

Thursday
6 September 2012

Volume 549
No. 38



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 6 September 2012

House of Commons

Thursday 6 September 2012

The House met at half-past Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Apprenticeships

1. **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): What assessment he has made of the level of satisfaction of participants and businesses with the apprenticeship system. [119391]

6. **Damian Hinds** (East Hampshire) (Con): What assessment he has made of the level of satisfaction of participants and businesses with the apprenticeship system. [119396]

10. **Simon Kirby** (Brighton, Kempton) (Con): What assessment he has made of the level of satisfaction of participants and businesses with the apprenticeship system. [119400]

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): The Department recently completed the biggest ever survey of apprentices and their employers, which revealed the best ever satisfaction rates. Overall, almost 90% of apprentices were satisfied with their training. Employer satisfaction is also high: 88% are satisfied with the relevance of their training, and 80% remain committed to offering places.

Richard Graham: I welcome the evidence from the Holt review that we need to do more to make apprenticeships accessible to small and medium-sized enterprises. I know from my own apprentices' business and administration non-vocational qualifications that they are not all user-friendly to the smallest businesses, which are the driver of future jobs. Does the Secretary of State agree that employers in, for example, the Federation of Small Businesses should have more say in the content of courses and in the setting of a reassuring series of national standards?

Vince Cable: I do agree, but let me preface my remarks by saying what a success story the apprenticeship programme is. Not only has there been a big increase in scale—more than 60% over the last two years—but there is a very high satisfaction rate. Let me also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of the

former Minister for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning, the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes)—who has now moved on to higher things—and to welcome his excellent replacement, who is, indeed, part of an excellent BIS team.

The Holt study, which the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) mentioned, does acknowledge that there are barriers to SMEs' access to the apprenticeship programme. We are trying to address them, most notably by channelling resources through employers rather than trainers: that will increasingly be the emphasis of the programme.

Damian Hinds: The Jason Holt reforms present great opportunities for the hospitality sector, which has considerable potential for employment export earnings and economic growth, but in which we need to drive productivity gains. As the quantity of apprenticeships continues to increase, how can we ensure that their quality keeps pace with it, or does better?

Vince Cable: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that we need to maintain quality standards. I have asked Doug Richard, an entrepreneur with a background in this area, to give careful consideration to the quality issues and how we can shape the apprenticeship programme around genuine skills training, particularly at skill level 3 and above.

A great deal is happening in the hospitality sector. For instance, Hilton recently offered 100 new apprenticeship places. The Department will shortly hold a round-table discussion about the sector, and apprenticeships will be an important element of that.

Simon Kirby: The number of apprenticeship starts in Brighton and Hove was up by 83% last year, with many digital media businesses taking that important first step. Does the Secretary of State agree that that the digital media sector is an important part of the apprenticeship scheme?

Vince Cable: Yes. Apprenticeships increasingly cover the service sector as well as the traditional manufacturing and construction sectors, and the digital sector is an important part of that. It depends on high technology and high skill levels, and as a result is absolutely crucial.

Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab): May I put it to the Secretary of State—as I did on the last occasion when I questioned him on this issue—that while the overall numbers are very good, there are certain problems in individual sectors such as the construction industry? If we do not ensure that the number of apprenticeships in that important sector is much greater than it is now, we shall find when the national infrastructure plan takes off, as it must eventually—indeed, with the new team behind it, it will no doubt do so in the very near future—that we do not have the apprenticeships and the manpower skills in the industry that would enable us to benefit from it.

Vince Cable: The hon. Gentleman is right. The programme must be demand-led and business-led. When a sector is struggling, as the construction sector currently is, that affects the demand for training; but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the sector is well organised, with a

levy system and a skills training board. We certainly want to see a substantial number of additional trained specialists in the construction sector, so that we do not have to rely on people coming from overseas to do the work, as we often have in the past.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Although the number of members of ethnic minorities who are taking up apprenticeships is improving, there are still patterns of occupational segregation, and ethnic minorities are less likely to be represented in the industry sectors with the best long-term career prospects. What specific steps are the Government taking to ensure that members of ethnic minorities have the chance to take up the best possible apprenticeships?

Vince Cable: I have not had that case made to me before. Certainly if there is some element of discrimination, that is unacceptable. I guess there might be a correlation with other patterns in the labour force, but I will undertake to see whether there is any evidence of there being a real problem that we need to address.

Mr Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): May I congratulate the Secretary of State on all his new Ministers? I am delighted that he paid strong tribute to the former Further Education and Skills Minister, the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes). Given his commitment to vocational education and the personal warmth he brought to his task, he will, as I am sure his successor knows, be a hard act to follow.

We now know that over the past year the number of 16 to 18-year-olds starting apprenticeships went down in the south-west, the north-west and north-east England, yet the Secretary of State's colleagues elsewhere in Government have so far ducked out of doing anything practical to implement Jason Holt's excellent report to get more small businesses to take on those young people. Will the Secretary of State now change that course, with an active Government response to help small businesses to take on young people for the extra apprenticeships that we desperately need, given the failures to deliver growth by No. 11 Downing street?

Vince Cable: The Jason Holt report was published just six days or so ago, so it is perhaps unsurprising that it has not yet been fully implemented. We are certainly going to be working on it, however. There clearly is an issue with 16 to 18-year-olds who need to have a ladder into apprenticeships rather than going straight into a demanding skill course associated with a job. We recognise that there is that transition issue, therefore, and I am working with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in particular on how we address it.

Recession (Small Businesses)

2. **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect of the recession on small businesses. [119392]

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): These are tough economic conditions for all sorts of businesses, including small and medium-sized businesses, but the small business sector is showing signs of considerable resilience. The number of small and medium-sized enterprises grew to 4.5 million at the

start of last year—an increase of over 270,000 since 2008—and the proportion of people involved in setting up and running new businesses has increased to over 7.5% in 2011, up from under 6% in 2009.

Ann Clwyd: I am afraid that is not true in the Cynon Valley. Earlier this week I was talking to small businesses, who said the failure of the banks to lend has made it very difficult for them to expand and take on new workers, such as the former Remploy workers in my constituency who were so disgracefully sacked by the Government last month. We have had enough of the donkey talk of carrots and sticks. Is it not time to hold the bankers' feet to the fire and get some movement on this matter, because it is not happening now?

Vince Cable: I have never been shy of criticising bank performance in lending to SMEs, and I am not going to change on that. None the less, I think we should be a little more positive about what is happening. One of the most interesting figures of the last two-and-a-half years is that the number of private sector jobs has increased by 900,000 in conditions of economic difficulty. Almost all of those jobs are in SMEs, despite the difficulties they face. We are taking action to ensure we get a better flow of funds from the banks, particularly through the new funding for lending arrangements, over and above the guarantee scheme. There are new challenger banks such as Aldermore and Handelsbanken that are specialising in that sector and meeting some of the unmet need.

Mr Speaker: Order. I gently remind the House that we have a lot of questions to get through, so some pithiness would be appreciated.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that what the small business sector in this country needs is confidence, not carping from those on the Opposition Benches? The fact that the Government have created over 900,000 jobs since the election suggests they are doing a lot of good. Does he also agree that the World Economic Forum report of this week showing that Britain's competitiveness has risen from 10th to eighth in the world league, because, it says, of our more efficient labour market reforms, suggests we are doing exactly the right thing?

Vince Cable: I thank my colleague for reminding me of that. It is a very positive report, and it is striking that it puts such emphasis on the fact that we have very flexible labour markets, which is one of the reasons why the private sector has been able to take on so many more people. That is publicly appreciated by many of the large manufacturing companies as well as by SMEs.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Two and a half years in, this Government still offer no significant support for small, innovative, high-growth businesses, which are exactly the kind that we need to get us out of this double-dip recession made in Downing street. The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts has called on the Government to expand the small business research initiative. Started by Labour, it uses Government procurement to help to turn innovative small businesses into world beaters—we support that call. Is it any wonder that business confidence is low when the Government plan to spend 10 times more on

subsidising local weekly bin collections than on innovative small business procurement? Can the Minister tell me whether they will now change—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry but the questions and answers are far too long today. A quick sentence and we are done.

Chi Onwurah: Will the Government now change course and bring forward proper support for small, innovative businesses?

Vince Cable: Small, innovative businesses are absolutely crucial, and the CBI, in particular, has focused on what it calls the “gazelles” in that space. One specific initiative that we introduced—I launched it—and which the hon. Lady may not be aware of is the growth accelerator, which is a system of providing high-quality coaching for 26,000 small and medium-sized enterprises of exactly the kind she has described. All our evidence so far suggests that it is appreciated and is working extremely well.

Skills (Young People)

3. **Mary Macleod** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that young people leave further and higher education with the skills that employers need. [119393]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Matthew Hancock): I am very pleased to answer this as my first question because it highlights a vital problem that Britain must address in order to compete in the world. The number of apprenticeships has increased by two thirds, and by 97% in my hon. Friend’s constituency. I join the tribute paid to my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), who brought passion and drive to this programme. He would say that we must do more and we will do more, and that is exactly what I hope to do.

Mary Macleod: I welcome my hon. Friend to his new role. Even though he has been in it for only a few days, what discussions is he planning to hold with businesses to understand where the current recruitment skills gaps are? Will incentives be given to students to study the subjects that we believe are critical to the future growth industries in the UK?

Matthew Hancock: My hon. Friend is exactly right; I have already been in contact with the Institute of Directors and various employers. Britain must have a skilled work force that meets the needs of employers if we are to compete against the hungry and driven rising nations of the east, and I will do all I can to deliver that.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the new Minister and the new ministerial team. May I say that some of us will miss not only the old Skills Minister, but the old manufacturing Minister? May I also push the new Minister on work-readiness, which is vital to young people seeking jobs? At a time when 1 million young people are unemployed, we have to look at best practice. There is good practice out there in further education and in higher education. We need to identify it and spread it, and to do so quickly.

Matthew Hancock: One of the things that my predecessor brought to this job was a cross-party focus. I agree with the hon. Gentleman on the importance of FE colleges and the excellent work that they do in ensuring that people are ready for work when they join the work force and in continuing to improve people’s skills once they are in the work force, so that we can compete with the best in the world.

Employment Law (Low-paid and Vulnerable Workers)

4. **Anas Sarwar** (Glasgow Central) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the likely effect of proposed changes to employment law on low-paid and vulnerable workers. [119394]

22. **Gemma Doyle** (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of the likely effect of proposed changes to employment law on low-paid and vulnerable workers. [119415]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Jo Swinson): We are conducting a Parliament-long employment law review to remove unnecessary burdens on businesses and give them the confidence to grow and create more jobs. Of course, we also remain committed to providing protection for low-paid and vulnerable workers.

Anas Sarwar: I welcome the hon. Lady her new job and congratulate her. I advise her to take more advice from the Business Secretary and a little less from the Chancellor’s prodigy, the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock), who is sitting two up from her.

Obviously, there is genuine concern as taking away employment rights from low-paid workers is not a substitute for a proper economic growth strategy. At a time when we should be looking at ways to encourage growth and hire people, rather than fire them, what assessment has been made of the positive impact on GDP of the proposed changes?

Jo Swinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question and his kind words. It is a particular delight that my first questions at the Dispatch Box come from my near neighbours in the west of Scotland. I also thank him for his advice. Of course he is right to point out that just removing employment rights is not the way forward. However, impact assessments have been published in respect of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill. It is still progressing through this House and the Government intend to make further announcements next week on employment law reform.

Gemma Doyle: I, too, am delighted to welcome the hon. Lady to her new role, particularly as she is my constituency neighbour. I do not know whether she is aware that on average women workers in my constituency earn £180 a week less than they do in her constituency. What does she think the impact of the Government’s proposals will be on women workers, who are more likely to be in lower paid, less secure jobs in the first place?

Jo Swinson: I thank my parliamentary neighbour for that question, in which she highlights the discrepancy between our constituencies. Of course, women are being hugely helped by many of this Government’s reforms,

particularly our taking low-paid workers out of paying income tax. That is especially helpful for part-time workers, who are disproportionately women. She also raises the issue of the pay gap between men and women, which the Government are committed to addressing.

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): It is very good to see my hon. Friend at the Dispatch Box. Adrian Beecroft identified in his report a number of ways in which current employment legislation is impeding the creation of new jobs. Will my hon. Friend assure me that the coalition Government will act to implement those parts of the Beecroft report that will enhance the creation of new jobs?

Jo Swinson: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Contrary to many of the headlines, the Beecroft report contained a wide range of proposals, many of which the Government were already committed to bringing forward. A call for evidence on one of the more controversial issues mentioned in it closed on 8 June and the Government are committed to progressing on an evidence-based policy. It is worth bearing in mind that some business organisations have expressed concerns about that policy, but the Government will respond formally shortly.

Lorely Burt (Solihull) (LD): I welcome my hon. Friend to her new post and I know that she will make an effective and assiduous Minister. Does she share my pride as a Liberal Democrat Member of this coalition Government that we are introducing measures such as flexible working and shared parental leave and rejecting the specific Beecroft proposal of a fire-at-will policy, all of which will disproportionately affect low-paid and vulnerable workers?

Jo Swinson: My hon. Friend makes her point very forcefully. I am very enthusiastic about the coalition agreement proposals for flexible working and shared parental leave and I very much look forward to taking them on.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I, too, add my congratulations to the hon. Lady. As I did with her predecessor, I wish her just a smidgen of success. Given the number of Scots who have already spoken, we should all know that "smidgen" is a Scottish term for "a very little". In the past two and a half years, Ministers have dithered on creating opportunities to get people back to work and have presided over a package of measures that make it easier to fire rather than hire employees. Given that the hon. Lady has backed her Secretary of State in saying that the watering down of employee rights, especially for low-paid female workers, is the wrong approach, will she now change course and put in place a proper strategy for growth, or will her new right-wing ministerial colleagues pressure her to follow the same failed approach?

Jo Swinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his congratulations in person, having received them on Twitter yesterday. The Government are announcing a range of different measures today that will support the economy and improve competitiveness. They are on the right track and I am very committed to ensuring that we make them a success.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): More than 900,000 private sector jobs have been created since this Government came to power. Will the Minister guarantee that her Department will deliver growth and that we will continue to see a rise in private sector job creation?

Jo Swinson: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out the success in the creation of private sector jobs. Members on both sides of the House share a concern about the problems of unemployment, which is why it is vital that the Government continue with our measures to kick-start the economy.

Start-up Businesses

5. **Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): What support his Department is providing to start-up businesses expanding in developing areas of industry. [119395]

The Minister for Universities and Science (Mr David Willetts): We aim to make the UK the best place in the world to start and run a business. That is why we are reintroducing the Smart awards for innovative new businesses, creating 24 new enterprise zones and committing a further £200 million to enterprise capital funds.

Graham Jones: CN Creative in Accrington in my constituency is a growing company that designs and manufactures the best electronic cigarettes in the world. It is planning to move its entire production from China back to the UK, to my constituency, but the banks will not lend it the money it needs, which is preventing the move and jobs coming to Britain. Does the Minister realise how damaging it is to start-up companies when they cannot access credit?

Mr Willetts: We agree; it is very important that banks are encouraged to lend to successful businesses. That is what the coalition is doing. Incidentally, the old pessimism that manufacturing will always go east is clearly now being reversed. We are optimistic about the prospects of manufacturing in this country.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): Following today's fantastic announcement of a further £267 million investment programme in the Honda plant in my constituency, what measures will the Minister take to help start-up businesses to take advantage of the potential opportunities in the supply chains of Honda and the UK automotive industry?

Mr Willetts: Immediately after these questions my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is going to Swindon to join Honda in this very welcome announcement. The Department absolutely understands the importance of the supply chains behind these large companies. Of course, the commitment to the supply chain is one of the many reasons why Britain is moving up the competitiveness league table.

Graduate Employment

7. **Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the employment outcomes of graduates. [119397]

The Minister for Universities and Science (Mr David Willetts): University remains a great route to a rewarding career: 90% of full-time, first degree leavers are in work or further study six months after graduating, and graduates earn on average £100,000 more over their working lives. We recognise the need to do all we can to help universities and businesses to prepare students for the labour market.

Steve Brine: The Minister might be interested to know that in 2010-11 the university of Winchester recorded that 96% of its full-time teacher training graduates had gone into teaching jobs, but is he satisfied that higher education institutions are doing enough to focus prospective students on the employment prospects they can expect if they choose to study and spend significant sums of money at their institutions?

Mr Willetts: I congratulate the university of Winchester on that excellent achievement. That is why this month we are introducing, for the first time, a requirement that universities release the information on the percentage of their leavers who are in work after six months, course by course, so that prospective students can assess their performance on that crucial measure.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): The Minister is well aware that going to university improves employability, but he will also be well aware that tuition fees are acting as a disincentive for many students. Specifically, I have been approached over the summer by Muslim students who are concerned about sharia-compliant financing for their tuition fees? I know that the Department is looking at this, so will he update us on progress towards achieving a model for those students?

Mr Willetts: The encouraging evidence from the UCAS application data is that people from poorer backgrounds are not being put off going to university. There is no evidence that changes in patterns of university applications are affecting poorer students in particular. I have been considering the issue of sharia-compliant student loans, and we continue to do so.

Employee Ownership

8. **Jane Ellison (Battersea) (Con):** What steps he is taking to increase levels of employee ownership. [119398]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Jo Swinson): The Government have welcomed the excellent report by Graeme Nuttall, which provided a series of recommendations on how we can promote employee ownership. We will publish a full Government response to his recommendations this autumn. We have already published a call for evidence on the right to request employee ownership, and I encourage any Members who have ideas on it to get in quick as it closes tomorrow.

Jane Ellison: I thank the Minister for that answer and warmly welcome her to her new role. The Germany and US economies have a much greater diversity of corporate ownership structures, so I wonder whether the Minister, in addition to looking at excellent British companies such as the John Lewis Partnership, will be looking abroad for useful lessons.

Jo Swinson: We certainly will. We are always happy to learn from and share experiences with other countries. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary has been looking at the issues of corporate governance. I know that my hon. Friend has had a strong career with the John Lewis Partnership, which is one of the better known examples of employee ownership, but of course there are many other great examples of British companies that do that, and we are looking forward to promoting that more widely.

Regional Growth Fund

9. **Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab):** When he expects all bidders from the first round of the regional growth fund to receive the funds allocated to them. [119399]

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): The regional growth fund is a three-year fund and we expect all the £2.4 billion allocated to be fully spent in that time. In round 1, 44 of the 67 contracts awarded have been finalised, totalling some £340 million, of which £220 million has already been drawn down. Of the other 23, 11 have been withdrawn and the remaining 12 are being processed.

Ian Mearns: I welcome the Minister of State to his new role. Having formerly been the MP for Darlington, at least he knows where the north-east is.

The regional growth fund has been mired in delay, chaos and confusion and, for some companies, no little uncertainty. How can we be certain, despite yet more reassurances, that winning bidders will receive their long-awaited awards?

Michael Fallon: My predecessor, the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk), can be proud that rounds 1 and 2 of the fund now involve some 149 projects and programmes, delivering about 330,000 new jobs and drawing in nearly £5 billion of private investment. The bid for Gateshead college in the hon. Gentleman's constituency was successful in round 2. A final offer letter was sent to the college at the end of July, and the money is there waiting for the college to take it up.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Minister to his new role and look forward to having the opportunity to question him at some stage in the BIS Committee. May I draw his attention to the fact that in the black country some companies that were successful applicants in round 2 of the RGF have still not had contracts issued, with some waiting for as long as 10 months, and that business opportunities are being lost as a result? Will he undertake to look at this rigorously in order to speed things up?

Michael Fallon: I certainly look forward to appearing in front of the hon. Gentleman's Select Committee.

I am happy to look at any specific examples of delay that the hon. Gentleman can produce. I want in round 3 to accelerate the process—in particular, to shorten the gap between announcement and conditional offer and between conditional offer and completion of due diligence. He will understand that it is necessary, when public money is involved, for those due diligence checks to be

carried out. However, I will look at what he has said and we will do everything we can to accelerate the approval process.

Community Learning

11. **Sarah Newton** (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): What steps he is taking to protect and promote access to community learning. [119401]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Matthew Hancock): This Government are committed to community learning. We have protected the budget, and I want to see funding increasingly targeted at the most disadvantaged people. Community learning trust pilots across England are testing new ways of better involving local communities in how that money is delivered.

Sarah Newton: I thank the Minister for that response. Does he agree that it is vitally important that there are opportunities to learn throughout life, and that having protected the community learning budget, it should be focused on those with ambitions to gain new skills throughout their life but not a great deal in the way of formal qualifications?

Matthew Hancock: I do agree. I have already heard of the work that my hon. Friend has been doing in supporting Truro and Penwith college and Cornwall college. Improving our nation's skills is vital for our economic prospects, but learning has intrinsic value in its own right. Henry Ford said:

"Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80. Anyone who keeps learning stays young",

so I hope that I have discovered the secret of eternal youth.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Community learning flourished under the previous Government and is at risk under this one. In warmly welcoming the new Minister to his role and congratulating him, may I ask him to look at my recent letter to his predecessor about LymeNet community learning centre in Lyme Regis, which was set up in 1999? I saw its great work on visiting the Axminster Methodist church job club over the summer. Rural areas cannot afford the loss of community learning that is now on the cards.

Matthew Hancock: I look forward to reading that letter, but I would say this: the budget for community learning has been protected in difficult fiscal times, and that shows the Government's intentions in this area.

SMEs

13. **Christopher Pincher** (Tamworth) (Con): What recent progress he has made in supporting small and medium-sized businesses. [119405]

20. **Annette Brooke** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): What recent steps he has taken to support small and medium-sized businesses. [119413]

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): In total, 450,000 new businesses were registered last year compared with 360,000 in

2009-10. We have cut corporation tax rates to an all-time low, we continue to cut red tape, we are incentivising bank lending, and we have a range of other schemes to support high-growth businesses in particular.

Christopher Pincher: I welcome my hon. Friend to his post and I welcome his answer. One of the concerns that SMEs in my constituency have is that, whereas previously they had access to overdraft extensions, which represent cheap credit, banks now insist on collateralised loans, which are repayable over a term at a rate over base, which represents more expensive credit. Will the Government's innovative reforms result in not just an extension of credit, but a reduction in its price?

Michael Fallon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is exactly right: cheaper credit is the key for many small companies. The whole aim of the funding for lending scheme is to ensure that banks pass on the reduction in the cost of the money that they themselves are accessing. The Bank of England will monitor that, but my Department will check that each bank continues to do it.

Annette Brooke: I welcome the Minister to his post. Undoubtedly, many small firms are getting a raw deal from the banks, with increased charges and limited credit. The board of Wimborne business improvement district is exploring the possibility of setting up a "bank" of Wimborne in conjunction with a local credit union, the idea being to go back to old-style banking with strong local relationships. What comment would the Minister make about that?

Michael Fallon: I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already met my hon. Friend's constituents to discuss the issue, and I believe that he has already met the founder of the Bank of Dave as well. One of the recommendations of the Independent Commission on Banking was that the Financial Services Authority should look again at the requirements for a banking licence, to see whether they are too onerous and disproportionate for the providers of very small credit. We expect the FSA to publish its recommendations shortly and I would be very happy to discuss them with my hon. Friend.

Mr Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): Many small businesses in my constituency run a post office as part of their business, and they are very worried about the chipping away of business and, particularly, the threat of losing the DVLA contract. What is the Minister's Department doing to encourage the DVLA to stick with the Post Office?

Michael Fallon: I cannot comment on any specific contract that may be up for renewal. Of course, the Post Office has to live in a competitive world, but I will certainly look at what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Late payments affect the confidence of SMEs to make purchases and to pay bills and even staff salaries. In this time of a double-dip recession, does the Minister agree that implementing the European Union directive on late payments would be a great help to SMEs?

Michael Fallon: It is extremely important, particularly for small companies, that their bills are paid promptly. In Government, we have taken steps to encourage Government Departments and public agencies to pay their suppliers promptly. It is also important that we look very carefully at any specific target that may encourage people to pay on the final day set in the target, rather than earlier as they would otherwise have done. I will certainly have a look at what the hon. Lady has suggested.

London Metropolitan University (Visas)

14. **Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with his ministerial colleagues on the UK Border Agency's decision to revoke the licence held by London Metropolitan university to teach international students. [119406]

The Minister for Universities and Science (Mr David Willetts): I am in regular contact with colleagues in the Home Office. The decision to revoke the licence was a matter for the UK Border Agency.

Our priority now is to ensure that the university's legitimate overseas students are given the help and advice they need to continue their studies. To deliver this, I set up a taskforce within hours of UKBA's decision, which has already started work.

Heidi Alexander: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. He mentions the taskforce, but the direct experience of one of my constituents is that it is anything but useful. She went as far as saying that it told her nothing that could not be found on the UKBA website. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that the help and advice given by the taskforce really enables legitimate students to access alternative courses?

Mr Willetts: The crucial task in which the taskforce is now engaged is preparing a kind of mini-clearing system in which there will be firm information about places available at specific universities and on specific courses that would have been available for suitably qualified overseas students at London Met. I can tell the hon. Lady and the House that that matching process will open and start on 17 September. We also know that the UKBA will not send out any letters about their 60-day limit to apply to the overseas students affected until 1 October.

Mr David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): I have a registered interest.

I put it to Ministers that although enforcement is critical, the message that needs to go out from the Government is that Britain is open for business in higher education, and that we care greatly about it for students, universities and our economy. What message is being sent by this Department to ensure that the world knows that we welcome higher education students and are proud of our record?

Mr Willetts: I very much agree with the right hon. Gentleman, as do the Government. Of course Britain is open for business. That includes being open to attract students from around the world who have a legitimate entitlement to study here. There is no cap on the number of overseas students who can come to study in Britain.

Through our Foreign Office posts around the world, we have re-emphasised that message in the light of the experience of London Met.

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): The attitude of the Minister and his Government to the international reputation of the UK's higher education sector and its importance to our economic growth is shockingly complacent. May I press the Minister on the legitimate international students at London Met who are partway through their studies? Will he guarantee that no such student will be financially worse off as a result of the licence revocation? If that is not possible, will he reconsider with his colleagues in the Home Office alternative routes by which legitimate international students may complete their studies at London Met?

Mr Willetts: I understand that one feature of the offers of places in the matching process that will be launched in 10 days' time is that many of the universities will offer courses at the same or lower fees than the students would have experienced at London Met.

Port of Liverpool

15. **John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): What support his Department is providing to the port of Liverpool; and if he will make a statement. [119407]

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): I understand the importance of the port of Liverpool to the city region's ambitions for growth. Under round two of the regional growth fund, the Government are supporting the port's bid to build a terminal capable of handling the largest container ships. Key features of the city region deal have regard to the local potential for logistics and offshore technologies.

John Pugh: Liverpool port is thriving under the management of Peel Holdings. What can the Government do to ease transport arrangements to and from the dock?

Vince Cable: The starting point is the recognition that Liverpool docks, having declined for many decades, now have enormous potential as a result of the £35 million that has been put in to dredging for the deep-water terminal and the support for offshore technologies. There is a major problem of access. A report has been carried out and is being followed through as part of the city region bid. We are working with the Department for Transport. We recognise that there are transport bottlenecks and there is a commitment to act on that.

Automotive Industry

16. **Stephen Mosley** (City of Chester) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the health of the British automotive sector; and if he will make a statement. [119408]

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): The British car and truck industry is strong and growing. More than £6 billion of investment has been committed to it by global investors including BMW, Nissan, Jaguar Land Rover and, as we

have heard today, Honda. More than 80% of the vehicles made here are exported, and exports now exceed imports in value for the first time since 1975.

Stephen Mosley: I welcome my hon. Friend to his post and thank him for the welcome news that he has just given. Will he assure us that he will use his new post to encourage exports by taking every opportunity to talk up and promote UK plc, unlike Opposition Members, who seem to delight in constantly talking down the success of British industry and talking down our economy?

Michael Fallon: I will certainly do what my hon. Friend suggests. I met some of the key players in the industry yesterday. The Government provide significant support for research and development, training, and improving the UK's sourcing of the supply chain in this important industry. I announced a further £9 million yesterday for a research and development centre for energy storage to capitalise on the growing electric and hybrid vehicle battery market. The Secretary of State will today visit Honda to welcome the 500 new jobs that it is creating in Swindon. I hope that the Labour party will welcome that vote of confidence in what the Government are doing.

21. [119414] **Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): Automotive companies and many other companies rely on skilled engineers. Whenever I raise the issue, the Government talk a great deal about the importance of getting women engineers into such companies. However, they have entirely cut the grant to the UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology, which was ensuring that good engineers got into jobs, and have given a minuscule amount of their budget to the royal societies and the Royal Academy of Engineering. I welcome the Minister and the rest of the team to their posts. Will he ensure that this matter is looked at again so that some of the jobs in these companies go to women engineers?

Michael Fallon: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for what she says, and I am happy to look again at the matter. The Government are working with the Royal Society to see what can be done to encourage more women into engineering, and specific help is available from Government to help with engineering training, particularly for the automotive industry.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Meg Munn) has provided an object lesson to new Members in how to shoehorn one's own question into someone else's, and we are greatly obliged to her.

Bioethanol Industry

17. **Ian Swales** (Redcar) (LD): What recent assessment he has made of the future of the UK bioethanol industry. [119410]

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): The Government's bioenergy strategy makes it clear that sustainable first-generation biofuels such as bioethanol are cost-effective in reducing carbon emissions and are an important source of renewable energy. We have sent a clear signal to the industry that

there is a market for biofuels in the UK by setting it a target of creating 10% of road transport fuel from renewable energy by 2020.

Ian Swales: I thank the Secretary of State for the work that he has done to help with the restarting of the Ensus plant in my constituency, which supports 2,000 jobs. Will he continue to work with his colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Transport and the Treasury to ensure that conditions remain right for that exciting, sustainable growth business?

Vince Cable: I would like to reciprocate by congratulating my hon. Friend on the work that he has done on campaigning for the Ensus plant, which was mothballed but has now been reopened, creating substantial employment. I believe that a significant number of other bioethanol plants are also in gestation, encouraged by the clarity of policy. One key element was the success that we had in persuading the European Union on the subject of unfair competition from overseas. That loophole has now been closed and there is a good business environment.

City Deals

18. **Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on the effects on business of city deals. [119411]

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): Local enterprise partnerships were at the heart of the eight deals with the core cities that were concluded in July, to ensure a strong focus on the growth priorities of business. An estimated 175,000 jobs over the next 20 years, and 37,000 apprenticeships, could result from those deals.

Rehman Chishti: When will the second round of city deals open, so that excellent local authorities such as mine can apply?

Vince Cable: The cities Minister, who is now in the Treasury, has been discussing with me and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how we will launch the second phase and the criteria that should be employed. I believe there will be an announcement very soon.

Topical Questions

T1. [119416] **Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): My Department has a key role in supporting the rebalancing of the economy and supporting business to deliver growth while increasing skills and learning.

Harriett Baldwin: The whole new ministerial team will already be aware that Malvern is the capital of cyber-valley owing to the cluster of private cyber-security firms that are located there, close to GCHQ. Will the

Minister update me and the rest of the House on the steps that the Department is taking to encourage growth in that important sector, and will he visit Malvern?

The Minister for Universities and Science (Mr David Willetts): My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the strength of the cyber-cluster in Malvern. Yesterday evening we held a major conference at the Foreign Office, at which I and colleagues briefed representatives of FTSE 100 companies on the threat to cyber-security, the practical steps that they could take to ensure it and the strength of the British cyber-security industry.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): May I first welcome the Secretary of State's new team of minders to their positions on the Front Bench? I note that he is so irreplaceable that he needs not one but three minders to keep him in check. His new minder of state, the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Michael Fallon), told the *Financial Times* yesterday that he would

"make sure business feels it has a senior champion in the department."

Does the Secretary of State not feel that he himself has been a sufficient champion of business across Government of late?

Vince Cable: I certainly regard myself as a champion of business, and the success that we have had in private sector job creation and in some of our main strategic industries, such as the car and aerospace industries, with both of which I have worked closely, is evidence of that. I very much look forward to working with my colleague, and we have exactly the same aspirations for British business.

Mr Umunna: The fact is that business simply does not believe that the Government are doing enough. Last month, the head of the British Chambers of Commerce said that he would give key politicians—presumably the Secretary of State is one of them—three out of 10 for delivery. A couple of weeks before, members of the Institute of Directors went further, stating that Government policies to support business were ineffective in every single area, and who can blame them? The Government have failed to deliver on their infrastructure plan, they have failed to get finance to businesses that need it, and they have failed to meet the delivery targets in their 2011 plan for growth. The Government are ridden with indecision. Three marks out of 10 was generous. How many marks would the Business Secretary give the Government given their litany of failure?

Vince Cable: Whenever I talk to business groups—which I do frequently—they unreservedly support the Government's emphasis on financial stability. That is something that the Labour party takes lightly, although we have emphasised it. There is a major agenda to revive the British economy, but in his question the hon. Gentleman made no reference to this morning's housing statement. At the moment, construction is the most difficult sector in the British economy, because of the collapse that took place in the wake of the boom that his party created when in office. This morning, the Government have proposed a series of businesslike initiatives to free up sites for private development, to

put substantial guarantees and resources behind social housing, and to revive a sector that was destroyed in the false bubble created by the hon. Gentleman's Government.

T2. [119418] **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): How much does the UK earn from overseas students, and what assessment has the Minister for Universities and Science made of the potential for further export growth from that sector?

Mr Willetts: We estimate that overseas students in higher education bring £8 billion to the British economy, which shows what a major export industry it is. We can be very proud of the success of our higher education sector, and that is why Britain has no limit on the number of suitably qualified overseas students who can come here to study.

T3. [119419] **Mr William Bain** (Glasgow North East) (Lab): This morning the OECD predicted that the British economy will shrink by 0.7% this year. When will the Secretary of State get on and set up a proper British investment bank, and follow the example of institutions in Germany and Brazil that between them invested nearly £100 billion last year?

Vince Cable: The hon. Gentleman is being a little churlish in not even acknowledging that on Sunday, the Chancellor made it clear that we wished to proceed with a business bank. We are discussing the range of its activities and the resources that will be available. The hon. Gentleman knows well that growth prospects in all European countries are extremely depressed at the moment, not only in the UK.

T4. [119420] **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): As secretary of the all-party group for post offices, I strongly support the Government's commitment to ensuring that there are no further post office closures, as well as the ambition to develop post offices to carry out more front-office Government services. I am, however, slightly concerned about the pace of progress in making new services available through post offices, and sub-postmasters in Gloucester are concerned about the possibility of losing the DVLA contract. I appreciate that the Minister has only just arrived in her post, but will she give that issue priority in the future?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Jo Swinson): I thank my hon. Friend for his comments; he is a strong campaigner for post offices which we all recognise lie at the heart of many of our communities. He asked me to comment on a live procurement contract, which I hope he will understand I cannot do. There are, however, some reasons to be cheerful. Over the past year, the Government's services revenue for Post Office Ltd increased for the first time in 10 years, reversing the trend of decline that we saw under the previous Government.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): May I welcome the new Minister responsible for further education and skills to one of the most important economic posts in the Government? Will he confirm his backing for the successful union learning fund that helps 100,000 people a year get on to courses? It is strongly backed by

employers who claim that staff with little history of learning are helped to take up training because of the unions' work.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Matthew Hancock): I am grateful for that question. It is clear that we have not only supported the union learning fund, but we will be driven by the evidence of what works to ensure that we increase the skill levels of the British population, both for its own sake and so that we can drive our competitiveness in the years ahead.

T5. [119421] **Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con):** I know the Front-Bench team are totally committed to promoting growth in our economy. Will the Minister set out how he will boost employment and growth in rural areas while balancing the need to protect the environment from unrestricted development?

Vince Cable: Several local enterprise partnerships are specialising in developing the rural economy—the hon. Lady's LEP is one of them. Such development should be dealt with properly at that level. At my level, I look forward to talking to the new Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about how we integrate economic development and rural development.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Three hundred and sixty of my constituents have told me that they value our local post offices. May I press the Minister to allow the post office network to allow the DVLA to have that contract for the future? Why will she not commit to doing that?

Jo Swinson: As I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), that is a live procurement contract—I hope the hon. Gentleman also understands that. However, he makes his point clearly. His points are on the record and it has been noted that he is standing up for his local post offices.

T6. [119423] **Eric Ollerenshaw (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Con):** What is being done to assist exporters, particularly in the north-west, to achieve results that match those of the best, such as Fisherman's Friend in my constituency, which exports 97% of its products to more than 100 countries?

Vince Cable: Until I heard the hon. Gentleman's question, I thought Fleetwood was primarily famous for its football team, which has just got back into the Football League. I will make an effort to visit Fleetwood. I am delighted to hear of the success of Fisherman's Friend, which I consume a great deal of. I had not realised it was an export firm, but we will do everything we can to promote it overseas.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): The Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill will, in effect, introduce no-fault dismissal by the back door through the system of protected conversation, which was debated extensively in Committee. Monitoring will be difficult, but what plans do the Government have to monitor the system to ensure that it is not abused by bad employers?

Vince Cable: There is no question of introducing no-fault dismissal by the front or the back door. The proposal in the Bill relates to settlement agreements. We are proceeding in consultation with both employers and the trade unions—there is a wide area of consensus on the matter.

Mr Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): I am delighted that my right hon. Friend is going to Honda Swindon today to help to mark 20 years of investment of more than £2 billion. Will he take the opportunity to discuss how trade barriers between the EU and Japan can be further removed and improved so that Honda's position can be strengthened?

Vince Cable: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's work, and to the workers and managers in Swindon who have made a success of the plant. As many of us remember, many of them went on to part-time working and long vacations to keep the plant alive, and it is now succeeding. I have discussed trade barriers with the Keidanren in Japan and with others. There are a lot of non-tariff barriers in the automotive industry. We must deal with them if we are to have a genuine free trade agreement with Japan.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): The green investment bank was first announced in the coalition agreement. Why, two and a half years later, is it not up and running properly?

Vince Cable: The green investment bank is up and running properly. The parliamentary legislation is being put in place, and the hon. Lady has the opportunity to debate it. The team in my Department that is overseeing the bank has already disbursed significant amounts of money to energy conservation and waste projects. The bank is a success, and it will expand considerably over the next few years when it has achieved state aid approval.

Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): Business investment in research and development is absolutely essential for growth, and yet UK business invests less in R and D than our international competitors. What can the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills do with the Treasury to encourage more investment in R and D in our businesses?

Mr Willetts: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the importance of R and D. We are improving the tax reliefs available to businesses, and especially to small businesses, when they invest in R and D to encourage them to do so.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Secretary of State mentioned the importance of growth in his Department's mission, and yet, as we have heard, the OECD has this morning revised its growth forecast for the UK economy from plus 0.5% to minus 0.7%. Does he not see the need to change course?

Vince Cable: We recognise the economic difficulties faced by most of the western democracies, including our own, and the hon. Gentleman knows the reason for them. We had a boom in this country that got out of control and left a substantial legacy; we have broken banks; we have a very serious consumer debt problem;

and we have major problems in our export markets. Those are the factors that contribute to the current difficulties, but we have a range of policies, several of which have been announced today, that are designed to counter those areas of weakness in growth, especially in construction.

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): UK Trade and Investment has scored some excellent results in attracting foreign direct investment, with a particular upturn over the last two years, but the spread of that investment is not necessarily equal. What action can we take to ensure that all parts of the UK benefit from UKTI activity?

Vince Cable: As my hon. Friend says, there has been a considerable increase in inward investment, much of it as a result of the hard work done by UKTI and indeed by Ministers. There was a particular success at the British embassy alongside the excellent Olympic games, which is attracting more inward investment to this country. In terms of regional distribution, we are drawing up agreements between the local enterprise partnerships and UKTI on how to ensure that parts of the country that currently do not receive very much inward investment get a proper opportunity to lobby for it.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I am pleased that the Minister of State has had the opportunity to spell out the importance of international students to the UK economy, and his Department has estimated that the contribution could double. I am sure that he will share my frustration at the way those prospects are being undermined by the Home Office. What is he going to do about it?

Mr Willetts: We completely understand the importance of the Home Office maintaining the integrity of our immigration controls, but BIS—and the whole Government—believe that legitimate students who have a visa entitlement to come and study in Britain should be welcome. There is no cap on those numbers and we are making every effort through UKTI and British embassies abroad to continue to communicate the message that Britain is a great place to come and study at our colleges and universities.

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): There has been a series of positive announcements from the aerospace industry in the last few months, especially from companies such as Rolls-Royce, which employs more than 1,000 people in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend say more about what he is doing to support the aerospace sector?

Vince Cable: Within the last few months I have been to Sheffield to open a new centre developing frontier research on materials. There is in addition work on

aerodynamics, which we developed through a new grant under the leadership programme that we have in relation to the aerospace sector. Aerospace is an excellent example of how Government and industry can work together to create growth and world-leading industries.

Alison Seabeck (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab): I welcome the new team, who will be very aware that the Government's stated policy is to improve UK growth through exports. Will they therefore explain why there is only one UK delegate to the NATO delegation supporting British defence industry and exports to that particular market? The US have got 40, the French and Germans have several—can we please have a bit of joined-up government and will he talk to his colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office?

Vince Cable: I can explain what happened at that conference. My ministerial colleagues and I spend a great deal of time promoting defence exports, which are one of the main success stories in the rapid growth of our exports and one of the main features of the rebalancing that is taking place.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): In my constituency, 3,000 people are waiting desperately for a council house. Perhaps one answer to that problem, both in my area and across the country, might be to consider quantitative easing through social housing bonds, to ensure that there is an explosion in council house building in this country.

Vince Cable: I know how passionately my colleague feels about this. I was with him a few weeks ago in his constituency and there is an acute shortage of affordable housing. The issue he raises of how to get resources into affordable housing was partly met this morning by the substantial increase in guarantees of £10 billion to housing associations, which is direct funding support for social housing. I am sure that he will see a good deal of activity in the wake of this.

Mr Speaker: Last but not least, I call Ann McKechin.

Ann McKechin (Glasgow North) (Lab): Further to the Minister of State's comments about overseas students, can he explain why there has been such substantial decrease in applications, given the consequent substantial impact that will have on the British economy?

Mr Willetts: The evidence from UCAS—admittedly it is imperfect—does not show a fall in overseas applications. Indeed, more students are either coming to Britain to study or remaining overseas and studying for British degrees. That adds up to more than 1 million people who want to come and study for British university qualifications. That is a fantastic effort, and we can increase that number.

Business of the House

11.34 am

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Andrew Lansley): The business for next week will be:

MONDAY 10 SEPTEMBER—Consideration in Committee of the European Union (Approval of Treaty Amendment Decision) Bill [*Lords*] (day 1).

TUESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER—Opposition Day (6th allotted day). There will be a debate on tuition fees, followed by a debate on a subject to be announced. Both debates will arise on an Opposition motion.

WEDNESDAY 12 SEPTEMBER—Remaining stages of the Defamation Bill, followed by a motion relating to the appointment of a new Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

THURSDAY 13 SEPTEMBER—A debate on a motion relating to oil markets, followed by a debate on tax avoidance and evasion. The subjects for these debates have been nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 14 SEPTEMBER—Private Members' Bills

The provisional business for the week commencing 17 September will include:

MONDAY 17 SEPTEMBER—Second Reading of the Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Bill.

TUESDAY 18 SEPTEMBER—Motion on the conference recess adjournment, the format of which has been specified by the Backbench Business Committee.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 13 September will be:

THURSDAY 13 SEPTEMBER—Debate on the dairy industry.

May I say how privileged I am to be appointed Leader of the House? I pay tribute to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Sir George Young), and to the former Deputy Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr Heath), who takes on important new Government responsibilities. Throughout the House, my predecessor was held in the greatest respect and affection, and continues to be. He saw through important reforms, and I can hope to do no better than to emulate him in how he demonstrated that he understood the importance of being not only Leader of the House but a leader for the House, speaking for the House and representing it in government and beyond, and balancing that with the important responsibility of representing the Government within the House. I look forward to these new responsibilities.

Ms Eagle: I welcome the new Leader of the House and join him in paying a warm tribute to his distinguished predecessor. The right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Sir George Young) has given long and distinguished service both in government and to the House. Over the years, he has surprised political pundits with his Lazarus-style tendencies, and perhaps even this time he is merely on a sabbatical and will be back. I also welcome the new Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, and pay tribute to his predecessor, the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr Heath).

I also welcome the Chief Whip to his new and extremely challenging job. One of the first things he will have to do is console his colleagues who have been sacked in the reshuffle—and not given knighthoods. If it is any help, I can tell them that, in my experience, being sacked from government does not necessarily mean the end of a Member's ministerial career. I returned to government in a subsequent reshuffle—under a new Prime Minister.

Over the summer, the Olympics and Paralympics have shown the best of our country, and I salute the tremendous achievements of all our athletes and those who volunteered during the games, who contributed to making it such an inspirational summer. I pay particular tribute to those at the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games and my right hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Dame Tessa Jowell), who did so much to bring the games to this country and make them a success. Also, in the spirit of cross-party unity and wanting, as always, to be helpful, may I single out the part played by the Mayor of London? No one has asked him whether he is a man or a mouse.

Speaking of the Prime Minister, after his disastrous summer, it is hardly a surprise that we have had yet another Government relaunch. After the reshuffle, we have a new right-wing Justice Secretary, an Environment Secretary who is a climate change sceptic and an Equalities Minister who has voted against almost every piece of equality legislation. So now we know: at the end of the rose garden, turn right. Given her record, can the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent statement from the new Equalities Minister, so she can inform the House of her unique approach to her brief?

The new Secretary of State for Health said before the election that a Conservative Government would “crowd-source” ideas, because Conservatives believe in collective wisdom. Will the Leader of the House commend the Chancellor for going to the Olympics stadium the other night to do his own little experiment with crowd-sourcing, and can he tell us what the Chancellor will be doing with the answer he got?

What the British people want is not yet another Government relaunch, but a real plan for jobs and growth, because the Chancellor's economic policies have failed spectacularly. We now have an economy in the longest double-dip recession since the second world war. Growth forecasts have been cut and borrowing is up by a quarter. The Prime Minister has been on “Daybreak” this morning making announcements that should have been made to this House. When will he learn that cosy chats on the “Daybreak” sofa are no substitutes for a statement to this House? We should not have to rely on urgent questions.

The Deputy Prime Minister said in an interview with *The Guardian* over the recess that, given the economic situation, it was right to increase taxes on the very wealthy. The next day the Chancellor rubbished the idea. After the reshuffle, does the new roving Economic Minister, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), have the casting vote? With the excitement of the Olympics, I thought I must have forgotten about the Liberal Democrats joining us in the Lobby to vote against a Budget that gave a huge tax cut to millionaires, but according to *Hansard* the Liberal Democrats voted for it. After the Deputy Prime Minister's disastrous performance at the Dispatch Box this week, the new

Leader of the House might find it difficult to coax him back to the Chamber any time soon, but can he try to get us an urgent statement? The impression at the moment is that the Deputy Prime Minister is saying one thing in public and voting the opposite way in this House.

I look forward very much to working with the Leader of the House. I hope that he can set out his views soon on the proposed House business committee. In the meantime, will he put all our minds at rest, on this first occasion at the Dispatch Box, and rule out a top-down reorganisation of the House of Commons?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her welcome. I am also grateful for her very warm tribute to my predecessor. I know that the House will very much appreciate the intention that he should be further honoured, as a Companion of Honour. It is a rare honour, but one that reflects the regard in which we all hold him.

The hon. Lady is quite right: I recall at the last business questions before the recess that the House was looking forward to the Olympics and Paralympics. In truth, I think all our expectations have been wonderfully exceeded. It has been a most inspirational event, and not only inspirational for a generation, as it was intended to be, but a fabulous showcase for what this country can achieve. We, the Government and the people of this country will be able to depend on that reputation across the world in years to come.

The hon. Lady asked a number of questions and made a number of points. Let me tell her that the changes in the Government are all about ensuring that we take forward our reforms and our focus on growth. All of us, as the Prime Minister absolutely said, recognise the difficulties that we encountered when we came into government. We know—and have known for two and a half years—how difficult they are. In a sense, they have been added to by the problems in the eurozone and the international economic situation. We are not alone in the problems we have to face, so we are focused on growth, and that will be true, as the Prime Minister has rightly said, in every Department—whether in the Department for Education, in developing the skills, the qualifications and the standards that are required; in the Foreign Office, which has been focused on delivering trade and investment, and business relationships across the world; or in the Department for Communities and Local Government, in using the powers that the Localism Act 2011 gave to local authorities and the new planning arrangements to deliver increased growth and build jobs. That is what it will mean in all those Departments. The difference between the Government and the Opposition is that the Labour Government were responsible for the mess that the country was in in 2010, whereas this Government are focused on getting the country out of that mess.

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): Millions of law-abiding citizens will be outraged that Mr and Mrs Ferrie spent three days in custody after defending themselves against burglars, one of whom turned out to be a violent career criminal out of prison early on licence. May we have a statement from the Home Secretary on the urgent need to include common sense in the training of police officers, and may we have a debate about the rights of householders to defend themselves and their property?

Mr Lansley: I completely understand how strongly my hon. Friend feels about that, and I think many Members of the House feel the same. I hope she sees that there is an opportunity for her on the 18th of this month to raise that issue at Justice questions. I am sure that Ministers will feel as strongly as she does on this.

Natascha Engel (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): Before I welcome the new Leader of the House to his new role, I too would like to put on record my thanks to his predecessor, the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Sir George Young). Without his help and good advice, the Backbench Business Committee would not be what it is today, and the Back Benches are a more interesting and more powerful place as a result of his time in office.

I am sure that the Backbench Business Committee will continue to enjoy a good and strong working relationship with the Office of the Leader of the House, and I look forward to working closely with him. May I take this opportunity to say to the House that the closing date for submitting subjects for the mini-recess Adjournment debate on the final Tuesday is Wednesday 12 September?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's kind words. I was pleased that in my first announcements on the business of the House I was able to include not only the pre-recess Adjournment debate but a day for the Backbench Business Committee which is not a Thursday. I want to follow what my predecessor achieved in improving the opportunities for debates for Back-Bench Members and in bringing a sense to this House of being a forum for the nation on issues of importance. I hope that we will continue to do that.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): For more than 100 years the Bacup and Britannia Coco-nutters have been dancing the boundaries of Bacup on Easter weekend. May we have a statement about the cost of road closure orders, as the Coco-nutters face the prospect of not being able to dance this Easter because it will cost £1,000 to close the road? It is endangering our morris dancing tradition.

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me an early opportunity to understand the encyclopaedic nature of business questions. The limits of my knowledge I have always been aware of, and it does not extend to morris dancing. I will draw the point that he raises on behalf of his constituents to the attention of my colleagues at the Department for Communities and Local Government, and ask them to respond to it.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): May we have a clear statement from the Government on their policy on regional pay? In May the Deputy Prime Minister said:

“There is going to be no regional pay system. That is not going to happen.”

Yet 20 health trusts in south-west England have announced that they intend to abandon the NHS's national “Agenda for Change” pay structure and adopt just such a regional pay system. This is causing great concern and anger among thousands of NHS workers and their families across the south-west.

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for the opportunity further to reiterate—we have discussed it in the past—that we were not proposing regional pay. I made it clear in my previous role as Secretary of State for Health that we were proposing pay that was more reflective of local labour market circumstances, marketplace and pay. That is capable of being achieved through the “Agenda for Change” framework, and to that extent it is consistent with national frameworks for pay. The consortium of trusts has made it clear that its frustration is borne of the lack of progress in the national pay frameworks.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): The Leader of the House will be fully aware that the 2nd Battalion the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers is due to be cut. That decision is wrong on many levels. It is a fully recruited, highly motivated regiment, in whose 6th Battalion I served. May we please have time in this Chamber to discuss what is blatantly a wrong decision and to put forward the reasons why the 2nd Battalion the Fusiliers should be kept as a line regiment doing the phenomenal job that it has been doing and wants to continue to do for this country?

Mr Lansley: I completely understand the strength of feeling that my hon. Friend expresses. He will have heard, as I did, the Prime Minister’s response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) yesterday. The Prime Minister explained how the reshaping and the changing character of the armed forces were being developed under the Army 2020 arrangements. He was willing to arrange a meeting to discuss that matter, and I simply reiterate that.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the new Leader of the House to his post. We will miss the old Leader of the House, who was essentially a great parliamentarian. He was full of wit and wisdom, and he will be a hard act to follow, but I am sure that the right hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr Lansley) will have a good go at it.

May I raise an important question as the Member of Parliament for Huddersfield? It relates to Pakistan and extradition. Criminals and suspected criminals who flee to Pakistan are almost impossible to track. Ten years ago, eight members of the Chishti family were killed in an arson attack, including the mother, the older children and tiny babies. Three of the gang that did it were arrested, tried and convicted, but one of the prime suspects, Shahid Mohammed, fled to Pakistan. People in Pakistan know where he is. What can we do to track him down, bring him back to face justice and give comfort to the Chishti family?

Mr Lansley: The hon. Gentleman raises an issue that is clearly of great importance to his constituents. I do not know the answer to his question, but I will gladly raise it with my Foreign and Commonwealth Office colleagues and ask them to respond to him.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I say to my former chief at the Conservative research department what a pleasure it is to see one of the most decent people in political life now occupying one of the most distinguished positions in Parliament? In return for

that, may we have a statement from a member of the new Defence ministerial team on the situation of Commonwealth soldiers who would normally be in a good position to apply for citizenship at the end of their service, but who are being prevented by the UK Border Agency, on very questionable grounds such as minor military disciplinary infractions? We owe those soldiers a debt of honour, and they should not be discriminated against in that way.

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I will raise that issue. I know that people feel strongly that service personnel who serve this country should be treated with the greatest respect and honoured as a consequence. My colleagues at the Ministry of Defence will want to reply to him on that matter.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): May I also welcome the Leader of the House to his new position? I should like to take him back to his previous incarnation as Health Secretary. Is he as shocked as I was to find out how much typing work is now being outsourced abroad by hospitals? My freedom of information request has revealed that West Middlesex outsourced 230,000 letters in one year, that Whittington outsourced 90,000, that Epsom outsourced 11,000 in a quarter, and that Kingston outsourced 17,000 in a pilot. Medical secretaries are being laid off as a result. May we have a debate so that the Secretary of State for Health can justify taking away British jobs from British workers?

Mr Lansley: I will of course raise that issue with the Department of Health on the right hon. Gentleman’s behalf, but he might also like to raise it himself in the pre-recess Adjournment debate, which will give Members the opportunity to mention issues of that kind. I was interested to see, in my own constituency a few years ago, that Addenbrooke’s—a major hospital—had outsourced activities of that kind, but that it brought them back to this country as a consequence of seeing the quality of service that could be delivered here.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): In July this year, the Prime Minister said that he fully supported the right of people to wear religious symbols at work. That position was supported by the Attorney-General and the Equalities Minister. Will a Minister therefore come to the Dispatch Box to explain why lawyers acting on behalf of the Government are contradicting the Prime Minister in bringing a case against Shirley Chaplin for wearing a crucifix at work?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr Lansley: I think that that response to my hon. Friend’s question demonstrates the fact that we feel strongly about this matter. People should be able to wear crosses and to reflect their faith and beliefs. The law allows for that, and employers are generally good at being reasonable in accommodating people’s religious beliefs. We believe that the law as it stands strikes the right balance between the rights of employees and employers. We also believe that it is better for the UK to look after its own laws, rather than being forced into a change by a European court. We believe that UK law strikes the right balance, and losing that case would place extra restrictions on how employers treat their work forces. We are not seeking that.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I congratulate the Leader of the House on his new position. May I also express my disappointment that the Government reshuffle did not deliver a Minister for Teesside? I say that because figures from the Office for National Statistics have today shown that South Teesside has moved from 14th to second in the country for its number of households with no work. May we have a statement on why the number of workless households in Teesside has increased so desperately in the past year?

Mr Lansley: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman did not put that in the context of the overall reduction in the number of households with nobody in work, which I believe is very much to be applauded.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate on the appointment of judges, and on how to make them more reflective of public opinion? A great deal of concern has been expressed about lily-livered judges by many people, not least me, and yesterday we heard a judge saying that it took a huge amount of courage to burgle a house, and refusing to send a persistent burglar to prison. How can we ensure that idiots like that do not remain in the judiciary, and that the people who are appointed to the judiciary do not reflect the views of that individual?

Mr Lansley: I am conscious that, in my new privileged position, I stand at a constitutional juxtaposition between the legislature and the Executive. One of the last things I would want to do, on my first occasion at the Dispatch Box, would be to trespass on the relationship between the legislature, the Executive and the judiciary, and in particular on the independence of the judiciary, so I will avoid commenting on that. However, my hon. Friend's observations are on the record.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Yesterday, 500 Teessiders, many of them from my constituency, lost their jobs with Direct Line, which is part of the state-owned RBS Group, not long after apparently having been cajoled into signing new contracts. That means that their redundancy payments will be considerably less; they will lose thousands of pounds as well as their jobs. I am sure that the Leader of the House will agree that such actions are abhorrent, and that the managers must be held to account. Does he know whether the Business Secretary plans to make a statement on the decisions of this state-owned business, and would the Leader of the House allow a debate on the issue?

Mr Lansley: I share the hon. Gentleman's view, as I am sure all Members do, that the prospect of losing one's job can be difficult and that we should all sympathise and do everything we can to help. Indeed, the Government will do everything they can to help, and Governments have done a great deal in the north-east. For example, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chancellor were there recently to see how new investment was going to the north-east as a result of the enterprise zones. I confess that I was in the House only for the latter part of Business, Innovation and Skills questions, so I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was able to raise this matter then. That would have been a good opportunity to do so.

Mike Crockart (Edinburgh West) (LD): Six hundred and fifty million silent calls were made in the UK last year, many of them to vulnerable older people. Forty-five million spam texts are sent in Europe every single year, 92% of which are estimated to be fraudulent, and 3 million UK adults will be scammed out of £800 each this year by fraudulent marketing calls. May we therefore have an urgent debate on the effectiveness of the powers of the Information Commissioner's Office, as it is now clear that we have an industry in crisis and a country under siege?

Mr Lansley: I am interested to hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say. I think that all Members and people outside the House will, almost without exception, have been the recipients of such nuisance calls, which can be very distressing, particularly for older and vulnerable people. He will know that this is exactly the sort of issue that it is helpful to raise, for example, in the pre-recess Adjournment debate, not least because that will focus the mind of the Information Commissioner. In any case, I will make sure that the issue, which touches on the responsibilities of Ofcom and the ICO, is raised with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): When can we debate the apparent ambition of the Prime Minister to rival the work of King James I and David Lloyd George in degrading the honours system? A Select Committee has already criticised the Prime Minister for setting up in March this year, without the knowledge or consent of Parliament, a new Committee dominated by the Whips, which exists to give honours to MPs. The distribution of consolation prizes to sacked Ministers is likely to bring the honours system into further disrepute and ridicule.

Mr Lansley: I do not welcome what the hon. Gentleman says. In this House as elsewhere, we should honour public service. This is a mechanism for honouring public service, and I see absolutely no reason why this Members of this House should be debarred from having access to that kind of honour.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): For the first time in ages, all the shop premises in Holmfirth, a market town in my constituency, are actually let, which is really good news. I know that the Government have been doing their bit to support our town centres with their high street strategy, but could we have a debate on the many "shop local" campaigns, which are working hard to support our local shop centres and businesses and our local producers?

Mr Lansley: I am pleased to hear what my hon. Friend has to say, and I welcome what he said about Holmfirth high street. Indeed, we have accepted and implemented virtually all Mary Portas's review recommendations. I hope that the pilots will show how we can extend some of the lessons further to invigorate high streets across the country—something that, as my hon. Friend illustrates, can be achieved.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I welcome the Leader of the House to his new position and place on record my thanks to the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Sir George Young) for the helpful and courteous way in which he dealt with Back Benchers. I hope that that will continue.

[Valerie Vaz]

Can we have an urgent debate on the Sunday trading laws, given that the announcements outside this House are at variance with the undertakings given inside it? If there is any consultation, will the Leader of the House ensure that retail staff, the unions, the Churches and the Association of Convenience Stores are included?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her kind words about my predecessor. I do hope to emulate in many respects the way in which he fulfilled his responsibilities so wonderfully. As to Sunday trading legislation, however, I do not accept the premise of her question. I do not think there is any variance between what the Government said when we introduced the legislation about the extension of Sunday trading hours during the summer and what has been said subsequently.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): In welcoming my right hon. Friend to his new position as Leader of the House, I would like to reiterate and add my voice to the calls for a debate on the proposal to disband the 2nd Battalion the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers? In particular, we should consider how that decision will affect recruitment opportunities in my Bury North constituency, which has a long and proud history of providing new recruits to the Fusiliers.

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who reiterates on behalf of his constituency a point that is particularly important to it as a location for recruitment. My colleagues in the Ministry of Defence are, through Army 2020, setting about the process of changing not the size but the shape of the armed services, particularly the Army. In that context, they are looking for something that is sustainable, not least because the Army recruits from across the country. I have already mentioned the opportunity for Members to talk to Ministers about this, but in addition, I hope that Members will recognise that this is the sort of issue that is worth raising in the pre-recess Adjournment debate on Tuesday week.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): It was reported yesterday that 50,000 more patients suffering from alcohol problems had been admitted to A and E, bringing the national annual total to a staggering 1.2 million. Again, according to experts, cheap alcohol is to blame. Will the Leader of the House press his Government colleagues to bring forward comprehensive measures to deal with Britain's growing and serious alcohol problems, including a minimum price for alcohol?

Mr Lansley: The hon. Gentleman will no doubt be aware of the alcohol strategy that the Government published several months ago. In itself, that reflected a comprehensive strategy to address the severity of the problem he describes. In that context, data were published only last week on alcohol-related admissions to hospital showing that the previous rates of increase in those hospital admissions under the last Government were considerably greater than those under this Government last year.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I was in the House a lot yesterday, and have been here a lot during the week, but I cannot recall any tribute being given to our

armed forces for how they rescued the security of the Olympics. I may be wrong, but I would like to place on record everyone's thanks to our armed forces. When watching the Olympics on my big television, I often noticed the red and white hackle of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. These soldiers were brought in quickly in an emergency to sort out a problem. I reiterate what colleagues and friends on both sides of the House have said: we need to debate what is happening to English regiments, which may well be needed quickly in the future. I would very much like to have debate on the 2nd Battalion the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and on my own old regiment, the 2nd Battalion the Mercian Regiment, called the Staffordshire Regiment.

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I will not reiterate my earlier points, as the importance of his points is recognised, as are the opportunities to debate the matter before the House rises for the pre-conference recess. I entirely share his view about the fabulous job done at the Olympics by members of our armed services, as I noted from my experience of visiting the Olympic park on one occasion. It is not just that they provided security, but that they did so in such a friendly, welcoming and engaging way.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Can we have a debate on multiple and double jobbing? I am thinking particularly of the large number of Conservative MPs who now have more than one job in government. For example, the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) is not only a Wales Office Minister, but a senior Government Whip. Leaving aside the convention that senior Whips do not normally speak in the Chamber, how do we know which job has his priority?

Mr Lansley: I am absolutely clear that there is no conflict between having a responsibility as part of the Government's business management and having responsibilities on policy and administration. I understand that there is no conflict, because I have such a role: I have responsibilities to this House and I have responsibilities in government, and I see them as equally important.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind the House that there is a further statement to follow. I am keen to accommodate the interest of colleagues in business questions, but if I am to be successful in doing so, brevity from both Back Benchers and Front Benchers alike is now vital.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Can we have a debate on intellectual insanity? The Labour-supporting Institute for Public Policy Research is now arguing that motorists are not suffering enough from high petrol taxes, and is calling for more taxes. Is that not surprising, given that high petrol taxes hit the poorest Britons twice as hard as the rich?

Mr Lansley: I am interested by what my hon. Friend has said. I seem to recall that, according to Einstein, one of the definitions of that kind of insanity was "to keep doing the same thing while expecting a different result". I am afraid that that is what we see from the Labour party day by day.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I, too, pay tribute to the former Leader of the House. I think it is a bit of a shame that he has not been given a knighthood. I know that he is already a baronet, but I thought he could prove that at the age of 70 it was still possible to do “twice a knight”.

Let me now ask a question of real importance. Given that the Government have a massive hole in their programme for the autumn because we lost the House of Lords reform Bill, which was carried by a three-to-one majority, can the Leader of the House do something on behalf of all the Back Benchers in the House, and ensure that the days that would have been allocated to that Bill—10 days, perhaps—can be allocated to Back-Bench business, particularly private Members’ Bills, so that some of the good ideas on the Back Benches can inform the Government?

Mr Lansley: I must confess that I am slightly staggered that the hon. Gentleman now seeks to make a virtue of the fact that he and his party voted by a substantial majority for the principle of House of Lords reform, and then effectively sought to obstruct any progress. My definition of opposition is not obstruction. It may be his definition, but it is not mine.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend to his position. Will he consider arranging a debate on over-zealous health and safety regulation? Apparently my local authority, Crawley borough council, has been told to remove all park benches that are under trees.

Mr Lansley: I hope my hon. Friend will not be surprised to learn that we in the Government have been working actively over the last two and a half years to ensure that common sense is at the heart of the way in which we apply health and safety regulations. It must be evidence-based, common-sense and proportionate. Measures have been taken, but I will certainly draw my hon. Friend’s comments to the attention of my colleagues in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills so that they can continue the process.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): This week, in Westminster Hall, Members held a debate on the shambles that is Atos. When will the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions come to the House to make a statement on what is going on in that organisation? In my constituency I have seen a woman undergoing chemotherapy passed as fit for work, and a veteran who was classed as being more than 40% disabled for the purpose of industrial injuries benefit lose his disability living allowance following an Atos report which referred to him as a woman throughout. When are we going to get some answers in relation to what this organisation is inflicting on disabled people?

Mr Lansley: In terms of business, the hon. Lady is right. The House had an opportunity to debate Atos Healthcare, and I think that she may have received replies from the then Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). I personally know that the work done as a consequence of the Harrington reviews, and what we announced in

July about the recording of tribunal judges’ reasons for overturning decisions on appeal, will enable us continuously to improve the process.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I welcome the Leader of the House to his new post. May I ask him to consider one further fact relating to the 2nd Battalion the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers? It is the only infantry battalion that is being axed for political rather than military reasons, in order to save the more poorly recruited Scottish battalions ahead of the referendum. In fact, no Scottish battalions are being axed. I am married to a Scot and I believe in the Union, but discriminating against the English is not the way for us to achieve our goal.

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend had an opportunity to raise that with the Prime Minister at Prime Minister’s Question Time, and I hope that he will take the opportunity that the Prime Minister gave him to make his points at a meeting. However, I do not recognise his description of the way in which decisions were made. They were made on the basis of an assessment of how the armed services could be sustainable for the future, and could secure representation and maintain recruitment throughout the United Kingdom.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): It is good to see that the Leader of the House is still in the Cabinet, and especially good to know that he will not be steering any legislation through the House in his new position. He will know that the number of university applications from young people in Britain has dropped by nearly 10% for this year, as a direct result of the disastrous decision to raise tuition fees to £9,000. Why will the Government not find time for a debate on the subject—in Government time—rather than leaving it to the Opposition?

Mr Lansley: When the Opposition have wished to present an issue for debate and have chosen the issue of tuition fees, I have announced it as a consequence.

I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his reference to legislation. I wonder whether he meant by it the piece of legislation which, shortly after its introduction, he described as “consistent, coherent and comprehensive”.

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): It is clear from what the Prime Minister said yesterday at Prime Minister’s Question Time, and will be clear from the statement that we shall hear shortly, that a considerable number of initiatives are being taken throughout Whitehall to promote growth and jobs. Indeed, it is sometimes quite difficult to keep up with what is being done. Could the Leader of the House arrange for a quarterly statement to be deposited in the Vote Office, in which every Whitehall Department reports to the House on the initiatives that it is taking to promote growth and the progress of those initiatives?

Mr Lansley: I will of course reflect on my hon. Friend’s suggestion. However, although he says that it is difficult to keep up, the connection between the things that are being done is often very straightforward. For example, our announcement in July of funding for lending that would allow increased access to mortgages at more affordable rates will be followed up by my right

[Mr Lansley]

hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in his statement shortly. While we wish to create more demand for new housing, we also wish to ensure that some sites that have not been developed can be developed in future.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): For the second time in 12 months, the Department for Work and Pensions is planning to close the Old Swan jobcentre. Unemployment in the Old Swan ward has risen by 3% in the last month. Will the Leader of the House find time for the employment Minister to make a statement to the House explaining why he is making it more difficult for my constituents to find jobs?

Mr Lansley: The hon. Lady will have an opportunity to raise that issue during questions to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions next Monday.

Mr Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): I, too, welcome the new Leader of the House, who I am sure will do an excellent job. May I take him back to his old brief for a moment, and ask for a debate about the gross distortions in health care funding that we inherited from the last Government? For instance, in Dorset, which I believe has the largest elderly population in the country, £4,000 is being spent on each cancer patient, while in Tower Hamlets, which contains very few elderly people, the figure is £13,000. We have a grossly distorted inheritance from Labour. In the name of deprivation, Labour distorted health funding and cheated people of the health care that they deserve.

Mr Lansley: A consultation is taking place on the mandate of the NHS Commissioning Board. It will deal with, among other topics, the board's responsibility to allocate NHS resources on the basis of equal access for equal need. If my hon. Friend wishes to make his points again, the board will be able to take them into account when it receives recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation.

Alison Seabeck (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab): I welcome the members of the new team. They will be as surprised as I was to hear what happened to a constituent of mine, a victim of domestic violence. Her screams and the breaking of a window from the inside attracted the attention of the police, but it is she who is now subject to antisocial behaviour powers. Will the Leader of the House please ask the new Home Office team to come to the House and engage in a debate about the way in which domestic violence victims are supported—or not—by police forces around the country?

Mr Lansley: I am surprised, and like the hon. Lady, I am obviously disappointed. I will of course ask whether my colleagues in the Home Office can respond to her on the issue.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): When I spoke recently to Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali, I was informed that there was persecution of Christian and minority communities in 130 out of 190 countries. May we have an urgent debate on tackling this growing problem?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. This matter has exercised Foreign Office Ministers. They have made substantial representations in a number of countries about such situations. I will gladly raise the matter with Foreign Office Ministers and ask them to respond to him.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I welcome the new Leader of the House to his post. Will he explain why only sacked male Ministers received honours, while none of the women who were sacked received honours, despite their having been more senior Ministers?

Mr Lansley: Matters relating to honours are matters for the Prime Minister.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I welcome the new Leader of the House to his post. I know he will do well for the House, as he did day in, day out for the health service in the last two-and-a-half years in government. He

My right hon. Friend was present for the end of Department for Business, Innovation and Skills questions, and he will have heard the representations made about the Post Office. May we have a statement from the new Minister with responsibility for the Post Office about the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency contract? The Government say they support post offices and making them viable front-office businesses. We need to put our money where our mouth is, so we are not at the mercy of a Europe-wide tendering process. