

Summary statistics on the timeliness of criminal proceedings in the magistrates courts and Crown court are published by the Ministry of Justice in the statistical bulletins "Court Statistics Quarterly". Statistics for the quarter July to September 2011 were published on

12 January and statistics from October to December 2011 will be published on the Department's website on 29 March 2012:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/courts-and-sentencing/judicial-quarterly>

Table 1: Magistrates and Crown courts, all defendants^{1, 2} in criminal cases completed by offence group, England and Wales: timeliness stages from offence to first hearing, January to September 2011^{3, 4}

Offence group	Days		
	Offence to charge/ laying of information	Charge/laying of information to first hearing	Offence to first hearing
Causing death by dangerous driving	165	28	193
Causing death by careless or inconsiderate driving	161	28	190
Causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs	165	18	182
Causing death by driving: unlicensed, disqualified or uninsured drivers	151	30	180
Causing death through the use of a motor vehicle (all offences)	162	28	190
Drink driving ⁵	14	21	35

¹ All defendants refer to adult and youth defendants.

² Includes all cases concluded in the magistrates courts or Crown court during the specified time period, and includes the longest duration and most serious offence in cases where there is more than one offence per case. Data is sourced from the linked administrative court data and includes around 95% of completed proceedings. These data are only available from April 2010

³ Data for 2011 are currently only available to September 2011. Data from October to December 2011 will be published on 29 March 2012.

⁴ The offence group is taken from data collected at the magistrates court, therefore some cases, such as Summary offences may have been upgraded by the time they reach the Crown court.

⁵ Drink driving includes both charged and summons cases.

Note:

These categories contain low sample sizes, so figures should be interpreted with caution.

Source:

Libra MIS Timeliness Analysis Report (TAR) and CREST linked court data, HM Courts and Tribunals Service

European Court of Justice

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether the UK has introduced the measures required by articles 3 to 9 of EU Council Framework Decision 2000/383/JHA. [99434]

Mr Blunt: The Government consider that existing UK law meets the measures required by articles 3 to 9 of EU Council Framework Decision 2000/383/JHA without the need for amendment.

Euthanasia: Prosecutions

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people have been prosecuted for helping another person to end their life in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [98935]

Mr Blunt: The number of persons proceeded against at magistrates courts for offences under the Suicide Act 1961, in England and Wales, from 2001 to 2010 (latest available) can be viewed in the following table.

Court proceedings data for 2011 are planned for publication in May 2012.

Number of persons proceeded against at magistrates courts for offences under the Suicide Act 1961, England and Wales, 2001-10^{1, 2}

	Number of persons
2001	2
2002	2
2003	3
2004	3
2005	—
2006	5
2007	1
2008 ³	2

Number of persons proceeded against at magistrates courts for offences under the Suicide Act 1961, England and Wales, 2001-10^{1, 2}

	Number of persons
2009	—
2010	—

¹ The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

² Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

³ Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates court for April, July and August 2008.

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services--Ministry of Justice.

Legal Aid Scheme: Females

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many additional women he estimates will be eligible for legal aid following the amendment made in the House of Lords on 5 March 2012 to the Legal Aid Bill to specify the evidential criteria for the purpose of accessing private family legal aid. [99242]

Mr Djanogly: We are unable to estimate on the basis of current data how many more women would qualify for legal aid in a private family law matter by virtue of domestic violence as a result of the amendment.

Prisoners

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what recent representations he has received on ensuring convicted murderers do not move into areas where they might come into contact with their victims' families; and if he will make a statement. [99236]

Mr Blunt: I have not received any recent representations on this matter.

Convicted murderers receive a mandatory life sentence and must serve the whole of their minimum term or 'tariff' before being considered for release by the independent Parole Board. The Parole Board will direct the release of life sentenced prisoners on licence, following a thorough risk assessment, only if it is satisfied that it is no longer necessary, on the grounds of public protection, for them to be detained in custody.

Since 2001, victims of specified violent and sexual offences, including bereaved relatives, have had a statutory right to make representations about which conditions they would wish to see attached to the offender's release licence. This could include a request for an exclusion zone which prohibits the offender from entering a specified area where the victim lives and works. The decision on which conditions to attach to a release licence will be for the Parole Board alone to determine in the case of life sentenced prisoners. In reaching this decision, the Parole Board will be mindful of the need to try to address the victims' concerns while ensuring exclusion zones are not so prohibitive that they prevent the offender from attending activities or accessing support which reduces the risk of reoffending and of others becoming victims.

A life licence lasts for the whole of an offender's life and, if he breaches his licence conditions, he is liable to be recalled to prison.

Prisoners: Ex-servicemen

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer of 14 November 2011 to the hon. Member for Luton North, *Official Report*, column 552W, on prisoners: ex-servicemen, if he will make it his policy to record and publish annually the (a) number of ex-service personnel in prison establishments and (b) the proportion of the prison population constituted by ex-service personnel. [98994]

Mr Blunt: In September 2010, the Ministry of Justice and Defence Analytical Services Advice (DASA) published the results of joint work to determine the number of regular ex-service personnel in prison in England and Wales. The report found that or 3.5% of the population in prisons in England and Wales (2,820 prisoners¹) were ex-service personnel.

This report remains the most comprehensive and reliable piece of research that has been published on this matter to date, and we have no current plans to repeat the exercise as there is no evidence to suggest that the proportion of veterans within the prison population has changed significantly.

¹ This corrects the answer of 2,280 previously given in answer to the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd) on 15 September 2011, *Official Report*, column 1339W, and the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) on 25 October 2011, *Official Report*, columns 154-55W.

Proceeds of Crime

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how monies and assets recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 are being used by his Department. [99170]

Mr Djanogly: The Ministry of Justice is responsible for collecting moneys paid in accordance with confiscation orders made under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. A confiscation order is an order to pay a sum of money and is enforced as if it were a fine. The Ministry of Justice pays confiscation order receipts to the Home Office, or the victim, if the court has so ordered.

The Ministry of Justice participates with other asset recovery agencies in an asset recovery incentive scheme, ARIS, under which the participating agencies receive 50% of what they collectively recover. Money available for allocation in accordance with ARIS is determined by the total value of Home Office receipts in any financial year. Incentive allocations are based on each agency's contribution to the total value of remittances from: cash forfeiture orders; confiscation orders (including part paid orders and interest); and civil recovery and taxation cases.

In recent years the Ministry of Justice share of scheme receipts has been 12.5% and income under the scheme as follows:

	£000
2008-09	10,407
2009-10	11,213
2010-11	11,845

The income has been used by the Ministry of Justice to defray the costs of regional collection and enforcement centres, related local and central management costs and the court costs relating to the making and enforcement of confiscation orders.

