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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 11 July 2012

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House of Commons

Wednesday 11 July 2012

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Bilateral Aid Review

1. **David Rutley** (Macclesfield) (Con): What progress his Department has made on its objectives for water and sanitation set out in the bilateral aid review. [116152]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Stephen O'Brien): As is made transparent in the Department for International Development's annual report, since 2010 the United Kingdom has given 2 million people access to clean drinking water, 2 million people improved access to sanitation and 7.4 million people improved hygiene services. The right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) was candid in 2007 when he admitted that the Labour Government had taken their "eye off the ball" in relation to water and sanitation. I assure my hon. Friend that the coalition will not make the same mistake. In April, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced our intention to double our results by reaching 60 million people.

David Rutley: I welcome the fact that under this Government, 7.4 million people have seen improvements in their hygiene conditions over the past two years. That is testimony to the Government's strength of commitment. What assessment has my hon. Friend made of the disparity in sanitation between rural and urban dwellings?

Mr O'Brien: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. The Government see providing adequate sanitation for poor people in the world's growing cities as crucial. We keep a record of the proportion of our results that are achieved in rural and urban areas. We have six bilateral water, sanitation and hygiene—or WASH—programmes in urban areas, including a programme to improve WASH service delivery in 31 slums in Freetown, including in Kroo bay. I volunteered there two years ago and went back last week to see the progress that has been made.

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): What steps is the Minister taking to improve the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, given that 80% of water in the west bank is stolen by Israeli settlers and 90% of the water in Gaza is contaminated with sewage due to the blockades?

Mr O'Brien: Part of our contribution to the multilateral agencies goes towards that, not least through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. Its work is important in the provision of water to the peoples of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, not least to provide fair access to drinking water.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Having visited the Gaza strip earlier this year, may I stress to the Minister the importance of the breakdown of the water and sewerage systems in that benighted territory? Some 20,000 children under three are suffering from avoidable illnesses because 90% of the water is contaminated. Whose fault that is does not bother the Gazans; they just need the systems to be sorted out. Britain could play an important role in doing that.

Mr O'Brien: My hon. Friend makes an extremely powerful point. Broadly, the answer is yes, not least because we make extremely strong representations at every opportunity on all the points that he has raised. Equally, we are working closely with UNRWA to provide a practical solution to many of these difficult problems.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): There are still 2.6 billion people worldwide who lack basic sanitation. What are the Government doing to get the international community to meet its obligations in that respect?

Mr O'Brien: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced, we are increasing our approach to water and sanitation to double our results and reach 60 million people. Indeed, we are seeking to match one person in the poor world who does not have access to water and sanitation to every single person living in the United Kingdom. In particular, it is incredible value for money that about \$10—which is often provided by households themselves—can provide sanitation for one household.

Development Aid (Legislation)

2. **Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): What progress he has made on enshrining in law spending on international development equal to 0.7% of gross national income; and if he will make a statement. [116153]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Andrew Mitchell): The 0.7 Bill is ready and is with the business managers. As the Prime Minister has said, the coalition Government will introduce the Bill when parliamentary time allows.

Stephen Timms: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer. There was widespread dismay that the Bill was not included in the Queen's Speech. Why has the commitment made in the coalition agreement not so far been fulfilled?

Mr Mitchell: The commitment was referred to in the Gracious Speech. The most important thing is to get on and fulfil the commitment, which has been made on both sides of the House and by all parties, to give development aid equal to 0.7% of our gross national income. That is what we are doing. The right hon.

Gentleman makes a fair point. We must get on with the legislation. As soon as the business managers say that there is a slot, we will take it.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): To those who continue to doubt whether, in this time of austerity, we should stick to our eminently worthwhile target, is it not worth pointing out that 99.3% of gross national income will still be available for all other purposes?

Mr Mitchell: My right hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. Many Members will agree that under 1% of gross national income is an incredibly good investment in the future prosperity and security of the countries in which we work as well as in Britain's prosperity and security.

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Lab): I say to the Secretary of State that we can get on with it. My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mark Hendrick) has tabled a private Member's Bill that would enshrine the 0.7% commitment in law. It has all-party support and is consistent with promises made in all three main parties' election manifestos and the coalition agreement. The Secretary of State is fully aware that the success of private Members' Bills depends on Government support. Will he confirm that that support will be forthcoming? If not, why not?

Mr Mitchell: I share the hon. Gentleman's interest in a potential private Member's Bill, but for the Government to comment on the Bill it will be necessary for the hon. Member concerned to publish it in the Table Office.

Mr Lewis: The Secretary of State is fully aware that my hon. Friend offered to take the Secretary of State's Bill and use it as the basis of his private Member's Bill, so let us get on with it.

Enshrining the 0.7% commitment in law is only one way of fulfilling our obligation to the world's poor. Can the Secretary of State explain why he has done nothing to stop measures in the Finance Bill that will enable UK multinational companies to avoid paying approximately £4 billion in tax to developing countries? That could be called legalising tax dodging. Is he concerned that his Government's legacy will be to increase aid dependency by reducing self-sufficiency in many developing countries?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is referring to the controlled foreign companies provisions of the Finance Bill and the ActionAid campaign on them. There have been discussions between Treasury officials and ActionAid, and there is significant disagreement about the effect of those measures.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): I warmly welcome the coalition Government's commitment to spend 0.7% of gross national income on international development, particularly to help us make progress towards the millennium development goal on reducing maternal deaths, which we are furthest from achieving. Will the Secretary of State outline how UK aid money will be spent to save the lives of women and girls in light of today's excellent family planning summit, where global leadership is being shown?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend is entirely right to underline the fact that the coalition Government have put girls and women right at the centre of everything we do in development. She refers to the family planning summit, which the British Government are co-hosting with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. That summit has the power, if successful, to reduce by half the number of women in the poor world who want access to contraception but do not have it.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): As the UK emerges—hopefully—from recession over the next two or three years, 0.7% of GNI will represent a significant increase in spending. What is the Secretary of State doing to ensure that UK citizens see value for money?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman rightly identifies the importance of being able to demonstrate to hard-pressed taxpayers that every pound of their hard-earned money is really delivering 100p of value on the ground. That is exactly what the Government are doing in the case of development policy. The 0.7% commitment to which the hon. Gentleman refers reflects the state of the economy, because the spending figure will go up and down with economic health. Many of us think that is what it should do.

Syrian Refugees

3. **Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): What humanitarian support his Department is providing for Syrian refugees; and if he will make a statement. [116154]

6. **Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): What humanitarian support his Department is providing for Syrian refugees; and if he will make a statement. [116158]

7. **Mr Sam Gyimah** (East Surrey) (Con): What humanitarian support his Department is providing for Syrian refugees; and if he will make a statement. [116159]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Alan Duncan): In addition to the support that we are providing within the country itself, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently announced that we were increasing our funding to £3 million to support the UN-led response for Syrian refugees, providing humanitarian assistance for up to 185,000 people in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq.

Jason McCartney: I thank the Minister. It is really important that I can show my constituents that we are supporting the Syrian people in these difficult times. How many people have fled across the border to Jordan, and does he think Jordan can cope with the influx of refugees?

Mr Duncan: Three weeks ago I was in Ramtha, on the Syrian border in Jordan, just 2 miles away from Daraa, from where we could hear the gunfire. Some 140,000 people have left Syria for Jordan since the start of the crisis, more than 30,000 of whom are seeking assistance. The Jordanian Government and host families

have generously accommodated a great number of refugees. We are concerned, however, that they may soon reach capacity and that the UN may need to create tented camps to accommodate the increasing numbers.

Tim Farron: Amnesty International has reported that some refugee camps in Turkey are so close to the Syrian border that refugees have suffered injuries as a result of stray bullets from clashes in Syria. Have any representations been made to the Turkish authorities to relocate the camps and allow human rights organisations access to them to meet Syrian refugees?

Mr Duncan: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is emphatically yes. More than 35,000 Syrian refugees are being assisted in Turkey and thousands more are fending for themselves. The Turkish Government are leading and co-ordinating the assistance to Syrian refugees, supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian agencies. Registered refugees are hosted in 10 camps, which are fully funded by the Turkish Government, but there is, by and large, no problem with access.

Mr Gyimah: I thank the Minister for his comments on the humanitarian support that the British Government will give to people inside Syria. Will he specify which agencies our extra support will go through?

Mr Duncan: We have channelled significant funding through UN agencies such as the World Food Programme, the UNHCR and the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Some humanitarian agencies have requested us not to name them publicly as they are concerned that their staff and operations could be put at risk. We fully respect those concerns, and I can assure the House that all UK funding is nevertheless going to humanitarian agencies with a proven ability to operate in Syria.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): As the Minister has said, we must be grateful to neighbouring countries such as Lebanon and Jordan. Is it correct that Iraqi Kurdistan and Switzerland are considering taking Syrian refugees because some of the neighbouring countries are already saying that they cannot cope?

Mr Duncan: A few Syrians—currently about 6,000—have crossed into Iraq. Those who do are predominantly Kurdish, as the right hon. Lady says. They mainly go to the north, although some go to Anbar and Baghdad. The camp at Domiz near Dahuk houses 3,500 such people.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): The Minister mentioned Ramtha on the Jordan-Syria border. In drawing attention to my entry in the register, may I tell the Minister that I have also visited and endorse what he says about the generosity of the Jordanian people? What extra assistance can be given there? Refugees fleeing Syria is a humanitarian issue, and refugees should be treated equally whether they are Syrians or other nationalities, such as Palestinian.

Mr Duncan: A number of Palestinian refugees are indeed among those who have been forced to flee their homes in Syria and cross into neighbouring countries.

We recognise that that raises difficulties, particularly in Lebanon and Jordan, and we continue to work with country Governments, the UNHCR and UNRWA to ensure that the needs of all refugees are met. Contingency planning for greater numbers is in place.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): A number of my constituents have relatives who are refugees from Syria or who are trying to exit Syria through shelling in cities such as Aleppo. What steps is the Minister taking to work with the Home Office to identify British people and people who have contacts in Britain to support them to return to the UK?

Mr Duncan: Discussions between Departments take place in the normal way. The prime responsibility of the Department for International Development is for the humanitarian need of people in Syria, but we will continue to work with other Departments to see what it might be possible to do to alleviate the suffering and plight of those who face such difficulty.

Sir Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): It is right that the international community and the UK respond to people in need at a time of crisis, but does the Minister accept that, as the crisis intensifies, Syria will get poorer and the people's needs will become greater? Does he agree with Kofi Annan that anybody who has an interest in the future of the region and the well-being of its people, including Russia, China and Iran, should have an interest in ending the conflict?

Mr Duncan: We are working with all organisations in all countries in any way we can to put pressure on the Syrian regime, in whose principal gift ending the conflict rests.

Overseas Territories White Paper

4. Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): What assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the overseas territories White Paper; and if he will make a statement. [116155]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Alan Duncan): The overseas territories White Paper reflects the Government's collective vision for the territories and our commitment to their future through good governance and economic growth. DFID fulfils its obligations primarily through its regular support to Montserrat, Tristan da Cunha, St Helena and Pitcairn Island.

Guy Opperman: I welcome a focus on increased support for our overseas territories as opposed to the bizarre focus we currently have, whereby support in aid goes to countries such as Argentina for bilateral relations and mutual understanding, which—I suggest—is clearly not working.

Mr Duncan: I assure my hon. Friend that DFID does not directly provide any such aid to Argentina. The World Bank has not considered any loan request from Argentina recently and the UK has refused to support recent loans considered by the Inter-American Development Bank. As well as supporting the four overseas territories that I have just mentioned, we are helping Turks and Caicos to turn around its previously dire financial situation. Any such needs in the overseas territories are, of course, a first call on our aid budget.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): Can the Minister confirm that there are two banks, mutual funds or tax-dodging offshore companies for every citizen of the Cayman Islands? Will the new White Paper deal with the fact that around the world the overseas territories and dependencies are seen as the tax evader's paradise network?

Mr Duncan: With respect to my ministerial responsibilities, I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that DFID is not providing any financial aid to tax havens. The UK recently signed agreements with the Cayman Islands and the British Virgin Islands Governments, but those agreements set out what we expect of those overseas territories in how they manage their public finances.

Nepal

5. **Mr Marcus Jones** (Nuneaton) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the development situation in Nepal. [116156]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Alan Duncan): Nepal is the world's 16th poorest country. As I saw during my recent visit, it faces enormous political and development challenges. We are tackling them by focusing on wealth creation, strengthened governance and security, health, education, and disaster risk reduction.

Mr Jones: According to WaterAid, only 31% of Nepal is covered by proper sanitation, and 7,900 under-fives die every year from diarrhoea. Following the high-level water and sanitation conference in April, can the Minister give me some assurance on what is being done to try to put right that appalling situation?

Mr Duncan: I assure my hon. Friend that things are just a little bit better than he says. The latest data from a highly regarded national survey suggest that 55% of people in Nepal have access to safe latrines. Despite total child deaths having almost halved in the past 10 years, child deaths from poor water and sanitation are still unacceptably high. Our programmes will help to avert 3,500 child deaths and should ensure that 110,000 more people have access to safe latrines by 2015.

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): In light of the fact that there will be elections in Nepal very soon, what assistance are we providing for good governance there?

Mr Duncan: The hon. Gentleman hits on a most important point. At the moment, there is constitutional and governmental deadlock in Nepal. When I was there, we were doing our utmost as an influential friend of Nepal—as I hope the UK can continue to be—to help to break the deadlock and ensure either that a new constituent assembly is formed or that there are elections, and each can facilitate and assist the other.

Burma

8. **Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): What plans he has for future development assistance to Burma. [116160]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Andrew Mitchell): On 1 March we announced a doubling of British aid to Burma. We are supporting the World Bank in conducting an assessment of the development opportunities there following the remarkable changes which Aung San Suu Kyi underlined in her historic visit to Westminster last month.

Yasmin Qureshi: For the first time in decades, positive changes in Burma offer hope to refugees to return home. What is the Secretary of State's Department doing to encourage them to return to Burma?

Mr Mitchell: We are engaged in Kachin and Rakhine states, both of which are receiving British humanitarian support. I can also announce today that a team of Members of this House, under the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, will be visiting the Burmese Parliament in Naypyidaw later this month.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Despite the signs of hope, I am sure that the Secretary of State will share my concern about the recent reports of human rights abuses in Kachin state—Christians being persecuted, women being gang raped and internally displaced persons camps becoming pools of prey for human trafficking. Can he assure me that international aid with robust human rights protection will reach the Kachin people?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend identifies a matter of great concern in Kachin. We have set aside £2 million for humanitarian support there, of which some £1.2 million has already been allocated.

Topical Questions

T1. [116167] **Tessa Munt** (Wells) (LD): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Andrew Mitchell): At the weekend, I represented the Government at the Afghanistan summit in Tokyo, at which Britain made long-term pledges to support the development of Afghanistan and called on the rest of the international community to do the same. Today, the British Government and the Gates Foundation are co-hosting a global summit that aims to cut by half the number of women in developing countries who want access to contraception but cannot get it. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I understand hon. Members' excited anticipation of Prime Minister's questions, but we are discussing extremely serious matters and it would be a courtesy to those people affected and to hon. Members if there were a reasonable level of decorum.

Tessa Munt: Thank you, Mr Speaker. What opportunities exist for pushing for financial transparency worldwide, including budgetary transparency and transparency in natural resource management? Will my right hon. Friend's Department seek to promote financial transparency initiatives such as GIFT—the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend identifies transparency as a most important aspect of development, and it is why Britain was a key leader at the launch and

implementation of the international aid transparency initiative, and we continue to work hard with partners all around the world to ensure that the emphasis on transparency and good spending that was championed at the Busan conference in November continues.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Today the Government are hosting an important summit on family planning, which we welcome. However, the brutal murder last weekend by the Taliban of an Afghan woman for adultery shows that women's rights and freedoms remain elusive goals. Does the Secretary of State agree that the credibility of the summit will depend on women's human rights being at the heart of the actions that follow it?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. The summit is about ensuring that women have the ability to choose whether and when they have children, and the spacing in between their children. We need to keep the focus of the summit on that issue. She will have heard the Government's strong condemnation of the Taliban's execution in Afghanistan. We set up the Tawanmandi fund last year specifically to empower women in the areas that the hon. Lady describes, and its work is ongoing. Three quarters of the grants from the fund have gone to organisations involved in protecting women.

T2. [116168] **Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Conditions in Afghanistan after the external forces leave are becoming a matter of increasing importance to us. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on the outcomes of the Tokyo summit on Afghanistan that he attended at the weekend?

Mr Mitchell: The Tokyo summit was essentially a grand bargain between members of the international community to ensure that funding and support will continue through 2015 to 2017, and indeed throughout the decade of transformation to 2025. In return for that, the Government of Afghanistan need to continue to place a strong emphasis on governance reforms and economic reforms.

T3. [116169] **Helen Jones** (Warrington North) (Lab): We have just marked the first anniversary of the creation of South Sudan, but 1 million people there require food aid, and along the border the situation is even worse, with between 15% and 22% of under-fives suffering from malnutrition. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the United Kingdom's response targets the needs of those children, who are the future of that struggling country?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady rightly identifies the plight of the many people caught up in that conflict. A girl born today in South Sudan is more likely to die while having a baby than to complete her primary school education. However, the position on the border, particularly in Abyei, is now easing, and there are some signs of optimism in the direct negotiations that are taking place between South Sudan and Khartoum.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): Will the Secretary of State join me in applauding the strong lead being given by the UK in the arms treaty negotiations in New

York and, in particular, our support for provisions that will allow legitimate arms sales but discourage wholly disproportionate spending on arms that is detrimental to sustainable development?

Mr Mitchell: Yes. My hon. Friend identifies an important point. There is strong support on both sides of this House for the arms trade treaty. The Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr Duncan) will be going to New York to take part in those negotiations, and it is interesting to note that, even in the defence industry in Britain, there is strong support for a level playing field and for transparency in the sale of weapons.

T6. [116172] **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): I have another question about South Sudan. Thousands of children there are dying of diarrhoea. What are the Government doing to help with this urgent need, and will other countries be urged to help as well?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman accurately identifies the position of children in South Sudan, which I set out in answer to his hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones). It is true that diarrhoea needlessly kills thousands upon thousands of children every day. That is one of the reasons why last year Britain led the replenishment for GAVI—the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation—so that Britain will be vaccinating a child in the poor world every two seconds and saving the life of a child every two minutes, precisely from these sorts of ills.

T4. [116170] **Mr Sam Gyimah** (East Surrey) (Con): Further to my visit to Helmand with the International Development Committee, I would like to pay tribute to the hard work and dedication of our forces and DFID staff operating in extremely difficult circumstances. The Secretary of State is aware of the shocking execution in Afghanistan a week ago of a 22-year-old woman accused of adultery. What are the Government doing to mitigate the risk of a return to Taliban-style treatment of women in Afghanistan, post our withdrawal in 2014?

Mr Mitchell: The Government vigorously condemned the execution to which my hon. Friend referred. One of the key ways of transforming Afghan society to prevent the return of the Taliban's evil practices is, of course, to get girls into school. When they are a critical mass, that will have a big effect on Afghan society. Nine years ago, there were no girls in school in Afghanistan; today, there are nearly 2.5 million.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [116137] **Mr Gerry Sutcliffe** (Bradford South) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 11 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): Before I list my engagements, I am sure the whole House will wish to join me in paying tribute to Police Constable Ian Dibell of Essex police, who was shot and killed in Clacton-on-Sea on Monday. Even though Ian was off duty at the time, he acted selflessly when he saw members of the public at risk. This is typical of the behaviour of

our brave police force. His death is a reminder of the great debt we owe everyone in our police force. We send our deepest sympathies to his family, his friends and his colleagues at this tragic time.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and in addition to duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Mr Sutcliffe: May I associate myself and the whole House with the Prime Minister's remarks about the brave police officer who lost his life? We all send our condolences to his family.

Will the Prime Minister explain why he is making it easier to amend copyright law by secondary legislation, affecting our creative industries? Does it have anything to do with the 23 meetings he and his Ministers have had with Google?

The Prime Minister: We are following the recommendations of the Hargreaves report, which we commissioned. It is important that we update and upgrade copyright law in our country, and that is exactly what we propose to do.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): A report on the Yorkhill child heart unit in Glasgow conducted by Sir Ian Kennedy says that

“the provision of paediatric intensive care may be unsafe if critical staffing problems are not addressed.”

The safe and sustainable review conducted by Sir Ian Kennedy now suggests that Leeds heart unit, which is safe, be closed while Glasgow's, which is not, is not affected. It is absurd. This review needs to be thrown out.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend rightly speaks up for his local hospital, which is an excellent one. My local hospital has not been selected either under the safe and sustainable review, but I would say—as Prime Minister, but also as a parent—that we have to recognise that the heart operations now carried out on children are incredibly complex. In the end, this review was led by clinicians, and it is about trying to save lives to make sure that we specialise the most difficult work in a number of hospitals around the country. It does lead to difficult decisions, but I am sure that what really matters is that more parents do not suffer the agony of losing their children because we do not have the very highest standards of care in the hospitals that are chosen.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to PC Ian Dibell. He demonstrated extraordinary bravery while off duty. His selfless act and his tragic death remind us what the police do for us right across this country. I am sure that the condolences of the whole House go to his family and friends.

At this last Question Time before the recess, may I remind the Prime Minister of what he said before the election when he was asked why he wanted to be Prime Minister? He paused, and with characteristic humility said:

“Because I think I'd be good at it.”

Where did it all go wrong?

The Prime Minister: It is this Government who have capped benefits, capped immigration, taken 2 million people out of tax, cut taxes for 25 million people, cut the fuel duty, increased spending on the NHS and cut the deficit by 25% in two years. I can't read out the list of all the things he got wrong. We haven't got time.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Edward Miliband: Government Members are obviously well whipped today. It is a shame it didn't happen last night.

Last night the Prime Minister lost control of his party, and not for the first time he lost his temper as well, because we understand that it was fisticuffs in the Lobby with the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman). I notice, by the way, that the posh boys have ordered him off the estate today, because he does not seem to be here. Who does the Prime Minister blame most for the disarray in his Government? The Liberal Democrats or his own Back Benchers?

The Prime Minister: Oh dear. If the best the right hon. Gentleman can do today is a bunch of tittle-tattle and rumour, how utterly pathetic. On the day we are introducing social care reform that is going to help people up and down the country, we get that sort of half-baked gossip.

Let me say this to the right hon. Gentleman. If we want to see House of Lords reform, all those who support House of Lords reform need not only to vote for House of Lords reform but to support the means to bring that reform about. He came to the House of Commons yesterday determined to vote yes and then to vote no. How utterly pathetic!

Edward Miliband: It is the same old story with the Prime Minister: he blames everybody but himself. The Government are a shambles and he blames the Leader of the Opposition. That is what it has come to, but his problems did not start last night; they started months ago with the part-time Chancellor's Budget, because they make the wrong choices and they stand up for the wrong people. Will the Prime Minister remind us, after all the Budget U-turns, why he still thinks it is right to give a banker earning £1 million a £40,000 income tax cut next April?

The Prime Minister: It was the Chancellor's Budget that cut taxes for 25 million working people, that took 2 million people altogether out of tax and that has left us with a top rate of tax which is higher than any of the times the right hon. Gentleman or his neighbour were in the Treasury, literally wrecking the British economy.

Edward Miliband: The Prime Minister has no answer on his millionaires' tax cut, but we are going to keep asking the question between now and next April because he has no answer. He is raising taxes on ordinary families, he is raising taxes on pensioners and he is cutting taxes on millionaires—[*Interruption.*] They say that they are not raising taxes. Will he therefore explain what has not been explained—[*Interruption.*] An hon. Member says “Weak”, by the way. What could be weaker than having 91 people vote against you in the House of Commons?

Will the Prime Minister explain what has not been explained since the Budget? Why is it fair, when he is cutting taxes for millionaires, to ask pensioners to pay more?

The Prime Minister: What we did in the Budget was to increase pensioners' weekly income by £5.30—the biggest increase in the pension in the pension's history. But let me repeat: what the Budget did was to cut taxes for every working person in the country and to take 2 million people out of tax, and the change in the top rate of tax was paid more than four times over by the richest people in our country. That compares with what we were left by the Labour party: the biggest bust, the most indebted households, and the biggest budget deficit in Europe, and never once an apology for the mess that it left this country in.

Edward Miliband: No answer on the disarray in the Government, no answer on the tax cut for millionaires, no answer on the tax rise for pensioners. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman has an answer on the biggest issue of all. In his new year message he said:

"We've got to do more to bring our economy back to health."

What has he delivered since then? A double-dip recession made in Downing street. Is not the reality that the biggest failure facing this Government is not the programme motion on Lords reform, but their whole economic plan?

The Prime Minister: It was under this Government that we got 800,000 more private sector jobs. Inflation is down, unemployment is down, and interest rates are at a record low. We are now a net exporter of cars for the first time since 1976. We have completed the biggest construction project in Europe, which is for the Olympics, and we have started the next biggest project, which is Crossrail. It is this Government who set up the enterprise zones, backed the apprenticeships, and are seeing business rebalance in this country.

We will never forget what we were left by the Labour Government. They were bailing out eurozone countries with taxpayers' money, they were paying £100,000 for just one family's housing benefit, and they presided over uncontrolled welfare, uncontrolled immigration and uncontrolled Government spending. Never has so much been borrowed, never has so much been wasted, and never have so many people been let down. This country will never forgive the Labour Government for what they did.

Edward Miliband: The redder the Prime Minister gets, the less he convinces people. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Members on both sides of the House now need to calm down. That is all there is to it.

Edward Miliband: It is the same lecture on the economy that we have had for the last two years, and things are getting worse, not better. Every time the Prime Minister gets up with that list of statistics, he just shows how out of touch he is. We have tax cuts for millionaires, a double-dip recession, and U-turn after U-turn after U-turn. Is not the truth that the Prime Minister did not just lose the confidence of his party last night, but he is losing the confidence of the country?

The Prime Minister: There is only one person who is red around here, and that is Red Ed, running the Labour party. Who backed Red Ken Livingstone? They did. Who backed Red Len McCluskey? He did. Who opposed every measure to deal with the deficit? Who proposed £30 billion more spending? Who has given the unions even more say—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the Prime Minister. As I said a moment ago, the Prime Minister's answers must and, however long it takes, will be heard.

The Prime Minister: Let us take what the Leader of the Opposition has done in the last year. He has opposed an immigration cap, opposed a welfare cap, opposed a housing benefit cap, opposed every single measure to cut the deficit. We know what he is against, but when on earth are we going to find out what he is for?

Q2. [116138] **Anne Marie Morris** (Newton Abbot) (Con): This Government have a great record on education reform. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Given the huge success of the university technical college initiative—more than 25 such colleges have been created—will the Prime Minister please confirm that he will support a further round of applications this autumn, and that funding will be available so that businesses, universities, carers and young people in Devon—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: I think that we have got the gist.

Hon. Members: More!

The Prime Minister: It is good to see my hon. Friend on such feisty form. She is absolutely right to speak up for university technical colleges, which I think are a great addition to the schools that we have in our country. They are a really high-profile way of providing proper vocational education so that we can give young people the skills that they need in order to have a great career in the future.

Teresa Pearce (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): On Monday 25 June, the Health Secretary announced the possible administration of the NHS trust that covers Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich. That night he met the hon. Members for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire) and for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill). However, although the Greenwich Members asked for such a meeting, at present there is no date in the diary and no date forthcoming. Can the Prime Minister explain why the residents of Greenwich are not given the same respect by his Minister as the residents of Bexley and Bromley?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady raises an important point. The situation at this NHS trust is very difficult, and it is quite right that the Health Secretary is using the powers put in place by the previous Government to deal with the issues. They are partly because of the completely unsustainable private finance initiative contracts. I take what she says very seriously and will see whether I can arrange a meeting between her and a Health Minister to discuss this important issue.

Q3. [116139] **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): In my constituency, the average pre-tax income is just under £25,000 a year. Does my right hon. Friend share my incredulity that the Labour party still opposes a benefits cap of £26,000 a year after tax? Does this not demonstrate who really is on the side of hard-working families trying to do the right thing?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Opposition came to the House of Commons and said they would back a welfare cap but, when it came to the crunch, they opposed it. He is absolutely right. That shows who is on the side of those who work hard and want to do the best for their families, their country and their communities, and who thinks that people should be better off on benefits. We back the workers; they back the shirkers.

Q4. [116140] **Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): The 2nd Battalion the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers is to be disbanded, which means that 600 soldiers face redundancy. These are a battalion and regiment with a proud history of service to this country. Will the Prime Minister reconsider the cut to this battalion?

The Prime Minister: We looked at this issue incredibly carefully and took our time—we were criticised for that many times—to ensure we got it right. The decision to have a smaller Regular Army of 80,000 but a much larger reserve force—Territorial Army—of more than 30,000 strikes the right balance. The Government are putting £1.5 billion into building up those reserves, and I hope that Members across the House will help with the process of encouraging employers to allow Territorial Army reservists to serve their country. It is the right decision. We have ensured that no existing regimental names or cap badges will be lost, so it is the right package for the future force of our country.

Q5. [116141] **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): On Sunday, independent observers hailed the first free elections in Libya for 47 years as broadly free, transparent and offering real hope for the future. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should congratulate the Libyan people on the progress made since their successful struggle to overthrow a brutal 40-year-old dictatorship? Does it not also send a message to others, including Aung San Suu Kyi, who yearn for democracy in their countries?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my hon. Friend speaks for the whole House and country in wanting to send our congratulations to the Libyan people on what looks like a successful set of elections. It is worth remembering that one year ago it did not look as if everything would turn out well in Libya, but I am proud that the NATO alliance and this country stayed true to the course and helped to secure the right outcome in Libya. The people there now have the chance of the successful democracy and prosperity that are denied to far too many in our world.

Q6. [116142] **Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): NHS North West London is currently consulting on the closure of four out of nine accident and emergency units. The medical director has said that North West London would literally run out of money if these

closures did not go ahead. What kind of consultation poses a choice between the closure of half the A and E units in north-west London and the potential bankrupting of the local NHS?

The Prime Minister: First, on the issue of money, we have put £12.5 billion extra into the NHS. That decision is opposed by her party, which says that extra money for the NHS is “irresponsible”. We will ensure that all consultations are properly carried out and that local people, clinicians and general practitioners are listened to. We want to ensure that we have good access to accident and emergency units for all our people.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend's attention been drawn to BAA's advertisement claiming that the regular train service to Stansted takes 47 minutes, which is not universally correct across the timetable and in any case is too long? Will he commit to a major upgrade of the West Anglia line so that airport passengers can get the truly fast service they need and my constituents who regularly commute can get the one they deserve?

The Prime Minister: I quite understand why my right hon. Friend wants to speak up for people in his constituency who want a better train service. What I can say to him is that as part of the new rail franchise in East Anglia, which will be let in the summer of 2014, we will be asking bidders to propose affordable investment aimed at improving services. I am sure that they will listen carefully to what he has said today.

Q7. [116143] **Jim Dobbin** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab/Co-op): The Government rightly donate millions in overseas aid to developing countries, including India, to eradicate poverty and disease. Despite that, the Canadian Government, including the Government of Quebec, are to invest 58 million dollars in an asbestos-producing mine; this is not for use in Canada, of course, but to export to developing countries, including India, which will put thousands of poor people at risk from deadly asbestosis and mesothelioma. Will the Prime Minister and the International Development Secretary encourage international communities, including the World Health Organisation, to oppose this quite outrageous decision?

The Prime Minister: I will be seeing the head of the WHO later today, so I can raise this issue with them. As the hon. Gentleman knows, asbestos is banned in the UK, in the EU and in a number of other countries. We are totally opposed to its use anywhere and would deplore its supply to developing countries. The Department for International Development does not provide funding to projects that encourage developing countries to import asbestos from any country or for any purpose. We are not aware that DFID funds have been used in that way at all and I would take urgent action were they to have been, but he makes a strong point about the Indian situation.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): On 4 September, the European Court of Human Rights is hearing the case of Miss Nadia Eweida, the lady who lost her job at British Airways for wearing a crucifix as a mark of her Christianity. The behaviour of BA in this was a disgraceful piece of political correctness, so I was

surprised to see that the Government are resisting Miss Eweida's appeal. I cannot believe that the Government are supporting the suppression of religious freedom in the workplace, so what are we going to do about this sad case?

The Prime Minister: For once, I can say that I wholeheartedly agree with my right hon. Friend. I fully support the right of people to wear religious symbols at work; I think it is a vital religious freedom. If it turns out that the law has the intention as has come out in this case, we will change the law and make it clear that people can wear religious emblems at work.

Q8. [116144] **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister accept the findings of the independent Action for Children report, which show that by 2015 the most vulnerable families with children in this country, including those in employment, will lose up to £3,000 a year because of this Government's policies? At a time when millionaires are getting tax cuts of more than £40,000 a year, can he stand at the Dispatch Box and say that we really are all in this together?

The Prime Minister: I know that the report the hon. Gentleman quotes does not actually include some of the steps that we have taken, such as providing more nursery education for disadvantaged two-year-olds. Above all what I would say is that if he looks at universal credit and the design of it, he will find that we are actually going to be helping parents with the most disabled children to make sure that they get the help they need.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): Will the Prime Minister comment on the worrying stand-off between the Egyptian military, who are clearly trying to cling on to power in defiance of the Arab spring, and Mr Mohamed Morsi, who may not be a Liberal or a Conservative but is undoubtedly the democratically elected President of Egypt?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I have been very struck by what the President-elect has said about how he wants to govern on behalf of everyone in Egypt and how he wants to respect religious and other freedoms. I very much hope that the current tension can be resolved, but I think that people have to respect the democratic will of the Egyptian people as they expressed it.

Q9. [116145] **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): At the last election, the Prime Minister promised that pensioners' bus passes were safe. Will he today reject calls from the Liberal Democrats and now from his close ally the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), and categorically rule out the means-testing of bus passes, including in his manifesto for the next general election?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Lady will know, at the last election I made very clear promises about bus passes, about television licences and about winter fuel payments. We are keeping all those promises.

Jane Ellison (Battersea) (Con): As Melinda Gates has recently said, women in developing countries want to raise healthy and educated children who can contribute to building prosperous communities. Does my right

hon. Friend agree that one of the ways in which we can support that aspiration is to help those who wish to plan their family to do so?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and later today I will be speaking at a seminar event with Melinda Gates and a whole range of leaders from across Africa and other parts of the developing world about exactly this issue. We should be doing more to allow mothers access to birth control so that they can plan their family size. All the evidence shows that as countries develop, family size does reduce and populations become more sustainable, but we should help people to plan that process. It is not about telling people what to do; it is about allowing people the choice that in this country we take for granted.

Q10. [116146] **Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): Members will know that St Patrick, a Roman Briton respected by all traditions in Ireland, is a unifying figure. He established his mission in my constituency of South Down, where today many people of all faiths, drawing on his legacy, work unstintingly to build peace across the divide. When the Prime Minister is next in Northern Ireland, perhaps during the Olympics, will he come to St Patrick's country and the Mourne, where he can meet these people and witness St Patrick's unique heritage for himself—and where he will not find any rebel Tories?

The Prime Minister: I do not know whether the hon. Lady can guarantee that—we have an active branch in Northern Ireland—but that is an intriguing and very kind invitation. I hope the Olympics will bring the whole of our United Kingdom together. I think the torch relay has already helped to achieve that; I was very privileged to see it in my own constituency, and I know it had a very successful tour around Northern Ireland. If I can take up the hon. Lady's intriguing invitation, I will.

Q15. [116151] **Simon Hart** (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): One of the success stories of this Government has been their commitment to rural communities, and farming in particular. Today almost 2,000 dairy farmers are meeting in Westminster to fight drastic reductions in their milk prices at the hands of processors and supermarkets. Will the Prime Minister join them in their fight to get a fair deal for their product?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to speak up for British farmers, and he does an extremely good job in doing that. This Government are investing in our countryside, not least through the rural broadband programme, but we do want to see a fairer deal between farmers and supermarkets, and that is why we are going to be legislating for the adjudicator, which I know my hon. Friend supports. I can also tell him that today we are announcing £5 million extra in additional funds under the rural economy grant scheme, which can help to make our dairy industry—which we should be very proud of in this country—more competitive.

Q11. [116147] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): What will the Prime Minister say to the 150,000 adults that the Government themselves estimate will be

denied a second chance of education as a result of their plans to charge full cost fees to over-24-year-olds studying A-level and equivalent programmes and access courses?

The Prime Minister: There will be a full statement on this issue this week, but it is important that we expand further education opportunities in our country, and if we are going to expand them, we need to make it clear how we are going to pay for them. The hon. Gentleman's question highlights what we repeatedly get from the Opposition: a complaint about this policy or that policy, but absolutely no idea of how they would pay for any of their policies.

Adam Afriye (Windsor) (Con): The Government have certainly achieved a great deal in the last two years. Given that new issues are emerging as we enter the third year of the coalition, does the Prime Minister agree that now would be a good time for the political parties to review the coalition agreement for the future?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree that in a coalition we need to keep working out the next set of things we want to achieve. This coalition has achieved cuts to corporation tax, taking people out of income tax, a massive expansion in trust schools, and a huge contribution to our health service—which is now performing better than at any time in the past decade—and I am committed to making sure we now look at all the next steps we want to take to make our country a better place to live.

Q12. [116148] **Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab):** A grandfather from Blaenau Gwent fears the dole for his grandson returning from Afghanistan; some 20,000 soldiers face losing their jobs. Labour has persuaded big firms, including John Lewis, to guarantee veterans a job interview. Will the Prime Minister get the public sector to do the same?

The Prime Minister: I welcome what the hon. Gentleman says. We should do everything we can to work with employers, whether in the public or the private sector, to help find ex-service personnel jobs. They are people who have been trained brilliantly and who have contributed incredible things to our country, and I am sure we can do much more to help them find jobs. For instance, in the public sector my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary has a programme of “troops to teachers” to try to get people who have served our country to inspire future generations. I think that is an excellent scheme.

Sir Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): On the Prime Minister's watch, the Army will reduce to its smallest size since 1750 and will be half the size it was at the time of the Falklands war. Does he accept that history is not kind to Prime Ministers who are perceived to have left our country without a strong defence capability?

The Prime Minister: I know that, with Colchester garrison in his constituency, the hon. Gentleman speaks with great power about military issues. If he looks at the overall balance of what we are doing, with 80,000 regular soldiers and 30,000 Territorial Army fully funded, that will mean that the Army is a similar size after the reforms to what it was before. Much the most important

thing is that we inherited a £38 billion deficit in our defence budget. We have closed that deficit and it is now fully funded. We have some huge investments going ahead for our Army, our Navy and our Air Force. This country under this coalition Government will always be well defended.

Q13. [116149] **Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab):** Will the Prime Minister assist the House and tell us when the Chancellor of the Exchequer will take the advice of the hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), admit that he made false allegations last week and finally apologise?

The Prime Minister: Let us look at what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said. He said that the shadow Chancellor had some questions to answer. I am not sure that there is anyone in this House who does not think that the shadow Chancellor has some questions to answer. Perhaps before we break for the summer we should remember what a few of those questions are. Who designed the regulatory system that failed? Who was City Minister when Northern Rock was selling 110% mortgages? Who advised the Chancellor and the Prime Minister that there was no more boom and bust? Who helped create the biggest boom and the biggest bust and who has never apologised for his dreadful record in office?

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): Shrewsbury remains the only county town in England without a direct rail service to our capital city. When the new rail franchises are apportioned in August, will the Prime Minister use his good office to ensure that the Government do everything possible to ensure that Shrewsbury is connected to our capital city?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend always speaks up for Shrewsbury. He is absolutely right that when these franchises are considered, there are opportunities to make the case for more investment and more services. I am sure that the rail operators and others will listen very closely to what he has said today.

Q14. [116150] **Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab):** My constituent is recovering from cancer but she has had her employment and support allowance stopped after 365 days. The Government's consultation on changing the rule ended in March. When will we see justice for the 7,000 cancer patients in that situation?

The Prime Minister: I have looked carefully at that case and I know that the hon. Lady has now had a response from a Minister. As she knows, there are two types of ESA: one that provides permanent support that is not means-tested and another that is means-tested after a year. We are ensuring that more people with cancer are getting more help and more treatment, which is very important. It is right that there should be two forms of ESA so that those people who genuinely cannot work or prepare for work get supported throughout their lives.

Mr Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Points of order come after statements and there is a statement now, but I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Care and Support

12.34 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Andrew Lansley): With permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the future of care and support for adults in England.

The coalition programme said that reform is needed urgently. We inherited a system that too often let people down and was unfair; a system that was complex and confusing, and which responded to a crisis, but too rarely prevented it. For many years, people have called for a system fitted around the needs of care users, not the preferences of the service; one that puts people at the heart of the service and delivers high-quality care with dignity and respect.

We knew two years ago that we had to offer urgent support to social care. In the spending review 2010, we provided an additional £7.2 billion for social care over the course of this Parliament, including nearly £3 billion from the NHS to deliver more integrated care. This gives the current system resource backing, but not reform. We need also to build a better service for the long term.

The White Paper I am publishing today represents the greatest transformation of the system since 1948. The practical effect will be to give service users, their carers and their families more peace of mind. Services will be organised around each individual's care and support needs, their goals and aspirations. Intervention will be earlier, promoting independence and well-being.

The White Paper will support people to remain active in their own communities, connected to their families, friends and support networks. We will invest an additional £200 million over five years in the development of specialised housing for older and disabled people, so that people can stay independent in their own homes for as long as possible. The role of carers is critical, so we will transform how the system views and treats carers. We will extend rights for carers to have an assessment and for the first time provide a clear entitlement to the support they need to maintain their own health and well-being.

The measures in the White Paper will make it easier for people to understand how care and support services work, and what their entitlements and responsibilities are. To give people greater consistency of access, we will introduce a national minimum eligibility threshold, as the Dilnot commission suggested. We will require councils to start supporting people as soon as they move into a new area, so that it is easier for people to choose to move home, to be nearer, for example, to their relatives. Local authorities will be under a duty to ensure continuity of care, and that care users are able to take their assessments with them if they move area.

We will establish a single website to provide clear and reliable information about all care and support services for self-funders and local authority supported users and carers. As well as these improvements to national information, we will invest £32.5 million to ensure that there is better local information about the range of local care and support services available in each area.

We want people to be confident that the care and support they receive is delivered by a compassionate and caring work force. We will place dignity and respect

for care users at the heart of a new code of conduct and minimum training standards for care workers. Alongside the new minimum standards, we will train more care workers, with 50,000 more apprenticeships by 2017.

A key requirement is for people to be confident that they will be treated with dignity and respect, and that providers deliver high-quality care at all times. We will rule out the crude practice known as "contracting by the minute" that can so undermine people's dignity and choice. We should contract for quality and service, not by the clock. We will call on local HealthWatch organisations to make active use of their new power of entry, allowing them to visit care services in their local area, and to make recommendations to the providers and to local authority commissioners.

People should also be entitled to expect that services will be maintained if a provider fails. Working with local government and the care sector, we successfully handled the consequences of the Southern Cross crisis, but we also learned lessons, so we will consult on how we can anticipate and act to ensure continuity of care if a provider goes out of business. Care itself, not the provider of care, is the most important factor.

A key theme of the White Paper is that those receiving care and support know what is best for them. It is right that they must be in control of their care and support. We will make sure everyone is entitled to a personal budget, so they can be in control of their own care. We will offer all who want it a personal budget, and by 2015 support that with a legal right to request this as a direct payment. To make it easier for people to get the care they want, we will ensure that they have better access to independent advice. We will make it easier for people to see whether a care provider is good or not so that they can make real choices through an online "quality profile" for each provider. We will work with a range of organisations to develop comparison websites so that people can give feedback and compare the quality of care for themselves.

Integrated care is important for everyone, regardless of age or the reason they need care and support, but getting integration right is particularly important for those moving from one service to another. That is why we will transfer an additional £100 million in 2013-14 and £200 million in 2014-15, beyond previous plans, from the NHS to support social care services that benefit people's health and well-being and promote better integrated care.

The White Paper will help people get better joined-up care at key points in their lives. We will legislate to give adult social care services a power to assess young people under the age of 18, and we will ensure protection so that no young person goes without care while waiting for adult support to start. We want people to receive the best possible care at the end of their lives, including a choice over where they die. The palliative care funding review recommended that all health and social care should be funded by the state once someone reaches the end of life and is entered on the end-of-life care locality register. We think that there is much merit in this and will be using the eight palliative care funding pilot sites to collect the data and experience we need to assess the proposal.

Alongside the White Paper, I am today publishing the draft Care and Support Bill. Many of the White Paper reforms need new legislation to make them work, but

[Mr Andrew Lansley]

the draft Bill is also a major reform in its own right. The law for adult social care is complex and outdated. All those involved know how it has made the system harder to work in. The draft Bill sets out a single, modern statute for adult care and support. It brings together and simplifies provisions from at least a dozen Acts of Parliament, reflecting the recommendations of the Law Commission. It builds the law around people's well-being and needs and outcomes—clear principles, clearly set out in law.

I am also today publishing a progress report on funding reform. In July 2010 I asked Andrew Dilnot to review the funding of the system of care and support in England. I can confirm today the Government's support for the principles of the Dilnot commission's report as the right basis for any new funding model: financial protection through capped costs and an extended means test. As Andrew Dilnot himself has said, that would enable people to plan and prepare so that they are not so vulnerable to the arbitrary impact of catastrophic care costs.

The progress report sets out a detailed analysis of the funding model, giving us a better basis for making decisions on how these changes can be funded. Of course, any proposal that includes extra public spending needs to be considered alongside other spending priorities, including the demographic pressures on social care services. The right and necessary time to do that is at the next spending review. Our talks with the Labour party were constructive, but no plan for funding Dilnot was agreed or, indeed, proposed by either side. A decision at the next spending review will allow time for continuing discussions with stakeholders and between the parties, and we can undertake open engagement on detailed implementation issues and options. These discussions will include the level of the cap, whether a voluntary or opt-in approach is a viable option in addition to the universal options and whether legislative provision is required.

However, as the report makes clear, we are also taking definitive steps now by accepting a number of the Dilnot commission's recommendations. Most notably, we will introduce a universal deferred payments scheme. This will mean that no one will be forced to sell their home in their lifetime to pay for care. Provisions for this are included in the draft Bill.

The White Paper, the draft Care and Support Bill and the progress report on funding together set out our commitment to a modern system of care and support, one designed around the needs of individual people, one with dignity and respect at its heart, and one that brings care and support into the 21st century. These reforms are also the product of immensely helpful reviews by the Law Commission and the Dilnot commission and a positive and wide-ranging engagement with the care sector and the public, which is helping us to design the kind of care services and support that we would all like to see for ourselves and our families. We are determined to secure these reforms to achieve in this Parliament that which our predecessors failed to achieve in over 13 years. I intend to continue and develop an open and co-operative approach in developing these reforms. I commend this statement to the House.

12.44 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement—and, indeed, for the constructive cross-party discussions that we have held on these crucial matters.

First, let me say that we welcome many of the ideas in the White Paper that the right hon. Gentleman is publishing today. A universal deferred payment scheme would help to spare vulnerable people the agony of watching savings and assets being washed away. National standards on eligibility could help to bring some consistency to a care system in England that is today the ultimate postcode lottery. Stronger legal rights for carers are overdue, as are improvements to end-of-life care.

The proposals are important steps forward; they were also in my own White Paper, "Building the National Care Service", which was published before the last election. I take the right hon. Gentleman's decision to carry the proposals forward into his White Paper as a positive sign of the developing consensus between the parties, but there is one crucial difference between his White Paper and ours. Despite the obvious political risks of doing so, we faced up to the difficult issue of how to pay for care and support in the century of the ageing society. The Government have failed to do that.

With no answers on money, the White Paper fails the credibility test; it is half a plan. The proposals that the right hon. Gentleman has set out are in danger of appearing meaningless and may raise false hope among older people, their carers and families. The proposals have no answers to the immediate funding crisis that is engulfing councils and resulting in thousands of older people seeing support taken away or facing huge increases in charges for day care and meals on wheels—stealth taxes on the most vulnerable in our society. Furthermore, there are no answers on how we pay for a fairer care system in the long term. Let me take each of the two issues in turn. I shall start with council funding.

Today we have a promise of new standards, new services and new rights for councils to deliver. I fear that that will be greeted with sheer disbelief in town halls up and down England. Councils are already facing a major funding shortfall, estimated to be at least £1 billion. They cannot cope with what they already have to do, never mind their being burdened with additional unfunded pressures. What is the Government's assessment of the extra costs that will fall to local authorities in England from the proposals in the White Paper? Will the Secretary of State tell us how and when he plans to pay for those costs, as well as make up the existing shortfall in council budgets?

There is simply no point in promising new ideas if they come on top of the crumbling foundations of inadequate care budgets. Councils need emergency support. The right hon. Gentleman has allocated just £100 million and £200 million today, but last week it was confirmed that the Treasury had clawed back £1.4 billion from the Department of Health budget. Surely it would have made sense to have reallocated at least half that clawback—£700 million—to council budgets, to relieve pressure on care. Does he not accept that such a move is needed if his plans are to have any credibility in local government circles?

Let me turn to the flagship proposal—the new duty on all councils to provide loans to older people so that people can pay care costs after they die. Before we judge

that, we need more detail. Can the Secretary of State tell us what the upfront set-up costs will be to local authorities? Currently, there is a deferred payment scheme based on no interest, but we read that, when his scheme is up and running, councils will be able to charge interest so as not to lose money.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that that means that councils will have to charge close to commercial rates on interest? Does he not accept that, if that is the case, taking on such large amounts of debt might be very frightening for older people? Was it not for that very reason that the proposal really made sense only if it came as part of a package alongside a cap, as promised by the Dilnot commission? This is the problem with the Government's White Paper: they are adopting a pick-and-mix approach to the Dilnot package, which was conceived as a coherent and complementary whole.

That brings me to my second issue. I hear talk only of a vague commitment in the progress report to the main principle of Dilnot, so are the Government not in danger of sliding back on their own independent commission, which had produced the best hope for years of a consensus between us? I know, perhaps more than anyone, how politically charged these issues are, but I also know that progress will never be achieved if politicians cannot put difficult options on the table for fear of being accused of political point scoring. That is why my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition made a genuine offer of cross-party talks to give the coalition the political space to look at those difficult options. I thank the Secretary of State for the way in which he conducted those talks—indeed, I thank the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Burstow), too—and I have welcomed his idea of producing a joint progress report on funding.

I do not doubt the Secretary of State's personal commitment to making progress, but I suspect that he was thwarted by the Treasury and a Chancellor who is making one wrong judgment call after another. The Government's decision to change course at the eleventh hour and produce their own progress report, without input from Labour Members, reflects a Treasury decision to try to close these issues down—a mistake and a missed opportunity. Let me say this to the Government: if they offer a genuine, two-way discussion on the funding of care, with honesty about existing pressures and the difficult options, we will play our part, but they cannot expect us to provide political cover for a failure to face up to the scale and urgency of the care crisis in England. To do so would be to fail the millions of older people, their carers and families who have already waited long enough for politicians to get their act together.

The truth is that the Government are ducking one of the biggest issues of our time, with a White Paper that has today been branded a "massive failure" by the Alzheimer's Society. Today's announcements are designed to create a false sense of momentum and to disguise a Government decision to kick the funding of care into the political long grass. They have made their choice—they have placed Lords reform at the top of the agenda and shunted the care of older people into "Any Other Business". That is the clearest sign yet of a Government who are losing their way and have their priorities completely wrong.

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for welcoming the announcements about access to universal deferred payments, national eligibility criteria, and the work that we are undertaking on promoting free care at end of life. I am surprised, however, that his final remarks seemed to be completely contrary to what he said at the outset. Let me be very clear: the White Paper is the product of the priorities of the people with whom we have engaged throughout the "Caring for our future" process. It directly reflects the priorities of the care and support sector, and I would therefore be surprised if anybody in the sector failed to recognise that and to support it. It is focused on delivering quality and promoting the work force. For the first time, it gives access to legal rights for carers in terms of support. It is very clear about the issue of personal budgets, where there has been a dramatic expansion over the past two years.

Let me deal with the right hon. Gentleman's specific questions. Since we came into office, we have continually recognised the need for support for social care and for the funding of local authorities for this purpose. That is why we made provision for £7.2 billion of additional support, £3 billion of which comes from within the NHS. As he will see from page 64 of the White Paper, the £300 million of additional resources that it announces more than meets the cost of the White Paper to local government. We are continuing to support social care within the NHS. The latest figures from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services suggest that only about 13% of total savings took the form of reductions in any service for care users, with the rest relating to efficiency savings redirected into the service that is being provided.

It is simply not the case that we are adopting a pick-and-mix approach to the commission of Andrew Dilnot and his colleagues. We are proceeding with some of its recommendations—for example, on eligibility criteria and deferred payments—and supporting the principles for a new funding model based on the capped cost and extension of the means test. The right hon. Gentleman said that we have to be able to pay for it; yes, indeed we do. That is why we will continue to engage with him and his colleagues and with the wider sector. It is very important that we take people with us on this.

It cuts no ice for the right hon. Gentleman to say that after 13 years of a Labour Government he published a White Paper days before the announcement of the last general election. If he wants to go back to the proposal that he made at that time, which was to impose a tax in order to pay for this and to means-test access to disability benefits, then let him say so, but that is not the basis on which we are proceeding. Andrew Dilnot considered those proposals and did not recommend them. We need a proposal that garners wider consensus and support than was evident for the right hon. Gentleman's White Paper. I am determined to try to secure that, and we will continue to engage with the sector to make it happen.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Lots of Members want to get in and there is pressure on time. Brevity is in good order and I hope that we should then get everybody in. I call the Chair of the Select Committee on Health.

Mr Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood) (Con): I welcome the package of measures that my right hon. Friend has announced, which represent important progress towards the delivery of many objectives that are, as we have heard, shared across the House. May I ask him two specific questions? First, he has published a welcome draft Bill showing that many of these aspirations can be brought into effect. Do the Government expect to be able to provide time to make that draft Bill law in the next Session of Parliament? Secondly, in the context of that Bill, does he hope that the continuing cross-party talks may yet provide the basis for answering the funding question that has bedevilled those talks for so long?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. It was neglectful of me not to mention that the White Paper and the announcement that I have made also drew on the recommendations and work of the Health Committee, and I am pleased to have been able to respond to its report as well.

First, matters relating to the legislative programme for the next Session will be announced in the normal way in the Gracious Speech. Secondly, I am determined that we will not only, I hope, have continuing cross-party talks but that they will be conducted, as I think that the shadow Secretary of State himself would wish, with the sector in a more open, public debate. If we were able to arrive at a position whereby, notwithstanding the fact that funding decisions might be made in the spending review, there was scope to put in place legislative provisions that allowed that to happen and could be agreed in time for the introduction of the draft Care and Support Bill, then we would look to make that happen. However, that is conditional at this stage.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): The Secretary of State seems to forget two things. First, his Government did not implement the Personal Care at Home Act 2010, which would have made a difference to people. Secondly, they did not ask Dilnot to consider where the money was coming from, so he can hardly be blamed for not putting forward suggestions. The Secretary of State has committed to a few of Dilnot's principles but ignored the fact that he advised the closure of the current funding gap in social care. Will he back Labour's call for the Treasury to use £700 million of this year's health underspend to close that funding gap, which is the cause of the crisis in social care?

Mr Lansley: First, it is ironic that the shadow Secretary of State said that local authorities would be aghast if they were asked to do extra things without resources given that we are providing those resources and that the Personal Care at Home Act was completely unfunded, which is why local government was desperate for us not to proceed with it. Andrew Dilnot and his colleagues are very clear, as are we, that there are, as I said in my statement, baseline funding pressures on local authorities in relation to social care. That will be addressed in the next spending review, as it was necessarily addressed in the previous spending review in direct response to recommendations that Andrew Dilnot gave us in 2010.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I welcome the statement, which contains many good things, but without financial clarity we risk offering an unsustainable solution to an unsustainable problem. What can coalition Back Benchers do to get the Treasury to go further and faster?

Mr Lansley: The statement I have made is a Government statement. We are working closely with our colleagues across Government to secure these proposals. I know that my hon. Friend understands these things very well. He will know that if there are significant public expenditure implications beyond the current spending review period, they must be dealt with in the context of a spending review. All Government Members are committed to deficit reduction. Understanding where, within those constraints, our priorities lie is the essence of a spending review.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): This is a much more important issue than Lords reform. It is important to millions of people in this country and I am happy to have the opportunity to discuss it. There is clearly a huge shortfall and a crisis of funding in social care. The Secretary of State is not hoodwinking anybody by suggesting anything other than that. What has changed since he walked away from the cross-party talks led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown)? The Secretary of State dressed up the proposal made before the general election as a "death tax", yet he has come back with a proposal that is broadly similar.

Mr Lansley: I am not attempting to hoodwink anybody. I have made the point very clearly that in this financial year the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services is making total savings of £891 million, of which only 13%, some £113 million, is being achieved through reductions in services. We are investing in and supporting such services. In 2012-13, £930 million of extra funding will go to local authorities through formula grant to support social care. The NHS is transferring £622 million and we are doubling last year's figure so that £300 million will be available through the NHS for re-ablement. Those are major additions to the support for care.

On the other point that the hon. Gentleman made, even the right hon. Member for Leigh did not try to return to the debate that we had before the election, and rightly so. The right hon. Gentleman eschewed party political point scoring; the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) did not. I think he should have done.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I warmly welcome the statement. There is clear commitment in a number of good areas, including improving the portability of services, providing greater support for carers, improving respite care and having more joined-up working between the NHS and adult social services, which will save social services and the NHS money, and improve the care that is delivered to patients. Does the Secretary of State agree that when local government commissions services, it should do so with a view to improving the quality of care and moving away from the care-by-the-minute mentality to which many local care providers seem to adhere?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in all respects. I know that local government will welcome the philosophy of commissioning for quality, rather than commissioning simply on the basis of watching the clock. That will also be welcomed by older people who are in receipt of care.

Mr Dave Watts (St Helens North) (Lab): It is clear that the Secretary of State is moving on from causing chaos in the NHS to causing it in the care service. Given the crisis in the budgets of social services, will he set up an independent body to look at how much money local authorities require to provide high-quality social care?

Mr Lansley: I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman simply demonstrates his ignorance of what is in the White Paper. Those who work in social care, those who represent care users, care recipients and carers want the changes in legislation and in support to focus on looking after people. That is absolutely our agenda. We know that there are funding needs. That is why, in the spending review, we have provided the sums that I have set out. That will enable local authorities to maintain their eligibility to care. This year, only six authorities have reduced their level of eligibility to care from moderate to substantial.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): My right hon. Friend's statement will be widely welcomed, especially the loans aspect and the emphasis on personal care budgets. Will he confirm that his Department's trials are showing that personal care budgets are very effective in empowering patients, reducing costs and bringing in a wider range of services and greater patient choice?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A study published in the latter part of last year demonstrated exactly what he has set out. There has been a major increase in access to personal budgets. When we came to office, about 168,000 people had access to a personal budget. The latest figures show that we have reached 432,000 people. We are aiming for everyone who wants it to have access to a personal budget by April 2013. The draft Bill that we have published today would give legal backing to that and to access to direct payments.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): On 5 December last year, the Minister with responsibility for disabled people said in a written ministerial statement that a consultation on the independent living fund would be published in conjunction with a White Paper on social care this year. Will the Secretary of State say how a consultation on a review of the independent living fund will be meshed with the proposals in the White Paper? Will he assure me that there will be a coherent approach in Government to deal with the ILF in the context of the proposals that he is announcing today?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, because she gives me the opportunity to say that my colleagues at the Department for Work and Pensions will publish a document shortly. That will enable her and other hon. Members to see the relationship between the two documents.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, and in particular the recognition of the role of housing in helping people to live independently in their own homes. Will he elaborate further on how the £200 million extra may be spent by local councils? Does he support the recommendation of the Health Committee that we have a single commissioner for health, social care and housing?

Mr Lansley: The £200 million over a period of five years that I have announced today will be able to leverage, with the involvement of private sector investment and social landlords, an opportunity for several thousand additional places in specialist housing for older people and those with disabilities. We are talking about the kind of extra-care homes that give people the sense that they are moving into their own home, but with care available. That will be available in people's own communities to a greater extent if we can increase the supply.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): The Secretary of State says that he can give no commitments past the spending review in 2015. However, he said that by 2017—two years after that—we will have 50,000 more care workers. There is a big question over how that money will be found. He makes a big point of saying he has given local authorities all these extra resources to deal with the extra tasks that they will have. In the discussions on that, have local authorities said they are satisfied that he is providing enough money for them to carry out those extra tasks?

Mr Lansley: I know that the hon. Gentleman will not have had a chance to look in detail at the White Paper, but it makes it clear that the costs in the spending review period are more than adequately met by the additional resources. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues are confusing two different things. The White Paper looks at specific additional tasks—for example, in the provision of independent information and advice, including local information about access to care services. That is more than fully funded. The figure he mentioned referred not to the number of care workers but to the number of care apprenticeships that are being developed with the sector.

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on carers, I welcome the new rights for carers that are proposed in the White Paper. However, a couple of things follow from that. First, GPs, social workers and others have a responsibility to do everything possible to identify carers, because unless people identify themselves as carers, they will not be able to access those rights. Secondly, we should support carers by developing training programmes for them, so that those who find themselves in that position are empowered to undertake their caring role.

Mr Lansley: I am grateful for the work of my hon. Friend and the all-party group. This is an important moment. If the House approves the draft Bill, the rights and entitlements of carers to assessment and support will be set out in law for the first time, in the same way as we have done for those for whom they care. He makes an important point. The draft mandate for the NHS that I published last week gives specific attention to the need to identify and support carers. I hope that these proposals will also enable the NHS and social care to join together in support of carers.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): May I return to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) made? Have local authorities confirmed that they are satisfied that the funding that has been made available will cover the new duties they have to undertake?

Mr Lansley: We have consulted not only the Local Government Association but my colleagues at the Department for Communities and Local Government, and I can assure the hon. Lady that that is indeed the case.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): There is much to be welcomed in today's announcement. After so many years, people all over the country will be pleased that so much progress has been made, particularly for carers and in improving the quality of care and professional standing of paid-for carers. Will the Secretary of State confirm what I think I heard him say—that if the Opposition were to redouble their efforts and the whole country were to engage in the debate that today's announcement will trigger, the mechanisms to solve the bigger problem of how the funding can be provided could be included in the forthcoming Bill within the next 12 months?

Mr Lansley: Yes, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I will not reiterate what I said in response to the Chair of the Health Committee, but I hope that as we make progress we will be able to see what legislative provisions are required and make them available at the earliest opportunity. She makes an important point, because we must not lose sight of the opportunity to improve quality. There are certain things that require resources, such as access to quality profiles of care providers so that people can make proper assessments of the quality of service that they will receive, increasingly using their personal budgets or direct payments. There is dramatic potential in that. Starting today, quality profiles of 12,000 care providers will be made available.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): A delayed solution to the growing crisis in social care is no solution. In Birmingham, there are none more noble than those who care and none who deserve our support more than those in need of care. Does the Secretary of State not recognise that in failing to act now he is both surrendering a historic opportunity for a new settlement based on Dilnot and letting down the most vulnerable in our country?

Mr Lansley: I know it is difficult for hon. Members when documents are published alongside a statement and they have not had an opportunity to read them, but when the hon. Gentleman does so he will know that what he has just said was utter nonsense.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): I, too, greatly welcome today's statement and congratulate my right hon. Friend on taking forward this important policy. Health and social care is devolved to the Welsh Government, but it is inevitable that statements, decisions and policy changes in England have a major effect on Wales as well, because some of the services provided to people in Wales are over the border in England. As well as cross-party talks, may we have cross-border talks to ensure that the system works well in Wales?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We want people who move from England to Wales or from Wales to England to have continuity of care, so I will make it clear to my counterpart in Wales that I am entirely open to discussions about

that. Given that it is a devolved matter, it is better in a sense if the initiative for those discussions comes from Wales, because I do not want to be interpreted as trying to impose any solution on Wales, but if the Welsh Government look for such discussions I will be open to them.

Mr Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): In response to the White Paper, the NHS Confederation has said that people are

“staying in hospital longer...because the right services are not in place to allow them to go home when they are medically fit to do so.”

Given that it is estimated that delayed discharges from our hospitals cost some £18 million a month, what action are the Government taking to get rid of that waste of public money?

Mr Lansley: The total number of delayed discharges is broadly the same as it was last year and, I believe, from memory, the year before—I will correct the record if not. Some 29% of the delays in discharge from hospital are due to the inability to access social care. Most of them arise because people are awaiting further assessment or treatment in the NHS. We have all the details of delayed discharges and are working actively to reduce them.

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): I very much welcome many of the measures that my right hon. Friend has announced, particularly on the improvement that he wishes to see in the dignity and respect accorded to those in our care homes and NHS hospitals, especially older people. Will he say a little more about the minimum standards for staff working in the care sector, and about the qualifications that people who apply for care apprenticeships might require to provide the right quality of care?

Mr Lansley: Yes, I am glad to do so. Through the work that we are doing with Skills for Health and Skills for Care, we will set out more clearly the training requirements for those undertaking care work and care assistance in the NHS. In addition, we set out in the White Paper that there should be a code of conduct, and I hope that across the service the philosophy of commissioning for quality, not simply commissioning or contracting by the minute, will help push us towards improvements in the dignity and respect with which care users are treated.

Hazel Blears (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): There are 800,000 people in this country with dementia, a devastating condition for themselves and their families. Many of them rely on the support of community-based services, which means that they are not admitted to residential care and may have a crisis that results in hospital admission. It is a false economy not to support community services. If the Secretary of State were really in touch, he would know that there are massive cuts across the country in exactly those services. Will he go back to the Chancellor now and say, “We need some money now to deal with the crisis”? Otherwise, the integration that he talks about in the White Paper will not happen and the crisis in local authority care will continue.

Mr Lansley: I am sorry that the right hon. Lady does not seem to recognise that in addition to what I have announced today, about three months ago the Prime Minister launched the dementia challenge. It provides resources in the NHS, through the commissioning for quality incentive, for the identification of patients with dementia and for follow-up assessments and support. It is doubling research into dementia and supporting a programme for the creation of dementia-friendly communities. As part of that dementia challenge, local authorities and the health service will work actively together to make communities far more dementia-friendly and more effective in treating dementia.

Matthew Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con): Like carers and many vulnerable people across the country, I warmly welcome the White Paper and the progress that is being made. People are keen to see a continued political consensus, which existed, and on which the Opposition were to be congratulated, until about half an hour ago. May I urge the Secretary of State to do everything he can to ensure that that consensus continues? Will he also set out a bit more about what the national minimum eligibility threshold will mean, so that people across the country know what they are entitled to?

Mr Lansley: On the latter point, my hon. Friend will be aware that the national eligibility threshold that we are legislating for will come into effect in 2015. We will of course make it clear before that at what level it will be set. I cannot provide that information at the moment, not least because we have reservations about the overall effectiveness of the classification of need under the fair access to care services system in the intervening period. If we can improve the eligibility framework, we will set out to do so.

I say to the right hon. Member for Leigh and his colleagues that I am very happy to continue to talk. I know that he did not want us to proceed on a unilateral basis from the progress report, but in truth what we published did not represent our making decisions unilaterally but instead reflected the point that we had reached. I am happy for further talks to take us beyond that point.

Tony Lloyd (Manchester Central) (Lab): If we are to offer people the dignity and respect that the Secretary of State has talked about and prevent the type of abuse that both shocks the nation and frightens care users and their families, although training is very important, so is monitoring. Will he guarantee that the money necessary for monitoring will be available to HealthWatch, the Care Quality Commission and similar agencies? At the moment, people do not believe that those agencies are requested to monitor them properly.

Mr Lansley: The hon. Gentleman will know that we are making resources available for HealthWatch. It also has additional powers and a remit that extends in a way that the remit of LINKs never did. There is therefore a patient and care users' voice, and a much more effective power to enter, view and report. The link of HealthWatch England to the Care Quality Commission is important. We have increased the resources of the latter. I am sure that when he sees its annual report, he will appreciate

the steps it is taking to extend its inspection more reliably on an unannounced basis, including into domiciliary care provision.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): I have a great deal of respect for the Secretary of State, but I agree with the chief executive of the Alzheimer's Society, who has said:

"Every day without a funding decision is another day where people...with dementia...face huge costs for...substandard care." Will the Secretary of State therefore take this opportunity to assure the House that any new system of funding will end the current dementia tax, under which those with dementia are penalised as a result of their condition with some of the highest social care costs?

Mr Lansley: In this instance, I completely understand where the Alzheimer's Society is coming from. We all want to achieve what Andrew Dilnot made very clear in presenting his report. Any of us or any members of our families could be subject to catastrophic care costs as a consequence of a diagnosis of dementia and several years' need for care. We want people to be able to plan and prepare, and to protect themselves against that. From the Government's point of view, and as I have said today, the Dilnot commission's report is the basis for a funding model for that, but it must be paid for. As with anything else, we are not going to start promising things that we do not know we can pay for. We therefore have a job of work to do, and I am determined that we will do it as speedily as we can.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): The Secretary of State referred to deferred payments. In the time before the individual dies, who will pay for that care? Is there any estimate of how much the care will cost? It seems to be an extremely bad deal for the individual if they must also carry the interest rates of that loan. Will it be administered by local authorities? Who will fund that local authority?

Mr Lansley: From the care user's point of view, it will be funded by local authorities. Central Government will back that up.

Laura Sandys (South Thanet) (Con): The residents of Thanet will be reassured by the paper, particular when it comes to caring by the minute, which shows so little respect and dignity for the elderly. However, I urge the Secretary of State to look at the culture of social care, in which funds go more to crisis management than to prevention. I urge him to understand that we could introduce many new measures that will keep people healthy as they get older rather than ambulance-chase after a crisis.

Mr Lansley: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is why we want the focus to be on maintaining well-being and independence. More specialist housing will help with that. The doubling this year compared with last year of resources from the NHS to support re-ablement—when people are discharged from hospital after, for example, a fall and a hip fracture—will directly enable people to be more independent. A lot of the resources that the NHS is putting in with social care is directed towards that kind of preventive work rather than to crisis response. I hope we can do more of that in future.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Without underestimating the inherent challenges, may I welcome the statement and commend the approach of the shadow Secretary of State? The draft care and support Bill makes provision in respect of the portability of care packages between local authorities in England, but it does not yet provide for the “passportability” of care packages to Northern Ireland and Scotland. Historical migration factors mean that many Irish people are lonely and in remote care settings in England who would much rather be in a care setting in which they can enjoy the support and contact of their families—their families want them there too. When will that finally be addressed?

Mr Lansley: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies), I completely understand the problem. I will be entirely open to representations from, and discussions with, the Wales and Northern Ireland Administrations on the scope for achieving continuity of care for those who move between different parts of the UK. There are differing systems, but we can at least try to ensure that we build continuity of care around the needs of the individual care user rather than constantly being obsessed with the characteristics of our own systems.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): As the Member of Parliament who represents the area with the highest elderly population in the north-west of England per head, I welcome the statement and the importance that the Government place on care and support, which is the most challenging issue authorities such as Cheshire East council will face over the next few years. The Secretary of State is right to talk about working with local authorities, but how will this work on greater support for carers include greater support for, and, importantly, dialogue with, community and voluntary organisations, such as Crossroads Care Cheshire East, which does excellent work and provides real added value? It tells me that it could do so much more if it was given such support.

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I know how important the work of Crossroads Care is in my constituency and others. The “Caring for our future” engagement over a number of months was a major contributory process to the White Paper. I believe we have accurately reflected in the White Paper the priorities set out then. This is not the end of the process. We have important and positive messages to take forward, and further work to do, not least on funding. I hope we can do that equally in close co-operation with the Care and Support Alliance and its members.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): Given the scale of the care crisis in Wirral, I have listened to my constituents at a number of public meetings. They tell me that their priority is for loved ones to live at home with dignity, but local authority cuts make that harder, and—I am sorry—the NHS reorganisation is just a distraction. Contracting by the minute, which the Secretary of State mentioned, is far from the only problem. How will he tackle other problems in the care industry, such as older people being disrespectfully told what time to go to bed and get up?

Mr Lansley: As I said in the statement, we absolutely intend for care services to be responsive to the needs of patients, and to their goals, aspirations and wishes. That is not only a cultural shift, but a financial one—the availability of personal budgets and direct payments for everybody in the social care system will give patients the financial levers to make that cultural shift happen. However, the situation in the Wirral she describes is not how it was described to me when I was there in April. I was told that the health and wellbeing board brings together social care, public health and the NHS so that they are far more effective in the delivery of services locally.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for making progress on this problem, which is a worry for so many of my constituents. They will welcome the proposals, but does he agree that the proposals for paying for care fees by way of a one-off insurance premium, which are contained in the Conservative party manifesto, would have been far better in promoting personal responsibility?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend will see in the progress report that we need to discuss both the universal options for paying for the Dilnot model of care and voluntary, opt-in systems. The latter could have a character not dissimilar to that he describes.

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): I welcome many measures in the paper, including on the transition from being a child needing care to becoming an adult needing care, and on allowing people to choose where they want to end their life in palliative care. I represent a coastal constituency. Many people retire to the coast to enjoy the benefits of the sea air. Will he assure me that Suffolk county council will not be penalised by the fact that, in bringing families together, they will not take on extra care burdens for which they had not planned?

Mr Lansley: I completely understand my hon. Friend's point. We very much reflect the need for care and health care in the allocation of resources to local authorities through the formula grant, and the allocation of resources to the NHS through the NHS resource allocation.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): Councils have faced a £1 billion cut in their funding for care of the disabled and elderly since the right hon. Gentleman's Government came to power. Without the cash, the White Paper will be meaningless. How confident can he and everybody else in the country be that the Treasury will cough up, given the track record so far of a £1 billion cut to councils?

Mr Lansley: I am sorry, but I simply do not recognise the figures that the hon. Gentleman is using. The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services has suggested—these are not my figures—that this year the service reduction in adult social care budgets on a monetary basis was £113 million and last year it was £226 million. The great majority of the figures he is quoting are actually not cuts at all; rather, they are service efficiencies, which are being reinvested for the benefit of maintaining eligibility.

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): My constituent who has been campaigning on portability of care packages outwith England will be extremely disappointed, because

he was given to understand in correspondence from the Secretary of State that this would be covered in the White Paper and it clearly has not been. While we are thinking about Scotland, does the Secretary of State accept that the problem will not be solved even by shifting some of the costs of care from the individual to the state? We have had free personal care in Scotland for some years, but it has not resolved the problems because no additional money was put into the system.

Mr Lansley: I will not attempt—not least because of time—to give an analysis of the difficulties that have been experienced in Scotland. From my point of view, I had understood that what we have set out to do in the White Paper is very much to ensure continuity of care, so that when people move—certainly in England, for which I am responsible—local authorities have a duty to ensure continuity of support. If we can make it so that this happens across the United Kingdom, I am absolutely open to having the discussions necessary to do so.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): The Health Secretary has spoken about the catastrophic costs that face some older adults suffering from dementia. My nan was one of those people. She had to sell her home and spent more than £100,000 on her care costs. Under the loan scheme proposed by the Government today, would somebody like my nan not just end up paying more for the costs of their care? Can the Health Secretary also clarify whether the interest payments would eat into the small amount of money that people like my nan can pass on to their families?

Mr Lansley: We are very clear—I hope I have been clear—that the adoption of a universal deferred payment scheme gives people an opportunity. We are not talking about something that people are required to do; rather, they can choose to do it. One of the things that has most distressed some of those who go into residential care settings is that, as a consequence, they are required to sell their homes—they are forced to do it. What we have announced gives people an opportunity for that not to happen, but as the White Paper and the progress report make clear, we would like to proceed on the basis of a funding model, based on the Dilnot commission, that enables people also to have a cap on their care costs. If we can do that, the combination of the two will be an effective solution.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): Without a cap on costs, which is what the Dilnot commission proposed for universal deferred schemes, will this measure not potentially leave some families with massive debts to pay when their loved ones die, far in excess of the £35,000 cap that the commission proposed?

Mr Lansley: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has read out the Whips' question, but he did not listen to the last answer. We are both implementing the universal deferred payment scheme and proposing in the draft Bill that we should legislate for that. We are, as I have made clear, supporting the principle of Dilnot that we should implement a capped-cost model with an extended means test, but we have to demonstrate, as we know, that it needs to be paid for, and if those decisions involve public expenditure, they must necessarily be held for the spending review.

Points of Order

1.34 pm

Mr Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would like to raise a point of order for which I have given prior notice. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) made clear in Prime Minister's questions earlier, Ministers are poised to announce detailed plans to scrap direct financial support for more than 350,000 adult learners and replace it with a loan system. Their regulatory assessment suggests 150,000 adults falling by the wayside as a result, yet we are being told that regulations will be laid imminently, via the negative procedure, just before the House's summer recess, offering no opportunity from the Government for debate. Is it in order for those changes to come into force, as they will, on 1 September, before we return, and is it acceptable that the further education sector should see the largest change in adult learning funding in a generation, with no opportunity offered to Members in this House to question Ministers or have a debate on the Floor of the House?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for notice of his point of order. The matters that concern him do not appear to me to raise any questions about the rules of the House. Therefore, they are not a matter for the Chair. No doubt Ministers will have heard what he has just said. It is open to any Member of the House to table a prayer against a statutory instrument. Moreover, I would emphasise that it is Wednesday today. The House will not rise for the summer recess until next Tuesday, so there are opportunities for the hon. Gentleman to seek to debate the matter, whether in Government time, Opposition time or, indeed, Back-Bench time. I hope that that is helpful to him.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your advice. I wrote to the Minister for Policing and Criminal Justice on the important issue of firearms on 4 January 2012, and again on 27 March and 21 May, as well as making two telephone calls to his private office to ask for a response. Today I have still not received a response. I wonder whether you could advise me on whether there is anything further I could do to seek a response from the Minister.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady is an experienced and assiduous Member of the House. One thing she can do is to raise the matter on the Floor of the House, which she has just done. It is perhaps fortuitous for her that she has done so in the presence of no less a figure than the Deputy Leader of the House, who, together with the Leader of the House, attaches great importance to timely replies from Ministers to Back-Bench Members. This is a point I have made repeatedly: Ministers must answer to hon. and right hon. Members. I hope that the failure thus far to do so will be speedily communicated to the Minister and that he will make good in time. I hope that is helpful.

United Kingdom Borders

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

1.37 pm

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to allow subjects of Her Majesty's realms to enter the United Kingdom through a dedicated channel at international terminals, to ensure that all points of entry to the United Kingdom at airports, ports and terminals display prominently a portrait of Her Majesty as Head of State, the Union Flag and other national symbols; to rename and re-establish the UK Border Agency as 'Her Majesty's Border Police'; and to enhance the Agency's powers to protect and defend the borders of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker, thank you for the opportunity today to present my Bill, in which I propose a fundamental re-evaluation of how our national border operates as the gateway to the United Kingdom. The UK border currently orchestrates the arrival of more than 101 million people each year. Some 40 million are UK nationals, 28 million are from the European Union and European economic area, and a mere 2.5 million come from Her Majesty's Commonwealth realms. It is on this point that I stand before the House today.

There is a great constitutional injustice occurring at our nation's border. It is an injustice that is not known to too many UK nationals; however, it is well known to the 73 million people outside the UK who share Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as their sovereign. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is one of a family of 16 Commonwealth realms, which form our oldest and closest union: Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Grenada, Jamaica, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu. The loyal people of those nations have fought alongside Britain, defended us and worked with us to form a global family of like-minded countries that have much in common with our cherished history, heritage and traditions, our culture and identity, our constitutional arrangements and parliamentary democracy, our legal system, our language and, of course, Her Majesty, as our Queen.

It is all too easy to forget that Queen Elizabeth II is not an exclusively British sovereign. She sits at the heart of the respective constitutions of the 15 other realms and is intertwined into the very fabric of each of those nations. The Queen's image appears on their coins and stamps, and her name and symbols are visible on the insignia and emblems of their Government institutions. Their politicians, judges and military officers swear an oath of allegiance to her on taking office, and she is technically charged with administering laws, issuing Executive orders and commanding the military within the sovereign realms over which she reigns. Only last year, the Government of Canada decided to restore the "Royal" prefix to the Canadian air force and navy, in recognition of the role of the monarch in Canada's heritage and constitution.

However, the people of those nations have no special status upon arriving at the UK border where, sadly, they are treated without reverence. For example, it is a travesty that citizens from Australia, Canada, New Zealand

and Jamaica have to queue up in the foreign nationals channel at London Heathrow airport, while citizens from European Union countries that have never had any historical connection to the Crown or the United Kingdom—and that, in recent times, have fought against us in war—are allowed to enter alongside British citizens by virtue of their EU membership. We should surely extend that basic courtesy to all Her Majesty's loyal subjects from the overseas realms that have enjoyed an enduring relationship with the United Kingdom and the Crown since long before the genesis of the European Union.

The Bill does not propose an immediate change to current immigration and visa requirements—although I hope that, in time, reciprocal arrangements can be put in place between the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth realms—but it will provide a visible, practical and relevant way to recognise those countries that have cherished and maintained a special relationship with the United Kingdom through the Crown.

I propose a dedicated channel at international terminals for those from the Commonwealth realms, operating next to the channel for UK, EU and EEA nationals, so that all Her Majesty's subjects may enter the United Kingdom with appropriate decorum and not as second-class subjects. Of course, all 16 flags of Her Majesty's realms should be displayed on signs pointing to this new entry channel, showing the whole world that being a subject of the Queen actually means something and is not just symbolic. That would have an added advantage for British passport holders, in that we could choose which queue to join. We would at last have the choice of whether to enter through the channel marked for Her Majesty's subjects or that marked for EU citizens. I know which one I would choose.

I believe that categorising citizens of the Commonwealth realms as “foreign” is shameful—indeed, an insult to our collective history—especially for those with relatives who have laid down their lives in the name of the Crown. But that is not the only way in which our border falls short. Our international terminals are currently not obliged to display any symbols that proudly show

our national identity. It is totally unacceptable that, when we land in the United Kingdom, there is often virtually no recognition that we have done so: no portrait of the Queen, no royal coat of arms and no Union flag or any other symbol that portrays our great British identity. I believe that when visitors arrive at UK passport control, they should be left in no doubt that they have arrived in a confident and proud British nation.

There is absolutely no excuse for not affording Her Majesty the respect that she deserves at our national border as the United Kingdom's Head of State. The Queen's portrait should be prominently on display at every entry point into the United Kingdom, without exception, alongside the royal coat of arms and the Union flag, together with the flags of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Just as perplexing is the nondescript uniform and politically correct image of the so-called UK Border Agency. Disgracefully, even the symbol of the Crown has been removed from its insignia. We should end the perpetuation of that bland, corporate and thoroughly ambiguous agency, and re-establish the body as Her Majesty's border police. That would reflect the solemn duty of Her Majesty's officials to protect and defend our national border, and give them the authority, standing and respect that they need to be effective guardians of the gateways to these islands.

In this, Her Majesty's diamond jubilee year, my Bill would demonstrate the confidence, pride and bulldog spirit that the people of Britain expect Her Majesty's Government to uphold in our nation today. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Andrew Rosindell, Mr Nigel Dodds, Rory Stewart, Bob Blackman, Steve Baker, Priti Patel, Jane Ellison, Mark Menzies, Kate Hoey, Ian Paisley, Mr John Redwood and Thomas Docherty present the Bill.

Andrew Rosindell accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 January 2013, and to be printed (Bill 59).

[Andrew Rosindell]

Backbench Business

Sittings of the House

1.48 pm

Mr Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That no change be made to the time at which the House sits on a Monday.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following:

Motion 2—Sittings of the House (Mondays) (1.00 pm to 8.30 pm)—

That this House should meet at 1.00 pm on Mondays, with a moment of interruption of 8.30 pm, and accordingly the changes to Standing Orders set out in the table be made, with effect from Monday 15 October 2012.

| <i>Standing Order no.</i> | <i>Line no.</i> | <i>Change</i> |
|---|-----------------|--|
| 9 (Sittings of the House) | 3 | Leave out 'and' and insert 'at one o'clock, on'. |
| | 20 | Leave out 'ten o'clock on Mondays' and insert 'half past eight o'clock on Mondays, at ten o'clock on'. |
| 10 (Sittings in Westminster Hall) | 12 | Leave out 'be between half past nine o'clock and two o'clock' and insert 'begin at half past nine o'clock, shall be suspended from one o'clock until four o'clock and may then continue for up to a further one hour'. |
| | 16 | Leave out 'two and a half' and insert 'one hour, two and a half hours'. |
| 15 (Exempted business) | 21 | Leave out 'eleven o'clock on Monday or' and insert 'half past nine o'clock on Monday, eleven o'clock on'. |
| 17 (Delegated legislation (negative procedure)) | 2 | Leave out 'half past eleven o'clock on Monday or' and insert '(ten o'clock on Monday, half past eleven o'clock on'. |
| 20 (Time for taking private business) | 26 | Leave out 'seven o'clock on any specified Monday or' and insert 'half past five o'clock on any specified Monday, seven o'clock on any specified'. |
| | 37 | At start, insert 'half past five o'clock,'. |
| 54 (Consideration of estimates) | 20 | Leave out 'seven o'clock on Monday or' and insert 'half past five o'clock on Monday, seven o'clock on'. |
| 88 (Meetings of general committees) | 11 | Leave out 'one o'clock and half past three o'clock in the afternoon on Mondays or' and insert 'five minutes to one o'clock and two o'clock in the afternoon on Mondays, between the hours of one o'clock and half past three o'clock in the afternoon on'. |
| | 22 | At start, insert 'five minutes to one o'clock,'. |

Motion 3—Sittings of the House (Tuesdays) (No change)—

That no change be made to the time at which the House sits on a Tuesday.

Motion 4—(Sittings of the House) (Tuesdays) (11.30 am to 7.00 pm)—

That this House should meet at 11.30 am on Tuesdays, with a moment of interruption at 7.00 pm, and accordingly the changes to Standing Orders set out in the table be made, with effect from Monday 15 October 2012.

| <i>Standing Order no.</i> | <i>Line no.</i> | <i>Change</i> |
|---|-----------------|--|
| 9 (Sittings of the House) | 3 | Leave out 'and Tuesdays at half past two o'clock, on' and insert 'at half past two o'clock, on Tuesdays and'. |
| | 7 | After 'a' insert 'Tuesday or'. |
| | 20 | Leave out 'and Tuesdays, at seven o'clock on' and insert ', at seven o'clock on Tuesdays and'. |
| 10 (Sittings in Westminster Hall) | 4 | Leave out lines 4 and 5 |
| | 6 | After 'on' insert 'Tuesday or'. |
| | 10 | At start, insert 'Tuesday or'. |
| 15 (Exempted business) | 21 | Leave out 'or Tuesday, eight o'clock on' and insert ', eight o'clock on Tuesday or'. |
| 17 (Delegated legislation (negative procedure)) | 2 | Leave out 'or Tuesday, half past eight o'clock on' and insert ', half past eight o'clock on Tuesday or'. |
| 20 (Time for taking private business) | 26 | Leave out 'or Tuesday, four o'clock on any specified' and insert ', four o'clock on any specified Tuesday or'. |
| 24 (Emergency debates) | 28 | Leave out 'or Tuesday, half past ten o'clock on a' and insert ', half past ten o'clock on a Tuesday or'. |
| 54 (Consideration of estimates) | 20 | Leave out 'or Tuesday, four o'clock on' and insert ', four o'clock on Tuesday or'. |
| 88 (Meetings of general committees) | 11 | Leave out 'or Tuesdays, between the hours of twenty-five minutes past eleven o'clock in the morning and half past one o'clock in the afternoon on' and insert ', between the hours of twenty-five minutes past eleven o'clock in the morning and half past one o'clock in the afternoon on Tuesdays or'. |

Motion 5—Sittings of the House (Wednesdays) (No change)—

That no change be made to the time at which the House sits on a Wednesday.

Motion 6—Sittings of the House (Wednesdays) (10.30 am to 6.00 pm)—

That this House should meet at 10.30 am on Wednesdays, with a moment of interruption at 6.00 pm, and accordingly the changes to Standing Orders set out in the table be made, with effect from Monday 15 October 2012.

| <i>Standing Order no.</i> | <i>Line no.</i> | <i>Change</i> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| 9 (Sittings of the House) | 3 | Leave out 'on Wednesdays at half past eleven o'clock and on' and insert 'and on Wednesdays and'. |
| | 20 | Leave out ', at seven o'clock on Wednesdays and at six o'clock on' and insert 'and at six o'clock on Wednesdays and'. |
| 10 (Sittings in Westminster Hall) | 7 | Leave out 'half-past eleven o'clock until half past two o'clock' and insert 'half past ten o'clock until half past one o'clock'. |
| | 9 | Leave out 'two' and insert 'three'. |
| | 16 | Leave out 'two and a half or three' and insert 'three or three and a half'. |
| 15 (Exempted business) | 22 | Leave out ', eight o'clock on Wednesday or seven o'clock on' and insert 'or seven o'clock on Wednesday or'. |

| <i>Standing Order no.</i> | <i>Line no.</i> | <i>Change</i> | <i>Standing Order no.</i> | <i>Line no.</i> | <i>Change</i> |
|---|-----------------|---|---------------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| 17 (Delegated legislation (negative procedure)) | 3 | Leave out ‘, half past eight o’clock on Wednesday or half past seven o’clock on’ and insert ‘or half past seven o’clock on Wednesday or’. | 20 (Time for taking private business) | 27 | Leave out ‘, four o’clock on any specified Wednesday or three o’clock on any specified’ and insert ‘or three o’clock on any specified Wednesday or’. |
| | | | | 37 | Leave out ‘, four o’clock’. |
| | | | 24 (Emergency debates) | 28 | Leave out ‘, half past ten o’clock on a Wednesday or half past nine o’clock on a’ and insert ‘or half past nine o’clock on a Wednesday or’. |
| | | | 41A (Deferred divisions) | 38 | Leave out ‘eleven’ and insert ‘ten’. |
| | | | | 45 | Leave out ‘eleven’ and insert ‘ten’ |
| | | | 54 (Consideration of estimates) | 21 | Leave out ‘, four o’clock on Wednesday or three o’clock on’ and insert ‘or three o’clock on Wednesday or’. |
| | | | 88 (Meetings of general committees) | 13 | Leave out ‘, between the hours of twenty-five minutes past eleven o’clock in the morning and half past one o’clock in the afternoon on Wednesdays or between the hours of twenty-five minutes past ten o’clock in the morning and half past twelve o’clock in the afternoon on’ and insert ‘or between the hours of twenty-five minutes past ten o’clock in the morning and half past twelve o’clock in the afternoon on Wednesdays or’. |
| | | | | 22 | Leave out ‘, twenty-five minutes past eleven o’clock’. |

Motion 7—Sittings of the House (Thursdays) (9.30 am to 5.00 pm)—

That this House should meet at 9.30 am on Thursdays, with a moment of interruption at 5.00 pm, and accordingly the changes to Standing Orders set out in the table be made, with effect from Monday 15 October 2012.

| <i>Standing Order no.</i> | <i>Line no.</i> | <i>Change</i> |
|---|-----------------|---|
| 9 (Sittings of the House) | 5 | Leave out ‘ten’ and insert ‘nine’. |
| | 21 | Leave out ‘six’ and insert ‘five’. |
| 10 (Sittings in Westminster Hall) | 14 | Leave out ‘two and insert ‘one’. |
| 15 (Exempted business) | 23 | Leave out ‘seven’ and insert ‘six’. |
| 17 (Delegated legislation (negative procedure)) | 6 | Leave out ‘seven’ and insert ‘six’. |
| 20 (Time for taking private business) | 28 | Leave out ‘three’ and insert ‘two’. |
| 24 Emergency debates | 30 | Leave out ‘half-past’. |
| 54 (Consideration of estimates) | 22 | Leave out ‘three’ and insert ‘two’. |
| 88 (Meetings of general committees) | 15 | Leave out ‘twenty-five minutes past ten o’clock in the morning and half past twelve o’clock in the afternoon’ and insert ‘twenty-five minutes past nine o’clock and half past eleven o’clock in the morning’. |
| | 23 | Leave out ‘ten’ and insert ‘nine’. |

Motion 8—September Sittings—

That this House considers that the Government should bring forward motions to provide for the House to sit in September from 2013 onward.

Motion 9—Sittings of the House (Tuesdays) (7.00 pm to 10.00 pm)—

That this House should sit on Tuesdays from 7.00 pm until 10.00 pm to consider Private Members’ Bills.

I commend the Procedure Committee’s report on sitting hours—HC330—to any Member who has not yet read it because it will be helpful in determining the decisions to be made during this debate.

[Mr Speaker]

I have been surprised over the past two weeks to see reports in certain sections of the press suggesting that MPs were demanding shorter hours, and that at a “time of national crisis”, we were seeking to cut back on the number of hours that we work. That forced me to re-read my Committee’s report. As I suspected, I discovered no such proposition in it. In fact, the Committee concluded that the hours we spent at Westminster were broadly correct and should continue. I guess that the headline “MPs resolve to work as hard as ever but may choose different hours” does not have the same attraction for a sub-editor, even if it is accurate.

Sir Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): It is difficult to believe that all the media got it so wrong. Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify whether his amended press release was taken up and reported by any of the media?

Mr Knight: Rather strangely, two sections of the press that had misreported what we were doing have now made changes on their website. It could well be that the truth has finally caught up with them.

It is usual for Select Committees to reach a firm conclusion and to ask the House to follow it, for very good reasons, but this usual practice is against the background of a Committee identifying an issue that needs attention or discovering a defect in our law or perhaps a fault in ministerial practice that warrants a particular remedy. That is not the case today. Although the Procedure Committee has expressed its view in the report, I wish to make it clear that on the issue of sitting hours, the Committee appreciates that each Member of Parliament has a different way of working. That means that in considering the House’s sitting hours, there are no mainstream options that are “right” or “wrong”, “antiquated” or “modern”, “effective” or “ineffectual”: the whole issue is a matter of individual preference.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I take issue with the right hon. Gentleman when he says that it is all a matter of individual preference. I travel from the Hebrides, and if we had a 1 o’clock start on Monday the furthest I could get by that time is Glasgow airport.

Mr Knight: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, and I shall come on to Mondays shortly.

The Procedure Committee accepts that our sitting hours are a matter of judgment for the House as a whole, which is why I have tabled motions to facilitate the majority view prevailing in respect of days Monday through to Thursday. Any changes made by the House will have consequences, which I hope Members will reflect on before they decide how to vote.

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): I am sure my right hon. Friend would be the first to recognise that it is not just a matter of individual preference; the House does not sit only in the Chamber, because Select Committees have to meet, preferably at times when they are not interrupted by votes and when witnesses can come a long distance to attend the meetings. That explains why Tuesday mornings, for example, are extensively used by Select Committees.

Mr Knight: The right hon. Member has identified one of the consequences that would come into play if the House decided to change its sitting hours on Tuesdays.

It is not my intention on behalf of the Procedure Committee to cajole the House to vote in any particular way. I have tabled a number of motions to facilitate the House’s expressing a view, and if it wishes to make a change to sittings on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Thursdays, it can do so today by voting for the appropriate motion.

I shall deal with the motions in the order in which they appear on the Order Paper, starting with motion 1, which is to retain the status quo on Mondays. Many Members told the Procedure Committee they feel that earlier sittings would compromise the ability of Members from constituencies distant from London to make the journey to Westminster on Mondays—the point well made by the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil). Those with constituencies closer to Westminster also made it clear that they valued the opportunity to carry out some constituency business on a Monday morning. If this motion to make no change to Mondays is passed, no further proposals will be put forward in respect of Mondays. If it is defeated—but only if it is defeated—I will move motion 2, which proposes a slightly earlier start. As no further proposals relating to Mondays have been tabled by any other Member, this will be the only alternative the House will be asked to consider.

Motion 3 is to retain the status quo on Tuesdays, and I will move it at the appropriate time. Similarly, if this is passed, there will be no further proposals dealing with Tuesdays. As I understand it, the other Tuesday motions—4 and 9—will in that event fall.

Sir Bob Russell: In its deliberations, did the Procedure Committee take into account the fact that the House used to have earlier Tuesday sitting hours, but it quickly restored the afternoon start because of the consequences, some of which my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Sir Alan Beith) has already alluded to?

Mr Knight: The Procedure Committee was well aware of why, having decided to sit earlier on Tuesdays as an experiment, the House subsequently failed to ratify that experiment. Speaking as a Member representing a northern constituency, I can point out other consequences. If we were to sit earlier on a Tuesday, some 750 people a day would not be able to have a tour of this building on Tuesdays, which is the day when most of my constituents prefer to visit Westminster. Denying them that opportunity would mean that they would have to come here on a Monday, when they would have to compete with commuter traffic in making the journey. That could force some constituents who can ill afford it to stay the night in London if they want to have a tour of this building. That may not be an overriding consideration, but it should be borne in mind before the House votes.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I have two points on the debate so far. First, the House today is a different place—there are an awful lot more women, and more younger people with important family commitments. Members may well have wanted to change the arrangements back then, but it is important to

understand that the House is different now. Secondly, we now have a different expenses regime under the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, and many more Members have to get back late at night. It is difficult, particularly for women, to make these journeys at 10.30 and 11.30 at night. That is another difference between the House that made the change previously and this House.

Mr Knight: The hon. Lady is quite right. That is why the Procedure Committee felt it important to have this debate today to test the mood of the present Parliament on what hours it chooses to sit. On her latter point, I have always been of the view that any expenses regime should model itself to fit the hours we choose to work, and not the other way around.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): I thank the Chairman and his Committee for the work they have done on this issue. I would like to follow up the point about how the sitting hours affect Members with family responsibilities. I first entered the House when I had a seven-year-old son. There is no change in the hours that could make the House more family-friendly to those whose children are hundreds of miles away. If we are to debate this issue, we should do so on the correct grounds. It is often said that a change in the hours is more family-friendly, but that is true only to those whose families live near the House.

Mr Knight: The hon. Lady makes her point very well indeed.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): The right hon. Gentleman raised the issue of tourism here. It is important for our constituents to visit the House, but I think that his point about the expenses regime also applies to tourism—in other words, we should facilitate tourism around the hours the House sits. To address the problem he raised, perhaps we could look at other options, such as providing greater facilities at the weekend, which would be much more convenient for many of our constituents.

Mr Knight: That is one option, but I have to say that my constituents prefer me to give them a guided tour, and I prefer to give them a guided tour rather than putting them into the hands of others.

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): Following up the important intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), does the right hon. Gentleman agree that for those fortunate enough to bring up their children in inner London, as I was, notwithstanding the fact that I have a constituency 225 miles away, there is no rule to say that a 7 o'clock finish on a Tuesday is more “family-friendly” than one at 10 o'clock? As I know for certain, having talked to younger Members today, it varies greatly according to the family circumstances. No one should presume to speak for those Members—men or women—who happen to have young children about what is “best for them”.

Mr Knight: And of course it depends on the whipping that is in force on any particular day as well. I take the right hon. Gentleman's point.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): The Chairman of the Procedure Committee is making an extremely good speech and balancing all the different factors. He says that “it depends on the whipping”, but I am sure that he will accept that often on a Tuesday night, when there is no Whip and Members are not engaged with a debate, one still finds Members in their offices until 9, 10, 11 o'clock at night—even when no votes are taking place and there is no engagement in the Chamber. That is the reality of this place.

Mr Knight: That is certainly true; I think we are all aware of that. It may not be a matter of any moment for Opposition Members, but, if the House were to decide to sit earlier on a Tuesday, it would in effect scupper many ministerial visits to different parts of the country during the daytime. Opposition Members might not be bothered about that now, but there might come a time when it does matter to them.

To return to the process, if the Tuesday motion on retaining the status quo falls, I understand that the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock) will then move motion 4, which I have also signed, recommending that our sitting hours on a Tuesday change to mirror those currently in force on a Wednesday.

I understand also that if the right hon. Lady is successful and the motion is passed, she might also move motion 9, at the end of this business on the Order Paper, recommending that private Members' Bills be taken on a Tuesday evening after 7 pm. I have considerable sympathy for the House looking at whether we move the time for debate on private Members' Bills, but, if her motion becomes eligible to move, I ask her again to reflect on not doing so—for five reasons.

The Procedure Committee has resolved to undertake a full report into private Members' Bills and the procedure relating thereto. I have also been to see the Leader of the House, because it is important that the House, at an early date, decides whether it wishes private Members' Bills to continue on a Friday or to move to another day of the week—not necessarily a Tuesday.

I am pleased to say that the Leader of the House accepted the strength of the necessity for an early decision on the matter, and he made it clear to me that he intends to provide time for the Backbench Business Committee, either in the September spill-over or shortly thereafter, when I hope that the Committee will allocate a debate for that purpose. So we have had a promise of time to debate the question of when we deal with private Members' Bills, and it should be a wider one than just, say, moving them from Friday to Tuesday; the House should debate whether to take such Bills on a Wednesday—perhaps even a Thursday might be an option—or keep them where they are on a Friday.

There are consequences of just moving such Bills from a Friday to a Tuesday, not least that such business will be more likely to attract a payroll Whip if the Government of the day find it unpalatable.

Dame Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman indicates that the payroll vote may become a factor in any consideration of private Members' Bills, but it would apply whenever such Bills were debated, and there are of course other mechanisms that Governments use to talk them out on a Friday. Specifically, will his thinking encompass running

[*Dame Joan Ruddock*]

such Bills parallel to the sittings of the Chamber, or are we talking solely about putting them on at the end of regular business?

Mr Knight: As the Procedure Committee has only just resolved to look into the matter, I would not want to cut off any avenue of discussion. I think that it will be happy to look at both suggestions—[*Interruption.*]

I know that one other aspect of the matter which the Committee wants to look at is the steps that we take to reduce the likelihood of just two or three Members completely destroying a Bill that has the support of many. There are various ways of doing so, one of which is to put the Question on a private Member's Bill's Second Reading after a certain amount of time has elapsed, rather than Members having to get 100 people here to vote in the affirmative.

So we are seeking to be helpful; we have been promised an early debate about the matter; and on that basis I hope that the House will be prepared to wait until September for a wide-ranging debate about private Members' Bills and where we allocate them within our sittings, rather than accept motion 9 today. I thought that someone else was seeking to intervene.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): You made my point for me.

Mr Knight: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. Apparently I made his point for him.

The short delay between today and September or the first week in October is not long enough to delay the implementation of any recommendation that we bring forward. Nothing will be lost by waiting, so I hope that on reflection the right hon. Lady will decide not to move motion 9 if it becomes possible for her to do so.

Motion 5 is to retain the status quo on Wednesdays, and again I shall move it at the appropriate time. Similarly, if it is passed no further proposals will deal with Wednesday and the remaining Wednesday motion will fall. If the Wednesday motion on retaining the status quo fails, I will move motion 6, which recommends that our sitting hours on that day change to mirror those currently in place on a Thursday, namely 10.30 am until 6 pm.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): If we move sitting times on a Wednesday, my concern, which applies to Tuesday as well, is that we will curtail the time that Members have to arrange meetings with constituents and others in this place. It is very tricky to organise meetings when the House is sitting; I have had to cancel two appointments this afternoon to take part in this debate. So I have great concerns about contracting the time that Members have available to meet constituents and others.

Mr Knight: My hon. Friend makes a fair point, and I assume that those concerns will lead him to vote for the status quo when the time comes.

Motion 7 is to bring Thursday sittings forward by one hour so that the House sits from 9.30 am until 5 pm, rather than from 10.30 am until 6 pm. Any

Member who wishes to see the status quo retained should vote against the motion.

Mr Gray: I am a member of the Procedure Committee and, therefore, I signed up to the report, which was of course unanimous, but since we produced it a number of people who live, for example, in Milton Keynes and similar places have brought to my attention the fact that, to get here by 9.30 am, it would be necessary to catch peak time trains, and that, given the strictures on our expenses, that might not be so good and, in order to accommodate them, might be a reason for leaving things at 10.30 am.

Mr Knight: Again, my hon. Friend, who is a very valued member of the Committee, has put forward an argument for certain Members voting for the status quo.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): This is probably the best laid out Order Paper that we have had for any such debate, as far as making things clear goes, and I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on how he has set out the options—so that people understand them and know what they are voting for. I may have missed this earlier, but if people vote for any new hours when will they be implemented?

Mr Knight: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the first part of his intervention. This way of proceeding was not without controversy, but I am pleased that he feels, as I do, that it is the best way of doing so. I am obliged to the Government and to the Backbench Business Committee, and the reason why we are having this debate today—as I understand it, and I stand to be corrected by the Deputy Leader of the House—and, in effect, debating sitting hours ahead of some of the other recommendations in the Committee's report is that if the House votes for any change, the Government and the House authorities will be able to put the necessary changes in place for when we return in October.

Dan Byles (North Warwickshire) (Con): Further to the intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray), does my right hon. Friend not agree that, on sitting hours, we should set ourselves up so that the Chamber and the House work and we do our jobs in the most effective way, and that, although the point about whether someone travels at peak time is an interesting one, it should be a secondary consideration?

Mr Knight: That too is an interesting point, but I believe that it is for individuals to decide at what time of day they consider themselves to work most effectively, and that is why I have hesitated to tell the House in which direction it should go today. I think that this is a matter for the House itself: I think it right for this Parliament, elected in 2010, to make its decision—a decision with which the majority are happy—and we know that that will happen in less than two hours' time.

Mr Aidan Burley (Cannock Chase) (Con) *rose*—

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Knight: I have already given way a number of times, but I shall continue to do so, as I see that two of my hon. Friends wish to intervene.

Mr Burley: My right hon. Friend said that the House should reflect on what is the optimal time of day for Members to work, and I think that that goes to the heart of the debate. Does he accept that for many new Members such as me—those of us who arrived in the House two years ago—10 pm is not the optimal hour of the day at which to work? Back in the real world, the optimal working hours are from nine in the morning, when people are fresh, until about 6 pm.

Mr Knight: I am not sure whether I agree with my hon. Friend. I am Knight by name, night by nature. Perhaps I have hung around with too many musicians, but I tend to like working during the evening.

Philip Davies: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is plenty of work to be done that can easily see us through until 10 pm? I am not entirely sure why Members should have nothing to do after 6 pm, given all their constituency work. Does my right hon. Friend also agree that what we are being asked to do is choose between the competing claims of Select Committees, the House and Westminster Hall? At present there is plenty of time for Members to participate in all of three, but a change in our hours would not allow that to continue.

Mr Knight: As I said at the outset, any change will have consequences. My hon. Friend has correctly identified one of those consequences, namely the clash with Committee sittings on Tuesday mornings.

Let me now, for the benefit of all Members, say something about the mechanics of the voting that will take place later. I have had a discussion with the Patronage Secretary, the Chief Whip, and because there is to be a genuine free vote for Government Members and also, I trust, for Opposition Members, and because there are differences of opinion in the Government Whips Office, he has agreed that the Government Whips will act as Tellers on motions 1 to 7. The right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock) will therefore not need Tellers for the vote on her motion to change Tuesday sittings, although if she wishes to push her later amendment, she will need Tellers for that. The Government have taken a view on September sittings, and if any Member chooses to divide the House on my motion on the subject, Tellers will also be needed then. I hope that that is helpful to all Members.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I congratulate the Committee on an excellent report which is thorough and very readable, and which makes some sensible recommendations.

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that if, at the appropriate time, a majority voted against September sittings, it would be disastrous for the reputation of the House? It is quite wrong, and always has been, for the House not to sit for 10 continuous weeks, and I hope that when the motions recommended in motion 8 are put to the House, it will vote overwhelmingly in favour of continuing the September sittings.

Mr Knight: I hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say, but I must tell him that the evidence that the Committee received from Members was rather mixed. There was little, if any, enthusiasm for September sittings.

Many Members felt that little of substance was achieved during those two-week periods, and that any presentational benefit was outweighed by the financial costs of setting up the House so that Members could be brought back for just eight or nine sitting days before the conference recess. Many also regretted the loss of opportunities for constituency work in September, particularly visits to schools.

However, the view in other quarters—including, I believe, the Government—rather reflected that of the hon. Gentleman, namely that any move to return to the long summer recess would be very difficult in presentational terms, and would also create a long period during which the House would be unable effectively to fulfil its task of scrutinising the Government and holding Ministers to account. Indeed, that may well be the view of the official Opposition.

Mr Straw: Under a Labour Government, when we were operating the old system of no September sittings, the House had to be recalled on three occasions. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the cost and disruption involved in recalling Members from their holidays, and the disruption of works in this building, far outweighs the cost of programmed, regular September sittings?

Mr Knight: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. However, I should add that the Clerk of the House has estimated that the additional cost of September sittings is some £1.5 million, mainly from the capital budget. That cost arises from the need to manage some projects within the tighter timetable that results from the breaking up of the long summer recess. Costs will of course vary from year to year. The key factor for the Parliamentary Estates Directorate is certainty about the parliamentary calendar to allow for effective planning. One reason for the Committee's wish for the matter to be decided today, either way, is that at least it will bring certainty to 2013 and beyond.

The House has not had an opportunity since the general election to debate the question of whether September sittings should become the norm. We have had two years of September sittings since the election, and we think that the time is now ripe for all Members to judge the desirability of such sittings. The House has already agreed to a motion providing for a sitting in September 2012, and today we have an opportunity to decide whether we should sit in September from 2013 onwards. I have proposed that we sit in September, and any Member who opposes September sittings should divide the House against motion 8.

We all have our own views on the sitting hours that we personally prefer. Today the Procedure Committee, above all else, wants the House of Commons, in the present Parliament, to have an opportunity to decide its own sitting hours. I hope that the motions that I have tabled will enable that to be achieved simply and with the minimum of fuss.

2.16 pm

Dame Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight) and his Committee on their report, and on facilitating today's debate. I also thank the right hon. Gentleman personally for the assistance that he

[*Dame Joan Ruddock*]

has given me in ensuring that there was a proper range of options on the Order Paper.

When I entered the House 25 years ago, 40% of our sittings lasted until midnight or beyond and we were here five days a week. We had no computers, no mobile phones and no e-mail, and very little time was available for constituency work.

Sir Bob Russell: Utopia!

Dame Joan Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman says that it was Utopia, and indeed there were Members at that time who boasted about how infrequently they visited their constituencies. A few could recall the days when a brass band and the stationmaster greeted such an arrival.

I was determined to try to make a change. That is why, in 2001, I joined the Modernisation Committee chaired by Robin Cook which introduced the reforms that shape the parliamentary timetables of today. However, 10 years have passed since then. Everything has changed, and I believe that the House must change too.

Our constituents present us with a paradox. They despise us as a class, but individually and locally they value us. They are ever demanding—through e-mails, campaigns, packed surgeries, and constant invitations for us to support local events—and Parliament itself proceeds at a faster pace than ever under the glare of an all-pervasive media. As the Procedure Committee observed, “This is an extraordinarily demanding role.”

The Committee found MPs working an average of 70 hours a week while the House was sitting, taking few holidays, and often remaining in touch even then and even when away with their families. For many Members, this life is very different from the one they led before entering the House.

Most telling was the Hansard Society survey that found that the effect of becoming an MP on personal and family life was universally negative. That is not a complaint. We are all volunteers and most of us fought very hard to get here, but the question is this: is that a reasonable state of affairs or could we improve how we work? Would it not make better sense, as the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Mr Burley) said, for the House to sit earlier in the mornings, functioning more like the other institutions of our national life? Might we not make better decisions if we started earlier and finished earlier? Constituents are always amazed that we begin to vote at 10 pm on two nights of the week.

Personally, I would be more radical than the options on the Order Paper, but I think that the 11.30 am start and 7 pm finish on a Tuesday is where the greatest consensus for change lies.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend accept that talking about an 11.30 am start or, as a journalist did on Twitter this morning, a 2.30 pm start demeans the work of Members? I do not know of any Member who starts their working day at 11.30 am or 2.30 pm.

Dame Joan Ruddock: I have already said that we work 70 hours a week. Those were the findings of an independent committee and of the Procedure Committee survey, so we clearly are working all sorts of hours. I

think my hon. Friend knows that I am talking about the formal sittings of the Chamber.

Dan Byles: As a new Member of the House with a young family and a seven-and-a-half-month-old daughter, I am open to the argument that more family-friendly hours might make it easier for Members with young families, but I also sit on the Energy and Climate Change Committee. It is a busy Committee that meets Tuesday mornings, and I do not see how such a change could be made to fit with Members’ other responsibilities, which we usually discharge before the House sits.

Dame Joan Ruddock: I am sympathetic to what the hon. Gentleman says, but in the past six weeks just 15 of the 35 Select Committees have met on a Tuesday morning.

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I agree with everything that the right hon. Lady is saying in her excellent remarks. The Treasury Committee, on which I sit, meets in private at 9.45 am on Tuesdays for a 10 am start. I take my daughter to school and am here by 8.30 am. Why not start then?

Dame Joan Ruddock: I share the hon. Lady’s enthusiasm for real change, but we have on offer what we have on offer.

Mr Gray: I am not certain what precise thesis the right hon. Lady is advancing. She says that we all work 70 hours a week—I suspect we do more—but is she saying that Members should work for fewer hours a week? If so, how would we deal with the constituency demands she described? Or, if we are to continue working that long, why should we necessarily change the formal sitting hours, given that we will still be doing other things in the evenings and before we sit?

Dame Joan Ruddock: I think the hon. Gentleman fails to grasp one point.

Mr Gray *indicated assent.*

Dame Joan Ruddock: He has indeed. The motions are concerned with the hours in which the House sits. That is all we are concerning ourselves with. What matters to most of us is that we have to vote on legislation that comes before the Chamber. The timings determine when we are obliged to be here, as opposed to our offices, our local offices, at home working or anywhere else. It removes choice. It is about the choice of when we are required to be here and voting. If the sitting hours of the day are moved forward, there will be no question of working fewer hours; we will simply work different hours.

Mr Straw: My right hon. Friend referred to the Hansard Society findings about the pressures on families when people enter the House. Those are undoubted. Does she accept, however, that the vast majority of Members have constituencies and families way beyond commuting distance from here, so whether the House finishes at 7 pm or 10 pm is irrelevant to whether they see their families? Moreover, as I know from talking to new Members, the pressures on families arise not from whether we finish at 7 pm or 10 pm but from the fact

that Members are under increasing power to work on Fridays, during the day and in the evening, and on Saturdays and Sundays?

Dame Joan Ruddock: Again, I am sympathetic to everything that my right hon. Friend says. He is absolutely right, and if he is patient, he will hear that I have taken account of all his points.

Natascha Engel (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend admit that she is not distinguishing between sitting hours and what we do in those sitting hours? She is conflating the two. Will she separate those two things, because the sitting hours are one thing but what we do in them is something completely different?

Dame Joan Ruddock: I think my hon. Friend is teasing me, because she knows exactly what I am suggesting. The sitting hours of the Chamber are the hours that condition the voting patterns, which most of us consider to be mandatory. I am talking about the opportunity for Members to consider bringing forward the mandatory voting hours to earlier in the day. Each person will choose how they vote during all the hours of the day and, indeed, all the hours of the night.

I do not claim that the proposed reforms are family-friendly. All families are different, and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) said, nothing is family-friendly if the family are hundreds of miles away. To bring forward the sitting hours, however, would be more people-friendly and would give us more control over our own time and more choice about how to spend the remaining hours of the day. It is not just a London issue either. The gap in preferences for earlier hours between those in the London area and those outside it is not that great.

Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend makes a series of excellent points, the most pertinent of which concerns the moment of interruption. The hour upon which we vote is clearly, for most Members, the most fixed moment of our diaries. It is clearly the most important decision that we can make. Although we can talk about the complications of Select Committees, where our constituencies are or our particular family make-ups, the point about flexibility is the most important one. That is why I advocate her position of making that hour as early as possible in the day.

Dame Joan Ruddock: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I echo the right hon. Lady's remarks. Although I cannot return to my constituency in the evening, I still think this issue says something about our institutional culture and what we think is a normal working practice.

Dame Joan Ruddock: The hon. Lady might also feel that if she gets home a little earlier in the evening, perhaps she has more time to talk to her family.

Sir Robert Smith: It is important to remember that we are talking about the moment of interruption. When we bring forward the moment of interruption, as we have done on Wednesdays, the business managers often find it convenient to schedule business for after the moment of interruption, because the House is sitting

more normal hours. There is no guarantee that people planning their diaries will know what time is available after the moment of interruption until the week before, when the business statement is made.

Dame Joan Ruddock: I have looked at the figures. The coalition Government have been very bad about doing that, but the Labour Government were not. We were much more disciplined. I think that the hon. Gentleman should complain to those in charge, not to me.

In the survey of more than 500 MPs that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey) and I conducted over a year ago, the most frequent demands from Members were for more control over time, more predictable voting times and debates, and Friday to be recognised as a constituency day for everyone. A few recorded their difficulties in getting home on Thursdays, and I very much welcome the Procedure Committee's motion to start and finish one hour earlier on Thursdays.

Kevin Brennan: On the matter of the moment of interruption on Mondays and Tuesdays, is it not the case that we are talking about 68 days in the year when Members are required to be here until 10 pm? The proposals being put forward would take away 34 days of the year when we might be required to be here on Mondays and Tuesdays—and we are not always required to be—because we meet for only 34 weeks of the year. Why is being here for 68 days until 10 pm—possibly—such a terrible thing?

Dame Joan Ruddock: I can only tell my hon. Friend that although this might not be something that people want to acknowledge in this public place, the vast majority of MPs say that they are perpetually tired, that they are stressed and that they find the late hours a particular problem. That is what people say when they are speaking in private. I acknowledge that having an earlier start and an earlier finish would make many of us feel better, think better and probably be healthier.

Mr Burley: The right hon. Lady is being modest in saying that this proposal is people-friendly and not family-friendly. Does she agree that were an MP with a family in my constituency in the west midlands, which is still more than 170 miles away, to finish earlier, at say 5 pm or 6 pm, they could drive up to their constituency, spend an evening with their family and then drive back? The argument that just because the constituency is far away an MP might as well stay here until 10 pm as they will never see their family is totally ludicrous.

Dame Joan Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman makes one of the key points: this is about choice and the fact that all families are different. As I said, some people will be able to take opportunities. I simply say to our colleagues: just because it does not suit you because you cannot do it, why would you prevent another person from being able to do it? We should be generous in our support of our colleagues. None of the proposals to be voted on today mean that MPs would work fewer hours. I am not advocating fewer hours, but simply a rearrangement within the day and the week; this is a very small attempt to make this workplace more manageable.

Dan Byles: A couple of times the right hon. Lady has alluded to the idea that what we do here is very different

[*Dan Byles*]

from what is done in other organisations. I just say to her that I have many friends in the private sector, and some in the public sector, too, who work until 10 pm, when they are busy and there is a lot of work to be done.

Dame Joan Ruddock: I could not agree more. I have a constituency of many very poor people and one of the things they do is work antisocial hours. They have several jobs and many of them work through the night, but believe me they do not want to do it. They would wish to be able to work in the hours of daylight and to do a normal and reasonable job. We owe it to ourselves to consider whether that would not work for us as well.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Given that this debate is focused on the Tuesdays, because most people believe that the Mondays should remain the same, and because whether we finish at 6 pm or 7 pm on Wednesdays is neither here nor there, is not the way to solve this problem without major upheaval to keep the sitting hours as they are but just move one-line Whip business or Back-Bench debates, which tend to have a one-line Whip—or they do not necessarily have a three-line Whip—and private Members' Bills to Tuesday nights? People would then have the option on whether or not to stay here in the Chamber.

Dame Joan Ruddock: That is an interesting suggestion, but the hon. Gentleman would have had to put it to his Government business managers before the debate to see whether they would have done it. We are too late for that now, because we have the motions on the Order Paper.

Andrea Leadsom: I want to reiterate, with the right hon. Lady's support, that this is absolutely not about Members working fewer hours. Unfortunately, the media tend to focus on MPs trying to vote themselves fewer hours, but that is not the case here. This is, exactly as she says, about the precise moment of interruption, when we are required to be here 99% of the time. If that moment is at 10 pm, people are given very little flexibility. If it were to come earlier, we would be able to make the choice to be working at home or in our offices. I entirely support the right hon. Lady.

Dame Joan Ruddock: I am grateful to the hon. Lady.

I now wish to discuss the Friday sittings. I have heard what the Chair of the Committee has said and I will be considering that as the debate goes on. It is very important that we discuss Fridays. The Friday proposal appears to be the most contentious, because we have heard dire warnings of reputational damage to MPs and the suggestion that MPs are going to be skiving off. Those of us who want to see private Members' Bills moved from Friday to earlier in the week are not advocating a four-day week. On the contrary, all the evidence shows that MPs' hours are already, as I have said, double those of a standard working week. MPs are rightly in their constituencies working for their constituents on a Friday.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are a number of Members

who, like me, have constituency advice surgeries on Friday? As a result of those, I have not been able to participate in debates on private Members' Bills where I would have wanted to contribute. Friday is the only day when I can make sure that I am there for my constituents, and I do not want to have to choose between legislation and my constituents. This House is getting more powerful and private Members' Bills can make more difference, and I genuinely think it ought to be easier for Back Benchers to participate in private Members' legislation. This change would make that possible.

Dame Joan Ruddock: I absolutely agree. As I was saying, our constituents want us to be in our constituencies working for them on a Friday. It is also where we want to be, and the record bears that out. On the 17 sitting Fridays in the 2010 to 2012 session, recorded attendance varied from 19 to 134. Indeed, according to the records, some of the strongest advocates of a five-day Westminster week have never attended a Friday sitting—I have all the names.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): I can tell the right hon. Lady that she has completely won me over to her arguments, which she has made so powerfully. Does she also agree that Friday is the day when we go to see schools and hospitals—when we meet ordinary people who live in the real world and work normal hours?

Dame Joan Ruddock: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady because she is 100% right. As my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) said, the worst thing that can happen if a Member comes to a private Members' Bill sitting is that they end up wiping out their entire Friday and, in particular, their surgery. I am convinced that we should move parliamentary business from a Friday, and if we bring Tuesday business forward by three hours we could accommodate private Members' Bills on a Tuesday evening. Attendance for Back Benchers would be optional and voting would be guaranteed at 10 pm, thus ending the farce of talking out these precious Bills, as happens at the moment.

Any changes to MPs' hours will, of course, require change to the working patterns of the staff and officers who make this place work for us. Care will need to be taken to ensure that they are not disadvantaged. If we sit earlier on a Tuesday, there will be, as on Wednesdays now, a continuing need for some services to continue beyond the time voting begins.

The reform proposals available to MPs today are modest; they involve no reduction in hours but an important rearrangement. The afternoon start on a Monday is, I believe, in the best interests of the House, enabling all MPs to travel from their constituencies in the morning and still do an eight-hour day. But on all other days I am committed to change. Not only will that benefit many sitting Members of this House, but it would help to bring into this House a wider range of future candidates, as they would believe that this is a place in which they could work. So I recommend voting against the no-change motions for Tuesday and Wednesday, and voting positively in favour of earlier hours on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and moving private Members' Bills from Friday. This is a chance to make a small change and a small gain, but it is an opportunity that will not come to this Parliament again. I hope that Members will seize it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Many Members wish to speak, and a few minutes—not many—will at some stage have to be allowed for the Front-Bench Members' contributions.

There is not a formal time limit, but I appeal to Members to make brief contributions, in the interests of their colleagues.

2.40 pm

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): I am a member of the Procedure Committee, and I must start by thanking its Chair, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight), for putting together these clever motions, which mean the House will get a chance to vote on these measures, and the Backbench Business Committee for giving us time to debate them.

It is an honour to follow the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock). She stated her case very eloquently, and I have enormous sympathy with it. I came to the House fully aware that this was not a family-friendly job, and I have to say that there is no family-friendly job; there is no job out there that allows people both to spend significant amounts of time with their families and to make a full contribution in their employment. I am not looking for more time with my family, therefore, but when we sit here at 10 o'clock on a Tuesday night—often tired and unable to think clearly because we have been working since 8 am or 9 am—I think that staying here until so late is, perhaps, not the best way for us to conduct our business.

Being an MP is a vocation, as was said on several occasions during Procedure Committee evidence sessions. It is a way of life; it is not a job. That was brought home to me by a text message I received from my dairy farmers at 8 o'clock on Sunday morning, letting me know about the summit they are currently attending in Central Hall in Westminster. I do not switch off. I do not have time off at the weekends. I do not have time to spend not doing this job—not having this way of life.

However, I do think that this House should sit—to debate what is, of course, very important business—at a time that is relevant and reasonable, and that works in terms of the outside world. That is a very important point. The outside world has no idea what we do. I have often had journalists come to shadow me, and they are astounded by the wide variety of different things we do, and that we work so late. When the hour of interruption comes at 7 o'clock this evening, there is nothing to stop anybody carrying on working until 10 o'clock if they wish. Nobody is going to be prevented from doing that, but at least with this change of hours Members can, if they want, do what their constituents do: read the latest book, see the latest film at the cinema, read their Committee papers—

Anna Soubry: Or get a life!

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend makes a very good point.

There is nothing to stop us working on into the evening if we have the hour of interruption at 7 o'clock on a Tuesday. If we want later sittings on a Tuesday, there is nothing to stop us deciding to have longer Adjournment debates, or more time for Back-bench business. This House can carry on functioning, but 7 o'clock is a perfectly reasonable time at which to set the hour of interruption when Government business should finish.

[Karen Bradley]

That is why I support the change in business on Tuesday. I will support the status quo on Monday, however, as I understand that many Members have to travel a significant distance or get things done in their constituencies on a Monday morning. Although I would be happier to start slightly earlier on Mondays, I would not wish to impose that on colleagues. We are all here in London on Monday night, however, so why not get started on Tuesday mornings?

In respect of Wednesdays, I have a point to make about Select Committees. I sit on the Work and Pensions Committee. We start at 9.15 on Wednesday morning, and we finish by 11.30 so we can come into the Chamber for Prayers. It is perfectly possible to have Select Committee business before 11.30—or for Committees to sit during House sitting hours on Monday afternoons, as we also sometimes do.

Mr Graham Stuart (Beverly and Holderness) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Does she agree that bringing Wednesdays forward to 10.30 that would impinge on the sitting times of Select Committees, such as the Education Committee, which I chair? She makes a strong case in respect of Tuesdays, however.

Karen Bradley: I will not support the Wednesday change; I will support the status quo for that very reason. Wednesday is one of the most effective days in the week in terms of my business, as I have my Select Committee and then we come into the Chamber for House business. It is a very easy day to get things done.

I support the change by one hour for Thursdays. That is not particularly relevant to me in terms of my getting back to my constituency, but I am fully aware that some Members have very long journeys, and being able to get a 6 pm rather than a 7 pm train can make the difference between getting home in the evening and having to get on the sleeper train. In the interests of all Members, it would be appropriate for this House to move to a 9.30 start on Thursdays.

Duncan Hames (Chippenham) (LD): I have read the Committee report, and I found the hon. Lady to be a pivotal member of the Committee. I, too, support the change for Thursday. However, are not the arguments for no change on a Monday, which I think she has accepted, just as valid as the arguments for change on Thursdays?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and I agree with him, which is why I will support the status quo on Mondays and the Committee's recommendations for starting an hour earlier on Thursdays.

I will not support the motion on private Members' business. The Procedure Committee has just started an inquiry into what might be done to improve private Members' business, and I would like to hear the evidence on that before making a final decision. I appreciate what my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire said about our having a debate on that very soon. I am content to leave that matter for now, therefore.

I will support the motion for September sittings. It is important that we hold the Executive to account during September. We should not have a 10-week break when the Executive is not challenged.

I will therefore support a change on Tuesdays, and no other changes as things currently stand.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. There is no formal time limit on speeches, but there is now heavy pressure on time. I want to accommodate colleagues, so I call for brevity. We will be led, with great distinction, in this exercise in succinctness by a very senior Member of the House: Mr Jack Straw.

2.47 pm

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): I shall stick to five minutes for my speech, Mr Speaker.

I am grateful to the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight) for the work he and other members of the Procedure Committee have done. I have no nostalgia for the old hours at all. Sitting into the small hours and going on until 11.30 pm was absurd. I also strongly support what my right hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock) said about Friday sittings. We should not move private Members' business to a separate ghetto after normal business. There should, for example, be 13 days allocated to private Member's Bills in the normal sitting week, which the business of the House Committee that would be formed would allocate according to need, and there should be proper knives coming down for that business, as with any other business.

I think we would be in grave error if we moved to a 7 o'clock finish on a Tuesday, however. We tried that, based on the 2001 Modernisation Committee report, and it was found not to be workable. In the words of one of my hon. Friends—who is not known as a neanderthal—in the Tea Room earlier, it was a “nightmare to operate.”

Ann Coffey (Stockport) (Lab): When it came to the vote, 225 voted to retain the early hours and 292 voted against, so 225 Members of the 2001-05 Parliament thought the hours did work.

Mr Straw: My hon. Friend makes my point. The vote was decisively lost—[*Interruption.*] It was lost.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Straw: I am afraid I will not take any more interventions, or I shall suffer the injunction of Mr Speaker.

I remind the House of what was said at the time in favour of those changes. We were told that the changes to the hours

“would bring us closer to the people”.

Extravagant claims have been made about changing the hours, which have all turned to dust.

I was glad that my right hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford did not push the family-friendly argument, as that was the argument that was made before and, as we have now accepted, there is no single rule about what suits families. As it happens, my family were brought up in London even though my constituency is a distance away. I did my best, like every other Member of this House, to meet my family obligations, including chairing the governing body of our children's

inner London comprehensive. The old hours happened to suit that, because I could go and come back. The thing that made the biggest difference to family-friendly hours was nothing to do with the formal hours at which we finish but pairing. I was able to pair with Conservative colleagues who also had small children. If we wish to get back to sensible arrangements that take account of individual circumstances, we must put pressure on the Patronage Secretary and our own Whips to reintroduce a pairing system. A natural equilibrium results from a pairing system, as those like me, old stagers who do not have families to go back to, give way to those who do have families to go back to.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Straw: I will not, if the hon. Lady will excuse me.

Finally, the reason we had to change back, as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Sir Alan Beith) pointed out, was that there was a clash with the meeting of Committees and with the meetings of Government in Cabinet and Cabinet Committees. I tell my hon. Friends that I do not wish us to stay in opposition as a perpetual state; I regard it as temporary. I wish to be on the Government Benches. The change would also be disruptive, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition would find, to the work of the Opposition. The shadow Cabinet meets on a Tuesday morning and will find that all sorts of meetings cannot happen.

The hon. Gentleman who is the Member for Slough—

Iain Stewart: For Milton Keynes South.

Mr Straw: For one of those new towns, anyway. The hon. Gentleman made some important points about Tuesday morning being the only time of the week when he felt safe about holding meetings.

I hope that, taking account of all those factors, Members will not make the error that they made in 2001 and that the House had to put right, by a big majority, just a few years later.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who has done a great service to the House and been very considerate in speaking with such brevity. I know that we will now hear two extremely brief speeches from the two Front Benchers.

2.52 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath): I will do my best, Mr Speaker. I ought perhaps first to apologise for the absence of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House who, as some Members will know, is in his constituency for the arrival of the Olympic torch today.

I thank the Procedure Committee for its work on the issues and the Government will respond to the issues that are not covered by today's motions in due course. I can also confirm that the motions before the House do not cover changes to Standing Order No. 14, on the arrangements and timing of public and private business, but we will bring forward consequential amendments if the House decides to change the sitting times.

I also want to make it clear that the Government have not taken a position on the changes to the sitting days of the week, as these are matters for the House and each individual Member's preference, including that of members of the Government. We welcome the starting point, which involves maintaining the current number of sitting days and the present pattern.

There is one proposition on which the Government have a strong view, however, and that is September sittings. We remain of the view that the House should continue to sit in September for precisely the reasons mentioned by the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick). I believe that Ministers should be held to account by this House and that a long break in the middle of the summer does the House's reputation and its ability to scrutinise Ministers no good at all.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Some of us have been campaigning for a long time for private Members' Bills to be moved from Friday mornings to Tuesday evenings because it would be a good idea if more Members could see their legislation not being dealt with capriciously but being allowed to enter on to the statute book. That would also require the Government, on occasion, to allow more than one Committee to sit on private Members' Bills. Will the Government commit to do that if the House changes the rules?

Mr Heath: That is a curious intervention to make when I was talking about September sittings. I shall now move on to the days of the week, but let me just mention the fact that European scrutiny requires us to sit in September, too, if we are to make an effective job of it.

Let me now deal with the days of the week and make a few observations on the effects. On the question of an earlier start on Monday, as a west country Member of Parliament I share the views that will be expressed by many about the difficulties that might entail. We must be very careful not to make arrangements based on the interests of those who live within the M25 while ignoring those outside it. In passing, let me point out that changing the times for Mondays would also change the start time on Tuesdays and Wednesdays after recesses when they are the first day back.

I think the most contentious issue is the sitting hours for Tuesday and I hope I will not alarm the press if I say that there is a division of opinion between me and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on that question. He favours a change and I do not. I do not because of the arguments that have already been made about the difficulty in reconciling the priorities of Members of the House if we make that move. That was my experience when we last experimented.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab) *rose*—

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Mr Heath: I am trying to give everyone a chance to speak, so if I take an intervention it will be at the expense of a short extension to my speech.

Valerie Vaz: I shall be very quick. The Deputy Leader of the House mentioned a split, so will he confirm whether there will be a free vote for everyone in the House, including the payroll vote?

Mr Heath: Absolutely. I have made it absolutely plain that the only point on which the Government are taking a view is the September sittings. Everyone is at liberty to vote as they wish on everything else.

There will be difficulties on Tuesdays in finding ways to reconcile the interests of Select Committees and our other duties in the House. I do not like the idea of Members' having to choose between one thing and another and I also have an interest in that I would like schools from my constituency to be able to visit the House occasionally. Others will take a different view, however, which has been expressed and it is for the House to decide on that point.

The proposed changes to Wednesdays are manageable and we could do it. There would be a knock-on effect on Prime Minister's questions, but we would have to return to that point. Obviously, it is for the House to decide.

As for Thursdays, there is a travelling issue involved, but there are also issues for the workings of the House, including the tabling of urgent questions and other deadlines, and Members ought to have regard for the effect on Committees and House staff.

On the motion in the name of the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock), I must say that I agree with the Chair of the Procedure Committee, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight). The Committee is carrying out an inquiry into private Members' Bills and I think we should wait and hear what it has to say. I do not think that we should pre-empt it. She provides an option, but it is not the only option to deal with the long-standing issue of private Members' Bills. I had to smile when the right hon. Lady was talking about Members talking out private Members' Bills, because I remember our altercations on a Bill in my name when she was the Minister not so long ago. There are issues, but we should let the Procedure Committee do its work and come back to the House with recommendations rather than pre-empting that decision.

In conclusion, the Government will work with the Procedure Committee on whatever results from our deliberations today. We will try to facilitate with the Backbench Business Committee early consideration of Standing Orders if the House decides in favour of a change. I urge the House not to vote for a change to September sittings and, for the rest, Members will make up their own minds.

2.58 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I pay tribute to the work of the Procedure Committee and its Chair, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight), and commend him for the very clear way in which he outlined the Committee's position on various issues.

On the question of private Members' Bills and Friday sittings, I acknowledge entirely the frustration and sense of futility felt by some hon. Members who are trying to introduce Bills with a significant level of public interest, which are talked out because the Bill at the top of the queue has taken all the time available. The challenges in moving our consideration of private Members' Bills to one of the evenings in the week, however, are substantial and are outlined in the report. The report rightly asks

the House to take a view. It is right that Members should make up their own minds on this important issue if my right hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock) seeks a decision on motion 9.

The report is also helpful in making clear the importance of our work here, that it has not diminished and that there is no room for any reduction in either the days or weeks that we sit during the year. We know that the House engages in a range of important activities in the passage of legislation. On occasion, it works as a Committee of the whole House, which depends on whether the appropriate committal and programme motions have been agreed. The House also scrutinises the Government at oral question and on statements, and urgent questions can be tabled. It guarantees opportunities for the Opposition to hold the Government to account and it enjoys the successful new innovation of the Backbench Business Committee. Overall, the work of the House is crucial in holding the Executive to account. That is why we support the report's recommendation that September sittings should be maintained. That will guarantee that the House is not in recess for too long, incapacitating its ability to fulfil its task in scrutinising Government and holding Ministers to account.

I come now to sitting hours on Monday to Thursday. Our response is based on two principles: first, that we need decisions on hours that minimise the harm to families as much as possible, and, secondly, that we will always favour sensible reform. In other words, we need reform that works in terms of how it fits in with the demands of the work load placed on the House and the role of individual Members in discharging their responsibilities here. That is why we favour the retention of the current sitting hours for Monday.

That is primarily because the current sitting hours allow a reasonable amount of time for Members who live in the constituencies that they represent to get to Westminster for the week's business. In addition, many London Members find Monday mornings useful for constituency business. I hope that a majority of Members in the House today will concur with our view and vote to retain the current sitting hours for Monday.

On Tuesdays, we understand the argument put by both sides of the debate. It is true that an earlier start and an earlier finish, as recommended in motion 4, will create more opportunities for Members to have people time and to spend valuable time with their families.

Sir Bob Russell: *rose—*

Angela Smith: I want to give others a chance to speak.

The latter is not the case for those of us who are separated from our families during the week by virtue of distance, but that should not blind us to the fact that we should, if it is practical and sensible to do so, create opportunities for those Members who do have family with them in London to enjoy more opportunities to spend time with them. That would be the equivalent of saying that because I cannot have something, others cannot have it either. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) said, there is a precedent for this new arrangement. However, it was not made permanent and it was defeated in a motion in

2005. I remember that occasion almost to the day, as my predecessor, Helen Jackson, resigned in the wake of that decision.

The main reason for the reversal was the perceived clash between the new hours and the work of Public Bill Committees and Select Committees, and access to the House for members of the public. There are genuine concerns about any change in hours and we should not underestimate the importance of allowing our constituents access to the House. The arguments in relation to Tuesday hours are finely balanced and Members will have to make up their own minds. But in doing so they should be careful to balance the needs of Members to discharge their responsibilities effectively with the importance of allowing Members reasonable access to decent quality time and time to spend with their families.

The same arguments apply to Wednesday and Thursday sittings in terms of balancing family life and the work of the House. However, the tensions here are even stronger than in relation to Tuesday sittings, because of the difficulties of Public Bill Committees, particularly on a Thursday morning, and the access to the House of members of the public on a Wednesday morning. Members should be careful in making their decision and should balance the need for quality time and their responsibilities in the House.

3.4 pm

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) persuaded me to vote for motion 4. However, having heard the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock), I have no hesitation in voting for motions 4, 6 and 7. She is absolutely right; we have to change the hours of the House. I speak with no self-interest. My daughters, at the ages of 20 and 22, are interested in seeing me only when I spend money on them. Equally, I am an absolute traditionalist. As a criminal barrister I was proud to wear my wig and gown because it served a function. I like tradition if it is functional, and that is the point of view that I come from when I say that unless we sort out this place we will have a crisis in our democracy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley) rightly identified, ordinary good, decent people will not come to this place unless we sort out our expenses system, so that it is more sensible, decent and proper, and we sort out our hours, the way in which we work, our procedures and our practices.

We must also be honest in this debate. With great respect, if the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) were representing a marginal seat now, he would not be able to have his family here in London. He would be bound to have his family in his constituency, because of what would be said by his opponents, be they Tory, Lib Dem or Labour—I speak with absolute authority because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, I have a very marginal seat. In this day and age, the stuff that is slung at Members in a marginal seat is such that one has to live in one's constituency. If we do not, we will be punished by our opponents. It is a fact that some Members of the House—in many ways it is heartbreaking for them—cannot have their very young children here. They must have their family home and their very young children in their constituencies or they will be criticised consistently.

I worked as a criminal barrister, a job I loved very much. We would sometimes work 60 or 70 hours, absolutely

mad hours, but as the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford absolutely identified, it was the certainty of the hours that allowed us to lead normal lives. Courts sat at 9.30 until 4.30, so we could organise our hard-working lives around those hours. That is why she is right and that is why I support motions 4, 6 and 7. If we do that, we can all get a life and that will make us better Members of Parliament.

3.7 pm

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): We all work long hours in this place, and however we jig them that will remain the position. However, we should hesitate a little before complaining about the hours that we work. They are long, and most of us have weekend duties and will continue to do so, but other people do as well. We are not going to get a great deal of public sympathy if we go round our constituency complaining that our hours are long and all the rest of it. The obvious reaction will be: “If it's so terrible, why do you stand for re-election?” We have to be a little careful about complaining. If there are lazy Members in the House, which I very much doubt—I do not know how they would get away with it—there must be very few indeed. All of us, wherever we sit in the Chamber, work long hours to carry out our duties here and in the constituency.

I am in favour of the present arrangements for Monday to Friday. As for Thursdays, I am not particularly concerned. I was and still am a member of the Home Affairs Committee, and when the House met at 11.30 on Tuesdays there was a clash. We had to decide where we should be. We had to decide whether to carry on in the Committee because we had further business, or come to the Chamber to participate in oral questions. There are bound to be strong feelings about the time we should finish, particularly on a Tuesday, but for the life of me I cannot see any advantage for the great majority of Members whose constituencies are hundreds of miles away in stopping at 7 o'clock.

The main reason I am on my feet is September sittings, which I am very pleased about. I do not often praise the Government, but I certainly praise them and my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) for supporting our sitting in September. I long campaigned for that in the 1980s and 1990s, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) may remember, because I simply could not understand why on earth we should break up for 10 weeks. As far as Governments are concerned, it is a tremendous advantage, because there are no oral questions, no statements and no points of order—it is almost a paradise for them.

Members talk about their constituency duties, such as visiting schools, holding surgeries and all the rest of it, and yes, they are very important, but we should bear it in mind that, apart from anything else, our job first and foremost is to be here holding the Executive to account. That is the first priority. If we break up for a continuous 10-week period, we are not doing our job. There might come a time when it is possible to rejig the conferences in such a way that we do not have to break up again after them, but in the mean time, as the Procedure Committee reported, there is apparently no opportunity for the parties to change the conference season. The September sittings are very important. I know that we are not conditioned by the media, but we

[Mr David Winnick]

can imagine what the press reaction would be: “MPs take 10-week holiday.” We call it a recess, but has anyone heard that word outside the Westminster village? The word that is bound to be used is “holiday”.

Mrs Grant: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman and know that he has a lot of experience in this place, but does he not accept that it is also very important for Members to have some semblance of a family life, and not just younger Members with child care responsibilities but older Members who now face caring for elderly parents?

Mr Winnick: Of course. We all have responsibilities in our political and private lives. We are all accountable to someone or other, and that is very important, but with the greatest respect, I do not think that the hon. Lady’s point has a great deal of relevance to September sittings. The last time there was a vote on September sittings we lost it. I hope that this time we will win it, and win it with a decisive majority.

3.12 pm

Mr Aidan Burley (Cannock Chase) (Con): I am delighted that we are having this debate, because it is the only opportunity any of us will have to change this Parliament, so how we vote today is important. I welcome the spirit of the debate, which was exemplified by the contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight), who said quite rightly that every MP has a different way of working. I am sure we could all come up with a slightly different arrangement, so there is no right answer.

I approach the debate with a simple perspective this afternoon: I am a new MP, I have been in this place for only two years, and I am 33 years old. I have not become institutionalised yet, although I fear that every day I become a little bit more so. I hear comments by older MPs about a gilded cage and so on. We sit until 10 o’clock at night wondering whether waiting for the 10 o’clock vote while eating or drinking is work or not, because it is not really work as our constituents would understand it. Equally, we cannot leave so it is not private time. We start to get into the idea that it is a lifestyle, and one that we have chosen. It is a bizarre way of working. As someone who still remembers working in the private sector, I want briefly to bring to the debate the perspective of what it is like back in the real world.

Mr Edward Timpson (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): Is the key point my hon. Friend is making not that our constituents want to know that the time we spend here is as productive as it could possibly be?

Mr Burley: I could not have put it better myself.

I want to give just one example from before I came to this place. One of the reasons that has been given for why we start so late on Mondays is that Members need to commute from their constituencies. I remember working on a project in Newcastle when I was living in London, and we were expected to be at our desks at 9 am. We got a 7 am flight from Heathrow, arrived in Newcastle at 8.10 am and were at our desks by 8.45 am, often before many of the local people. There is an article on the BBC

news website today entitled “MP with... the longest commute” As some Members may know, he is the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), who commutes 1,400 miles each week. His 713-mile trip each way is astonishing, including two flights, three trains and two tubes. He still gets here for 12.30 pm, so even he can arrive for that time. Even accounting for the longest commute of any MP, we do not need to start at 2.30 pm on Mondays.

It has been said that we need to allow for Select Committees and therefore need to start at 2.30 pm on Mondays and Tuesdays, but as has already been said, Select Committees also meet on Wednesdays when the House is sitting and Tuesday afternoons. It cannot be the case that we have to say that every single Member must be able to attend every single minute of every debate. Members choose to be on Select Committees, to do other things and to go on trips, and that is fine, but we have to accommodate that into normal, productive working hours that are at the beginning of the day at 9.30 am onwards and not until 10 pm.

Dan Byles (North Warwickshire) (Con): If we end up having Select Committee meetings on Tuesday or Wednesday afternoons, Members will have to choose between those duties and their core function, which is to be legislators.

Mr Burley: They are already doing that, and that is my point. They are already making that choice because Select Committee meetings already clash with the working hours of the Chamber.

I am conscious of the time and so will make only a couple more points. We have a problem, and one in which I know you, Mr Speaker, take a personal interest: the late-night, boozing, alcoholic culture of this place. That is something that is made worse by having to wait around until 10 o’clock to vote—[*Interruption.*] I cannot hear what they are saying—[*Interruption.*] It is also at lunchtimes, they say. It is anti-family. Even if a Member’s family is 150 miles away, they can still talk to them on the phone, Skype them or drive up to visit them, or the family could drive down to visit the Member. They can do other things in the evenings.

We see how few women MPs there are in this place. How many women, especially those with young children, must look at the working hours of this place and think, “Yes, that is something I aspire to. I want to work those hours and to work until 11 o’clock at night, away from my family”? Frankly, we can see that there is not a very good mix of society here. There are not very many normal people in this place. If we want more normal people who have lives—[*Interruption.*]

I have two final points. Members have talked about tours. This place is closed for 20 weeks of the year; surely our constituents can go on tours in 20 weeks. The hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) has an understandably traditional view of this job and believes that we are here to be legislators and that we represent our constituents in Westminster, not Westminster in our constituencies. As a new MP who represents a constituency next to his patch, and a very marginal one, I have to say to him that that is not the reality today. As a new MP who represents a marginal seat, I am expected to run jobs fairs and business awards evenings, to hold many surgeries, to go to every fete opening and to visit schools—

I am expected to do the lot. The job has changed, and it is old-fashioned to say that our job is to be down here legislating; our job is also to be in our constituencies.

I conclude with a comment on September sittings. I ask the Government whether they have considered the cost of September sittings. As we heard from the Procedure Committee, the cost of sending just the builders on the estate home for two weeks is £1.5 million because they cannot carry on their work. Then there is the cost of MPs commuting down here, the cost of all the staff and so on. Is spending up to £10 million keeping this place open for two weeks really the best use of taxpayers' money? Many of our constituents would question that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. We have only 30 minutes left and several Members are still seeking to catch my eye. I appeal to colleagues to make very short speeches to allow others to contribute.

3.18 pm

Natascha Engel (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): I welcome the Procedure Committee's report and thank the Committee for allowing me to give evidence. I have only one point to make. My right hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock) said that I teased her when I tried to draw a distinction between our sittings hours and what we do, but I was not teasing her. It is very important. The difference between what MPs do today and what they used to do in the past is dramatic. What we do in our constituencies has become much more important. Case work, campaigning, visiting schools and all the things the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Mr Burley) mentioned have become much more important than they used to be, but that is something that we as individual MPs have to decide how to deal with. It has nothing to do with sitting hours. The sitting hours are supposed to be arranged around what we do in Westminster, where we have Committees, all-party groups, meetings and any number of different things.

A variety of Members have spoken about the different kinds of constituency and the distances that they have to travel. There are inner-city and rural constituencies and constituencies far away and close by. We have also heard details from any number of Members about their domestic arrangements. The issue is that every single MP has different domestic arrangements. Some people have families and some have social lives—*[Interruption.]* Very lucky people have both.

The point is that we are not here to fit our hours around those families and social lives, but to make and change laws. We are supposed to be running the country; we are not here to look at sitting hours and fit them around my children's bed times. In looking at the sitting hours, what we are doing today is wrong. We should be considering the changing role of MPs, because that is the issue. As individual MPs, we have to sort that out between ourselves and our constituents rather than looking at changing the sitting hours.

Jo Swinson *rose*—

Natascha Engel: I will take a very brief intervention.

Jo Swinson: Does the hon. Lady not accept that in our roles as legislators, it is incredibly important that we should be able to work efficiently and make good decisions? Important decisions are made here. Sitting late into the night does not always guarantee that good decisions. Having a bit more control over how we can arrange our working lives would make for more efficient and effective working.

Natascha Engel: I do not really take that point. If the problem is late-night sitting, people should get up later. The sitting hours are not the problem. The hon. Lady mentioned the efficiency and effectiveness of an MP's work. The sitting hours are not the issue. The issue is what we do when we are here and what we do in our constituencies.

Mrs Grant *rose*—

Natascha Engel: I will give way very briefly and then stop.

Mrs Grant: Does the hon. Lady not accept that the role of an MP and the hours we spend here are inextricably linked?

Natascha Engel: I do not. What I do accept is that there is a job of work that MPs do in Parliament and a different job of work that we do in our constituencies. How we manage that is down to us. We have to make sure that everybody can manage to work around our sitting hours. Although what we have at the moment may not work perfectly for everyone, I think it works for everyone. I will leave it at that.

3.22 pm

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): I will be very brief, because I am a member of the Procedure Committee; my voting record on the Committee will show my views on these matters.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for providing this debate, as we all know about the enormous pressure on its time. I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight) for opening the debate and setting out the issues so clearly.

Whatever the House decides today, there will never be enough time for any of us to meet all the demands on our time, both as individual MPs and in respect of debating the wide variety of subjects of concern and interest to us and those we represent. I ask Members, as they reach decisions today, to consider the effect of the different options on the staff of the House and their families. The issue is about not just what suits us, but the effect it will have on the staff of the House.

As a member of the Procedure Committee and having considered these matters at great length, I have come to a conclusion. If half a dozen MPs are sat around a table, they will finish up with at least six different ideas about the days and times when the House should sit. I caution hon. Members that, whatever change we decide to make to the current sitting hours, there will inevitably be knock-on effects elsewhere, which may well produce unintended and possibly unwelcome consequences.

[Mr David Nuttall]

I hope that hon. Members on both sides have found the report and the debate useful in trying to reach a conclusion and decision about this most knotty of matters.

3.24 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I thank the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight) for all his Committee's work and the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Dame Joan Ruddock) for her eloquent speech. Notwithstanding the considerable progress made since the right hon. Lady first came into Parliament, we still have a long way to go before this institution is fit for the 21st century.

As I walked into the Chamber today, I noticed the snuff box still provided for MPs by the entrance. That is perhaps just a faintly amusing anachronism, which falls into the category, mentioned by the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), of traditional things that are not harmful. I would say that our late sittings fall into the category of things that are anachronistic and harmful. They are harmful to the health of Members—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I appeal to Members to show courtesy to those who are speaking, rather than wittering away as though their own conversations were somehow more important. Sit quietly—and if you are not interested in doing so, get out. We can manage without you.

Caroline Lucas: I was saying why I thought late hours were harmful. They also give out the impression that things here are suited to the workings of a gentlemen's club, and that gets in the way of efficient working.

I hope that Members will take this opportunity to bring the Commons out of the snuff age and into the 21st century. We should not be afraid of change because we will all benefit from a more modern House of Commons. When I say "modern", I fully appreciate that on some days the hours that help some families closer to Westminster will be different from the hours that help families in constituencies further afield.

We have to take on a system that takes the mix of constituency distance from Westminster on board, and there is a solution for Tuesday and Friday that could be an improvement for all Members. I shall come to that after commenting briefly on the other days. I share the commonly held view that the distances that many Members need to travel are a sound reason for leaving Monday's hours as they are. Ideally, I would like a slightly earlier start time on Wednesday, but I could certainly live with an 11.30 start if Members felt strongly about it. As for Thursday, many Members share the view that the earlier we start and finish the better, so that those whose constituencies are far away at least have a chance of staying for important debates and getting home at a reasonable hour. I hope that the 9.30 to 5 o'clock Thursday will be adopted.

I turn to the case for the earlier start time of 11.30 on Tuesday, which I support. I want to address concerns that that is, apparently, just a measure designed for the benefit of MPs with constituencies near Westminster. To many who are promoting the change, it is about

being people-friendly, allowing people control over how they organise their lives and work, and having greater certainty over how we arrange our working lives. Yes, it will directly help family access for some; as long as that does not make it worse for others, we should not be saying, "If it doesn't help me, why should I help you?"

We should be mindful that, whenever possible, we also have a duty to lead by example with good working practices. Late hours are not good for House of Commons staff who have to clear up afterwards and keep the place running. We are also allowing an unhealthy working culture to prevail. If we do not reform where we can—and Tuesday is the obvious candidate for reform—we send the message that hard-working people are not entitled to a healthy work-life balance. People, and even MPs, are entitled to that. We are often characterised as taking long holidays when in fact most of us are working hard in our constituencies.

The issue is about creating a House of Commons that is both effective and people-friendly. Of course, family arrangements often differ depending on how far away from our constituencies we are here in Westminster, but that can be addressed if we combine an earlier start on Tuesdays with moving private Members' Bills to Tuesday evenings. Starting Tuesday's business at 11.30 am and giving PMBs the Tuesday evening slot would have three benefits. It would give PMBs the prominent midweek slot they deserve, it would deal with the problem of filibustering, and it would allow Fridays to become an official constituency day.

We need to send out a very clear message that the House of Commons is a reasonable place in which to work—a place where people can work even when they have family commitments both far and near. That is why we have to make this place a more friendly place for women. The House of Commons is 81% male, and that is a shocking figure. If we frame our sitting hours around modern life instead of allowing the continuation of a system based on hangovers from the snuff-snorting era, we can send out the important message that we are not happy with the status quo of 81% men and want to be a place where the population is properly represented. Changing sitting hours will not solve everything, but it will make things better. I very much hope that by supporting motions 4 and 9 we will take the opportunity to make this place more contemporary and even just slightly more appealing to those who are staggeringly under-represented.

3.29 pm

Sir Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): I would like to put in a request for friendly working hours for grandfathers, who seem to have been omitted, and for grandmothers where appropriate.

The real losers in this proposal will be the 20,000 visitors, predominantly schoolchildren, who come here on Tuesday mornings. In supporting retention of the current hours, I bring to Members' attention the views of the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Sir Alan Beith), the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), and the Deputy Leader of the House, who spoke with their experience of the time when we had earlier starts on a Tuesday. This will not only rob 20,000 children of visits on a Tuesday morning but

impact on the 15 Select Committees involving 180 right hon. and hon. Members. We have two late-night sittings on a Monday and a Tuesday and two earlier finishes on a Wednesday and a Thursday. That is a fair compromise that keeps most people content, and I suggest that we stick with the status quo.

3.31 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I recognise that for people watching from the Public Gallery and outside, this is clearly not the most important issue facing Parliament, but it is useful that we have found a short period to debate it. For those of us who can no longer describe ourselves as new MPs but are of the 2010 intake, it is the first opportunity to comment on our sitting hours.

I acknowledge, as have many Members, the thoughtful and helpful report presented by the Procedure Committee to provide a framework for this debate. I am surprised that the Chair of the Committee was surprised by the reaction of the press. We must recognise, sadly, that we have a press that all too often is willing to take every opportunity to undermine confidence in democratic politics.

The Chair of the Committee usefully made it clear in his opening remarks that this is not about the extent of the hours that we work but how we manage them to maximum effect. In that context, as a northern MP, I acknowledge the points that have been made by many Members. This is not, for me, about family-friendly hours—being away from home for four days a week is not an issue—but about how we can operate more effectively. An earlier start and end to Tuesdays would provide greater flexibility. It would not mean that we would not work late on a Tuesday but, as the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) said, it would give us more control over how we plan our work. It would mean that we could organise meetings inside and outside Westminster, at times when other people could attend, with greater confidence and without always having to pull out of them at the last minute. It would give us the opportunity, just sometimes, to have a night off. I must say that it would occasionally be good to be able to get away on a Monday or Tuesday in time to stock up the larder before the supermarket shuts.

As the Procedure Committee acknowledged, the main argument in favour of the current Tuesday hours was made by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Sir Alan Beith), in his role as Chair of the Liaison Committee, in relation to Select Committees. As a member of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, I place great importance on my participation in it and find it enormously rewarding, but it is not beyond the imagination to bring our sittings forward for a 9 am private start and a 9.30 am public start. The same applies to Public Bill Committees, where I understand that that already happens.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): The last time we did this, it created absolute chaos for Select Committees, not only as regards Members having to start at 9 o'clock but in trying to get witnesses here for that time. It did not work, and we will threaten our Select Committee procedures if we go back to that nonsense.

Paul Blomfield: I acknowledge the point that has been made, but contrary opinions have been expressed by others who were around in that period. Indeed, some Select Committees appear now to be—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Again, a large number of rather excitable private conversations are taking place. We owe Members the courtesy of a fair hearing.

Paul Blomfield: As has been pointed out, there are Select Committees that meet earlier and that seem to manage to arrange for witnesses to attend.

The argument for earlier Tuesday sittings, as well as standing on its own merits, provides the opportunity to move the debates on private Members' Bills to Tuesday evenings. As a Back Bencher, I believe in the importance of our having the opportunity to drive change through the House. Although I acknowledge the other options that the Chair of the Procedure Committee shared with us, moving those debates to a Tuesday evening would give many of us a greater opportunity to attend.

Jim Dowd (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): When we first had sittings on Wednesday mornings, I was the Government Whip responsible for private Members' Bills. I suggested then—this was before we had sittings in Westminster Hall—that we could move private Members' Bills to Wednesday mornings. We opened up Westminster Hall to make that easier. The reason I made that suggestion was that if we debated private Members' Bills during the normal sitting week, it would make it easier for the Government. Is that what my hon. Friend is proposing?

Paul Blomfield: Not for one moment.

As has been pointed out, there are options on how we deal with private Members' Bills. It is unreasonable that at the moment, those of us who plan our diaries so that we have constituency time on Fridays have to choose between going to our constituencies and attending the House to support private Members' Bills, whether of our own volition or because we have had representations from our constituents to be there. Over the past two years, I have done that on three occasions. Frustratingly, on each occasion the Bill was talked out. I fear that if we do not agree to change our Tuesday sittings, we will exclude one important way in which the Procedure Committee might address the issue, because the slot will not be available for private Members' Bills. There are stronger arguments than that, but it is one dimension of the argument.

3.37 pm

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I rise briefly to support the options not to change our arrangements. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Sir Bob Russell) said, there is a good balance at the moment.

I will make two points. The first, and most important, is that nothing that we are debating today would change our work load. We can debate the order in which we deal with it, but our work load would not be diminished one iota by these proposals.

I have listened carefully to the argument that some hon. Members have made that an earlier point of interruption on Tuesday would give us greater flexibility

[Iain Stewart]

in organising our business. I do not accept that. Tuesdays for me, and I suspect for many other Members, are the critical day in the week, when I have to cram in many competing requirements. My Select Committee sits on Tuesdays. This Tuesday, there was also a Westminster Hall debate that I wanted to fit in and there were various other meetings. Those bits and pieces could not be moved to the end of the day. If the main business in this Chamber was brought forward, the amount of time available for those other important matters would be restricted, to the detriment of our ability to do our jobs.

Mr Graham Stuart: I am torn on the proposals for Tuesdays, but I am quite clear that moving the sitting time forward an hour on Wednesdays would disrupt the work of Select Committees, such as the Education Committee, with very little benefit. Wednesdays work. Whatever else the House votes for, I urge it not to vote to change Wednesdays.

Iain Stewart: I concur with my hon. Friend.

My second point has not been made in the debate thus far. It concerns our friends at the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. I fear that if the point of interruption gets earlier, IPSA will deem that it is not appropriate for many Members to stay in Westminster overnight and will require them to return to their constituencies. I faced that problem in my first few months in the House, and three to four hours a day were added on to my work load. I ended up having four and a half hours' sleep a night, which is not sustainable. I fear that if we moved the moment of interruption forward, IPSA would conclude that more and more Members should be forced to commute. That would not be helpful to Members' health or their ability to conduct their business.

3.40 pm

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I have been in this House for a long time—some people may think too long—and over the years I have found little more degrading than the aspect of the House staring into its own navel and discussing how this place should operate, which hours would be most family-friendly and convenient and which hours would allow Members to get home early.

My father worked in a factory, and he got up in the morning to get to there for 7 am. He worked the hours he was told by his bosses to work, with the trade unions doing what they could to help him. Then he came home in the evening and spent the rest of his time with his family—unless he went out playing cards, whose winnings he would give to me.

I find it incomprehensible that the House should look in on itself in this way at a time of mass unemployment, when our constituents thank God if they have a job at all, regardless of the hours that they have to work. They thank God that they have somewhere to go and collect money to keep their families.

Barbara Keeley: One important consideration for me and my constituents over the next few months is that I have a private Member's Bill on social care and carers that is important to them and many other people. I believe it would be much better if I could have that Bill

considered on a Tuesday evening and spend my Fridays where I should be, in my constituency.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: I do not understand my hon. Friend's approach to this. When I first came here we had a five-day week, and Government business alternated with private Members' Bills on Fridays. I do not want to be arrogant or patronising, but I think I look after my constituency as well as any Member, and I can do it in the hours that we used to have, let alone the current ones. I can get to my constituency and do my jobs. I had eight engagements last weekend, and I managed to fulfil them without having family-friendly hours at the House of Commons.

I have a duty to be in my constituency, but I was elected to come here and represent my constituents. I am a Member of Parliament, not partly a Member of Parliament and partly for hanging around.

Jim Dowd: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the House has spent the whole of this week discussing things that do not matter to our constituents at all?

Sir Gerald Kaufman: I agree totally. I have surgeries every weekend, and I have people coming to see me who have hardly any money to live on. I have just had letters from constituents in the same situation. It is my job to try to help them against a Government who do not care about them. The very idea that we should spend two days in this House of Commons talking utter and total rubbish about reforming the House of Lords, when people are anxious about their jobs, their NHS and their pensions is absolutely sickening. Now we are spending a whole day debating the House and hon. Members are absorbed by it, offering all kinds of different useful formulae to make this place more attractive to Members. When my father worked at Montague Burton's tailoring factory in Leeds making suits and clothes, he was not given a chance to make his work more attractive for him. He was bloody lucky to have a job at all.

We are lucky to be here and to have this marvellous opportunity to speak for our constituents, and we are paid very well indeed. Millions of people cannot believe how much hon. Members are paid when they are paid so little—assuming they are not on benefits. It is therefore about time the House stopped this navel gazing. Our job is to hold the Government to account; it is not to say, "I want a tidier and more useful day. I want to be able to get home on a Thursday afternoon." If hon. Members want that, I suggest they find another career.

3.45 pm

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): I shall be very brief given that I have only about two minutes to speak.

I am astonished that the House is considering changing the moment of interruption on Tuesday and putting private Members' Bills on the same evening for two simple reasons. First, the payrolls—the Front Benchers and Parliamentary Private Secretaries—will go in and tell loyal Back Benchers that they must stay here until 10 o'clock in the evening.

Secondly, the other group of people of whom there has been absolutely no mention at all are the staff of the House, who would have to stay here until 10.30 pm,

11 pm or later—I am talking about the workers of *Hansard*, the security staff and the Doorkeepers. They would then have to come back first thing in the morning for the earlier starts on Wednesday for Select Committees and Public Bill Committees. Not a single Member, when they have spoken of family hours and of supporting people, has recognised the fantastic work done by the staff of the House and the impact on their lives of such a change. For that reason and that reason alone, we must reject the proposition to change the Tuesday evening.

3.47 pm

Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): We have heard a number of insightful contributions and a number of anecdotes. I do not mean to add to the latter and want to add only to the former.

I make one, simple case: it is perfectly appropriate for this Parliament to express an opinion once about its sitting hours. That is not disproportionate. If all hon. Members would choose a different way to serve their constituents, surely the maximum flexibility is the best route to go down. Changing the moment of interruption on a Tuesday night would make a small difference, but it would be significant if we are to serve our constituents in the way they expect.

Mr Speaker: Order. Under the order of the House of Monday, I am now required to put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motions relating to sittings of the House. I will put them in sequence. If any of the motions to maintain the status quo for Mondays to Wednesdays is agreed to, the alternative motion relating to that day will fall and will not be called. Before I put the Question on motion 1—Sittings of the House (Mondays) (No Change)—I remind the House that if the question is agreed to, motion 2 will fall.

3.48 pm

Two hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the first motion, the Speaker put the Question (Order, 9 July).

Question agreed to.

Ordered,

That no change be made to the time at which the House sits on a Monday.

The Speaker then put the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Order, 9 July).

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE (TUESDAYS) (NO CHANGE)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That no change be made to the time at which the House sits on a Tuesday.—(*Mr Knight.*)

The House divided: Ayes 241, Noes 256.

Division No. 48]

[3.49 pm

AYES

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| Afriyie, Adam | Bacon, Mr Richard |
| Aldous, Peter | Bailey, Mr Adrian |
| Amess, Mr David | Baldry, Sir Tony |
| Andrew, Stuart | Barclay, Stephen |
| Austin, Ian | Bebb, Guto |

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Beith, rh Sir Alan | George, Andrew |
| Berry, Jake | Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl |
| Bingham, Andrew | Goodman, Helen |
| Birtwistle, Gordon | Gray, Mr James |
| Blackman, Bob | Greatrex, Tom |
| Blenkinsop, Tom | Green, Damian |
| Bone, Mr Peter | Grieve, rh Mr Dominic |
| Bottomley, Sir Peter | Griffiths, Andrew |
| Brady, Mr Graham | Gwynne, Andrew |
| Brazier, Mr Julian | Halfon, Robert |
| Brennan, Kevin | Hamilton, Mr David |
| Brokenshire, James | Hammond, rh Mr Phillip |
| Brown, rh Mr Nicholas | Hands, Greg |
| Browne, Mr Jeremy | Hart, Simon |
| Bruce, Fiona | Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan |
| Buckland, Mr Robert | Hayes, Mr John |
| Burden, Richard | Heald, Oliver |
| Burns, Conor | Healey, rh John |
| Byles, Dan | Heath, Mr David |
| Cairns, Alun | Heaton-Harris, Chris |
| Campbell, Mr Alan | Hemming, John |
| Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair | Hendry, Charles |
| Carmichael, Neil | Hermon, Lady |
| Cash, Mr William | Hilling, Julie |
| Chope, Mr Christopher | Hinds, Damian |
| Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth | Hoey, Kate |
| Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey | Hollingbery, George |
| Clwyd, rh Ann | Hollobone, Mr Philip |
| Coffey, Dr Thérèse | Hopkins, Kelvin |
| Collins, Damian | Hopkins, Kris |
| Connarty, Michael | Horwood, Martin |
| Cooper, Rosie | Howarth, rh Mr George |
| Corbyn, Jeremy | Howell, John |
| Cox, Mr Geoffrey | Hunter, Mark |
| Crouch, Tracey | Jackson, Mr Stewart |
| Cryer, John | Jenkin, Mr Bernard |
| Cunningham, Mr Jim | Johnson, Gareth |
| Cunningham, Sir Tony | Jones, Andrew |
| Dakin, Nic | Jones, Mr David |
| Danczuk, Simon | Jones, Graham |
| Davies, David T. C. | Jones, Helen |
| (<i>Monmouth</i>) | Jones, Mr Kevan |
| Davies, Geraint | Jones, Mr Marcus |
| Davies, Glyn | Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald |
| Davies, Philip | Kelly, Chris |
| Davis, rh Mr David | Knight, rh Mr Greg |
| de Bois, Nick | Kwarteng, Kwasi |
| Denham, rh Mr John | Laing, Mrs Eleanor |
| Djanogly, Mr Jonathan | Lancaster, Mark |
| Dobbin, Jim | Lee, Dr Phillip |
| Docherty, Thomas | Leech, Mr John |
| Donohoe, Mr Brian H. | Leslie, Charlotte |
| Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen | Lewis, Dr Julian |
| Drax, Richard | Lidington, rh Mr David |
| Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain | Lilley, rh Mr Peter |
| Dunne, Mr Philip | Lloyd, Tony |
| Efford, Clive | Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn |
| Ellis, Michael | Lopresti, Jack |
| Engel, Natascha | Lucas, Ian |
| Evans, Jonathan | MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan |
| Fallon, Michael | Main, Mrs Anne |
| Farron, Tim | Marsden, Mr Gordon |
| Fleelo, Robert | McCann, Mr Michael |
| Foster, rh Mr Don | McCartney, Karl |
| Fox, rh Dr Liam | McDonnell, Dr Alasdair |
| Francois, rh Mr Mark | McGovern, Jim |
| Fuller, Richard | McGuire, rh Mrs Anne |
| Gale, Sir Roger | McIntosh, Miss Anne |
| Gardiner, Barry | McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick |
| Garnier, Mr Edward | McVey, Esther |
| Garnier, Mark | Meale, Sir Alan |
| Gauke, Mr David | Mearns, Ian |

Menzies, Mark
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, Andrew
 Mitchell, Austin
 Moore, rh Michael
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, James
 Mosley, Stephen
 Mudie, Mr George
 Mulholland, Greg
 Murray, Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Nash, Pamela
 Neill, Robert
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Ollershaw, Eric
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, Mike
 Percy, Andrew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Pound, Stephen
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Randall, rh Mr John
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
 Reckless, Mark
 Redwood, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Reeve, Simon
 Reid, Mr Alan
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
 Rogerson, Dan
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rotheram, Steve
 Roy, Mr Frank
 Ruffley, Mr David
 Russell, Sir Bob
 Rutley, David
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Scott, Mr Lee

Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Sheridan, Jim
 Simmonds, Mark
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Smith, Sir Robert
 Soames, rh Nicholas
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mr Mark
 Stanley, rh Sir John
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Straw, rh Mr Jack
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Mr Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Tami, Mark
 Tapsell, rh Sir Peter
 Thurso, John
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Twigg, Derek
 Tyrrie, Mr Andrew
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Walter, Mr Robert
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Weir, Mr Mike
 White, Chris
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Roger
 Williamson, Gavin
 Wilson, Sammy
 Winnick, Mr David
 Wishart, Pete
 Wright, David

Tellers for the Ayes:

Mr Brooks Newmark and
 Mr Robert Goodwill

NOES

Abrahams, Debbie
 Adams, Nigel
 Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bain, Mr William
 Baker, Steve
 Balls, rh Ed
 Banks, Gordon
 Barker, Gregory
 Baron, Mr John
 Barron, rh Mr Kevin
 Bayley, Hugh
 Begg, Dame Anne
 Bell, Sir Stuart
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman-Woods, Roberta
 Blears, rh Hazel

Blomfield, Paul
 Blunkett, rh Mr David
 Blunt, Mr Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bradley, Karen
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brooke, Annette
 Brown, Mr Russell
 Bruce, rh Sir Malcolm
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burley, Mr Aidan
 Burnham, rh Andy
 Burns, rh Mr Simon
 Burrows, Mr David
 Burt, Lorely
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Caton, Martin
 Chapman, Jenny
 Clappison, Mr James

Clark, Katy
 Clarke, rh Mr Tom
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Crockett, Mike
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cunningham, Alex
 Curran, Margaret
 Darling, rh Mr Alistair
 David, Wayne
 Davidson, Mr Ian
 De Piero, Gloria
 Dinenege, Caroline
 Doran, Mr Frank
 Dorries, Nadine
 Dowd, Jim
 Doyle, Gemma
 Duddridge, James
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellison, Jane
 Esterson, Bill
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Chris
 Evans, Graham
 Evennett, Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Featherstone, Lynne
 Field, rh Mr Frank
 Field, Mark
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fullbrook, Lorraine
 Gapes, Mike
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gilmore, Sheila
 Glass, Pat
 Glendon, Mrs Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goggins, rh Paul
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Gove, rh Michael
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Nia
 Gummer, Ben
 Hague, rh Mr William
 Hain, rh Mr Peter
 Hames, Duncan
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, Matthew
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harvey, Nick
 Hendrick, Mark
 Hillier, Meg
 Hoban, Mr Mark
 Hodge, rh Margaret

Hosie, Stewart
 Hughes, rh Simon
 Huhne, rh Chris
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huppert, Dr Julian
 Jackson, Glenda
 James, Margot
 Jamieson, Cathy
 Jarvis, Dan
 Javid, Sajid
 Curran, Margaret
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Joyce, Eric
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Kirby, Simon
 Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
 Laws, rh Mr David
 Lazarowicz, Mark
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Jessica
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Long, Naomi
 Love, Mr Andrew
 Lucas, Caroline
 Macleod, Mary
 MacShane, rh Mr Denis
 Mactaggart, Fiona
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Maynard, Paul
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McClymont, Gregg
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKechnie, Ann
 McKenzie, Mr Iain
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McPartland, Stephen
 Mercer, Patrick
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Miller, Maria
 Morgan, Nicky
 Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, Graham M.
 (*Easington*)
 Mowat, David
 Munn, Meg
 Munt, Tessa
 Murphy, rh Mr Jim
 Murphy, rh Paul
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Nokes, Caroline
 O'Donnell, Fiona
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, Sandra
 Ottaway, Richard

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Pearce, Teresa | Thomas, Mr Gareth |
| Phillipson, Bridget | Thornberry, Emily |
| Poulter, Dr Daniel | Timms, rh Stephen |
| Qureshi, Yasmin | Timpson, Mr Edward |
| Raab, Mr Dominic | Tomlinson, Justin |
| Reed, Mr Jamie | Tredinnick, David |
| Reeves, Rachel | Trickett, Jon |
| Reynolds, Emma | Truss, Elizabeth |
| Riordan, Mrs Linda | Twigg, Stephen |
| Ritchie, Ms Margaret | Umunna, Mr Chuka |
| Robertson, John | Uppal, Paul |
| Roy, Lindsay | Vara, Mr Shailesh |
| Ruane, Chris | Vaz, Valerie |
| Rudd, Amber | Walley, Joan |
| Ruddock, rh Dame Joan | Ward, Mr David |
| Sandys, Laura | Watkinson, Angela |
| Sarwar, Anas | Watson, Mr Tom |
| Seabeck, Alison | Webb, Steve |
| Sharma, Alok | Wharton, James |
| Sheerman, Mr Barry | Wheeler, Heather |
| Shuker, Gavin | Whiteford, Dr Eilidh |
| Slaughter, Mr Andy | Whitehead, Dr Alan |
| Smith, Angela | Whittaker, Craig |
| Smith, Miss Chloe | Whittingdale, Mr John |
| Smith, Julian | Williams, Stephen |
| Smith, Nick | Wilson, Mr Rob |
| Smith, Owen | Wollaston, Dr Sarah |
| Soubry, Anna | Wood, Mike |
| Stephenson, Andrew | Woodcock, John |
| Stewart, Rory | Wright, Simon |
| Stride, Mel | Yeo, Mr Tim |
| Stunell, Andrew | Zahawi, Nadhim |
| Swales, Ian | Tellers for the Noes: |
| Swinson, Jo | Jenny Willott and |
| Teather, Sarah | Jeremy Wright |

Question accordingly negated.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE (TUESDAYS) (11.30 AM TO 7.00 PM)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House should meet at 11.30 am on Tuesdays, with a moment of interruption at 7.00 pm, and accordingly the changes to Standing Orders set out in the table be made, with effect from Monday 15 October 2012.

| <i>Standing Order no.</i> | <i>Line no.</i> | <i>Change</i> |
|---|-----------------|--|
| 9 (Sittings of the House) | 3 | Leave out 'and Tuesdays at half past two o'clock, on' and insert 'at half past two o'clock, on Tuesdays and'. |
| | 7 | After 'a' insert 'Tuesday or'. |
| | 20 | Leave out 'and Tuesdays, at seven o'clock on' and insert ', at seven o'clock on Tuesdays and'. |
| 10 (Sittings in Westminster Hall) | 4 | Leave out lines 4 and 5 |
| | 6 | After 'on' insert 'Tuesday or'. |
| | 10 | At start, insert 'Tuesday or'. |
| 15 (Exempted business) | 21 | Leave out 'or Tuesday, eight o'clock on' and insert ', eight o'clock on Tuesday or'. |
| 17 (Delegated legislation (negative procedure)) | 2 | Leave out 'or Tuesday, half past eight o'clock on' and insert ', half past eight o'clock on Tuesday or'. |
| 20 (Time for taking private business) | 26 | Leave out 'or Tuesday, four o'clock on any specified' and insert ', four o'clock on any specified Tuesday or'. |

| <i>Standing Order no.</i> | <i>Line no.</i> | <i>Change</i> |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| 24 (Emergency debates) | 28 | Leave out 'or Tuesday, half past ten o'clock on a' and insert ', half past ten o'clock on a Tuesday or'. |
| 54 (Consideration of estimates) | 20 | Leave out 'or Tuesday, four o'clock on' and insert ', four o'clock on Tuesday or'. |
| 88 (Meetings of general committees) | 11 | Leave out 'or Tuesdays, between the hours of twenty-five minutes past eleven o'clock in the morning and half past one o'clock in the afternoon on' and insert ', between the hours of twenty-five minutes past eleven o'clock in the morning and half past one o'clock in the afternoon on Tuesdays or'. |

—(Dame Joan Ruddock.)

The House divided: Ayes 267, Noes 233.

Division No. 49]

[4.03 pm

AYES

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Abrahams, Debbie | Clarke, rh Mr Tom |
| Adams, Nigel | Clegg, rh Mr Nick |
| Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob | Coaker, Vernon |
| Aldous, Peter | Coffey, Ann |
| Alexander, rh Danny | Cooper, rh Yvette |
| Alexander, rh Mr Douglas | Creagh, Mary |
| Alexander, Heidi | Creasy, Stella |
| Ali, Rushanara | Crockart, Mike |
| Allen, Mr Graham | Cruddas, Jon |
| Ashworth, Jonathan | Cunningham, Alex |
| Bacon, Mr Richard | Curran, Margaret |
| Bain, Mr William | Dakin, Nic |
| Baker, Steve | Darling, rh Mr Alistair |
| Balls, rh Ed | David, Wayne |
| Banks, Gordon | Davidson, Mr Ian |
| Barker, Gregory | De Piero, Gloria |
| Baron, Mr John | Dinenage, Caroline |
| Barron, rh Mr Kevin | Doran, Mr Frank |
| Bayley, Hugh | Dorries, Nadine |
| Begg, Dame Anne | Dowd, Jim |
| Bell, Sir Stuart | Doyle, Gemma |
| Benn, rh Hilary | Duddridge, James |
| Berger, Luciana | Durkan, Mark |
| Betts, Mr Clive | Eagle, Ms Angela |
| Blackman-Woods, Roberta | Edwards, Jonathan |
| Blears, rh Hazel | Elliott, Julie |
| Blomfield, Paul | Ellison, Jane |
| Blunkett, rh Mr David | Esterson, Bill |
| Blunt, Mr Crispin | Eustice, George |
| Boles, Nick | Evans, Chris |
| Bradley, Karen | Evans, Graham |
| Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben | Evennett, Mr David |
| Brake, rh Tom | Fabricant, Michael |
| Bridgen, Andrew | Featherstone, Lynne |
| Brooke, Annette | Field, rh Mr Frank |
| Bruce, rh Sir Malcolm | Field, Mark |
| Bryant, Chris | Fitzpatrick, Jim |
| Buck, Ms Karen | Flint, rh Caroline |
| Burley, Mr Aidan | Flynn, Paul |
| Burnham, rh Andy | Fovargue, Yvonne |
| Burns, rh Mr Simon | Freeman, George |
| Burrowes, Mr David | Freer, Mike |
| Burt, Lorely | Fullbrook, Lorraine |
| Byrne, rh Mr Liam | Gapes, Mike |
| Campbell, Mr Ronnie | Garnier, Mark |
| Carswell, Mr Douglas | Gibb, Mr Nick |
| Caton, Martin | Gilmore, Sheila |
| Chapman, Jenny | Glass, Pat |
| Clappison, Mr James | Glendon, Mrs Mary |
| Clark, Katy | Godsiff, Mr Roger |
| | Goggins, rh Paul |

Goldsmith, Zac
 Gove, rh Michael
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Nia
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hague, rh Mr William
 Hain, rh Mr Peter
 Hames, Duncan
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, Matthew
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harvey, Nick
 Heath, Mr David
 Hendrick, Mark
 Hermon, Lady
 Hillier, Meg
 Hoban, Mr Mark
 Hodge, rh Margaret
 Hosie, Stewart
 Hughes, rh Simon
 Huhne, rh Chris
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huppert, Dr Julian
 Jackson, Glenda
 Jamieson, Cathy
 Jarvis, Dan
 Javid, Sajid
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Joyce, Eric
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
 Khan, rh Sadiq
 Kirby, Simon
 Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
 Laws, rh Mr David
 Lazarowicz, Mark
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Jessica
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Mr Edward
 Leslie, Chris
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr
 Ian
 Long, Naomi
 Love, Mr Andrew
 Lucas, Caroline
 Macleod, Mary
 MacShane, rh Mr Denis
 Mactaggart, Fiona
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Maynard, Paul
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McClymont, Gregg
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat

McGovern, Alison
 McKeichin, Ann
 McKenzie, Mr Iain
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McPartland, Stephen
 Mercer, Patrick
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Miller, Maria
 Morgan, Nicky
 Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, Grahame M.
 (*Easington*)
 Mowat, David
 Munn, Meg
 Munt, Tessa
 Murphy, rh Mr Jim
 Murphy, rh Paul
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Nokes, Caroline
 O'Donnell, Fiona
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Osborne, Sandra
 Ottaway, Richard
 Pearce, Teresa
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Riordan, Mrs Linda
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, John
 Roy, Lindsay
 Ruane, Chris
 Rudd, Amber
 Ruddock, rh Dame
 Joan
 Sandys, Laura
 Sarwar, Anas
 Seabeck, Alison
 Sharma, Alok
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Shuker, Gavin
 Slaughter, Mr Andy
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Miss Chloe
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Soubry, Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs
 Caroline
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Rory
 Stride, Mel
 Stunell, Andrew
 Swales, Ian
 Swinson, Jo
 Teather, Sarah
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Timpson, Mr Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tredinnick, David

Trickett, Jon
 Truss, Elizabeth
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vaz, Valerie
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walley, Joan
 Ward, Mr David
 Watkinson, Angela
 Webb, Steve
 Wharton, James
 Wheeler, Heather
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan

Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, Mr John
 Williams, Stephen
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Simon
 Yeo, Mr Tim
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jeremy Wright and
Jenny Willott

NOES

Afriyie, Adam
 Amess, Mr David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Baldry, Sir Tony
 Barclay, Stephen
 Bebb, Guto
 Beith, rh Sir Alan
 Berry, Jake
 Bingham, Andrew
 Birtwistle, Gordon
 Blackman, Bob
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, James
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Browne, Mr Jeremy
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Mr Robert
 Burden, Richard
 Burns, Conor
 Byles, Dan
 Cairns, Alun
 Campbell, Mr Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cash, Mr William
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Connarty, Michael
 Cooper, Rosie
 Corbyn, Jeremy
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crouch, Tracey
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Cunningham, Sir Tony
 Danczuk, Simon
 Davies, David T. C.
 (*Monmouth*)
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David

de Bois, Nick
 Denham, rh Mr John
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Dobbin, Jim
 Docherty, Thomas
 Donohoe, Mr Brian
 H.
 Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
 Drax, Richard
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr
 Iain
 Efford, Clive
 Ellis, Michael
 Engel, Natascha
 Evans, Jonathan
 Fallon, Michael
 Farron, Tim
 Fiello, Robert
 Foster, rh Mr Don
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Gardiner, Barry
 Garnier, Mr Edward
 Gauke, Mr David
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Goodman, Helen
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gray, Mr James
 Greatrex, Tom
 Green, Damian
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Halfon, Robert
 Hamilton, Mr David
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hands, Greg
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, Mr John
 Heald, Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Hemming, John
 Hendry, Charles
 Hilling, Julie
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Horwood, Martin
 Howarth, rh Mr George

Howell, John
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Johnson, Gareth
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr David
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Kelly, Chris
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Laing, Mrs Eleanor
 Lancaster, Mark
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leech, Mr John
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Lewis, Dr Julian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lloyd, Tony
 Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lucas, Ian
 MacNeil, Mr Angus
 Brendan
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 McCann, Mr Michael
 McCartney, Karl
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McGovern, Jim
 McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McVey, Esther
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Menzies, Mark
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, Andrew
 Mitchell, Austin
 Moore, rh Michael
 Morris, James
 Mosley, Stephen
 Mudie, Mr George
 Mulholland, Greg
 Murray, Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Nash, Pamela
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr Brooks
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, rh Mr
 Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, Mike
 Percy, Andrew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Pound, Stephen
 Prisk, Mr Mark

Pugh, John
 Randall, rh Mr John
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
 Reckless, Mark
 Redwood, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Reeve, Simon
 Reid, Mr Alan
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
 Rogerson, Dan
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rotheram, Steve
 Roy, Mr Frank
 Ruffley, Mr David
 Russell, Sir Bob
 Rutley, David
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Scott, Mr Lee
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Sheridan, Jim
 Simmonds, Mark
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Smith, Sir Robert
 Soames, rh Nicholas
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Spencer, Mr Mark
 Stanley, rh Sir John
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Straw, rh Mr Jack
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Mr Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Tapsell, rh Sir Peter
 Thurso, John
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Twigg, Derek
 Tyrrie, Mr Andrew
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Walter, Mr Robert
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Weir, Mr Mike
 White, Chris
 Willetts, rh Mr David
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Roger
 Williamson, Gavin
 Wilson, Sammy
 Winnick, Mr David
 Wishart, Pete
 Wright, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr Philip Dunne and
Mark Hunter

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr Speaker: We come now to motion 5. [*Interruption.*] Order. It would help the House if it was clear what it

was voting on. Once again, I remind the House that if the question on motion 5 is agreed, motion 6 will fall.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE (WEDNESDAYS) (NO CHANGE)

Ordered,

That no change be made to the time at which the House sets on a Wednesday.—(*Mr Knight.*)

Mr Speaker: As the House's short-term memory will enable it to recall, motion 6 now falls. We therefore come to motion 7. I remind the House that if this motion is negated, the sitting times of the House on Thursdays will be unchanged.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE (THURSDAYS) (9.30 AM TO 5.00 PM)

Motion made, and Question put,

That this House should meet at 9.30 am on Thursdays, with a moment of interruption at 5.00 pm, and accordingly the changes to Standing Orders set out in the table be made, with effect from Monday 15 October 2012.

| <i>Standing Order no.</i> | <i>Line no.</i> | <i>Change</i> |
|---|-----------------|---|
| 9 (Sittings of the House) | 5 | Leave out 'ten' and insert 'nine'. |
| | 21 | Leave out 'six' and insert 'five'. |
| 10 (Sittings in Westminster Hall) | 14 | Leave out 'two and insert 'one'. |
| 15 (Exempted business) | 23 | Leave out 'seven' and insert 'six'. |
| 17 (Delegated legislation (negative procedure)) | 6 | Leave out 'seven' and insert 'six'. |
| 20 (Time for taking private business) | 28 | Leave out 'three' and insert 'two'. |
| 24 Emergency debates | 30 | Leave out 'half-past'. |
| 54 (Consideration of estimates) | 22 | Leave out 'three' and insert 'two'. |
| 88 (Meetings of general committees) | 15 | Leave out 'twenty-five minutes past ten o'clock in the morning and half past twelve o'clock in the afternoon' and insert 'twenty-five minutes past nine o'clock and half past eleven o'clock in the morning'. |
| | 23 | Leave out 'ten' and insert 'nine'. (<i>Mr Knight.</i>) |

The House divided: Ayes 280, Noes 184.

Division No. 50]

[4.17 pm

AYES

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Adams, Nigel | Betts, Mr Clive |
| Afriyie, Adam | Blenkinsop, Tom |
| Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob | Blomfield, Paul |
| Alexander, rh Danny | Blunkett, rh Mr David |
| Alexander, rh Mr Douglas | Blunt, Mr Crispin |
| Alexander, Heidi | Boles, Nick |
| Ali, Rushanara | Bradley, Karen |
| Allen, Mr Graham | Brake, rh Tom |
| Bacon, Mr Richard | Bridgen, Andrew |
| Bain, Mr William | Brine, Steve |
| Balls, rh Ed | Brooke, Annette |
| Banks, Gordon | Brown, rh Mr Nicholas |
| Barron, rh Mr Kevin | Bruce, rh Sir Malcolm |
| Bayley, Hugh | Bryant, Chris |
| Begg, Dame Anne | Buck, Ms Karen |
| Beith, rh Sir Alan | Buckland, Mr Robert |
| Bell, Sir Stuart | Burden, Richard |
| Benn, rh Hilary | Burley, Mr Aidan |
| Berger, Luciana | Burnham, rh Andy |
| Berry, Jake | Burns, rh Mr Simon |

Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Connarty, Michael
 Corbyn, Jeremy
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Cunningham, Sir Tony
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Philip
 Denham, rh Mr John
 Dobbin, Jim
 Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr
 Iain
 Ellis, Michael
 Engel, Natascha
 Fallon, Michael
 Field, Mark
 Foster, rh Mr Don
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Garnier, Mr Edward
 Gauke, Mr David
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Goodman, Helen
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gray, Mr James
 Green, Damian
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Halfon, Robert
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, Mr John
 Healey, rh John
 Heath, Mr David
 Hemming, John
 Hendrick, Mark
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoban, Mr Mark
 Hoey, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Howell, John
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Johnson, Gareth
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr David
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Kelly, Chris
 Laing, Mrs Eleanor
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leigh, Mr Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Lewis, Dr Julian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Love, Mr Andrew
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 McCann, Mr Michael
 McCartney, Karl
 McClymont, Gregg
 McGovern, Jim
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McVey, Esther
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Menzies, Mark
 Miller, Andrew
 Miller, Maria
 Morris, James
 Mosley, Stephen
 Mowat, David
 Mulholland, Greg
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr Brooks
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Ottaway, Richard
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Penning, Mike
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Randall, rh Mr John
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
 Reckless, Mark
 Redwood, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Reeve, Simon
 Robathan, rh Mr
 Andrew
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ruffley, Mr David
 Russell, Sir Bob
 Scott, Mr Lee
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simmonds, Mark
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Smith, Sir Robert
 Soames, rh Nicholas
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Stanley, rh Sir John
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Straw, rh Mr Jack
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Tami, Mark
 Tapsell, rh Sir Peter
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Twigg, Derek
 Tyrie, Mr Andrew
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Charles

Walter, Mr Robert
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Wharton, James
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, Mr John
 Williamson, Gavin

Wilson, Mr Rob
 Winnick, Mr David
 Wishart, Pete
 Wright, David

Tellers for the Noes:
 Greg Hands and
 Mark Hunter

Question accordingly agreed to.

SEPTEMBER SITTINGS

Ordered,

That this House considers that the Government should bring forward motions to provide for the House to sit in September from 2013 onward.—(*Mr Knight.*)

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE (TUESDAYS) (7.00 PM TO 10.00 PM)

Motion made, and Question put,

That this House should sit on Tuesdays from 7.00 pm until 10.00 pm to consider Private Members' Bills.—(*Dame Joan Ruddock.*)

The House divided: Ayes 205, Noes 228.

Division No. 51]

[4.30 pm

AYES

Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
 Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bain, Mr William
 Balls, rh Ed
 Banks, Gordon
 Barron, rh Mr Kevin
 Bayley, Hugh
 Begg, Dame Anne
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Birtwistle, Gordon
 Blackman-Woods, Roberta
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Blunkett, rh Mr David
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brine, Steve
 Brooke, Annette
 Browne, Mr Jeremy
 Bruce, rh Sir Malcolm
 Bryant, Chris
 Burden, Richard
 Burley, Mr Aidan
 Burnham, rh Andy
 Burt, Lorely
 Byles, Dan
 Byrne, rh Mr Liam
 Cairns, Alun
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carmichael, Neil
 Caton, Martin
 Clark, Katy
 Clarke, rh Mr Tom
 Coffey, Ann
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Connarty, Michael
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, Jeremy
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Crockart, Mike
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Cunningham, Sir Tony
 Curran, Margaret
 Danczuk, Simon
 Davidson, Mr Ian
 Davies, David T. C.
 (*Monmouth*)
 De Piero, Gloria
 Denham, rh Mr John
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Dobbin, Jim
 Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
 Dorries, Nadine
 Doyle, Gemma
 Durkan, Mark
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Esterson, Bill
 Eustice, George
 Farron, Tim
 Field, rh Mr Frank
 Field, Mark
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francis, Dr Hywel
 Freer, Mike
 George, Andrew
 Gilmore, Sheila
 Glass, Pat
 Glendon, Mrs Mary
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodman, Helen

Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Nia
 Hain, rh Mr Peter
 Hamilton, Mr David
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harvey, Nick
 Healey, rh John
 Hemming, John
 Hendrick, Mark
 Hermon, Lady
 Hillier, Meg
 Hilling, Julie
 Hodge, rh Margaret
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Horwood, Martin
 Huhne, rh Chris
 Huppert, Dr Julian
 Jackson, Glenda
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 Jamieson, Cathy
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Johnson, Diana
 Johnson, Gareth
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kelly, Chris
 Kendall, Liz
 Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
 Lazarowicz, Mark
 Leech, Mr John
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Lloyd, Tony
 Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn
 Long, Naomi
 Love, Mr Andrew
 Lucas, Caroline
 MacShane, rh Mr Denis
 Mactaggart, Fiona
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Maynard, Paul
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McClymont, Gregg
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McDonnell, John
 McGovern, Alison
 McKechin, Ann
 McKenzie, Mr Iain
 McKinnell, Catherine
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Mercer, Patrick
 Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
 Morris, Grahame M.
 (*Easington*)
 Munn, Meg
 Nandy, Lisa
 Nash, Pamela
 O'Donnell, Fiona

Offord, Dr Matthew
 Osborne, Sandra
 Owen, Albert
 Parish, Neil
 Pawsey, Mark
 Pearce, Teresa
 Percy, Andrew
 Perkins, Toby
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Reckless, Mark
 Redwood, rh Mr John
 Reid, Mr Alan
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Riordan, Mrs Linda
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, John
 Rogerson, Dan
 Rotheram, Steve
 Roy, Mr Frank
 Ruddock, rh Dame Joan
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Sandys, Laura
 Sarwar, Anas
 Sheridan, Jim
 Slaughter, Mr Andy
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Owen
 Smith, Sir Robert
 Spencer, Mr Mark
 Stewart, Iain
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Mr Graham
 Swinson, Jo
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tredinnick, David
 Twigg, Stephen
 Tyrie, Mr Andrew
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walter, Mr Robert
 Ward, Mr David
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mr Mike
 Wheeler, Heather
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Roger
 Williams, Stephen
 Wilson, Sammy
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Simon

Tellers for the Ayes:

Barbara Keeley and
 Mr Frank Doran

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Aldous, Peter
 Alexander, rh Danny
 Amess, Mr David
 Andrew, Stuart

Austin, Ian
 Baker, Steve
 Barclay, Stephen
 Barker, Gregory
 Baron, Mr John

Beith, rh Sir Alan
 Berry, Jake
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Mr Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Brennan, Kevin
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brokenshire, James
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Browne, Mr Jeremy
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Mr Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Mr Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Campbell, Mr Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clegg, rh Mr Nick
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Collins, Damian
 Cryer, John
 Dakin, Nic
 Davey, rh Mr Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Philip
 de Bois, Nick
 Docherty, Thomas
 Dowd, Jim
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Engel, Natascha
 Evans, Chris
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Jonathan
 Evennett, Mr David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, Michael
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Foster, rh Mr Don
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Gauke, Mr David
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Goggins, rh Paul
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Greatrex, Tom
 Green, Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic

Griffiths, Andrew
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hague, rh Mr William
 Halfon, Robert
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, Greg
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, Mr John
 Heald, Oliver
 Heath, Mr David
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoban, Mr Mark
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollingbery, George
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Howell, John
 Hughes, rh Simon
 Hunter, Mark
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Mr David
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Mr Greg
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Laing, Mrs Eleanor
 Lancaster, Mark
 Laws, rh Mr David
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Jessica
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Leigh, Mr Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Lewis, Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Macleod, Mary
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 McCann, Mr Michael
 McCartney, Karl
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Jim
 McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, Andrew
 Miller, Maria
 Mitchell, Austin
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, Nicky
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Mosley, Stephen
 Mudie, Mr George
 Murray, Ian

Murray, Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr Brooks
 Nokes, Caroline
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Ollerenshaw, Eric
 Opperman, Guy
 Osborne, rh Mr George
 Ottaway, Richard
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Percy, Andrew
 Phillips, Stephen
 Pickles, rh Mr Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Pound, Stephen
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Randall, rh Mr John
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Reeve, Simon
 Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, Amber
 Ruffley, Mr David
 Russell, Sir Bob
 Rutley, David
 Scott, Mr Lee
 Seabeck, Alison
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simmonds, Mark
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Smith, Julian
 Soubry, Anna
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Stanley, rh Sir John
 Stephenson, Andrew

Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Rory
 Straw, rh Mr Jack
 Stride, Mel
 Stunell, Andrew
 Sturdy, Julian
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Tami, Mark
 Tapsell, rh Sir Peter
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Timpson, Mr Edward
 Trickett, Jon
 Truss, Elizabeth
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Twigg, Derek
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Watkinson, Angela
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Wharton, James
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, Mr John
 Willetts, rh Mr David
 Williamson, Gavin
 Willott, Jenny
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Winnick, Mr David
 Wishart, Pete
 Wright, David
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr Shailesh Vara and
Jeremy Wright

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the next Back-Bench business debate, on the motion relating to VAT on air ambulance fuel payments, which may continue until 7 pm. In a moment I shall call the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) to open the debate. I feel sure that Members leaving the Chamber will wish to do so quickly and quietly so that we can have an orderly transition to the next debate and the hon. Gentleman can be heard with the courtesy and attentiveness that we would all wish.

VAT on Air Ambulance Fuel Payments

4.42 pm

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House supports wholeheartedly the work and actions of the Air Ambulance Service nationally, and all the individual crew members and staff, who provide an outstanding service to people up and down the UK; notes that the Air Ambulance Service is a charitable organisation, funded by donations given by the general public, and without any direct funding from Government; further notes that the Air Ambulance Service has saved successive governments millions of pounds; notes that the Air Ambulance Service provides an emergency service similar to the Lifeboat Service, and that the Lifeboat Service has been excluded from the EU VAT Directive on fuel costs since 1977, whereas the Air Ambulance Service has been required to pay for VAT on fuel; notes that successive governments have failed to provide a rebate or exemption to the Air Ambulance Service for this VAT; calls on the Government to conduct an urgent review of this situation; and further calls on the Government, in the next 12 months, to consider providing for grants to the Air Ambulance Service commensurate to the sums incurred by the Air Ambulance Service for the VAT on the fuel they purchase, and to publish the outcome of that review within this timescale.

This is a cross-party debate arriving from an e-petition that has approximately 150,000 signatures and is supported by many Members up and down the land. The reality is that our support for the air ambulances and the e-petition derives from a constituent of my co-sponsor of the motion, the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley), to whom I give my thanks. The constituent is Mr Ken Sharpe. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee for its support and Mr Speaker for finding time for it to be heard.

On 1 August the eyes of the world will be on London for the Olympics. For months I have been rigorously training my body to be at the peak of physical perfection. But I shall not be lining up against Usain Bolt. I shall be in the sleepy village of Edale, in north Derbyshire, where I, the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) and other hikers will be about to commence a 280-mile hike along the greatest walk in the world, the Pennine way. I shall not be walking for a gold medal. My goal is not gold, but hard cash to support the Great North air ambulance service, which is of course the finest of all the air ambulance organisations. Others may be cheering on Jessica Ennis and sipping the corporate champagne, but this ageing, fattening ex-jockey will be existing on a prime diet of beer and flapjacks as I wearily trudge my way north to Northumberland. Usain Bolt has nothing to fear.

This debate is supported not only by the e-petition, but by a petition run by my local paper, the *Hexham Courant*. Other newspapers up and down the land have also done a great deal to raise the profile of this debate. It is a cross-party debate, giving the Treasury a fantastic opportunity, over the next 12 months, to consider all the information to do with air ambulances, how they are funded and how VAT applies to their fuel, and to come back with a possible solution after the Budget next year.

What is certain is that the issue derives from Europe, an issue that may have been occupying some of our minds these past few months. When our illustrious forebears took us into Europe—purely, as we all understood, for economic reasons—there was a requirement to sign up to the EU VAT directive, which covers UK VAT

[Guy Opperman]

legislation. In 1977, the lifeboat service was exempted from the VAT on marine diesel. However, as the air ambulance did not exist at the time, it was not exempted and has subsequently been required to pay VAT on fuel costs. We are in this situation today because of that anomaly. As we have learned since the Budget in March, the Government are keen to clear up VAT anomalies.

We Back Benchers are often asked by Whips to believe many outlandish things—that the European Union always makes sensible decisions or that we will one day win a penalty shoot-out or have a Wimbledon singles winner. Today I will ask the House to accept one basic principle: that there is no real difference between a lifeboat and a helicopter. The lifeboat services are exempt from the VAT exclusion but the air ambulance charities are not—but they are both, I suggest, providers of life-saving emergency services that deserve all our support and all the exemptions made available for their vital work so that they may continue.

My constituency is the second biggest in the country; it has schools with catchment areas almost the size of the M25. It has rough, rural country, often without roads. In the west of Northumberland, our nearest hospital is well over an hour away; sometimes the four-wheeled ambulance struggles to be with us within an hour, if at all.

When I was a thinner and better jockey, I met many other jockeys who had struggled after a fall when they needed to be airlifted to hospital. People frequently have to be supported and airlifted to safety from the A1. The issue is not just a rural issue, but one that affects cities and towns just as much, when there is a lack of access or urgent transfers are required.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I absolutely commend my hon. Friend's argument. Devon Air Ambulance in my constituency is absolutely vital. There are very rural parts of the countryside and I entirely agree that it seems disproportionate that it should have to pay VAT, unlike the lifeboat services.

Guy Opperman: I endorse everything that my hon. Friend has said; she is a great supporter of that organisation.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on being fortunate enough to raise this debate. As he pointed out, urban areas are often as dependent on air ambulance services. The North West Ambulance Service, based in my constituency, is highly regarded right across the region.

Guy Opperman: The right hon. Gentleman mentions an exceptional air ambulance charity, which is supported not just by him but all MPs concerned with the north-west.

Put simply, in my part of the world—and all others, for that matter—health care would be jeopardised without the charitable air ambulance service. I am not denigrating the providers of other emergency services, but we could not operate without the air ambulances. For example, the Great North air ambulance covers an area of 8,000 square miles, from the Scottish borders to North Yorkshire and from the east to the west coasts. The helicopters can be anywhere in the region within 15 minutes and on board are specialist trauma doctors and paramedics,

who bring expert accident and emergency qualities to the scene. However, each mission costs £2,500, regardless of whether the patient is airlifted. That takes into account the cost of the aircraft, storage, paying the pilots and paramedics, and medicine and other equipment. There are hundreds of call-outs per month, and the same applies all across the country. Given that this involves paying in excess of £100,000 a year on fuel, of which VAT represents 20%, there will be a significant saving not only to the Great North air ambulance service but to several others, and that would equate to life-saving missions.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend for securing this debate. East Midlands air ambulance is based in East Midlands airport in my constituency. I have met the crew, and they are genuine professionals who, as he says, go out every day saving people's lives, especially along the M1 and M42 corridor, where the roads are very dangerous.

Guy Opperman: At this stage, one has to acknowledge that only a fool would fail to see that the Government are in the headlock of a debt crisis, a eurozone meltdown and a struggling economy. Everyone accepts that they are short of a magic chequebook. However, I am pleased to point out to the Treasury that those at the air ambulance organisations are not difficult people. We do not seek a solution straight away. The motion asks for an urgent review and a study of the submissions and financial arrangements of the air ambulance charities, and for a long-term solution to be reached at some stage in the near future. On any interpretation, successive Governments have got a great deal from this free service. No Government have ever properly addressed this loophole, and we are giving this Government a chance, over the next year, to investigate and address the problem.

We may be divided on many things, but we should all support this wonderful organisation. The sums that the Treasury would have to find are relatively slight—considerably less than £200,000 a year. Given the amount that the charitable organisations raise from members of the public and the amazing service that is provided, at the end of this debate we should be able to agree that there is no fundamental difference between a lifeboat and a helicopter, because both services are invaluable and should receive our support equally.

4.52 pm

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): Like the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), I congratulate my constituent Ken Sharpe and his wife Helen, who have got this important issue on to the agenda of the House of Commons by launching an e-petition that calls on the Government to refund to air ambulance services the VAT that air ambulances pay on the fuel they use. Ken Sharpe has promoted this issue with flair and passion. He achieved the 100,000 signatures needed to trigger a debate in this place within a record 39 days, and the petition now has 150,000 signatures. To any members of the public who are listening to this debate, I would say this: sign that petition now!

I have known Ken for some 20 years. He is an active member of the RMT union and served for several years on its national executive committee. The same principles of voluntary action and social service that

underpin his trade union work support his passion for charities and the air ambulance service; it is what the Government call the big society. I know him to be a brilliant and effective campaigner. When this man starts a campaign—I hope that the Minister is listening—he never gives up.

Many people will be aware of the work of the Yorkshire air ambulance service from the BBC1 fly-on-the-wall—perhaps I should say fly-in-the-sky—series, “Helicopter Heroes”, a new series of which starts in the autumn. The Yorkshire air ambulance service made the national news in 2006 when it airlifted “Top Gear” presenter Richard Hammond from Elvington airfield in York to Leeds general infirmary after he sustained life-threatening injuries in a crash in a jet-powered car. I know that Richard would say that he owes his life to the Yorkshire air ambulance service. That is one of many cases. I can think of a case of a young boy who had his ear bitten off by a horse. The air ambulance got him to hospital in time for surgeons to sew his ear back on.

The Yorkshire air ambulance, like the 18 other air ambulance services, is a registered charity. The Government help it, for example by seconding NHS paramedics to fly in the helicopters to provide ambulance services to patients. The paramedics also provide services to the pilots. In Yorkshire, it is the paramedic who navigates for the pilot. However, the Yorkshire air ambulance service still needs to raise £2.6 million a year—that is about £7,200 a day—to keep its two helicopters flying.

As the hon. Member for Hexham said, the lifeboat service, unlike the air ambulance service, does not have to pay VAT on the fuel that it uses. We are calling on the Government to treat the air ambulance service in the same way as the lifeboat service. I recognise that EU Finance Ministers are unlikely to extend the exemption that applies to sea rescue services such as lifeboats to air ambulances. However, the United Kingdom Government could act on their own by refunding to air ambulance services the VAT that is charged on the fuel that they use.

Linda McAvan, the Labour MEP for Yorkshire and the Humber, recently asked a question on this matter in the European Parliament. The spokesman for the European Commission replied:

“Member States are free to address the problem of unrecoverable VAT by the introduction of so called compensation schemes.”

I am assured that that means, in EU-speak, that if the Government chose to provide air ambulance services with sums equivalent to the VAT that is raised from them, there would be no objection from the European Union. The Exchequer Secretary, who is responsible for VAT, accepts that that is the case. When the hon. Member for Hexham and I went to see him a week or so ago to discuss our motion, he assured us that if the motion was unamended, the Government would raise no objection to it. I hope that that is the case. We will hear whether it is from the Financial Secretary, who will speak for the Treasury this evening.

The motion calls on the Government to carry out a study over the year ahead into whether they can accede to the request in the e-petition. Members on both sides of the House hope that the study will be completed in time for the answer to be given as part of the Budget statement next spring.

I have been a Minister in a spending Department and know what it is like to get a dozen requests a day for new Government spending commitments. I also recognise

that this is a time of austerity. So why do I think that the Government should agree to this request? First, the proposal has caught the public imagination. Ken Sharpe’s e-petition has been signed by 150,000 citizens. We agreed at the end of the last Parliament and confirmed at the start of this Parliament that when more than 100,000 citizens make a request, Parliament should debate it.

Secondly, as the hon. Member for Hexham said, the request is modest and affordable. The Yorkshire air ambulance service paid less than £6,000 last year in VAT on fuel. It serves a population of 5 million. The population of the UK is 60 million, so if all air ambulance services use the same amount of fuel per the size of the population they serve, the total cost will be something in the order of £75,000 a year. Even if I am out in my calculation by a factor of two—the Treasury will check that carefully when it conducts its study—and the cost is £150,000, it will still come to just £1 per person who has signed the e-petition.

The air ambulance petition has attracted more signatures than the e-petition pressing the Government for a change in policy on fuel duty. The Treasury estimates that the recent decision to postpone the August fuel duty increase will cost the Exchequer £550 million. If we divide that by the 148,000 citizens who have signed the fuel duty e-petition, it comes to £3,700 a petitioner, which makes the air ambulance request, at just £1 a petitioner, rather cheap.

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): I have spent my working life in the charity sector, and in fundraising in particular. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that groups such as the one that organises the Rawdon fun day in my constituency, which raises £14,000 a year for the air ambulance, find it objectionable that some of that money is going on VAT? If we lost the air ambulance service, the effect on the Treasury would be immense.

Hugh Bayley: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. It is important that the Treasury focuses on the fact that the air ambulance service is an emergency service that saves lives, just like the lifeboat service. I used to run a charity, and much as I would love every charity to be exempt from paying VAT, that would be a very expensive ask. This is a limited and specific ask of the Government. As I said, it would not be too costly. More importantly, as I am sure he will acknowledge, it is the right thing to do.

If the motion is agreed to, Ken Sharpe and the 150,000 members of the public who have signed the e-petition will move into a slightly difficult period. They will have got over the hurdle of securing the Government’s attention, but there will then be a period, at least until the Budget in the spring, when the Government are considering the position. It will appear to the public as though not a lot is going on. My advice to members of the public who support the cause is: do not let up on the pressure, and keep reminding the Government that this issue will not go away. The best way for a citizen to lobby the Government is through their Member of Parliament. I invite every single one of those 150,000 people to e-mail or write to their MP and ask them to contact the Treasury, asking how the study is going. In that way, we can continue to remind the Government that this change is both the right thing to do and has a high level of support from the public.

[Hugh Bayley]

5.3 pm

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) and the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley) on securing the debate. I was delighted to attend the Backbench Business Committee meeting at which the proposal was made. I know that the hon. Member for York Central was unable to be there, but I am pleased that we now have the opportunity to have this discussion in the Chamber. I want to make a short contribution in support of the motion.

The Kent, Surrey and Sussex air ambulance has a special place in the hearts of my constituents. It provides an invaluable service across the three counties, which have seven motorways running through them on which five serious accidents happen every day. However, road accidents account for only 41% of the emergencies that the local air ambulance attends. Medical emergencies such as cardiac arrests and strokes account for a further 25%, and both require a swift response and excellent, quick medical care if they are to be dealt with quickly and properly.

A quick news search on the Kent, Surrey and Sussex air ambulance shows how vital it is across the counties. Yesterday, it landed on the M20 motorway and took a lady who had fallen from a bridge not to the hospital at the next junction but to a specialist unit in London. A few hours later, it transferred from Ramsgate to King's college hospital, again in London, a workman who had fallen 30 feet. That journey would have been very difficult to make by road. Last Friday, the helicopter took a 78-year-old man with serious facial injuries following a DIY accident from Lordswood in my constituency to hospital in London. As the local newspaper reported, the helicopter landed nearby at 10.25 am. Doctors gave the man emergency treatment at the scene before he was flown to the major trauma centre at the hospital in Denmark Hill.

Mary Macleod (Brentford and Isleworth) (Con): This is a crucial issue, because the VAT money could be put back into the air ambulance, especially the London air ambulance, which serves more than 10 million people. We need a second air ambulance to serve those numbers.

Tracey Crouch: I completely agree. The Kent, Surrey and Sussex air ambulance has two helicopters to serve the three counties. I am sure that all money saved from VAT would be used effectively.

One great thing about the Kent, Surrey and Sussex air ambulance is that it transports a specialist doctor and a critical care paramedic directly to the scene of serious medical emergencies. They provide enhanced care at the scene of the accident, often involving medical procedures usually provided only in the emergency department of a hospital. Patients are flown to the most appropriate hospital for their needs, and many are transferred to county or regional hospitals. However, as the three shouts I described show, patients quite often require specialist treatment at a major trauma centre in London. Quite simply, the intervention of the air ambulance team saves lives.

The Kent, Surrey and Sussex air ambulance costs £5 million per year to fund and operates 365 days a

year, responding to 1,500 to 1,800 medical emergencies per annum. It is funded almost entirely by donations. Its mission, objective and outcomes are as important to our country as those of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, another lifesaving service very dear to my heart. However, as we have heard, and as the motion states, the key difference between the two is that the Kent air ambulance pays VAT at the rate of 20% at its base in Marden. It buys fuel in bulk and uses between 180,000 and 200,000 litres a year. Given that each mission costs around £2,500, zero-rating fuel for the helicopters would save the air ambulance a significant amount of money that it could reinvest in its lifesaving functions. That is not a vast amount of money for the Treasury, but it would be directly available to air ambulances.

It has already been made clear that, under EU law, it is not possible to implement a new zero-rating into UK legislation relating solely to the air ambulance. Although I am not a VAT expert, let me offer the Minister a possible solution. Schedule 8 to the Value Added Tax Act 1994 refers to charities and outlines provisions that allow for the supply, at the zero rate of VAT,

“of any relevant goods to an eligible body which pays for them with funds provided by a charity”.

The Act also makes it clear that “relevant goods” includes “ambulances” and

“parts or accessories for use in or with”

ambulances. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs already accepts that “ambulances” includes specially equipped air ambulances or watercraft, and that “eligible bodies” includes charitable institutions providing

“rescue or first aid services”.

Under those provisions, therefore, and with guidance from the Treasury and HMRC, the air ambulance could purchase fuel in its own name for use at a zero rate of VAT. I am sure that, with proper discussion, air ambulance charities could certify the use of the fuel, making them liable for VAT payments if they misappropriate it for other purposes. Furthermore, I am sure the charities would be willing to appease any concerns that HMRC might have on claims for retrospective recovery of VAT incurred over the past four years, which would obviously lead to a greater cost to the Treasury.

The Treasury might be concerned about the reduction of revenue, but it should recognise how much the air ambulance saves the NHS. First, like others, the Kent air ambulance is not funded by the ambulance service or the NHS. Secondly, the speed at which it can transfer injured persons to hospital often means that they are treated and discharged more quickly, thereby saving the NHS money in the long term.

Throughout the debate thus far, Members have spoken highly of the air ambulances serving their constituents. There can be no doubt about the level of genuine support they enjoy, but as the motion makes clear, and as we have heard, there is potential for the Treasury to give additional financial support to help air ambulances up and down the country to carry on providing a vital service. It is for this reason that I urge the Treasury to review the current VAT arrangements and use this opportunity to recognise further the vital contribution that the air ambulance service makes to people's lives.

5.10 pm

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy

Opperman) and my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley) on securing this debate. I also want to echo the congratulations to Ken Sharpe on working so vigorously to get so many people to sign up to the campaign.

I want to focus on the contribution of the London air ambulance service, which is based at the Royal London hospital in my constituency. It was established in 1989 and does incredible work across London, providing critical care to those with serious injuries. The London air ambulance service has completed 26,000 missions since 1989. In March, I visited the service and heard about the amazing work it does. In 2006, the last Labour Government committed £1 billion of much needed funding to rebuild the Royal London hospital in Whitechapel, which included renovation of the helipad. In December 2011, the London air ambulance service moved to its new base, on the 17th floor of the refurbished hospital building.

Last Saturday we marked the seventh anniversary of the 7/7 London bombings, when terrorists detonated bombs on three underground trains, including one near Aldgate in my constituency, and a London bus. We remembered the 52 innocent people who lost their lives in the London bombings and the many more whose lives were changed for ever. It is difficult to forget the harrowing scenes of devastation and chaos across London that day. I would like to use this opportunity to pay tribute to our emergency services, whose response and professionalism following the 7/7 attacks saved the lives of many. In particular, I would like to focus on the work of London's air ambulance service. Following the attacks, London's air ambulance staff, who had been attending a monthly clinical governance day, were deployed immediately. London's air ambulance service flew 26 helicopter missions to deliver urgent medical care and supplies to the scenes of the incidents across London, and the service's medical teams treated or triaged more than 700 people. The service rightly received praise for its incredible work and quick response in the wake of the attacks.

At the coroner's inquest into the 7/7 London bombings, Lady Justice Hallet recommended that London's air ambulance should have its "funding and capacity" reviewed and said:

"Despite current financial constraints, London's Air Ambulance has, since its formation, provided an invaluable service to the capital."

The service has been deployed to numerous major incidents in London, including not only the London bombings but the Bishopsgate and Aldwych terrorist attacks, as well as the Southall, Paddington and Potters Bar rail crashes. Yet despite those recommendations, the London air ambulance service has received no increase in major incident funding. The service believes additional funding for major incidents to be a necessity, which would enable it to expand major incident cover.

However, responding to major incidents is just one aspect of the service's work. It also provides pre-hospital emergency care to victims of serious injuries, attending road traffic accidents, industrial accidents, and stabbings and shootings. The service treats more than 2,000 critically injured patients on the streets of London each year. Without it, patients would not receive the critical care they need.

Mary Macleod: I applaud the hon. Lady's enthusiasm for the London air ambulance service, which I share. The service is also supporting the Olympics and the Paralympics, on top of its normal workload, serving and supporting so many individuals—more than 10 million within the M25—as compared with many other air ambulances, which support far fewer people.

Rushanara Ali: I could not agree more with the hon. Lady. She has been working with me to highlight the work of the London air ambulance service. I will talk about the demands in the run-up to, and during, the Olympics in a moment.

The London air ambulance service has a doctor-led team that provides advanced medical procedures and leadership in situations in which a patient might otherwise die before reaching hospital. As London's only helicopter medical emergency service, the team works incredibly hard to provide 24/7 emergency care services to the 10 million people who live and work in the capital.

Despite the incredible work of the London service, its funding is limited. Many people do not realise that it is a charity, as are many of the other air ambulance services around the country. At a time when it should be expanding its operational capacity, a lack of funding means that it is unable to do so. That will have an impact across London, and, as the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mary Macleod) has mentioned, that is deeply worrying in a year in which millions of visitors will come to the city for the Olympics.

Compared with other cities in England and Wales and around the world, London's air ambulance service lacks resources. It has just one helicopter and one team to serve 10 million people, compared with an average of one helicopter per 1.5 million people across the rest of the UK. Internationally, Paris has 12 teams and at least three helicopters, and Sydney has six helicopters.

London's air ambulance service is currently funded through private donations and an NHS contribution, but much more work must be done to raise funds if it is to provide the level of service required to meet London's growing needs. In these tough economic times, it is even more challenging for the service to achieve its funding objectives. As a charity, it relies heavily on donations from the corporate sector, and in 2011 donations and sponsorship made up 45% of the service's overall income. The donations from organisations, charities and companies are welcome, and donors include organisations such as Virgin, Coutts and the London stock exchange. At a time of economic uncertainty, however, that funding is not stable, and it does not meet the funding needs of the service.

Contributions from the private and corporate sectors play a large part, but it is vital that the Government should meet their obligations to support the charity. The London service has received a long-standing donation of £1.2 million from the NHS, which represented 40% of its overall income in 2011, but I believe that the Government must do more. The impact of the Government's VAT increase to 20% is being felt by services such as the London air ambulance, which receive no support to cover the cost of VAT on aviation fuel payments. We are calling on the Government temporarily to reduce the rate of VAT from 20% to 17.5%, which would lessen the VAT bill for charities, including air ambulance services.

[*Rushanara Ali*]

The London air ambulance service needs an estimated £3.9 million if it is to enhance and expand the service that it provides in the coming years. The necessity for the service to do that will only increase, and it is important that we take action now to ensure that the service can cope with future demand. The extra funding would enable the service to acquire and maintain a new helicopter in order to achieve 100% “up time”, so that if one helicopter required maintenance, another would still be operational. It would also allow the service to maintain medical and rescue equipment, fund medical innovation and invest in staff training, research and the charity’s infrastructure. That type of expansion would greatly enhance the service, benefiting Londoners and ensuring a sustainable model for the future.

The London air ambulance is a service that many of us take for granted. It is a service that many of us do not think of as a charity, and one that we would expect to assist us in an emergency. This is a call to the Government to reduce VAT to 17.5% and give charities such as London’s air ambulance service the support that they need. It is also a call to the private sector and the business community, in London and elsewhere, to invest in the air ambulance services and support their incredible work of saving people’s lives.

5.19 pm

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) and the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley). I am delighted and proud to have my name on this motion and to have signed the early-day motion and been a part of this excellent campaign. I echo their words in congratulating Ken Sharpe and the 150,000 people who have spoken out on this issue and enabled us to have this debate in this place—a clear example of the democratic e-petition process working to allow us to debate the subjects that matter to local people.

There are 18 air ambulance service charities up and down the country. As we have heard, each and every one does work that is not only vital but that can be done only by air ambulances attending emergencies that are difficult, and sometimes impossible, for road ambulances to get to. Speed is vital, too, with lives saved every week of every month of every year by air ambulance staff throughout the country. That would not happen if the air ambulance services were no longer there.

I am incredibly proud to be the MP representing one of our two Yorkshire air ambulances—the one based in my constituency at Leeds Bradford airport. Yorkshire air ambulance was set up back in 2000, with the helicopter introduced at Leeds Bradford airport, and to this day the YAA service has rescued 4,446 people. A second helicopter was added in 2007, and Yorkshire became the first air ambulance service in the UK to operate a dedicated air desk. Having recently added airways communication systems, it is now one of the most developed and highly sophisticated emergency services in the whole country.

Yorkshire air ambulance now operates these two helicopters, which, as the hon. Member for York Central said, serve 5 million people around the Yorkshire area,

covering an incredibly diverse landscape of rural and suburban areas, as well as the great cities. But the YAA needs £7,200 every single day to keep both of our helicopters in the air. Last year, it used approximately 170,000 litres of fuel, which cost £5,800 in VAT. It is a simple, stark fact that if the YAA did not have to pay this charge on fuel, it could save a minimum of three extra lives each year. We can extrapolate from that that the number of lives that could be saved around the country by that change would be substantial. This is not just about money.

I would like briefly to mention a constituent of mine. We have already heard about the importance of fundraising for keeping these air ambulances in the air and functional. A lady from Cookridge, Mrs Val Pawsey, has attended shows, fairs and fêtes all around the Yorkshire area with her knitting. She knits all sorts of products—teddies, dolls, dolls’ clothes, babies’ clothes and so forth. To date, she alone has raised £8,500 for the Yorkshire air ambulance as a volunteer by doing this incredible work as she goes round the shows with her husband John. It is difficult to have to tell someone like Val Pawsey that the Government are taking £5,800 a year in VAT from the service for which she is working so incredibly hard, giving her own effort, energy, resources and time to raise money. That is why I sincerely hope we will get a sympathetic response from Ministers today and a commitment properly to look at this issue.

As other hon. Members have said, we need to give enormous credit to all the people involved in the amazing charitable work that provides the funding, but we also need to be clear that millions of pounds are saved for the Government and for us as a society when a service such as this is provided. If the air ambulance service did not provide it, it would have to be provided in another way through the NHS. Surely, therefore, we have a strong case.

People have already mentioned the example of the lifeboats and the complications with EU legislation, and our message is clear: we want Ministers to make the case very strongly in Europe; when things are wrong with European directives we all must say so; and we should say that the EU directive in question clearly needs to be amended. Until it is amended, however, we need Government action; we cannot simply wait and hope that it might be changed. That is why I am very happy to support the motion and to urge the Treasury to find a solution within its own means to the problem.

We have also seen a huge rise in fuel costs over recent years and, indeed, months, and it stretches even further the limited resources that arise from fundraising. That is why it is even more important that the Treasury mitigate the effect by looking at the VAT that is currently charged.

The Treasury can be sympathetic, and has been in the past. I was delighted to support my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) in his campaign for a VAT refund on the emergency services provided by our wonderful mountain rescue teams, and the air ambulance is another service that carries out a similar and equally important life-saving function. It therefore deserves similar sympathetic treatment.

I hope that Ministers have noted that 150,000 people have so far signed the petition, and have noticed the consensus among Members on both sides who have

spoken and campaigned with passion on the issue. We are proud of our air ambulances throughout the country, and we know that the Government are, too. The Treasury, in its response in April to the petition, said that the Government noted

“the valuable role that the air ambulance services play in responding to emergencies.”

We believe that today should be the start of a process whereby they put their money where their mouth is. We believe that there is a solution to the problem, and we look forward to some good news in the Budget next year.

5.27 pm

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): It is a real privilege to speak in today’s debate, and I too pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) and my close constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley), who alongside others have secured this important debate.

Whenever there is a debate in this place about our emergency services and personnel, it is humbling to think of the sheer number of lives that have been saved because of the dedication, bravery and professionalism of our firefighters, police officers, NHS nurses, doctors and ambulance drivers. But the emergency service family extends far further than we often appreciate. From our lifeboats and coastguards to countless voluntary agencies, our society is underpinned by the dedication of so many committed public servants.

In this debate, however, we are rightly focused on an area of the emergency services that plays a vital yet, sadly, under-acknowledged role in saving lives each and every day. According to the Association of Air Ambulances, an emergency air ambulance takes off every 10 minutes in the UK, collectively undertaking more than 19,000 missions in a year and serving 177 accident and emergency departments.

Today’s debate is focused on the VAT on fuel that several air ambulance charities are required to pay as a result of owning and operating their own aircraft. The e-petition that prompted this debate attracted, as many Members have said, about 150,000 signatures, and it calls on the Government to exempt the air ambulance service from paying VAT.

I will discuss that request later in my speech, but first let me join the hon. Member for York Central and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) in praising the work of Yorkshire’s own local air ambulance service. It flies seven days a week, providing a life-saving, rapid service for 5 million people across Yorkshire. It is also an independent charity which, as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West, must generate £7,200 a day—some £2.65 million a year—to keep our air ambulance operational. I think that the public will be as astonished as I was to learn that it has to find such an amount.

The need to raise awareness of the charitable status of the air ambulance service is undeniable. Its real strength lies in its ability to work throughout our county’s vast and challenging landscape, from densely populated urban centres to the rural and almost wild countryside in parts of north Yorkshire. It ensures that anyone in trouble can be reached and transferred to life-saving health centres within minutes. Without such provision,

some people would die of their injuries and health complications. Let me put it simply: I truly believe that the Yorkshire air ambulance saves lives every single day.

The hon. Member for York Central has already given a famous example of the superb work of the service in action, but that is well worth mentioning again. I refer to the devastating accident involving the “Top Gear” presenter Richard Hammond in 2006. That almost fatal accident occurred in Elvington airfield, which is in my constituency. Mr Hammond was driving a dragster car while filming “Top Gear” when the vehicle crashed at terrific speed. I am sure that many Members recall seeing the sickening footage of the crash on the news at the time. The injuries sustained by Mr Hammond were life-threatening and required immediate medical attention. Like so many other individuals over the years, he received initial treatment followed by an immediate transfer to hospital. The speed of the transfer was crucial, and because of the work of the Yorkshire ambulance which flew to his rescue, Richard Hammond’s life was saved.

That high-profile case reflects the cases of many individuals who are saved every day by the air ambulance service. It brings to life the importance of the service and its work, and we should bear such examples in mind when considering the financial demands that threaten the sustainability of the service.

Many Members have touched on the technicalities of whether, and how, the Government can return VAT payments or make exemptions in the future, so I shall keep my remarks about the motion itself brief. First, there is an issue of fairness. At present, only charities that own their helicopters are required to pay VAT on fuel. The result of the status quo is clear: the more money is swallowed up in VAT payments to the Treasury, the less there will be to keep air ambulances operational and ready to respond to emergencies as and when they are needed.

Secondly, when considering cost, we must take into account the millions of pounds that the air ambulance service as a whole has saved successive Governments. A number of Members have already mentioned that. Any decision that we make should take into consideration the amount that the charity saves the Government by running the service at its own cost, funded by public donations. What would we do if these charities could no longer afford to operate? My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) made a telling intervention on this point. Would the Government pay directly for an air ambulance service? Would they have to purchase all the helicopters and equipment? Or would such a service simply not exist?

Thirdly, comparisons to other services must be made. The life boat service has already been mentioned. I appreciate that Ministers have said that under EU law we cannot extend the scope of existing zero rates or introduce new ones, but perhaps this is the sort of nonsense that should be tackled in any forthcoming EU renegotiation. Regardless of one’s position on European matters, it is simply ridiculous that this elected, sovereign House lacks the power to decide such matters because of European red tape.

Naturally, I understand that the Government cannot do everything and that many requests are made for financial exemptions and tax cuts in many areas, but I believe that our air ambulance service is being unfairly targeted. It is told by countless politicians that its

[Julian Sturdy]

dedicated work is essential, but it is then told to make do with an unfair and expensive deal for paying VAT on fuel. We must make up our minds. If we are truly to back the service, let us fight for it in Europe and at home, and let us prioritise its financial needs higher up the agenda. I very much support the part of the motion urging the Government to review the matter in depth over the next few months. In the light of the work of the air ambulance service across the country, that is the least we could agree to tonight.

5.36 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) for moving this debate, to my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley) for ably supporting him and leading our campaign to support our Yorkshire air ambulance service, and to all Members, on both sides, who have spoken in support of their local air ambulance services. I pay particular tribute to Ken Sharpe, my hon. Friend's constituent, who must hold the record for getting 100,000 names on an e-petition in the shortest possible time and who has helped provide the basis for this debate.

I say to the Minister that we are asking for a small contribution that will be a big boost to the efforts of those who support and keep our air ambulances flying across the country. The motion covers the interests of our 18 air ambulance services across England. All of them are sustained by the dedicated efforts of those who raise funds to help finance the costs and all are kept flying by the dedicated, skilled, professional staff who provide this vital emergency service. I am particularly pleased that the Yorkshire caucus is so strong in the House tonight, with not only my hon. Friend the Member for York Central leading the charge but the hon. Members for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) and for York Outer (Julian Sturdy), whom I am delighted to follow.

Like most other air ambulance services, ours is a charity. It is, so to speak, the airborne wing of the Prime Minister's big society. It deserves the House's support in deed, not just in word, and the sort of support that the motion is urging on the Government. It is funded by the public to provide a vital emergency service for the public across our county. Since the debate started, I reckon that our fundraisers in Yorkshire will have had to raise at least £300 as a contribution towards keeping our two helicopters and our service going. That is a total of more than £7,000 a day or £2.65 million a year. They do this because they understand, like we do, how vital this emergency service is and how essential it is in many parts of our county that patients requiring such help can be at their nearest hospital within 10 minutes. It flies more than 1,000 missions each year, which is a unique and essential service, of interest and concern to us all. As others have said, the fuel costs are about £10,000 a month and the VAT costs are something under £6,000 a year.

I say two things to the Minister in conclusion. We are not asking in today's motion for the same sort of exclusion from VAT that the lifeboat service has. We are not asking today for the same sort of VAT rebate scheme that has been in place to support the cost of church repairs. We are asking simply for a review to look at the fairness of the situation and the case for

making a small public contribution to the voluntary efforts of those who keep our air ambulances flying. I hope that, in responding to this debate, he will accept the terms of the motion and the review that is urged upon him. But I hope actually that he may stand up to tell us that the motion is not needed and the review is not needed because he will introduce that sort of compensation scheme to cover the costs of VAT on fuel and will do so on a similar basis to the one we have established with the precedent of helping with the VAT costs of church repairs.

5.41 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): I join colleagues in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) and the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley) on securing this debate. I contribute to it as the chairman of the new all-party group on the emergency services. We recently secured a Westminster Hall debate on the interoperability between the emergency services, including the role of the air ambulance, at which my hon. Friend spoke eloquently about his support for the air ambulance, on the basis of the motion before us. I wholeheartedly agree with the sentiments expressed by hon. Members and join them in putting on the record my support and thanks for the service that air ambulances provide up and down our country. They supply a crucial and critical service for which we should all be thankful.

Many hon. Members have given accounts of people who support the air ambulance service, and a friend of mine, Gill, was involved in a major road accident on a country lane. She suffered multiple breakages and was airlifted by the air ambulance to the local trauma centre and treated. Having been helped by our air ambulance, she, along with many others in the same position, is an effective and enthusiastic fundraiser for our local air ambulance. She trains as a volunteer, runs stalls, sells Christmas cards and collected funds at a rugby game played on "The Close" at Rugby school. This is a key feature of the air ambulance service: it is funded through donations and with the support of the community. That unique funding method not only encourages local people, but means savings to government.

Although I support the call for a Government review into VAT, I wish to raise one or two concerns about it, as I believe the House should hear them. I do this because of the approach taken by the air ambulance service, whose Warwickshire and Northamptonshire service covers my constituency. It argues that charities, such as air ambulances, should be working closely together and with the Government to make efficiencies within their organisations, and I have one or two suggestions as to how that can be done. In asking for caution, my case is based on the voluntary funding of the air ambulance service, depending, as it does, on the unique feature of donations from local and national companies. That key feature entices people to get involved because they know that currently the air ambulance service receives no Government or lottery funding. Most importantly, the Warwickshire service does not seek Government or lottery funding. In fact, it strongly argues that its independence from Government is what enables it to innovate and drive up service delivery standards.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The London air ambulance is based at the

Royal London hospital, which is just outside my constituency, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali). People with serious trauma who are taken by air ambulance to the Royal London are much more likely to survive than those who are not. That underlines the point about the quality of service that this charitable money is delivering.

Mark Pawsey: That serves to highlight the unique nature of the air ambulance organisations.

On the payment of VAT, or any other tax, let me quote from a representation from Warwickshire and Northamptonshire air ambulance:

“Along with the rest of the world, we would welcome any reduction in taxation levels and in an ideal scenario we would pay no VAT on any aspect of our service.”

That is right, of course. In an ideal scenario—when we are enjoying periods of sustained economic growth and there is no pressure on Government finances—many different kinds of concessions can be made, but unfortunately this Government have been left with a structural deficit, so they may not be able to fund all the items of expenditure that we might want. The air ambulance service made this point to me:

“In the current fiscal climate we believe that charities and organisations like ourselves whose sole aim is to benefit our communities, should not seek further strains on the public purse.”

There is a contrary view, therefore, and it is held by the air ambulance service based in my constituency.

Hugh Bayley: I imagine that the hon. Gentleman’s points will be considered by the Treasury if the motion is passed tonight, and so they should be. However, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution has the VAT exemption, but that does not act as a bar to its raising funds for its services. Is he aware that the Association of Air Ambulances—which represents the 18 air ambulance services in the country, including his—put out a press release calling on the Chancellor

“to introduce a balanced and fair approach to the application of VAT and duty charged on Aviation Fuel where it is used in helicopter emergency medical services”?

Although his points are valid, could they not be considered as part of such a Treasury review if we pass the motion tonight?

Mark Pawsey: I shall support the motion, but I am putting to the House the contrary view, which is about the unique nature of our air ambulance services.

On the basis of the quote I have just read out, we should applaud the sense of public duty displayed by the air ambulance that covers the area I represent.

Rory Stewart (Penrith and The Border) (Con): I warmly applaud the idea that there should be a strong focus on charitable fundraising, but the challenge we in Cumbria face is that the North West air ambulance is attempting to fundraise in exactly the same areas as the Great North air ambulance. They are both presenting themselves as the sole Cumbrian provider. We therefore have paid fundraisers fighting on the doorsteps, as it were, to get contributions from Cumbria’s very small population of 500,000 people. Does my hon. Friend agree that we will need a more disciplined approach to fundraising if these wonderful institutions are to flourish and survive?

Mark Pawsey: I accept that point of view. There needs to be some control. We do not want one air

ambulance to be competing with another for what we all accept are limited funds. That takes us back to my point about co-operation and interoperability. There may be a case for interoperability not only between air ambulances, but between air ambulances and other emergency services.

Those who support the charitable structure are concerned that it is not very many steps from a grant to offset VAT on fuel to the full nationalisation of the service, and the absorption of air ambulances into the ambulance service more generally. There might be some hon. Members in the Chamber for whom that would be a desirable move, but I believe that it would materially change the unique basis on which the service is delivered. It was interesting that it fell to the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) to describe the air ambulance as probably one of the best examples of the big society.

There are other ways besides a VAT exemption in which the air ambulance can effect substantial savings. I argued in the Westminster Hall debate about the need for air ambulances and other emergency services to share assets. Earlier this week, I spoke at a Royal United Services Institute conference on the future operations of blue-light air assets. RUSI has produced research papers drawing attention to the fact that there is no co-ordination of air assets at this stage nationally or across agencies. If we investigate asset sharing we could effect savings that would be significantly in excess of the amount of savings that could be produced by reducing the costs of fuel.

Rory Stewart: On that specific point, one challenge we face in Cumbria is that mountain rescue finds it easy to co-ordinate with the police and the RAF, particularly when Sea Kings are involved, but very difficult to co-ordinate with air ambulances. Air ambulances appear to be reluctant to give information to mountain rescue as a standard operating procedure. Interoperability is a challenge, but I would suggest that it is a particular challenge with air ambulances.

Mark Pawsey: I certainly accept that point. One of the challenges for us, which is one reason why we have formed the new all-party group, involves trying to make the links that allow such interoperability. There is no point in having unused air ambulance assets dotted around parts of the country when they are badly needed in other areas. The point of an air ambulance is that a helicopter can move quickly between areas and provide such support.

A wide range of figures have been mentioned. The Association of Air Ambulances says that air ambulance charities across the country collectively generate an income of £46 million, with an average spend per helicopter of £843,000 and an average mission cost of £1,229. I accept that all those sums need to be raised through fundraising and that any savings that could be achieved would be welcome, but the cost of VAT on fuel needs to be seen in the context of some of the other significant costs, which put the total amount paid on VAT in perspective.

I fully support the motion’s tribute to our air ambulance services. They are worthy of more praise than they receive and I am glad that we have had the opportunity to pay tribute to them. I hope, however, that I have been able to put the cost of VAT on fuel in perspective and to

[Mark Pawsey]

suggest other, better ways of saving money through more efficient co-ordination of helicopter assets between air ambulance and emergency services. I hope that I have raised the concerns that the granting of a concession such as that asked for in the motion could be the start of a change to the unique method of funding our air ambulance services which involves the enthusiastic and active participation of volunteers up and down our land.

5.53 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey). I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) and the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley)—he might recall that I used to interview him as a fledgling reporter all those years ago—have brought this matter to the attention of the House.

First, like all other Members I want to pay tribute to the professionalism and bravery of our air ambulance crews. The A31 just outside my home is, sadly, notorious and I often see that yellow bird of mercy landing to rescue people and take them to hospital. It saves countless lives. In my constituency, the Dorset and Somerset air ambulance saves lives as we have no motorways as such, at least not in Dorset, and our roads are narrow, which means that getting down them is extremely difficult. It is especially important, therefore, for us to have that air ambulance cover.

Which air ambulances pay VAT on fuel and which do not—I hope I am being accurate because I know we like to be accurate in the House—is a matter of who owns and operates them. As has been said, owner-operators—those who own and operate the helicopter directly through their charities—are seriously disadvantaged. Because they are VAT registered they must pay VAT. In contrast, leased aircraft, operated through a third party, such as Bond Aviation, which is the case for the Dorset and Somerset air ambulance, which bills for a total service, including fuel, are exempt under an agreement with HMRC in 2005.

Tracey Crouch: It is worth pointing out that not every helicopter that is leased is done so with the fuel included. Some air ambulance helicopters are on a lease agreement, such as the Kent air ambulance, but that does not include the fuel.

Richard Drax: I totally accept that. I am not saying that they are all the same. I am looking for some harmonisation. I am not for one minute saying that we should not tackle the VAT issue. However, it seems from my research that there are some anomalies in the system.

Of the 18 charities, operating 29 helicopters, 12 operate such leasing agreements—admittedly, as my hon. Friend said, under different arrangements. For example, our Dorset and Somerset air ambulance pays no VAT, while our neighbouring Devon air ambulance pays £3,000 a year, which is about the cost of a mission, give or take a few pounds. The situation is clearly deeply unsatisfactory, with thousands of pounds of hard-raised money being squandered needlessly. I would have thought that some harmonisation would resolve the issue.

Overall, the Association of Air Ambulances must pay £100,000 every year in VAT. That rises with every increase in the price of fuel. That sum would pay for about 30 mercy flights to road traffic accidents and medical emergencies and for urgent hospital transfers. As has been said, this is not really about money; this is about saving people's lives.

It is interesting how many of our valuable services in this country are charitable. Think of our armed services. These are men and women whom we send to places such as Afghanistan who are relying on charity to be looked after. That begs another debate altogether.

I hardly need point out that charging VAT on fuel for our air ambulances is an EU initiative. In a characteristic Catch-22 situation, the EU VAT directive allows no zero rating provisions, except for those that were in place in 1975. Again as we have heard this afternoon, there were no air ambulance helicopters in the UK in 1975. Only the RNLI has been allowed exemption from duty charges on marine diesel due to its life-saving role—no different, in effect, from that of the air ambulances. With such a precedent already set, it seems an obvious and relatively inexpensive step for HMRC to extend this exemption to helicopter emergency air services.

The Association of Air Ambulances has suggested three solutions, each of which I would commend to the Minister. The first is a total exemption for all helicopter emergency medical services. The second is a refund arrangement provided by HMRC for air ambulance charities. The third is for new legislation to exempt air ambulances from VAT, as with the RNLI.

As all hon. Members have said, this is a worthy cause, and, frankly, the sums of money are a pittance when one looks at the Government's overall expenditure. I cannot think of a better cause in the big society. That is not a phrase I entirely endorse, but I would use it in this case, because it conjures up the worthiness, bravery and dedication of those who crew the ambulances and the lives that are saved, and, importantly, the knock-on benefits to the families of those who have been injured and who can continue to live their lives with their fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters because they have been rescued by this exemplary service. I hope that common sense prevails today.

6 pm

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) and the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley) on securing it. The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) has already spoken about the London helicopter, which serves not only her constituency but mine and, indeed, the rest of London, so not all the comments I will make are about London's air ambulance because I do not wish to replicate the fine things she has already said.

I want to describe for the Minister some of my experience of one of the UK's air ambulance services. He is probably unaware that I grew up in Cornwall, which was the first county to have an air ambulance. Indeed, I have quite some experience with that air ambulance. There was not a great deal to do in Cornwall when I was young, so one of the things I did was surf, which led me to become a lifeguard, and on several occasions we needed to make use of the air ambulance.

Before the air ambulance service was established, the RAF had to become involved if someone needed to be airlifted—I look to my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy), who talked about what would happen if there was no air ambulance. I remember one occasion when a Frenchman had fallen down a cliff and I could see that the back of his head was open. The RAF was called in from the royal naval air station at Culdrose and a helicopter came out to pick him up. That was the cost of not having the air ambulance, but it was a cost for the RAF, so someone did pick up the bill. The difference between the RAF helicopter and the air ambulance was what was on board.

On one occasion I had to call an air ambulance myself when I was a lifeguard in Crackington Haven. The chairman of my local Surf Life Saving club had managed somehow to cut his leg on his surf board. When we brought him to shore, we called the ambulance service, which sent the air ambulance. That necessitated that we clear the beach very quickly, which we did with the help of the Surf Life Saving club, so that the helicopter could come in. We loaded the chairman on board and got him safely away.

I had the foresight to pick up a loudhailer and ask all the tourists on the beach to put their hands in their pockets and fill up a bucket that I sent some of the nippers around with. That was a good way of raising money, and one of the points I made was that the people on the beach might one day need the air ambulance themselves, so I asked them to dig deep. However, I found having to do that quite demeaning. The air ambulance was an emergency service, but I was asking people who were visitors to Cornwall and who did not actually live there to pay for it. But they did the air ambulance very proud.

The air ambulance in Cornwall has continued. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) spoke about an individual who raised money in his constituency. When I grew up in north Cornwall there was a lady called Pearl Cory who did the same. Pearl was well known for going around the pubs and clubs and selling her lottery tickets, which funded the air ambulance. Again, I look to the Minister and say that there are people such as Pearl who go out and do that kind of work, which is admirable. Pearl was well known in every pub for the work she did. She received an OBE for her service, for which I am grateful.

Tracey Crouch: As a Cornishman, my hon. Friend will understand the close links between the air ambulance service, RAF search and rescue and, of course, the RNLI, which has been mentioned many times. I think that we should take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers, particularly those in the RNLI—having grown up in Cornwall, he will know that, sadly, some lifeboat men have been lost over the years—for their great work and bravery.

Dr Offord: I certainly echo my hon. Friend's comments, although I must correct her and say that I am not a Cornishman—I was born in Hampshire. I certainly acknowledge the work of the RNLI. As a keen yachtsman, I am always pleased that I do not have to seek their services, and hope I never will.

As a London MP, I know that air ambulance services are not valuable only in peripheral, rural counties such

as Cumbria, Cornwall or Yorkshire; they are so important to my constituents and me in London because of what they can achieve. I mentioned the RAF helicopter that was manned by the pilot, the linesman and the navigator but had no medical equipment. The air ambulance in London not only has a trained paramedic, navigator and pilot, but a trauma doctor and an observer, who is often observing as preparation for being a trauma doctor.

The helicopter has qualified people and specialist equipment on board. As we know from accidents in our constituencies, the issue is not always about what the patient is suffering from, but about getting them medical assistance. Air ambulances can provide that quickly—the similarity between Cornwall and Hendon, for example, is that the air ambulance can be on site quickly. As my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) said, they can take the patient to the most qualified centre that they can find and the patient can get treatment that would not have been available if a road ambulance had taken them to the nearest hospital.

The Minister is many things, including a maritime MP. If, for example, the VAT exemption of the RNLI were taken away, how would the organisation feel? I appeal to the Minister to accept the review and put the air ambulances of London, Cornwall, Yorkshire and everywhere else on the same footing as the RNLI. That is not only the fair thing to do; it is the best thing to do for our constituents.

6.6 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for bringing this important matter to the House. I congratulate my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), and my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley), both of whom paid moving tributes to their air ambulance services—the Yorkshire Air Ambulance and the Great North Air Ambulance Service.

The debate has been well considered and well informed. As hon. Members have said, it came about following an e-petition, signed by nearly 150,000 people, that calls on the Government urgently to review the amount of VAT paid on fuel for air ambulances and

“to return in the form of grants to Air Ambulance Service providers all the future VAT which the Treasury collects from them”.

I should like to put on the record my thanks to all those who have taken the time to sign the petition and bring this important matter to the Floor of the House.

We all now know that air ambulances play a key role in communities up and down the UK. They have been in use since the beginning of the 20th century. Early versions included the Red Cross's “Florence Nightingale”, which began to carry vital medical equipment across the country in 1934. However, it was not until 1987 that the first UK air ambulance charity, the foundation of the modern air ambulance service, was established in Cornwall.

The most recent air ambulance charity was established in Hertfordshire in 2008. There are now 30 helicopters in service for the 18 air ambulance charities in England and Wales, with a further two run by the Scottish Ambulance Service. We have heard moving tributes to the work that the services undertake around the country.

[Catherine McKinnell]

To give the overall picture, I should say that they undertake 19,000 missions a year, servicing 177 accident and emergency departments. On average, an air ambulance takes off every 10 minutes in the UK; every hour of every day, seven air ambulances may be attending accidents and medical traumas around the country.

The emergency teams have an enormous impact on our communities and play a vital role in supporting and extending the work of conventional land ambulances.

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) for being unable to get to the earlier part of the debate because of a meeting.

The hon. Lady will know that in the remote rural parts of Northumberland such as my constituency the air ambulance is vital because, without it, it would be extremely difficult to get cases to hospitals, which are often closer to her constituency in Newcastle, where they need to be treated.

Catherine McKinnell: Indeed. We all know of very moving stories in our respective localities where lives have, without doubt, been saved by air ambulances.

As the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) said, air ambulances have come an awfully long way since their early days. They are now high-tech, mobile A and E departments carrying senior trauma doctors alongside paramedics and transporting state-of-the-art medical equipment to wherever it is needed.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I recently met people at Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire Air Ambulance, to whom I pay tribute. They told me about some of the other problems they face, apart from VAT. Does the hon. Lady agree that there are other issues that we need to address, such as the fact that while some hospitals can accept air ambulances, others will need a land-based ambulance transfer?

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and I am sure that the Minister will take it on board and deal with it in his response.

Only a few months ago, air ambulances proved that they are at the cutting edge of technology. As the hon. Member for Hendon pointed out, we are in an ever-progressing medical world where we need to keep constantly under review all the services that provide vital care to people, but particularly the air ambulance service. A few months ago, for the first time, an air ambulance carried blood supplies allowing a blood transfusion to be carried out at the scene of an accident. London's air ambulance service believes that this innovation has been made possible due to a new refrigeration unit devised by the British military, and it could no doubt save hundreds of lives in the years to come.

It is no wonder that air ambulances continue to receive such outstanding support from members of the public and that over 150,000 people have been moved to sign the petition. I do not think that anyone would disagree that we have to support such services. However, as has been discussed, there are other issues relating to EU law and the harmonisation of VAT legislation across member states. Members have already mentioned the

anomaly whereby fuel for lifeboats is VAT-free. As hon. Members and members of the public who have signed the petition have noted, there is no equivalent provision in these EU-wide rules to allow for fuel bought by charities such as air ambulances to be provided VAT-free, although various provisions such as medical equipment and first aid kit are VAT-free, and air ambulance providers that lease the air ambulance rather than buying it outright receive different treatment for VAT. Air ambulance services are put in a difficult position when there are anomalies within the VAT system and they are subject to change.

The motion calls on the Government to review the tax treatment of air ambulances and their fuel and to carry out the requested study on compensating them for VAT payments. I will be interested to hear the Government's response to that, but there is more that they could do to try to help these life-saving services. As we all know, we are living in difficult times. Our economy is in a double-dip recession; borrowing forecasts are rising, not falling, and not only families and businesses are feeling the pressure and the squeeze but charities and organisations in the voluntary sector, which have been hard hit by the cuts that have been made. Collectively, air ambulances are one of the busiest voluntary services in the country. As charities, they rely on the support of over 1.25 million donors to keep them going. Air ambulances save hundreds of lives every year. They are expensive, but for those who benefit from the service they provide, they are priceless. The average spend per helicopter is more than £750,000. Put simply, without charitable donations and funding, these life-saving services would not exist. The men and women of these emergency teams work tirelessly. The Government should do all they can to support them.

There are changes that the Government could make immediately to ease the pressure on air ambulance services and other charities. As part of Labour's five-point plan for jobs and growth, we are calling on the Government to introduce a temporary reduction in VAT to 17.5% to bring down the cost of fuel across the board. Air ambulances and motorists alike would benefit from that. Since the Government increased VAT, people across the country have been feeling the squeeze. Equally concerning is the impact it has had on charities. It has cost them an overwhelming £143 million.

With air ambulances using about 130 litres of fuel on every mission, a decrease in the rate of VAT would bring immediate relief to those services up and down the country—so too would clarity on the Government's position on fuel duty, because it would allow them to plan for the future. The Labour party called for the 3p rise in fuel duty that was scheduled for August to be delayed to help hard-pressed motorists. Although we welcome the U-turn on that, it would be helpful if the Government explained what they will do in the long term on the price of fuel and how they will put it on a more sustainable footing for motorists and for air ambulance services.

As well as responding to the request in the motion put forward by the Backbench Business Committee, the Government could usefully respond to some additional questions to reassure air ambulance services that they have the support of the Government and that the Government are doing all they can in these difficult

times to ease the pressure on them, so that these hard-working teams can continue to save lives and carry out their excellent work. What plans do the Government have to provide support to the thousands of charities that are increasingly performing vital services in our communities and that are struggling as a result of the increases in VAT and the cuts to funding? How do the Government intend to pay for the delay in the 3p fuel duty rise in August? What are the Government doing to put the cost of fuel on a more sustainable footing to help not just households and businesses, but vital charitable services? Finally, what assessment has the Minister made of the possibility of offsetting the cost of VAT on fuel payments by air ambulances through the use of other departmental budgets or anticipated departmental underspends?

6.17 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Mark Hoban): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) and the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley) on securing this debate, and the more than 150,000 who signed the e-petition that triggered it.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali), and my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) and for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) for speaking. When the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) spoke, I was waiting to find out whether he looked at this issue when he was a Treasury Minister, but he did not share that insight. My hon. Friends the Members for Rugby (Mark Pawsey), for South Dorset (Richard Drax) and for Hendon (Dr Offord) also spoke.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) showed remarkable restraint in speaking for nine minutes before mentioning the five-point plan. Perhaps she should have shown more restraint and mentioned that this Government are deferring the fuel duty increase for which her Government legislated. She should be careful about the comments that she makes on this matter, because her Government's record in introducing the fuel price increases that we have deferred or cancelled is nothing to boast about.

This is a good opportunity to explain the Government's position on an issue that has generated a great deal of public interest. First, I want to reaffirm how much the Government appreciate the commitment of air ambulance charities. Since every other Member has named their local service, I will mention the excellent work of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight air ambulance service. We can all agree that, whether it is in Hampshire, Yorkshire, London, Cornwall or elsewhere, air ambulances play an important role in our society and we are very lucky to benefit from the valuable service that they provide.

I shall remind the House of the current position on VAT. It is a broad-based tax levied on final consumption, and businesses can recover VAT charged on supplies that will be used to produce products that will carry VAT. If a service is not charged for, the provider cannot claim back VAT, and that is the position of air ambulance charities.

Throughout the debate, hon. Members have mentioned their concern about the impact of VAT on air ambulance fuel and asked how it can be mitigated. One suggestion is that we seek an exemption from VAT for that fuel. Members, including the hon. Member for York Central and my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds North West and for Hendon, have drawn a comparison between air ambulance services and the provisions that apply to lifeboat services. The analogy between the critical life-saving services that both provide is clearly strong, but the relief from which the RNLI benefits relates not to charities or to life-saving services but to international transport. The RNLI makes good use of that, but it is not about life saving.

There is no equivalent provision for air ambulance services, or indeed for any other rescue services, and rectifying that would require a change to EU law. That would need unanimous approval by all 27 member states, and I am sure it will not surprise the House if I make the point that that is exceptionally difficult to achieve. The most recent discussions on reduced VAT rates took six years of charged negotiation to conclude. For that reason, I believe that there is little prospect of agreement on new zero VAT rates in the medium term, and the Government cannot legally introduce new zero rates without that agreement.

As my hon. Friends the Members for York Outer and for South Dorset noted, the air ambulance service comes in many shapes and sizes, and the VAT system supports different operating models in different ways. Charities that purchase their helicopters outright benefit from full VAT relief on the purchase cost, saving about £600,000 on the cost of a £3 million helicopter, whereas charities that lease their helicopters benefit from a similar relief on their leasing costs of about £86,000 a year for each helicopter. If the helicopter contractor makes no separate charge for fuel, the whole leasing cost is covered by the zero rate.

That situation has been likened to a zero rate on fuel for some charities and an unfair charge on others, but I disagree. Each charity is free to decide on the commercial operating arrangements it thinks best, so I would not describe the situation as an anomaly. Different operating models have different costs and benefits, and organisations of all kinds often lease their equipment because it is difficult, costly or risky to make a large up-front investment. I have seen no evidence to suggest that significant investment decisions are taken purely for tax purposes, given the many other substantial considerations that go into them.

The majority of air ambulances use aviation fuel rather than diesel, and aviation fuel for commercial flights is exempt from excise duties and taxed at a reduced VAT rate of 5% on each occasion when less than 2,300 litres is purchased. Although that is not specific to air ambulances, it represents a significant reduction in the cost of services for the majority of air ambulance charities, which use aviation fuel in their helicopters rather than diesel.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford came up with the typically ingenious suggestion of using the Value Added Tax Act 1994. However, I have to disappoint her, because the exemption to which she referred relates to relevant goods and accessories for ambulances. Relevant goods cover parts and accessories,

[Mr Mark Hoban]

but not fuel, as fuel is neither a part nor an accessory. It was an ingenious idea for dealing with the matter, however.

The motion suggests that there should be an investigation into what should be done. There are many merits to reviewing the position of air ambulances to see whether some consistency can be achieved, and in that context it is useful to consider two separate reviews that the Government have already conducted. First, on the London air ambulance, which was raised by the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow and my hon. Friends the Members for Hendon and for Brentford and Isleworth (Mary Macleod), the Department of Health is working with other bodies to undertake a review of the capability and funding of emergency medical care of the type provided by the London air ambulance service. That follows the publication of the coroner's report into the 7 July bombings. It is likely that the outcome of the review will have implications for other air ambulance services operating across the country. I can confirm that my officials will engage with the Department of Health on the review.

Rushanara Ali: Will the Minister indicate on what date we can expect the outcomes of the review and the publication of the report?

Mr Hoban: I do not have that information available but I will ensure that either my colleagues in the Department of Health or I write to the hon. Lady with it.

The second review that is being undertaken looks at the tax position of health care charities. The Secretary of State for Health is required by the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to lay a report before Parliament on matters that might affect the ability of providers of NHS services to carry out their activities. That report is expected to cover the full range of different providers, including charities, and will include taxation issues. Treasury officials will be actively involved in the review.

I therefore suggest that, rather than having a separate, Treasury-led review, the most efficient way forward is for the existing engagement to continue, and for the Department of Health and the Treasury to work collaboratively to consider the tax impacts of different funding models as part of the wider work already in hand.

John Healey *rose*—

Mr Hoban: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will tell us whether he looked at the matter when he was a Treasury Minister.

John Healey: The Minister mentions the review under the 2012 Act, but it is a review of charities that carry out NHS services. The whole point about the air ambulance services is that they are not NHS services, although they play a great role in emergency health support. Therefore, they are unlikely to be covered by the second review. The Minister says that the review proposed in the motion is useful, but will he accept the motion and conduct the review it urges on him? I am still not clear about that.

Mr Hoban: I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's knowledge—he is a former shadow Secretary of State

for Health—but my point is that the Treasury is working with Department of Health officials to ensure that the matter is covered by the review. I can confirm that, if it is ultimately not covered, the Treasury will carry out its own review. However, rather than having three reviews into air ambulances, I believe that two are sufficient if the second covers the tax issue. We are working with the Department of Health to ensure that that is the case. I can confirm to hon. Members that there will be a review and that the Government will not vote against the motion. Indeed, we believe it raises valid issues.

It would be possible in principle to introduce a refund system for air ambulance charities' non-business activities, although it is important to consider that in the context of broader public spending, as I am sure my hon. Friends appreciate.

To refer to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby, it is important for us to consider carefully how air ambulance charities can provide a better service by improving efficiency, and not just through refunds and tax breaks. Effective co-ordination of services could bring cost reductions that far outweigh the scale of a VAT refund on fuel. I am sure the House will join me in applauding such innovation and agree that we should continue to do all we can to improve this excellent service further. As my hon. Friend said, the air ambulance based in his constituency delivers a co-ordinated approach to providing the service across Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Rutland. It has made significant cost savings and earned the transformational change award at the Orange national business awards last year.

I hope I have set out clearly my reasoning on why a change to the VAT law is impractical. I believe the best review on a level playing field for providers is being done by the Department of Health, but, as I have made clear, if that does not fully cover air ambulances, the Treasury will conduct its own, separate review.

Hugh Bayley: I am most grateful to the Minister for giving—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. The Minister has finished and is not giving way. I call Guy Opperman.

6.29 pm

Guy Opperman: I suggest that the principle is the key. The proposed change would, without a shadow of doubt, potentially save lives. If anyone doubted the universal appeal of the air ambulance, we should look at who has spoken in this debate.

The debate was commenced on the Scottish border, in Hexham, but took in the constituencies of my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Sir Alan Beith), my hon. Friends the Members for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) and for York Outer (Julian Sturdy), and the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley), as well as other Yorkshire constituencies, such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew). We then went down to the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) and the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland). Then we travelled

down the country, taking in the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen) and the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth), as well as constituencies in London, such as those of my hon. Friends the Members for Brentford and Isleworth (Mary Macleod) and for Hendon (Dr Offord), before going down into Kent, to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch). We then went down to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax)—not forgetting my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey), whose constituency we passed on the way—before finally heading down towards the vast reaches represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris), and that is without taking into account the areas represented by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), and the Minister.

I am grateful that this has been a cross-party debate. My thanks go to all who signed the petition. The debate was also well informed, but it would have been helpful if the shadow Minister had remembered the 10 fuel duty rises from the last Government, which have had such an impact on the air ambulance service, and the fact that this Government have not put fuel duty up once.

To sum up, I want to give particular credit to two groups of individuals: to all the staff of the air ambulances, all over the country, and to all those who raise money for individual air ambulances. Last weekend I was at the Haydon Bridge beer festival, and I shall be at the Otterburn show raising money for these institutions this coming weekend. Anybody who has no plans for the Olympics in the summer can come and join me on the Pennine way odyssey, which is taking place in August, or give funds to the event. The principle is the key. The proposed change will save lives, and I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House supports wholeheartedly the work and actions of the Air Ambulance Service nationally, and all the individual crew members and staff, who provide an outstanding service to people up and down the UK; notes that the Air Ambulance Service is a charitable organisation, funded by donations given by the general public, and without any direct funding from Government; further notes that the Air Ambulance Service has saved successive governments millions of pounds; notes that the Air Ambulance Service provides an emergency service similar to the Lifeboat Service, and that the Lifeboat Service has been excluded from the EU VAT Directive on fuel costs since 1977, whereas the Air Ambulance Service has been required to pay for VAT on fuel; notes that successive governments have failed to provide a rebate or exemption to the Air Ambulance Service for this VAT; calls on the Government to conduct an urgent review of this situation; and further calls on the Government, in the next 12 months, to consider providing for grants to the Air Ambulance Service commensurate to the sums incurred by the Air Ambulance Service for the VAT on the fuel they purchase, and to publish the outcome of that review within this timescale.

London Local Authorities and Transport for London (No. 2) Bill [Lords]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the promoters of the London Local Authorities and Transport for London (No. 2) Bill [Lords], which was originally introduced in the House of Lords in Session 2007–08 on 22 January 2008, may have leave to proceed with the Bill in the current Session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of bills) (By Order).—(*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

6.32 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Very briefly, this is the revival motion for the Bill. I do not seek to prolong the House's proceedings. The sponsors and promoters of the Bill have made a series of changes to various clauses, following Second Reading and the various stages in the House of Lords. I support the motion, and I trust that we can proceed with the Bill through its various stages and get it on to the statute book as fast as possible.

6.33 pm

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I will not detain the House any longer than is necessary—it is ironic that we have just voted for different hours for the House, so that we should be finishing more quickly. We generally support the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Canterbury City Council Bill, Leeds City Council Bill, Nottingham City Council Bill and Reading Borough Council Bill

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That so much of the Lords Message [21 May] as relates to the Canterbury City Council Bill, the Leeds City Council Bill, the Nottingham City Council Bill, and the Reading Borough Council Bill be now considered.—(*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

6.33 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I support the revival motion for these Bills on behalf of the sponsors, who will be deeply grateful for their passing through the House again this evening.

6.33 pm

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): We support the motion as well. There is nothing else to say.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That the promoters of the Canterbury City Council Bill, the Leeds City Council Bill, the Nottingham City Council Bill and the Reading Borough Council Bill, which were originally introduced in this House in Session 2007–08 on 22 January 2008, should have leave to proceed with the Bills in the current Session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of bills) (By Order).—(*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

[Ian Murray]

Transport for London Bill [Lords]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That so much of the Lords Message [21 May] as relates to the Transport for London Bill [Lords] be now considered.—(*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

6.34 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): This is a vital measure that I hope will progress rapidly through the House to allow Transport for London to order its disposal and acquisition of property as fast as possible.

6.34 pm

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I shall spare the House my 90-minute speech. We support the proposals.

Question put and agreed to

Resolved,

That this House concurs with the Lords in their Resolution—(*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

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

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO INDUSTRY

That this House authorises the Secretary of State to undertake to pay, and to pay by way of financial assistance under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982, in respect of the Mobile Infrastructure Project, sums exceeding £10 million and up to a cumulative total of £150 million.—(*Mr Newmark.*)

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN UNION DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 119(11)),

PENSIONS

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 6715/12 and Addenda 1 to 3, relating to the Pensions White Paper: An Agenda for Adequate, Safe and Sustainable Pensions;

supports the Government's objective of an adequate and sustainable pension system; and shares the Government's concerns that UK occupational pension schemes would be at risk from new solvency requirements arising from the review of Directive 2003/41/EC on the activities and supervision of Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provision.—(*Mr Newmark.*)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That at the sitting on Tuesday 17 July the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr Bernard Jenkin relating to the Prime Minister's Adviser on Ministers' Interests not later than one hour after their commencement; and such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved.—(*Mr Newmark.*)

PETITION

VAT on fuel for the Air Ambulance Service

6.35 pm

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): Further to the debate that we have just conducted on the air ambulance service, and in the light of the e-petition that has been presented to the Backbench Business Committee, it is my great pleasure to present on behalf of the citizens of Hexham and Tynedale a petition by several hundred residents who have submitted it via the good offices of my local newspaper, the *Hexham Courant*, and its editor, Mr Colin Tapping. This petition supports the e-petition.

The petition states:

The Petition of residents of Hexham,

Declares that the Petitioners believe that the Air Ambulance Service should be afforded a similar exemption from VAT on fuel to that enjoyed by the Lifeboat Service; and notes that the Air Ambulance service provides an essential service that is funded by charitable donations, saving successive Governments millions of pounds.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to review VAT arrangements on fuel for the Air Ambulance Service, and ensure that it is not subject to VAT.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

[P001108]

High Energy Caffeine Drinks

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

6.37 pm

Mr Rob Wilson (Reading East) (Con): I am grateful to have secured this important debate on an issue of great concern to my constituents, and I very much welcome the opportunity to engage the House in considering the health effects of high energy caffeine drinks. At the outset, I must say that I have absolutely no intention of being alarmist about high energy caffeine drinks, as it is important to raise these issues in a temperate and moderate way. Furthermore, I do not intend to focus on any particular brand, because I am concerned with the issues and not with singling out individual brands; I shall mention them only in passing. When I use examples of specific brands, it will not be an attempt to target them; it will be because they will be useful to illustrate my arguments. It is my aim to bring to the House's attention a serious issue that requires rigorous examination. It is my view that we need a sensible discussion on this topic in order to assess the availability of high energy caffeine drinks to at-risk people, their health effects and any risks or dangers associated with them.

This issue was brought to my attention by my constituent, Mrs Rebecca Rye. When I met Mrs Rye, she expressed her concerns about the availability of high energy caffeine drinks after she had discovered her son, Edward, then aged 12, buying a 500 ml can of a product called Monster. She suspects that he might have been drinking such products without her knowledge for some time while on his way to school. Fortunately, she was able to put an end to his drinking them. The point is that Edward was drinking them without his mother's knowledge or permission because they were, and still are, so easy to get a hold of. After some challenges—I will not go into them tonight—Edward no longer drinks these high energy drinks and is aware of the health concerns: a happy conclusion was reached for the Rye family.

That is not always the case, however, and tragedy, with perhaps a connection to energy drinks, is no stranger to the Reading area. On new year's day 2010, Shaun Biggs of Lower Earley lost his life as a result of sudden death syndrome. Shaun, who was 21, had been out celebrating the new year and was drinking the popular mixture of vodka and Red Bull with his friends. After a few drinks, Shaun collapsed in his hotel room and later died at Wexham Park hospital. Following the police autopsy report, toxicology results showed an alcohol reading of 76 mg in 100 ml of his blood—notably less than the legal drink-drive limit of 80 mg. The amount of caffeine in his blood told a different story, as it showed an excessive level. Consequently, the coroner found that Shaun died of sudden cardiac arrest.

Shaun's parents are convinced that he died as a result of the caffeine he had ingested from the Red Bull. Peter Biggs, Shaun's father, has founded the campaign SAFE, which stands for the Shaun Awareness Foundation for Energy Drinks. In memory of Shaun, Mr Biggs aims to raise awareness of the potentially lethal health consequences of high energy drinks. It is to raise awareness of that issue that I asked for this debate.

I believe it is time that the UK carried out an authoritative medical study into the health effects of these drinks. Perhaps this could be carried out by the NHS itself or by engaging a leading university's toxicology or pharmacology departments. I therefore look forward to hearing from my hon. Friend the Minister about what can be done to facilitate an in-depth study here in the United Kingdom. As I will demonstrate, there is quite a lot of partial evidence from around the world, but a definitive UK study is needed so that we can have evidence-based Government policy in this area.

At present, the UK Food Standards Agency advises that

“children, or other people sensitive to caffeine, should only consume in moderation drinks with high levels of caffeine”.

This is sensible guidance, but apart from that, there is no regulation or any other particular guidance except for the wording on product packaging to emphasise that it is “not recommended” for children and pregnant women. In the circumstances, I do not feel this is sufficient for the dangers that appear to be present, particularly for vulnerable groups.

The Minister will be aware that EU regulations due to come into force in 2014 will require nutrition labelling and that this will have implications for the soft drinks industry and energy labels. That might be a good juncture significantly to improve labelling on these products and any additional warnings that might be deemed appropriate by the Department of Health.

At this point, I would like to give the British Soft Drinks Association credit for ensuring at least that information is available on the can as part of its code of conduct. Advising that a drink is high in caffeine content and therefore unsuitable for children under 16 or pregnant women is helpful. The industry deserves credit, too, for its precautionary policy of not marketing or promoting energy drinks to those under 16. We all know that energy drinks are popular, however, and are clearly branded to attract young people, but the industry needs to recognise that children under 16 are attracted to the manufacturers' marketing as much as their older peers. I see these drinks all the time in my Reading East constituency, and nine times out of 10 they are in the hands of someone under the age of 25, including many clearly under 16. Regardless of the labelling due to arrive in 2014, the attractiveness of these products to young people will remain.

Energy drinks are now marbled into British youth culture. Their manufacturers claim the benefits of drinking them include increased mental alertness, wakefulness, attention, physical endurance and stamina. Indeed, one brand claims it “gives you wings”. Their caffeine content can vary significantly, from 50 mg to 240 mg, depending on container, brand and size. Some products contain a very high caffeine potency, some the equivalent of 12 cans of cola or of four to five cups of coffee. The typical caffeine measurement of a mug of instant coffee is 100 mg, and 140 mg for filter coffee, according to the BBC health website, but no sensible parent would hand their 10-year-old or 12-year-old child a mug of filter coffee, would they?

I believe that now is the time to make such assessments, asking whether those levels of caffeine in drinks are wise or acceptable, and whether there is a need to take action. We cannot undertake a proper analysis of the

[Mr Rob Wilson]

situation, however, without the required knowledge and advice, provided to us by professionals. Any action taken must of course be evidence-based, hence the need for a comprehensive study and for this debate.

It is worth the House noting that concerns about these drinks have been voiced for some time, but little has really been done to tackle the issue throughout the country. That is not a party political point; it is just a statement of fact. As a free-market Conservative, it is not my instinct to lunge for regulation or to ban things—quite the contrary. It is my view that informed adults should be free to purchase goods as and when they see fit, so long as they do no harm to others. Indeed, that is part of the reason why I sought election to this Chamber.

If a product is dangerous and proven to be, however, the state has a legitimate role to play in protecting consumer interests, particularly when vulnerable groups are involved. Indeed, we as Members of this House are duty bound to do so for our constituents, and I also believe that manufacturers have a responsibility to do so for their customers.

In considering the matter, it is helpful to look at the approach that is undertaken overseas. In Europe, Denmark and Norway did not authorise Red Bull for general sale for several years; in Sweden, energy drinks are not sold in major outlets to children under the age of 15, because of a self-imposed ban by companies; and in Argentina, not usually a country from which I take guidance, there is an ongoing debate about banning their sale in nightclubs. We can see the merit in that, as energy drink consumption is prevalent among young people having a night out. Pubs and clubs in Reading, including the university's bars, sell plenty of drinks that include products such as Red Bull.

Across the Channel, France banned energy drinks in 1996, but its ban did not last and energy drinks are now on sale there. Sticking with the example of France, I note that awareness on the issue was raised when Irish athlete Ross Cooney, aged 18, died hours after drinking four cans of Red Bull, following a basketball match. His death prompted the French Government to ban Red Bull, but, following legal challenges from the European Commission in the European Court of Justice, the ban on the sale of Red Bull was lifted.

The ruling came about because EU regulations stipulate that a product made or sold in other EU countries cannot be banned unless a health risk is proven, and that is one of the key points—access to information and, importantly, awareness of the issue. That is where I believe a state-sponsored medical study could help us to understand energy drinks and their consequences for health, particularly among vulnerable groups such as children, adolescents and young adults.

In this country, energy drinks such as Monster, Red Bull and Relentless are readily available in shops and supermarkets and are sold like any other soft drink. Many people actually consider them a soft drink, but in reality they are not just any old soft drink; they are something very different. The average soft drink does not risk causing heart palpitations, hallucinations, seizures, mania, stroke, diabetes or sudden death.

That is not my list, but a list of findings in pockets of medical research and studies taken from numerous journals.

Studies carried out in Canada, Australia and the United States warn of the health effects of energy drinks. Let us take, for example, a recent study from the university of Miami, published in February last year in *Pediatrics*, the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

According to the report,

“these drinks have been reported in association with serious adverse effects, especially in children, adolescents, and young adults with seizures, diabetes, cardiac abnormalities, or mood and behavioural disorders or those who take certain medications.”

The report concludes:

“Energy drinks have no therapeutic benefit, and many ingredients are understudied and not regulated. The known and unknown pharmacology of agents included in such drinks, combined with reports of toxicity, raises concern for potentially serious adverse effects in association with energy-drink use.”

Those strong words pose serious questions and challenges. The need for more research, possibly leading to regulation, seems clear to me.

One of the ingredients that have been identified as needing further attention is taurine, an amino-acid commonly found in caffeine and sugar-laden drinks that jump-starts the metabolism. It is normally manufactured in the human body, and plays an important role in a good balanced diet. It is also found in, for example, meat and dairy products. However, some studies have indicated that synthetic taurine—the kind that is found in energy drinks—is linked to a range of illnesses, including high blood pressure, strokes, heart seizures and heart disease. Each 8 oz can of Red Bull contains 1,000 mg of taurine, and a can of Monster of the same size contains roughly same amount.

Given that taurine is such a prominent ingredient in energy drinks, it is surprising that we know so little about it. Researchers at Weill Cornell medical college in New York have said that

“Remarkably little is known about the effects”

of taurine in energy drinks, particularly on the brain, and other medical studies have indicated that it is linked to irritability and even hallucinations. Australian professor, Dan Lubman, director of the Turning Point Drug and Alcohol Centre, has said that it has been associated with self-mutilation in rats. Professor Lubman's view on energy drinks is that

“just because they are freely available in our market does not mean they are safe.”

I am strongly inclined to agree with him.

Changes in behaviour have been linked to heavy consumption of energy drinks, again with tragic consequences. I am mindful of the sad case of 11-year-old Tyler Johns from Bolton, whose personality completely changed as he began to drink excessive amounts of energy drinks, according to a national newspaper report. Tyler hanged himself in his bedroom, and his parents allegedly blame energy drinks for his “addiction”. Described by his father as once a happy-go-lucky child, he changed when he began consuming those drinks, which were freely available and cheap. He was suspended from school and enrolled in a re-integration programme at another school. During that time he was not drinking energy drinks, and his behaviour improved. He even scooped several certificates. When he resumed drinking, the poor pattern of his behaviour resumed, and tragically ended in suicide. When his mother found him, a 1 litre caffeine drink was found near his body.

Following an open verdict at Tyler's inquest, his parents remained convinced that energy drinks had claimed their son. After his son's inquest, Lee Johns said:

"Tyler is so missed. These drinks did affect him. They should not be sold to those under 16. There is so much said about what children should eat and there are links between children's behaviour and food. Yet these drinks are freely available."

Picking up Mr Johns's point, I urge the Government to consider a temporary ban on the sale of energy drinks to under-16s until research has been commissioned, or, at the very least, much clearer and mandatory labelling. Given the British Soft Drinks Association's policy of not targeting the under-16 age bracket, I cannot see why they would object to that suggestion.

Behaviour change in the young following the consumption of energy drinks is painfully obvious. In yesterday's edition of the *London Evening Standard*, the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver said that he would ban such drinks, remarking that parents

"might as well be giving them cocaine"

owing to the hyperactivity and disruption that they can cause in schools. Mr Oliver's words were passionate—that is his way—but he also made the point that teaching children who have downed a can of an energy drink is extremely challenging, and given his understanding of nutrition and his involvement with young people, I think that his opinions are well worth listening to.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's comments and would like to support his argument. In my constituency, a group of parents is collecting a petition on exactly his points about sales to under-16s and investigations into the long-term effects. They have seen a marked impact on their children from these drinks, which, as he said, can contain the equivalent of up to eight or nine cups of coffee. Unfortunately, parents cannot control their children at the point of purchase and are not with their children every moment of the day. I support his objectives, therefore, and will listen carefully to what the Minister says.

Mr Wilson: I welcome that intervention and wish the parents collecting that petition the best of luck. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will speak up on their behalf on many occasions in the House, and perhaps we can work together to push this campaign through the House.

I understand that Oxted school in Surrey has banned these drinks, as has Chatsmore Catholic high school in Goring, and that Cardinal Newman school in East Sussex has asked local shops not to sell drinks to their pupils. Concern also extends to the police. I understand that in Whitchurch, Hampshire, the police have asked local shops to stop selling the products to under-16s on Friday nights. I urge the Minister to be mindful of the concerns of our police and schools.

I have also mentioned hallucinations. In 2010, a study published in the *American Journal of Pharmacology and Toxicology* found that taurine is implicated in hallucination. Closer to home, academics at the University of Durham have recorded increased likelihood of hallucination from high caffeine intake. Similar conclusions were drawn by Professor Simon Crowe from the school of psychological

sciences at La Trobe university in Australia. High caffeine intake is linked to auditory hallucination, according to the professor.

Concerns have been relayed to me that the hallucinogenic risks of taurine are far more potent in the young. I am not a toxicologist—and as far as I am aware there are not many in this House or the other place—but it seems clear to me that we need a study into taurine in energy drinks and its effect on the human body. At present, it seems that we have a situation in which a form of Russian roulette is being played with energy drinks, sometimes with tragic consequences. An in-depth study would increase our understanding of these drinks and their consequences for health. Once we have that greater medical understanding, we can take appropriate action, if needed.

As I touched on earlier, energy drinks are targeted at the young. The drinks have become a sort of fashion status, a symbol, the trendy thing. It is not unusual to see their logos on T-shirts or baseball caps these days. As I said, these drinks are marbled into the youth culture in our country, and given the concerns surrounding their health effects a serious examination needs to take place here as well.

Stars in sport and the music industry are increasingly linked to energy drinks. For example, Relentless is a sponsor of 2013's UK-wide tour from the music channel Kerrang!, Welsh international rugby player Jamie Roberts advertises Red Bull, and the Welsh rock band Bullet For My Valentine feature on the Monster website. The advice of the Food Standards Agency—that children should consume heavily caffeinated drinks in moderation—clearly does not seem to be working. If young people think it cool and trendy to consume the drinks and they are easily and readily available, there is little we can do about it.

The study from the University of Miami viewed young people with cardiac or seizure disorders as particularly vulnerable. We just have to look at the figures to see the overall vulnerability. The study highlights the fact that, in 2007, 46% of the caffeine overdoses in the US occurred in people under the age of 19. In Ireland, between 1999 and 2005, 17 separate incidents of specifically energy-drink-related adverse events were recorded, including confusion, rapid heartbeat, seizures and two deaths. Similarly, between 2005 and 2009, New Zealand's poison centre reported 20 energy-drink-related adverse events, with 12 cases of vomiting, nausea, abdominal pain, jitteriness, rapid heartbeat and agitation referred for treatment.

The Miami report does not make it clear whether the Irish and New Zealand figures are those for young people. But hold this in mind: even if they are not exclusively younger cases and they apply solely to adults, the effects on younger people are presumably much worse. Polish research published by the European Society of Hypertension in May showed that energy drinks ranging in strength from 120 mg to 340 mg of caffeine have adverse effects for otherwise healthy adults aged between 20 and 35, including irregular heartbeats, anxiety and insomnia.

In February, *Time* magazine's "Healthland" section was right to label the Miami report's findings as "especially worrisome" for children suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, heart conditions or diabetes. Medical research has made a link—

7 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No.9(3)).

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

Mr Wilson: I will continue, Mr Deputy Speaker. Medical research has also made a link between energy drinks and the development of type 2 diabetes, but more work needs to be done on that. We must not lose sight of the fact that the treatment of type 2 diabetes cost the NHS £11.7 billion in 2010. When we include the cost to the economy, the total cost is roughly £27 billion lost to type 2 diabetes each year. I have few doubts that high-energy drinks can claim some responsibility for adding to those costs. I shall be interested to learn whether the Minister can shed any light on this, so that we can see the economic as well as the health cost of these high-energy drinks.

In summary, I believe that the case for a Government-initiated study is overwhelming—we should simply get on with it. But while the Government look at the research data with the experts, it would be wise to take a precautionary approach, particularly in respect of the under-16s. If we can prevent even one death with a temporary ban on shop sales to under-16s, we should do it. I urge the Minister and the Government to consider this very carefully.

As an absolute minimum we should ensure much clearer labelling on products, their ingredients and the dangers they pose to young people. That is not the nanny state at work; it would be a sensible and responsible Government intervention to inform the public of the scientific and medical facts on an issue that may well be costing lives. Similarly, it is not an attack on the soft drinks industry. In fact, I believe we should work with it on the issue, and I look forward to doing so.

Let me finish by saying that an evidence-based study, perhaps carried out by the Food Standards Agency and supervised by the NHS, will allow us to do our job in this place in making evidence-based decisions and ensuring that consumers, especially the vulnerable, are properly protected.

7.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Anne Milton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Mr Wilson) on securing this debate and applaud his desire not to be alarmist, as it is easy to be alarmist on occasions such as this, particularly given the tragic stories he quoted this evening. I also applaud his desire to have an evidence-based approach. Such an approach always sounds simple, but it is not always that easy to obtain in practice, because the evidence is sometimes conflicting and confusing.

There is no doubt that nothing is more important than the food and drink we give to our children. Innumerable studies have been done on how it affects their education, their behaviour and their development. It is our responsibility as politicians, as adults and as parents to make sure that all children are eating a good and varied diet. My hon. Friend is clearly well aware that caffeine appears in many different foods, from various sources. It occurs naturally in things such as tea, coffee and chocolate, and is traditionally used as a component for the flavouring of cola drinks. In addition,

of course, the reason for this debate is that it is also added as a stimulant to energy drinks. What is interesting for me in doing this job is that it is sometimes staggering how low awareness is. I think that most people are aware that caffeine is present in coffee, but they are perhaps not so aware that it is also present in tea and chocolate.

We need to recognise, of course, that in sensible doses caffeine is perfectly all right. However, as my hon. Friend will no doubt know if he has ever drunk one too many espressos, it does have its side effects. In 2003, the European Scientific Committee on Food specifically looked at high-caffeine soft drinks, finding that in its opinion those drinks did indeed cause increased excitability, irritability, nervousness or anxiety in some people who drank them, particularly if those people were normally low consumers of caffeine—that is where we get into the issue about children. Such effects were seen when someone consumed about 5 mg of caffeine per kilogram of bodyweight. That is the equivalent of about 300 mg of caffeine for an average adult and 150 mg for an average 10-year-old child. As a comparison, the amount of caffeine in a can of a typical high-caffeine energy drink is 80 mg, which is about the same as that found in a mug of instant coffee.

The committee said that caffeine appears to affect people's heart rate and blood pressure, but it also said that those effects were short term and did not appear to have any long-term effects or cause heart attacks. I remind my hon. Friend that that study was conducted in 2003. The Committee did not at that time consider it necessary to establish a recommended daily limit for caffeine.

There are many anecdotal reports of young people having heart attacks after drinking too many energy drinks—my hon. Friend mentioned some of those cases—but those reports are not always complete, and these cases have often involved someone drinking such drinks along with consuming alcohol or drugs, thus clearly limiting the ability to draw conclusions. That shows why building up a good evidence base can be quite difficult.

The independent UK Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment is currently investigating the interaction between caffeine and alcohol, and is expected to report back later this year. My hon. Friend mentioned a number of tragic cases and the campaign started by some of the families who have been affected, and I want to applaud their efforts. It is always remarkable to see how families can turn a tragic incident into a campaign to do good for others. The committee's study will be important in further informing us about the effects of caffeine.

Consumers need to be aware that there is information about caffeine content on the labels of high-energy drinks. Because some people may be particularly sensitive to caffeine, legislation was introduced across Europe in 2003 that stated that drinks with high levels of caffeine had to be labelled with the words "high caffeine content". Those drinks also had to carry an indication of the actual caffeine content in milligrams per litre, so people can see exactly how much caffeine they are drinking. That labelling is not needed for tea and coffee, or drinks based on them, because it is generally accepted that people already know they contain caffeine. We do need to be much better at informing consumers, and persuading them to be better consumers and to read the labels of

the products they eat and drink. The labelling requirement comes into play when a drink contains more than 150 mg of caffeine per litre. A typical high-caffeine energy drink would contain 320 mg of caffeine per litre, and therefore would have to be labelled.

In line with the May 2010 voluntary code of practice developed by the British Soft Drinks Association, many high-caffeine drinks also carry extra labelling to make it clear that such drinks are not suitable for children or people sensitive to caffeine. My hon. Friend praised the BSDA for its action and mentioned that recent changes at European level will make such labelling mandatory by December 2014. I am always pleased to see UK manufacturers acting responsibly by pre-empting legislation and making sure such labelling is already the norm. The code of practice also states that high-caffeine soft drinks should not be advertised, marketed or promoted to those under 16.

Finally, Government advice is that children and other people who are sensitive to caffeine should be careful with high-caffeine soft drinks, just as they should be with other products with lots of caffeine, such as coffee. Our advice is that they should be sensible and drink them only in moderation. If only it was that easy, and people just took the advice they were given; sadly, however, they do not always do so.

Mr Rob Wilson: My hon. Friend seems to acknowledge that children under 16 should not be drinking these drinks, and I think that that is even the advice of the industry. However, while a 12-year-old can go to their corner shop and buy those drinks there is no deterrent and nothing to stop them. What can the Minister say to me tonight about what will help to stop 12-year-olds going into local shops and buying these drinks unless we do something about it in this place?

Anne Milton: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and I will go into that point in a little more detail. We live in a world where children and adults are bombarded with information and it is not always possible to legislate our way out of a problem. I will say something more about that in a minute.

My hon. Friend referred to a report by the University of Miami on the possible effects of energy drinks on children and young people. Officials at the Food Standards Agency consider the study a useful review of a great deal of existing information, but it does not provide conclusive evidence to change the conclusions previously drawn by the EU Scientific Committee on Food. It does, however, add to our information base, to which we must continue to add.

I want to reassure my hon. Friend, just as I would like to reassure everyone, that the Food Standards Agency will continue to monitor the situation. It is extremely important that all Governments remain open minded and continue to look at any new evidence that becomes available. At the moment, the scientific advice is that the

effects of caffeine are short term and information labelling is thorough and widespread, but, as I have said, that is not the end of the story.

My hon. Friend quoted extensively from the experiences of other countries. It is critical to remain open minded as new evidence emerges. I do not often have the privilege of being able to talk about this but I sit on the European Health Council, which gives me an opportunity to meet Health Ministers from other European countries and, indeed, such issues come up at those meetings. It is important to share experiences. He talked about raising awareness and I have no doubt that the opportunity he has taken to raise the issue tonight will play its part in doing just that.

The difficulty and the challenge in considering evidence, of course, is filtering out the impact of the particular ingredients in these drinks when there are so many confounding factors. That is why the Government need to be mindful of the research that is produced, particularly when there are also obvious and immediate commercial pressures. We are always battling against that.

I note my hon. Friend's quote from Jamie Oliver. Passion is never a bad thing. It is good to feel the passion from other people and it helps raise awareness. The problem of the sale of alcohol to under-age children is not easy in itself. I note and commend the action taken by some schools that have taken a lead, presumably because they have had problems with the behaviour of children and are concerned about the quantity of high-energy drinks their children are drinking. My hon. Friend has covered a lot of detail, particularly about the impact of taurine. Sadly, I cannot respond specifically on the question of that one ingredient this evening, but if there is any more information that I feel will be useful or helpful to him I will ensure that he receives it in a letter.

Responsibility for public health will move to local authorities. We are keen to achieve much better informed consumers, and that includes children. Smoking is taken up by 320,000 children each year, and we have a big battle on our hands. In my role as Minister with responsibility for public health, it is important that I understand that some of the choices that children face are very complex. We need to ensure that they have the skills they need to make good decisions about their life and that they have the information on which to base those decisions.

My hon. Friend strayed into type 2 diabetes, and there is a danger of my straying much further tonight. However, I finish by commending my hon. Friend for raising this issue and for the work that he has obviously done with some of those people and families who have been affected by this. I look forward to working with him in the future to ensure that we do all that we can to further the cause he has raised.

Question put and agreed to.

7.15 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 11 July 2012

[MR JAMES GRAY *in the Chair*]

Hospital Services (West London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(James Duddridge.)

9.30 am

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Mr Gray, and a pleasure to see so many colleagues from west London, of various parties, here for an important debate that concerns us all. It is a particular pleasure to see the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Angie Bray), relieved of the cares and constraints of office and therefore able to speak. I am slightly surprised that she chose to be pushed over House of Lords reform rather than this issue, the third and fourth runways at Heathrow airport or the cuts to Sure Start, pensions and other things that are going into the next manifesto, but we all find our path to salvation. I also welcome the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), who already adorns the Back Benches. I hope that we can see others, including the hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), joining the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton soon in order to fight the appalling changes to our health service.

Members of Parliament for the north-west London NHS area represent 2 million Londoners, and I know that all of them, whether they can be here or not, are very concerned by the proposals in the consultation document, "Shaping a healthier future", published on 2 July. I will primarily deal with that document today. I intend to confine my comments, as the debate's title suggests, to the effect on the major hospitals in north-west London of the proposed changes. Given the time constraints and the fact that hon. Members with more knowledge of hospitals in their own constituencies are here to speak, I will deal principally with the risks to Charing Cross and Hammersmith hospitals, but I will try to put those in the wider context of what can only be called a crisis in the NHS in north-west London. That is in the light of the further decision last week to put the future of Royal Brompton hospital at risk by the closure of children's cardiac services there and the failure by Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust to manage waiting lists and GP referrals.

The Minister will have seen the letter that I sent last week to the Secretary of State, asking for independent intervention to rescue the health service in west London before matters get more out of hand. I will expand on that and hope that the Minister can respond positively.

The other point that I will make in opening the debate is that the consultation should not be a Dutch auction. I do not think that any hon. Member will have come here to say, "Don't close my hospital; close his or hers." Every hon. Member and, indeed, every member of the public I have spoken to in the past few weeks wants to challenge not the detail or options that we are offered, such as they are, but the premise that such a

major downgrading of the health service is sustainable, safe or sensible. If any hon. Member here felt a moment's relief when they saw the schedule of closures—in particular, of accident and emergency departments—and realised that their local hospital was not on it, that relief was short-lived. The question immediately arose: how will the five remaining A and Es cope with the consequence of closing four busy departments and the consequent downgrading of other hospital services?

I am pleased to see here hon. Members representing, I think, all the north-west London hospitals, not only those under threat. Neither I nor my constituents are resistant to change in the NHS or unaware of the cost pressures that it faces. Indeed, it is the Government, not us, who need to be candid about both their failure to fund the NHS and the underlying financial motivation for these proposals.

The medical director for north-west London has been admirably frank. In approving the consultation two weeks ago, he stated that the local NHS would "literally run out of money" if the closures did not go ahead.

Mary Macleod (Brentford and Isleworth) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Does he agree that whatever the shortfall in funding in London that he talks about, more funding has gone into the NHS from the current Government than ever before?

Mr Slaughter: Apart from the bit of fun that I had at the beginning of the debate, I am going to stay off party politics. I think the hon. Lady knows that the NHS was rescued under a Labour Government, and knows about the increase in funding then. She will also know from articles in the press this week and last that in fact, the promise made by the Prime Minister before the election to increase funding for the health service is not being kept. *[Interruption.]* I therefore think that that was a bad point to make. *[Interruption.]*

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order.

Mr Slaughter: There has already been significant change in hospital services in north-west London. That has been for clinical and financial reasons. It has involved within Imperial the centralising of services, including renal, paediatric, oncology and vascular specialisms. More of that was anticipated. Other proposals for savings have been leaking out of Imperial for the past six months. Further moves away from hospital to community or GP services were expected—but nothing on the current scale.

This review is driven by the need to cut costs and is unrestrained because the chaotic reorganisation in the NHS, for which the Minister must answer, means that there is no accountability on the part of those who are making decisions. The Joint Committee of Primary Care Trusts, itself a body artificially created to make these cuts, is neither their author, nor will it survive to see their execution.

I would like to say a little about the history of hospital services in my part of west London, the scale of the changes proposed and the flawed process under which they are being made. I would then like to summarise

[*Mr Slaughter*]

the emerging public and professional views on the proposals, before finally asking the Minister for his response. Given that many in the NHS see the north-west London proposals as a prototype for what will happen elsewhere, it is not satisfactory for him to disown interest. He must either justify or be prepared to criticise the loss of front-line hospital services.

Each of the hospitals now under threat has a long and distinguished history. I am afraid I am old enough to remember when Charing Cross was Fulham hospital and when Chelsea and Westminster was St Stephen's. Hospitals have stood on the Hammersmith campus since 1905 and at Charing Cross since 1884. Originally, these were workhouse infirmaries, fever hospitals or military hospitals. They have evolved into the world-class treatment centres that they are today. I do not want to take up a great deal of time with the history, but while preparing for the debate, I did come across this interesting paragraph on the opening of Hammersmith hospital:

"Immediately on opening, there was an outcry about the cost of the...building...£261,000...and its lavishness. The vestibule was paved with mosaic and was surrounded with a dado of the most expensive encaustic tiles. The dining hall was 'of baronial splendour'. The press dubbed it the 'Paupers' Paradise' and the 'Palace on the Scrubs'."

I did not know the *Daily Express* was going in 1905, but clearly it was. I am not sure that that was a completely accurate representation of the hospital, because its annual report for 1957 illustrated a granite block—part of the last consignment to the workhouse for breaking up by the inmates of the casual ward. I do not want to give the Minister any ideas about reintroducing rock breaking for out-patients, but that does show that we have come a long way over that time.

The Minister may say that I am being nostalgic in looking at the history of Hammersmith's hospitals or that it is evidence that change in the health service is nothing new, but that misses the point. These hospitals have grown up on their current sites and changed in response to local need. These are some of the most densely populated parts of the UK. There is intensive residential development in the area: tens of thousands of new homes are planned for the next decade. This is a population with complex health needs and high turnover. This is an area with major transport infrastructure—air, road and rail—and with risks ranging from major trauma accidents to tropical and infectious diseases.

The accident and emergency departments under threat are always busy. They are trusted by my constituents. They have evolved to work side by side with GP practices, walk-in clinics and urgent care centres. However, they work, because the level of clinical expertise available can be adapted to cases ranging from the relatively minor to the very serious. I understand the debate about having fewer major trauma centres—the trade-off between travelling further and losing critical treatment time against the quality of care on arrival. I do not think that that argument is settled, not least because of the unpredictable and congested road system in west London, but also because of the conflicting opinions as to how crucial minutes can be in reaching specialist care in different trauma cases. What is unarguable is that the vast majority of patients currently attending A and E will potentially receive a worse service. They will not be

sure whether their condition merits a longer trip to a hospital that still has A and E services, or whether seeing a GP at an urgent care centre will suffice. There will certainly be confusion and delay, and overall standards in quality of care will fall.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I apologise for missing the first couple of minutes of my hon. Friend's remarks. Does he accept that, notwithstanding the proposed closure programme, there is already growing concern about the length of waiting times in A and E? Many of my constituents will be worried that their wait at Northwick Park hospital A and E unit will increase as a result of this closure programme.

Mr Slaughter: My hon. Friend missed the point that I made at the beginning: this affects all MPs and all communities in north-west London, not only those expecting the closure of services. The closures go against the thrust of the changes in the health service over the past five to 10 years, which have seen the huge pressure on A and Es relieved by the addition of urgent care centres, not the replacement of A and Es by them.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Simon Burns) *rose—*

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr Slaughter: I give way to my hon. Friend and will give way to the Minister in a moment.

Ms Buck: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He was with me when we met representatives of north-west London recently and were advised that the number of A and E attendances is rising by about 10% a year. Does he agree that, even for those of us who agree that in an ideal world, we would reduce unnecessary A and E admissions through the provision of quality care in the community, it is wrong to propose the closure of A and E units before we have a demonstrable improvement in the community facilities that would allow for that reduction in unnecessary A and E admissions?

Mr Slaughter: Indeed, and I will come on to that when I talk about the process and history of the closure of services.

Mr Burns: I rise in response to the comments of the hon. Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) on A and E waiting times. Would he like to tell us what the percentage standard is for A and Es and what was achieved in his trust?

Mr Slaughter: I am here to question the Minister, and I hope that in response he will not adopt the complacent tone that he has just shown.

Mr Burns: *rose—*

Mr Thomas *rose—*

Mr Slaughter: I will not give way to the Minister again yet. I want to make some progress. We shall see what happens in a few moments, but after I give way to my hon. Friend, I really must move on.

Mr Thomas: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I do not know whether the Minister's intervention was prompted by the recent answers he gave to my parliamentary questions. He will be aware of the approximately 180,000 people who waited more than four hours from arrival in A and E to departure. Will my hon. Friend ask the Minister for an assurance in his final remarks that the figure is not likely to rise for the 2011-12 period?

Mr Slaughter: I am happy to trade statistics with the Minister, but the debate is not about incremental performance, but the fundamental change to services.

Mr Burns: I just want to inform the hon. Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas), because he clearly does not know, that the percentage standard for A and E waits is 95% and in his trust in the past quarter it is 97.5%, which is 2.5 percentage points above the standard.

Mr Slaughter: I am glad that the Minister is praising the standards of health care in Hammersmith. Saving the recent problems over referrals, we are all very proud of the standard of clinical care that people receive in our world-class hospitals under a world-class trust. The subject of the debate, which I hope that the Minister will address, is the fundamental changes being wrought on that and other trusts in north-west London, which will damage the standard of medical care and the health of my constituents. He has entirely missed the point.

The headline news from the consultation launched last week is the proposed closure of both A and E departments in my constituency, along with two of those closest by: Central Middlesex and Ealing. Clearly, that is a disaster for everyone living in the area, perhaps particularly for those in Shepherds Bush, White City and Old Oak, which include some of the poorest areas in London, with low car ownership, poor health outcomes and low life expectancy. The consequences for the two hospitals however are very different. Although neither will provide emergency care for my constituents, Hammersmith will remain a specialist hospital, but Charing Cross will be reduced to little more than an urgent care centre on an otherwise vacated site. Of the 500 beds, all but 30 will be closed or moved elsewhere. One of the largest and busiest hospitals in London will effectively become a clinic.

I want to move on to talk a little about the process of the review. I want to spend time on that, because it is the reason why there is so much disquiet and so much need for external intervention. Proposals for the closure of hospitals in Hammersmith have a chequered history. In my constituency office, I have a photograph of the former Health Minister, Ann Keen, standing on a chair with a megaphone outside Charing Cross hospital, when she was head of nursing there in the early 1990s and there was a massive community campaign against the then Conservative Government's attempt to close the hospital. That campaign was successful, as I am sure this one will be. Over and between the past two elections there were, what I can only call scurrilous rumours that Charing Cross hospital would close either wholly or in part. That substantially muddied the waters, and was done, I think, purely for electoral advantage, in that there was no substance to those rumours at the time.

The rumours resurfaced last autumn in an article on the front page of *The Independent*, which speculated that either St Mary's or Charing Cross or both would close. Following that, I, my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) and, I am sure, others, sought assurances from Imperial College trust that that was not the case, and we were given those assurances. We are now told in the documentation, which I have brought with me today and was approved by the Joint Committee of Primary Care Trusts two weeks ago, that, over the past two years, when we were being assured that there would not be closures of the type now mooted, a very close consultation was going on and we all knew about it.

To take one page from the documents, it tells me that I received five pieces of correspondence from the trust in relation to the closures, and that at a meeting in March, which I did not attend, I was represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North. She is in the room and may contradict me: I did not know about that meeting and I certainly did not authorise her to represent me at that meeting.

Although I do not rule out some of the documents having been sent to me, they are junk e-mails—I do not use the term offensively; it is accurate. They are electronic newsletters that go straight into the very efficient House of Commons spam system. If we retrieve the e-mails and look at them, we can read things like, "There will be major improvements at Hammersmith and Charing Cross hospitals in the near future." Even the document sent on the Thursday before the decision was taken, which was hidden in another newsletter from the chief executive of the trust, did not spell out the proposals.

When we walked into the decision-making meeting at Central hall Westminster two weeks ago, we were handed a bundle of 18 volumes of documentation to look at, which I believe had been available online for two days before that—very generous. We were expected to understand and respond then. That is not consultation. We are now told that a thorough process has been gone through, in which opinion formers have been consulted, and therefore we can proceed to the public consultation. We are presented with a fait accompli. The medical director of NHS North West London, Dr Spencer, when asked whether it was worth people lobbying and petitioning as part of the consultation process, said:

"No. People are currently wedded to mediocre services. If we don't do this then people need to realise that our hospitals will go bankrupt. We have already seen this in south London."

That does not sound to me like open and reasonable consultation. What is taking place is a pretence of consultation.

The options are no options at all. There is a preferred option, which I am sure will be adopted, and two others. All of them involve closing the A and E department at Hammersmith hospital, and two involve closing the A and E department at Charing Cross hospital. We will get the usual farrago of road shows, boards and helpful-looking people standing around with clipboards asking for our views. I am told that there is a five-page document that will be delivered, doubtless summarising the much larger consultation document, to all households in the area. However, if someone actually wants to take part in the consultation, they either have to go online—a lot of my constituents do not have access to the internet—or request a questionnaire.

[*Mr Slaughter*]

NHS North West London could not provide me with a copy of the questionnaire or indeed a copy of the consultation document for the meeting that I had last Friday. I managed to print one off the internet and Sir Humphrey would have a field day with it. Buried at question 15, it says:

“How far do you support or oppose our recommendation that we should use our high quality hospital buildings with spare space as elective hospitals?”

At question 17, it says, and this is the closest that the questionnaire comes to asking a clear question in all its 50 pages:

“How far do you support or oppose the recommendation that there should be five major hospitals in North West London?”

At the meeting where it was decided that there would be consultation, I specifically asked, “Will there be questions that people will understand? Will there be questions such as, ‘Do you agree that Hammersmith hospital’s A and E should close?’, or, ‘Do you agree that the hyper-acute centre should move?’, or ‘Do you agree that the A and E at Charing Cross should close?’” There are no questions of that kind. As far as I can see, there is no question that relates to Charing Cross hospital’s A and E department at all. The only question that relates to Hammersmith hospital says:

“All the options above include the recommendation that Hammersmith Hospital should be a specialist hospital. There would continue to be a maternity unit at Hammersmith. How far do you support or oppose the recommendation that Hammersmith Hospital should be a specialist hospital with a maternity unit?”

My constituents are supposed to take from that the fact that they are losing their A and E service. As I have said already, they are living in some of the most deprived communities in the country and many of them have English as a second language. So I do not accept that this consultation is a valid process.

I want to finish before 10 am, because I know that a number of Members wish to speak. However, I will just make two or three other points. First, there is professional opinion to consider. It is increasingly clear that this proposal does not have the support of the local GPs. At a meeting of Ealing GPs a week or so ago to which my colleagues—my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) and for Ealing North (Stephen Pound)—may wish to refer if they speak, there was universal opposition to the proposal from the 50 or so local GPs who were present. The only local GPs who did not oppose the process were those who are involved in it, and they abstained. I have written to Hammersmith GPs and they have expressed only questions, queries and doubts about the process in response to my inquiries.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way briefly on a point of information?

Mr Slaughter: Yes.

Stephen Pound: At that particular meeting of GPs, the voting figures, which I am sure hon. Members will want to know about, were 47 against and three for.

Mr Slaughter: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. I had thought that the vote was 47 against, with three abstentions, but I always stand to be corrected by him.

The bodies that have supposedly devised these proposals are indeed the commissioning groups. As far as I can see, the only people supporting these proposals on a clinical level among the GP community are those who are heavily involved and who perhaps have a vested interest in relation to those commissioning groups, which of course will not take control until April next year.

It is absolutely true that, unlike some other hospital trusts, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust is at best acceding to this process and at worst actively supporting it. It is very clear why it is adopting that approach and why it would see the closure of two of its own A and E departments. The Imperial trust is in deep and dire financial trouble. It has a deficit of more than £100 million and the ability to close down significant services and, perhaps more importantly, to free up one of the most lucrative pieces of real estate in London—in other words, most of the Charing Cross hospital site—presumably for commercial disposal will, it believes, allow it to see its way out of its financial difficulties. Therefore, I am afraid that its opinion is coloured by that judgment.

Let me move on to discuss public opinion briefly. At 48 hours’ notice, I called a public meeting by e-mail and 250 people turned up. I also put a petition online and within a day 750 people had signed it. We have set up a consultative committee under the banner, “Save Hammersmith and Fulham hospitals”, which involves 40 concerned local residents. They have no particular political affiliation; they simply care about their local health services.

All that is but the germ of what I am sure will be the largest campaign of public opposition across west London that we have seen. There will be no safe parliamentary seats in west London if the Government pursue this course of action; there will be no limit on the opposition to the proposals, and there will be marches, petitions and protests until they are withdrawn.

I am hopeful that there will be a debate—at least a partial one—next Tuesday on the Floor of the House about children’s cardiac services, and therefore I will not spend as much time today discussing that issue as I had planned to. All I will say now is that the same body that has been involved in the proposals about my area—the Joint Committee of Primary Care Trusts—has taken the extraordinary step of recommending the closure of the children’s cardiac unit at the Royal Brompton hospital, despite knowing that there were no risks attendant on keeping it open. On the contrary, it is a world-class unit with world-class doctors and surgeons. Moreover, the JCPCT also took that step in the knowledge that a range of other world-class services at the Royal Brompton hospital—the respiratory service, the cystic fibrosis service and the neuromuscular services—are also at risk. The Royal Brompton hospital is not in my constituency, but it is used by my constituents and indeed I substantially used it myself when I was severely asthmatic in younger life. It is unthinkable that it should be put at risk by this decision to recommend the closure of services and I am glad to see that there is opposition to the review by the JCPCT from around the country.

Let me also mention the concerns that we in Hammersmith have about the Imperial trust and its use of data. I will quote from an article in last week’s *Fulham and Hammersmith Chronicle*, a local newspaper:

“An investigation has been launched to determine whether data recording blunders by Imperial College NHS Healthcare Trust could have cost lives. The panicked trust...realised there

had been major errors in the way it handled recording files for patients referred for cancer tests earlier this year. People suspected of having cancer are required to be tested within two weeks of being referred by their GP. But Imperial found its records of this treatment path was flawed, with many incomplete, giving no indication of whether the patient was tested or not, and others duplicated.”

Furthermore, as was widely reported in the press last week, there were 25 deaths in that period in the local area that are still under investigation.

The issue of the Imperial trust’s record-keeping and referrals was first raised by me in February. I know that there has been some limited improvement in clearing the backlog of cases, but it is simply not acceptable that a trust serving such a large proportion of west London’s population can continue to keep data in this condition.

That brings me to my final point, which is what I am seeking from the Minister. The Secretary of State for Health wrote to me last week and said that the consultation process

“is a matter for the local NHS.”

However, he acknowledged that

“there is an independent scrutiny and review process...which is overseen by local Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs). OSCs have the power to refer proposals...which I am then able to pass...to the Independent Reconfiguration Panel for advice.”

I have no doubt that will happen at some stage, because there is such overwhelming opposition to these proposals from local authorities as well as from MPs and their constituents across west London. However, given the farce of this purported consultation and the way that this matter has been handled so far by NHS North West London, it would be better for the Government to act now and call off this consultation, review the proposals and engage genuinely with MPs, clinicians and local authorities in reaching a sensible set of conclusions and proposals. We are not luddites; we do not oppose change in the health service for the sake of it. But our NHS and our local hospitals are very special places. People who have used those hospitals—sometimes over generations—have a unique relationship with them. I am sure that is true. I know that the Minister is familiar with the area and has past associations with it, so he will know what I am talking about. I know that he will also be aware of my constituents’ special and particular problems in terms of complex health needs.

I ask the Government in what I hope is an open-handed spirit to look now at what is happening, not only in the Imperial trust but in NHS North West London, because this situation cannot be allowed to continue.

9.59 am

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr Slaughter) on getting this important debate, which affects all of us who are central and west London MPs. I am sure that he regrets the necessity of the debate. Our constituencies have a number of hospitals in common and, over some time, he and I have discussed health matters that affect them. New commissioning boards, run by local GPs, will come into play from next April. The Westminster board will share its management with Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, and Hounslow, and it is currently considering how the hospital configuration in west London should work. It is the soon-to-be-defunct primary care trusts, however, that will formally make the final decision.

As recently as 25 June, the North West London Joint Committee of Primary Care Trusts considered the business case for closing four A and E departments in the north-west London region. The plans are out for consultation until 6 October, and the results will, I think, be presented to the PCTs in advance of final consideration next January. As the hon. Member for Hammersmith pointed out, it is recommended that four departments in west London be closed, including those at the Hammersmith and Charing Cross hospitals in his constituency. The plan is that people can easily be steered away from A and E and towards their local health centres and GP services. There are of course a couple of fall-back options, both of which involve closing Hammersmith, though. One also involves closing Charing Cross, and the other affects the Chelsea and Westminster hospital, which, although outside my constituency—in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands)—serves a considerable number of my constituents. The joint committee seems to favour the closure of both Hammersmith and Charing Cross A and Es.

I agree with the hon. Member for Hammersmith that there is little doubt that if Charing Cross’s A and E is closed, we will see the end of a hospital there, because it would, I suspect, be only a matter of time before the majority of the Fulham Palace road site was disposed of commercially. I have two major hospitals in my constituency, one of which, Barts, serving the eastern part of my patch from over in the City of London, is not affected by any of the considerations. The other is St Mary’s, Paddington which, ironically, is probably more important to the constituents of my neighbour, the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), than to mine, although a significant number of my constituents in the Hyde park area and Marylebone use it as their local hospital.

The Department of Health has been mindful of the fact that hospitals in the centre of London, which serve large working populations as well as residential ones, give the NHS more bang for the buck. I have often observed that my constituency has been well served over the past decade and a half by new walk-in centres and the like. The joint committee might have been tempted to realise one of its most valuable assets on the St Mary’s site, which is, like Charing Cross, a prime piece of central London real estate. From the recommendations, it seems that that temptation has been resisted, and I am glad about that, but, like the hon. Member for Hammersmith, I am not going to take anything for granted until the whole process is over. There is, inevitably, a sense that there is an element of a zero-sum game here but, like the hon. Gentleman, I do not recognise that we should necessarily be in this place, for reasons I will set out.

My constituency next-door-neighbour, the hon. Member for Westminster North, and I would have vigorously fought any plans to close St Mary’s, because the hospital has a proud historical importance and is incredibly well served by public transport, which makes it a key local service for countless central London residents. Let us not forget, in this week of all weeks, the seventh anniversary of the terrible 7/7 bombings in London. One of the bombings was on the Edgware road, and St Mary’s, Paddington had pride of place as one of the sites that played an important part in ensuring that lives were

[*Mark Field*]

saved. I have a great deal of sympathy, therefore, with the hon. Member for Hammersmith, as he faces two closures on his doorstep. If the closures went through, they would not, perhaps, cause me the same amount of political grief, but they would affect my constituents, many of whom receive hospital treatment from some of the institutions earmarked for closure. There would also be the ongoing effect of the substantial burden of increased pressure on the area's existing hospitals.

I accept the clinical wisdom of trying to steer traffic away from A and Es as far as possible, but before we press ahead with closures, particularly in this part of west London, we must ensure that the alternative services are truly in place and that we are not operating on some naive hope that the pressure on A and Es will miraculously dissipate once four west London departments are removed. Until there has been a proper assessment of out-of-hours care, I question the wisdom of closing as many as four busy A and Es in this area of the capital. The plan is misguided because the population is transient, with huge numbers of non-residents spending time in central London as workers, visitors and tourists. The pressures on central London are very different from those in other parts of the UK. I can understand that the Minister does not want to hear all sorts of special pleading from different parts of the country, but I think that he will recognise that in my unusual constituency I have 70,000 UK nationals, but 920,000 people working there every day of the working week. That is an extreme example, but it is fair to say that around Ealing Broadway and Heathrow airport there are also huge clusters of people who work but do not live in the area, and that should play some part in the thought process about the closures.

I want to say a little about two slightly more parochial issues, because this is not the only health proposal that has caused my constituents alarm. One is the Royal Brompton hospital, which the hon. Member for Hammersmith mentioned. The hospital is just outside my constituency, in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and Fulham, but it serves a lot of my constituents. I have received many e-mails and other correspondence imploring me to fight the decision to close the specialist children's heart surgery unit at the hospital, as I am sure have other central London MPs. I buy into much of the thinking on the issue of specialist care, not just by this Government but also from before 2010. In my view, it is better to concentrate specialist services in fewer and larger centres, rather than to hold on to a widespread but perhaps more mediocre service. I know that it is easy to make that case in a constituency such as mine, where services are in parts of London that are only 10 miles apart, and I appreciate that in more rural parts of the UK we are talking about distances of many dozens of miles, but I have great sympathy with the concerns that some of my constituents have highlighted. They are particularly worried that the review of the Royal Brompton has failed to consider what a difference having child and adult cardiac services in the same centre makes to the quality of care.

My constituents will point out that the Royal Brompton is one of only two hospitals in the country where four surgeons already handle well over 500 congenital cardiac cases a year, meeting, therefore, the standards expected

by professionals and the review panel's criteria. It is the only centre in the country to have undertaken more than 1,000 interventions in a year for such diseases, and the service has consistently been rated as excellent by the Care Quality Commission, the review team and, of course, Ministers. The campaigners fear that the decision to close children's heart services will threaten the viability of the entire trust in the Royal Brompton area. The hospital hosts the country's largest service for children with cystic fibrosis, which requires intensive paediatric care, and also anaesthesia teams to support the respiratory team with some of the most complex cases. I hope that the Minister will continue to listen to some of the concerns.

Finally, the other parochial issue, which the hon. Member for Hammersmith also raised, relates to Imperial College Healthcare, which has an important part to play on the St Mary's, Paddington site. If the changes go ahead, the hospital looks set, rightly, to become ever more important in that part of London. I wish to touch on the recent negative press coverage, and give Imperial the right to reply, as it were. Following the deaths of some 25 patients, my local authority, Westminster city council, has expressed concern about Imperial's poor record keeping, and the loss of a large amount of referrals data.

I received this week a missive from Mark Davies, Imperial's chief executive, explaining that in January the trust took the rare step of taking a temporary break from reporting its performance in meeting the 18-week waiting time target for referral to treatment, and waiting times for both cancer and diagnostics. He contends that the break was necessary to establish new and robust systems for recording and reporting patient data. Reviews of that period have found that there is no evidence of the trust missing any cancer diagnoses, and the measure was a short-term one, allowing for new configuration. The trust's view is that the negative press coverage rather overstates the case.

The matter we are debating affects us all as Members of Parliament. We understand that it will inevitably be a partisan, party political issue to an extent, but we all hold close to our hearts the area of London that we represent, and I hope that as far as possible we will work together to get the best deal for west and north-west London as a whole.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. There are no formal time limits, but I intend to call the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman at 10.39, unusually, which gives us exactly half an hour to accommodate the five remaining hon. Members who want to catch my eye. If my arithmetic serves me right, that works out at about six or seven minutes a head. As a courtesy to each other it might be nice to attempt to achieve that.

10.11 am

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I associate myself with the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), particularly about the Royal Brompton and its specialist services. I will focus briefly on the impact of what is happening on my constituency, but I follow what my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith

(Mr Slaughter) said: there has been an attempt to divide and rule Members over whether to save some A and E units and close others. Yet it is healthy that all Members across west London are working on a common cause to try to get a long-term view of the health care needs of our areas.

I was reminiscing a few weeks ago with one of our chief executives, who has been dealing with this issue in our area for about as long as I have—almost 40 years. I think that this is our ninth reorganisation. On average, a reorganisation takes place over roughly a two-year period and operates for about 18 months, and then we start all over again. I started off in my area with a network of GPs, a community hospital, a district hospital and specialist services. In the first reorganisation, we lost the community hospital. After that, I was promised five GP centres; I got two. Then we had the wonderful idea from Lord Darzi about polyclinics, which looked awfully like community hospitals, but I did not get one of those. By the time that they had been discarded, it was decided there should be a walk-in centre. After that, we lost a lot of the capital investment in relation to GP improvements, so I am left with some GP centres, but many GPs still working out of converted houses and many single practitioners. Many of them are about to retire. The walk-in centre is about to be closed and relocated to Hillingdon hospital, where I am told that all the basic triage will be performed. We seem to have come full circle but have cut out some of the basic elements.

I am now told that, under the present consultation, the coming plan is to devolve services into the community, with more community care and improved GP services, which will then reduce the need and desire to go to accident and emergency and make it possible for specialist services to be concentrated into fewer units. The problem with that form of devolution is that the walk-in centre in central Hayes is being lost; no further capital investment in GP centres is planned; many GPs, although they have given good service over the years, are aging and will soon to retire and, as I have said, are working in poor quality settings; and there are, to be frank, cuts in community care support as well, particularly those that are happening in personal budgets. Some bizarre judgments are being made at local authority and other levels about qualification for community care. People are winding up in my office to attend my constituency surgery because the care that they have had for years has been withdrawn.

The next stage of the proposal is the closure of Ealing accident and emergency. Ealing dealt with 84,000 people in 2010-11, with 12,000 urgent care cases and 30,000 serious in-patient cases. If even half that number transfer to Hillingdon, it will be swamped. My fear is that in the next round of cuts A and E performance at Hillingdon hospital will be examined and criticised, because it has been swamped, and that it will eventually become a target for further closure. I worry also because it appears possible to extrapolate from the numbers in the consultation reports the cutting in the next 12 months of up to 1,700 NHS jobs, with the prospect of 5,000 being cut by 2015. That could be yet another reorganisation that exhausts staff, confuses patients and the community, and wastes large amounts of resources. In the end, it will reduce the quality of services and might result in further cuts. I predict that, within four years, we will be back here again if we continue on this path.

All that my community is pleading for is an element of stability. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith that the consultation process has been tainted from the start, because information for the community and opportunities for engagement have been lacking and there has been a failure to disseminate information in a form that people can understand properly. I think that that has been done by what is now emerging in our sub-region as a group of elite GPs, who seem to control the process rather than engaging even with many of the other GPs. When, in our meetings with GPs, we ask whether they support the proposals, those at the grass roots say clearly they do not. They do not feel involved.

It is time to draw breath in the consultation, start a proper process of discussion and try to get some form of longer-term stability into the process. My hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) is here, and there is a 17-year difference between life expectancy in some wards of our constituencies and in some wealthier constituencies represented by hon. Members present for the debate. It is clear to me that the eight or nine, or perhaps more, reorganisations of the past 40 years have not dealt with the real health care issues and needs in our area. What is happening will be another exercise involving abortive costs, which will frustrate the provision of real health care to those who need it.

10.17 am

Angie Bray (Ealing Central and Acton) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr Slaughter) on securing this important debate. He is right to extend its scope to hospital services across west London because the proposed imminent reorganisation of services—the “Shaping a healthier future” programme, led by NHS North West London—will affect all hospital users in the area. It is a hugely ambitious and, I am sure, well-intentioned programme, but none the less it presents perhaps more questions than it answers. It raises serious concerns, especially for my constituents in Ealing and Acton.

Mary Macleod: I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for giving way. My constituents use the West Middlesex university hospital and Charing Cross hospital, and I was glad to see that the aim is to retain the West Middlesex as a major acute hospital with A and E and its award-winning maternity provision. Does my hon. Friend agree that the ultimate aim of what is happening, whatever decision is made—any constituent would find the closure of any part of a hospital a difficult thing—is better clinical outcomes, and the key issue is whether they are achieved?

Angie Bray: Of course, we all want better clinical outcomes for all our constituents. The question is how to get to that result, and how to provide services for residents. An unfortunate aspect of the way things have been done is the pitching of one hospital against another, with everyone being asked to decide on one or another. That has been a divisive process.

My constituents face the real possibility of Ealing, central Middlesex, Hammersmith and Charing Cross hospitals all having their A and E departments downgraded—a result that would surely be disproportionately negative for them and that threatens to destabilise health care

[*Angie Bray*]

provision right across my constituency. In making its three key recommendations for the current consultation, NHS North West London seems to have completely overlooked their needs. While the consultation document does at least mention the full list of eight possible options, the pressure on people to support one of its three main recommendations leaves the impression that minds have already been made up. Minds should not be made up when my constituents in Acton—a place with a rapidly expanding population—look set to be left without any local emergency cover.

The consultation and pre-consultation business case documents make bold predictions when calculating travel times to justify recommendations. One document even states that the

“geographic distribution is proposed to apply to the remaining sites to minimise the impact of changes on local residents”.

Tell that to the people of Acton, as they battle their way through traffic to Chelsea and Westminster hospital, or the people on the western edge of my patch doing the same to get to Hillingdon hospital, in the event of downgraded services at Ealing hospital. With London’s transport infrastructure as it is, I remain unconvinced that those bold predictions stack up.

The current recommendations take all my constituents further away from to access emergency health. That is why I am encouraging all constituents who get in touch with me on this issue to contribute to the ongoing consultation, regardless of my concerns. That seems to be the best way forward. After all, we all know that, for many people, their local hospital is more than just a physical structure. Attachments to hospitals are often incredibly emotional. Quite naturally, people want to know, when or if they or their loved ones fall ill, that they can access the care that they need in good time. It is all very well presenting a case for change based on facts, figures and statistics in a hefty document, but it is clearly important that local people—the people who use these hospitals—are given a proper chance to have a proper say on their future.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Lady agree that it is very important that the many people in our constituencies who do not have a car are able to get to a hospital quickly? Relatives also need to travel to hospital in a way that has a minimal impact on their families, particularly those with caring responsibilities.

Angie Bray: I agree. It is always important to bear in mind the impact on families who want to visit, because that is all part of the healing process. That is an important consideration.

The consultation is not made easy when the options to choose from are buried in such a heavy document. I have concerns about how that will affect the consultation process. The consultation document is itself a barrier to participation, as it is so huge and bulky as to be virtually impenetrable.

It would be helpful if NHS North West London were to encourage the GPs that it says support its proposals to actually speak out in support of them. The public are much more inclined to listen to their doctors than their politicians—we all know that, unfortunately—and I

have urged those behind “Shaping a healthier future” on numerous occasions to do exactly that. So far, however, there has been a deafening silence. If the case for change is so strong, why are we not hearing more local GPs coming out publicly in support of the recommended options?

It is, of course, important to acknowledge that the NHS is set to undergo a series of improvements. The health reforms will fully kick in in April next year, crucially putting GPs in charge of decision making. It therefore seems extraordinary that, after the lengthy process of getting legislation through Parliament, we are now seeing a last-minute, top-down reorganisation of local health care pushed through by NHS North West London, instead of waiting for the GPs to take charge.

The “Shaping a healthier future” programme is a bureaucratically-led initiative by NHS North West London. As such, I urge my neighbouring MPs to accept that this is not about Government cuts. In fact, the Government are putting extra funding into the NHS in real terms year on year, and the Conservatives were the only party to pledge to do so in their 2010 election manifesto.

Mr Slaughter: I entirely respect the position that the hon. Lady is speaking from today, and I accept that the NHS locally is behaving very badly. However, does she not agree that the Government must take some responsibility and that, as local MPs, we all ought to be talking to the Government as well?

Angie Bray: I spend quite a lot of time talking to Ministers, who have been very generous with their time on this and other issues. Finance is at the root of the problem, but I suspect that the Government have decided to make the NHS a major spending priority; rather more so than some other Departments. We have to accept that there was a problem with funding relating to NHS London for a long time before the Government took power—a point that I was going to come on to in a moment.

As I said, we were the only party to make a pledge on extra funding in its 2010 election manifesto. Furthermore, any efficiency savings do not go back to the Treasury, but are instead ring-fenced for reinvestment in the health service. The latest figures from the Department of Health show that by 2014-15, there will have been funding growth of £12.5 billion across London. The problem is that NHS North West London has been struggling in the face of a huge £5 billion or £6 billion deficit in the past five years or so.

Clearly, we cannot stand against every proposal for change. All institutions occasionally need refreshing and reforming. The key to “Shaping a healthier future” is to work with local communities to establish clinical need that works for those who use the hospitals. This clunky consultation does not do the trick. Nevertheless, I urge people to persevere and wade through the massive document. My message to the Minister is that for my constituents to have all four of their nearest A and Es downgraded is absolutely disproportionate. I hope that, should the consultation go the way that I suspect is intended, the decision will be then called in and a fairer way forward will be found.

10.26 am

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): Thank you for allowing me to speak in this important debate, Mr Gray. It is important to my local constituents and to me personally. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr Slaughter) on securing the debate and thank him for allowing me to join him and speak in it. I agree with everything that my hon. Friends have said. As hon. Members have repeatedly said, this is not a scaremongering debate and we are not taking a party political line—these are the genuine concerns expressed by constituents and health professionals.

I will not repeat my colleagues' arguments on whether the consultation is fair and transparent, but I hope that the Minister will take this one point on board about the way that people are being asked to access the document—by making a request, downloading and then responding online. I do not know about other areas, but in my constituency the people who are going to respond are those who are very keenly concerned because they have used the services before and they have lived in the area for many years. Many of my constituents will not have access to the documents and will not be able to respond.

I hope the Minister will take that point on board and understand the reasons for it. There are old people who do not have access to computers. Ethnic minority communities, whose first language may not be English, will not have the access to do that, either. It is not easy. There is always the response that they could ask friends, relatives and others, but it is not that simple to respond to the fear that the hospital services are going to close. Those people should be taken into account as well.

The future of all the hospitals in north-west London lies in the balance. I am particularly concerned about Ealing hospital, which is very close to my heart. My two grandchildren were born in Ealing hospital, my daughter worked there and I live just a short walk away. Many of my constituents depend on Ealing hospital for life-saving treatments.

It is therefore with shock and anger that I speak about the current proposals to close Ealing's accident and emergency unit, maternity unit, paediatric services, intensive care unit and other acute services. If the proposals go through, they will mean the effective closure of Ealing hospital. It will cease to be a district general hospital and be little more than a glorified polyclinic, with the surplus land sold off for luxury flats. I am deeply concerned about the proposals, and fear that they will have a significant detrimental impact on the health care that my constituents receive. It is being said that the proposals are clinically led, but the House should be aware that Ealing hospital consultants and local GPs almost universally oppose them. It is clear to me that the proposals are financially driven and that clinical care for my constituents will suffer.

I have been warning for some time about the significant threat to Ealing hospital. I have had numerous exchanges on the subject with the Prime Minister at Question Time. In October 2010, in answer to my specific question about whether there were any plans to close Ealing hospital, the Prime Minister gave a broad answer. He stated that the purpose of the health reforms was to put decisions about A and Es in the hands of patients and doctors, and that decisions to close A and Es that did not do so were often wrong. I agree.

Seema Malhotra: My hon. Friend rightly raises the particular circumstances of Southall and the surrounding areas, where there is a distinct community that operates in a particular way. Decisions about health care must take into account not just clinical issues but how a community behaves and how its members access health care.

Mr Sharma: I am sure that the Minister will take note of that and will respond.

Ealing is a case in point, as the decision is being made by the unaccountable north-west London primary care trusts in their dying days before they are abolished, and not by patients and doctors. Patients and doctors are firmly against the proposals. I ask the Minister to listen to them and abandon the proposals.

After the Prime Minister visited Ealing hospital in May 2011 to deliver his keynote speech on the Government's health reforms, I again asked him specifically at Prime Minister's Question Time whether there were any plans to close Ealing hospital. In his answer to me on 8 June 2011, he said that he was impressed by what he saw, stated twice that there were no plans to close Ealing hospital and said that the maternity service was undergoing phased redevelopment. Those assurances and answers now seem hollow and almost worthless unless the Prime Minister intervenes to stop the closure of Ealing hospital.

The Secretary of State for Health has also said on the record that there were no plans to close Ealing hospital's A and E, and asked where all the people would go who use it. My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) has given the figures on how many people use the services, and I am sure that the Minister will have taken note.

My constituents, local GPs and hospital consultants, local Members of Parliament and councillors of all political parties are totally opposed to the proposals, and there is a massive campaign against them. I ask the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State to listen to local people and intervene to safeguard our health services at Ealing hospital and other hospitals in west London. Lives are at risk and the future of the health service is at stake. With the support of Ealing Hospital SOS, Ealing trades council, Ealing council and West London Citizens, I will not stop campaigning, and neither will my hon. Friends and constituents, until the proposals are stopped dead in their tracks.

10.34 am

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): It is an honour and a pleasure to serve under you, Mr Gray. Like all other right hon. and hon. Members, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr Slaughter) on securing this debate. I assure him that although I was not present at the inauguration of the "Paupers' Paradise" in Hammersmith, I was present at Queen Charlotte's hospital on the same day that the national health service was born, having also been born on that day.

We have heard a great deal of extraordinary information that underlines the seriousness of the situation facing us. The hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Angie Bray) put her finger on it: the root of the problem is finance. This is about money. It is not about clinical need, clinical determination or a reconfiguration of the health service. As many have said, there is no

[*Stephen Pound*]

luddite tendency facing the health service. It has changed massively. I spent 10 years working at Middlesex hospital, which may or may not have been in the constituency of the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), although he certainly knew that hospital. It closed because people realised that there was alternative provision at University college hospital.

The situation in north-west London has been dramatically illustrated by the range of geographical interests represented here. Although Ealing hospital is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma), it is the hospital used by my constituents. Those who do not use Ealing tend to use Northwick Park hospital, which is in Brent, although it is used predominantly by people from Harrow. We have extraordinary crossover. If the toothpaste tube is squeezed in one place, the shape changes in another.

This is the message that I want to give the Minister, who is a decent man. I have known him for a long time, and in many ways I respect his instincts on this matter. We must recognise that London is different. The days of “predict and provide” may have changed and we may not consider it a fashionable option any more, but the reality is that we in west and north-west London face health problems. We face the resurgence of rickets, tuberculosis and illnesses that we thought did not exist any more. We have a massively mobile population, but above all a growing population. Every single school in my constituency is having to expand. Looking around, I see colleagues on both sides of the Chamber whose schools are having to expand. The population is increasing.

What possible clinical case can there be for reducing accident and emergency services, which at Ealing provide succour for nearly 100,000 people every year, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell)? Those people will wash up at West Middlesex university hospital and Hillingdon hospital, with appalling, dire consequences.

Can it be that we have changed so much in terms of clinical delivery that an ambulance service is a mobile operating theatre and that it does not matter how far an incident or accident is from the hospital, because the ambulance service is now so brilliant? That is very different from when a former Conservative Health Minister referred to ambulance staff as lorry drivers with first aid certificates. I cannot believe that moving people at speed, however efficient the vehicle, will help the problem. In many cases, it will make it worse. How many times have we seen people on the blues and twos hammering through our streets, which at the moment are crowded, congested and dangerous? It can only make matters worse.

I have less than a minute left to speak. I say to the Minister through you, Mr Gray, that the public are not persuaded that there is a clinical case. The Secretary of State has said that there are four criteria. There should be

“support from local clinical commissioners; strong public and patient engagement; clear evidence of the clinical benefit; and reflecting current and prospective patient choice.”

Ealing Hospital Save Our Services has been mentioned, and Colin Standfield, the organiser, is here in Westminster Hall today. I say to the Minister that there is no evidence at any level that anyone is committed to the proposals

to cut the A and E department. We heard earlier from the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster that there might be political grief. The Minister and I have both sat in the House for a while, and we both remember an Independent Member who represented one hospital anti-closure campaign. Hospital closures are a massively toxic issue. That is not a threat; it is a reality.

People are not with the Government on this issue, they are not with a shadowy PCT and they are not at all confident that the process is anything other than the biggest, crudest, roughest and most brutal rubber stamp. That is the impression that we in west London have. I implore the Minister to put our minds at rest and tell us that the consultation is genuine, and that there is a prospect of something other than an evisceration, an amputation without anaesthetic and a destruction of what we in north-west London hold so dear.

10.39 am

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): As ever, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr Slaughter) on securing this important debate. As we have heard, there is widespread concern in his constituency and throughout the capital about the future of hospital services in west London. He has been doing a great job in raising the issues, and has done so again today.

NHS North West London claims that its proposals, as outlined in the “Shaping a healthier future” programme, will improve NHS services for the 2 million residents of the area and save lives. As we have heard, the proposals will lead to the loss of accident and emergency departments at Charing Cross, Ealing, Hammersmith and Central Middlesex hospitals. That means that people will have to travel further for treatment. I ask the Minister: how will that help save lives, and does he agree with NHS North West London’s analysis?

It is not only my hon. Friends who are concerned about the future of A and E departments in west London; the local authorities in Ealing and Hammersmith and in Fulham are also formally opposed to the proposals and committed to fighting the downgrading of their hospitals.

We all know what happens to hospitals after they lose their A and E departments. We have seen in other cases hospitals lose their A and E departments and, sadly, subsequently become glorified health centres without proper resources to provide immediate health care to the local community.

Charing Cross hospital has a 200-year history of providing a wide range of services and is one of the capital’s largest teaching hospitals. It has one of London’s busiest A and E departments, which had 69,300 cases last year. Under the proposals, it will be downgraded to a local hospital. Ironically, while in opposition, the Conservative party often produced and perpetuated unfounded scaremongering about the future of Charing Cross hospital—my hon. Friend mentioned it in his opening remarks—yet now seems content for it to be downgraded under its watch.

It is understandable that there is such widespread concern about the proposed closures in my hon. Friend’s constituency. The whole of the borough of Hammersmith

and Fulham will be left without an accident and emergency department; facilities that both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State had promised to save as recently as last year will close. Travel times to the nearest alternatives could be far too long. As we have heard from both Government and Opposition Members, journeys to the hospitals run by the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust can be subject to delays of up to an hour in heavy traffic. That could put the lives of many west London residents at risk. What action does the Minister's Government propose to take to ensure the safety of my hon. Friend's constituents and the residents of west London as a whole?

The Secretary of State has not, to date, taken a clear position on the proposals, and I understand that he wrote to my hon. Friend on 3 July to say that they are a matter for the local NHS. I appreciate that the consultation closes on 8 October and that, according to the Secretary of State, no final decision will be made until early next year. The plans, however, are not only unpopular with local people; other Conservative politicians, such as Councillor Joe Carlebach of Hammersmith and Fulham council, have not refrained from taking a position and have openly voiced their opposition to the plans.

Mr Virendra Sharma: My hon. Friend may recall that, during his visit to my constituency, many constituents voiced their opposition to any threat to Ealing hospital.

Andrew Gwynne: Absolutely. I enjoyed my visit to Ealing hospital with Ken Livingstone in the run-up to the London elections, although I am not sure whether my support did Ken's campaign much good.

Stephen Pound: We did win the Greater London assembly seat.

Andrew Gwynne: Yes, as my hon. Friend confirms, we did win the GLA seat.

Councillor Carlebach told the BBC in April:

"We have some serious concerns at closing that many A and Es in such a large region."

The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) has expressed similar concerns.

The scale of the problem is easily grasped when one considers that NHS North West London serves a population of 1.9 million people in eight boroughs: Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster. Does the Minister agree with the remarks made by his colleague on Hammersmith and Fulham council?

The chief executive of NHS North West London, Anne Rainsberry, has been clear on what is driving the decisions. She told the BBC in February:

"The financial challenges in London are pretty much unprecedented."

The local Joint Committee of Primary Care Trusts has said that there will be a £332 million gap to plug by 2014-15 if no changes are made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith, and the Labour party, are not opposed to change. He said a few weeks ago that there was

"nothing wrong with economies of scale if you can join forces and do something cheaper that provides more resources,"

and I associate myself with those remarks. The chief executive of the King's Fund agrees that "London's NHS is in urgent need of change."

but, he goes on to say,

"the risk is no-one will be in the driving seat".

My hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) also warned about the lack of leadership and the timing of the changes when she said:

"The question is how do we get there from here at a time of chaotic reorganisation in the health service, when planning is falling apart, when north-west London hospitals alone have to save over £120m between now and 2014."

I am afraid that what we are seeing goes much further than, and is in direct contradiction to, the Prime Minister and Health Secretary's general election promise to halt the closures of hospitals, A and E units and maternity departments. What happened between the general election and now that caused both those right hon. Gentlemen to change their position? Why does the Minister think that there is such widespread concern about the lack of leadership in the health service in London, at a time when the NHS is being put through an unnecessary upheaval?

It is obvious from what the Government have had to say to date that Ministers are hiding behind their new localism and are happy to blame the soon-to-be-abolished PCTs for the forthcoming closures. We all know what happened between the general election and now: the unpopular and, frankly, unnecessary Health and Social Care Bill—the biggest threat to the NHS in its long history—was introduced. It was a disastrous decision on the part of the Government to spend £3 billion on an unnecessary top-down reorganisation that has led to the loss of financial grip on the NHS.

In the case of west London, we are seeing another broken promise on the part of the Prime Minister, who spent millions during the general election putting up posters throughout the country reassuring the British electorate that, under the Conservatives, there would be a moratorium on hospital and A and E closures.

Does the Minister think that the proposals in the "Shaping a healthier future" document will save money in the long term? If all the closures go ahead, would that not leave Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust with just St Mary's hospital as a single site, and pose huge financial and practical problems for the expansion of its services to cope with the extended case load?

The Opposition warned Ministers repeatedly during the Bill's passage that it would lead to the break-up of the NHS, and the "Shaping a healthier future" proposals seem to be a missed opportunity to improve care by reducing duplication where it occurs and ensuring that hospitals work together for the benefit of patient care.

10.49 am

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr Simon Burns): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr Slaughter) on securing this debate, the importance of which is indicated by the significant number of Government and Opposition Members who have either taken part or listened. I also congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing Central and Acton (Angie Bray) and for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) and the hon. Members for

[*Mr Simon Burns*]

Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma), for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) on their contributions.

Before I get to the nub of the debate, it is important to pay tribute to all those who work in the NHS in north-west London, including in the constituency of the hon. Member for Hammersmith, for the selfless dedication and determination that they put in day in, day out—whether doctors, nurses, consultants, porters or ancillary workers—to ensure that the people of north-west London get the quality of care that they deserve.

I am aware of the controversy and high emotions that surround any service reconfiguration, or proposed reconfiguration, and I respect the way that hon. Members, including my hon. Friends, rightly draw the attention of the House to their concerns about aspects of the proposed reconfiguration. I should like to give a general message to all hon. Members: I urge them to engage fully in the consultations, to the best of their abilities, and make their case and argument, which can be part of the information gathering and ideas that will be considered when the consultation process ends in early October.

The reconfiguration of services is a matter for the local NHS. I hope that the hon. Member for Hammersmith agrees that that should not be dictated or micro-managed by Ministers in Whitehall. Reconfigurations are affecting local services and should be determined by the local NHS in full consultation with stakeholders within the local NHS in north-west London and the local community.

Mr Slaughter: Given that the medical director of the NHS, who the Minister says has to make the decision, has said that the NHS is doing this because it would be out of money otherwise and given that the Minister has said that the Government would not take any notice of the consultation, does not he see a role for the Government?

Mr Burns: First, the hon. Gentleman has unintentionally only given the Chamber half the quote. Secondly, the medical director will engage in the consultation responsibly and fully. It is—hon. Members asked about this—a full, proper and valid consultation, which is why I urge all hon. Members to take part.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health wrote to the hon. Member for Hammersmith on 3 July—he mentioned this in his speech—on the process and the localism of the decision making, following the conclusion of the consultation, and to set out the process for service change that my right hon. Friend strengthened in 2010. For the record and for other hon. Members, I remind the hon. Gentleman of the position. The NHS in London, as elsewhere, has constantly to evaluate how services can best be tailored to meet the needs of local people and to improve the standards of patient care. The proposals in north-west London seek to do that, and the local NHS has now embarked on a full consultation with patients, the public and the local NHS. It is important to remember that that no decisions have been taken.

On Monday 2 July, NHS North West London launched the full public consultation. It will last more than 14 weeks—two weeks longer than the normal period—to take into account that it spans the traditional holiday month

of August. Patients, staff and the public will have the opportunity to review the clinicians' suggestions, look at the evidence provided and have their say.

The hon. Gentleman knows that the NHS has always had to respond to patients' changing expectations and advances in medical technology. As lifestyles, society and medicine continue to evolve, the NHS also needs to evolve. Reconfiguration is about modernising the delivery of care and facilities to improve patient outcomes, develop services closer to home and, most importantly, save lives.

As I said, the Government are clear that the reconfiguration of front-line health services is a matter for the local NHS, which knows the needs of local people and how to deliver services far better than Ministers in Whitehall. That is why we are putting patients, carers and local communities at the heart of the NHS, shifting decision making as close as possible to patients, devolving power to clinicians and removing top-down influence.

In 2010, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out four tests that all proposed reconfigurations had to pass. I trust that that will help to answer the point made by the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall about the decision-making process. Reconfiguration and the consultation process that accompanies it must have support from general practitioner commissioners, strengthened public and patient engagement, clear clinical evidence and support for patient choice. Without all those elements, reconfigurations cannot proceed.

The health needs of north-west London are changing as its health services are increasing. The local NHS does not believe that the way that it has organised its hospitals and primary care in the past will meet the future needs of north-west London. I understand that north-west London has 8% more internal hospital space per head of population than the English average, even after excluding the specialist hospitals. Indeed, when combined with the number of beds available, hospitals in north-west London have approximately 50% more space per bed than the rest of the country. However, much of that extra space is not suitable for clinical care and costs those hospitals more money to run and maintain every day.

Under the preferred option proposed for changes to hospital services, the NHS in north-west London will invest £112 million in capital that will add capacity for expanded services, develop local hospital sites in the community and address maintenance issues. For example, I am sure that hon. Members, particularly in the Westminster and Fulham side of the area, will be acutely aware that only two weeks ago the Earl's Court health and wellbeing centre re-opened after having £2.7 million capital invested in it to serve the local community.

Emergency services have been mentioned a lot. The quality of care and the time taken for hospitals to see and treat patients varies. A recent study showed that patients admitted at weekends and evenings in London hospitals, when fewer senior doctors are available, stand a higher chance of dying than if they were admitted during the week. Clinicians in north-west London have agreed clinical standards for emergency surgery and A and E that include providing expert consultant cover 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Therefore, patients admitted in an emergency at the weekend will have the same standard of care as those admitted on weekdays.

We would like that approach to spread throughout the country. Rationalising emergency care in five north-west London acute sites will enable the NHS in north-west London to meet these standards, address service variability and save an additional 130 lives per annum, on the basis of the number of lives expected to be saved across London.

Clinicians argue that, to provide safe and effective care, they need experience of the most acute cases regularly, which means centralising services on fewer sites. A good example of that is stroke care provided in London, in respect of which significant improvements in outcomes and the quality and safety of patient care have been made. I hope that hon. Members agree that that is the right way forward.

Mark Field: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Burns: I only have one minute left; I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me.

Trauma services have also been centralised, with a major trauma centre sited at St Mary's and the two heart attack centres at Harefield and Hammersmith, which will continue to provide service.

Let me remind hon. Members of the process after the consultation is completed. As the hon. Member for Hammersmith rightly said, after the consultation has concluded, the responses have been considered and a decision taken, if the local authority overview and scrutiny committees do not agree and do not think the proposition is in the best interests of the local community, they have the right to communicate with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to request that he refer it to the independent reconfiguration panel. If my right hon. Friend does so, the panel will independently consider the proposals and advise him whether it believes that they are right for north-west London, and he can then take a decision accordingly. There is full consultation, full involvement and a mechanism to allow the matter to be pursued further after the consultation has concluded.

Oceans and Marine Ecosystems

11 am

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray.

This debate is important for the opportunity not only to highlight in Parliament the plight of our oceans but to focus more on the international dimension of protecting them, including the high seas beyond national jurisdictions. Thankfully, the issue is now coming to the attention of international policy makers—it was not even raised at Rio in 1992, but became one of the most high-visibility issues at Rio+20 this year. Although Rio fell a long way short of the actions identified by scientists as crucial, its decisions were, in the words of Professor Alex Rogers of the International Programme on the State of the Ocean, “urgent, important and game changing measures which should be immediately implemented by governments as a direct response to the oceans text.”

I hope today's debate is timely in focusing on the role that the Government should play in making progress. Britain can make a real difference. The United Kingdom, through its overseas territories, is responsible for the world's fifth largest marine area after the US, France, Australia and Russia, amounting to nearly 2% of the world's oceans. We are, therefore, a major player, with a duty to act.

I will outline the scale of the crisis facing the world's oceans. Oceans and seas are of course critical to sustaining the earth's life support systems and to our survival. Covering 72% of the earth's surface, oceans and seas moderate our climate by absorbing heat and around 30% of global CO₂ emissions. They are the habitat of nearly 50% of all species and, as a result, are vital for global food security—providing 2.6 billion people with their primary source of protein—and for the well-being of many national economies, especially in developing countries.

The health of the oceans, however, is under threat. Organisations such as Greenpeace, with its “Defending our Oceans” campaign, the World Wildlife Fund—WWF—and many others have been campaigning to raise awareness of the findings of marine scientists, which I hope to give expression to in this Chamber. The findings in the IPSO report published last June are particularly shocking. It said that the seas are degenerating faster than anyone had predicted because of the cumulative effect of a number of severe individual stresses—from climate change and sea water acidification to widespread chemical pollution and gross overfishing. In particular, it said that the world's oceans are facing an unprecedented loss of species, from large fish to tiny coral, comparable to the great mass extinctions of prehistory. Approximately 90% of the big predatory fish in our oceans, such as sharks and tuna, have been fished out since the 1950s. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates that 85% of global marine fish stocks are fully exploited, overexploited or depleted, a subject to which I shall return.

Scientists are also discovering growing areas of the ocean that suffer from hypoxia—regions that are starved of oxygen—caused by warmer sea temperatures, which is also increasing sea levels and changing ocean currents. Whole species of fish are at risk due to the temperature rise. They simply cannot survive in the changed conditions.

[*Kerry McCarthy*]

Pollution is also damaging our seas. Although oil spills from tanker accidents are among the more visible and more talked-about pollutants, their impact is less than that from other sources, which include domestic sewage, industrial discharges, urban and industrial run-off, accidents, spillage, explosions, sea dumping, plastic debris, mining, agricultural nutrients and pesticides.

Not only are there severe declines in many fish species, and an unparalleled rate of regional extinction of some habitat types, such as mangrove and seagrass meadows, but some whole marine ecosystems, such as coral reefs, could disappear this century in what has been described as

“a first for mankind—the extinction of an entire ecosystem”.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this vital debate. I do not want to anticipate the rest of her speech, but does she agree that the evidence shows that rigorously enforced marine conservation zones can make a real difference in starting to turn things around? The lesson is that we, internationally, and the world need to be more ambitious about the scale of such zones and more rigorous in restricting the activity that can take place in them.

Kerry McCarthy: I shall come on to marine conservation zones mooted in the UK and what we can do internationally to persuade and join up with other countries to have larger zones.

One of the reasons why I am interested in the issue is that I am a keen scuba diver. At an anecdotal level, I have heard stories about the decline in coral reefs. I was speaking to someone the other day who has been running trips from Bristol for about 30 years. He said that the Great Barrier reef is now almost unrecognisable as the place where he used to dive 20 years ago, because of bleaching and reef damage and disappearance.

Around one fifth of global coral reefs have already been damaged beyond repair, including catastrophic mass bleaching in 1998 when scientists watched between 80% and 90% of all the corals die on the reefs of the Seychelles in a few weeks. Professor Callum Roberts said that

“outside the world of marine science, this global catastrophe has passed largely unseen and unremarked.”

It is predicted that 90% of all coral reefs will be threatened by 2030 and all coral reefs by 2050, if no protective measures are taken.

That goes some way to outlining the scale of the problem, so I now want to discuss the solution. Although Rio was disappointing—I think most people agree—and it mostly reaffirmed existing commitments and promises, it marks a point from which countries should now focus on action and implementation. The High Seas Alliance and the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition have set out the key commitments that Governments now need to act upon. I hope that the Minister can make a firm commitment today to implement those decisions and to set out how the Government will do so.

The top commitment was

“to address, on an urgent basis, the issue of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction”—

in particular through networks of marine protected areas—

“including by taking a decision on the development of an international instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea”

before the end of the 69th session of the UN General Assembly.

More than 64% of our oceans are beyond the jurisdiction of any one country—the so-called high seas. UNCLOS, the UN convention on the law of the sea, provides the legal framework for governing such areas, but the current structure is highly fragmented and has huge governance gaps. It is widely acknowledged that an agreement under UNCLOS is needed to assist the creation and management of marine reserves; to set a framework for environmental impact assessments to be undertaken before damaging activities are allowed to take place; and to co-ordinate a highly fragmented structure of regional organisations that currently regulate human activities.

The Arctic ocean provides a strong case for reform of UNCLOS as it becomes accessible to deep-sea oil drilling and large industrial-scale fishing fleets with the melting of the permanent sea ice. Regulation of such activities is entirely inadequate. The Environmental Audit Committee has been hearing evidence as part of its inquiry into protecting the Arctic, highlighting grave problems with responses to an accident or major oil spill, which would have even more serious environmental consequences than a similar incident in warmer water.

The biggest disappointment at Rio was that an unholy alliance of the US, Venezuela, Russia and Japan blocked a decision on an agreement under UNCLOS for a maximum of two years, until the 69th session of the UN General Assembly in 2014. Although action is desperately needed now, that at least sets a deadline towards which Governments in favour of an ocean rescue plan can work. The 2014 deadline should not, therefore, be seen as a target date to start looking at how we protect and rescue our oceans, but rather as a deadline by which to have completely decided on the way forward for formal negotiations.

What steps will the UK now take, with the others that spoke in favour of an agreement—such as Brazil, Australia, the European Union, South Africa, India and the Pacific Islands—to move the agenda forward and to urge the UN General Assembly to convene, as a matter of urgency, a diplomatic conference to deliver a new implementing agreement under UNCLOS? What steps will the Minister take towards establishing marine protected areas and marine reserves, creating offshore oil and gas no-go zones in the Arctic, and agreeing a mandatory polar shipping code?

Marine protected areas, which have been mentioned, are underwater national parks that help areas to recover and rebuild, and help fish stocks to be replenished and marine ecosystems and coastal communities to have breathing space and better protection from the effects of climate change. Just before Rio, Australia announced its plan to create the world’s largest network of marine reserves, an area encompassing one third of its territorial waters, where fishing will be restricted and oil and gas exploration banned in the most sensitive areas.

In addition, all 1,192 of the Maldivé Islands will become a marine reserve by 2017. The UK’s overseas territories provide an opportunity to designate large

marine reserves, such as that created in Chagos under the previous Government. I would be grateful if the Minister reported on the progress the Government are making in supporting overseas territories in designating more large-scale marine reserves in the near future.

What discussions has the Minister and his ministerial colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had with other nations that have overseas territories, such as France, about the creation of marine protected areas or about joint working with them to join up areas where our territories coincide?

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I commend my hon. Friend on an excellent speech. Does she agree that it is important that the UK show leadership in this regard, and that it is very disappointing that our network of 127 marine protected areas is two years late? There are even suggestions that the Government might drastically reduce the number of such areas, thereby rendering them completely useless in environmental terms.

Kerry McCarthy: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. He has done a great deal of work in this area and, indeed, has been trying to get a debate on the topic since Rio.

I was just about to come on to the subject of the UK's marine conservation zones. If we are to try to encourage other countries to sign up to marine protected areas, we need to get our own house in order. The Government have delayed designating any new marine conservation zones until 2013, failing to fulfil the promise they made at the 2002 Earth summit to do so by 2012. They are now shifting the goalposts by raising the evidence bar for designation. There is real concern that the Government may be preparing the ground for designating between just 27 to 40 sites out of the 127 sites that were originally recommended. However, we are already committed to 127 sites, which have had buy-in from all marine industry stakeholders following the regional project consultation, and were recommended where they had the least socio-economic impact.

The Science Advisory Panel, appointed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, stated that all 127 marine conservation zones need to be designated if the UK is to follow its own guidance on delivering an ecological network. Without those 127 zones, the seas will not have the necessary chance of recovery. How will the Minister achieve such a network if he does not designate all 127 sites?

In the few minutes left to me before I ask the Minister to respond, I shall talk about overfishing, the one area of the debate that has been discussed in Parliament in some detail. There have been debates about overfishing and fish discards, so I will keep my comments fairly brief. Rio agreed to maintain fish stocks at levels that would at least produce the maximum sustainable yield and eliminate destructive fishing practices. I was pleased to see that progress was made on that at the recent EU fisheries council, with agreement to a ban on discards and to legally binding limits on fishing levels. The timetable for phased implementation of that agreement is too lengthy and the decisions were more politically than science-led, but some good progress was made. I hope that we can take that forward.

I would like to raise with the Minister his Government's failure to protect marine protected areas by sanctioning destructive fishing practices, such as scallop dredging, in areas recommended for designation as marine conservation zones and special areas of conservation.

Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on a most powerful speech. In the part of the world I represent, scallop dredging is a significant problem. At one time in North Ayrshire there were huge numbers of fishing fleets, but we now have none. Does she agree that we need to consider that, but that we also need to look at other species such as dolphins and whales? Does she also agree that it is concerning that the Scottish Government are not including such species in their network of marine conservation areas?

Kerry McCarthy: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I was not aware of what was going on with the Scottish Government in that regard. It sounds like very disappointing news. Any of us who have seen films such as "The End of the Line," which talks about the huge impact overfishing is having on species—particularly dolphins, tuna and some of the bigger fish that she mentioned—would regard that as very disappointing. Has the Minister's Department assessed whether scallop dredging and trawling is in breach of the EU habitats directive, which states that site integrity, not features, must be conserved?

My final point is that commitments were made at Rio to eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Some 15% of all sea catch is from illegal fisheries. I know that the EU is starting to play its part by demanding strict traceability on all fish sold in Europe, but, globally, more effort is needed to address suspicious consignments landing at ports. The Environmental Justice Foundation estimates that Sierra Leone, where coastal communities are dependent on fishing for their food and livelihoods and where fishing represents around 10% of GDP, is losing almost \$29 million a year to pirate fishing operators.

There is also concern that illegal fishing off the coast of west African countries such as Senegal and Mauritania is contributing to growing levels of piracy in those countries, and that they could end up like Somalia, with armed pirates attacking ships. As the President of Puntland said at last year's conference in London on piracy:

"the violation of Somali waters by foreign trawlers triggered a reaction of armed resistance by Somali fisherman, whose livelihoods were disrupted by the illegal fishing fleets. Over time, payment of ransom by the foreign trawlers to the poor fishermen of Somalia encouraged the escalation of pirate attacks to current levels".

That obviously does not excuse piracy, but it goes some way towards explaining why it has increased to such dramatic levels.

Turning to my final questions to the Minister, what assessment have the Government made of the impact of illegal fishing on increased levels of piracy around the shores of Africa? What steps are the Government taking to help build the capacity of local communities in affected countries to end illegal unreported and unregulated fishing? What steps are they taking to collaborate internationally to develop national, regional and global monitoring, control surveillance, compliance and enforcement systems?

11.16 am

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr James Paice): Good morning, Mr Gray. I start by congratulating, as others have, the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) on obtaining the debate. I apologise for my presence and, more importantly, the absence of the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who the hon. Lady had presumably expected to reply to the debate. Unfortunately, he cannot be here this morning. I assure her that most of what I have to say addresses the points she quite properly raised. If I miss or am unable to respond to any points, I will ask my hon. Friend to write to her with more information.

The Government recognise, as the hon. Lady does, that marine ecosystems are central to human well-being as a source of several important marine ecosystem services. The sustainable management of oceans and seas is essential to achieve the goals of a blue economy in terms of sustainable economic growth, poverty eradication and job creation. As she has rightly pointed out, oceans are globally, regionally and nationally important.

That is why, as she has described, the Government are acting on all fronts, pressing for action on a global scale in Europe and nationally. The Government have been quick to realise that there is an urgent need for a governance structure for areas beyond national jurisdiction to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of those vast areas. In June 2011, in the White Paper on the natural environment, the Government committed themselves to working towards delivering a new global mechanism to regulate the conservation of marine biodiversity in the high seas. As she says, even though marine issues were not the main focus of Rio+20, there was tangible progress on them, which is good news.

Against a background of delay and intransigence that has dogged previous negotiations on the issue—and as the hon. Lady said, still persists in some quarters—agreement was secured that a decision on the matter should be taken by the UN General Assembly in 2014. I can assure her that we will continue to work to ensure that such an agreement provides a coherent structure for the conservation and sustainable use of those areas beyond national jurisdiction, including a globally accepted mechanism for the designation of high seas marine protected areas and the effective use of environmental impact assessments in so doing.

In the absence of such a global agreement, the UK continues to work through regional sea conventions such as OSPAR, which is the convention for the protection of the marine environment of the north-east Atlantic, and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, which is known as CCAMLR, to protect those high seas. Following the establishment in 2009 of the world's first high seas MPA under CCAMLR at the ministerial conference to OSPAR in 2010, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury, together with fellow Ministers from OSPAR contracting parties, agreed to establish six marine protected areas in the high seas of the north-east Atlantic. A further site was added at the OSPAR Commission meeting in June this year. I assure the hon. Lady that the UK will

continue to work within OSPAR and other regional conventions to consider other designations on the high seas.

There was also consensus at Rio on understanding and dealing with the effects of climate change and, consistent with the Government's position and that of the hon. Lady, a more sustainable future for fisheries. We agreed on the need for better implementation of the UN fish stocks agreement and the Food and Agriculture Organisation's code of conduct from countries to ensure that they ratify and implement the provisions quickly to demonstrate their international commitment to the protection of fisheries resources.

We welcomed recognition of the efforts made by regional fisheries management organisations to improve the management of resources for which they are responsible. As the hon. Lady said, illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing—IUU—is a blight on our seas. The regional management organisations have a key role to play in combating IUU fishing and in ensuring the sustainability of fishing stocks, and we will continue to work within those of which we are members to step up those efforts.

At this year's International Whaling Commission meeting in Panama last week, we were successful in demonstrating the UK's commitment to the IWC's conservation work and our fundamental support for the moratorium on commercial whaling. The meeting delivered positive results for the conservation and welfare of whales. However, we must match our efforts on the global and regional stage with our own implementation.

It is surprising to some that the UK has established the world's largest marine protected areas, including the world's largest no-take zone—I speak of the vast biologically rich marine resources of our overseas territories—and in February an area of more than 1 million sq km around South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands in the Southern ocean was designated a sustainable-use marine protected area, establishing one of the largest areas of sustainable managed ocean in the world. That built on the equally impressive no-take marine protected area around the British Indian Ocean Territory of 640,000 sq km, designated in 2010. As the hon. Lady knows, it includes the protection of some pristine coral reefs, to which she referred. Further work is under way elsewhere.

The recently published White Paper on overseas territories illustrates the Government's commitment to enhance our work in partnership with overseas territories so that we understand, value and preserve their rich natural heritage appropriately, and ensure that their resources are managed sustainably, building on measures already in place. However, as the hon. Lady and the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) said, the UK itself has a rich, diverse and economically important marine area.

“Charting Progress 2” was published by the Department in 2011, and shows the progress that the UK has made in achieving the Government's vision of clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas, but our seas will remain sustainable, productive and healthy in the long term only if the right balance can be struck between conservation and economic activity. That will work only if marine conservation sits alongside other policies, such as marine planning and fisheries. That is at the heart of our recent consultation on targets for achieving good environmental status in our seas

under the marine strategy framework directive. That consultation has now closed, and we aim to publish our response in the autumn, finalising proposals for targets that are ambitious, but recognise the need to achieve sustainable use of our seas.

We remain committed to establishing a network of marine protected areas, but it is important that the right areas are designated and managed, as opposed to simply designating a large number of sites.

Mr Bradshaw: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Paice: Let me say what I was about to say because it relates directly to the right hon. Gentleman. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in response to the right hon. Gentleman that we already have a network of 84 marine protected areas in English seas out to 12 nautical miles from the coast. We plan to complete the set designated under the EU habitats directive this year. In addition, we are working to designate more sites under the EU birds directive, and marine conservation zones provided for in the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, for which he was responsible.

Mr Bradshaw: The Minister is quite right to say that such areas need to be properly designated, but two years of painstaking work went into identifying the potential 127 sites, involving all stakeholders: commercial fisheries, recreation fisheries, environmental groups and others. The fear among most of those groups now is that the Department is selling out to small but very powerful commercial fishing industries by dragging its feet in setting up those areas. We would be grateful for his reassurance that that is not the case.

Mr Paice: I am very happy to give the right hon. Gentleman that assurance. The information I have is that the problem is not as he implies, special interest groups, but simply that there is insufficient evidence for some of those zones. That is not to say that they will be ruled out, and the delay is because of trying to find sufficient evidence to justify their inclusion. I hope to reassure the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Bristol East a little more.

More than 22% of English waters are protected by European marine sites, and we have set a target that at least 25% of these waters will be covered by well-managed marine protection areas by the end of 2016. By then, we expect the coverage of all UK waters to be consistent with the 10% target for marine areas agreed at the convention on biological diversity in 2010. The first tranche should be designated in summer 2013, after we have held our public consultation on recommended sites and examined all the evidence before us. We fully expect further tranches of sites to follow in future.

That MPA network is central to achieving good environmental status by 2020 under the marine strategy framework directive, and as implementation of management measures will take time, and biological recovery from pressures can be slow, early action, when possible, is a pragmatic approach. However, marine protection areas

are only one tool we are using to deliver clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas.

Katy Clark: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Paice: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I want to deal with the fishing issue, which the hon. Member for Bristol East addressed. I believe, as did the right hon. Member for Exeter when he had responsibility for the matter, that only a very urgent change in European fisheries policy can ensure that our seas deliver a sustainable future, for both conservation of biodiversity and a viable fishing fleet.

The UK has been leading the way in trialling schemes to improve the selectivity of how we fish, and to tackle the waste of discards by managing fisheries by what is caught, and not what is landed. We have taken that experience into the current reform of the common fisheries policy. Hon. Members will know that the recent meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council successfully made the case for measures progressively to eliminate discards. Not all member states shared our ambition, but a commitment to implement a landing obligation with a provisional timetable is a major step in the right direction.

At that same meeting, we also secured a responsible approach to setting fishing levels. Overfishing has been a central failing of the current CFP, and the UK was adamant that the text should include a clear legal commitment and deadlines to achieve a maximum sustainable yield in line with our international commitments.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Paice: No, I am sorry. I want quickly to finish by answering the point that the hon. Member for Bristol East made about scallops. The use of bottom trawls or other types of gear and activity must be managed appropriately in European marine sites to ensure site compliance with, as the hon. Lady rightly said, the habitats directive. Appropriate measures must be considered by regulators and relevant authorities for their specific areas for activities that may pose a significant impact. Banning an activity or type of gear, such as bottom trawls, as the hon. Lady suggested, can be one example of management action for some scenarios. Orders prohibiting bottom trawling are already in place in areas such as Lyme bay, and we are committed to ensuring that appropriate regulation is put into practice where it is important.

The hon. Lady referred to illegal fishing off Africa and the link with potential piracy, and I confess that that has never been raised with me or my officials. If she will allow me to do so, I will write to her.

I have tried to answer most of the hon. Lady's questions. I know that she is extremely diligent on such issues, and I respect that.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

Child Support Agency

[MR MIKE WEIR *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): It is a pleasure, Mr Weir, to speak in the Chamber this afternoon with you in the Chair. I am not sure whether we are setting a record here, but women outnumber men by about five to one at the moment. That is an extremely good sign on an afternoon when Parliament is debating sitting hours.

This afternoon's debate is about reform of the Child Support Agency. When I was elected, I expected to deal with a number of cases relating to welfare benefits, the United Kingdom Border Agency and organisations such as Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. What I did not expect was that one of my largest and most enduring case loads would relate to the Child Support Agency. In just over two years, my constituency office has dealt with 70 individual cases in which something has gone wrong, and I am just one Member of Parliament. In the borough of Charnwood alone, in December 2011 the CSA had a live case load of almost 2,600 cases.

Before I go into the details of some of those cases, it might be helpful if we consider why the CSA was set up in the first place. Back in 1993, when John Major's Government introduced the agency, the aim was for it to pursue parents who failed to support their children financially. Savings were expected because parents claiming benefits from the state would instead find their income supplemented by a maintenance arrangement paid by the non-resident parent. I support that intention, but as I aim to show in this debate, it is clear to me and doubtless to other hon. Members that the system is not working and must be reformed, as children, through no fault of their own, are not receiving the financial support they need or deserve.

Despite an often heavy-handed approach, and costs of £440 million every year, half of children living in separated families in this country have no financial maintenance support in place. The CSA is expensive to run, with 40p being spent to collect each £1. Those costs often result from the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission running two separate, failing IT systems, and an additional 100,000 clerical cases—that is, paper cases—that the system cannot cope with.

Recent CMEC statistics show that 48% of complaints were from non-resident parents, and 50% were from parents with care, so it is clear that no one is happy with the current system. CSA data also show that more than 5,000 past and current CSA cases remain, with more than £50,000 in arrears. I congratulate CMEC on producing an excellent set of statistics. It should be congratulated on the transparency with which it produces its figures. It is a model for many other non-departmental public bodies and other arms of Government to follow.

Despite the statistics, there has been some progress, with deduction orders, under which money is removed directly from debtors' accounts, having trebled since 2009. We need a simple and flexible system that supports families in making and sticking to their own arrangements, if that is possible, and that steers families through a tough time, keeping negotiations constructive and preventing a difficult family break-up from becoming worse or potentially destructive.

The problem with the current system from my perspective is, first, that it seems to invite conflict, and is often accused of being heavy-handed and far too arbitrary. The evidence shows that the most effective and enduring arrangements are ones that parents come to themselves. Secondly, the CSA does not offer value for money; and thirdly, enforcement may be ineffective, with huge arrears totalling nearly £4 billion in March 2012. A specific issue that I suspect other hon. Members will also speak about relates to self-employed partners paying child maintenance.

Mr Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does she recognise that at the moment the system seems to penalise those dads and absent parents who want to do the right thing and want to contribute to their children's welfare, but the CSA seems to have no power to grab hold of those who want to avoid the system, and to make them contribute to their children's lives?

Nicky Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. He is absolutely right, and I will refer to a couple of constituency cases in which the non-resident parent, usually the father, is trying to do the right thing, perhaps by looking after the children on one or two days a week, but that is not recognised, when other people seem to be able to play the system. That is certainly something we in my constituency office have found.

I want to bring a human element to this debate. Numbers and statistics are all very well, but what I and other hon. Members—including the Minister—see in our constituency casework is the negative effect that the CSA is having on people's lives, particularly children. I do not expect the Minister to comment on the individual cases I am about to raise—she has been good enough to see me twice with her officials to discuss two very difficult cases—but I feel that I owe it to my constituents, who often come to see me and my caseworkers in a state of some distress, to talk about their cases.

I shall start with poor enforcement. Karon Hollis is the mother of four children. All have the same father, who is self-employed and was using the accounting system to tell the CSA that he does not earn enough to pay her anything but the bare minimum of £5 per week—£5 for four children. Ms Hollis gathered evidence to show that his lifestyle could not possibly match what he was saying about his finances, but the CSA did not take her evidence, or lost it on the several occasions when she sent it in. Ms Hollis asked for our help with putting her evidence to the CSA, which has resulted in an assessment of £50 per week—10 times the amount she was originally getting. Why must ex-partners so often have to become detectives to get a fairer assessment?

My second case relates to Tracey Warren. It is currently with the adjudicator, who is carrying out a formal investigation. Ms Warren told the CSA 18 months before her ex-husband left the country that he was planning to go, and kept doing so, but nothing was done to get him to pay before he went. He has now moved to the middle east, and because Britain does not have a reciprocal arrangement with the country in question, the CSA cannot chase him for payment. The same issue has arisen in another case, in which the mother has moved to China.

Moving on to cases where paternity is an issue, I have had two cases in which the father queried the paternity of the child and, as a result, the whole CSA claims process ground to a halt. I cannot say whether that is a delaying tactic, but in one case, after a father had asked for a DNA test, he heard nothing further from the CSA for three years, when they contacted him to say he was £16,000 in arrears. Surely an efficient and effective system should not allow such a long period of silence to occur. Paternity should be swiftly established to allow the CSA system to proceed, or the CSA to cease involvement if paternity is not proven.

On arrears being allowed to accrue without the CSA seeming to notice, Mr B in my constituency had a deduction of earnings order so that maintenance was deducted from his salary every month. Unfortunately, the employer failed to pass that amount on to the CSA, and the CSA failed to notice. When the employer went into administration, my constituent, Mr B, was told by the CSA that he would have to pay the outstanding amounts all over again. He did eventually recover a percentage of the debt as part of the administration process. What I cannot understand is why the CSA failed to spot that it was not receiving the money from the employer in the first place.

An element of flexibility is needed in the system. My constituent, Christine Barrell, is claiming maintenance from her husband, who is self-employed. He has been "nil assessed", which Mrs Barrell is challenging. Her husband's business accounts, which will support her appeal, are not due until the end of the year, but the CSA needs her appeal within the next 28 days. Can that period be extended to reflect the particulars of this case?

Finally, I want to highlight those cases that I have already mentioned, thanks to the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr Spencer), in which the non-resident parent is trying to do the right thing and to maintain contact with their children by seeing them regularly. They often feed and clothe their children, as well as incurring transport costs to see them and to return them to the parent with care. But those costs are not reflected in the maintenance calculation, and the parent with care may not agree to the calculation being adjusted to help to meet those costs. In one case, the CSA recommended that the parent with care should share the child benefit they are receiving, but that was met with a flat refusal.

I hope I have shown that we have a system that no one seems satisfied with; so where do we go from here? In a recent survey carried out for CMEC, two thirds of parents with a family-based arrangement said they were happy with their situation. Only one third of CSA clients said they felt the same. Almost 90% of non-resident parents complied with their own arrangements, compared with just under two thirds of those who had payments assessed and enforced by the CSA. Most parents with family-based arrangements considered them to be fair, whereas only 42% of those whose payments were calculated and enforced by the state system did so. More than 50% of parents who use the CSA say that they could make their own arrangements if only they had the right help and support.

I welcome the Government's proposed collaborative approach. Hopefully, it will mean that separated parents are able to avoid the conflict that often comes with

CSA involvement by making their own, family-based maintenance arrangements whenever possible, and the Government have already committed £20 million to developing better co-ordinated local support services to help that happen. The money will be used to work with voluntary and community groups to make it easier for parents to navigate existing support, and to consider what additional help is needed.

There has been criticism of the charges that will be introduced to allow people to access the statutory system. The previous Government introduced a wide-ranging power to charge all parents as part of the Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act 2008, and the coalition is building on that legislation and on Sir David Henshaw's report to the previous Government on the CSA, and implementing those charging proposals. I understand that there will be heavy discounts for those on the lowest incomes, and total exemption when domestic violence has occurred.

In her response to the debate, will Minister say more about those charging proposals? Who will be affected, how will they work, and when will they be introduced? Will she also address an issue that has been raised with me by Gingerbread: what will happen to new and existing cases when the new system comes into force? We hope that parents who separate after the new system is introduced will be signposted to a range of support services and encouraged to make a private arrangement, but what about parents who are already caught up in the system? If, for example, a deduction of earnings order is in place, what will happen to that when the new system comes into force?

In conclusion, I hope I have shown that the current statutory child support system needs speedy reform. I appreciate, however, that it is difficult for any Government system to cope with the complexities of family life. Parenting is hard enough for both mothers and fathers, without having to make allowances for the access arrangements, work pressures and new relationships that make every situation unique, and that is why any child support system will, perhaps by necessity, be a fairly blunt instrument.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making a powerful case and we all agree that changes to the CSA are needed. Does she feel that it is important that the new system works smoothly immediately—something that has foxed all previous Governments? At a time of cuts and rising living costs, child maintenance really matters to families. We must not risk making things worse by getting things wrong and making the situation even more difficult for those families who are on the breadline.

Nicky Morgan: I think the hon. Lady might have read the last sentence of my speech, and she is absolutely right. It will be interesting to hear speeches from all parts of the House, but we probably all want to get to the same place and ensure that families who cannot make arrangements receive help to do so, that children get the money they need in order to have the essentials required in life, and that families get the support they need. The hon. Lady is right to say that any transition must be as smooth as possible, and I am sure the Minister will address that point. We are talking about IT systems and family arrangements, and although

[Nicky Morgan]

things will never be entirely smooth, we do not want to see families put in a worse position than they are already in, or the unhappiness that I have already mentioned.

It is right to encourage families to make their own maintenance arrangements. However, the Government should consider how we can become better at getting assessments right in the first place and at enforcing arrangements when things go wrong, and how we can best help families to resolve such issues themselves. I hope to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister on those points.

As I have already hinted, it would be a terrible legacy if, in addressing all the problems I have highlighted, we were to introduce new instabilities into the new system. I look forward to hearing from the Minister about how lessons have been learned and how the system will avoid the situation—this is where I started my speech—in which half the children in this country who live in families that have separated have no financial maintenance support in place.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order. It is my intention to start the winding-up speeches no later than 3.40 pm, which gives us just under an hour. Six Members wish to speak, so I would ask you all to do the maths and tailor your speeches accordingly.

2.43 pm

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) on securing this important debate. It is an issue that, even during our discussions on reform, often comes at the end of a lot of other matters and has sometimes not received the full amount of time that it deserves.

I do not for an instant pretend that the CSA has not had problems, but I am concerned that we are making a wrong analysis of them, and it is possible that we could again make a gigantic mistake. Many mistakes were made when the CSA was set up in 1993, and one reason for that was because at the time, the views of those who worked in the field were almost totally disregarded.

I had better declare an interest because I am a family lawyer by profession although I am not currently practising. The CSA was introduced to meet a need because the previous systems were not working well. Then as now, many children and families were not receiving the money that they should have been getting, and the Government did not invent the CSA simply to be difficult. When it was introduced, however, it was an all-or-nothing system that was not terribly helpful and produced a huge work load right from the start. That was probably the wrong end to go from. I am still convinced that the CSA should have been started, at least in the early stages, on a slower basis, perhaps dealing only with some types of situation, and that we should have listened to some of those who were used to working in the field.

Many of the problems that the hon. Lady mentioned are endemic to the situations in which people find themselves, rather than caused by the Child Support

Agency. The hon. Lady mentioned self-employed people, and they are always extremely difficult to tackle. They were extremely difficult under previous legal powers when we went to court, or used the system in Scotland that did not involve going to court—I will mention that in a minute. Trying to get from the self-employed what we felt they ought to be paying was extremely difficult, and their ability to produce accounts that made it look as if they did not earn much was notorious. That was always a problem, as were people who disappeared and went overseas. I had a client whose husband worked on oil rigs. Every time we got an earnings assessment for him, he would simply give up that job and take another. He was a scaffolder and very well paid, and his ability to thwart the system, as it was then, was great. I do not, however, believe that that situation would have been any easier for the CSA. We must address the real problems, and not necessarily blame the CSA.

Mr Spencer: Surely the hon. Lady will acknowledge that within her constituency there will be people who experience enormous frustration when trying to communicate with the Child Support Agency. People get moved between different offices around the country; the CSA loses information and does not acknowledge the simple facts that are happening in people's lives. That is the fault of the CSA rather than the lifestyle of those individuals.

Sheila Gilmore: I must say that my case load on this matter is not as large as some people's appear to be. Some of the cases are almost a legacy because they come from the previous system. I have some long-standing cases, and in my experience, although I do not seek to defend the CSA, it is not necessarily much worse than dealing with other large Government agencies.

I am worried that we are in danger of making another big leap based on a wrong premise. The Minister's assumption—this also came through in the opening speech by the hon. Member for Loughborough—is that the statutory child support system is the cause of discord and bad feeling between parents. However, if we start off with a wrong premise, we will come to a wrong conclusion.

The hon. Lady cited research that indicated that two thirds of people with family-based arrangements were happy with them, whereas only one third of CSA clients were happy. Some 74% of those with family-based arrangements considered them to be fair, compared with 42% of those with CSA arrangements. However, the crucial point missing from that analysis is that the people who end up using the CSA are those who cannot reach family-based arrangements. Those who can reach such arrangements do so, and we are not comparing like with like if we come to that conclusion and decide that we should basically shrink the existing statutory system. If I understand the situation correctly, those currently within the system will be asked to close their cases and restart the process by trying to get a family-based arrangement. If they cannot, presumably they will come back through the process. The idea is to shrink the system due to the analysis that the CSA is what causes discord between parents.

My experience as a family lawyer is that separation is a very difficult situation. People do not separate because they are getting on well. They do not usually separate

because they can communicate well. Often they are angry and often they have good cause to be angry. That anger is not something that is just stirred up either by the courts, which is one of the assertions that we hear, or by the Child Support Agency. People are angry. They do have difficulty getting money, and there are reasons why that will always be quite difficult.

Generally, when people separate, both partners lose financially. It is a financially difficult situation for them, and often it does not get better after a few weeks, months or even years of separation, because new liabilities come into play. People form new relationships and they find it even more difficult to cope. These things influence people's attitudes to one another, and some people clearly are not willing to come forward to make an agreement. My concern is that we are making the wrong assumption—that having a statutory system is causing discord—and if we start from the wrong point, we will reach the wrong conclusion, and the solution will not be the one that cures the problem.

I would like to make a practical proposition to the Minister. It is drawn from Scots law and could fill a gap. The Government should think seriously about it, especially if they are determined to shrink the child support arrangements. In Scotland, it is possible to have not just the vague, family-based arrangement that everyone talks about, but a legal minute of agreement, which is enforceable in the same way as a court order would have been under the previous system. These minutes of agreement are usually negotiated with the assistance of solicitors. Many people have them drawn up, and they have worked extremely well. As I said, they are directly enforceable. All the same steps can be taken to enforce them as could have been taken with a court order. That model would enhance the system here tremendously. I offer it up, from Scotland, as something that perhaps the Minister will want to discuss with the Ministry of Justice. They may want to discuss how something such as that might be introduced into the English legal system to enable people to have something that, yes, is agreed—it is negotiated and agreed—but also has legal enforceability.

There is one minor point about minutes of agreement that the Minister might also want to consider. Under the previous CSA arrangements, after one year of having a minute of agreement, it was possible to go to the CSA and renege on it—that was possible for either partner, in effect. The Law Society of Scotland suggests that it would be better if that were a four-year period, and I concur. I think that if people have been properly advised and a minute of agreement has been drawn up—people can ask for a minute of agreement to be reduced in certain circumstances, such as if they have been coerced—a four-year period would be sensible.

Another couple of issues have been raised about how the much-diminished statutory scheme will work in the future. These have to do with finding out about the earnings and assets of some of those who are the most difficult to deal with. Under the present regime, the CSA can have regard to evidence about people's assets and lifestyle that suggests that their income is not what they say it is. My understanding is that the Government propose to remove the effect of two regulations that achieve that at the moment. I believe that they are regulations 18 and 20 of the child support regulations. That, too, would be a mistake, because it would enable people to construct their affairs in a particular way.

Regardless of gender, it is very frustrating for the parent with care, who is struggling, to see the other parent living what appears to be a fairly affluent lifestyle, yet able to present official records suggesting that they do not have the money to pay for their child. That makes people angry, but it often has to do with the attitude of the partner. The Government should reconsider that.

Fundamentally to take away the system and say, "We want people to make their own arrangements," especially if they will not be legally enforceable, is a mistake and underestimates the difficulty of making those arrangements. Furthermore, that is happening at a time when changes to legal aid may make it harder for people to obtain legal advice so that they can turn the arrangements into more formal ones, and to obtain advice on what their rights are. Sometimes—perhaps not always but sometimes—informal agreements are not very good ones. Let us say that one parent says to the other, "I'll give you 20 quid a week. That's fine. Just don't shop me to the CSA." I know people who have been through that. The weaker partner, the one who has perhaps traditionally been quite afraid—I am thinking not just of domestic violence as it is narrowly defined—may well accept that when actually it is grossly unfair. People need proper support. I am not convinced that the £20 million that is talked about will be sufficient to put in place for people the level of advice, support and mediation that will be required if the Government press ahead with their proposals.

It is regrettable that, because the Government have framed the question in the way that they have and made this assertion—created this straw man—about the CSA being the cause of so much family discord, that will lead them into a situation in which even fewer children will get maintenance.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): The hon. Lady is touching on a very important point. Obviously, the position will differ throughout the United Kingdom, but I have found through experience that the turnover of staff at the Child Support Agency is pretty significant, given the difficult task that many of them face. Does the hon. Lady agree that additional training of staff coming into the agency would go some way towards trying to deal with what are very emotive and difficult problems and could help alleviate the issues to which she has just alluded?

Sheila Gilmore: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I agree. Obviously, we want staff to be well trained, given that they are dealing with very difficult situations. My point was that, if the official agency is to be shrunk to the extent that appears to be the case and people are to be largely discouraged from going down that route, on the assumption that it will be relatively easy for them to reach family-based agreements, that flies in the face of the reality of the situation that many people find themselves in after separation. I am referring to the fact that it is very difficult to conduct these negotiations and that that will allow people who just want to walk away to do so even more easily than they can at the moment. If the answer is to put in support services, they have to be put in at a level that will be effective. Up and down the country, people know that there are often waiting lists to get support and advice

[Sheila Gilmore]

and that mediation is not necessarily easily available—and mediation itself has a cost. Not all mediation services are offered free to users.

It is important that we do not throw the baby out with the bathwater and that a generation of children do not lose out as a result of these proposals.

2.58 pm

Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) on securing this exceptionally important debate. It is on an issue that spans all constituencies. I cannot imagine being able to find an hon. Member who has not had many letters and e-mails about the Child Support Agency. The issues that parents face when claiming or being claimed against are massive; this is such a complex issue on both sides of the coin. I am sure that all hon. Members will agree with me when I say that one answer does not fit all, as every incident is so case specific; and it is near impossible to attain the best solution for everyone, especially when one law applies to all. I agreed with the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Maria Miller) when she said that the child maintenance system was “broken”. I am pleased that the Government are taking action to reform the system, which is unworkable in most cases.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that a frustration our constituents often face, whether they are the parent with care or the non-resident parent, is that they find it very hard to make their voices heard by the CSA, or indeed anyone?

Sheryll Murray: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting that important point. I would like a formal mechanism through which parents can share experiences and suggestions with the Government and the CSA. A kind of CSA users forum or a panel made up of non-resident parents and those with care could be initiated to feed back their experience regularly to Government. That would enable the CSA to improve its performance for parents with care and non-resident parents.

A major issue seems to be the CSA’s use of the deduction of earnings system. Non-resident parents complain that the CSA does not adequately monitor changes in their income or give them sufficient notice that a deduction of earnings is taking place. Deduction of earnings comes out of the non-resident parent’s pay before they see it, and the payroll department cannot make changes if anything is incorrect. Nothing can be done if an error has been made; the person paying the money has to claim it back and prove that errors were made, which can take years.

An absent father who lives in my constituency has never missed a payment. He was following the old rules, and then the departure was granted and he went on to the new rules. The CSA now says that he has arrears of £8,000, although he has never missed a payment. There appears to be a catalogue of errors, which are being investigated, including putting the wrong child’s name on correspondence, which causes unnecessary angst.

The CSA is now taking £400 out of his wages per month for one child, which is ridiculously high. Because that money comes out of a deduction of earnings, the father has no say over the amount taken out—at one point, it increased considerably with no explanation. The situation has caused untold stress to him and his family, especially when the paperwork says that he should pay £42 a month.

Outstanding child maintenance arrears increased by almost £1 billion between December and March. If net weekly profit is over £100, £5 plus a percentage of weekly income in maintenance is payable. That may help explain the complaint that non-resident parents often try to avoid paying child maintenance. The Government recognise that, and the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission has recommended a new scheme, which is at consultation stage. It would use HMRC-sourced gross annual income for the income child maintenance calculation. That method would reduce costs to business by £0.8 billion.

A major difficulty for the CSA occurs when the non-resident parent is self-employed. Self-employed status means that it is much more challenging to obtain accurate figures. Money cannot be taken at source or from a deduction of earnings. A case in my constituency has taken approximately 14 years. The parent with care is owed a considerable amount of money. The absent parent owns a number of properties, and a charge should be taken on his properties. Allegations have been made—I cannot confirm or deny them—that the absent parent has put his accounts into his partner’s name, so it appears as if he has no assets. I obviously do not know whether that is true, but it is clear that it is not a straightforward case.

Sheila Gilmore: The circumstances the hon. Lady describes are familiar to me, but would she not concede that such difficulties existed before the CSA and there would undoubtedly be difficulties whoever enforced decisions? Such cases were always hard to pursue, because people could do exactly as she describes.

Sheryll Murray: I accept what the hon. Lady says, but I am sure that we can do something with the system to ensure that there not such anomalies and long-standing cases. It has been 14 years and there is still no conclusive result. The situation needs to be addressed.

I must express my concern that in such circumstances, the only option left open to parents with care is variation mechanisms, such as lifestyle inconsistency tribunals, and the Government have announced their intention to scrap them. If the last line of defence for parents with care is removed, what hope is there for justice to be done and for children to get the money they are owed? Some non-resident parents are engaged in practices that, if this were income tax and not child maintenance, would be seen as tax evasion. I urge the Government to think again and ensure that parents with care have adequate opportunities to appeal against obviously perverse CSA assessments.

In another constituency case, the absent parent lives in a caravan, which is not an official registered address. That completely throws the normal process off balance, because the CSA has to send out officials to identify the tenant. In that case, the non-resident parent denied their identity to the CSA and had to be photo-identified

by the parent with care. That process has taken months. The CSA should be equipped to deal with unusual situations. The person concerned has asked for face-to-face meetings, but is being ignored. I have even visited the regional CSA centre with my caseworker to discuss long-standing cases—the regional manager of my centre was a classmate of mine from school.

The CSA costs the public £450 million, and a typical case costs the taxpayer £25,000. Reform is desperately needed, but we must be exceptionally careful because botched reforms by the previous Government cost almost £1 billion, left thousands of families in hardship and were deemed one of the greatest public sector disasters of recent times. I am glad that we have a Minister and a Government who understand that reform is necessary and a priority, and that we have learned the lessons from the previous Government's time in office.

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Time is marching on. There are four Members left to speak. I recommend trying to keep to seven minutes each.

3.7 pm

Mr Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) on securing the debate. I will not repeat the excellent points made by the speakers so far, but will simply use a couple of examples from my casework to illustrate two recurrent problems from which the CSA suffers and which need to be addressed as part of the reform process, as we move to 2013 and that all-important change.

More than 4,000 families in Swindon use the CSA to recover maintenance payments. In my constituency, £6.9 million is owed in arrears—the highest figure in the south-west—so the number of parents, either with care or non-resident, who come to me, as a last hope in many cases, because of the problems they are experiencing, is no surprise. I will use two examples: one of a non-resident parent and one of a parent with care.

First, Mr D, the non-resident parent, was on tour with the Army in Afghanistan for six months. Prior to his tour of duty, he informed the CSA that it meant that he would be away and therefore would technically not be a shared carer, because he would see the children for fewer than the required 52 days. By way of a court order, he has the children for approx 70 days a year with split holiday time. He told the CSA, went on his tour of duty and came back to find that the CSA had finally acted and presented him with a large bill for arrears.

That is not acceptable. The least courtesy we can offer to serving members of the armed forces is to deal promptly when they provide information to the CSA, rather than reward them with a massive bill on their return. Mr D accepts that his tour of duty means a reduction in shared care and that consequences follow, but really, more must be done to improve the quality of how we deal with cases such as his. I do not believe that he and many others should be penalised in that way for serving and representing their country. Active service should be taken into consideration when such issues are being determined.

There is a broad-brush approach that does not help anyone. I find it hard to believe that no mechanism can be found to deal more sensitively with payment changes

for serving military personnel. This is an ongoing problem, not just for Mr D but for countless serving military personnel, because they never know when they might be redeployed. I urge the Minister to consider a more flexible approach in those circumstances, so that we can do better by our armed forces. I have already raised Mr D's case with the Minister and I am grateful to her for corresponding with me about it. Today I make a heartfelt plea, not just on Mr D's behalf, but on behalf of thousands in the same position.

My second example illustrates what I regard as a poor use of enforcement powers. Miss C is a parent with care of a young child. She first contacted the CSA in 2006, but is yet to receive any money. She has had liability orders and has had the non-resident parent taken to court on two occasions, but still she has received nothing. Her bitter experience has taught her that the powers available to the CSA are not being used strongly enough. Those powers include the removal of driving licences and, yes, imprisonment. At the moment the maximum sentence for non-payment is six weeks, but there are clearly cases where that is an insufficient deterrent and maximum term, and it seems the courts are slow to remove driving licences or impose such sentences. There must be stricter penalties for evading responsibilities. More people are being imprisoned for animal cruelty—itself a serious offence—than for non-payment of child maintenance.

Miss C's former partner is of no fixed abode, as in the example cited by my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Sheryll Murray), and works in what I shall describe as an irregular way, for cash payment. I understand that it is proving very difficult for the CSA to trace and track activities of that nature, but other powers are available in such circumstances and they are not being adequately used. I urge that a different approach be taken with persistent non-compliance of this nature—we are talking about six years. There should be more automatic powers available to the successor body to the CSA to freeze and remove money from bank accounts, where available, and to impose restrictions on holding passports and driving licences, without the need for costly and cumbersome court proceedings.

In the years since its creation, the CSA has become an organisation that, despite the best efforts of many of its employees, is still failing far too many parents with care and non-resident parents. I urge the Minister to do everything she can to ensure that the reforms address some of the issues raised today.

3.13 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I will endeavour to keep my comments as brief as possible, so that colleagues may also contribute.

As has been pointed out, the Child Support Agency is a recurrent issue in every MP's mailbag. I would like to raise one key aspect of the reforms with the Minister: the family-based arrangements. We know from past failures that parental responsibility is key to any workable CSA reform. Parents should be encouraged to make their own arrangements, with minimal interference either from the CSA or from the courts, which of course should be the last resort for those whose separation is so rancorous or potentially violent that private arrangements are not possible.

[Caroline Nokes]

Like the Government and Resolution, an organisation representing 5,700 family lawyers, I support the concept of family-based arrangements wholeheartedly. However, many family law solicitors are concerned that the Government's objectives will not be achieved unless those arrangements are enforceable. That is not because lawyers are looking to feather their own nests, but because they have a duty of care towards their clients—a duty of care that the CSA sadly lacks and which unenforceable agreements simply do not fulfil. Lawyers will therefore be obliged to recommend that clients refer themselves direct to the agency or pay for a court order. Family lawyers assure me that, if the agreements were enforceable, the duty of care would be fulfilled and their uptake might be vastly increased. However, there is a risk that the number of couples making such an arrangement will be pitifully small, due to the inability to provide security or certainty.

One might be tempted to argue that a parent who wants an enforceable arrangement should simply pay the fee and use the agency or the courts, but I would argue that logic is flawed in both its economic and social consequences. In terms of social policy, while the fee could be sufficiently high to discourage or even prevent those who most need CSA assistance from getting it, in economic terms the fee makes no substantive contribution towards the real cost of agency services. That cost will not fall, as levels of caseload will remain near constant, prompting one to ask what the purpose of the fee is.

The logical and pragmatic answer is to establish agreements that, if possible, bypass the CSA and the courts, yet are none the less enforceable. There are several ways to establish that. Perhaps the simplest option would be to lodge the agreement with the CSA and rely on the agency for enforcement, passing the full cost of collection on to the defaulting parent, not the parent with care. One would hope that would be a significant disincentive to default. Secondly, the arrangement could be lodged with the court, so that in the event of default, the parent with care would look to the court for enforcement. However, as with the CSA option, that has cost and, most important, significant time implications for parents in financial difficulties.

It is with some trepidation that I follow the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Sheila Gilmore), who not only is a family lawyer but has significant experience of Scotland, because I am about to launch a suggestion that a further option could be to replicate the system north of the border. I will not repeat her comments, but will add to the information she has already provided. I contend that the system in Scotland is far superior to anything thus far proposed in England in terms of simplicity, cost and speed of recovery of moneys due. It might also hearten the Minister to know that it also avoids the need to have an argument over who should be charged.

As we heard, Scotland has long had the benefit of a registered minute of agreement, which does not need to go before either a court or the CSA, and works because it is summarily enforceable. Minutes of agreement are easy to draw up, so they are cheap; and when it comes to default on child maintenance payments, the parent with care does not need to go to the CSA, with its

long-winded collection processes, or return to court to seek an order. When the money does not get paid, the parent with care merely asks the sheriff's officers—roughly the equivalent of an English bailiff—to enforce the agreement. The defaulting parent then has his or her assets frozen in a process that a Scottish lawyer described to me as being “quick and muscular”. They then have a choice: pay the maintenance or go to court to try to have their assets unfrozen. The reality is that, due to its enforceable nature, the minute of agreement rarely has to be enforced, as parties know the harsh measures that can be deployed in the case of default.

I do not suggest that we can expect the entire legal system south of the border to be turned upside down and made to replicate Scottish law. There are certainly different understandings about the use of bailiffs, but we can surely import the key principle: that the agreement is enforceable, and is enforceable quickly and cheaply. How could we replicate the Scottish system? Changing and improving the collection powers and methods of the CSA is an option and should be looked at, but the courts will ultimately use bailiffs anyway, so replicating the quick and muscular nature of a Scottish minute of agreement within English family-based arrangements, perhaps by making them summarily enforceable, would enable solicitors to recommend them and, most important for the Government's objectives, it might make parents actually want them.

I can see no better way to reflect the spirit of the original legislation and meet the Government's objectives than with a family-based arrangement that is speedily enforceable. If someone is destitute and has hungry mouths to feed, an arrangement that is not enforceable is useless, and an arrangement that is enforced many weeks or months after default is next to useless. The best solution is an arrangement that is enforceable speedily and, best of all, at no cost to the parent with care.

3.20 pm

Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) on securing the debate—so much so that I have ripped up half my speech; but here we go. Hon. Members have given excellent examples and covered key issues in the debate, so I shall go straight to the heart of the two things that I think changes to the CSA should deal with, to make the agency truly effective. There are two loopholes that need to be addressed.

The first is undoubtedly the 12-month rule, which 87% of family lawyers say causes difficulties, because it enables the CSA to overturn court orders after just 12 months. What is the point of going to court to seek an order, when after only a year—and without the need for any substantive change in circumstances to be demonstrated—the order is void? As my hon. Friend the Minister has said before, the rule is open to abuse, and has become a tool whereby non-resident parents, especially the self-employed, can hide income to avoid paying the full level of support. Furthermore, family lawyers tell me that the existence of the rule skews divorce negotiations, with solicitors increasingly relying on spousal maintenance as a backstop because of the inevitable consequences of the CSA's ability to scupper

a court order after 12 months. The rule likewise promotes hostility, as after 12 months the parent with care returns to court to seek a pound-for-pound increase in spousal maintenance to compensate for what has just been lost through child maintenance under an agency review.

Finally, the 12-month rule is used as a tool for blackmail. I have been shown a shocking but sadly typical case, evidenced by the e-mail exchanges between the parties, of a woman who, having spent considerable sums in legal costs to secure a financial settlement, was threatened with having her children's maintenance halved unless she agreed to dispose of a joint overseas asset that remained unresolved from the divorce. Her lawyers advised her against short selling. At exactly the same time as her ex-husband, a wealthy accountant working in risk management and financial services, was funding private education for his other children, he was threatening to use the 12-month rule to reduce his maintenance payments by 50%.

The rule was not designed to be used as a tool for blackmail. Indeed, correspondence between the lady in question and the Minister, which I have seen, showed that the Minister regarded that use of the rule as abusive. Therefore, I have to agree with the findings of Henshaw on the rule. It is used as a means of securing a better outcome for the non-resident parent, not the child, and the Government should consider scrapping it, or at least extending it to four years. That would give security and certainty for both parents, and prevent the current abuse.

The second issue that reforms must address is that of spurious zero assessments. It is perfectly illustrated by the case of a lady whose ex-partner, a Porsche-driving former executive who lives in a luxury docklands apartment and who she says has an extremely luxurious lifestyle, is assessed as having to pay less than someone on benefits. Despite his extravagant lifestyle, he simply claims he lives entirely on his new wife's earnings. The mother however, forced to provide evidence to the contrary, lives in poverty, works full time in low-paid work, and last winter, at the height of the cold snap, was forced to accept charity food parcels and to beg £300 from a friend to put heating oil into her boiler when the tank ran dry. Often the only way the parent with care can attempt to secure some maintenance is through a lifestyle inconsistency appeal, where they can demonstrate that the lifestyle of the non-resident parent is inconsistent with his declared income.

It therefore causes me considerable dismay that the Government have now made clear their intention to scrap the only two effective measures—including the lifestyle inconsistency appeal—by which parents with care can secure support for their children from non-resident parents who seek to hide their real income and capital. Curiously, in the case I have just mentioned, despite claiming to have no income or assets, the child's father is still able to fund expensive legal proceedings against the mother on a separate issue. It is bizarre.

The CSA needs to be reformed. That is self-evident just from the three examples I have given. I therefore ask the Minister to consider extending the 12-month rule to four years; to examine the issue of zero assessments; and, in particular, to maintain the right of parents with care to mount a lifestyle inconsistency appeal. Lastly, we need to ensure that the CSA has a duty of care. In this era of increased accountability, we need to ensure that Government agencies are held to account.

3.25 pm

Caroline Dinenege (Gosport) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I add my praise to that of other hon. Members for my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), for obtaining this valuable and important debate. My hon. Friends and other colleagues have also made useful and admirable contributions. Many of the comments I wanted to make have already been made, so I will briefly voice the concerns of parents in my constituency.

Like many hon. Members who are present, I am contacted all too often by single parents who have struggled with the system and do not receive the support they need for their children. It is a tragic fact that up to half of UK children of separated families live in poverty, but it is one that is borne out by many of the cases I have assisted with in Gosport. The failures in the Child Support Agency, whether they arise from poor administration or bad decisions, have had a direct impact on the well-being and security of children throughout the country.

The hugely valuable Gosport citizens advice bureau has dealt with almost 100 CSA problems in the past year alone, and that highlights the instability caused by the CSA's failure to secure payments. Most frequently, parents fall into arrears with their rent or mortgage, and then face the threat of losing their home, which of course gives rise to many other issues. One disabled lady in my constituency was advised by the CSA not to bother applying for child support at all, as her two children were 15 years old. That meant that she could not afford to stay in her home, in spite of her significant care needs.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Sheryll Murray) mentioned, the often irregular and unpredictable actions of the CSA also cause problems for non-resident parents. In one case, the CSA took payments ranging from £400 to £600 over a number of months from one of my constituents, without any notice. While it is without doubt the duty of both parents to support their children, such actions mean people suddenly find themselves unable to pay their own household bills.

I am also frequently left baffled by the catalogue of errors in the administrative handling of CSA cases. By the time many constituents approach me, they have endured months or even years of inaction, as other hon. Members have said. When contacted by my office, the CSA often, to its credit, gets things sorted relatively quickly, but that raises the question why it should be necessary for things to get to a stage when someone needs to contact their Member of Parliament.

That is why I welcome the Government's reforms to the CSA. So much time and money is lost in its complex, creaking bureaucracy and the Government are right to do all they can to empower parents to come to family-based arrangements. However, in the light of my experiences in Gosport, I seek reassurance from the Minister that the Government will not neglect those for whom family-based arrangements, negotiation and collaboration are sadly not an option. Many people in my constituency have ex-partners in the armed forces, for instance, which presents greater challenges as their long periods of absence from the UK mean that they are not around to take part in the negotiations, which take time.

[Caroline Dinenage]

My hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough mentioned—as, indeed, did virtually every hon. Member who spoke—the problem of those whose ex-partners earn very little on paper, although the new car on the drive and frequent sunshine holidays belie that, and suggest more cash in hand. It may take significant joined-up thinking between Departments to address that, but we must do so in the interests of fairness, and for children’s long-term well-being. I wonder if the Minister has any thoughts on how to address the issue. It is vital that the Government’s far-sighted reforms should put vulnerable children, and, indeed, common sense, at the heart of all we do.

3.28 pm

Mrs Anne McGuire (Stirling) (Lab): I echo the comments made by other hon. Members: it is a pleasure to be here under your chairmanship today, Mr Weir, for this short debate on the Child Support Agency. I congratulate the hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) on securing the debate, and hope she will agree that she was well supported in the contributions made by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Sheila Gilmore) and the hon. Members for South Derbyshire (Heather Wheeler), for South East Cornwall (Sheryll Murray), for South Swindon (Mr Buckland), for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) and, last but not least, the hon. Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage).

What we have heard today shows how complex child maintenance is. I listened carefully to the various cases with which MPs illustrated what they were saying. Frankly, no two of those cases were the same. If we multiply that by 650 MPs and multiply that again by the number of families who find themselves in a period of stress, perhaps we would appreciate the challenge that all of us face in trying to design a system that reflects all those individual situations. They range from the example that the hon. Member for South Swindon gave of the soldier in Afghanistan to the example that the hon. Member for Gosport gave of the disabled parent trying to keep her children. How do we come up with a system that deals with all those situations?

We should encourage more people to make voluntary arrangements. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East—who is an expert on these issues—indicated, the people who make the voluntary arrangements are not the ones who need the state to intervene or facilitate. They are the people who come to what we could call an amicable separation and who understand that parenting, and the responsibility for parenting, is a joint effort, in terms of providing both emotional support and financial support. Sadly—and it is sad—not every couple can separate in that way. I think that it was the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North, who I understand may also have some experience in—

Caroline Nokes *indicated dissent.*

Mrs McGuire: If the hon. Lady is not a lawyer, she should get a Bachelor of Laws degree, because she certainly sounded as if she had that sort of hinterland; studying an LL.B, perhaps part-time, might be an

opportunity for her to take. Anyway, she highlighted some of the issues about how people try to manage these things.

Having said that, I must say to hon. Members that some of the situations that have been described today are hopefully not quite indicative of the changes that have happened in the CSA. I will just refer to a comment from a former Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, which I think some hon. Members will probably agree with. The BBC reported:

“The public accounts committee said the CSA had a catalogue of complaints, a backlog of cases, and poor enforcement of uncollected payments”

and that the PAC said the CSA was one of the “greatest public administration disasters of recent times”.

That was the view of the PAC in 2007, when it was under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr Leigh).

In May of this year, the PAC said:

“The Commission has made real progress in recent years but the challenges it faces”—

and hon. Members have illustrated some of those challenges today—

“in supporting separated families and securing maintenance payments for children are serious.”

So there have been significant changes, and the hon. Member for South Swindon remarked on the range of enforcement actions that exist and that were supported across the board; the Minister was in the House at the time. We had to realise that sometimes the carrot might not work and that sometimes it is about the stick. We can argue about whether six weeks is an adequate sentence, but the difficulties that people would face if they had their driving licence withdrawn, as well as all the other issues relating to enforcement, would really focus the minds of many people.

As a constituency MP, I have had nothing like the volume of CSA cases recently that I previously had. Ten years ago, I would have had a little queue of parents—both with care and non-resident—complaining about all the issues that have been highlighted today. I can now count on one hand how many live cases about the CSA that I have. I do not know if there is a particular problem in Loughborough, but I am just being frank with hon. Members in saying that I have seen a significant change. That is not to say that I do not occasionally have cases where somebody has had a wage deduction charge that has been wrongly applied—

Heather Wheeler: I am sure that my constituency of South Derbyshire is as fragrant as it always is, but I get three CSA cases a week—three a week.

Mrs McGuire: Mr Weir, I hope that you will agree with me that there must be a change in the atmosphere in Scotland, although I have to say that it is nothing to do with your political party. My experience is not the same as that of the hon. Lady. I can only put my experience on the table, in the same way that other colleagues have done.

Since the range of enforcement actions have been introduced, I have seen a significant downturn in the number of CSA cases. That is not to say that there have not been occasions when people have come to me and complained about the administrative errors at the CSA,

which are unforgivable, or about the fact that the wrong assessment has been made. Those are the types of problems that have been highlighted in the debate today.

The comments that I quoted from the two distinguished Chairs of the Public Accounts Committee are intended show that there have been changes in the CSA. The reality is that all of us have to wrestle with the legacy of a flawed initial approach; that includes the Minister, who is doing so quite admirably. The introduction of the CSA had joint-party support at the time, but it was rushed. The technology was not up to it and the scale of the problem in those initial years was grossly underestimated. Perhaps because we always want to believe the best of humankind, the idea was that if we suddenly introduced the CSA, everybody would conform. That was not the reality, as we know from individual experiences.

I am sure the Minister could tell us how many connections have to be made just to reach a conclusion in a single CSA case. Reaching a conclusion is quite a complex business; everything has to be tested. As MPs, we all know that someone can have a perspective on a particular case that might not fit with what another person thinks, whether that case is about the CSA, a housing complaint or any other complaint. So, all those checks have to be made in each case. I am trying to illustrate that this problem is not easy to solve, and there are some questions that I hope the Minister will address, which have been raised by colleagues in her own party as well as by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East.

I echo the advert that the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North gave for the Scottish legal system. Minutes of agreement are a good vehicle for getting parents to come to an understanding and to recognise that such an agreement is not something they can sign off and then just park; it is legally enforceable. That makes a significant difference to how those agreements are seen in Scotland.

The hon. Lady also suggested that such an approach could be exported, or perhaps transferred—I do not think we are quite into exports yet, Mr Weir, from Scotland to England—into the English legal system. I echo that suggestion, which the Minister might like to consider, although I appreciate this issue is not totally within her domain. Such an approach is an excellent example of how the legal system can formally—but almost informally—make something happen. Things are done between lawyers, and as a lawyer yourself, Mr Weir, you will know that in Scotland one always trusts the word of a Scottish lawyer. The Minister should look at that issue, which I know the Law Society of England and Wales and the Law Society of Scotland have highlighted in their response to the consultation. Interestingly, the Law Society of England and Wales has said that family-based agreements are unable to command support because they are not enforceable, and that they add to the existing uncertainty.

We have all seen examples of how difficult it is to pin somebody down about their lifestyle and what they tell the CSA is their income. Before there was investigation and enforcement within the CSA, I had a long-standing case involving a woman who was married to a high-profile person who was returning an income of almost zero. Frankly, everybody and their dog knew that that was not the case, but the woman had difficulty in dealing

with the situation. I think that is why there is some surprise that, given the Minister's views on trying to get a consensual approach to arrangements, regulations 18 and 20 will, I understand, be withdrawn, and I hope that the Minister can throw some light on that.

I thank the Law Society of Scotland for its excellent comments in highlighting this problem. It is concerned that a change in the regulations, whereby the parent with care, and the CSA, could challenge the lifestyle of the parent without care,

“could allow non-resident parents with well-informed advisers to be navigated out of the child support system to the detriment of the children concerned.”

I suppose that that is the flipside of the lawyer. The lawyer will act in what he or she sees as the best interests of their client and, in those circumstances, that might be to try to navigate their way around—that is the sort of neutral term I would use.

Finally, I have one or two points to put to the Minister, which have arisen out of the recent Public Accounts Committee report. One is on the charging of parents, and a Member has already asked: if it is only £20, what is the point, because it will not even cover the costs, and there could be an element of tokenism? I certainly agree that that aspect would perhaps have been better left as it was. There is a view that the introduction of fees might well make child poverty worse, and that it might act as a deterrent. Given that some people will be on extremely low incomes, £20 might just be the deterrent that will put them off.

The Public Accounts Committee also identified that the IT system that has been introduced to save money is already running late, and every month's delay will cost £3 million. *[Interruption.]* The Minister smiles in that enigmatic way that most Ministers before her have smiled about IT and Departments. Given that IT systems have been the bane of the CSA's life, we need some—any—reassurance that she has this under control. The other related issue is whether a new IT system can be installed and tested while an existing programme is still being delivered. Those of us with accounts in the Royal Bank of Scotland and NatWest have perhaps seen an example of things going wrong when an incident happens during the running of a new system. I seek the Minister's reassurance on that matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East asked what would happen to the case load. Is it a zero-sum game? Will the current case load just be wiped, and will people have to say, “I want the CSA to be involved again”?

I hope that this has been a good discussion for everyone here. We have constantly to monitor the CSA. This is not an easy problem, and none of us should ever think that we can invent an IT system or an organisation that will solve the complexity of the emotional problems resulting from the break up of a relationship where children are involved. We only need think of our own families' and friends' experiences to see exactly what the pressures are, even in the most amicable of circumstances. In some ways, we are asking the CSA staff to work miracles in very difficult circumstances, and although they have come in for some criticism today, I think the majority of them work efficiently, to a high standard, and as compassionately as they can, within the parameters set by politicians.

3.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Miller): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. You have a tendency to chair a lot of our debates on welfare.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) on securing the debate. It is difficult to do justice to the wide range of issues raised by Members on both sides, but the debate has left me with the overwhelming feeling that the system is broken much more fundamentally than just a broken IT system. I may have smiled wryly before because, when the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mrs McGuire) referenced IT systems, I had a vague recollection, which officials have just confirmed, that the new future scheme was supposed to have been introduced under a Labour Government but has been delayed considerably since its inception—hence the wryness of my smile.

Mrs McGuire: Does the hon. Lady accept that the first system was rubbish anyway?

Maria Miller: I think the right hon. Lady misunderstands me. I mean the introduction of the future scheme, which was considerably delayed under the previous Administration.

I am also somewhat surprised that Stirling seems to be atypical. Although the right hon. Lady might have only a handful of cases or fewer troubling her postbag, the statistics say something considerably different, which is that the Child Support Agency receives more than 20,000 complaints every year. I know that the agency's chief executive is absolutely unhappy about that and is doing a great deal, working with staff, to do something about it, but it is indicative of the situation facing us.

Heather Wheeler: I hope that my hon. Friend will get around to talking about the duty of care, because if the CSA mucks up, there is nowhere else for the parent to go.

Maria Miller: My hon. Friend is right that as a Government we have a duty to ensure that we have a system that operates correctly for families. I would like to take her back a step, though, to look at the fundamentals.

The reality is that every child in this country has two parents who have a commitment to that child for life. For too long, the evidence has been conveniently ignored that children who live in a stable family do better than those who do not, and the most stable families that we have are married ones. This Government do not ignore the evidence. My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr Spencer), who is no longer in his place, was right to say that both parents have a right to stay involved in their children's lives. I applaud the work being done by my colleagues in the Department for Education to make sure that that will happen more readily in the future.

Children thrive when both parents take an active role in their lives, and evidence from elsewhere in Europe underpins that. If adult relationships break down and parents do not work together to ensure that they both continue to play an active role in their children's lives, it is the children who suffer. For me, that is the starting point for today's debate. Having the opportunity to reframe the subject is important for all of us here.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Sheila Gilmore) got it wrong, I think, when she said that we are trying to say that the CSA causes animosity. The Government are not saying that; we are saying that the CSA is making the situation worse not better, and at a cost of almost £500 million a year that is completely unacceptable. For too long, the child maintenance system has played a one-dimensional role—pretty badly—focusing almost exclusively on money transfer. IT breakdowns apart, perhaps that is why it has fallen so short of the mark and why so many Members have taken part in today's debate. In the past, the Government have spent almost 10 times more on the CSA, its IT systems and administrative processes for money transfer and enforcement, than on supporting families to work together to fix their relationship problems, which the evidence indicates is a more successful approach. We have to change that.

As right hon. and hon. Members have said, more than half the parents who use the current system say that they would like to make their own arrangements if they had the right support to do so. That is not to say—

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order. There is a Division in the House, and I understand that there may be several. The sitting is suspended until the series of votes ends.

3.49 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

4.44 pm

On resuming—

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): The main players are all here, so we will resume the debate. Minister, you have 10 minutes.

Maria Miller: What I have said so far is the basis for the reform that this Government are putting in place. I pay tribute to the 8,000 staff at the Child Support Agency and all that they do, with the difficult system they work with, but I share the view hon. Members have expressed today that the current system is not working well enough for the people who need it the most. We inherited two sets of rules, three IT systems and more than 20,000 complaints every year, and reform that has failed to date. It is time to change the role of the child maintenance system and set it in context of the Government's broader family and social justice policy, which is founded on the evidence that children have a better life with their parents providing support and protection throughout their childhood.

My hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Sheryll Murray) was right to say that parents need support from each other. Indeed, we have recently set up a customer panel to do just that and we are considering how to develop it further.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh East was right to say that we have to take into account the views of those who work in the field. They are indeed vital, but I caution her against focusing simply on the views of the legal profession, because as MPs who deal with such issues day in, day out, we all know that many people have more grass-roots experience, and we need to draw on that. Indeed, we as a Government have drawn on such voluntary and community sector experience in

making our plans for the future scheme. A group of experts in the sector have worked with us to set out how we can ensure that parents have the right information and support, particularly early on, to work together post-separation and to make sure that both parents remain actively involved in their children's lives. We have already announced £20 million to make that happen—that is in the current spending review. That £20 million, previously spent on IT systems and the rest, will now be used to support charitable organisations, which we all know do so much effective work with families. That funding adds to some £45 million that the Government are already spending in 2012-13 alone on supporting families and relationships.

The money will provide the sort of tangible help that makes a real difference to families' lives when separation is involved, and it will do so in a way that supports children. It will cover the provision of an online distributable web application; training for voluntary and community organisations to provide telephone support and improved face-to-face support; and up to £14 million for the recently launched innovation fund, which will help innovative ideas to get off the ground and measure their success in supporting parents during family separation.

I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage) that we know that not everybody will be able to work together. She is absolutely right about that. The hard work that she does in her constituency proves that not everybody can come to their own arrangements. That is why we will also introduce a new statutory child maintenance service for parents.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Mr Buckland) has immeasurable experience, and on a number of occasions I have had the benefit of his wisdom regarding reform in this part of my ministerial portfolio. He is right that tough enforcement action is needed. The Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act 2008 contains tough enforcement powers and we are committed to ensuring the implementation of the new statutory scheme, which will be introduced this year, along with powers to manage arrears of maintenance payments that have been accumulated under the existing scheme and are not collectible. We want to make sure, first and foremost, that we have the right statutory scheme before we take on those forcible powers that my hon. Friend thinks—and I agree—could work so well.

I will try to deal with the main issues raised in the debate. One that troubles many Members is that of non-resident parents whose lifestyles are inconsistent with their declared earnings. That is often coupled with being self-employed and other ways of playing the system that hon. Members have said some parents may be exploiting. The problem is not new and we think that our reforms will start to address it. We will use information from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs about taxable income alongside other data to calculate the amount of maintenance that a non-resident parent is required to pay, and that information will be updated every year.

That is an important innovation, because we will no longer have to rely on declared income and will move instead to a system that relies on data provided to HMRC. Of course, some individuals may not declare all their income to HMRC, but that is a different matter. We are working closely with HMRC to do as much as we can to ensure that such income estimates are accurate and kept up to date, which, under the current system,

they are not. The right hon. Member for Stirling is probably aware of all those issues from her time in government, and I hope she agrees that this is an important step forward.

Mrs McGuire: Given that we are dealing with people who put in a self-employed schedule D return, as opposed to the pay-as-you-earn, can the Minister give us any indication about where she will be taking the declared income figure from? Will it be from declared income, or will it be from income after all the other legitimate deductions come off—car use, boots for work and so on; all of the things that can be taken down—so that the taxable income at the end is far lower than what the person actually draws in?

Maria Miller: The right hon. Lady will know that we are looking at those sorts of details right now. I take from her comments that she wants to ensure that we are dealing with an income that is representative of the income that an individual has, rather than an income that may be depressed for the purposes of the calculation that is being made. I assure her that those are exactly the sorts of conversations that we are having.

The change to using HMRC data will also give us a much more efficient system, getting money to children quicker and more effectively tracking down parents who fail to pay. On that note, my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon raised an important issue regarding armed forces personnel. We are reviewing how to provide a service to assist service personnel in this respect. I hope he finds that reassuring.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Heather Wheeler) raised an important issue relating to the 12-month rule. Since I became a Minister, I have looked at that in some detail. We are looking for the evidence needed to quantify the scale of the problem and to ensure that we understand it fully, but I understand her point. I have received other representations on the matter and officials are working with the legal community and with the Ministry of Justice to consider how we can resolve the problem. It cannot be right to have a system in which people can play the rules to their advantage. We must have a system that works equitably across the piece. I undertake to write to my hon. Friend in more detail about the actions we are taking and to keep her fully informed of how we move forward.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) and various Scottish Members brought up the minute of agreement, which I have looked at in some detail. We do not feel that we can take that forward as part of the child maintenance system for which the Department for Work and Pensions has responsibility, but I know that my colleagues are well aware of it. If time were to permit—it does not today—I could talk a lot about the important innovations being made in the Ministry of Justice on mediation, which may well deal with some of the issues that the minute of agreement deals with.

In the few minutes that I have available, I wanted to address some of the other detailed points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough, who is an assiduous constituency MP—

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order. We have run out of time for this debate.

Local Authorities (Cumbria)

4.54 pm

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I appreciate this opportunity to debate local government in Cumbria in the Chamber. Before specifically discussing Cumbria, I would like to make a few comments on local government generally. I believe that there is a growing acknowledgement that local government is more important to the success of this country than many previously thought or accepted. I commend the Government for their interest in local governance and for their pursuit of the localism agenda, which is greatly welcome.

However, there is more work to be done. I am delighted that there is a growing cross-party view promoted by many different MPs, councillors and think-tanks that local government matters. However, it is in need of reform. I fully accept that the Government have other priorities—primarily the economy—and it is right that that should be the case. Nevertheless, reform should not be put off or delayed. Indeed, local government reform could be a vital weapon in the Government's battle to improve the economy and they could carry out those reforms relatively simply.

The Government could call for a commission to review local government. I am aware that Select Committees are already looking at a possible settlement between local and central Government. That commission could look at two key reform issues, namely restructuring local government—in my view, moving towards unitary local governance up and down the country—and furthering the localism agenda that has already been initiated by the Government in respect of passing further powers, particularly tax raising, to local authorities.

Sir Tony Cunningham (Workington) (Lab): May I first put on the record the apologies of the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), who would have been here but is giving evidence to a Select Committee? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that whatever decision comes out of this, it must have the ownership of the people of Cumbria? Whatever way we divide up Cumbria—whether we have one, two or three unitaries—there has to be the fullest and broadest consultation with the people of Cumbria, so that they feel a definite ownership of the final decision.

John Stevenson: I will come specifically to that point later in my speech, but, as a general observation, yes I have sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

The commission could report in due course and the Government and Parliament could consider its views. The advantage of that is that it would not distract the Government from their current business of policy implementation and it would avoid distracting Ministers from their priorities. I have digressed somewhat, but it is important to state that, although the debate is about Cumbria, I and many others believe it is important to address wider issues.

I have had the good fortune to live in Cumbria for 20 years and I was a councillor on Carlisle district council for 11 years before my election to this place in 2010. Over that time, I have become all too familiar with the structure of Cumbrian authorities, as well as

with their politics. Back in 1974, when local government was last comprehensively reorganised, Cumbria county council was created along with six district councils within the county council boundaries.

Arguably, that was the most sensible approach at that time: it suited the nature of local government and the needs of the different parts of Cumbria in the 1970s. However, life has moved on. We live in a different world, and government at all levels has increased and become far more complex. It is also true that the role of councillors has changed dramatically. Since 1974, there have been attempts to modernise and improve the arrangements, structures and roles within local government. Yet, I question whether the role of local government has truly modernised and kept up with the times. That is especially true of Cumbria.

A report on governance in Cumbria that was published a few years ago said:

“Cumbria is a county which is over-governed and under-led”.

It was true then and it still applies today. In Cumbria, we have seven councils—eight if the Lake District national park, which has considerable authority, is included—and there are nearly 400 councillors, with seven chief executives and seven senior management teams. In the county, six authorities are responsible for collecting council tax, at a total cost of more than £4.2 million. There are six different departments for planning, environmental and property issues. All that administration serves a total population of around 500,000 people.

The structure of Cumbrian local government needs to be reformed for two reasons. First, any substantial restructure, if done properly, would lead to considerable savings for the county. When the possibility of a unitary in Cumbria was discussed a few years ago, the county council believed that it would make substantial savings running into millions. That point is even more important and relevant given the economic backdrop against which we are having this debate. Any savings, particularly from amalgamating senior management teams, unifying departments and reducing the number of councillors, could ensure that front-line services that are vital to the everyday lives of the people of Cumbria are safeguarded and, in some cases, even enhanced.

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a very concise and overdue case for looking again at the structure of local government in Cumbria. I am grateful to him for securing the debate. He talks about the cost savings, which is an important point to recognise, but do we not also need to look at and be very mindful of the effectiveness of local government? A current problem—whether with education, health care or roads—in my constituency and I am sure in many others, including that of the hon. Gentleman, is not only saving money from the front line but the effectiveness of local government doing what it is supposed to do.

John Stevenson: I 100% agree with the hon. Gentleman and, funnily enough, that is what I am about to come on to. I take his point—he is absolutely right—and that is the second most important part of a reformed structure in Cumbria.

However, the second issue, better governance, is the most important in many respects. The reform of local government in Cumbria would in itself lead to better

government, and the benefit for our county is potentially enormous. Currently, people often have no idea which council is responsible for the services that they need; they do not know the difference between the roles of the district and county councils; and the political parties on one council are often fighting the parties on another. Indeed, too often, we have the absurd situation of councillors of the same party but different councils battling each other. That can extend to the officer corps of the councils, with the officials of each feeling the need to defend their council's position rather than pursuing policies that are in the interests of the local population. However, the ultimate absurdity is with individuals who are councillors on both councils. They might vote a particular way on policy in one council, but then go the other council and vote a different way in exactly the same policy debate—that takes place across the political divide, occurring among Conservative, Labour and Liberal councillors.

All that does nothing for the reputation of politicians in Cumbria, of councils or of political parties and, most importantly, it does nothing for the people of Cumbria. Over time in Cumbria, there has been a growing consensus in the political and business worlds, in local communities and among council employees and other organisations that a change is needed. Many organisations are utterly frustrated by the lack of decision making and consensus within the various councils. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor said that if we are to pursue successful growth in the British economy, we need to remove the obstacles to growth. Worryingly, in Cumbria the business community sees the current structure of local government as an obstacle to growth. It is imperative, therefore, to remove the obstacle so that we can see a better performing economy in Cumbria.

One problem I acknowledge is that while everyone—I like to think—agrees that change is needed and that something must be done to streamline and improve the current arrangements, many say that a consensus on how reform should go ahead is impossible. The solution, in my view, is relatively simple: Cumbria should move towards a unitary system of government. My personal preference is for two unitary authorities in the county. The simplest way to achieve that is to ask central Government to request the Boundary Commission to come in, review the arrangements and produce a proposal. Such a proposal could go out to consultation before a final decision.

I take on board the comments of the hon. Member for Workington (Sir Tony Cunningham) that we must ensure a consensus in Cumbria. Whatever structure that the Boundary Commission came up with should have support in our different communities. I take that on board fully.

Sir Tony Cunningham: Does the hon. Gentleman accept, given that the Boundary Commission came up with whatever it came up with on the parliamentary seats proposals, that there ought to be a way to input into the process and to change the proposals, if necessary? The way in which the commission dealt with the parliamentary boundaries has been ludicrous.

John Stevenson: If the Boundary Commission was to agree new boundaries in Cumbria, I like to think that it would come to Cumbria, go around the place physically

to see what it is all about, meet the communities, MPs and councillors, and then come up with proposals, rather than what happened with the parliamentary boundaries.

The advantage is that the politics would be taken out of the issue—at least, primarily, at the beginning—and the unnecessary squabbles that would inevitably arise if a decision had to be made by the various parties in Cumbria would be avoided. I therefore ask the Government to accept that there is a need for change in Cumbria, to acknowledge that the current arrangements are an obstacle to growth and to ask the Boundary Commission to come up with proposals for restructuring Cumbrian local government with a view to introducing unitary councils.

I am fully aware that there is general reluctance in Government to get involved in local government changes, and I understand the reasons for that. I fully support Government policy to give greater control to local authorities. I ask this: if there is sufficient support for reform in Cumbria, from local politicians of all colours, local organisations and the local population, will the Government consider exercising their powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to initiate a review into the local government of Cumbria? If the Government agree, it will simply be up to Cumbrians to request such a review, and I hope that MPs across the county would support it.

The legacy of a reformed structure in Cumbria would be huge. It would lead to better local government, better management, better services, and, I like to think, a more vibrant economy. Instead of being over-governed and under-led, we would be a county properly governed and effectively led. The businesses, communities and even councillors of Cumbria are asking for the removal of unnecessary layers of bureaucracy and the streamlining of a currently cumbersome system. I hope that the Government are willing to give them, and us, the tools we need to see proper government in Cumbria.

5.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) on securing the debate and for giving us the opportunity to debate local government structure in Cumbria. I am grateful to the hon. Members for Copeland (Mr Reed) and for Workington (Sir Tony Cunningham), who intervened during his speech.

I very much sympathise with many of the sentiments and views expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle. Like him, my background is in local government. I spent some 16 years as a councillor in a London borough and another eight or more on what we would regard as a top-tier authority, so I understand the point that he makes. The Government recognise the importance of effective local government and how it can significantly contribute to economic growth in the local economy. I recognise the importance not only of delivering local services in the most effective and efficient way, but of effective local leadership—both officer and member leadership. Sweeping away the unnecessary bureaucratic controls, regulations and processes that could lead to over-government and stifle initiative and growth is also important.

[*Robert Neill*]

I part company with my hon. Friend on the belief that changing the structure is the answer. Having looked at, and on one occasion lived with, local government reform and restructuring in London, I do not believe that the cost, disruption and delay, which attended past attempts at enforced unitary reorganisation, are justified. It is not the right means to deal with the problem that he identifies.

Mr Reed: Although I have sympathy with the case made by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson), I agree that now is not the time for local government reorganisation in Cumbria, given the huge costs necessarily involved at a time of financial distress for local government, not only in Cumbria, but across the country.

I would like the Minister to take on board the fact that, when the previous Government tried to address local government reorganisation in Cumbria last time, the proposal failed due to the national strategic interests in Cumbria, principally those surrounding the nuclear industry in west Cumbria and my constituency. That needs to be addressed. There were doubts about what might happen to the nuclear industry under a unitary Cumbrian authority. I ask him to bear those considerations in mind.

Robert Neill: I am happy to do so. It is a perfectly fair point; we cannot look purely at narrow structural issues in isolation from the impact that a local authority has on the wider community and economy or the national and sub-national considerations that flow from it. I therefore agree with that proposition.

The Government do not intend to instigate centrally imposed local government reorganisation, but reform and change are necessary. We should concentrate on how local government works and delivers the services that residents need. That is where we could fruitfully apply our minds and our time, and it can best be delivered in today's circumstances of dealing with economic growth, with the financial constraints facing us and with the pressure on public finances. That points clearly to councils working closely together when that makes sense, as it often does. I accept that the boundaries may often be somewhat artificial when looked at in the economic context or in terms of the practical geography of delivery for some types of service. It is not necessary to change the boundaries and the names on the map to achieve such aims.

We should encourage local authorities to work more and more together, to pool and share their staff and their buildings and to discharge their functions jointly with other councils and other public service providers. Much work has already been done on community budget pilots and how a multi-agency approach can deliver better public services for us.

John Stevenson: I understand the Minister's argument, and I sympathise with it. If councils work together, savings can undoubtedly be made and local government can be more efficient, but what happens when councils do not agree and are unwilling to co-operate?

Robert Neill: First, increasingly that culture is changing. Secondly, the Government have made it clear that, when we look at how we finance local government in future, innovative councils will benefit because those that seek to attract economic growth to their areas and to make homes provision and so on will benefit through business rates retention and the new homes bonus. Often, it makes good sense to work jointly together. There is an obligation on councils to work together to prepare their planning policies under the duty to co-operate, so there are specific levers to give a firm nudge to local authorities to co-operate.

In most parts of the country, electors will be able to see authorities not far away and sometimes of different political persuasions working jointly together. My Conservative-controlled London borough had some joint working with the Labour-controlled council in Lewisham. Party politics need not get in the way. It is the mindset that is important, and we must all work to change that. That is the way forward, and separate chief executives, separate legal payrolls and so on are not necessary.

An example close to here is Westminster council, Kensington and Chelsea council and Hammersmith and Fulham council, which have pioneered a radical approach whereby they share all their services. They still have individual councillors with democratic accountability, but all their services are effectively now being shared and are delivering efficiencies of about £100 million every year. It is called the tri-borough approach, and it can be, and is being, adapted in rural areas. I suggest that that model is the way forward.

Since March 2010, East Devon district council has been sharing a chief executive with South Somerset district council, and they are looking to expand that sharing process. Significantly, that collaboration is across a county boundary. An enforced unitary arrangement in the county would not have helped their situation and would have been needlessly constraining. It indicates that where there is a will for authorities to collaborate, they can achieve real savings. We are seeing that in many places. Sharing senior staff, as well as back-office staff, shows that more can be done for less, and such an approach can work with the business community, which is important. That is why it is important to ensure that local economic partnerships work effectively and efficiently. We must continue to ensure that that is delivered.

Such innovation does not need permission from central Government. It does not have to wait for us to say so. Given the new general power of competence under the Localism Act 2011, councils have the ability to do that without reference to central Government. I agree with the point made by the hon. Members for Workington and for Copeland that, whatever the form of the arrangements, they should be locally developed and locally owned to meet the specific needs of local areas. The right way forward is for councils to consider what is best for their residents, rather than preserving the current means of doing things and the institutional interest in any area.

Mr Reed: The Minister is being very patient and accommodating with his time. On the point that he raised earlier, will he undertake to write to me about the prospects of business rates from the nuclear industry going to my local authority?

The hon. Member for Carlisle mentioned the effectiveness of local government. The system that we have in Cumbria severely impinges on the effectiveness of our local government structure, and whatever our political persuasion, we would all like to make that work better now, in advance of any future reorganisation. How can the Government help us to ensure that local government is more effective, particularly, as I said, in education?

Robert Neill: We will consult on further technical details about the operation of the business rates retention scheme in the summer, and I will, of course, write to the hon. Gentleman. Improving ways of working together does not always require a central Government intervention. The Local Government Association has done a lot of pioneering peer-improvement work within the sector, and there are many examples, including in other parts of the north-west, of experienced members and chief officers going in to mentor and encourage joint working.

I hope that the authorities in Cumbria will look at the opportunities that are open to them and that people are benefitting from elsewhere. That will require a cultural change in the way of thinking, and that is sometimes the biggest challenge to get over. I think that there is a way to achieve that objective without the up-front costs and potential disruption of enforced reorganisation. There are also opportunities where councils come together and form a joint authority that is responsible for certain services. The obvious example, although in a more urban context, is Greater Manchester, which deals with transport and related issues. It is a combined authority that has voluntarily pooled a measure of sovereignty. It is driven from the bottom up and locally owned, and that is its advantage.

I accept that there can be arguments for the merger of districts within a two-tier system, but again we would regard anything in that direction as having to be locally driven. If local authorities—this has been mooted in some parts of the country—want to come together voluntarily, that would be a different consideration from our imposing it from above, provided that there was clear evidence of public support and that it could demonstrate that it represents value for money and would result in better services for local people.

There are ways in which we can deal with the situation as it is. Reference was made to the number of councillors, and I will touch on that issue by saying that local government electoral arrangements, which include the number of councillors on a council, are the responsibility of the Local Government Boundary Commission and are not something that the House has decided should be in the Government's hands. The commission is responsible directly to Parliament for its work. There are circumstances in which local authorities can request a review of their arrangements, and the Local Government Boundary Commission, which is well staffed and expert in these matters, is always willing to talk to local authorities in such situations.

Having looked at everything in the round, I hope that our arrangements will enable the legitimate objectives, which my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle rightly seeks to achieve, to be met without the consequences that flow from an imposed top-down approach that is not consistent with the spirit of localism. I submit that he and I were both elected on that issue in our manifestos, and I hope that localism is generally accepted as the right approach across the House.

5.19 pm

Sitting suspended.

Co-operative Housing

5.20 pm

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir, and to debate the potential effects of the *Berrisford v. Mexfield Housing Co-operative Ltd* Supreme Court judgment on the future of co-operative housing in the UK. Many of us who believe that the co-operative model has a significant part to play in the UK's current shortfall in affordable housing think that this case has raised some important issues. I am grateful to have the opportunity to discuss them today.

The court case, which I will refer to as *Mexfield*, or *Berrisford and Mexfield*, has had a profound effect on the tenancies issued by many housing co-operatives. Among other things, it has reinforced the need for a new legal framework to define the relationship between a housing co-operative and its members. Instead of applying feudal landlord and tenant law to co-operative housing projects, we would have a law that recognises the right of occupancy as a result of membership of that co-operative, as defined in the members' agreement.

I made that argument last year when I introduced a ten-minute rule Bill that would have recognised co-operative housing tenure in UK law for the first time. Before I continue, I should say that I am grateful to the Minister for Housing and Local Government, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), who cannot be here today. He took time after that ten-minute rule Bill to meet me to discuss the matter further. I appreciate his interest in these matters.

The ruling of the Supreme Court in the *Berrisford and Mexfield* case highlighted the problems caused by the absence of this specific provision for housing co-operatives in law. I hope we can explore the implications of the court case and the actions that need to be taken in the short and long term to deal with them.

Before examining the specifics of the court ruling, I will turn to housing co-operatives more generally. I see here several colleagues from the Co-operative party, who will be well aware of the merits of housing co-operative schemes. For others less familiar with them, let me explain how they work. Like any co-operative organisation or business, fully co-operative housing projects are owned and controlled by the people who use their services, in this case, the residents.

The co-operative model gives residents democratic control of the property in which they live, giving them a greater say over the management and maintenance than they would otherwise have as tenants. Residents also decide codes of conduct and rules of membership. In brief, the co-operative model is based on a combination of rights with responsibilities and a respect for mutualism. I believe it is a model that builds strong communities, with the potential to increase the supply of affordable housing, and I would like to see it flourish.

Tom Greatrex (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and on his ten-minute rule Bill on housing co-operatives, which I was proud to support. Does he agree that, in addition to the points he just outlined, co-operative housing can be an important way to help some people obtain their first home?

Jonathan Reynolds: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention; I see that as a major benefit and will say more on that later. There are already a number of housing schemes across the country that are run to varying degrees in accordance with the co-operative model. Because UK property law acknowledges only the legal states of freehold, ownership and tenancy, co-operative housing schemes do not have full legal recognition. A definition of fully mutual housing co-operatives does exist and slightly different legal rules apply. For instance, under the Housing Act 1988, fully mutual housing co-operatives are not permitted to grant either secure or assured tenancies. Instead, co-operatives grant non-statutory contractual tenancies. The case involving Ms Berrisford and the Mexfield Housing Co-operative shows that the currently available tenancy agreements are not wholly appropriate for co-operative housing organisations. In fact, although I appreciate that this sounds like a very technical point, the issue of contractual tenancies is crucial to understanding why this case has caused concern.

Currently, the majority of the members of a co-operative housing scheme are issued with what is known as a periodic tenancy. A periodic tenancy is regularly renewed at a specific point; it is usually granted from week to week, or from month to month. It can be brought to an end unilaterally, by the tenant or landlord.

As co-operatives are not legally capable of granting secure or assured tenancies, the rights of the landlord and the tenant are defined by the tenancy agreement. So, instead of statutory security, co-operatives ensure that tenants have security through the decision-making practices and policies, of which the tenants are a part. In addition, they usually give tenants an additional degree of security by inserting a clause in the tenancy agreement specifying the circumstances in which they would end the tenancy, such as non-payment of rent. The tenancy can still be ended if either the tenant serves notice or the co-operative issues a notice to quit, but the clause in the agreement specifies that the co-operative can serve notice to quit only in certain specific circumstances, such as non-payment of rent, which I have already mentioned, or antisocial behaviour or some other pre-defined breach of the tenancy. By and large, that system has operated effectively for co-operative housing projects in the UK for some time.

However, the Supreme Court's *Berrisford and Mexford* ruling has thrown that practice into doubt. Ironically, the ruling has stemmed from the clauses in the agreements that are designed to offer greater security to tenants. The Supreme Court ruled that the clauses in the co-operatives' tenancy agreements that specified particular circumstances in which the tenancy could be brought to an end actually created an uncertain term, and as no tenancy can be for an uncertain term, the Supreme Court ruled that it should instead be considered as a tenancy for life. That means that, instead of a periodic tenancy that was routinely renewed at regular intervals, the Supreme Court said that the tenancy should be considered as a form of tenure that is more commonly associated with home owners, because under the Law of Property Act 1925 a tenancy for life lasts 90 years or for the lifetime of the resident.

Again, that decision might sound technical, but it potentially has very wide-ranging implications for housing co-operatives, bringing in a wide range of legal provisions

that are primarily aimed at home owners and that are therefore inappropriate for co-operatives. First, that is because, unlike periodic tenancies, fixed-term tenancies such as the ones I have mentioned cannot be ended with a notice to quit. Instead, they must be ended through mutual agreement or, where there has been a breach of tenancy, a legal process that is again usually associated with home owners. I understand there has already been a case in which a co-operative member has successfully argued a “Mexfield defence” against possession proceedings, arguing that in effect, he had a 90-year fixed-term tenancy that could not be ended with a notice to quit.

There are concerns that this ruling could open the door to potentially complex and costly legal processes. Determining whether co-operative tenancy agreements are periodic or fixed-term tenancies is not easy, and co-operatives across the UK are waiting to see how the county courts interpret the Supreme Court’s ruling on possession orders. They are scrutinising their tenancy agreements to consider what they can do to eradicate any uncertainty, while avoiding costly legal disputes. They know that currently, the only real way to determine the status of these tenancy agreements may be through the courts.

I have already outlined the impact this ruling might have on housing co-operatives in the unfortunate circumstances where possession proceedings are needed, but its implications could also impact on the day-to-day running of housing co-operatives for residents. For example, I understand that residents will no longer be able to rely on the so-called “right to repair” outlined in section 11 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, because that only applies to tenants with a short tenancy.

Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising this very important issue. I was very pleased to be one of the people helping him out on his ten-minute rule Bill. When I speak to housing co-operatives, it strikes me that one of the issues they are concerned about is the implications of this ruling for housing benefit. Can he say a few words about that?

Jonathan Reynolds: Absolutely, and I too am aware that this issue is causing significant concern. The concern stems from the understanding that co-operative tenants would be entitled to claim housing benefit only if clarification was sought. As I understand it, housing benefit is not usually payable to people with leases over 21 years, so this ruling would cause a significant problem to those people. Can the Government confirm as a matter of urgency whether co-operative tenants, like other tenants, would still be eligible to claim housing benefit?

When making the judgment, Supreme Court Justice Baroness Hale highlighted the fact that the rule about certainty was invented long before periodic tenancies. Others, including the retired Law Lord, Lord Browne-Wilkinson—back in the early 1990s, I believe—have acknowledged that this area of the law is not in a satisfactory state. I understand that CDS Co-operatives, the largest co-operative housing service agency in England, is already seeking to bring a test case before the Supreme Court. That case will ask the Court to consider whether the principle that a tenancy cannot be for an uncertain term can be overturned. However, that process will be long and costly, and even if CDS Co-operatives succeeds,

the Supreme Court may rule that it is the role of this House and Parliament, not the Court, to change precedent derived from an interpretation of centuries of feudal law.

The Supreme Court ruling has raised serious questions for the co-operative housing sector. It would be wrong to leave the sector to deal with that fallout alone, so today I ask the Minister whether he can offer urgent assistance to housing co-operatives as they try to navigate their way through the implications of the judgment. However, I still firmly believe that Parliament needs to change the law in this area.

As my hon. Friends the Members for Luton South (Gavin Shuker) and for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Tom Greatrex) said, last year I introduced a private Member’s Bill that would have acknowledged co-operative housing in law for the first time. I argued that existing landlord and tenant law assumes a fundamental conflict of interest between landlord and tenant and that that was inappropriate for the co-operative model. I suggested that the new form of tenure would open the way for the expansion of co-operative housing schemes at a time when the UK faces a significant housing crisis. The change in the law would formally have acknowledged the nature of housing co-operatives for the first time, but it would also have had the potential to increase access to affordable housing and would have enabled members of housing co-operatives to build up financial equity at a time when people are finding it harder than ever to take their first step on the housing ladder. That point is in response to what my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South said, because if that Bill had become law, it would for the first time give people a real option between ownership and renting. By virtue of being a member of the co-operative, they could pay an amount of money appropriate to their income, giving them an equity stake that would grow. They would not face the financial hurdles of buying for the first time, but they would have a greater stake than if they were simply renting.

In many countries, co-operative housing tenure is already recognised as a distinct way for members to acquire the right to occupy their homes. For example, in Sweden, where 18% of the population live in housing co-operatives, that has been part of the law since the 1920s. I am delighted that, in Wales, the housing White Paper, “Homes for Wales”, gives due prominence to the need to support co-operative schemes through legislation, committing to create co-operative housing tenure in Welsh housing law. I congratulate the Welsh Labour Administration, the Welsh co-operative movement and the Minister for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage, Huw Lewis AM, on Wales being the first part of the UK to do so.

The importance of the issues highlighted by the *Berrisford v. Mexfield* ruling is inextricably linked with the seriousness of the growing housing crisis in the UK. I am sure that I need not remind hon. Members here today that in the private rented sector, rents are increasing more quickly than wages, and at a time when living standards for working families are being squeezed and people are under huge pressure. Local authorities and housing associations own 1 million fewer homes now than in the late 1970s. Families can no longer rely on social housing. With the average price of a property in the UK in excess of £165,000, it is now harder than ever for first-time buyers to step on to the housing ladder.

[Jonathan Reynolds]

We urgently need to find solutions to the problem. Co-operative housing schemes do provide an alternative solution. They can offer affordable, quality accommodation to residents, while empowering them to play a key role in the decisions that relate to their property. What is more, they have the potential to attract new investment into the provision of much-needed housing. We should be doing all we can to support the growth of the co-operative housing sector. We need to do more and we should start today by supporting existing co-operatives in the wake of the *Berrisford v. Mexfield* judgment.

5.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Andrew Stunell):

It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) on bringing this matter to the attention of the House today. I want to establish my own credentials in two ways—first, by geography in saying that he and I have adjacent constituencies, which have some common problems and issues. I also want to establish my credentials in relation to the co-operative movement. My first paid job was with the co-operative movement in Manchester, and it seems to have stood me in good stead as a foundation for my career, such as it is.

The hon. Gentleman has been a very assiduous supporter of the co-operative movement. This debate, coming in the international year of the co-operative and following his private Member's Bill, is relevant and timely.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the fact that after the demise of his Bill—at least at its first attempt—he met my right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Local Government to discuss in some detail his proposals and how they might move ahead. The Government have no hesitation in agreeing with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of the co-operative principle. It is certainly in tune with the Government's thinking about decentralisation and democratic engagement and with our view that powers should be returned to local communities, local neighbourhoods and local tenants' associations. Tenant empowerment is a notable feature of the Localism Act 2011, which came into law earlier this year.

Overall, we aim to rebalance power from central Government to local authorities and local people and to deliver the housing that communities want and need and that, as the hon. Gentleman made clear, is certainly urgently required. We are doing a lot to achieve that and to create new models to deliver additional housing. I am sure that he recognises that co-operative models of delivery and development would be welcome in that pattern; I do not think that they could ever be an exclusive, or probably even a substantial part of the sector. It is important to distinguish some of the fundamental differences between the history of the housing market in Scandinavia and in this country. We are all prisoners of our own history and models of development. Nevertheless, co-operative models can make an important contribution.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will also recognise that this Government, in investing £4.5 billion in developing social and affordable homes, are responding strongly

and positively to the need for low-cost housing. We will deliver 170,000 new social and affordable homes by 2015. I must say for the record that that is somewhat in contrast to the outgoing Administration, which in 13 years reduced the stock of social rented homes by more than 400,000. We are turning back that figure.

Jonathan Reynolds: Just for the record, the Minister mentioned our neighbouring constituencies. I know that he knows my area well, as I know his. When the Government give statistics like that, it does not reflect schemes such as one that he will be aware of that was pursued in Hattersley in my constituency. It fundamentally turned around the housing market in that area and the area itself. Yes, it reduced some of the stock, but it resurrected the market and invested a great deal. That must be reflected. It is not just about housing; it is about homes and quality of life for the people who live in those homes.

Andrew Stunell: Indeed. I can look over my constituency boundary at Hattersley. I fully understand the work being done on regeneration there. We have continued it with investment that will deliver 150,000 additional decent social homes in this spending review period. The hon. Gentleman and I have some shared objectives, but I thought that it was important to put on record what has been achieved so far and what our aims are.

I turn to some of the hon. Gentleman's specific points. The Government believe that getting people involved is the key to making healthy, strong communities and places to live. That is encapsulated in the empowerment White Paper, which the Government recently published. We recognise that members of housing co-operatives are more likely to be active members of the community and engage in other areas of governance in the community. For instance, they are school governors, and so on. In other words, people in co-operatives and with co-operative tenancies are often the joiners and doers of a lively community.

Gavin Shaker: The Minister makes a compelling point about the involvement of many people in housing co-operatives. Will he outline what specific work has been done at the Department for Communities and Local Government with reference to the implications of the *Berrisford v. Mexfield* case that we are discussing?

Andrew Stunell: Indeed, I shall come to that shortly.

The Government, working with the Homes and Communities Agency, is engaged with the Confederation of Co-operative Housing as the lead member of the Mutual Housing Group, which is considering how we can develop an investment fund to support the co-operative sector. I understand that a meeting this autumn will take that forward. I hope that that shows the Government's earnest intent to ensure that the sector is not left out of the investment and development that we have in mind.

I recognise the uncertainty that the judgment may have created for housing co-operatives and welcome the Confederation of Co-operative Housing's issuing guidance to its members. I am sure that Opposition Members will know that that guidance makes it clear that co-operatives need to think carefully about how they word their tenancy agreements in future. However, if they get that right, co-operatives should still be able to end tenancies

in a straightforward way, through service of a notice to quit. Even if a lifetime tenancy is deemed to subsist, a co-operative landlord can still rely on a breach of a term of the tenancy, for example, failure to pay rent, to obtain possession. That is broadly the same position pertaining to most other social tenants.

It is important to recognise—I am sure that co-operatives do—that there is no standard model tenancy. Therefore the Mexfield judgment has to be taken as a case relating to a particular form of tenancy. I believe that the co-operative movement has received advice about different tenancy agreements in different areas, saying either that they are subject to the Mexfield judgment or, alternatively, that a particular version is not. It is certainly a fine legal point and I would not set myself up to judge that. In short, we do not need a new form of co-operative housing tenure. We need existing tenancy agreements to be in accordance with best practice—Mexfield avoidance compliant, if I can put it that way—to avoid any of the consequences that the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde mentioned.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have received the message from my right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Local Government about his proposed Bill. We are not clear what a new co-operative housing tenure would look like or what benefit it would bring in practice. His Bill might have the perverse effect of giving occupiers of co-operative housing fewer rights than tenants in social housing, local authority or housing association properties. I am sure that he would not want that to be the outcome.

Jonathan Reynolds: I understand how the advice that the Minister received may have come to that, but will he acknowledge, for the record, that the rights and obligations of the members of a co-operative are democratically determined by its membership? The Minister's argument could be based on the fact that some tenants in social housing have statutory rights to defend them, but the whole point of a co-op is that decisions are made democratically by a co-op's membership, so in practice they would not have fewer rights. They would probably have many more rights than people in equivalent forms of social housing.

Andrew Stunell: I would certainly hope that that is right. One would expect a high level of mutual respect between tenants who form the co-operative. However, as the current example shows, that is not always the case. The Mexfield case went to court because that fundamental appeal to common sense and common rights broke down and the individuals saw fit to challenge the basis on which the contract had been formed.

That makes a point that is highly relevant to the work that the House does when it considers legislation. Legislation is not primarily for the use of people who have common

sense; it is to regulate people who have not got a great deal of common sense. In developing a new tenure system, one has to be very aware of any perverse consequences that might be brought to light. It is also quite—in fact, very—important to make it clear that, even if the hon. Gentleman's Bill were suitably amended and then passed, it would not apply retrospectively. The measure cannot unilaterally and retrospectively change the terms of tenancy agreements already in force. It is therefore still important for co-operative associations that believe that they may have a kind of tenancy agreement that falls foul of the Mexfield judgment to take appropriate steps at their level to amend it and to seek to get their tenants and members of that co-operative to sign up to that.

There were perhaps a couple of other points that it is worth my mentioning to try to deal with the issues raised—although I want to make it clear that both I and the Department are more than ready to enter into a continued discussion with the hon. Gentleman and his supporting colleagues if they feel that more work still needs to be done.

The outstanding point related to the applicability—or eligibility—of a tenant who had been affected by the Mexfield judgment to apply for housing benefit. First, sensible and workable solutions are certainly available locally through the tenant and the co-operative agreeing to a suitable amendment to the tenancy to ensure that there is no room for doubt. As far as I can see—if I can make an appeal to common sense—that would overcome any difficulties that might theoretically arise in that circumstance. I take it for granted—as I hope Opposition Members do—that, from more or less the day of the Mexfield judgment onwards, all future tenancies let by co-operatives will avoid this rather strange detour in contract law as established by the High Court.

Co-operatives are keen to work with the community sector to attract private sector funding, which was a point made by the hon. Gentleman. I have already mentioned that the Homes and Communities Agency, which acts as the mediator of the Government's social and affordable housing programme, is in discussion with the co-operative housing societies and I very much hope that a fruitful outcome will be produced in the months ahead. Again, I am more than happy to share with him the progress made, although he might well have his own sources of information on the other side of that discussion.

I hope that my response was full, but I know that the hon. Gentleman will be assiduous in telling me if it was not. The Department is more than happy to engage in further discussion, if appropriate.

Question put and agreed to.

5.49 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 11 July 2012

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Employment Tribunals

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Norman Lamb): In November 2011, Mr Justice Underhill, outgoing president of the Employment Appeals Tribunal was asked by Government to lead a fundamental review of the rules of procedure for employment tribunals. I am publishing Mr Justice Underhill's recommendations ahead of a formal consultation exercise on their implementation, particularly given its interest to members of the committee scrutinising the Employment and Regulatory Reform Bill currently before Parliament, and placing copies in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr Justice Underhill was asked to carry out a fundamental review of the rules of procedure for employment tribunals following the Government's response to the Resolving Workplace Disputes consultation in November 2011. This was in response to feedback from stakeholders that the existing rules were overly elaborate and poorly drafted as a result of piecemeal change over recent years. Employers, particularly smaller businesses told us that a fear of employment tribunals was affecting their decision to take on new staff. Mr Justice Underhill was therefore tasked with ensuring the rules were simplified and provided the framework to manage cases flexibly, efficiently, proportionately and where possible, consistently, providing certainty to all parties who participate in the employment tribunal process.

I would like to thank Mr Justice Underhill for the time both he and his working group have given to this important piece of work. He has cut the length of the legislation by more than half, and has simplified the language substantially. He has suggested a number of significant changes that he believes should bring about a better functioning employment tribunal system.

His procedural changes include: new rules on the way that weak cases that should not proceed are managed; a new rule to provide for a lead case mechanism in multiple case or where cases raise the same point of law, which brings employment tribunals in line with other types of tribunals; a combining of the separate case management discussion and pre-hearing reviews into a single preliminary hearing; and simpler procedures to conclude claims that are withdrawn. The combined effect of these recommendations should be quicker disposal of cases, and an overall legislative framework that is simpler for all parties to understand.

Mr Justice Underhill's new rules also give employment tribunals a more formal role in promoting alternative forms of dispute resolution. He has also proposed a greater role for presidential guidance, designed to give all parties involved a better idea of what to expect at an

employment tribunal, and what is expected of them, while also promoting consistent case handling by employment judges.

We intend to launch an eight-week consultation on the substance of these changes later in the year, before bringing forward amended rules for consideration by both Houses.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Fire and Rescue National Framework for England

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill): I have today published the fire and rescue national framework for England. The framework resets the relationship between fire and rescue authorities and Government. One of the key principles of which is to acknowledge the proficiency and experience of fire and rescue authorities; and to allow them the freedom and flexibility to deliver the services for which they are respected and renowned without Whitehall prescription.

The priorities in the framework are for fire and rescue authorities to:

- identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks their area faces, make provision for prevention and protection activities and to respond to incidents appropriately;

- work in partnership with their communities and a wide range of partners locally and nationally to deliver their service; and

- be accountable to communities for the service they provide.

Fire and rescue authorities face new challenges: the need to deal with the continuing threat of terrorism, the impact of climate change, and the impacts of an ageing population, against a backdrop of change and the need to cut the national deficit. The framework enables fire and rescue authorities to efficiently deliver their services; including working collaboratively with other fire and rescue authorities, or with other organisations, to improve public safety and cost effectiveness. Principally, it is to local communities, not central Government, that fire and rescue authorities are accountable.

The framework delivers on the Government commitment in their response to the fire future reports, to clearly define national resilience and to set out clear roles and responsibilities in relation to national resilience. The framework also sets out arrangements for fire and rescue authorities to collectively engage with Government on national resilience issues through a new Fire and Rescue Strategic Resilience Board. Through this board, we will take a collaborative approach to national resilience that is based on and drawn from local capability, expertise, knowledge and leadership.

The framework has an open-ended duration which gives fire and rescue authorities greater certainty. The high-level, strategic nature of the framework should mean that it will remain unchanged for the medium to long term.

A copy of the fire and rescue national framework for England has been placed in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan Autumn 2012 Roulement

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Philip Hammond):

The next roulement of UK forces in Afghanistan is due to take place in October 2012. The UK's current framework Brigade in Helmand, 12th Mechanised Brigade, will be replaced by 4th Mechanised Brigade. The forces deploying include¹:

4th Mechanised Brigade Headquarters and Signal Squadron (204)
 Headquarters 104 Logistic Support Brigade
 40 Commando Royal Marines
 Elements of 847 Naval Air Squadron
 857 Naval Air Squadron
 The Royal Dragoon Guards
 The Queen's Royal Lancers
 4th Regiment Royal Artillery
 Elements of 5th Regiment Royal Artillery
 Elements of 16th Regiment Royal Artillery
 Elements of 32nd Regiment Royal Artillery
 Elements of 39th Regiment Royal Artillery
 21 Engineer Regiment
 Elements of 28 Engineer Regiment
 Elements of 36 Engineer Regiment (Search)
 Elements of 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographical)
 Elements of 101 Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal)
 Elements of 170 (Infrastructure Support) Engineer Group
 2nd Signal Regiment
 Elements of 10th Signal Regiment
 Elements of 14th Signal Regiment (Electronic Warfare)
 Elements of 15th Signal Regiment (Information Support)
 Elements of 21st Signal Regiment (Air Support)
 1st Battalion Scots Guards
 The Royal Scots Borderers, 1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland
 1st Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment
 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment
 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles
 Elements of 1 Regiment Army Air Corps
 Elements of 3 Regiment Army Air Corps
 7 Theatre Logistic Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 6 Theatre Logistic Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 12 Logistic Support Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 9 Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 11 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 17 Port and Maritime Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 23 Pioneer Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 29 Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 3rd Medical Regiment
 1st Close Support Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
 Elements of 7 Air Assault Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
 Elements of 101 Force Support Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
 150 Provost Company Royal Military Police
 Elements of 101 Provost Company Royal Military Police
 Elements of Special Investigations Branch (United Kingdom)
 Elements of The Military Provost Staff
 Elements of 1st Military Working Dogs Regiment
 Elements of 1 Military Intelligence Battalion

Elements of 2 Military Intelligence (Exploitation) Battalion
 Elements of 4 Military Intelligence Battalion
 Elements of The Military Stabilisation and Support Group
 Elements of 15 Psychological Operations Group
 Elements of The Defence Cultural Specialist Unit
 Elements of The Honourable Artillery Company
 Elements of The Royal Mercian and Lancastrian Yeomanry
 Elements of 101st (Northumbrian) Regiment Royal Artillery (Volunteers)
 Elements of 75 Engineer Regiment (Volunteers)
 Elements of 32nd Signal Regiment (Volunteers)
 Elements of 52nd Lowland, 6th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland
 Elements of 3rd Battalion The Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment
 Elements of 4th Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment
 Elements of 4th Battalion The Mercian Regiment
 Elements of The London Regiment
 Elements of 148 Expeditionary Force Institute Squadron, The Royal Logistic Corps (Volunteers)
 Elements of 150 (Yorkshire) Transport Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps (Volunteers)
 Elements of 159 Supply Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps (Volunteers)
 Elements of 204 (Northern Irish) Field Hospital (Volunteers)
 Elements of 243 (The Wessex) Field Hospital (Volunteers)
 Elements of 102 Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (Volunteers)
 Elements of 103 Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (Volunteers)
 Elements of 5th Regiment Royal Military Police
 2 (Army Co-operation) Squadron, Royal Air Force
 31 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 9 (Bomber) Squadron, Royal Air Force
 15 Squadron Royal Air Force Regiment
 Number 7 Force Protection Wing Headquarters, Royal Air Force
 Number 2 Tactical Police Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 47 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 30 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 5 (Army Co-operation) Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 32 (The Royal) Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 28 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 216 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 39 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 27 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 18 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 99 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 78 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 90 Signals Unit, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 1 Air Control Centre, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 33 (Engineering) Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of Tactical Supply Wing, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 1 Air Mobility Wing, Royal Air Force
 Elements of Tactical Medical Wing, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 2 (Mechanical Transport) Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 93 (Expeditionary Armaments) Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of Engineering and Logistics Wing Royal Air Force Odiham

In addition to the list of formed units, individual augmentees from each of the services will continue to deploy as part of this integrated force package. In total we expect 1,138 individual augmentees to deploy on operations. This will be comprised of 168 Royal Navy personnel; 344 Army personnel and 626 Royal Air Force personnel.

Volunteer and ex-regular members of the reserve forces will continue to deploy to Afghanistan as part of this integrated force package, and we expect to issue around 575 call-out notices. On completion of their mobilisation procedures, the reservists will undertake a period of training and, where applicable, integration with their respective receiving units. The majority will serve on operations for around six months. As part of this commitment, we expect up to six members of the sponsored reserves to be in theatre at any one time.

In accordance with previous statements the UK's conventional force level will draw down by 500 in 2012.

I shall make a further statement on 4th Mechanised Brigade's planned replacement formation, 1st Mechanised Brigade, nearer the time of their deployment.

¹Where the contribution is 10 personnel or more.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Managing the Impacts of Flooding

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mrs Caroline Spelman): In 2008 it was agreed that the current statement of principles on the provision of flood insurance between the Government and insurers would not be renewed following its expiry in June 2013.

In order to make sure that insurance for homes at risk of flooding remains widely available and affordable, work is underway to establish a successor arrangement to the statement of principles. Recent events have once again underlined the importance of safeguarding the widespread uptake of affordable insurance.

The central objective of this work is to reach an agreement with insurers whereby insurance bills remain affordable without placing unsustainable costs on wider policyholders and the taxpayer. There is the potential to deliver a new approach that is a step change better than the current statement of principles, by for the first time directly addressing the affordability of flood insurance.

This is a complex issue, as insurers themselves recognise, and we have undertaken to work with the Association of British Insurers (ABI) to look at ways of providing safeguards. A number of proposals have come forward from the industry and we are continuing to consider a range of options.

These discussions have made significant progress. The Government are considering with the industry's support a way of formalising existing pricing arrangements and maintaining the current cross-subsidy in place between policyholders. This would be by means of an internal industry levy, as proposed by insurers themselves. By reflecting existing arrangements, the levy would avoid increasing costs for those not at risk whilst helping households to continue to afford insurance in flood risk areas.

This work is taking place against a backdrop of significant advances in flood risk mapping and forecasting which in turn is giving insurers the ability to more accurately ascribe the level of flood risk to individual properties.

As this knowledge base expands it will bring considerable benefits, not least in terms of helping Government, local authorities, households and businesses plan for and mitigate the risk of flooding. Investment by all in preventing flood damages from occurring will remain the best and most sustainable way of achieving affordable insurance over the long term.

The Government and insurers are determined to see insurance premiums remain affordable and widely available, particularly in light of the pressure household budgets are currently under and the pattern of flood events we have seen over recent years.

The priority is now to resolve detailed design issues including how support would be targeted. We are looking to develop with insurers a model that delivers benefits to households in need of support whilst avoiding poorer policyholders subsidising wealthier ones. We are looking for an approach which also encourages individuals and communities to consider the actions they can take to keep future premiums down.

This measure would be intended to facilitate a gradual change in the market but would still mark a step change in Government's role in the management of flood risk. As such any proposal will require detailed scrutiny before it could be introduced.

Meanwhile, this Government are continuing to fulfil their role in reducing flood risk by spending more than £2.17 billion on flood and coastal erosion risk management in England over the current four-year spending period. Sixty new schemes are moving into construction this year under our new partnership approach to funding which has already brought forward £72 million in additional investment from other sources. We expect that the benefits of our investment in risk management will be reflected in reduced insurance premiums going forward.

The recently published national planning policy framework fulfils the Government's commitment to avoid unnecessary building in floodplains and this outcome has been welcomed by the ABI and others. We are helping insurers incorporate the protection afforded by property-level protection measures into their pricing models and, with the industry's help, are publishing a guide to help households find the best means of accessing insurance in flood risk areas. We are also working with local authorities and other partners to look at the extent to which communities, through acting together, can help to manage the costs of flood insurance.

Intensive discussions with the insurance industry are continuing and we will announce further details in due course. I undertake to update the House at the most appropriate points.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Stephen Lawrence

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): In response to an urgent question by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) on 24 April, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire) made a

statement on my behalf about the continuing allegations that have appeared in the media over recent months of police corruption in the original investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence. As my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said at that time, allegations of police corruption must always be taken seriously. It is essential we ensure that the actions and behaviour of corrupt police officers do not undermine public confidence in the police's ability to respond to, investigate and fight crime. I undertook to keep the House updated.

On 31 May, the Home Office announced that I had decided to call for an independent, QC review of the work the Metropolitan Police Service has undertaken into allegations of corruption in the original investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

I have asked Mark Ellison QC to carry out this review and he has agreed. Mr Ellison was the lead prosecutor in the successful prosecutions of Gary Dobson and David Norris for the murder of Stephen Lawrence. He will be supported by Alison Morgan, the junior counsel from the prosecution of Gary Dobson and David Norris.

The review team has agreed terms of reference with the Lawrence family and I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House. The review will begin in July 2012 and will aim to complete its findings by July 2013. The team will report to me and I intend to publish the review's report.

The review will address the following questions:

Is there evidence providing reasonable grounds for suspecting that any officer associated with the initial investigation of the murder of Stephen Lawrence acted corruptly?

Are there any further lines of investigation connected to the issue of possible corrupt activity by any officer associated with the initial investigation of the murder of Stephen Lawrence?

Was the McPherson inquiry provided with all relevant material connected to the issue of possible corrupt activity by any officer associated with the initial investigation of the murder of Stephen Lawrence? If not, what impact might that have had on the inquiry?

The review team is calling for evidence to be submitted to the review for consideration alongside the significant amount of material made available by the Metropolitan Police Service. Evidence should be sent to SLMEQC@qebhw.co.uk or by post to Stephen Lawrence Review, PO Box 70744, London, EC4P 4DT.

I am grateful to the Commissioner for the support he has offered to the review. I know that the Metropolitan Police Service will co-operate fully with the review team.

JUSTICE

European Union Act 2011 (Section 8)

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Kenneth Clarke): A parliamentary statement has been laid before the House today, 11 July. This has been laid under section 8 of the European Union Act 2011. In the opinion of the Secretary of State, the Council decision establishing a multi-annual framework for 2013-17

for the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, published on 13 June 2012, relates to an exempt purpose within the meaning of section 8(6)(a) of that Act.

Copies of the parliamentary statement are available from the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office. Copies of the draft Council decision have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Workplace Pension Reform

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Steve Webb): On 12 July 2012, we intend to publish the Government response to the consultation "Revised implementation proposals for workplace pension reform", which began on 23 March and closed on 4 May 2012. I am grateful to all those who responded with views, thoughts or suggestions.

The response confirms the Government's timetable for bringing small and micro employers into the workplace pension reforms in the next Parliament and this is reflected in the accompanying regulations.

The Government's response to the consultation, the amendment regulations and an impact assessment will be available on the Department's website in due course.

I will also place copies of the consultation and impact assessment in the House Library.

"Bereavement Benefits for the 21st Century"

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Steve Webb): Today my noble friend Lord Freud, the Minister for Welfare Reform, is publishing a Command Paper, Government response to the public consultation "Bereavement Benefits for the 21st Century". This sets out the Government's strategy for providing effective support after the loss of a spouse or civil partner, and includes a summary of the responses to the public consultation on how to achieve this.

Our strategy reaffirms the Government's commitment to providing financial support after spousal bereavement as an important part of the state safety net. Our primary aim is to improve an out-of-date system, targeting additional resources on bereavement benefits over a Parliament, to ensure that existing recipients are protected, and that those who claim the new benefit get the help that they need when they need it most.

We are shifting the focus of bereavement benefits, to provide a short-term intervention, helping people deal with the more immediate costs caused by the death of a spouse or civil partner, and to provide some breathing space to start to come to terms with the emotional and practical upheaval caused by this loss.

It will be paid as a lump sum with monthly instalments to avoid the risks associated with making a large lump sum payment. This period is not intended to reflect the time required for "recovery", but instead to provide a buffer for the immediate financial impact of bereavement. Payments will be disregarded from universal credit and the benefit cap for a period of 12 months.

This refocusing will improve the targeting of bereavement benefits, providing greater support in the period that social research tells us is particularly challenging financially. The strategy also involves ongoing support being provided through other parts of the welfare system, such as universal credit, and contributory jobseeker's allowance and employment and support allowance, depending on circumstances.

Recipients of the bereavement support payment, who also receive universal credit, or contributory JSA or ESA, will be able to access Jobcentre Plus support on a voluntary basis from three months after bereavement. They will not be subject to conditionality for a further three months. This means that those who need to start work, or change their working patterns after bereavement, receive the support they need to do so.

The Government acknowledge the value of simplifying the rules that govern conditionality easements for bereaved people across the benefit system, so that they are consistent, supportive and easy to understand. These exemptions

from conditionality will therefore also apply after the death of a child or partner, where there is no entitlement to bereavement benefits.

Contribution conditions will be simplified and people will be entitled to receive the full payment as long as their late spouse or civil partner paid national insurance contributions at 25 times the lower earnings limit for any one year prior to their death.

This builds on changes to bereavement benefits in 2001, and on recent fundamental reforms to the welfare landscape. In the same way that universal credit has been designed to create a simpler system of support, the proposed simplification of bereavement benefits will make it easier for people to understand their entitlement, and to be able to plan accordingly.

In order to effect these changes, after legislation has been introduced, existing bereavement benefits will be replaced with the new bereavement support payment. This will not impact those already in receipt of bereavement benefits at that time or payments made under the war pensions scheme or armed forces compensation scheme.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 11 July 2012

SCOTLAND

Olympic Games 2012

Graeme Morrice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment his Department has made of the economic benefit to (a) West Lothian and (b) Scotland of the London 2012 Olympics. [115990]

David Mundell: The Olympic Delivery Authority publishes regular updates on the London 2012 Olympic Games. Their latest figures show that over £33 million worth of direct contracts have been awarded to 30 businesses in Scotland—that does not include the additional downstream benefits of the supply chain. Furthermore, a recent report by Oxford Economics has identified that Scotland will benefit from £185 million through tourism over a 12-year period, with gains in employment from London 2012-related tourism effects.

Pay

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the lowest hourly rate paid to staff by his Department is; how many members of staff based outside London are paid less than £7.20 per hour; and how many members of staff based in London are paid less than £8.30 per hour. [116370]

David Mundell: All staff in the Scotland Office are on secondment from other Government bodies. It reimburses those bodies for the costs involved. The Office does not maintain a record of the hourly pay for staff; such information is the responsibility of the parent bodies.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Pay

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the lowest hourly rate is paid to staff by his Department; how many members of staff based outside London are paid less than £7.20 per hour; and how many members of staff based in London are paid less than £8.30 per hour. [116371]

Mr Paterson: The lowest hourly rate paid to staff by my Department is £8.00 per hour. No staff based outside London are paid less than £7.20 per hour. No staff based in London are paid less than £8.30 per hour.

Welfare Reform

Mr Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to his oral answer of 4 July 2012, *Official Report*, column 900, on welfare reform,

what his responsibilities are in respect of welfare and benefit provisions in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [116136]

Mr Paterson: Social Security, child support and pensions are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), in Great Britain, and for the Minister for Social Development in Northern Ireland as these are transferred matters.

Section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides for arrangements to ensure that there are single systems of social security, child support and pensions across the United Kingdom.

I remain in regular contact with both ministers in respect of the welfare reform agenda.

WALES

Cabinet

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what bilateral meetings she has had with the Minister for the Cabinet Office in the last 12 months. [116017]

Mrs Gillan: I meet with the Minister for the Cabinet Office on a regular basis.

Official Visits

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many (a) Labour, (b) Conservative, (c) Plaid Cymru and Liberal Democrat hon. Members have visited the Wales Office, Whitehall, since July 2010. [116016]

Mrs Gillan: I have regular meetings with hon. Members from all parties, both in Gwydyr House and in the House of Commons.

Poverty

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many meetings she has had with ministerial colleagues to discuss poverty in Wales since May 2010. [116018]

Mrs Gillan: Both I and the Under-Secretary of State have regular meetings with ministerial colleagues about a range of matters relevant to Wales.

In March, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), published “Social Justice: Transforming Lives”. Together with the Social Mobility and Child Poverty strategies, it sets out an ambitious approach, aspiring to deliver lasting life change which goes much wider than increases in family income. The strategy is available at the following link:

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/social-justice/>

The Welsh Government is responsible for many of the policies involved in tackling poverty. We will work closely with the Welsh Government in delivering our ambitions.

Poverty: Children

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Pontypridd of 3 July 2012, *Official Report*, column 532W on poverty: children, what the number of children living in poverty in Wales was in each quarter of the last four years; and what estimate she has made of the likely number in each of the next three years. [115995]

Mrs Gillan: The Welsh Government is responsible for many of the policies involved in tackling poverty, including child poverty.

Information on levels of child poverty in the United Kingdom and Wales, dating back to the three year period 1994-97 and up to the period 2008-09 to 2010-11, is included in the statistics on Households Below Average Income (HBAI). The latest HBAI publication was released by the Department for Work and Pensions on 14 June 2012 and is available at the following link:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/hbai/hbai2011/index.php?page=contents>

Disaggregation by geographical regions is presented as three-year averages as single-year regional estimates are considered too volatile. Information for Wales in each quarter of the last four years is therefore not available.

The level of poverty is dependent on a number of factors which cannot be reliably predicted. While income is important, considering this measure in isolation fails to properly reflect the real experience of poverty. The Government are therefore developing more effective measurements of child poverty which will provide a more accurate picture in Wales and the UK. We will be launching a consultation seeking views on how to do this in the autumn.

Third Sector

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Pontypridd of 3 July 2012, *Official Report*, column 533W on third sector, how much the big society seminar held by her Department in Cardiff in 2011 cost; and what the main outcomes were. [115997]

Mr David Jones: The cost of the big society seminar—£518.40—was published as part of our transparency measures and is available on our website.

The seminar was very successful, engaging the grassroots of civil society in Wales with the big society vision. From the discussions held during the event we identified several outcomes for further exploration; such as the huge potential of the National Citizen Service in Wales; the need to grow the social investment market; and the need to work in partnership with the Welsh Government.

Since the seminar we have secured funding for a pilot of the National Citizen Service in Wales; we have set up the big society advisory forum; and we are in the final stages of planning an event around social investment to be held in September. We will continue to encourage the Welsh Government to become involved in these important initiatives.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL**Cybercrime**

Helen Goodman: To ask the Attorney-General what recent discussions he has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions on the prosecution of crimes committed online. [116697]

The Solicitor-General: None recently, but I am aware that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) robustly prosecutes crimes committed using computers or other devices (including mobile phones) and last year they trained a number of prosecutors specifically on prosecuting cybercrime. The CPS has also developed further general training in this area which will be available to all its prosecutors later this year.

Sentencing

Gareth Johnson: To ask the Attorney-General (1) how many requests he received from the Crown Prosecution Service relating to unduly lenient sentences in each of the last 10 years; [115887]

(2) how many unduly lenient sentences he referred to the Court of Appeal in each of the last 10 years; what the offence was in each case; and how many times the Court of Appeal found a sentence to be unduly lenient in each year; [115888]

(3) how many requests he received from victims' families relating to unduly lenient sentences in each of the last 10 years. [115889]

The Attorney-General: Statistics on sentences referred to the Court of Appeal as unduly lenient are published annually on the Attorney-General's Office website at:

<http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.uk/ULS/Pages/default.aspx>

The figures show that the Attorney-General and I have referred 117 individual sentences from the year 2011. The Court of Appeal found 97 of these sentences to be unduly lenient. The figures for the preceding years are as follows:

| | <i>Referred sentences considered by Court of Appeal</i> | <i>Sentences found by the Court of Appeal to be Unduly Lenient</i> |
|------|---|--|
| 2010 | 77 | 65 |
| 2009 | 108 | 77 |
| 2008 | 71 | 57 |
| 2007 | 106 | 86 |
| 2006 | 144 | 113 |
| 2005 | 108 | 82 |
| 2004 | 137 | 108 |
| 2003 | 96 | 88 |
| 2002 | 139 | 120 |

These figures do not include those sentences in respect of which a notice of application was lodged with the Court of Appeal and subsequently withdrawn prior to the sentence being considered by the Court of Appeal.

Information published on the website also shows the offences associated with each Reference to the Court of Appeal for years 2008 to 2011 inclusive, however reliable data for the earlier years could only be obtained at disproportionate cost as it would have to be extracted from individual files.

Data held by the Attorney-General's Office, but which has not been assured, indicates that in 2011 the Attorney-General and I received requests from the Crown Prosecution Service to consider referring 225 individual sentences to the Court of Appeal as potentially unduly lenient sentences. Equivalent figures for the preceding years are:

| | <i>Number</i> |
|------|---------------|
| 2010 | 200 |
| 2009 | 223 |
| 2008 | 190 |
| 2007 | 271 |
| 2006 | 247 |
| 2005 | 308 |
| 2004 | 194 |
| 2003 | 238 |
| 2002 | 252 |

The Attorney-General's Office does not hold the equivalent data for requests received from victims or their families. To provide such information would incur a disproportionate cost as it would have to be extracted from individual files.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Democratic Republic of Congo

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions HM Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo has had with the government of that country on the conduct of the elections held in December 2011. [116064]

Mr Bellingham: Since the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)'s presidential and parliamentary elections in November last year, the British ambassador in Kinshasa has made it clear to the DRC Government on several occasions that we support the recommendations of the EU election observation mission report, which include restructuring the electoral commission CENI, establishing a constitutional court to address electoral disputes, and auditing and revising the electoral register.

Israel

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs on his proposal to exclude goods made in Israeli settlements from EU markets. [116229]

Alistair Burt: The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), has not held any discussions with the Irish Foreign Minister on settlement goods.

However, settlement produce is the subject of discussion within the EU. EU Foreign Ministers, at their meeting on 14 May, agreed that:

"the EU and its Member States reaffirm their commitment to fully and effectively implement existing EU legislation and the bilateral arrangements applicable to settlement products. The

Council underlines the importance of the work being carried out together with the Commission in this regard".

This ongoing work includes measures to ensure that settlement produce does not enter the EU duty-free.

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the European Commission on exclusion of participants based in or operating from Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories from regulations for Horizon 2020. [116230]

Alistair Burt: We have not held any discussion with the European Commission on exclusion of participants from regulations for Horizon 2020.

We enjoy a close and productive relationship with Israel. It is this very relationship that allows us to have the frank discussions often necessary between friends. We believe that imposing sanctions on Israel or supporting anti-Israeli boycotts would lessen this influence, not increase it, and would do nothing to promote the peace process.

Israel: Palestinians

Nadhim Zahawi: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Palestinian Authority on the importance of direct peace talks. [116184]

Alistair Burt: We and our EU partners have welcomed the recent efforts by the Palestinian and Israeli leadership to renew direct contacts. We have urged both sides to focus on dialogue, to avoid steps that could undermine the prospects for peace and to work towards the resumption of direct negotiations. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), conveyed this message when he met President Abbas on 6 July.

Michael Ellis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the number of (a) Qassam rockets, (b) Grad rockets and (c) mortar bombs launched into Israeli territory from Gaza (i) since 1 January 2012 and (ii) in June 2012; and what reports he has received of the number of persons (A) killed, (B) seriously injured and (C) slightly injured in such attacks. [116240]

Alistair Burt: We remain concerned about continued indiscriminate rocket attacks by Palestinian militant groups on Israel, as well as air-strikes and other attacks by the Israeli military on Gaza.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) produce a detailed breakdown of Israeli-Palestinian conflict related casualties every month for the UN OCHA humanitarian monitor report, these can be found at:

<http://www.ochaopt.org>

The Israeli Defence Forces report that over 400 rockets have been fired from Gaza so far this year. During the recent outbreak of violence in June over a 100 rockets were fired into southern Israel, with 10 Israeli civilians injured.

Middle East

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what delegation the UK plans to send to the Helsinki conference on the Non-Proliferation Treaty Conference on a nuclear-weapons free Middle East in December 2012. [116065]

Alistair Burt: The UK delegation to the conference on achieving a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone will be determined once further details have been announced by the conference facilitator. These include the date and other practical arrangements. As co-convenor of the conference, the UK is committed to its delivery. We fully support the work of the facilitator Mr Jaako Laajava, to bring all parties of the region together to discuss this issue.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Atos

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer of 14 June 2012, *Official Report*, column 567W, on Atos, what the total monetary value was of each contract between his Department and Atos in (a) 2009, (b) 2010, (c) 2011 and (d) 2012. [115088]

John Penrose: A breakdown of spend in relation to the information and communication technology service contract and the Mobile Infrastructure project, which started this year, is set out in the following table:

| | <i>Information and communication technology</i> | <i>Mobile Infrastructure project</i> | £ |
|-------|---|--|---------|
| 2009 | 2,801,923 | 0 | 0 |
| 2010 | 3,232,498 | 0 | 0 |
| 2011 | 2,856,981 | 0 | 0 |
| 2012 | 1,973,434 | 164,639 | 164,639 |
| Total | 10,864,836 | 164,639 | 164,639 |

Broadband

Andrew Bridgen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how many local authorities have submitted their local broadband plans; and how many of those submitted have been approved. [116576]

Mr Vaizey: I can confirm that 44 out of 45 local broadband plans have been approved by the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt). The local authorities for the outstanding plan, covering Sandwell and Birmingham, are working to submit their plan for approval in July 2012.

Mobile Phones

Andrew Bridgen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what progress has been made by Ofcom on the terms of reference for the Spectrum Auction; and when such an auction will be held. [116575]

Mr Vaizey: Ofcom are currently considering the responses received as a result of their recent consultation on the auction of spectrum suitable for 4G services, which closed on 22 March, and are expected to make a statement in the summer. Ofcom remain on schedule for the UK auction process to start by the end of 2012. This is compatible with the spectrum becoming available to allow successful bidders to start rolling out 4G services in these bands in 2013.

Pay

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what the lowest hourly rate is paid to staff by his Department; how many members of staff based outside London are paid less than £7.20 per hour; and how many members of staff based in London are paid less than £8.30 per hour. [116372]

John Penrose: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) does not pay its employees at an hourly rate. DCMS's lowest annual salary rate is £19,836 per annum, which equates to more than £8.30 per hour. All DCMS employees are based in London, except for eight individuals based in the regions, working in connection with the Olympic Games. All of these individuals earn over £7.20 per hour.

RTE

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the potential effect of the proposed closure of the London bureau of Raidió Teilifís Éireann. [115931]

Mr Vaizey: No assessment has been made.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what recent meetings he has had with his Irish counterpart on the London bureau of Raidió Teilifís Éireann. [115932]

Mr Vaizey: Neither myself, nor the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), have had any meetings with Irish counterparts to discuss this matter.

Subtitling

Anna Soubry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to review the provision of subtitling on all broadcast platforms, including catch-up and on-demand services. [116182]

Mr Vaizey: The Government understands that television subtitles on all broadcasting formats are vital if profoundly deaf and hard of hearing people are to have access to television and online TV services. It is for this reason that the Government is committed to maintaining access to broadcasting services for people with sensory impairments and to help ensure that the subtitling offered is of a consistently high standard.

In May of this year, I hosted an event, together with Intellect and the Royal National Institute for Blind to celebrate the successes made by the UK TV industry over the last 10 years. During this event, the provision

of subtitles on all broadcast platforms, including catch-up and on demand services was discussed. The event also looked at the challenges facing the industry, with the advent of Internet Protocol TV (IPTV) or connected televisions regarding subtitles of programmes delivered through online channels, video on demand and catch-up TV channels.

As part of the Communications Review process the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has published a paper on the 'Consumer Perspective' which, among other things, asks questions about accessibility issues. This will be discussed at the next meeting of the DCMS eAccessibility Forum, and comments on this and other papers can be submitted before 14 September, via the Communications Review website:

<http://dcmscommsreview.readandcomment.com/>

Tourism

Mr Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what the budget allocated to VisitBritain for attracting tourist visitors from Japan was in each year since 1997. [116388]

John Penrose: The following table shows VisitBritain total spend on attracting tourist visitors from Japan. Figures include marketing costs and direct infrastructure costs of running the VisitBritain Japan office.

| | <i>Net expenditure (£)</i> |
|---------|----------------------------|
| 2004-05 | 910,903 |
| 2005-06 | 897,836 |
| 2006-07 | 757,244 |
| 2007-08 | 884,659 |
| 2008-09 | 883,255 |
| 2009-10 | 721,855 |
| 2010-11 | 693,522 |
| 2011-12 | ¹ 1,304,369 |

¹ 2011-12 expenditure includes spend allocated to Japan for the GREAT campaign, Partnerships, Press PR UK, and B2B UK.

Note:

VisitBritain was established in 2003; data before 2004-05 are not available.

Mr Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the expenditure in the retail sector attributable to visitors from Japan in the latest period for which figures are available. [116390]

John Penrose: Neither the Department nor VisitBritain has made an estimate of expenditure in the retail sector attributable to Japanese tourists.

Work Experience

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the number of interns working in the media sector. [115940]

Mr Vaizey: No estimate has been made.

The graduate internship market is hugely diverse and we welcome the numerous quality opportunities which both public and private employers provide.

TREASURY

Business: Barnsley

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many reports his Department received from small businesses in Barnsley Central constituency required to pay breakage fees from swap protection contracts in each of the last three years. [116445]

Mr Hoban: Treasury Ministers and officials meet with, and receive representations from, 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 representations.

EU Grants and Loans

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was allocated to Wales in addition to the block grant under the EU share of Wales Objective 1 and Convergence funding needs in each year since 2000. [116304]

Danny Alexander: European Structural Funds expenditure, including Objective 1 and Convergence funding, scores within departmental expenditure limits but is offset by Structural Fund receipts which score as negative DEL. The devolved Administrations plan for expected Structural Funds expenditure and receipts within their DEL which usually nets to zero within the block grant.

Financial Services Authority

Michael Connarty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the process to replace the Financial Services Authority with successor bodies to be completed. [115982]

Mr Hoban: The Government's intention is for the new regulatory authorities to be in place in early 2013. This is dependent on the Bill receiving Royal Assent at the end of 2012, which will be subject to the parliamentary timetable.

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will carry out an investigation into the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services Authority. [116487]

Mr Hoban: The Government have no plans to carry out an investigation into the cost-effectiveness of the Financial Services Authority (FSA). The FSA's successor bodies, the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) will be subject to full audit by the National Audit Office, including value for money studies. In addition the Treasury will have the power to order an independent inquiry into the regulators' economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Financial Services: Advisory Services

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the implications of the Retail Distribution Review for the level of independent financial advice available to the public. [116489]

Mr Hoban: The Retail Distribution Review (RDR) is the responsibility of the Financial Services Authority (FSA), an independent body. This question has been passed on to the FSA, which will reply to you directly by letter. A copy of the response will be placed in the Library of the House.

Money Advice Service

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will commission an independent study into the cost-effectiveness of the Money Advice Service's allocation of marketing and brand awareness. [116488]

Mr Hoban: The Money Advice Service (MAS) is an independent body, funded by a levy on the financial services industry. The Financial Services Authority (FSA) is responsible for approving its business plan and budget. MAS published its business plan and budget for 2012-13 in March 2012. Lord Turner, Chairman of the FSA, has made it clear that the FSA intend to commission an independent review into the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of MAS's use of public resources in the first half of next year.

MAS makes an annual report to the FSA in relation to the discharge of its consumer financial education function, including setting out the extent to which the body has met its objectives and priorities for the period covered by the report. The annual report for 2010-11 is available on MAS's website. The service will publish its 2011-12 accounts in July and will report on its marketing spend for 2011-12 in its annual review to be published in August.

Pay

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the (a) highest, (b) median, (c) median full-time equivalent and (d) lowest full-time equivalent salary was paid by (i) his Department and (ii) its associated public bodies in (A) 2010-11, (B) 2011-12 and (C) 2012-13. [111027]

Miss Chloe Smith: The figures requested are available as follows:

| | 2010-11 | 2011-12 |
|---------------------|---------|---------|
| Median ¹ | 36,875 | 36,736 |
| Mean | 42,723 | 42,749 |
| Minimum | 15,500 | 16,063 |
| Maximum | 195,063 | 195,063 |

¹ The median figures will be published this month in the 2012 Departmental Annual Report and Accounts and are for HM Treasury and its agencies. Figures for 2012-13 are not yet available.

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the lowest hourly rate is paid to staff by his Department; how many members of staff based outside London are paid less than £7.20 per hour; and how many members of staff based in London are paid less than £8.30 per hour. [116384]

Miss Chloe Smith: The lowest rate paid to staff in HM Treasury is £8.81 per hour.

Public Sector: Pay

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the potential effect of regional public sector pay on social mobility. [115847]

Danny Alexander [*holding answer 10 July 2012*]: The independent Pay Review Bodies are currently considering the case for greater local pay flexibility in the wider public sector and will report from July onwards. UK civil service Departments are also considering their approach.

Nothing has yet been decided and the effect on social mobility can only be assessed once formal proposals have been made.

Quantitative Easing

Mr Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on how many occasions he has received notice from the Bank of England that it would support quantitative easing in the latest period for which figures are available; what the value was of the proposed quantitative easing on each such occasion; and on how many occasions he supported such an easing; [116033]

(2) if he will make it policy that his Department controls the money that is released through quantitative easing; [116068]

(3) what assessment he has made of the implications for the economy of his Department not controlling the process of quantitative easing. [116069]

Mr Hoban: Quantitative easing (QE), or asset purchases financed by the issuance of central bank reserves, is implemented via the Asset Purchase Facility (APF), a subsidiary company of the Bank of England established in January 2009. QE was authorised in March 2009 by the then Chancellor in a published exchange of letters with the Governor of the Bank of England.

Decisions on the scale and speed of QE are those of the independent Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) which has operational responsibility for monetary policy as set out in the Bank of England Act 1998. QE is an additional policy tool to Bank Rate in order to enable the MPC to meet the inflation target in the medium term.

Given that HM Treasury indemnifies the Bank for any losses it makes arising out of the use of the APF, the Chancellor authorises, at the MPC's request, changes in the maximum amount of assets that can be purchased.

The MPC voted for an increase in asset purchases financed by the issuance of central bank reserves at the following times, which the then Chancellor authorised in published exchanges of letters with the Governor: March 2009 by £75 billion; May 2009 to a total of £125 billion; August 2009 to a total of £175 billion; and November 2009 to a total of £200 billion.

The Chancellor had made clear that he would follow the arrangements put in place in 2009 for authorising further asset purchases. The MPC has requested, and the Chancellor has authorised, an increase in the ceiling of asset purchases financed by the issuance in central bank reserves in October 2011 to a total of £250 billion; in February 2012 to a total of £325 billion; and in July 2012 to a total of £375 billion.

As the Chancellor's letters have made clear, monetary policy continues to have a critical role in supporting the economy as the Government delivers on its commitment to fiscal consolidation and it remains the primary tool for responding to changes in the economic outlook.

Tax Evasion

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was lost to the Exchequer as a result of tax evasion in each of the last five years. [116456]

Mr Gauke: HMRC has only produced an illustrative breakdown of the tax gap by behaviour for 2007-08 and 2009-10.

The most recent tax gap estimates were published in September 2011 in 'Measuring Tax Gaps 2011', which can be found at the following link:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/measuring-tax-gaps.htm>

In 'Measuring Tax Gaps 2011' HMRC estimated that evasion accounted for around £4 billion (12%) of the 2009-10 total tax gap.

The HMRC publication 'Protecting Tax Revenues 2009':

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100330144254/>

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/pbr2009/protect-tax-revenue-5450.pdf>

estimated that evasion accounted for around £7 billion (17.5%) of the 2007-08 total tax gap.

HMRC will publish the 2010-11 illustrative breakdown of the tax gap by behaviour in 'Measuring Tax Gaps 2012' in October 2012.

Tonnage Tax

John McDonnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the UK's (a) imports and (b) exports were undertaken by vessels in the tonnage tax in each year since 2000-01. [R] [115937]

Miss Chloe Smith: HMRC does not hold the information on imports and exports undertaken by vessels in the tonnage tax regime as requested.

John McDonnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect on the level of revenue accruing to the Exchequer of the introduction of the tonnage tax scheme in 2000-01. [R] [115938]

Miss Chloe Smith: Tonnage tax was introduced in 2000. The size of the UK fleet has increased significantly since then.

Estimates of the tax liabilities due to tonnage tax for each year from 2000 to 2009 are available at the following link:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/111215w0001.htm#11121582000209>

HOME DEPARTMENT

Alcoholic Drinks: Prices

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what comparative assessment she has made of the use in countries other than Scotland of minimum pricing for alcohol as a means of reducing consumption or tackling problem drinking; [115338]

(2) what representations she has received from organisations working with problem drinkers or alcoholics on minimum alcohol pricing; [115339]

(3) what estimate she has made of the likely change in the level of revenue to the Exchequer which would result from minimum alcohol pricing; [115340]

(4) what assessment she has made of the potential effect of minimum alcohol pricing on the cider industry; [115371]

(5) what representations she has received from cider makers and apple growers on the potential effects of minimum alcohol pricing on their income; [115372]

(6) what assessment she has made of the potential effect of minimum alcohol pricing on farm sales of cider; [115373]

(7) what assessment she has made of the likely effect on revenues for major retailers of the introduction of minimum alcohol pricing; [115374]

(8) what estimate she has made of the proportion of alcohol sales which would increase in price if a minimum alcohol unit price of 40 pence was implemented; [115375]

(9) what assessment she has made of the change in the level of alcohol consumption in each income group since 2004; [115396]

(10) what assessment she has made of the level of hazardous and binge drinking in each income group; [115397]

(11) what assessment she has made of the effect of a minimum alcohol price of 40 pence per unit on each income group. [115398]

James Brokenshire: In the forthcoming months the Government will produce an Impact Assessment that will consider the impact of minimum unit pricing on a number of key groups; including the impact on the alcohol industry as a whole, impact on the Exchequer, income groups and consumer groups. The Assessment will refer to the most recent available evidence and analysis relating to reducing consumption and tackling harmful drinking. These impacts will be measured against a range of minimum price levels.

The Government will launch a consultation in the forthcoming months on key proposals in the Alcohol Strategy, including the level to be set for a minimum unit price. We will consider representations as part of that consultation.

Alcoholic Drinks: Scotland

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with reference to her Department's consultation on minimum alcohol pricing, what information her Department has gathered on the (a) proportion of alcohol sales and (b) types of drink which have increased in price in Scotland as a result of minimum alcohol pricing. [116027]

James Brokenshire: The Scottish Government has not yet brought their minimum unit pricing legislation into force. To accompany the forthcoming consultation, the UK Government will produce an impact assessment that will consider the impact of minimum unit pricing in England and Wales. The assessment will refer to the most recent available evidence and analysis relating to alcohol sales and the impact on different types of alcoholic drinks.

Assets

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assets her Department has sold and leased back over the last 12 months; what the sale price was of each asset so sold; and what estimate her Department has made of the cost to the public purse of leasing back each such asset over the period of the lease. [116768]

Damian Green: The Home Office has not sold and leased back any assets over the last 12 months.

Asylum

Mr Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she estimates that all cases referred to the Case Assurance and Audit Unit will be cleared. [115960]

Damian Green [*holding answer 9 July 2012*]: As the chief executive of the UK Border Agency reported to the Home Affairs Committee on 15 May, we intend to close the controlled archive by December 2012.

Due to the nature of individual live cases, we cannot give a date for when all of these will be cleared. Cases will be worked to the furthest possible point and if barriers remain to final conclusion, a grant of leave or removal, then the cases will continue to be actively monitored until full conclusion is possible.

COE Convention On the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with reference to the answer of 17 May 2011, *Official Report*, column 156W, to the hon. Member for Bolton South East, on children: protection and the answer of 19 April 2012, *Official Report*, column 457W, on children: EU action and pursuant to the answer of 4 July 2012, *Official Report*, column 653W, to the hon. Member for Slough, on children: EU action, when her Department plans to report on the steps that would be required to ratify and implement the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. [116386]

Lynne Featherstone: As the hon. Member is aware, discussions are taking place across Government to establish a clear picture of current levels of existing compliance. Subject to the successful progression of these discussions, we aim to reach a decision on the steps needed to ratify and implement the convention before the conclusion of this Parliament.

Deportation

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much her Department spent on deportations in each of the last five years. [115513]

Damian Green: The UK Border Agency annual accounts for 2010-11 can be viewed at:

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/aboutus/annual-reports-accounts/>

A copy has also been placed in the House Library.

These accounts include the costs of Public Expense Removals, and also of the various voluntary removal schemes which the Agency operates. The gross costs to the Agency of removals shown in the Agency's accounting records between 2006 and 2011 are detailed in Table 1; these figures include the total programme costs of the voluntary return schemes including re-integration assistance, flights and running costs. The Agency also receives funding from the EU for its removals programme, and the amounts received and expected from this source are shown in Table 2, which will offset some of the gross costs.

EU Funds received for 2009-10 and 2010-11 remain subject to audit and possible amendment.

Annex: Net costs of public expense and voluntary removals schemes

Table 1: Gross removal costs 2005-10

| Public Expense Removals (PERs) | | £ million |
|--------------------------------|--|-----------|
| 2006-07 | | 20.2 |
| 2007-08 | | 22.3 |
| 2008-09 | | 27.0 |
| 2009-10 | | 27.5 |
| 2010-11 | | 28.4 |

Voluntary Removals Schemes

| Voluntary Removals Schemes | | £ million |
|----------------------------|--|-----------|
| 2006-07 | | 22.2 |
| 2007-08 | | 21.7 |
| 2008-09 | | 10.8 |
| 2009-10 | | 20.4 |
| 2010-11 | | 17.3 |

Table 2: EU Funding for Removals 2005-10

| EU Funding for Removals 2005-10 | | £ million |
|---------------------------------|--|-----------|
| 2006-07 | | 3.2 |
| 2007-08 | | 3.2 |
| 2008-09 | | 6.3 |
| 2009-10 | | 4.1 |
| 2010-11 | | 2.7 |

Note:

EU funding for 2009-10 and 2010-11- is subject to EU audit and possible amendment.

Drugs: Crime

Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate her Department has made of the number of acquisitive crimes committed that are related to the consumption of illegal drugs. [116451]

James Brokenshire: The most recent Home Office estimate of the proportion of acquisitive crime which was related to the use of class A drugs was published in 2005. This estimated that between one third and a half of acquisitive crime was related to use of class A drugs.

Reference:

Macdonald, Z. et al (2005) 'Measuring the harm from illegal drugs using the Drug Harm Index' Home Office Online Report 24/05

<http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/rdsolr2405.pdf>

Extradition: EU Action

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what extent the UK participates in EU decision number SCH/Com-ex (96) decl 6 rev 2 on extradition; and what assessment she has made of the effects for the UK of that decision. [115819]

Damian Green [*holding answer 9 July 2012*]: The Council Framework Decision of 13 June 2002 on the European arrest warrant and the surrender procedures between member states, by virtue of Article 31(e), replaces the extradition provisions (Title 3, Chapter 4) of the Schengen Acquis. The Acquis is the legal basis for this declaration so it is considered that this declaration has been superseded by the EAW FD—which is given effect by parts 1 and 3 of the Extradition Act.

Heathrow Airport: Immigration Controls

Mr Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average waiting time was on 29 June 2012 at Terminal 4 Heathrow Airport for passengers holding (a) EU and (b) non-EU passports arriving into the UK. [115797]

Damian Green [*holding answer 6 July 2012*]: On 29 June at Heathrow Terminal 4, the average waiting time was four minutes for EEA passengers and 32 minutes for non-EEA passengers. This is management information which is provisional and therefore subject to change.

Immigration Controls

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations she has received on her border control policy; and if she will make a statement. [115504]

Damian Green: The Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), routinely receives representations relating to border control policy and regularly meets officials to discuss policy. Information relating to the type of representations is not held centrally and cannot be obtained without incurring a disproportionate cost.

Licensing Laws

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the use by police of powers to take action against licensees whose premises serve people who are (a) underage and (b) already intoxicated. [115336]

James Brokenshire: In 2010, the Government carried out an extensive public consultation on the Licensing Act 2003, which includes a range of criminal offences. Following this, the Government legislated via the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 to increase the penalties and powers available to the police and local authorities in dealing with the criminal offence of persistently selling alcohol to children. The measures included doubling the maximum fine to £20,000 for persistent under-age sales. In the Alcohol Strategy, published

in March this year, the Government announced further work with the police on the offence of knowingly selling alcohol to a person who is drunk.

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the use by local authorities of powers against problem drinking and licensed premises that are the source of drunken disorder. [115337]

James Brokenshire: In 2010, the Government carried out an extensive public consultation on alcohol licensing. Following this analysis, the Government legislated via the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 to rebalance the Licensing Act 2003 in favour of local communities. The Act includes new powers for local authorities and the police to tackle problem premises and alcohol-related disorder. The Government has also set out further steps to tackle problem drinking in the Alcohol Strategy, published in March 2012, and will consult publicly on key new measures shortly.

Missing Persons

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps she is taking to encourage police, health, local government and other agencies to co-operate and share information on missing person cases. [116194]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government published its Missing Children and Adults strategy in December last year which set out clearly the roles and responsibilities of all agencies in tackling missing persons cases. In particular the strategy outlines the importance of information sharing between all agencies and provides examples of good practice in local information sharing including the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub model.

The strategy invites all local areas to review the arrangements they have in place to ensure they are delivering the best service they can to missing people and, following publication of the strategy, the Home Office are working with local, national and voluntary sector partners to encourage implementation including through the better sharing of information in missing children and adults cases.

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance her Department provides to (a) the Missing Person Unit, (b) the Salvation Army and (c) other groups for work helping families who have missing relatives. [116195]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government's Missing Children and Adults strategy recognises the key role of the voluntary sector in providing support to missing children, adults and their families. Delivery of this support is one of the strategy's three key objectives and in addition to the close working between the Home Office and organisations such as the Children's Society and Parents and Abducted Children Together, the Home Office has also provided grant funding directly to the charity Missing People to support the delivery of their 24-hour help line support service (116 000) which missing children, adults and their families can call or text to get access to advice and support.

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent estimate she has made of the number of (a) children under 18 and (b) adults who went missing in the UK last year. [116196]

Lynne Featherstone: Missing persons figures are supplied by police forces and collated by the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA). SOCA records these data on missing persons by financial year.

In the year 2010-11, 327,000 incidents of missing persons were recorded. Individuals may be reported missing more than once, however not all police forces supply this information on repeat missing persons. Therefore, based on the percentage of cases known to relate to repeat missing persons, SOCA estimates that these incidents related to approximately 216,000 individuals.

Not all police forces provide the age of missing persons. Based on data that are collected from police forces SOCA estimates that two-thirds (66%) of missing persons incidents relate to children under the age of 18.

The data for 2011-12 have not been published to date.

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps she is taking to support the families of missing persons. [116197]

Lynne Featherstone: The Government published its Missing Children and Adults strategy in December last year which set out clearly the roles and responsibilities of all agencies in tackling missing persons cases.

In particular, one of its main objectives is to provide missing people and their families with support and guidance, ensuring they are referred promptly to support services by the police and that families understand how and where to access help and support. The Government is providing direct grant funding support to the charity Missing People to help deliver their 24-hour help line support service (116 000) which missing children, adults and their families can call or text to get access to advice and support.

Schengen Agreement

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with reference to the amendment to Article 40 of the Schengen Agreement implemented by Article 1(i) of EU Council Decision 2003/725/JHA, on how many occasions the UK has conducted cross-border surveillance in another EU member state since 2003; and on how many occasions another EU member state has been authorised to carry out such surveillance in the UK. [115966]

James Brokenshire [holding answer 9 July 2012]: The Serious Organised Crime Agency has collected data on requests for authority to continue surveillance into foreign jurisdictions under article 40 of the Schengen convention since 2008. In that time the UK has made 154 such requests and received five requests from other member states.

The figures do not represent the number of occasions that UK law enforcement actually conducted surveillance on foreign soil because such requests for continued surveillance are often facilitated by the receiving country, eliminating the need for UK law enforcement to travel.

Of the five requests the UK has received from other member states, all were conducted by UK authorities rather than the requesting member state.

Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Notification Requirements) (England and Wales) Regulations

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when her Department plans to bring into force the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Notification Requirements) (England and Wales) Regulations 2012. [116568]

James Brokenshire: We expect the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Notification Requirements) (England and Wales) Regulations 2012 to come into force in summer 2012.

Terrorism: EU Action

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions the Government has (a) issued and (b) received requests for judicial assistance and enforcement of judgements under Article 4 of EU Council Decision 2005/671/JHA in each year since 2006; and how many of such requests have been granted. [114207]

James Brokenshire [holding answer 28 June 2012]: We attach high importance to the exchange of information and co-operation in relation to terrorism offences however we do not record the name of the legal instrument under which such requests are issued and received.

TRANSPORT

Blue Badge Scheme

John Woodcock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate she has made of the number of blue badge holders who will (a) cease to be automatically eligible for a blue badge and (b) cease to be eligible for assessment for a blue badge, under each of the three options set out in the consultation document. Personal Independence Payment and Eligibility for a Blue Badge. [116822]

Norman Baker: Eligibility for Personal Independence Payments is being assessed on a different basis to Disability Living Allowance. None of the options therefore replicate the existing eligibility criteria for a Blue Badge as this is not possible.

My Department has indicatively modelled the potential costs and benefits of the three options presented using assumptions sourced from available DfT and DWP data sets. The results of the modelling and the assumptions are presented in the consultation document. However, detailed information on some of the potential impacts is not available. It is not therefore possible to provide precise estimates of the number of existing badge holders who would become ineligible under some options, or those currently ineligible who would become eligible. We have asked in the consultation for disabled people and their representative groups to let us know if they believe they may be affected by particular options.

If someone is not eligible for Personal Independence Payment, they would still be able to apply for a badge directly to their local authority under the 'with further assessment' criteria. If a person's eligibility is in doubt, the local authority will refer them for an independent mobility assessment.

The Department's preferred option is Option 3 as outlined in the consultation as we would not expect this proposal to significantly affect the overall numbers of people eligible for a badge.

Electric Vehicles

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 19 June 2012, *Official Report*, column 841W, on electric vehicles, for what reason her Department moved the commitment to push for the early EU adoption of electric vehicle infrastructure standards from being an action in the main Structural Reform Plan in its May 2011 Business Plan to being an additional departmental action in Annex B of its May 2012 Business Plan; and what progress her Department has made towards securing early EU adoption of electric vehicle infrastructure standards. [116272]

Norman Baker: In line with Cabinet Office guidance the main Structural Reform Plan is now more focussed on the actions we will undertake to implement our major structural reforms. In light of which we have in some cases consolidated some individual actions into higher level actions, in order to retain a manageable number of actions in the main document.

The Office for Low Emissions Vehicles (OLEV) remains an active member of the British Standards Institution (BSI) PEL/069 Committee, which develops and sets UK standards and represents UK interests in EU standards setting bodies. The Government participated, at both ministerial and official level, in CARS21 (Competitive Automotive Regulatory System for the 21st Century), a recent Commission-led process which made recommendations for the policy and regulatory framework for the European automotive industry, including on the standardisation of recharging infrastructure. The CARS21 final report can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/automotive/files/cars-21-final-report-2012_en.pdf

The EC intends to adopt a Communication on the recommendations from the CARS21 process, to which both my Department and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will be responding.

Lost Working Days

Mr Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average number of working days lost per person was in (a) her Department and (b) each of its agencies in each of the last three years. [116422]

Norman Baker: The Central Department and its seven executive Agencies recorded the following in respect of average working days lost due to sickness during the financial years 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12:

| Average Working Days Lost | 2009/ 2010 | 2010/ 2011 | 2011/ 2012 |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| DFT C | 5.20 | 4.30 | 4.50 |
| DSA | 12.20 | 11.10 | 10.60 |
| DVLA | 7.80 | 7.10 | 7.50 |
| GCDA | 8.20 | 8.40 | 8.50 |
| HA | 7.30 | 8.50 | 9.60 |
| MCA | 7.00 | 5.70 | 5.20 |
| VCA | 4.90 | 4.30 | 5.00 |
| VOSA | 9.60 | 8.50 | 7.70 |
| Average Working Days lost for DfT and the Agencies over all | 8.20 | 7.70 | 7.90 |

Motor Vehicles: Exhaust Emissions

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason her Department moved the commitment to play an active role in the European Commission's review of the long-term targets in new car carbon dioxide reduction regulations from being an action in the main Structural Reform Plan in its May 2011 Business Plan to being an Additional departmental action in Annex B of its May 2012 Business Plan; and what progress her Department has made in playing an active role in the European Commission's review of the long-term targets in new car CO₂ regulations. [116212]

Norman Baker: In line with Cabinet Office guidance the main Structural Reform Plan is now more focussed on the actions we will undertake to implement our major structural reforms. The Department remains fully committed to reducing CO₂ and chose in the 2012 Business Plan to expand on the previous action by setting a new action, 4.6ii to "develop and promote a UK position on the European Commission's review of long-term targets in new car and van CO₂ and the Commission's developing strategy for reducing HGV CO₂ emissions" by June 2013. The previous action was therefore moved to an annex in line with guidance.

The Department for Transport leads for the UK in negotiating new car CO₂ regulations through the EU, which remains one of the main policy levers for delivering improvements in new car efficiency. We have an active and constructive ongoing engagement with the European Commission and key industry stakeholders and are fully engaged in this review at ministerial and official levels.

Pay

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the lowest hourly rate is paid to staff by her Department; how many members of staff based outside London are paid less than £7.20 per hour; and how many members of staff based in London are paid less than £8.30 per hour. [116374]

Norman Baker: The Department for Transport consists of a central Department and 7 Executive Agencies - Highways Agency, Driver Standards Agency, Driver Vehicle & Licensing Agency, Maritime & Coastguard Agency, Vehicle & Operator Services Agency, Vehicle Certification Agency and Government Cars and Despatch Agency.

In the Department for Transport the lowest hourly rate paid to staff is £6.16; 47 employees based outside of London are paid less than £7.20 per hour and no employees based in London are paid less than £8.30 per hour.

Railways: Safety

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 26 June 2012, *Official Report*, column 253W, on railway safety, what role her Department has in setting minimum railway safety standards other than sending officials as observers to Rail Safety and Standards Board committee meetings. [116273]

Mrs Villiers: The practice of sending officials as observers to the Rail Safety and Standards Board committee meetings continues the approach used by the previous administration. In addition, as well as working with stakeholders to ensure that the United Kingdom continues to have one of the safest railways in the world, the Department has provided input to the European Union's harmonised Common Safety Targets ('CSTs'). These represent the minimum safety levels and safety performance which must be reached by member states.

Roads: Safety

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many local authorities in England operate road safety education activities in schools. [116562]

Mike Penning: The Department for Transport does not collect information about how many local authorities operate road safety education activities in schools in England. Local authorities have statutory duties related to road safety but the decisions about whether they operate road safety education activities in schools in England are for local authorities.

Rolling Stock: Procurement

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date she expects all the rolling stock and infrastructure for Thameslink services to have been delivered; and for what reason the May 2012 update to her Department's Business Plan removed the reference to this being completed by the end of 2018. [116616]

Mrs Villiers: The Department's objective is for all the rolling stock and infrastructure for Thameslink services to be delivered by December 2018.

Ryanair

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if she will discuss with Ryanair its treatment of passengers with disabilities. [116640]

Mrs Villiers: Ryanair, like all European airlines, is bound by EC Regulation 1107/2006 which confers right of access for disabled passengers when travelling by air.

Treatment of people with a disability by Ryanair is the responsibility for the Irish Civil Aviation Authority as Ryanair is an Irish registered airline.

Transport: Infrastructure

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the (a) road and (b) rail infrastructure projects announced in the 2010 autumn statement were placed on hold between May 2010 and autumn 2011. [116211]

Mrs Villiers: The information requested is as follows:

(a) The document 'Investment in Highways Transport Schemes', published alongside the 2010 autumn statement, set out the major roads schemes that will continue to be worked on and those that have been cancelled.

(b) No rail projects were put on hold during the period in question, other than the Intercity Express Programme. The latter programme was only put on hold for the purposes of the Foster review commissioned by the previous Government in February 2010. The then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), reported the outcome of this review in his statement to the House in March 2011, *Official Report*, columns 185-87.

HEALTH

Antidepressants

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 26 June 2012, *Official Report*, column 222W, on antidepressants, what scientific and medical advice he considered on the safety for patients of withdrawing from Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI) antidepressants over several weeks; and which specialists in SSRI withdrawal were recommended by the MHRA in its SSRI learning module. [116105]

Mr Simon Burns: Ongoing concerns about the safety of the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) in early 2003 prompted a review by an Expert Working Group of the Committee on Safety of Medicines (the predecessor to the Commission on Human Medicines) into suicidal behaviour and withdrawal reactions associated with the SSRIs. This review examined all available evidence including data from clinical trials, published literature, post-marketing studies, reports of patients' experiences and feedback from meetings with patient support groups. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) published key findings and updated advice to healthcare professionals and patients as the review progressed.

The key findings of the Expert Group were widely communicated to healthcare professionals and the public in December 2004, at the same time as publication of National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence clinical guidelines on the treatment of depression and anxiety. One of the key findings with respect to the risk of withdrawal reactions was that evidence showed that withdrawal reactions are less severe when the dose is tapered gradually over a period of several weeks according to the patient's needs. The evidence base for the key findings is detailed in the group's comprehensive report, "Report of the CSM Expert Working Group on the Safety of Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor Antidepressants". A copy has already been placed in the Library and is also available on the MHRA website at:

Since completion of the review by the Expert Working Group, every effort has been made to issue updated advice as appropriate and communications have been issued to healthcare professionals via the letters to healthcare professionals, the MHRA website and also Drug Safety Update.

This has included the SSRI Learning module available on the MHRA website, which informs health professionals about actions to manage and minimise the most important risks associated with SSRIs. It provides general information on managing SSRI withdrawal, followed by the following advice:

“Severe cases (of withdrawal) may call for specialist advice and possible switch to an SSRI with longer half-life before gradual tapering.”

The target audience for the learning module will know that ‘specialist advice’ means a psychiatrist or specialist mental health services. The expectation would be that once referred to such services, the patient will be managed appropriately by drawing in the skills of all relevant specialists.

Cancer

Gordon Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to encourage clinical commissioning groups to reduce unnecessary emergency readmissions of cancer patients within 28 days of discharge. [116221]

Paul Burstow: NHS Improvement has been leading a Transforming In-patient Care programme for cancer patients to promote enhanced recovery programmes for elective surgery, the reduction of avoidable emergency admissions, and reducing lengths of stay for those who do need to be admitted as emergencies.

To support improvement across the service, lessons learned from the Transforming In-patient Care Programme will be disseminated to providers and commissioners. Clinical commissioning groups will be under a statutory duty to obtain advice to ensure they are commissioning services to meet the needs of patients and protect their health, and this programme, together with the advice of clinical senates and networks will be a valuable source of expertise.

Dental Services

John Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were registered in England at NHS dentists in each of the last three years. [116000]

Mr Simon Burns: Information is not available in the format requested.

Under the current dental contractual arrangements, introduced on 1 April 2006, patients do not have to be registered with a national health service dentist to receive NHS care. The closest equivalent measure to ‘registration’ is the number of patients receiving NHS dental services (‘patients seen’) over a 24-month period. However, this is not directly comparable to the registration data for earlier years.

The numbers of patients seen by an NHS dentist in the last three years in England are available in the following table.

It should be noted that the patients seen measure shows the number of patients who received NHS dental care in the previous 24 months; an equivalent measure covering the 12-month period is not available.

Number of patients seen by an NHS dentist in the previous 24-month period ending 31 March each year in England

| | <i>Number of patients</i> |
|------|---------------------------|
| 2010 | 28,362,825 |
| 2011 | 29,112,012 |
| 2012 | 29,582,541 |

The information is taken from the ‘NHS Dental Statistics for England 2011/12, Third quarterly report’, published on 17 May 2012 by the Health and Social Care Information Centre, and is available online at:

www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/dental1112q3

Diabetes

Chris Skidmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the total number was of unplanned hospital admissions involving patients with a form of diabetes in each year since 1997; [116084]

(2) what the total number was of hospital bed days taken up by patients with diabetes in each year since 1997. [116085]

Paul Burstow: The following table identifies the number of finished admission episodes where there was either a primary or a secondary diagnosis of diabetes in England from 1997-98 to 2010-11, for non-elective hospital admissions.

A finished admission episode is the first period of in-patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. Admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.

| | <i>Episodes</i> |
|-----------|-----------------|
| 1997-98 | 189,283 |
| 1998-99 | 206,193 |
| 1999-2000 | 225,272 |
| 2000-01 | 237,975 |
| 2001-02 | 255,717 |
| 2002-03 | 287,326 |
| 2003-04 | 319,136 |
| 2004-05 | 359,775 |
| 2005-06 | 401,025 |
| 2006-07 | 429,517 |
| 2007-08 | 461,410 |
| 2008-09 | 513,851 |
| 2009-10 | 570,365 |
| 2010-11 | 615,586 |

The following table identifies the number of finished consultant episode bed days where there was either a primary or a secondary diagnosis of diabetes in England from 1997-98 to 2010-11.

This data should not be described as a count of people as the same person may have been admitted on more than one occasion and does not account for admissions that had started but not finished within the financial year.

| | <i>Episodes</i> |
|-----------|-----------------|
| 1997-98 | 3,223,707 |
| 1998-99 | 3,389,391 |
| 1999-2000 | 3,608,950 |
| 2000-01 | 3,889,916 |
| 2001-02 | 4,223,874 |
| 2002-03 | 4,831,110 |
| 2003-04 | 5,059,325 |
| 2004-05 | 5,319,268 |
| 2005-06 | 5,577,981 |
| 2006-07 | 5,554,183 |
| 2007-08 | 5,719,773 |
| 2008-09 | 6,095,138 |
| 2009-10 | 6,548,166 |
| 2010-11 | 6,678,441 |

Drugs: Prisons

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what clinical advice his Department provides on drug treatment in prison for those addicted to heroin; and what National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidelines exist on such treatment. [116121]

Paul Burstow: In 2006 the Department issued comprehensive guidance on the clinical drug treatment in prisons. In March 2010, this guidance was reiterated and reinforced to ensure that other than in exceptional circumstances, prison opioid substitution treatments (including methadone maintenance) should not exceed six months' duration.

In 2007, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence issued a Technology Appraisal of methadone and buprenorphine for the management of opioid dependence, which found that these treatments were cost-effective and recommended their use to national health service funded organisations, including prisons.

Health Services: Tower Hamlets

Rushanara Ali: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the operation of his Department's new funding formula for health services in Tower Hamlets. [116070]

Mr Simon Burns: On 14 June, the public health finance update document, "Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Update on Public Health Funding", was published. A copy has already been placed in the Library.

This document sets out the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation's (ACRA) interim recommendations on the public health allocations formula, gives an update on the health premium, and sets out proposed conditions for the ring-fenced public health grant including proposals for local authority reporting on public health spend.

These are interim recommendations. As part of this publication, ACRA identified areas needing further work before making its final recommendations for the formula for making 2013-14 allocations.

The Department is now undertaking a focused engagement process with a full range of stakeholders including public health and local government representatives and the wider national health service community. This

feedback will help the work to finalise ACRA's recommendations to support the 2013-14 allocations to local authorities.

Hospital Beds

Chris Skidmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the total number was of patients staying in emergency beds for more than (a) 14 days and (b) 28 days in each year since 1997; [116082]

(2) what the total number was of emergency bed days taken up by patients staying in emergency beds longer than (a) 14 days and (b) 28 days in each year since 1997. [116083]

Mr Simon Burns: The national health service does not categorise beds as emergency and non-emergency beds. NHS Information Centre Hospital Episode Statistics information on the number of emergency admissions with a total length of stay of more than 14 or 28 days, along with the total length of stay for all such admissions, is shown in the following table. Admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.

Count of discharge episodes¹ and total bed days² where there was an emergency admission method³ and a total length of stay⁴ in hospital of (a) more than 14 days and (b) more than 28 days in England from 1997-98 to 2010-11

| <i>Length of stay:</i> | <i>Activity in English NHS Hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector</i> | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| | <i>Discharge episodes</i> | <i>Total bed days</i> | <i>Discharge episodes</i> | <i>Total bed days</i> |
| More than 14 days | | | | |
| More than 28 days ⁵ | | | | |
| 1997-98 | 540,241 | 25,653,961 | 232,379 | 19,484,769 |
| 1998-99 | 556,056 | 25,472,015 | 240,015 | 19,137,471 |
| 1999-2000 | 556,216 | 23,952,506 | 241,201 | 17,632,440 |
| 2000-01 | 570,342 | 26,954,807 | 253,512 | 20,596,108 |
| 2001-02 | 588,888 | 26,284,646 | 266,341 | 19,798,465 |
| 2002-03 | 598,440 | 26,368,633 | 271,961 | 19,798,801 |
| 2003-04 | 613,344 | 26,044,563 | 274,091 | 19,225,431 |
| 2004-05 | 602,846 | 25,302,016 | 265,957 | 18,532,851 |
| 2005-06 | 578,605 | 23,952,023 | 251,844 | 17,394,544 |
| 2006-07 | 548,300 | 22,925,967 | 237,405 | 16,689,852 |
| 2007-08 | 529,999 | 20,652,793 | 226,372 | 14,559,261 |
| 2008-09 | 550,637 | 21,468,684 | 234,510 | 15,120,476 |
| 2009-10 | 552,643 | 21,036,016 | 231,147 | 14,584,190 |
| 2010-11 | 537,841 | 20,442,818 | 221,400 | 14,103,317 |

¹ Discharge episode: A discharge episode is the last episode during a hospital stay (a spell), where the patient is discharged from the hospital or transferred to another hospital.

² Total bed days: This is the sum of the spell duration for all spells that ended within the financial year. It should be noted that bed days are only counted for finished spells during a financial year (including those from spells that started the preceding year).

³ Method of admission (emergencies): This field contains a code which identifies how the patient was admitted to hospital.

⁴ Length of stay (duration of spell): The difference in days between the admission date and the discharge date (duration of spell), where both dates are given. Length of stay is based on hospital stays and only applies to ordinary admissions not day cases (unless otherwise stated).

⁵ Length of stay (More than 28 days): The count of discharge episodes and total bed days where there was a length of stay of more than 28 days are included in the count of discharge episodes and total bed days where there was a length of stay of more than 14 days.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), The NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care

Hospitals: Admissions

Chris Skidmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total number was of unplanned hospital admissions involving patients over the age of 65 in each year since 1997. [116081]

Mr Simon Burns: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Count of finished admission episodes¹ (FAEs) for patients aged 65 and over where there was an emergency admission method² in England from 1997-98 to 2010-11

| <i>Activity in English NHS Hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector</i> | | <i>Episodes</i> |
|--|--|-----------------|
| 1997-98 | | 1,406,319 |
| 1998-99 | | 1,481,856 |
| 1999-2000 | | 1,506,837 |
| 2000-01 | | 1,504,752 |
| 2001-02 | | 1,519,192 |
| 2002-03 | | 1,565,315 |
| 2003-04 | | 1,674,083 |
| 2004-05 | | 1,749,336 |
| 2005-06 | | 1,810,531 |
| 2006-07 | | 1,818,011 |
| 2007-08 | | 1,844,259 |
| 2008-09 | | 1,975,273 |
| 2009-10 | | 2,050,451 |
| 2010-11 | | 2,109,794 |

| <i>Organisation</i> | <i>Calendar year</i> | <i>Total number of (working) absence days due to sickness</i> | <i>Average working days lost per staff year due to sickness</i> |
|---------------------|----------------------|---|---|
| DH | 2009 | 11,262 | 4.6 |
| DH | 2010 | 11,810 | 4.5 |
| DH | 2011 | 9,962 | 4.1 |
| MHRA | 2009 | 7,297 | 7.5 |
| MHRA | 2010 | 6,439 | 6.3 |
| MHRA | 2011 | 5,138 | 5.2 |

Malnutrition

Chris Skidmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total number of patients discharged from hospital with malnutrition was in each year between 1997 and 2010. [116080]

Paul Burstow: The information requested is not collected centrally. However, the following table shows a count of in year discharge episodes¹, where there was a primary or secondary diagnosis² of malnutrition³, from 1997-98 to 2010-11. This indicates that the patient was diagnosed with, and would therefore receive the appropriate treatment, for malnutrition during the last episode of care before their discharge.

¹ Finished admission episodes

A finished admission episode (FAE) is the first period of in-patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. FAEs are counted against the year in which the admission episode finishes. Admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.

² Method of admission (emergencies)

This field contains a code which identifies how the patient was admitted to hospital. The codes used to identify emergency episodes are:

21 = Emergency: via Accident and Emergency (A&E) services, including the casualty department of the provider

22 = Emergency: via general practitioner (GP)

23 = Emergency: via Bed Bureau, including the Central Bureau

24 = Emergency: via consultant out-patient clinic

28 = Emergency: other means, including patients who arrive via the A&E department of another health care provider

Notes:

1. Assessing growth through time

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) figures are available from 1989-90 onwards. Changes to the figures over time need to be interpreted in the context of improvements in data quality and coverage (particularly in earlier years), improvements in coverage of independent sector activity (particularly from 2006-07) and changes in NHS practice. For example, apparent reductions in activity may be due to a number of procedures which may now be undertaken in out-patient settings and so no longer include in admitted patient HES data.

2. Data quality

HES are compiled from data sent by more than 300 NHS trusts and primary care trusts (PCTs) in England and from some independent sector organisations for activity commissioned by the English NHS. The NHS Information Centre for health and social care liaises closely with these organisations to encourage submission of complete and valid data and seeks to minimise inaccuracies. While this brings about improvement over time, some shortcomings remain.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), The NHS Information Centre for health and social care

Lost Working Days

Mr Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of working days lost was per person in (a) his Department and (b) each of its agencies in each of the last three years. [116099]

Mr Simon Burns: The average numbers of days lost to sickness in each of the last three calendar years in the Department (DH) and its agency, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) are shown in the following table.

| <i>Finished in year discharge episodes</i> | |
|--|-------|
| 1997-98 | 1,410 |
| 1998-99 | 1,415 |
| 1999-2000 | 1,540 |
| 2000-01 | 1,381 |
| 2001-02 | 1,517 |
| 2002-03 | 1,719 |
| 2003-04 | 1,818 |
| 2004-05 | 2,006 |
| 2005-06 | 2,265 |
| 2006-07 | 2,883 |
| 2007-08 | 3,008 |
| 2008-09 | 3,633 |
| 2009-10 | 4,412 |
| 2010-11 | 5,558 |

¹ In year discharge episodes

A discharge episode is the last episode during a hospital stay (a spell), where the patient is discharged from the hospital or transferred to another hospital.

² The count of discharges does not represent the number of in-patients; a person may have more than one admission within the year.

³ Primary or secondary diagnosis of malnutrition

The number of episodes where this diagnosis was recorded in any of the 20 (14 from 2002-03 to 2006-07 and 7 prior to 2002-03) primary and secondary diagnosis fields in a Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) record. Each episode is only counted once, even if the diagnosis is recorded in more than one diagnosis field of the record.

Notes:

1. ICD10 Clinical Codes

The ICD-10 codes for Malnutrition are:

E40.X Kwashiorkor

E41.X Nutritional marasmus

E42.X Marasmic kwashiorkor

E43.X Unspecified severe protein-energy malnutrition

E44 Protein energy malnutrition of moderate and mild degree

E45.X Retarded development following protein energy malnutrition

E46 Unspecified protein-energy malnutrition

O25 Malnutrition in pregnancy

2. Assessing growth through time

HES figures are available from 1989-90 onwards. Changes to the figures over time need to be interpreted in the context of improvements in data quality and coverage (particularly in earlier years), improvements in coverage of independent sector activity (particularly from 2006-07) and changes in NHS practice. For example, apparent reductions in activity may be due to a number of procedures which may now be undertaken in outpatient settings and so no longer include in admitted patient HES data.

3. Additional information

Activity in English NHS Hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), The NHS Information Centre for health and social care.

Manchester Declaration

Stephen McPartland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent contribution his Department and its non-departmental bodies and agencies have made to implementation of the 2005 Manchester Declaration. [116101]

Mr Simon Burns: The Government published in May 2012 its information strategy for health and care in England, 'The power, of information—Putting all of us in control of the health and care information we need'. This sets a 10-year framework to harness information and new technologies to achieve higher quality care and improve outcomes for patients and service users.

A copy of the publication has already been placed in the Library and further information is available at:

www.informationstrategy.dh.gov.uk

This strategy aligns with the European Union actions on eHealth through the Digital Agenda for Europe 2010-20.

Mental Health Services: Kent

Michael Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people in Sevenoaks constituency are receiving treatment for mental health conditions; [116440]

(2) what the (a) mean and (b) median ages are of people receiving mental healthcare treatment in Sevenoaks constituency. [116443]

Paul Burstow: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the following table.

Number of people using adult and elderly secondary mental health services by age in 2010-11 for Sevenoaks constituency

| Age group | Number |
|------------------------|--------|
| Under 18 | 55 |
| 18-35 | 569 |
| 36-64 | 880 |
| 65 and over | 925 |
| Total number of people | 2,429 |

Notes:

1. Data for 2010-11 is the most up-to-date available.

2. The MHMDS only covers adults using secondary mental health services and is therefore only a subset of those people being treated for mental health illnesses.

3. The MHMDS does not contain the range required to provide a mean and median age of people receiving mental healthcare treatment. Instead, the above table shows data by age grouping.

4. The MHMDS is a record level dataset covering mainly specialist NHS mental health services for working age adults and people over the age of 65. Some (but not all) independent service providers who provide services on behalf of the NHS are also included. The MHMDS includes information from medium secure services but does not include information from the three high security hospitals.

5. The quality of MHMDS data has been improving over time in general and with respect to key items and trust level data quality reports. Improvement in the completeness of recording all the activity which should be included in MHMDS is less easy to measure, as the MHMDS records the packages of care received by individuals and these vary widely.

Source:

Health and Social Care Information Centre Mental Health Minimum Dataset (MHMDS) 2010-11 annual returns.

Michael Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost of NHS mental healthcare treatment was in Sevenoaks constituency in each of the last five financial years. [116441]

Paul Burstow: The information requested is not held on a constituency level. The following table sets out mental health expenditure for West Kent primary care trust (PCT), for the years 2006-07 to 2010-11.

| Programme Budgeting Category | Total expenditure (£000) | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | 2010-11 |
| 5—Mental health disorders | 56,800 | 106,636 | 97,321 | 101,577 | 115,228 |
| <i>This includes:</i> | | | | | |
| 5a—Substance misuse | 11,286 | 2,577 | 3,616 | 4,777 | 3,579 |
| 5b—Organic mental disorders | 4,493 | 8,367 | 8,292 | 12,721 | 8,525 |
| 5c—Psychotic disorders | 3,136 | 12,925 | 17,778 | 19,037 | 23,628 |
| 5d—Child and adolescent mental health disorders | 4,730 | 6,817 | 11,100 | 11,905 | 9,163 |
| 5x—Mental health disorders (Other) | 33,155 | 75,950 | 56,535 | 53,137 | 70,333 |

Notes:

1. Estimates of expenditure are calculated using price paid for specific activities and services purchased from health care providers. PCTs follow standard guidance, procedures and mappings when calculating programme budgeting data.
2. Figures include expenditure across all sectors. Disease specific expenditure do not include expenditure on general practitioners (GP) contracts but do include prescribing expenditure.
3. Not all expenditure relating to 'Mental Health disorders' will be included within the figures given. Analysing expenditure for the programme budgeting return is complex, and there are some service areas where local commissioners do not have sufficient information to determine which expenditure on specific patients and conditions. In primary care, the majority of PCTs do not have information to identify the health care condition that was the main reason for a patient's appointment with a GP or Practice Nurse. Additionally, for many patients the diagnosis may be unknown at the time of the appointment or the patient may have multiple conditions. For out-patient activity most PCTs do not have information to identify the health care condition that was the main reason for out-patient attendances.
4. For community care, PCTs may not have sufficient information to accurately allocate expenditure to programme categories.
5. The allocation of expenditure to programme budgeting subcategories is not always straightforward, and subcategory level data should therefore be used with caution.
6. The programme budgeting data collection methodology and underlying data sources are subject to yearly changes to improve the data quality. Due to the significant changes made to calculation methodologies, it is not possible to make direct comparisons with programme budgeting data from previous years.

Source:

Annual PCT programme budgeting Programme Budgeting data collection

Michael Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has made an assessment of future demand for NHS mental healthcare treatment in (a) Sevenoaks constituency and (b) Kent. [116442]

Paul Burstow: No such assessment has been made centrally. The planning and provision of health care services is a matter for local national health service organisations.

Michael Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make an assessment of the role of voluntary organisations in providing mental healthcare treatment in (a) Sevenoaks constituency and (b) Kent. [116444]

Paul Burstow: The role of voluntary organisations in providing mental health services locally is a matter for local national health service organisations. Local voluntary and community organisations can draw on the wealth of experience of their local communities in meeting the needs of people they work with, including people experiencing poor mental health who may also feel socially excluded. Some of these organisations have experience of helping people to manage their own mental health better in the community—including through peer support services, user-led self-help groups, mentoring and befriending, and time-banking schemes, which enable service users to be both providers and recipients of support.

Well-managed and well-supported volunteering opportunities can help people to develop the skills and confidence to play a more active role in their own wellbeing and their community, and to influence the shape and scope of local services. Innovative approaches aimed at involving service users and the wider community can also help to break down barriers and reduce stigma.

NHS: Drugs

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether his Department has established any inquiries into bribery by the pharmaceutical and drug sector related to treatment in the NHS in the last 30 years; [115956]

(2) what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the recent fining of UK pharmaceutical companies for bribing doctors in the US to prescribe anti-depressants to (a) children and (b) adults; and if he will make a statement. [115959]

Mr Simon Burns: No such inquiries have been established by the Department.

In the United Kingdom, the advertising of medicines is controlled by a combination of statutory measures (with both criminal and civil sanctions), enforced by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and self-regulation through Codes of Practice for the pharmaceutical industry, administered by trade associations.

In addition, under the Bribery Act 2010, it is a criminal offence for an individual to give or receive a bribe. It is also a corporate offence if a business operating in the UK is found to have failed to prevent bribery.

The MHRA carried out an exhaustive investigation in 2008 into GlaxoSmithKline's compliance with legal obligations to report key safety information and on its promotion of unlicensed uses of Seroxat. That investigation concluded that the company could, and should, have communicated safety information sooner than they did but that the law was not sufficiently clear to support legal action. In response, both the UK legislation and European law on reporting requirements have been strengthened.

Obesity

Mr Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of obesity and obesity-related conditions in (a) 2012, (b) 2015 and (c) 2020; [116434]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost to the economy of obesity in (a) 2012, (b) 2015 and (c) 2020. [116436]

Anne Milton: The Department has not undertaken an assessment of the estimated cost of obesity to the national health service and the economy. However, a recent analysis of the economic burden of a range of risk factors for chronic disease estimated that overweight and obesity now cost the NHS £5.1 billion per year.

The Foresight team which is part of the Government Office for Science published "Tackling Obesities: Future Choices" in 2007. The Foresight team estimated the cost of obesity and overweight to society and the economy were almost £16 billion in 2007, with a potential to rise to just under £50 billion in 2050 if the increase in obesity rates were to continue unchecked.

Palliative Care

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to the NHS Outcomes Framework on Improving the experience of care for people at the end

of their lives, whether the proposed indicator will measure whether people's wishes regarding a preferred place of death were met. [116111]

Paul Burstow: The proposed indicator for improving the experience of care for people at the end of their lives will be based on responses to the National Bereavement Survey (VOICES). This survey, which seeks the views of carers on the care that their loved one received, does contain questions regarding whether or not people were involved in decisions about their care and if their preferences and choices for care were met.

The findings from the first survey have been published by the Office for National Statistics at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/subnational-health1/national-bereavement-survey--voices-/2011/stb-statistical-bulletin.html>

with a complementary report, 'First national VOICES survey of the bereaved: key findings report', published by the Department. A copy of the Department's report has been placed in the Library.

The proposed indicator seeks to measure the quality of people's experience in the last three months of life.

Prescription Drugs

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were issued for the (a) (i) Paxil and (ii) Wellbutrin forms of anti-depressant and (b) Advair forms of asthma treatment in each year since its introduction. [115958]

Mr Simon Burns: Paxil (paroxetine) is marketed in the United Kingdom as Seroxat. Wellbutrin (bupropion) is not licensed as an anti-depressant in the UK. Advair (fluticasone propionate combined with salmeterol) is marketed as Seretide.

The table shows the number of prescription items dispensed in the community in England for Seroxat, Wellbutrin and Seretide for each available year¹. The specific indication for which a medicine is prescribed is not collected.

¹ 1991 is the earliest complete dataset available.

| | Number of prescription items ¹ | | |
|------|---|------------|-----------|
| | Seroxat | Wellbutrin | Seretide |
| 1991 | 53,600 | 0 | 0 |
| 1992 | 316,361 | 0 | 0 |
| 1993 | 572,473 | 0 | 0 |
| 1994 | 784,982 | 0 | 0 |
| 1995 | 1,128,164 | 0 | 0 |
| 1996 | 1,691,474 | 5 | 0 |
| 1997 | 2,287,243 | 3 | 0 |
| 1998 | 2,719,180 | 12 | 0 |
| 1999 | 3,144,937 | 20 | 131,555 |
| 2000 | 3,452,272 | 8 | 463,075 |
| 2001 | 3,786,829 | 0 | 957,974 |
| 2002 | 2,125,004 | 0 | 1,477,565 |
| 2003 | 715,931 | 1 | 2,147,353 |
| 2004 | 376,282 | 0 | 3,048,477 |
| 2005 | 119,564 | 0 | 3,970,822 |
| 2006 | 101,617 | 0 | 4,711,504 |
| 2007 | 108,434 | 0 | 5,303,141 |
| 2008 | 141,707 | 0 | 5,831,964 |
| 2009 | 158,990 | 0 | 6,315,863 |

| | Number of prescription items ¹ | | |
|------|---|------------|-----------|
| | Seroxat | Wellbutrin | Seretide |
| 2010 | 170,020 | 0 | 6,676,587 |
| 2011 | 173,354 | 0 | 6,917,503 |

¹ Does not include generic equivalents which may also have been dispensed.

Source:

Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) system

Private Finance Initiative

Chris Skidmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the total value is of PFI schemes signed between 1997 and 2010; and what estimate he has made of the amount it will cost the NHS to pay back these schemes; [116078]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the total number of individual PFI schemes signed between 1999 and May 2010, the value of each individual scheme and the total estimated cost to pay back each scheme. [116079]

Mr Simon Burns: Information on the estimated annual revenue payments for the lifetime of each national health service private finance initiative (PFI) contract signed between 1997 and May 2010 can be found on the Treasury's website at:

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/pfi_current_projects_list_march_2012.xls

These are the latest estimates collected from each Department for end of March 2012; the health sector schemes are clearly marked "Department of Health" and then "DH-Acute (i.e. Hospitals)". The initial capital cost of each scheme is shown in column R and the annual revenue payment in the columns headed 'Unitary Charge Payment'.

The Treasury table shows that the total initial capital expenditure of the 102 NHS schemes that have been signed is £11.4 billion and the estimated total revenue payments is £76.2 billion. The revenue payment figures include not just the financing costs for initial construction but also the costs of all the other services such as building maintenance and support services (cleaning, catering, portering etc.) provided over the lifetime of the contract. The payments are subject to meeting agreed performance and quality standards and include an annual uprate assumption for inflation of 2.5%.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Carbon Emissions: Business

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps she plans to take to promote voluntary uptake of carbon reporting for companies not required to report under the mandatory scheme from April 2013; [116021]

(2) what discussions she has had with the organisations which supported a voluntary approach in response to her Department's consultation on greenhouse gas reporting. [116022]

Richard Benyon: My noble Friend, Lord Taylor of Holbeach, and his predecessor, my noble Friend, Lord Henley, have met with a range of organisations to discuss greenhouse gas reporting, including the Freight Transport Association and the Manufacturers' Organisation for UK Manufacturing (EEF), which both supported a voluntary approach.

We will continue to work closely with the Carbon Disclosure Project, the Climate Standard Disclosure Board, and other non-governmental organisations to encourage voluntary measuring and reporting of greenhouse gases by non-quoted companies.

Teresa Pearce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evidence she plans to gather on the progress of mandatory carbon reporting for quoted companies to inform her post-implementation review in 2015. [116042]

Richard Benyon [holding answer 9 July 2012]: Details of the post-implementation review, and the evidence to be gathered, are set out in section 12 of the impact assessment on carbon reporting, which is available on DEFRA's website. The review will include evidence from a range of different stakeholders on the actual costs experienced by companies, as well as the benefits that they attribute to the process of mandatory reporting.

Common Fisheries Policy

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 25 June 2012, *Official Report*, column 17W, on Commons Fisheries Policy, what agreement was reached at the meeting on 12 June 2012 on arrangements for providing member states to take non-discriminatory measures for the conservation and management of fish stocks which apply to foreign vessels fishing within their 12-mile limits. [115188]

Richard Benyon: The General Approach agreed at the Fisheries Council in Luxembourg on 12/13 June, maintains the current derogation setting out member state control over fishery activities in waters from 0 to 12 nautical miles. This includes provision to apply non-discriminatory conservation and management measures in the 0 to 12 nautical mile zone.

Where such measures are liable to affect fishing vessels of other member states, they shall be adopted only after consultation with the Commission, relevant member states and relevant Advisory Councils. Member states may set a reasonable deadline for consultation on draft measures, but this should not be shorter than one month.

Game: Animal Welfare

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department has spent on protecting game birds from attacks by buzzards in each of the last five years for which figures are available; what spending has been allocated for this purpose over the next three years; and if she will make a statement. [115723]

Richard Benyon [holding answer 6 July 2012]: DEFRA has not spent any money on directly protecting game birds from attacks by buzzards in the last five years, nor has any funding been allocated for this purpose over the next three years.

DEFRA has, however, funded the Food and Environment Research Agency to undertake a desk study in January 2012 entitled "Approaches to mitigating bird of prey conflicts with pheasants at release pens, outdoor poultry and lambs" at a total cost of £24,694. The report can be found on the DEFRA website.

DEFRA has made provision for up to £125,000 to be available in each of the current and following two financial years for additional research to look at the relationship between raptors (including buzzards), livestock, wildlife and game birds. DEFRA will collaborate with all the organisations that have an interest in this issue to identify and develop any future research proposals.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Business

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Deputy Prime Minister on mandatory greenhouse gas reporting for companies. [115927]

Richard Benyon [holding answer 9 July 2012]: 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 on a range of important issues, including mandatory corporate reporting of greenhouse gas emissions.

Natural Capital Committee

Mr Graham Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the budget is for the Natural Capital Committee in financial year 2012-13. [115646]

Richard Benyon: In 2012-13, the Natural Capital Committee has a budget of up to approximately £400,000, including administrative costs and research and development (R&D). From 2013-14 onwards, the budget is expected to increase to over £500,000, reflecting an increase in R&D activities.

Mr Graham Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made on the Natural Capital Committee's work programme in 2012-13; and if she will make a statement. [115647]

Richard Benyon: The Natural Capital Committee met on 23 May and has begun to formulate a work programme around the terms of its remit. This is:

1. Advice on when, where and how natural assets are being used unsustainably.
2. Advice on how government should prioritise action.
3. Advice on research priorities to improve future advice.

The work programme is being developed and will be published as soon as it is ready.

PRIME MINISTER

G8

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Prime Minister to what extent his work as a member of the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on the post-Millennium Development Goal framework will be reflected in the agenda for the UK presidency of the G8 Summit in 2013. [116074]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis), on 18 June 2012, *Official Report*, column 632W. The Government are developing a programme for the UK's G8 presidency.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Housing Benefit: Greater London

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the average change in private sector housing benefit supported rents in each London borough for the 12 months up to May 2012. [116062]

Steve Webb: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions.

The information is not available.

Housing: Construction

Jack Dromey: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when the £30 million announced in the Government's Housing Strategy in November 2011 will be available to support provision of short-term project finance to the self-build sector. [110411]

Grant Shapps: The £30 million Custom Build Homes investment fund to support provision of short-term project finance for group self build projects on a repayable basis was launched on 7 July 2012.

Full details can be obtained from the Homes and Communities Agency. Separate arrangements for London will be announced shortly by the Greater London Authority.

Housing: Greater London

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many (a) council house, (b) housing association and (c) private sector housing units were completed in each London borough in (i) 2011-12 and (ii) 2012-13 to date; and how many he expects to be completed in 2013. [116019]

Grant Shapps: Statistics on house building in each English local authority are published on the Department for Communities and Local Government website in live table 253 at the following link.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingresearch/housingstatistics/housingstatisticsby/housebuilding/livetables/>

The Department does not forecast levels of overall house building.

From the 1 April 2012, the Mayor of London has had oversight of strategic housing, regeneration and economic development in London. The Mayor has clearly stated that over the next three years he anticipates delivering 55,000 affordable homes within London. Within the settlement letter agreed between this Department and the Greater London authority we are expecting them to deliver 36,000 affordable homes by March 2015.

Land Investment Companies

Gordon Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will review the (a) operation and (b) regulation of land investment companies. [110037]

Mr Hoban: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Treasury.

Regulation of land investment companies which fall within the scope of Collective Investment Schemes (CIS) as defined in section 235 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 is a matter for the Financial Services Authority, as the independent regulator.

The Financial Services Authority keeps the coverage of collective investment schemes under review.

Local Government Finance

Mr Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what specific grants and ring-fenced funding he has paid to local authorities in 2011-12; and what such grants and funding he plans to pay to local authorities in 2012-13. [115211]

Grant Shapps [*holding answer 5 July 2012*]: In line with Government policy my Department has not made any payments to local authorities that have been ring-fenced in 2011-12 and there are no plans to do so in 2012-13.

My Department paid specific grants to local authorities from a number of DCLG programmes in 2011-12 totalling £2.3 billion; the programmes are broken down in the following table. As set out in the Department's business plan we estimate that the Department will provide total funding for specific grants of around £1.5 billion in 2012-13. The details have not yet been finalised but funding will be from programmes including Disabled Facilities Grant, Decent Homes, Weekly Waste, Preventing Homelessness.

However as set out in the Statement of Intent published in June 2012 the Government has considered the scope for further simplification and will include a number of specific grants in the business rates retention system from April 2013.

All grant spending, including specific grants to local authorities, over £500 since 2008-09 is also published on the website as part of my Department's broader transparency agenda.

| | £000 | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Programme name</i> | <i>Resource grant</i> | <i>Capital grant</i> | <i>Total</i> |
| Housing—New Homes Bonus | 234,260 | 0 | 234,260 |
| Housing—Affordable Housing programme | 0 | 35,130 | 35,130 |

| Programme name | £000 | | |
|--|----------------|---------------|-----------|
| | Resource grant | Capital grant | Total |
| Housing—Property and Regeneration programme | 0 | 136,798 | 136,798 |
| Housing—Preventing Homelessness ¹ | 131,635 | 0 | 131,635 |
| Housing—Decent Homes programme | 0 | 300,000 | 300,000 |
| Housing—Other | 7,247 | 40,705 | 47,952 |
| Growing Places Fund | 8,427 | 453,083 | 461,510 |
| Disabled Facilities Grants | 0 | 180,007 | 180,007 |
| Fire | 79,801 | 113,494 | 193,295 |
| Decentralisation and Big Society | 1,853 | 0 | 1,853 |
| London Settlement (GLA) | 321,552 | 28,230 | 349,782 |
| Olympic Legacy and Thames Gateway | 9,454 | 120,577 | 130,031 |
| Troubled Families | 8,519 | 0 | 8,519 |
| Transition Grant ² | 96,199 | 0 | 96,199 |
| Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder ² | 4,001 | 0 | 4,001 |
| Other small grants | 1,800 | 0 | 1,800 |
| | 904,748 | 1,408,024 | 2,312,772 |

¹ Preventing Homeless was paid in part (£90,340) through Local Services Support Grant

² Transition Grant and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders grant were paid entirely through Local Services Support Grant

Manchester Declaration

Stephen McPartland: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what progress his Department and its agencies have made on implementation of the Manchester Declaration of 2005. [116365]

Robert Neill: My Department and its agencies support the Government's commitment to use digital technologies to transform the quality of public services, to improve transparency and accountability of public bodies, to secure value for money and foster economic growth. These objectives are consistent with the 2005 Manchester Declaration.

The forthcoming Departmental Digital Strategy, due to be published in December alongside the Government Digital Strategy, will describe these actions in more detail.

Non-domestic Rates

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government which local authorities will be (a) tariffed and (b) topped-up from 2013 following reforms to non-domestic rates; and what the amounts for each local authority will be. [115955]

Robert Neill: We will be consulting this summer on the technical details of the Business Rates Retention arrangements, including tariff and top-up proposals. This consultation will build on the proposals in the Government's response to consultation published in December 2011. We will set out our final proposals for which local authorities will be tariff and top-up in the provisional 2013-14 Local Government Finance settlement later this year.

Pay

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the lowest hourly rate is paid to staff by his Department; how many members of staff based outside London are paid less than £7.20 per hour; and how many members of staff based in London are paid less than £8.30 per hour. [116375]

Robert Neill: The lowest hourly rate to a member of staff in the Department for Communities and Local Government is £7.80 an hour.

There are no staff based outside London paid less than £7.20 an hour, and no staff based in London paid less than £8.30 an hour.

Planning Permission

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether he plans to allow local authorities to charge for planning applications received as a result of direction under Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995. [116653]

Robert Neill: There are no plans to allow local authorities to charge for such applications.

The permitted development regime is set nationally, and seeks to strike a balance between allowing individual freedom to carry out development while protecting the interests of neighbours and the wider environment. As the nationally set criteria can have differing impacts when applied locally, local councils are able to consult the local community on whether to withdraw specific permitted development rights using article 4 directions. Where an article 4 direction is in place, a planning application must be submitted in the normal way, but no application fee is payable where the development would otherwise have been permitted under the General Permitted Development Order.

Rented Housing

Simon Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will review the Housing Act 2004 and related legislation to entitle tenants to be re-housed when they have to leave their home for works to take place which are required of their landlord to comply with a local authority issued improvement notice. [115581]

Andrew Stunell: Statutory guidance already makes it clear that, in serving a prohibition order under the powers in the Housing Act 2004, local authorities should consider the availability of alternative housing for tenants who may need to be re-housed.

The guidance explains that, although in some cases, provision may have been made as part of the relevant tenancy agreement, in general terms, it is unreasonable to expect a private landlord, who may have a very small portfolio of only one or two properties, to re-house a tenant who has been made homeless as a result of the actions of a local authority.

The guidance—'Housing Health and Safety Rating System, enforcement guidance'—can be found at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/safetyratingsystem.pdf>

We have no plans to review the legislation or the associated guidance.

Social Impact Bonds and Home Bonuses

Nadine Dorries: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what recent discussions there have been within (a) his Department and (b) HM Treasury on (i) social impact bonds and (ii) home bonuses. [115809]

Grant Shapps: As a result of close working between my Department and Her Majesty's Treasury, in March this year we announced that £5 million has been set aside for a new Social Impact Bond to help London's persistent rough sleepers off the streets and into secure homes.

Ministers within the Department for Communities and Local Government regularly meet colleagues from Her Majesty's Treasury to discuss a range of matters. There are also regular discussions within the Department on a variety of issues.

JUSTICE

Lost Working Days

Mr Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the average number of working days lost was per person in (a) his Department and (b) each of its agencies in each of the last three years. [116096]

Mr Kenneth Clarke: The average number of working days lost by staff in the Ministry of Justice and its agencies in each of the last three years for which information is available, is provided in the following table:

| | <i>Average working days lost</i> | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---------|---------|
| | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 |
| MoJ HQ ¹ | 8.5 | 4.6 | 6.1 |
| Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service ² | 4— | 8 | 7.4 |
| The Office of the Public Guardian | 4— | 6.2 | 6.1 |

Defendants proceeded against at magistrates court for selected cycling offences, by Police Force Area, England and Wales, 2001-11^{1,2}

| <i>Offence and Police Force Area</i> | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 ³ | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------------|------|------|------|
| <i>Pedal cycle—riding to common danger</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| City of London | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Humberside | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Merseyside | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Metropolitan Police | — | — | 1 | 3 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Northumbria | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| Total | — | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 | — | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| <i>Cyclists fail to stop on signal and failing to comply with traffic signals or signs</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Avon and Somerset | — | — | — | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Cambridgeshire | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | 14 | — | 3 | — | 1 | — |

Average working days lost

| | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|
| Wales Office ³ | 4— | 4 | — |
| Scotland Office ³ | 4— | 2.3 | — |
| The National Offender Management Service | 10.7 | 10.1 | 9.8 |
| Total for Department | 10 | 9.2 | 8.9 |

¹ In 2011 HQ included additional staff from NOMS and Home Office as a result of Restructuring.

² Her Majesty's Courts Service and the Tribunals Service merged on 1 April 2011. Data prior to this date have been aggregated.

³ Scotland and Wales Office ceased to be part of the MoJ from 1 April 2011 after moving to the Office of the Territories.

Probation: Essex

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what discussions he has had with Essex Probation on any (a) overspend and (b) underspend by the authority since July 2010; and if he will make a statement. [107553]

Mr Blunt: The National Offender Management Service holds quarterly contract review meetings with Essex Probation Trust, at which any or under or overspends are discussed.

Road Traffic Offences: Cycling

Gareth Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many cyclists have been prosecuted for wanton and furious cycling in each court division in each of the last 10 years; [115896]

(2) how many cyclists have been prosecuted for cycling offences in each court division in each of the last 10 years by type of offence. [115897]

Mr Blunt: Data held centrally on the Court Proceedings Database do not include information about all the circumstances behind each case other than which may be identified from a statute. From proceedings for offences of wanton and furious driving, it is not possible to specifically identify whether the defendant was a cyclist.

The number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts for selected cycling offences, by Police Force Area, in England and Wales, from 2001 to 2011, can be viewed in the table as follows:

Defendants proceeded against at magistrates court for selected cycling offences, by Police Force Area, England and Wales, 2001-11^{1,2}

| <i>Offence and Police Force Area</i> | <i>2001</i> | <i>2002</i> | <i>2003</i> | <i>2004</i> | <i>2005</i> | <i>2006</i> | <i>2007</i> | <i>2008³</i> | <i>2009</i> | <i>2010</i> | <i>2011</i> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Cheshire | — | — | 3 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 |
| City of London | — | — | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | — | 3 | 11 | 14 | 36 |
| Cumbria | 7 | 8 | 3 | — | 1 | 4 | — | 2 | 1 | 1 | — |
| Derbyshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 |
| Devon and Cornwall | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | — |
| Dorset | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 |
| Essex | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| Gloucestershire | — | — | — | 2 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Greater Manchester | 3 | 2 | 5 | 1 | — | 2 | — | 1 | — | — | 1 |
| Hampshire | — | — | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | — | 2 |
| Hertfordshire | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Humberside | — | — | 1 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Kent | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| Lancashire | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | 1 |
| Lincolnshire | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| Merseyside | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 2 | — | — | 1 |
| Metropolitan Police | 2 | 4 | 11 | 3 | 2 | 10 | 5 | 8 | 11 | 19 | 137 |
| Norfolk | 2 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| North Yorkshire | 9 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | — | 5 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Northamptonshire | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Northumbria | 4 | 3 | 5 | 15 | 14 | 8 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 4 |
| Nottinghamshire | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | 1 |
| South Yorkshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 3 | — |
| Staffordshire | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Suffolk | 4 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Surrey | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | — |
| Sussex | 3 | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | 2 | — |
| Thames Valley | — | — | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | 1 |
| West Mercia | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | — |
| West Midlands | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | 3 | — |
| West Yorkshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| Wiltshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| Gwent | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | — |
| North Wales | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| South Wales | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | — |
| Total | 38 | 19 | 38 | 35 | 35 | 55 | 22 | 34 | 48 | 63 | 199 |

Bicycle, more than one person carried

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bedfordshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| Cumbria | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | 3 | — | — | — | — |
| Devon and Cornwall | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Gloucestershire | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Greater Manchester | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Hampshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 |
| Humberside | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| Kent | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| Lincolnshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| Metropolitan Police | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| North Yorkshire | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | — |
| Northamptonshire | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Northumbria | — | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 | — |
| South Yorkshire | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Staffordshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| Suffolk | — | — | — | 3 | 2 | 2 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Surrey | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| West Mercia | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| West Midlands | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | 2 |
| West Yorkshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| Wiltshire | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Total | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 8 |

Defendants proceeded against at magistrates court for selected cycling offences, by Police Force Area, England and Wales, 2001-11^{1,2}

| <i>Offence and Police Force Area</i> | <i>2001</i> | <i>2002</i> | <i>2003</i> | <i>2004</i> | <i>2005</i> | <i>2006</i> | <i>2007</i> | <i>2008³</i> | <i>2009</i> | <i>2010</i> | <i>2011</i> |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <i>Pedal cycles—riding on footpath</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Avon and Somerset | 4 | — | 2 | 1 | 3 | — | — | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| Bedfordshire | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | 2 | — | — | 1 | — |
| Cambridgeshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| Cheshire | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| City of London | — | 1 | — | 4 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 5 | 4 |
| Cleveland | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | 2 | 10 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Cumbria | 26 | 12 | 8 | 14 | 17 | 12 | 9 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| Derbyshire | — | 2 | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Devon and Cornwall | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | — | — | — | 2 | — | 2 | 1 |
| Dorset | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | — | 14 | 1 | 5 | 2 | — |
| Durham | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | 3 | — | 1 | — | — |
| Essex | 2 | 1 | — | 1 | 3 | 6 | — | 3 | 7 | 3 | — |
| Gloucestershire | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 5 | 2 | 1 |
| Greater Manchester | 5 | 7 | 14 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 15 |
| Hampshire | 6 | 5 | 14 | 8 | 6 | 6 | 9 | 20 | 16 | 8 | 21 |
| Hertfordshire | 2 | 1 | — | 2 | 2 | 2 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Humberside | 25 | 18 | 7 | 8 | 20 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 42 | 72 | 51 |
| Kent | 1 | — | 2 | — | 3 | 4 | 4 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 |
| Lancashire | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | — | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | — |
| Leicestershire | 5 | 2 | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | — |
| Lincolnshire | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | — | 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | — | — |
| Merseyside | 3 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 9 | 13 | 10 |
| Metropolitan Police | 11 | 8 | 10 | 17 | 29 | 48 | 17 | 18 | 49 | 153 | 254 |
| Norfolk | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | — | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 6 |
| North Yorkshire | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 5 | 6 |
| Northamptonshire | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| Northumbria | 15 | 3 | 10 | 14 | 15 | 26 | 21 | 21 | 8 | 28 | 15 |
| Nottinghamshire | — | — | 1 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 10 | 5 | 4 |
| South Yorkshire | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Staffordshire | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — |
| Suffolk | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | — | 1 | — | 2 | — | — |
| Surrey | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Sussex | 1 | 3 | 1 | — | 2 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Thames Valley | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | 2 | 2 | — |
| West Mercia | 8 | 9 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | — | 4 | 1 |
| West Midlands | 1 | 2 | 1 | — | 3 | 1 | 8 | 6 | 6 | 2 | — |
| West Yorkshire | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 2 |
| Wiltshire | 2 | — | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | — |
| Dyfed-Powys | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| Gwent | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| North Wales | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| South Wales | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — |
| Total | 139 | 94 | 95 | 118 | 143 | 145 | 149 | 144 | 204 | 342 | 412 |

Offences connected with pedal cycles; in relation to pedestrian crossings

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bedfordshire | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Cleveland | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Devon and Cornwall | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Dyfed-Powys | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Total | — | 1 | 2 | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |

Pedal cycles—failing to obey signal

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cambridgeshire | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | — |
| City of London | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Cleveland | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Derbyshire | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Greater Manchester | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — |

Defendants proceeded against at magistrates court for selected cycling offences, by Police Force Area, England and Wales, 2001-11^{1,2}

| <i>Offence and Police Force Area</i> | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 ³ | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------------|------|------|------|
| Hampshire | 3 | 2 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Merseyside | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Metropolitan Police | — | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| North Yorkshire | 4 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Staffordshire | — | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Thames Valley | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| South Wales | — | — | 1 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 3 | — | — | — | — |
| Total | 9 | 8 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 6 | — | — | — | — |

Riding, causing or permitting riding a bicycle with defective brakes

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Avon and Somerset | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | 1 | — |
| Bedfordshire | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Cambridgeshire | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | — |
| City of London | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| Cleveland | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | 2 | 1 | — | — | 1 |
| Cumbria | 2 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Derbyshire | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Devon and Cornwall | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Dorset | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| Durham | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Gloucestershire | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Greater Manchester | 1 | 3 | 2 | 5 | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | 1 | — |
| Hampshire | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| Humberside | 3 | 1 | — | 3 | — | — | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Kent | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| Lancashire | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| Leicestershire | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Lincolnshire | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 |
| Merseyside | 1 | — | — | 1 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 4 | — | — | — |
| Metropolitan Police | — | — | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | — | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Norfolk | 2 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| North Yorkshire | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | — | 2 | 1 |
| Northumbria | 1 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| Nottinghamshire | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | — |
| South Yorkshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| Staffordshire | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| Suffolk | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — |
| Surrey | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Warwickshire | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| West Mercia | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — |
| West Midlands | 1 | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | 2 |
| West Yorkshire | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Wiltshire | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Dyfed-Powys | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | — |
| Gwent | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Total | 16 | 12 | 12 | 21 | 14 | 18 | 20 | 17 | 14 | 16 | 10 |

Dangerous riding by pedal cyclist

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Avon and Somerset | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | 2 | — | 2 |
| Cambridgeshire | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | — |
| Cheshire | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| City of London | — | — | 2 | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Cleveland | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | 2 | — |
| Cumbria | — | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | — | 1 | — | — | — | 1 |
| Derbyshire | 2 | 3 | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Devon and Cornwall | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Dorset | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 |
| Durham | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Essex | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | 2 | — | — | 2 |

Defendants proceeded against at magistrates court for selected cycling offences, by Police Force Area, England and Wales, 2001-11^{1,2}

| <i>Offence and Police Force Area</i> | <i>2001</i> | <i>2002</i> | <i>2003</i> | <i>2004</i> | <i>2005</i> | <i>2006</i> | <i>2007</i> | <i>2008³</i> | <i>2009</i> | <i>2010</i> | <i>2011</i> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Gloucestershire | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Greater Manchester | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | — | 2 | — | 1 | — | 1 | 2 |
| Hampshire | — | 2 | 1 | 4 | — | 2 | — | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Humberside | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Kent | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 |
| Lancashire | 3 | 1 | — | 1 | — | 2 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Leicestershire | — | — | — | 2 | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 |
| Lincolnshire | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| Merseyside | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | — |
| Metropolitan Police | 3 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 11 | 2 | 11 | 5 | 7 | 14 | 13 |
| Norfolk | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 |
| North Yorkshire | 1 | 3 | 1 | — | 1 | 2 | — | 2 | — | — | 1 |
| Northamptonshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| Northumbria | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 2 | 6 | 2 |
| Nottinghamshire | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| South Yorkshire | 5 | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Staffordshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| Suffolk | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| Surrey | — | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| Sussex | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 3 | 1 |
| Thames Valley | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | 1 |
| West Mercia | — | 1 | — | — | 3 | 1 | — | 1 | — | 2 | 1 |
| West Midlands | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 1 | — | — | 2 |
| West Yorkshire | 3 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — |
| Wiltshire | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Dyfed-Powys | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Gwent | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| North Wales | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 |
| South Wales | — | — | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| Total | 30 | 27 | 21 | 37 | 33 | 25 | 27 | 25 | 21 | 41 | 40 |

Careless riding by pedal cyclist

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|----|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Avon and Somerset | — | 3 | 4 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Bedfordshire | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Cambridgeshire | 5 | — | — | — | — | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 2 |
| Cheshire | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| City of London | — | — | 2 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Cleveland | — | — | 2 | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | — |
| Cumbria | 1 | — | 3 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| Derbyshire | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Devon and Cornwall | 2 | 4 | — | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Dorset | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Durham | — | — | — | 2 | 1 | — | — | 3 | — | — | — |
| Essex | — | — | 6 | 6 | 4 | 1 | — | 2 | 2 | 4 | — |
| Gloucestershire | 4 | 3 | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 2 | 2 |
| Greater Manchester | 6 | 4 | — | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Hampshire | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | — | 4 | 3 | 6 | — |
| Hertfordshire | — | — | 3 | 1 | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — |
| Humberside | — | 1 | 2 | — | 5 | 2 | — | 2 | 5 | 5 | 6 |
| Kent | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Lancashire | — | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 | — | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Leicestershire | 2 | — | 2 | 2 | — | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Lincolnshire | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Merseyside | 3 | — | 1 | 7 | 5 | 1 | — | 2 | — | 5 | 2 |
| Metropolitan Police | 13 | 13 | 6 | 15 | 10 | 20 | 15 | 15 | 23 | 29 | 45 |
| Norfolk | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | — | 4 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| North Yorkshire | 2 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 1 | — | 2 | — | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Northamptonshire | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 |
| Northumbria | 5 | 6 | 2 | 7 | 8 | 5 | 10 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 3 |
| Nottinghamshire | 5 | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | — | — |
| South Yorkshire | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |

Defendants proceeded against at magistrates court for selected cycling offences, by Police Force Area, England and Wales, 2001-11^{1,2}

| <i>Offence and Police Force Area</i> | <i>2001</i> | <i>2002</i> | <i>2003</i> | <i>2004</i> | <i>2005</i> | <i>2006</i> | <i>2007</i> | <i>2008³</i> | <i>2009</i> | <i>2010</i> | <i>2011</i> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Staffordshire | 1 | 2 | 3 | — | 1 | 2 | — | 1 | 2 | — | — |
| Suffolk | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | 2 | — | 1 | — | 2 | 3 | — |
| Surrey | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | — |
| Sussex | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | 2 | — | — | — |
| Thames Valley | 1 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 3 | — | 1 | 1 | 3 | — | — |
| Warwickshire | — | — | 3 | 2 | — | — | 2 | 2 | 2 | — | 1 |
| West Mercia | 8 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 3 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 3 |
| West Midlands | 3 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 4 |
| West Yorkshire | 2 | — | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | — | — | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Wiltshire | 2 | — | — | — | 3 | 3 | — | — | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Dyfed-Powys | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| Gwent | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| North Wales | — | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| South Wales | 2 | 3 | 5 | 2 | — | 1 | — | 3 | 1 | — | 4 |
| Total | 75 | 66 | 77 | 94 | 81 | 88 | 70 | 88 | 95 | 103 | 120 |

Pedal cyclist riding under the influence of drink or drugs

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Avon and Somerset | 2 | — | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | — | — | 1 | — | 1 |
| Bedfordshire | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Cambridgeshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| Cheshire | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 3 |
| City of London | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | 1 | — |
| Cleveland | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | 1 | — |
| Cumbria | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | — | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Derbyshire | — | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 1 | — | 1 |
| Devon and Cornwall | 1 | — | 2 | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| Dorset | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Durham | 3 | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 2 | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Essex | 1 | 1 | — | 2 | 1 | 3 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Gloucestershire | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Greater Manchester | 6 | 8 | 7 | 2 | 1 | — | 2 | — | — | 1 | — |
| Hampshire | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Hertfordshire | — | 2 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 | — |
| Humberside | — | — | 3 | — | 1 | 1 | 2 | — | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Kent | — | 1 | 2 | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| Lancashire | — | 2 | — | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Leicestershire | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | 4 | — | 1 | — |
| Lincolnshire | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | 2 | — | — | — | — |
| Merseyside | 1 | 2 | — | 2 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| Metropolitan Police | 1 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| Norfolk | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| North Yorkshire | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | 2 | — | 1 |
| Northumbria | 5 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Nottinghamshire | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| South Yorkshire | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | 1 |
| Staffordshire | 1 | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | 1 | — | 1 | — |
| Suffolk | — | 1 | 2 | 1 | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | — |
| Surrey | — | — | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Sussex | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Thames Valley | 2 | 2 | 1 | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | — | 1 |
| Warwickshire | 2 | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | 1 | 1 | — | — |
| West Mercia | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | — | 1 | 1 |
| West Midlands | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| West Yorkshire | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | — | — | — |
| Wiltshire | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Dyfed-Powys | 1 | — | — | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | — | — | — |
| Gwent | 1 | 4 | 1 | — | 3 | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| North Wales | 1 | 1 | 3 | — | — | 2 | — | 1 | — | 2 | — |
| South Wales | 3 | — | 4 | 2 | — | — | 1 | 2 | — | — | — |
| Total | 46 | 44 | 55 | 45 | 51 | 55 | 40 | 37 | 21 | 28 | 30 |

Defendants proceeded against at magistrates court for selected cycling offences, by Police Force Area, England and Wales, 2001-11^{1,2}

| <i>Offence and Police Force Area</i> | <i>2001</i> | <i>2002</i> | <i>2003</i> | <i>2004</i> | <i>2005</i> | <i>2006</i> | <i>2007</i> | <i>2008³</i> | <i>2009</i> | <i>2010</i> | <i>2011</i> |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <i>Promoting unauthorised cycle race on public highway</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Merseyside | — | — | — | 1 | 2 | 2 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Total | — | — | — | 1 | 2 | 2 | — | — | — | — | — |
| <i>Use pedal cycle on an excluded road</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Avon and Somerset | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Cambridgeshire | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Cheshire | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 | — |
| Cleveland | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Durham | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Greater Manchester | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | — |
| Hertfordshire | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Humberside | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | — |
| Lancashire | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Metropolitan Police | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Northumbria | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | — |
| South Yorkshire | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| West Mercia | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| West Yorkshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| Total | 3 | 2 | — | 1 | — | 7 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 4 | — |
| <i>Pedal cycle wilfully obstructing the highway</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Northamptonshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| Thames Valley | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| West Midlands | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| Total | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — |
| <i>Rider of cycle failing to give name and address when alleged to have been cycling recklessly, dangerously, carelessly or inconsiderately</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Avon and Somerset | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Dorset | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Essex | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Greater Manchester | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Hertfordshire | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Humberside | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| Metropolitan Police | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | 2 | 1 | — | 1 | — |
| West Mercia | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| West Yorkshire | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Total | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | — | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | — |
| <i>Pedal cycle lighting and reflector offences (RVL Regs 1984)</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Avon and Somerset | 5 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 11 | 17 | 11 | 9 | 10 |
| Bedfordshire | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Cambridgeshire | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 | 35 | 2 | 7 | 1 | 1 | — |
| Cheshire | 5 | 7 | — | 3 | 2 | — | 1 | — | — | — | 1 |
| City of London | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | 2 | — | 2 | 3 |
| Cleveland | 2 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 2 | — | — | 1 | — | — | 4 |
| Cumbria | 20 | 14 | 12 | 43 | 44 | 25 | 28 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 7 |
| Derbyshire | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | 2 | — |
| Devon and Cornwall | — | 4 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 | — | — | — | — |
| Dorset | — | 3 | — | 2 | 1 | 1 | — | 17 | 5 | 1 | 3 |
| Durham | — | 3 | 1 | — | — | 2 | 3 | 1 | — | — | — |
| Essex | 3 | 2 | — | 1 | 3 | — | 2 | 4 | — | — | — |
| Gloucestershire | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | 10 | 3 | 5 |
| Greater Manchester | 13 | 13 | 21 | 7 | 12 | 6 | 2 | 5 | 9 | 10 | 14 |

Defendants proceeded against at magistrates court for selected cycling offences, by Police Force Area, England and Wales, 2001-11^{1,2}

| <i>Offence and Police Force Area</i> | <i>2001</i> | <i>2002</i> | <i>2003</i> | <i>2004</i> | <i>2005</i> | <i>2006</i> | <i>2007</i> | <i>2008³</i> | <i>2009</i> | <i>2010</i> | <i>2011</i> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Hampshire | 24 | 21 | 14 | 8 | 15 | 19 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 5 |
| Hertfordshire | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| Humberside | 32 | 23 | 22 | 9 | 11 | 2 | 8 | 10 | 19 | 31 | 21 |
| Kent | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | — | 3 |
| Lancashire | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | 4 | 2 |
| Leicestershire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Lincolnshire | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | 3 | — | 1 |
| Merseyside | 3 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 5 | — | 2 | 3 | — | 3 | 3 |
| Metropolitan Police | 2 | — | 1 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 8 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| Norfolk | 6 | 3 | 1 | 8 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| North Yorkshire | 9 | 9 | 78 | 8 | 37 | 3 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 4 | 6 |
| Northamptonshire | 4 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| Northumbria | 15 | 25 | 29 | 34 | 42 | 75 | 55 | 23 | 27 | 32 | 31 |
| Nottinghamshire | — | 2 | 1 | — | — | 1 | 3 | 1 | — | — | — |
| South Yorkshire | — | 1 | 1 | — | 2 | — | 1 | — | — | 2 | 2 |
| Staffordshire | — | 2 | 2 | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | 3 |
| Suffolk | 3 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 4 | — | 3 | 3 | 4 | — | 1 |
| Surrey | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | — |
| Sussex | 2 | — | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — |
| Thames Valley | 1 | — | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — |
| Warwickshire | — | — | — | 6 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| West Mercia | 12 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 11 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| West Midlands | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | — | 2 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 3 |
| West Yorkshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| Wiltshire | — | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | — | — | 4 | — | 1 | — |
| Dyfed-Powys | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Gwent | 1 | 2 | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| North Wales | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| South Wales | 4 | 1 | 2 | 6 | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| Total | 179 | 180 | 213 | 175 | 215 | 201 | 158 | 135 | 125 | 120 | 144 |

Failing to stop pedal cycle when required by constable

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Avon and Somerset | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| Cambridgeshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| Cheshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| City of London | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 4 | 3 | — |
| Cleveland | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — |
| Cumbria | 1 | — | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | — | — | 1 | — |
| Derbyshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | — | — |
| Durham | — | — | — | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — |
| Essex | 6 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Gloucestershire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| Greater Manchester | — | — | — | 2 | — | — | 1 | 2 | 2 | — | — |
| Hampshire | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 5 | 2 | 5 |
| Hertfordshire | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| Humberside | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | — | — | 1 | — | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Kent | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | 2 | — |
| Lancashire | — | — | — | — | — | 3 | — | — | — | — | 1 |
| Leicestershire | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — |
| Lincolnshire | — | — | 3 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Merseyside | — | — | — | — | — | — | 3 | 4 | — | 1 | — |
| Metropolitan Police | — | — | 1 | 9 | 27 | 26 | 43 | 32 | 37 | 48 | 38 |
| Norfolk | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | 2 |
| North Yorkshire | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Northumbria | — | 1 | — | 1 | 2 | — | 4 | 2 | — | — | — |
| Nottinghamshire | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | 2 | — | — | 1 | — |
| South Yorkshire | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Staffordshire | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Suffolk | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | — |
| Surrey | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Sussex | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — | 1 | 1 |

Defendants proceeded against at magistrates court for selected cycling offences, by Police Force Area, England and Wales, 2001-11^{1,2}

| Offence and Police Force Area | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 ³ | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
|-------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------------------|------|------|------|
| Thames Valley | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | — |
| Warwickshire | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| West Mercia | 2 | 1 | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| West Midlands | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | — | 2 |
| West Yorkshire | — | — | 1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 1 |
| Wiltshire | 1 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | 1 | — | — |
| Gwent | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| South Wales | — | — | 1 | 26 | — | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Total | 17 | 5 | 8 | 50 | 36 | 35 | 61 | 46 | 60 | 65 | 54 |

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

Roads: Accidents

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) what steps he (a) is taking and (b) plans to take to provide face-to-face support to those who are bereaved or seriously injured in road accidents; [116057]

(2) how much funding he allocated to support victims of (a) burglary and (b) road accidents in the latest period for which figures are available; [116058]

(3) what assessment his Department has made of the recommendations by Brake on support for road crash victims. [116059]

Mr Blunt: In each of the three years 2011-12 to 2013-14 the Ministry of Justice has allocated £125,000 to support victims of burglary and £277,606 to support those bereaved or injured by road traffic offending.

The funding in relation to road traffic offending goes to four organisations: the Road Victims Trust, Aftermath, Brake and Roadpeace. All except Brake provide face-to-face support.

Any victim of crime is also eligible to receive support from Victim Support which receives £38 million a year in grant funding from the Ministry of Justice.

In its response to the consultation 'Getting it Right for Victims and Witnesses' the Government committed to doing more for victims of road traffic offending and we will work with interested parties to identify and examine the options for doing so. The Government does not consider it feasible to extend coverage broadly to anyone bereaved through a road traffic accident or seriously injured by one.

Young Offenders

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what proportion of young offenders given a community sentence have (a) breached that order and (b) received a custodial sentence as a result in each month of the last five years. [116060]

Mr Blunt: With regard to young adult offenders aged 18 to 20, the information on the proportion of offenders who breached their community sentence is not held centrally. Information on breaches of community sentences by individual offenders is recorded by probation trusts on their case management systems. It is used in the day-to-day management of offenders, including as a trigger to appropriate action in response to breach, for example through formal warnings or enforcement action, but the figures requested do not form part of trusts' routine reporting.

Information is available for 2007 and 2008 on the number of 18 to 20-year-olds who were received into custody for breach of a community sentence, as follows:

2007: 886¹

2008: 964²

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

¹ Source:

Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2007. Table 6.12

² Source:

Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2008. Table 6.9

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100406130654/justice.gov.uk/publications/prisonandprobation.htm>

Since the roll-out of the Prison-NOMIS system commenced in May 2009 information on receptions into custody for breach has no longer been available.

The available information required to answer this question in relation to juveniles is currently being collated. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available. A copy will be placed in the House Library.

EDUCATION

Free School Meals: Further Education

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the contribution of the Minister of State for Schools of 13 June 2012, *Official Report*, column 94WH, on free school meals (colleges), how

his Department estimated the cost of extending the provision of free meals to disadvantaged 16 to 18 year olds who study at further education or sixth form colleges. [115627]

Mr Gibb [*holding answer 6 July 2012*]: In my answer of 13 June 2012, *Official Report*, column 94WH, I quoted a figure of between £35 million and £70 million as the cost of extending the provision of free meals to disadvantaged 16 to 18-year-olds who study at further education or sixth form colleges.

In his letter to the Secretary of State for Education dated 13 April, Martin Doel, chief executive of the Association of Colleges (AoC), applied a figure of £32 million as the cost of extending free meals to eligible students in FE and sixth form colleges. The AoC 'No Free Lunch?' campaign quotes a figure of £38 million.

Departmental estimates are based on a number of factors, including the current cost of providing free meals to school sixth form students, which would give an upper cost threshold of £70 million. For the purposes of the debate, my estimate assumed that the actual cost of extending free meals would fall between the AoC figures and the higher cost of £70 million. I did not give a precise departmental estimate because the cost is reliant on a number of assumptions which need to be tested further.

The factors which are likely to contribute to the actual departmental estimate are the costs of providing school meals; the number of 16 to 18-year-old students who were known to be eligible for free school meals at age 15; and the proportion of 16 to 18-year-olds in school sixth forms relative to those in further education and training.

We are continuing to determine the best factors on which to base our assumptions.

DEFENCE

Aircraft Carriers

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on training individuals to handle and fly the CATOBAR aircraft since its introduction. [108868]

Peter Luff: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave on 30 April 2012, *Official Report*, column 1123W. I will write to the right hon. Member once the costs associated with this training have been collated.

Substantive answer from Peter Luff to Jim Murphy:

In my answer to your questions related to the costs of our training individuals to handle and fly-Catapult Assisted Take Off Barrier Arrested Recovery (CATOBAR) aircraft (Official Record 23 April 2012 : Column 716W) I said that I would update you on this issue.

To clarify the position on those personnel training with the US Navy as of July 2012 we now have nine Royal Navy pilots at various stages of training with US Navy carrier borne aircraft. This training does include the use of catapult and arrestor gear, but I should make clear that this is a small element of the wider carrier strike training and interoperability package being undertaken with the US Navy.

As part of the training programme for the Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers, there remains a requirement for the Royal Navy to train a cadre of suitably qualified and experienced personnel who will supervise embarked carrier aviation in the future, and this training with the US helps to fulfil this requirement.

The Royal Air Force also has a long-standing reciprocal Pilot Exchange Programme and there are currently two Royal Air Force pilots flying US aircraft under this arrangement, which attracts minimal additional cost.

The requirement for, and continuation of, such training will see Royal Navy and Royal Air Force personnel gain experience of frontline carrier capability in its widest sense, and the incorporation of US Navy training courses. The current training programme is focused on development of a UK understanding of large carrier Flight

As part of this process, a UK/US Statement of Intent on Carrier Co-operation and Maritime Power Projection was jointly signed by the Secretary of State for Defence and the US Defence Secretary on 5 January 2012.

I hope you will understand that, given the scope of this training, we continue to discuss the associated costs with the US authorities. When we have collated this information, I will consider its release.

Armed Forces: Pay

Simon Reevell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 4 July 2012, *Official Report*, columns 678-9W, on armed forces: pay, what the nature is of the future payments; and whether they are adjusted to claim back salaries automatically paid to service personnel in respect of the period after their death and before the month end. [116301]

Mr Robathan: Future payments relate to any additional sum due to a deceased serviceman or woman that would normally be paid with salary. These can occur where there is a backdated increase in the individual's salary, introduction of a new allowance, or increase in the rate at which an allowance is paid that includes a period before the death of an individual.

We never ask families of those killed in service to pay money back; reconciliation of the individual's pay account is made as soon as all the information is available to us. Adjustments of future payments are made to ensure families are paid all monies to which they are entitled.

Armed Forces: Vaccination

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what vaccinations and inoculations are administered to armed forces personnel (a) on entry to the services and (b) on a routine basis throughout a person's service career. [116125]

Mr Robathan: It is Ministry of Defence policy that all entitled service personnel are recommended to be immunised in accordance with National Immunisation policy. The following list details routine vaccination requirements on entry to the armed forces:

- Hepatitis A + B (as single antigen or combined vaccines)
- Human papillomavirus
- Low-dose diphtheria/Tetanus/Inactivated Polio (Td/IPV)
- Meningococcal (serogroup C disease)
- Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR)
- Typhoid
- Tuberculosis
- Varicella
- Yellow fever

Service personnel are routinely kept in date for the following vaccines throughout their career: Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Poliomyelitis, Tetanus, Tuberculosis, Typhoid and Yellow fever.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases of severe adverse reaction due to administration of vaccinations and inoculations leading to (a) the death of service personnel and (b) disablement causing medical discharge from the services have occurred in each of the last five years. [116126]

Mr Robathan: Between 2007 and 2011, the latest date for which data is available, there have been no reported UK Regular armed forces personnel deaths, including reservists deployed on operations overseas, caused by severe adverse reaction due to administration of vaccinations and inoculations.

Between financial years 2006-07 and 2010-11, no UK Regular Royal Navy Service personnel were medically discharged due to a severe adverse reaction due to administration of vaccinations and inoculations. Fewer than five UK Regular Army personnel and fewer than five Regular Royal Air Force personnel were medically discharged with severe adverse reaction due to administration of vaccinations and inoculations, but only as a contributory factor and not as a primary factor.

Data for medical discharges in the UK Regular armed forces for 2011-12 will be published on 12 July 2012 and will be available on the following website:

www.dasa.mod.uk

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what medical advice the Armed Forces has received from expert bodies on the simultaneous administration of multiple vaccinations, inoculations and biological and chemical pre-treatments (a) prior to Operation Granby and (b) most recently. [116127]

Mr Robathan: Simultaneous administration of multiple vaccinations, inoculations and biological and chemical pre-treatments prior to Operation Granby was given in accordance with the Department of Health's (DH) 'Green Book'.

In 2006, the MOD announced that final scientific papers relating to its Vaccines Interactions Research Programme had been published. These looked at the possible adverse health effects of the combination of vaccines and tablets given to troops to protect them against the threat of biological and chemical warfare. The overwhelming evidence from the programme is that the combination of vaccines and tablets that were offered to UK forces at the time of the 1990-91 Gulf conflict would not have had adverse health effects. The scientific papers concerning the above research programme can be found on the following MOD web page:

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/HealthandSafety/GulfVeteransIllnesses/VaccinesInteractionsResearchProgramme.htm>

More recently, we have not approached any expert bodies for medical advice on the simultaneous administration of multiple vaccinations as vaccinations are administered in accordance with the extant version of the DH 'Green

Book'. This core document is continuously updated and is available on the DH website at:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_079917

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what vaccinations, inoculations and biological and chemical pre-treatments are administered to armed forces personnel prior to deployment to Afghanistan; and what such treatments were routinely administered prior to 2012. [116128]

Mr Robathan: In addition to the vaccinations routinely provided to all personnel on entry and throughout their service career, personnel deployed to Afghanistan are offered vaccination against anthrax and seasonal influenza, and anti-malarial chemoprophylaxis in the form of Chloroquine and Proguanil. Rabies vaccination is also offered to occupational at-risk groups, namely dog handlers and those personnel likely to be assigned to dog handling duties, as well as veterinarians and their support staff. No biological or chemical pre-treatments are indicated prior to deployment to Afghanistan.

The only change to the treatments offered to deployed personnel since the start of Op Herrick has been the addition of routine vaccination against seasonal influenza.

Army

Mr Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving Army personnel at the time of their recruitment were citizens of (a) the UK, (b) the Irish Republic and (c) other countries. [116405]

Mr Robathan [holding answer 10 July 2012]: Information on how many serving Army personnel, at the time of their recruitment, were citizens of the UK, the Irish Republic and other countries is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, the following table shows the nationality of those recruited to the Regular Army as either officers or soldiers, since 2007-08, if this information was declared on the Joint Personnel Administration system:

| Financial year | UK | Irish Republic | Other countries | Not known | Total |
|----------------|--------|----------------|-----------------|-----------|--------|
| 2007-08 | 8,160 | 30 | 1,300 | 3,960 | 13,450 |
| 2008-09 | 9,870 | 30 | 1,490 | 2,370 | 13,760 |
| 2009-10 | 11,140 | 80 | 1,010 | 1,360 | 13,580 |
| 2010-11 | 7,510 | 70 | 540 | 580 | 8,700 |
| 2011-12 | 9,950 | 90 | 810 | 220 | 11,070 |

In addition, the nationality of Regular Army personnel, officers and soldiers, currently serving as at 1 May 2012 is shown in the following table:

| Nationality | Trained | Untrained |
|-----------------|---------|-----------|
| UK | 86,890 | 9,300 |
| Irish Republic | 340 | 70 |
| Other countries | 10,350 | 700 |
| Not known | 10 | 10 |

Figures do not include those serving in the full-time reserve service.

All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Mr Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving Army personnel lived at the time of their recruitment in (a) Scotland, (b) England, (c) Wales, (d) Northern Ireland, (e) the Irish Republic and (f) elsewhere. [116406]

Mr Robathan [*holding answer 10 July 2012*]: Information on where serving Army personnel were living at the time of their recruitment is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the following table shows the country that recruits joining the Army from 2007 to date, have declared as their main contact address during the recruitment and selection process:

| | 2012-13 | 2011-12 | 2010-11 | 2009-10 | 2008-09 | 2007-08 |
|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Scotland | 261 | 618 | 528 | 664 | 464 | 443 |
| England | 2,538 | 4,475 | 3,102 | 4,329 | 3,683 | 4,129 |
| Wales | 241 | 493 | 320 | 626 | 660 | 531 |
| Northern Ireland | 113 | 182 | 161 | 213 | 244 | 231 |
| Republic of Ireland | 53 | 101 | 82 | 103 | 43 | 28 |
| Elsewhere | 226 | 259 | 223 | 332 | 761 | 540 |
| Great Britain | 4 | 9 | 2 | 10 | 5 | 2 |
| Not known | 2,247 | 4,753 | 4,059 | 7,203 | 7,670 | 7,316 |
| | 5,683 | 10,890 | 8,530 | 13,400 | 13,530 | 13,220 |

Where recruits have not completed the 'country' address field on their applications, the country is shown as not known; this may be because the information has been entered in the wrong address field or, as frequently occurs with recruits from the UK, they do not complete the 'country' field.

Electronic Warfare

Alison Seabeck: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he had with (a) ministerial colleagues and (b) external organisations prior to the publication of the draft Energy Bill on the provision of security systems to protect against cyber attack on the Government Pipeline and Storage Systems. [115882]

Peter Luff: Officials at the Oil and Pipeline Agency (OPA), which manages the Government Pipeline and Storage Systems (GPSS) on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, regularly discuss with appropriate external organisations measures to best protect the GPSS, including from the risk of cyber attack now and in the future. Concerns are raised to the appropriate level as necessary.

To date, Ministers have had no requirement to discuss security systems to protect the GPSS against cyber attack.

Iraq-Kuwait Conflict

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what vaccinations, inoculations and other biological and chemical pre-treatments were administered to Armed Forces personnel prior to deployment on Operation Granby. [116124]

Mr Robathan: The information requested is available in the Ministry of Defence published paper entitled: "Background to the use of Medical Countermeasures

to protect British Forces during the Gulf War (Operation Granby)". This paper discussed the background to the use of medical countermeasures not only in terms of the scientific issues involved, but also of procurement and other matters which were raised by Gulf veterans.

The paper is available on the MOD website at:

<http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/86D81B65-F0B0-46E4-8BCC-50DD4F1FF584/0/Oct97MedicalCountermeasurepaper1.pdf>

and is available in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department considers to be a minimum credible nuclear deterrent. [115686]

Mr Philip Hammond: The Strategic Defence and Security Review published in October 2010 concluded that we can meet the minimum requirement of an effective and credible level of deterrence with a reduced nuclear weapons capability. We therefore decided to cut the maximum number of warheads deployed on each deployed submarine from 48 to 40, and to reduce the number of operational missiles on each submarine to no more than eight.

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the UK's need to maintain a nuclear deterrent. [115688]

Mr Philip Hammond: Our current analysis is that we cannot rule out the risk either that a major direct nuclear threat to the UK's vital interests will re-emerge or that new states will emerge that possess a more limited nuclear capability but nevertheless one that could pose a grave threat to our vital interests. We therefore see an enduring role for the UK's nuclear forces as an essential part of our national security capability.

Rifles Regiment

Mr Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to reduce the size of The Rifles regiment. [116010]

Mr Philip Hammond: Further to my announcement to the House on 5 July 2012, *Official Report*, column 1087-88, I can confirm that there are no current plans to change the size of The Rifles regiment.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Electricity: Meters

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many external consultants his Department engaged to work on smart meter roll-out in April (a) 2011 and (b) 2012. [115073]

Charles Hendry: None. There are industry and technical experts working on the smart meter roll-out in delivery roles, but none in a consulting capacity.

Energy

Dr Phillip Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of counterparty risks in the draft Energy Bill's multiparty contract model; and whether he plans to make further assessments of the single counterparty model. [116564]

Charles Hendry: In developing the Contracts for Difference payment model set out in the draft Energy Bill and draft Operational Framework in May 2012, we have engaged with a wide range of stakeholders to assess any risks associated with the proposed model. We have also considered external legal advice.

While I still believe that the proposed model is workable, I recognise the concerns that have been raised by industry. For that reason, I have been assessing the viability of alternative models, including those based on a single counter-party.

I await the outcome of the Energy and Climate Change Committee's pre-legislative scrutiny before making a decision on whether to make any changes in the Bill.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate his Department has made of the number of jobs that will be created in the UK as a result of the Norway-UK energy partnership for sustainable growth. [116677]

Charles Hendry: During a visit to Oslo on 6-7 June, the Prime Ministers announced a UK-Norway energy partnership and billions of pounds of new investment by UK and Norwegian companies. The announcement can be found at:

http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/news/pn12_072/pn12_072.aspx

These investments have the potential to create thousands of jobs in the UK. Details include:

Statoil's further £12 billion investment developing Mariner-Bressay North Sea oil fields will create 800 to 1,000 new jobs, including 200 to 300 jobs at a new operations centre in Aberdeen;

Aker Solutions creating 1,300 jobs in London.

Forewind Consortium's development of Dogger Bank offshore wind farm could create many thousands of jobs.

Energy: Meters

Guto Bebb: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate he has made of the relative costs for installing the available smart meter solutions. [116397]

Charles Hendry: In April 2012 DECC published updated impact assessments for the roll-out of smart meters in the domestic and non-domestic sectors. These estimate total costs of £11.5 billion and total benefits of £18.6 million, giving a net benefit of £7.2 billion. The impact assessments estimate that the total cost of installing smart meters will amount to £1.7 billion.

Guto Bebb: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate he has made of the relative equipment and support costs for the available smart meter solutions. [116398]

Charles Hendry: In April 2012 DECC published updated impact assessments for the roll-out of smart meters in the domestic and non-domestic sectors. These estimate total costs of £11.5 billion and total benefits of £18.6 million, giving a net benefit of £7.2 billion. Of the total costs outlined in the impact assessments, equipment costs are estimated at £5.3 billion, which includes smart electricity meters, smart gas meters, In-Home Displays and in-premise communications equipment. Overall, considering both costs and cost savings to energy suppliers and energy savings by consumers, we expect the roll-out to reduce the average, annual gas and electricity bill by £25 by 2020.

Energy: Prices

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much his Department has spent on the Check, Switch, Insulate to Save campaign since October 2012. [113435]

Gregory Barker: Excluding staff costs, the Department of Energy and Climate Change has spent just over £1,000 on banners and web work/design for the Check, Switch, Insulate to Save campaign since October 2011.

The Department developed joint messaging with partners using shared language in the lead up to Big Energy Week.

Fuel Poverty

Eric Ollerenshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change with reference to the Hills Fuel Poverty Review published in March 2012, when he plans to announce a new measure of fuel poverty. [116643]

Gregory Barker: We intend to publish a consultation on a future definition of fuel poverty in September and to adopt a new approach to fuel poverty measurement after it has been completed.

Dr Whiteford: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the effect on levels of fuel poverty of recent increases in domestic energy tariffs. [116821]

Gregory Barker: The Department of Energy and Climate Change published its latest annual, fuel poverty statistics in May 2012. This report projected 3.9 million households to be in fuel poverty in 2012 in England, an increase of 0.4 million households from 2010 levels (the latest year for which actual data is available).

It is not possible to isolate the effect of tariff changes (either increases or, as seen in the first quarter of 2012 compared with the previous quarter, decreases) on projected fuel poverty levels in 2012. This is because there are many factors that determine whether a household is in fuel poverty or not, and these factors are not independent of each other.

Fuels

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (1) what the terms of reference are for his Department's work on the resilience of the UK's

petrol and diesel supplies; when this work will be completed; and whether it will be made public; [116208]

(2) how much his Department has spent on studying the resilience of the UK's petrol and diesel supplies. [116209]

Charles Hendry: Since the financial year 2010-11, the Department has currently spent £150,000 on reports to study the resilience of the UK's petrol and diesel supplies.

DECC has published a number of assessments on the resilience the downstream oil industry:

http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/meeting_energy/en_security/downstream_oil/improving/improving.aspx

These reports include the terms of reference for these studies.

Further work is under way with industry to develop a strategic framework for the UK refining industry; this work is expected to report later this year in the autumn. This is the first strategic review undertaken in the past decade.

Green Deal Scheme

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what selection criteria were used by his Department when allocating the £200 million of funding pledged by his Department to incentivise take-up of the Green Deal. [116490]

Gregory Barker: The principle use of the £200 million funding is expected to be an incentive payment scheme which will reward households that take early action to have energy efficiency measures installed through the Green Deal.

Further details on the scheme, including eligibility criteria, will be announced later in the year.

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change which (a) individuals, (b) companies, (c) organisations and (d) local authorities have received funding from the £200 million pledged by his Department to incentivise take-up of the Green Deal; and how much funding each such individual and organisation received. [116491]

Gregory Barker: No individuals, companies, organisations or local authorities have received funding from this £200 million Green Deal take-up fund.

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether any of the £200 million funding pledged by his Department to incentivise take-up of the Green Deal was allocated as part of the Government's City Deals; and whether any conditions were attached as part of these allocations. [116492]

Gregory Barker: The Department is considering options for awarding money as part of the City Deals process. No funds have been allocated, and any conditions that may be attached to such an allocation are currently under consideration.

Manchester Declaration

Stephen McPartland: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent contribution his Department and its non-departmental bodies and agencies have made to implementation of the 2005 Manchester Declaration. [116102]

Charles Hendry: None.

Warm Front Scheme: Coventry

Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many households in (a) Coventry and (b) Coventry North East constituency received assistance from the Warm Front scheme in each of the last five years. [116450]

Gregory Barker: The number of households assisted in (a) Coventry and (b) Coventry North East constituency in each of the last five years is shown in the following table:

| | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | 2012-13 ¹ | Total |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------------------|-------|
| Coventry local authority | 2,070 | 1,687 | 649 | 275 | 60 | 7,291 |
| Coventry North East constituency | 886 | 723 | 317 | 133 | 23 | 2,960 |

¹ Figures up to 30 June 2012

WORK AND PENSIONS

Housing Benefit

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people under the age of 25 years are in receipt of housing benefit in each parliamentary constituency. [116495]

Steve Webb: Information on how many people aged under 25 years are in receipt of housing benefit by parliamentary constituency is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Benefit: Greater London

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information his Department holds on the number of private sector tenants in receipt of housing benefit who have been relocated from each London borough in the first three months of 2012-13. [116061]

Steve Webb: The Department has commissioned a consortium of academics and research organisations led by Ian Cole, professor of housing studies at Sheffield Hallam University to undertake an independent review of the impact of changes to the local housing allowance system of housing benefit.

The research will include a spatial analysis of the effects of the changes that will examine movement from one local authority to another.

The Department published a report of early findings on 14 June and a copy of the report has been deposited in the House Library.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what funding of transitional benefit to recipients of housing benefit was paid by each London borough in the first three months of 2012-13; and what funding will be available for the remainder of the year.

[116063]

Steve Webb: Transitional funding for the housing benefit reforms for the financial year 2012-13 was allocated to local authorities earlier this year. These funds are intended to be used to provide targeted support to help meet the housing needs of claimants affected by the housing benefit reforms. Examples of this could include additional support with homelessness prevention, negotiating with landlords, money advice and supporting people who need to move. It is for local authorities to decide how the funding will be spent and we do not monitor this expenditure on a month by month basis.

Allocations of transitional funding for each London borough for the financial year 2012-13 can be found at:

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/S1-2012.pdf>

Jobseeker's Allowance: Young People

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many 18 to 24 year olds in each (a) parliamentary constituency and (b) region claimed jobseeker's allowance for 12 months or more in the latest period for which figures are available. [116258]

Mr Hurd: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Cabinet Office.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated July 2012:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking how many 18 to 24 year olds in each (a) parliamentary constituency and (b) region claimed jobseeker's allowance for 12 months or more in the latest period for which figures are available. (116258)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles the number of claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) from the Jobcentre Plus administrative system.

Table 1, shows the number of 18 to 24 years who had been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for over 52 weeks in each Region and Parliamentary Constituency in May 2012. As the information requested is quite extensive, a copy has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

National and local area estimates for many labour market statistics, including employment, unemployment and claimant count are available on the NOMIS website at:

<http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>.

Personal Independence Payment

Kate Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects to announce the providers that will carry out the new personal independence payment assessment. [116242]

Maria Miller: The Department for Work and Pensions tendered for a framework of providers to deliver future health and disability assessments earlier this year. A competition among framework providers for the personal independence payment assessment has recently been completed. The bids have now been evaluated and we are in the process of internal governance. We aim to announce successful providers by the end of July.

Poverty: Young People

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of people under the age of 18 were living below the poverty line in the UK in each of the last five years; and what steps he is taking to tackle the problem of youth poverty. [115814]

Maria Miller: The Child Poverty Act 2010 sets four income-based UK-wide targets to be met by 2020. The targets are based on the proportion of children living in households with relative low income, absolute low income, combined low income and material deprivation and persistent poverty, all before housing costs have been taken into account.

Estimates of the number and proportion of children living in households with relative low income, absolute low income and combined low income and material deprivation are published in the "Households Below Average Income" (HBAI) series. HBAI uses household income adjusted (or 'equivalised') for household size and composition, to provide a proxy for standard of living. The datasets that underlie the HBAI series can be used to estimate the proportion of people under the age of 18 in poverty by these measures.

Proportion of people under the age of 18 in relative low income, absolute low income and combined low income and material deprivation, before housing costs, in the UK 2006/07-2010/11

| | <i>Relative low income</i> | <i>Absolute low income</i> | <i>Percentage Combined low income and material deprivation¹</i> |
|---------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| 2006/07 | 22 | 13 | 16 |
| 2007/08 | 23 | 14 | 17 |
| 2008/09 | 22 | 13 | 17 |
| 2009/10 | 20 | 11 | 16 |
| 2010/11 | 18 | 11 | 14 |

¹ Proportion of dependent children (see Note 6)

The Government published its first strategy to tackle child poverty in April 2011. The strategy draws together the Government's radical programme of welfare and education reform. It underpins the Government's ambition for every child to realise their potential and reflects its belief that reducing poverty is about more than lifting families' incomes above an arbitrary line. It demonstrates that the Government are making a sustained, long-term attempt to lift people out of not only income poverty, but poverty of aspiration and poverty of outcomes. The child poverty strategy sets out how the Government will tackle the root causes of poverty such as worklessness, educational failure, debt, poor health and family breakdown, thereby raising the life chances of poorer children and breaking the cycle of entrenched intergenerational poverty.

It is particularly important that during this time of economic difficulty we ensure that a generation of young people is not left behind. The Government are making £126 million of new money available as part of the Youth Contract to give teenagers opportunities to train, work and get their lives on track. Under this Government, apprenticeship starts have increased at a record rate, with growth across all age ranges, in all sectors and throughout the country. In 2010/11, there were 131,700 apprenticeship starts for 16-18 year-olds—an increase of 12.8% on 2009/10.

Notes:

1. These statistics are based on households below average income (HBAI) data sourced from the 2010/11 Family Resources survey (FRS). This uses disposable household income, adjusted using modified OECD equivalisation factors for household size and composition, as an income measure as a proxy for standard of living and is available at:

http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=hbai_arc

2. These figures have been presented on a before housing costs basis. That means housing costs (such as rent, water rates, mortgage interest payments, buildings insurance payments and ground rent and service charges) are not deducted from income.

3. All estimates are based on survey data and are therefore subject to a degree of uncertainty. Small differences should be treated with caution as these will be affected by sampling error and variability in non-response.

4. The reference period for HBAI figures is the financial year.

5. Proportions have been rounded to the nearest percentage point.

6. Based on the FRS data, it is not possible to calculate material deprivation for all people under the age of 18 so the proportion of dependent children experiencing combined low income and material deprivation is provided. A dependent child is defined as an individual aged under 16. A person will also be defined as a child if they are 16 to 19 years old and they are: not married nor in a civil partnership nor living with a partner; living with parents; in full-time non-advanced education or in unwaged government training.

7. The measures in the Child Poverty Act 2010 are defined as:

Relative poverty: children living in households with equivalised incomes below 60% of contemporary median household income.

Absolute poverty: children living in households with equivalised incomes below 60% of 1998/99 median household income held constant in real terms.

Low income and material deprivation: percentage of children living in households in material deprivation and with less than 70% of contemporary median household income.

Persistent poverty: children living in households who have had equivalised incomes below 60% of median household income for at least three out of the last four years.

8. In the past, persistent poverty measurement has been based on the British Household Panel survey, which has now been subsumed into the much larger Understanding Society survey. There is no publication for 2009 as there is a gap in the data as the respondents are moved into the understanding society sample. This means the last data covers the period 2005-08 and has not been reported here.

Universal Credit

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether families with disabled children will be involved in monitoring and evaluating universal credit once it is rolled out nationally. [116393]

Maria Miller: The Department is currently developing the overall strategy for the evaluation and monitoring of universal credit. No detailed plans are yet available. However, monitoring and evaluation will involve capturing

the views of representative samples of different groups of claimants such as families with disabled children. Survey data, qualitative research and feedback from stakeholder groups will be used to assess the effects for different groups of claimants. In conducting research on universal credit, the Department will draw on the guidance “Involving disabled people in social research” published in August 2011 by the Office for Disability Issues.

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions by what means his Department will monitor and evaluate the effect of the universal credit on families with disabled children. [116394]

Maria Miller: The Department is currently developing the overall strategy for the evaluation and monitoring of universal credit. No detailed plans are yet available. However, we are committed to monitoring the effects of the policy in aggregate and in terms of the outcomes for different groups of claimants, including families with disabled children. To understand the experiences and outcomes of claimants, the Department will employ a wide range of different research methods, survey techniques and sources including evidence from regular surveys.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Protection of Freedoms Act 2012

Kate Green: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities (1) with reference to Chapter 4 in Part 5 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, what steps she plans to take to enable individuals to apply to have relevant offences disregarded; [115422]

(2) when she expects to implement the provisions on erasing historic convictions for consensual homosexual sex in the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012; and if she will make a statement. [115423]

Lynne Featherstone: The Home Office is leading work, in consultation with other Government Departments, Agencies and relevant stakeholders, to develop and implement an application process to enable individuals to apply to have any convictions, cautions, warnings or reprimands that meet the criteria as set out in Part 5 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, disregarded. The application process will be implemented later this year. Further details will be available on the Home Office website.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Adult Education: Blackpool

Paul Maynard: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many residents of Blackpool North and Cleveleys constituency completed a course at an adult education college in each of the last five years. [116275]

Mr Hayes: Table 1 shows Government-funded further education and skills learner achievements in general further education colleges in Blackpool North and Cleveleys parliamentary constituency by age, for academic years 2006/07 to 2010/11, the latest full years for which final data are available.

Table 1: General further education colleges learner achievement by geography and age, 2006/07 to 2010/11

| | Age | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
|--|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Blackpool North and Cleveleys constituency | Under 19 | 780 | 890 | 970 | 960 | 1,060 |
| | 19+ | 1,560 | 1,310 | 1,840 | 1,870 | 1,710 |
| | Total | 2,340 | 2,200 | 2,800 | 2,830 | 2,770 |
| England | Under 19 | 457,610 | 489,320 | 521,120 | 546,780 | 558,360 |
| | 19+ | 1,089,100 | 1,060,260 | 1,221,600 | 1,187,170 | 975,860 |
| | Total | 1,541,700 | 1,549,600 | 1,742,700 | 1,734,000 | 1,534,200 |

Notes:

- Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 except for the England totals which are rounded to the nearest 100.
- Geography is based upon the home postcode of the learner. Geographic information is based on boundaries of regions as of May 2010. The England totals include some postcodes which are not known.
- These data include both young people (under 19) and adults (aged 19+) achieving in apprenticeships, workplace learning, community learning and education and training provision taken at general further education colleges (including tertiary) only.
- Age is based on age at the start of the academic year.

Source:

Individualised Learner Record

Information on further education and skills achievement by geography is published in a supplementary table of a quarterly Statistical First Release (SFR). The latest SFR was published on 28 June 2012:

http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_supplementary_tables/

Apprentices

Mr Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) how many young people started a level (a) 2 and (b) 3 apprenticeship

programme in construction at the age of (i) 16, (ii) 17 and (iii) 18 in each of the last three years; [116203]

(2) how many people completed level (a) 2 and (b) 3 apprenticeship programmes in construction at the age of (i) under 19, (ii) 19 to 24 and (iii) 25 in each of the last three years. [116204]

Mr Hayes: Table 1 gives the number of apprenticeship programme starts in the "Construction, Planning and Built Environment" sector subject area by level and age for 2008/09 to 2010/11, the latest years for which final data are available. Table 2 gives the equivalent information for apprenticeship achievements.

Table 1: Apprenticeship programme starts in the construction, planning and built environment sector subject area by age and level, 2008/09 to 2010/11

| Age | Intermediate (level 2) | | | Advanced (level 3) | | |
|----------|------------------------|---------|---------|--------------------|---------|---------|
| | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
| 16 | 4,790 | 3,680 | 3,690 | 1,380 | 890 | 1,060 |
| 17 | 4,430 | 4,140 | 3,730 | 1,370 | 1,120 | 1,100 |
| 18 | 2,860 | 2,840 | 2,940 | 3,490 | 3,000 | 3,270 |
| Under 19 | 12,080 | 10,660 | 10,360 | 6,230 | 5,000 | 5,420 |
| 19-24 | 3,850 | 3,410 | 4,100 | 5,080 | 4,790 | 5,200 |
| 25+ | 960 | 690 | 1,650 | 1,020 | 670 | 1,360 |
| Total | 16,890 | 14,760 | 16,110 | 12,330 | 10,450 | 11,980 |

Notes:

- Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
- Age is calculated based on age at start of the programme.
- Figures include some apprentices aged under 16.

Source:

Individualised Learner Record

Table 2: Apprenticeship framework achievements in the construction, planning and the built environment sector subject area by age and level, 2008/09 to 2010/11

| Age | Intermediate (level 2) | | | Advanced (level 3) | | |
|----------|------------------------|---------|---------|--------------------|---------|---------|
| | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
| 16 | 3,910 | 3,300 | 2,280 | 1,020 | 1,220 | 1,120 |
| 17 | 3,860 | 2,960 | 2,300 | 990 | 1,020 | 980 |
| 18 | 2,360 | 1,960 | 1,710 | 2,560 | 2,750 | 2,610 |
| Under 19 | 10,130 | 8,220 | 6,290 | 4,570 | 4,990 | 4,710 |
| 19-24 | 3,240 | 2,640 | 2,350 | 3,940 | 4,100 | 4,010 |
| 25+ | 300 | 480 | 480 | 150 | 400 | 560 |
| Total | 13,680 | 11,340 | 9,110 | 8,650 | 9,490 | 9,280 |

Notes:

- Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
- Age is calculated based on age at start of the programme.
- Figures include some apprentices under 16.

Source:

Individualised Learner Record

Further breakdowns of the number of apprenticeship starts and achievements are published in supplementary table to the quarterly Post 16 Further Education and Skills Statistical First Release (SFR). The latest SFR was published on 28 June 2012:

http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_current

http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_supplementary_tables/Apprenticeship_sfr_supplementary_tables/

Mr Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what proportion of apprentices who completed a Level 2 programme in construction before their 19th birthday progressed to start a Level 3 construction programme in each of the last three years. [116205]

Mr Hayes: Table 1 gives the following information for the “Construction, Planning and Built Environment” sector subject area:

(i) the number of apprentices who successfully completed a Level 2 apprenticeship in the 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 academic years while they were aged 18 or under; and

(ii) the number and proportion of these apprentices who then progressed to start a Level 3 apprenticeship. The figures on Level 3 apprenticeship starts relate to any ages and include provisional data for the 2011/12 academic year. Provisional data will change as further data returns are received from further education colleges and providers. Provisional data for 2011/12 data will be finalised in January 2013.

Table 1: Progression from a Level 2 to a Level 3 Apprenticeship in the construction, planning and the built environment sector subject area, 2008/09 to 2010/11

| | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|
| Number successfully completing a Level 2 Apprenticeship while aged 18 and under | 5,730 | 4,820 | 3,570 |
| Of which progressed to Level 3 Apprenticeship (number) | 2,500 | 2,180 | 1,690 |
| Of which progressed to Level 3 Apprenticeship (proportion) | 44 | 45 | 47 |

Notes:

- Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
- Age of the learner is based on age at completion of Level 2 Apprenticeship. Apprenticeship achievements by age are usually based on age at the start of the programme, so these figures will not match other published counts of achievements.
- Years are based on completion date of the Level 2 Apprenticeship. The Level 3 Apprenticeship could have started in any year, including the first nine months of the 2011/12 academic year. 2011/12 data is provisional and will be revised. Provisional data for 2011/12 data will be finalised in January 2013.

Source:

Individualised Learner Record

Further breakdowns of the number of apprenticeship starts and achievements are published in supplementary table to the quarterly Post 16 Education Statistical First Release (SFR). The latest SFR was published on 28 June 2012:

http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_current

http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_supplementary_tables/Apprenticeship_sfr_supplementary_tables/

Directors: Disqualification

Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much the Insolvency Service spent on printing hard copies of D1 reports concerning the conduct of directors as required under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 in each year since 2002. [116259]

Norman Lamb: The Insolvency Service does not maintain a separate record of the cost of printing D1s. The cost of printing D1s is subsumed into the overheads for the Insolvency Service.

Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much the Insolvency Service has spent on couriers to send D1 reports in each year since 2002. [116262]

Norman Lamb: The Insolvency Service does not maintain a separate record of the costs resulting from using couriers to send D1 reports. The cost of using couriers is subsumed into the overheads for the Insolvency Service.

Pay

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the lowest hourly rate is paid to staff by his Department; how many members of staff based outside London are paid less than £7.20 per hour; and how many members of staff based in London are paid less than £8.30 per hour. [116380]

Norman Lamb: The lowest hourly rate paid to a member of staff in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is £8.01.

Staff based outside London paid less than £7.20: Nil

Staff based inside London paid less than £8.30: Nil

Retail Trade: Newspaper Press

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what assessment he has made of the evidence considered by the Office of Fair Trading in determining not to make a referral to the Competition Commission of the newspaper and magazine wholesale distribution sector; [115786]

(2) if he will consider using his powers under section 132 of the Enterprise Act 2002 to refer the newspaper and magazine industry to the Competition Commission for a full market investigation. [115787]

Mr Vaizey: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

The Office of Fair Trading, as the appropriate independent body, is currently actively discussing the matter with the distribution chain. It would therefore be inappropriate for the Department to intervene.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Sahel

9. **Ian Murray:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment he has made of the humanitarian situation in the Sahel.

[116161]

Mr O'Brien: 18 million people across the Sahel remain at risk of food shortages. I visited Niger and Senegal in late June to assess the humanitarian situation in the Sahel for myself. The UK Government has responded swiftly and is providing lifesaving aid to 1.6 million people across the region.

UN Arms Trade Treaty

10. **Bridget Phillipson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions he has had with the Secretaries of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and for Defence on the implications for his Department of the UN arms trade treaty.

[116162]

Mr Duncan: All Departments across Whitehall are united in wanting to see an effective arms trade treaty. Negotiations are taking place this month in New York. The UK will do its utmost to secure a successful outcome.

Diarrhoeal Disease

11. **Naomi Long:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department is taking to tackle diarrhoeal disease in developing countries.

[116163]

Mr O'Brien: In April we doubled our commitment on water, sanitation and hygiene to provide 60 million people with services that prevent diarrhoeal disease. Through the GAVI Alliance we are vaccinating 50 million children against rotavirus, which is the most common cause of severe diarrhoea.

Bilateral Aid Review

12. **Glyn Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress his Department has made on its objectives for water and sanitation set out in the bilateral aid review.

[116164]

Mr O'Brien: As stated in DFID's new annual report, the UK has given 2 million people access to clean drinking water, 2 million people improved access to sanitation and 7.4 million people improved hygiene since 2010. The right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) was candid in 2007 when he admitted that the previous government had 'taken their eye off the ball' in relation to water and sanitation. The coalition will not make the same mistake. In April we announced our intention to double results by reaching 60 million people. We are seeking to match one person in the poor world without access to water and sanitation to every person living in the UK.

0.7% Development Aid Target

13. **Bill Esterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister and other Ministerial colleagues on enshrining in law spending on international development equal to 0.7% national income. [116165]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: I am in regular discussions with my colleagues on the coalition's Government's development priorities, including enshrining the zero point seven commitment into law.

Aid Effectiveness

14. **Mike Freer:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what arrangements his Department has put in place to monitor the effectiveness of UK aid to the Palestinian Authority and the UN Relief and Works Agency. [116166]

Mr Duncan: Our agreements with the PA and UNRWA specify a number of results milestones against which progress is reviewed annually. This is designed to improve effectiveness and value for money. This year, UK aid will provide primary education for 36,000 children and cash transfers for 200,000 people.

Developing Countries: Debts

Dr Whiteford: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what information his Department holds on the amount of (a) new and (b) rescheduled debt to the UK held by developing countries. [116071]

Mr Duncan: DFID holds information on loans previously provided by DFID (and its predecessor Departments) and a portfolio of loans to governments once held by CDC but managed and administered by DFID since 2008. The total outstanding value of these loans (principal amount only) is £91,871,000, this figure can be found on page 170 of the DFID 2011-12 annual report and accounts and is the total of all outstanding loans as at 31 March 2012.

http://www.dfid.gov.uk/About-us/How-we-measure-progress/Annual-report/?tw_p=tw

Of this amount, the total outstanding value of rescheduled loans (principal only) is £34,272,864.

DFID does not currently make any new loans directly to developing countries. Information on the amount of new and rescheduled bilateral export credit is held by UK Export Finance (Export Credit Guarantee Department).

Developing Countries: Family Planning

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if he will use the upcoming London Summit on Family Planning to consider the link between child marriage and fertility and maternal health outcomes; [116035]

(2) if he will encourage governments and donors making commitments at the upcoming London Summit on Family Planning to also commit to fund projects

addressing early and forced marriage, sexual violence and social barriers to contraceptive access; [116036]

(3) if he will encourage governments and donors making commitments at the upcoming London Summit on Family Planning to also commit to implement legal and policy changes that will address early and forced marriage; [116037]

(4) if he will encourage governments and donors making commitments at the upcoming London Summit on Family Planning to also commit to implement legal and policy changes that will address social barriers to women and girls accessing family planning and other health services in developing countries. [116038]

Mr Duncan: The London Summit on Family Planning aims to support the right of women and girls to decide, freely and for themselves, whether, when, and how many children they have. At its core is the objective of saving lives and empowering girls and women to be able to make decisions about their own future. Over the last year, UK investment has given 1 million additional women in developing countries access to modern methods of contraception. Much more needs to be done, which is why we are co-hosting the summit with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The summit aims to galvanise unprecedented political and financial commitment to meet the unmet need of an additional 120 million women who want to avoid or delay pregnancy. Significant political, policy and financial commitments by donors and developing countries are anticipated.

Addressing wider social and cultural barriers to women's and girls' empowerment will be essential to achieving the summit's objectives. Building the support of men, families, and communities, and ensuring laws and policies are in place to support women's and girls' empowerment and their sexual and reproductive health and rights, is critical.

The summit recognises the link between violence against women and girls, coerced sex and unintended pregnancies. There are an estimated 14 million births to adolescents every year, before they are physically, emotionally or economically prepared. Many of these girls are married. Girls who can delay marriage and their first pregnancy are at less risk of death or disability from complications arising from pregnancy, childbirth and unsafe abortion, as these are a leading cause of death among young women aged 15 to 19. They are also more likely to stay in school and secure productive employment.

There will be a focus on these issues throughout the different sessions of the summit itself on 11 July. Commitments sought by the summit include measures to address these wider issues and it is anticipated that participants will make specific commitments to address social and cultural barriers.

Developing Countries: Malaria

Pauline Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department is taking to ensure that its targets on control of malaria are met. [115813]

Mr O'Brien: Controlling malaria is one of the main priorities of the UK Government. In March 2011 we announced that we will help halve malaria deaths in at least 10 of the worst affected countries by 2015.

The UK's Framework for Results for malaria in the developing world sets out how we will work with other international and UK organisations in partner countries to achieve more results and greater value for money to ensure that our malaria targets are met. We will focus on achieving results by blending experience of what works with fresh thinking and a new focus innovation. The results contained in the Framework are specific and quantifiable, against which we, and others, will monitor our performance and hold ourselves to account. The Framework for Results will be subject to a mid-term review in 2013 and an independent evaluation in 2015.

Overseas Aid

Mr Bone: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will bring forward proposals for funding to be made available to overseas missions which would be used for local anti-human trafficking projects. [116485]

Mr O'Brien: The Department for International Development (DFID) is already funding a range of anti-trafficking and anti-slavery projects in developing countries. These include projects in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Malawi. DFID's regional anti-trafficking project in South Asia aims to reduce trafficking of 60,000 women and girls in the garment and domestic work sectors over four years.

DFID officials are currently discussing with Home Office officials whether there is scope for any additional support to anti-trafficking initiatives in priority countries, within the programme allocations agreed in the Bilateral Aid Review in 2011.

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