Reoffenders

Mr Hollobone: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the reoffending rate for (a) Northamptonshire, (b) the area with the worst record in England and Wales and (c) the area with the best record in England and Wales was in the latest year for which figures are available. [99439]

Mr Blunt: Your question has been answered using the Ministry of Justice's published proven reoffending statistics, the latest of which was published on 26 January 2012. It gives proven reoffending figures for offenders who were released from custody, received a non-custodial conviction at court, received a caution, reprimand, warning or tested positive for opiates or cocaine between April 2009 and March 2010. Proven reoffending is defined as any offence committed in a one year follow-up period and receiving a court conviction, caution, reprimand or warning in the one year follow-up or a further six months waiting period.

Table 1 shows the proportion of offenders that reoffended in Northamptonshire, Hartlepool (the local authority with the highest proportion of reoffending), and Rutland (the local authority with the lowest proportion of reoffending).

	Number of offenders	Proportion of offenders who reoffend
Northamptonshire	7,920	24.9
Rutland	212	16.5
Hartlepool	1,978	35.9

When comparing between local authorities, the differences may be due to:

different types of offenders; areas where the offenders have high numbers of previous offences are likely to have higher proven reoffending rates;

police activity; areas with high police detection rates are likely to have higher proven reoffending rates;

age profile of offenders in the area; areas with a younger population are likely to have higher proven reoffending rates.

This information is published each quarter at:

www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/reoffending/proven-re-offending

Suicide

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) if he will take steps to ensure training on the needs of relatives bereaved through suicide is provided to coroners in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement; [98704]

(2) if he will take steps to ensure the needs of relatives bereaved through suicide are considered in the inquest process; and if he will make a statement; [98705]

(3) what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health on the distribution of Help is at Hand to coroners; and if he will make a statement. [98715]

Mr Djanogly: The Ministry of Justice funds and organises regular training for coroners, which includes training on handling bereaved relatives. Once in post, the Chief Coroner will have a power to make regulations about the training of coroners. Under section 42 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 the Lord Chancellor may issue guidance about the way the coroner system is expected to operate in relation to bereaved relatives. This will build on the Charter for Coroner Services, which we intend to publish shortly. Ministry of Justice officials have provided coroners' contact details to the Department of Health to facilitate the distribution of the publication 'Help is at Hand'.

Translation Services

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer of 6 March 2012, *Official Report*, column 706W, on translation services (1) which of the key performance indicators the contractor is not fulfilling; and when the Department expects the contractor will be fulfilling all the key performance indicators; [99601]

(2) whether he has (a) applied service credits against Applied Language Solutions based upon the delivery of services against key performance indicators and (b) charged the contractor for any cost differential where the Department was required to source translation services from an alternative party. [99602]

Mr Blunt: We are seeing a steady improvement in performance, however, the contractor is not yet delivering service in line with the following key performance indicators, for example:

98% of all assignments requested are fulfilled

All complaints were resolved to our satisfaction within three working days

98% of assignments were delivered on time.

We are demanding continued action to ensure that the contractor meets these performance levels as soon as possible. Contingency arrangements to minimise disruption to courts and tribunals will remain in place until then.

Service credits have not yet been applied against the key performance indicators. We are currently considering the application of remedies in certain cases.

Translation Services: Foreign Nationals

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many foreign nationals in the criminal justice system have been released on bail rather than remanded in custody because of problems with the provision of translation or interpretation services since 30 January 2012. [99243]

Mr Blunt: This information is not available.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Air Travel

Mr Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on what occasions he has taken overseas flights to countries on official business since August 2010; what class of travel was used on each such flight; and by whom he was accompanied. [99395]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: Details of all Ministers' overseas visits, including the cost of flights and the number of officials accompanying the Minister, are available on the Department for International Development (DFID) website at:

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/about-us/our-organisation/ministers/#travel>

and are published every quarter.

DFID do not hold further details of the Secretary of State's visits. The Secretary of State is accompanied by a Private Secretary and normally by a special adviser, senior official or both when the business requires.

Section 10 of the Ministerial Code provides guidance on travel for Ministers and makes clear that Ministers must ensure that they always make efficient and cost-effective travel arrangements.

Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in other donor countries on meeting commitments to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria; and what recent steps his Department has taken to ensure such commitments are met. [98536]

Mr O'Brien: UK Ministers continue to actively follow the reforms under way at the Global Fund and the resource mobilisation efforts, staying in close contact with the Global Fund and the Board Chair. We have had discussions with US counterparts and we are pleased with the recent USA budget approval to live up to their October 2010 pledge of US \$4 million over 2011-13.

Senior officials are working closely with other donors, including the USA, Australia, Nordic countries, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and with civil society groups to rebuild confidence and to ensure the fund has the resources it needs.

We are encouraged by the recent funding announcements from Germany, Japan, the Gates Foundation, Sweden, the US and the intention of Spain to resume its funding. In November 2011, the Department for International Development was able to bring forward part of the UK's existing pledge to the fund (of up to £1 billion from 2008-15) in order to make sure that all Round 10 grants could be signed.

We will continue to work with the fund and with other development ministers to ensure that the fund has resources in 2012 and paves the way for replenishment in 2013.

Jamaica

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the cost has been of UK aid to Jamaica since his Department's records began. [99022]

Mr Duncan: The amount of official development assistance disbursed by the UK to Jamaica since 1960 (the earliest date for which information is available) is US\$293 million at current prices.

Leishmaniasis

Mr Virendra Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will estimate the number of people globally affected by visceral leishmaniasis; and what steps his Department is taking to tackle the disease. [98851]

Mr O'Brien: Visceral leishmaniasis (VL), also known as kala-azar, is one of the most neglected tropical diseases. The World Health Organisation estimates that 500,000 new cases and approximately 50,000 deaths occur annually due to the disease. The majority (90%) of cases are in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Nepal, Sudan and South Sudan. If left untreated, VL is invariably fatal within two years.

The Department for International Development (DFID) announced the expansion of its work to help control NTDs on 30 January 2012. This was part of a new coordinated push by public and private partners to accelerate progress toward eliminating or controlling ten neglected tropical diseases ("London Declaration on NTDs") and will include the development of a new DFID programme for VL. DFID also supports VL research at the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative and the Institute of One World Health.

Members: Correspondence

Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development plans to respond to the letter of 16 February 2012 from the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow. [99471]

Mr O'Brien: I replied to the hon. Lady's letter on Friday 9 March 2012.

North Korea

Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps the Government is taking to respond to the humanitarian situation in North Korea. [98903]

Mr Duncan: The UK is not taking any direct steps to respond to the humanitarian situation in North Korea. We believe that the UK's investment in the various humanitarian organisations working in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) represents the best way for the UK to assist the people of the DPRK. We are in close contact with these humanitarian agencies and continue to monitor the situation.

Palestinians

Mike Crockart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations he has made to the Israeli government on the restrictions in permitted fishing off the coast of Gaza and the effect on the Gazan people's ability to feed themselves. [98792]

Mr Duncan: The UK regularly makes representations at both ministerial and official level to the Government of Israel on the urgent need to ease restrictions on Gaza. Most recently, the Secretary of State for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), and the Minister for the Middle East, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), discussed these issues during visits to the region in December 2011 and January 2012.

As part of our engagement with the Israeli authorities, we frequently emphasise the impact restrictions have had on industry in Gaza. Alongside our EU colleagues, we have urged Israel to extend the fishing zone from three to twenty nautical miles, as stipulated in the Oslo Accords. We continue to express our deep concern that in Gaza, which should have a thriving economy, over 50% of the population are food insecure.

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations he has made on the opening of crossings into Gaza. [98800]

Mr Duncan: We have consistently called on Israel to improve movement and access into and out of Gaza, including in recent visits by the Secretary of State for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), and the Minister for the Middle East, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt). While steps taken by Israel in 2010 to ease restrictions were welcome, we are clear more needs to be done. We believe that easing restrictions will enhance Israel's security and are working with Israel and EU partners to achieve real change on the ground.

Sahel

Mr Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions he has had with (a) other governments and (b) multilateral organisations about funding for food insecurity in the Sahel. [98843]

Mr O'Brien: The UK has responded quickly to provide assistance to the worst affected areas, but it is vital that other donors step forward to carry their share of the international response. To this end date, the International Development Secretary has already spoken with European Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva, and United Nations Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos. Officials from my Department have also met with representatives from USAID, and raised the issue of the Sahel at a recent EU meeting attended by representatives from all 27 member states; and I have lobbied officials from Nordic countries.

We will continue to engage in regular discussions with our counterparts in other governments and international organisations to help ensure an effective response to the crisis in the Sahel.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Energy: Prices

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate his Department has made of the value of support fuel-poor households will receive in 2013 from the energy company obligation; and what value of support such households received from the carbon emissions reduction target in 2010.

[99226]

Gregory Barker: The Green Deal and energy company obligation consultation proposed that, under ECO, activity estimated to be worth £350 million per year should be targeted at low income and vulnerable consumers, using means-tested benefit proxies, in private tenures. Within this group, approximately 61% were expected to be in fuel poverty¹. We also consulted on roll-out patterns, including whether there was a need to ensure that a proportion of the remaining carbon reduction element should be reserved for low-income households. In the Government response we will confirm the final structure of ECO and the expected impact on fuel poor households.

Under CERT in 2010, 40% of the overall carbon saving target was required to be met in a priority group of lower income households, defined by age and benefit proxies. This was to ensure the equitable distribution of benefits. Just over £600 million a year was estimated to be needed to meet the priority group target². Within the priority group, approximately 15% were expected to be in fuel poverty³.

¹ Green Deal and energy company obligation draft impact assessment, November 2011, p. 112

² UK Fuel Poverty Strategy 7th Annual Progress Report 2009, October 2009, p.4

³ Carbon emissions reduction target April 2008 to March 2011 Consultation Proposals published May 2007, Annex 3, p.2

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate has been made of the average annual amount which will be levied on a dual fuel bill to pay for the energy company obligation.

[99227]

Gregory Barker: The costs of energy and climate change policies are not direct levies on energy bills but impact the prices energy suppliers charge their customers. How the costs of policies are passed on to consumers

will be a commercial decision for energy suppliers. DECC's analysis of the impact on energy bills of policies assumes that energy suppliers fully pass on the cost of the energy company obligation (ECO) to energy consumers on a per unit of energy supplied basis¹. On this basis, assuming the consultation proposal that ECO be set at £1.3 billion the estimated impact of ECO support costs on average household energy bills is £48 in 2020:

	£
Net impact of ECO and Green Deal	8
ECO support costs	48
Green Deal repayment costs	20
ECO and Green Deal energy efficiency saving	-61

The Green Deal repayments and total efficiency savings are averaged across all households, including those which do not take up measures. For an individual household which takes up a Green Deal and/or ECO measure, the efficiency saving is expected to be much larger.

The figures presented above are consistent with the Green Deal consultation impact assessment². Government will be publishing an updated impact assessment in due course, which will include the estimated impact on energy bills, alongside its formal

response to the Green Deal and ECO consultation.

¹ In reality, this cost may be passed on a per household rather than a per unit energy basis.

² <http://www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/11/consultation/green-deal/3603-green-deal-eco-ia.pdf>

EU Emissions Trading Scheme

Mrs Main: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of the Emissions Trading Scheme.

[98987]

Gregory Barker: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 10 January 2012, *Official Report*, column 133W.

Green Deal Scheme

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change when his Department plans to bring forward Green Deal secondary legislation.

[99223]

Gregory Barker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 6 March 2012, *Official Report*, column 686W.

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what progress has been made in establishing a Green Deal apprenticeship scheme.

[99224]

Gregory Barker: I am pleased to confirm that on 8 March we announced £3 million to fund the training of up to 1,000 'go-early' assessors and 1,000 solid wall insulation installers as part of our commitment to develop the skills necessary for the Green Deal.

We will continue to work with the sector skills councils and employers to develop more training opportunities and ensure that the National Apprenticeship scheme can support all those wishing to train for the Green Deal.

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change if he will place in the Library copies of correspondence he received between 1 January 2012 and 1 March 2012 from energy companies or their representatives on the implementation of the Green Deal and the Green Deal Central Charge. [99225]

Gregory Barker: Ministers have received correspondence from energy companies or their representatives on the implementation of the Green Deal during this period. However we believe that release of this information would prejudice commercial interests.

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change if he will take steps to establish clear rules for the independence of Green Deal assessors from Green Deal providers. [99573]

Gregory Barker: It is important that the advice provided by Green Deal assessors is completely impartial, no matter how they are being employed. The regulations, code of practice and standards, to be published in due course, will set out the expectations on all Green Deal assessors in terms of quality and impartiality of advice.

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps he is taking to ensure Green Deal assessors are appropriately qualified to provide advice to the consumer of the effect of Green Deal measures on their property. [99574]

Gregory Barker: All Green Deal assessors will need to be qualified to the standards set out in the National Occupational Standards for Green Deal Advisers. The draft standards have been submitted to the UKNOS Panel for approval and can be found on the Asset Skills website:

<http://www.assetskills.org/PropertyAndPlanning/EPBDGreenDealNOS.aspx>

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps he is taking to ensure that the Code of Practice for Green Deal assessors enables consumers to access advice on Green Deal measures that is wholly independent of those selling such measures. [99575]

Gregory Barker: The regulations, Code of Practice and standards, to be published in due course, will set out the expectations of all Green Deal assessors in terms of quality and impartiality of advice and the distinction between the assessment process and other elements of the Green Deal.

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change if he will take steps to ensure that consumers have access to advice from qualified built environment professionals on the full effects of proposed Green Deal measures. [99576]

Gregory Barker: The role of the Green Deal assessor will be to provide consumers with impartial information on the energy efficiency of their property and the potential to improve it further. They will be required to have an understanding of the effect of installing measures in a range of different property types and they will also be required to have an understanding of where further more specialist advice can be sought, where this is necessary, and to direct consumers towards that advice.

Nuclear Power Stations: Safety

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what information he has received from HM Chief Nuclear Inspector on progress made in resolving each of the outstanding issues identified on issuance in December 2011 of the interim design acceptance confirmation for the UK EPR as part of the generic design assessment process; when he expects all outstanding issues to be satisfactorily resolved; and how many such issues are related to concerns arising from safety assessments of the Fukushima nuclear accident. [99005]

Charles Hendry: The Office for Nuclear Regulation and the Environment Agency provide regular updates on the progress of the Generic Design Assessment process in their quarterly reports. These reports include metrics showing the progress of each GDA Issue and are published on the Regulators' website:

www.hse.gov.uk/newreactors/quarterly-updates.htm

The timing for the resolution of the outstanding GDA Issues for the EPR is a matter for the GDA Requesting Party and the Regulators, and is based on agreed resolution plans, which are also available on the Regulators' website:

www.hse.gov.uk/newreactors/2011-gda-issues-epr.htm

Regulators will not give their permission for construction of the safety related nuclear island until all issues have been resolved to their satisfaction.

The EPR design has one outstanding GDA Issue that requires the Requesting Parties to "consider and action plans to address lessons learned from the Fukushima event". This GDA Issue and its associated resolution plan can be found towards the end of the above web page.

Renewable Energy: Feed-in Tariffs

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much additional funding he has allocated to the feed-in tariff scheme in the most current spending period. [99577]

Gregory Barker: No specific amount of additional funding has been allocated to the feed-in tariffs (FITs) scheme. The FITs budget falls within the Levies Control Framework, which also includes the Renewables Obligation and Warm Homes Discount schemes. This includes a 'headroom' of 20% to recognise the uncertainty involved in managing demand-led schemes.

The anticipated overspend on FITs resulting from the surge in installations in 2011-12 will be met through a combination of underspend from the Renewables Obligation, and if necessary use of the headroom facility. We expect that underspend on the Renewables Obligation will be available because we will be able to meet our

interim renewables targets more cheaply than originally anticipated. There will not be any lower deployment of large-scale renewables in order to pay for FITs.

Annex A of the Impact Assessment accompanying the consultation on Phase 2A of the comprehensive review of FITs available at:

www.decc.gov.uk/media/viewfile.ashx?filetype=4&filepath=Consultations/fits-review/4320-feedin-tariffs-review-phase-2a-draft-impact-asses.pdf

sets out the expected spend on FITs on existing installations, and the potential cost of new installations. The actual cost of new installations will depend on the rate at which technology costs fall and the level of uptake under the proposed new tariffs.

Renewable Energy: North West

Bill Esterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what plans he has to promote renewable energy sources in the North West of England. [98463]

Charles Hendry: In order to meet our 2020 renewable energy target we will need to boost deployment across the UK. The Renewable Energy Roadmap (published July 2011) sets out a UK-wide targeted plan of action for eight key technologies in order to meet our renewable energy target.

I am aware of a number of existing key renewable energy projects in the North West including: Scout Moor onshore wind farm (65MW); Barrow (90MW); Burbo Bank (90MW); the recently completed Ormonde (150MW); and Walney 1 and 2 offshore wind farms. Walney was recently inaugurated by the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr Davey) as the largest offshore wind farm in the world.

There is also potential for further offshore wind developments in the North West with the Crown Estate awarding development rights for extensions to both Burbo Bank and Walney and the round 3 Irish Sea Zone with its potential capacity of 4,200MW.

Biomass will also play an important role in the North West—INEOS ChlorVinyls (a leading manufacturer of chlorine and PVC) is currently constructing an energy from waste (EfW) combined heat and power (CHP) plant in Runcorn, Cheshire. When complete, it will be the largest EfW CHP plant in the UK.

The North West is a good place for investment in renewables—from 1 April 2011 to 17 January 2012, the Department has identified £86 million of investment in renewables in the North West with the support of 977 jobs, and a potential £20 million and 610 jobs in the pipeline. Further information is available from our website at:

<http://www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/11/meeting-energy-demand/renewable-energy/3994-renewables-investment-and-jobs-announced-1-april-t.pdf>

Solar Power

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps he will take if deployment levels of solar photovoltaics are not on a trajectory to meet his 22GW ambition. [99469]

Gregory Barker: Under the central deployment scenario set out in the Impact Assessment accompanying the current consultation on solar photovoltaic (PV) cost control, see the following website:

www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/Consultations/fits-review/4320-feedin-tariffs-review-phase-2a-draft-impact-asses.pdf

we estimate that there could be approximately 22 GW of solar PV by 2020 in the central scenario. The assumptions behind this estimate are set out in the Impact Assessment.

Estimates of future solar PV growth are extremely uncertain, and depend on a number of assumptions such as future PV costs, and the growth of the PV market. Thus, whether or not 22 GW is deployed by 2020 will depend on PV costs coming down.

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what levels of solar photovoltaic deployment he expects in (a) 2012-13, (b) 2013-14 and (c) 2014-15, broken down by (i) 0 to 4kw and (ii) 250kw to 5MW installations. [99470]

Gregory Barker: DECC's estimates of future deployment levels are set out in the impact assessment supporting the current consultation on solar PV cost control, available to view at:

www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/Consultations/fits-review/4320-feedin-tariffs-review-phase-2a-draft-impact-asses.pdf

The impact assessment does not break deployment down by installation size.

Estimates of future solar PV growth are extremely uncertain, and depend on a number of assumptions such as future PV costs, and the growth of the PV market. DECC is continuously reviewing its estimates in the light of the latest evidence, and will provide updated assessments for the final impact assessment published alongside the Government response to the current consultation.

Tidal Power: North West

Bill Esterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent assessment he has made of the potential for the use of tidal energy in the North West of England. [98464]

Gregory Barker: In 2007 the Government commissioned the further development of the UK Marine Renewables Energy Atlas. The atlas represents the most detailed regional description of potential marine energy resources in UK waters ever completed to date at a national scale. The atlas is publicly available at:

<http://www.renewables-atlas.info/>

DECC also takes a strategic view on the environmental impacts of deploying wave and tidal energy technologies. The Department recently published its Offshore Energy Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA 2) which considered wave and tidal energy technologies for England and Wales and concluded that there are no overriding environmental considerations to prevent the leasing of wave and tidal energy devices provided appropriate measures are implemented that prevent, reduce and offset significant adverse impacts on the environment and other users of the sea.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Political Parties: Directors

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had on requiring Government funded bodies to publish a register showing the political affiliations, if any, of directors and senior staff. [98360]

Mr Maude: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Cabinet Office.

I have had no such discussions.

The rules that are already in place require civil servants to act in accordance with the provisions of the Civil Service Code, including the requirement to act with political impartiality. They are also subject to restrictions on their political activities as set out in the Civil Service Management Code.

Board members and staff of public bodies are subject to separate codes of conduct and rules that govern impartiality and political activities.

HEALTH

Ambulance Services: Pay

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of all the salaries of the chief executives of NHS ambulance trusts in England in (a) 2007 and (b) 2011. [99189]

Mr Simon Burns: Information on total remuneration is not held centrally. NHS ambulance trusts are independent organisations in their own right, and the pay of their chief executives is a matter for each individual NHS ambulance trust.

The pay of Ambulance Trust chief executives is governed by the Very Senior Managers (VSM) Pay Framework. The spot rates are set out as follows:

	Current salary levels	
	Salary from 1 April 2007	Salary from 1 April 2011
Band 1	108,705	112,764
Band 2	116,987	121,355
Band 3	124,234	128,873
London	144,940	150,351

Ambulance services by band are as follows:

Band 1—South West; North East; Great Western

Band 2—South East Coast; West Midlands; East Midlands; South Central

Band 3—North West; East of England; Yorkshire

Band 4—London

Remuneration committees may consider the need for paying a Recruitment and Retention Premium (RRP). A RRP is an addition to the pay of an individual post (or specific group of posts) where market pressures would otherwise prevent the employer from being able to recruit and retain staff for the post(s) concerned at the normal basic salary for the post(s). Payments in respect of recruitment and retention should not normally exceed 30% of basic pay.

The Remuneration Committee may also provide additional payments where individuals take on significant responsibilities outside their core role. Payments are linked to the proportion of time that the individual would spend on the additional work.

The remuneration committee should make any recommendations for payments of RRP or Additional Responsibilities on the basis of a clear business case, this has to be approved by the grandparent organisation.

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department holds on the levels of pay of chief executives of ambulance services in other EU member states. [99190]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department does not hold this information.

Brain: Injuries

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 28 February 2012, *Official Report*, columns 244-5W, on the brain: injuries, for what reason civilian patients treated in NHS hospitals for a head injury are not warned that they have a high risk of suffering post-traumatic hypopituitarism, while members of the armed forces treated in military hospitals are warned of the risk and screened for the condition; and if he will take steps to ensure that all hospitals routinely provide such screening to high risk patients. [99030]

Paul Burstow: Health professionals are best placed to use their clinical judgment to decide on the most appropriate treatment for patients with head injuries.

Breast Cancer

Mr Leech: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what progress his Department has made on a national breast cancer audit as part of the National Clinical Audit and Patient Outcome Programme; [98519]

(2) whether he plans to hold a specification development meeting for a national breast cancer audit; [98520]

(3) when he plans to announce further details of the funding arrangements for a national clinical audit for breast cancer as part of the National Clinical Audit and Patient Outcome Programme. [98521]

Paul Burstow: The Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr Lansley), announced in October 2011 that 11 new clinical areas would be added to the Department of Health funded National Clinical Audit and Patient Outcomes Programme. These include a national breast cancer audit. The first four new national clinical audits to be commissioned are: chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emergency laparotomy, the national vascular registry and prostate cancer. Specification development meetings have already been held for these audits and tender returns will shortly be invited for them. The remaining seven new national clinical audits will be commissioned in due course, using the same commissioning process.

Cumbria Primary Care Trust

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of patients from the Cumbria Primary Care Trust area who have been referred to out-of-county specialists in each of the last five years. [99356]

Mr Simon Burns: The available information for patients resident in Cumbria Primary Care Trust (PCT) is shown in the following table. PCT level data have been used, as data by county of residence are not available.

The data provided show a count of first out-patient attendances for residents of Cumbria PCT that occurred in a different PCT, in each of the last five years.

The number of first out-patient attendances does not represent the number of patients, as a person may have had more than one attendance or non-attendance within the year.

Number of first out-patient attendances by patients resident in Cumbria Teaching PCT that occurred at a different PCT

	Number
2006-07	6,798
2007-08	8,311
2008-09	10,947
2009-10	11,250
2010-11	14,371

Note:

First Attendance: a first attendance that was either face-to-face or via a telephone/telemedicine consultation.

Source:

Health and Social Care Information Centre Hospital Episode Statistics (HES). Activity in English NHS Hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector.

Departmental Ethnic Minority Staff

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department were from an ethnic minority in March (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; and if he will make a statement. [98871]

Mr Simon Burns: The numbers and proportions of senior civil servants (SCS) from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, for the months requested, are given as follows.

<i>As at March each year</i>	<i>Total BME SCS</i>	<i>Percentage of SCS BME</i>
2010	20	7
2011	17	7
2012	12	6

The Department continues to exceed the Cabinet Office threshold target of 4% for BME staff in the senior civil service and has set aspirational 'stretch' goals, to be achieved by April 2013.

Diabetes: Screening

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people with diabetes who did not receive the nine health care checks recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidelines in each primary care trust area in 2011. [98744]

Paul Burstow: The nine health care checks for diabetes as recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) are: HbA1c (a measurement of residual glucose), body mass index, blood pressure, urinary albumin, creatinine (a measure of kidney function), cholesterol, eye examinations, foot examinations and smoking status. NICE guidance recommends that diagnosed diabetics receive these nine health care checks (also known as care processes) annually. Primary care trusts (PCTs) are accountable for delivery of care and should be monitoring service delivery at local level.

There are two sources of data for assessing the extent to which the nine health care checks are provided: the National Diabetes Audit (NDA), and the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) achievement data.

The NDA covers 81.1% of the 2.34 million people aged 17 years and over with diagnosed diabetes reported by the QOF. Results for all PCTs that submit data to the annual NDA can be accessed via the NDA dashboard on the following link:

www.ic.nhs.uk/services/national-clinical-audit-support-programme-ncasp/national-diabetes-audit/analysis/pct-analysis-profiles

Ranking of results is colour coded enabling easy comparison of performance between PCTs.

In addition, two maps in the NHS Atlas of Variation (2011) can be accessed via the following link:

www.sepho.org.uk/extras/maps/NHSAtlas2011/atlas.html

These are specific to delivery of the nine care processes, and use data from the NDA. The atlas shows that, depending on their PCT area, between 5.4% and 47.9% of people with Type 1 diabetes received all nine health care checks, and between 7% and 71.4% of those with Type 2 diabetes received all the nine health care checks.

The QOF achievement data show higher numbers of patients receiving each of the health care checks than does the NDA (when comparing the QOF and NDA figures for each of the tests separately). The QOF data tables for each QOF year including 2009-10 at national strategic health authority and PCT levels are at:

www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/audits-and-performance/the-quality-and-outcomes-framework/the-quality-and-outcomes-framework-2009-10

The differences may be ascribable to variations in scope and data assessment methodology. We intend to work with stakeholders to understand the reasons for the differences and to identify what needs to be done as a result.

Drugs

Oliver Colvile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department makes available for independent research into branded medicines which are in short supply. [99063]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department funds many independent research programs. We are not currently funding research about short supply of branded medicines.

Drugs: Delivery Services

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 1 March 2012, *Official Report*, column 474W, on drugs: delivery services, if he

will (a) make and (b) publish an assessment of the number of emergency deliveries made. [98846]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department does not monitor the number of emergency deliveries made by medicine manufacturers to pharmacies and has not made any assessment.

Drugs: Misuse

Sir Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his strategy is for training and workforce development to support the transfer of responsibility for drug and alcohol services for the new public health service; and what the role will be of the Substance Misuse Skills Consortium. [99115]

Anne Milton: The Government's Drug Strategy, published in December 2010 sets out our plans for ensuring that an inspirational recovery orientated workforce helps more people to recover from dependence on drugs, alcohol and prescription and over-the-counter medicines.

We have committed to work with the Substance Misuse Skills Consortium to develop a skills framework. The Substance Misuse Skills Consortium is an independent and representative body of providers, service users and carers, and professional and membership organisations for those working in substance misuse treatment.

The National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse is supporting the transfer of responsibility for commissioning drug and alcohol treatment services to local authorities, subject to parliamentary approval. This includes advice on commissioning and help with the analysis of local data for Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.

Drugs: Plymouth

Oliver Colvile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department holds on which branded medicines are in short supply in Plymouth. [99064]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department does not hold information on which branded medicines are in short supply in Plymouth. The Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee collates reports from pharmacy contractors on medicines that they have had difficulty sourcing and publishes the Branded (medicines) Shortages List on their website:

www.psn.org.uk/pages/problem_medicines_list.html

Health

Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether there are any (a) organisations and (b) individuals that have withdrawn from the plenary group which oversees the development of the Public Health Responsibility Deal; [98789]

(2) if he will list any organisations and individuals who have withdrawn from each of the five networks established under the Public Health Responsibility Deal. [98908]

Paul Burstow: In autumn 2010, a range of organisations and individuals were invited to participate in the development of the Responsibility Deal. For a list of

network invitees, I refer the hon. Member to the response given by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Anne Milton) on 8 December 2010, *Official Report*, columns 343-44W.

On the launch of the Responsibility Deal in March 2011, we invited these organisations to sign up to the deal. Some individuals, such as academics or expert advisers, were and continue to be involved in a personal capacity rather than as representatives of organisations. Consequently, they cannot sign up as partners.

The following is a list of the organisations involved in the development work; which have not signed up to become partners.

Plenary group

Federation of Small Businesses

Diabetes UK

Alcohol, network

Alcohol Concern

Alcohol Health Alliance

British Liver Trust

British Medical Association

Institute for Alcohol Studies

Health at work network

British Heart Foundation (BHF)

C3 Collaborating for Health

Men's Health Forum

NHS Employers—signed up to the Responsibility Deal as part of the NHS Confederation

Royal College of Physicians.

South East Chambers of Commerce

TUC

Transport for London.

Physical activity network

BHF National Centre

BSkyB

CABE—organisation no longer exists

Cycling England—organisation no longer exists

Natural England

Royal Town Planning Institute

There have been some changes to the individuals representing partner organisations and we have not listed these.

Information on the current structure of the plenary group and its networks and a full list of the Responsibility Deal's partners is available on our website at:

<http://responsibilitydeal.dh.gov.uk/>

Since March 2011, the following six organisations have withdrawn from the Responsibility Deal.

Badminton England

Centrica

energie Fitness, Hackney Club

L'Aquila

NHS North East Essex

Punch Pub Company—company no longer exists

Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many meetings have been held of the plenary group which oversees the development of the Public Health Responsibility Deal since its inception. [99140]

Paul Burstow: Five meetings of the Responsibility Deal's plenary groups have been held since September 2011.

Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Public Health Responsibility Deal in tackling obesity and other health issues. [99141]

Paul Burstow: The Department's Policy Research Programme is currently investigating the feasibility of an independent evaluation of some element of the Public Health Responsibility Deal.

Health and Social Care Bill

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received urging him to drop the Health and Social Care Bill from (a) individuals and (b) organisations. [99363]

Mr Simon Burns: The Government are aware that a number of individuals and organisations have made representations arguing for the withdrawal of the Health and Social Care Bill. However, the Department does not record these separately from other correspondence.

Health Services: North West

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the (a) capital and (b) ongoing revenue costs of providing extra intensive care and high dependency unit beds at (i) Warrington and Halton NHS Trust and (ii) the Countess of Chester NHS Trust in the event of a vascular hub being located at either hospital. [99053]

Mr Simon Burns: The provision of local health services is a matter for the local national health service. As such, the Department has made no estimate of the costs to Warrington and Halton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (FT) and Countess of Chester Hospital NHS FT of the provision of intensive care and high dependency unit beds.

Cost implications of the proposal to centralise arterial surgery at the Countess of Chester hospital, included in the review by the local NHS of vascular services in Cheshire and Merseyside, will be considered by local commissioners as part of detailed implementation planning. Further information on this work can be obtained from Kathy Doran, chief executive of the Cheshire, Warrington and Wirral primary care trust cluster board.

Heart Diseases: Children

Jonathan Ashworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the budget is for the safe and sustainable review of children's heart services in England which is being carried out by the National Specialised Commissioning Team; and how much has been spent on the review. [99130]

Mr Simon Burns: The review of children's congenital heart services is a clinically led national health service review, independent of Government. However, we understand that the total budget for the review is not

available as the review is ongoing and costs are still being incurred, and will be incurred up to the decision by the Joint Committee of Primary Care Trusts later this year. We also understand that the final costs of the review will be published on the Safe and Sustainable website once the review is completed.

Midwives

Stephen Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington of 20 February 2012, *Official Report*, column 701W, on midwives, what proportion of midwifery graduates started work as midwives in the NHS within six months of graduation in each year from 1997 to 2009. [99109]

Paul Burstow: The Higher Education Statistics Agency is the official agency for the collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative information about higher education.

The following table shows the percentage of midwifery graduates who started work as midwives in the national health service within six months of graduation in each year from 2002-03 to 2009-10. The first Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Survey was carried out in 2002-03 and prior figures are incomparable.

<i>Year of graduation</i>	<i>Graduates from midwifery courses¹</i>	<i>Of which: working² in midwifery</i>	<i>Percentage working in midwifery³</i>
2002-03	1,030	870	84.4
2003-04	1,245	1,000	80.3
2004-05	1,135	910	80.1
2005-06	1,355	1,085	79.9
2006-07	1,365	1,055	77.2
2007-08	1,485	1,180	79.4
2008-09	1,425	1,135	79.6
2009-10	1,520	1,245	81.7

¹ Covers graduates of all domiciles from full-time and part-time postgraduate and undergraduate courses.

² Covers full-time, part-time and voluntary employment and work and further study.

³ Based on the Standard Occupational Classification.

Notes:

Numbers are rounded up or down to the nearest multiple of five, so components may not sum to totals: Percentages are based on unrounded figures and are given to one decimal place. Subject information is shown as full person equivalents (FPEs) in the table. FPEs are derived by splitting student instances between the different subjects that make up their course aim.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) Survey.

Multiple Sclerosis: Drugs

Ben Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 1 March 2012, *Official Report*, columns 476-7W, on multiple sclerosis: drugs, how many prescriptions for the Tysabri form of the drug natalizumab were issued in each strategic health authority between December 2009 and February 2012. [98735]

Mr Simon Burns: The latest information available from the Prescribing Analysis and CosT tool system indicates that there was one prescription for Tysabri

and none using the generic name natalizumab, recorded as being prescribed by a strategic health authority (SHA) between December 2009 and December 2011. As there might be a data protection issue with releasing information where the drug has only been prescribed once, we have not named the SHA. Currently prescribing data are available only up to December 2011, therefore figures between January 2012 and February 2012 are not available.

As previously stated, natalizumab (Tysabri) is used mainly in secondary care.

Ben Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 1 March 2012, *Official Report*, columns 476-7W, on multiple sclerosis: drugs, how many prescriptions for the Fampyra form of the drug fampridine were issued in each strategic health authority between October 2011 and January 2012. [98736]

Mr Simon Burns: The latest information available from the Prescribing Analysis and CosT tool system indicates that there was one prescription for fampridine, the generic name of Fampyra, recorded as being prescribed once by a strategic health authority (SHA) between October 2011 and December 2011. As there might be a data protection issue with releasing information where the drug has only been prescribed once, we have not named the SHA. Currently prescribing data are available only up to December 2011, therefore figures for January 2012 are not available.

As previously stated, fampridine (Fampyra) is used mainly in secondary care.

NHS: Innovation

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role the Specialised Commissioning Innovation Fund will have in supporting the adoption and diffusion of innovation. [98746]

Mr Simon Burns: The focus of the Specialised Commissioning Innovation Fund is on the rare health conditions and diseases, and is due to be trialled in 2012-13. It would see the establishment of an advisory board, reporting to the NHS Medical Director, which will horizon scan for the best innovations, and then fund rapid trials in hospitals to test and evaluate the effectiveness and use of the technologies. If the trials show that the technologies can deliver significant improvements in quality or value, they will be spread at pace and scale across the national health service.

Where appropriate this would enable suitable patients to have early access to innovative treatments in a way that ensured the collection and dissemination of data for wider use.

John Glen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many bodies within the NHS he proposes will have specific responsibility for the promotion of innovation in health care after March 2012; [98772]

(2) what future role he plans for NHS regional innovation hubs. [98773]

Mr Simon Burns: Innovation remains crucial to delivering a world-class health service, in terms of improving the quality of patient care and its contribution to economic growth.

However, over the last decade, the innovation landscape has become fragmented, cluttered and confusing. Many new organisations have emerged all charged with improving innovation in the national health service, including the regional innovation hubs. We need to ensure that innovation investment, development and support are coherently organised, and focused on delivering quality and driving value.

This is why, as announced in 'Innovation Health and Wealth', we will undertake a sunset review of all NHS and Department of Health funded or sponsored innovation bodies, which will determine their future form and funding arrangements.

NHS: Procurement

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he plans to monitor the personalisation of healthcare by primary care trusts and clinical commissioning groups. [98532]

Mr Simon Burns: The Health and Social Care Bill sets out a clear framework of accountability and assurance, giving the NHS Commissioning Board the tools to ensure local commissioners can deliver improved outcomes for patients, including making services more personalised and getting the best value for money from the public's investment.

The Bill includes specific duties for the NHS Commissioning Board and clinical commissioning groups about involving patients in decisions about their care and enabling them to make choices. While clinical commissioning groups will be responsible for the way they meet these duties, there will be transparent accountability to the NHS Commissioning Board. The board will report against its functions, and the Secretary of State for Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr Lansley), will have an explicit duty to keep the board's performance under review.

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether he plans to transfer commissioning support services to the private sector; [98635]

(2) what future arrangements he plans for the control and accountability of commissioning support services; [98636]

(3) how many managing directors he estimates will be appointed for commissioning support services in the NHS; [98637]

(4) which primary care trusts are forming partnerships for joint provision of commissioning support services. [98638]

Mr Simon Burns: The White Paper 'Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS' proposed that clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) would have the freedom to decide which commissioning activities they do themselves and those that they choose to buy in from external organisations, including local authorities, private and voluntary sector bodies, and that over time a more competitive market will develop for supplying some of these services.

The strategy for ensuring that CCGs can choose from a range of high quality commissioning support services (CSSs) was set out in 'Developing commissioning support:

Towards Service Excellence' published by the NHS Commissioning Board Authority (NHS CBA) on 2 February 2012.

This guidance describes the business review process that aims to support staff in primary care trust clusters to transform their services and the assurance process that will test their viability. The business review will operate until August 2012 when the NHS CBA will assess the full business plans that CSSs have developed. More information will be available on the detailed operating arrangements for commissioning support services in the autumn.

NHS: Reorganisation

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued on the conduct of consultations with the public on proposed changes to NHS services; and what procedures he has put in place to assess whether such consultations have been conducted effectively. [99054]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department published statutory guidance in October 2008 "Real Involvement". The guidance provides advice to national health service organisations about their obligations under section 242 of the NHS Act 2006. This duty requires NHS organisations to make arrangements to involve patients and public in the planning and development of services and decisions affecting the operation of services. The Act is not prescriptive about what constitutes 'involvement', but the provision makes it clear that users may be involved by being consulted, or by being given information, or in other ways.

Additional guidance published by the Department (Changing for the Better, 2008) advises that major service change proposals should have a plan that covers a range of activities to involve and consult with local people and representative organisations, staff and other stakeholders.

The Department does not routinely assess the conduct of individual consultations by NHS organisations. However, it does require that primary care trusts report annually on the impact of public feedback to consultations and their commissioning decisions.

Pharmacy

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to review the effect on the supply of prescription drugs of the Direct to Pharmacy initiative; and for what reasons the Direct to Pharmacy initiative is imposing a quota on the stock of prescription drugs distributed to chemists. [98712]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department continues to meet supply chain representatives regularly to seek to ensure that patients can continue to obtain the medicines they need when they need them. Suppliers may use their own distribution arrangements, including a direct to pharmacy model and quotas providing they continue to meet the legal requirements to ensure, within the limits of their responsibility, the appropriate and continued supply of medical products to pharmacies so that the needs of patients are met.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 20 February 2012, *Official Report*, column 711W, on pharmacy, what his policy is on imposing a legal obligation to ensure a pharmacy receives medicines within 24 hours. [98847]

Mr Simon Burns: I have nothing further to add to my earlier reply to the hon. Member.

Pinderfields Hospital: Spinal Injuries

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department holds on whether a review of spinal cord injury services is being undertaken at Pinderfields hospital, Wakefield. [98530]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department is aware Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust is currently developing a clinical services strategy to ensure the future safety and sustainability of services. The spinal injuries centre at Pinderfields hospital is included in the development of this strategy. However, this is a matter for the local national health service and the hon. Member may wish to write to the chief executive of the trust for more information.

An NHS-led national review of spinal surgery services is also under way. The purpose of this review is to identify current provision and make recommendations on future need. The report of the taskforce leading the review is expected later this year.

Prescription Drugs: Exports

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had on reducing the exports of prescription drugs which are in shortage in the NHS. [98743]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department meets regularly with representatives of the medicine supply chain to discuss the export of medicines to other European member states, which can be carried out legally by anyone who holds the necessary licences under United Kingdom medicines legislation. The licence holders remain under a duty, within the limits of their responsibilities, to ensure appropriate and continued supplies to pharmacies so that the needs of patients in the UK are met.

Primary Ciliary Dyskinesia: Prescriptions

Charlotte Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on exempting adults with primary ciliary dyskinesia from prescription charges in the last 12 months. [98709]

Mr Simon Burns: In the period 1 March 2011 to 29 February 2012, the Department received one relevant written representation on this matter, a letter from my hon. Friend dated 26 May 2011.

Recruitment

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department has spent on advertising job vacancies since October 2011. [99253]

Mr Simon Burns: Since October 2011, £6,745 has been spent on advertising to recruit senior civil servants. There has been no spending on advertising for posts below the senior civil service. Fast streamers are centrally recruited by Cabinet Office for a standard fee.

Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals NHS Trust: Public Appointments

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to give guidance to the Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Hospitals Trust board on the inclusion of interested stakeholder groups in the appointment of a new chief executive of the Trust. [99193]

Mr Simon Burns: The appointment of a chief executive is an employment matter for the employing trust. However, national health service trusts' chairs are expected to consult and involve the strategic health authority chief executive at all stages of the recruitment, selection and appointment process when appointing a new chief executive.

South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust

Bob Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the responsibilities are of the (a) chair and (b) chief executive of the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust. [99351]

Mr Simon Burns: Responsibilities of both the chair and chief executive will cover strategic, human resources and operational issues.

In addition, the chief executive has responsibilities as accounting officer, to ensure that financial systems and procedures promote the efficient and economical conduct of business and safeguard financial propriety and regularity throughout the trust.

Further details of the responsibilities of an NHS foundation trust accounting officer can be found in the "Revised: NHS Foundation Trust Accounting Officer Memorandum" (April 2008), which is available on Monitor's website at:

www.monitor-nhsft.gov.uk/home/our-publications/browse-category/guidance-foundation-trusts/mandatory-guidance/revised-nhs-foun

Sugar

Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he considered including a pledge on sugar as part of the Responsibility Deal Collective Pledges on Food. [98811]

Paul Burstow: The Responsibility Deal Food Network has agreed the terms of a calorie reduction pledge under which companies can make commitments to support and enable their customers to eat and drink fewer calories. Reducing sugar content in food and soft drinks to reduce calories is one of a range of actions businesses might take.

West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust: Pay

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the total value of the remuneration package is for the chief executive of West Midlands Ambulance Service, including costs associated with pension and car allowance; [99112]

(2) what the individual components are of the remuneration package for the chief executive of West Midlands Ambulance Service; [99113]

(3) what the travel expenses were of the chief executive of West Midlands Ambulance Service in (a) 2009, (b) 2010 and (c) 2011. [99192]

Mr Simon Burns: The information requested is not held by the Department. My hon. Friend may wish to approach the West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust directly.

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will take steps to reduce the salary of the chief executive of West Midlands Ambulance Service; [99114]

(2) if he will arrange for officials in his Department to meet the chief executive of West Midlands Ambulance Trust to renegotiate his contract to ensure he does not earn more than the Prime Minister. [99188]

Mr Simon Burns: National health service ambulance trusts are independent employers and organisations in their own right. The pay of a chief executive within an NHS ambulance trust is a contractual agreement between the employee and the employing organisation. It is for the NHS ambulance trusts remuneration committee to ensure the pay of the chief executive within that organisation is appropriate in accordance with the very senior managers (VSM) pay framework. This provides an objective spot rate for every post.

Under the VSM pay framework, a remuneration committee may consider an additional payment beyond the basic spot rate. This is when there is a requirement for a recruitment and retention premium or where an individual takes on significant responsibilities outside their core role. Any additional payment beyond the spot rate requires grandparent approval. The grandparent organisation for the West Midlands Ambulance Trust is NHS Midlands and East.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Equality and Human Rights Commission: Pay

Mr Stewart Jackson: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities for what reason the Deputy Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission's daily rate of pay is set at £700; and if she will make a statement. [96347]

Lynne Featherstone [holding answer 27 February 2012]: The deputy chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) was appointed in 2009 by the then Minister for Women and Equalities, the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman).

The deputy chair has a higher remuneration rate than the other commissioners (£700 per day compared to £500 per day) to reflect the additional responsibilities of the role, including standing in for the chair in his absence.

In March 2011, we set out plans to reform the EHRC. We will respond to the consultation shortly.

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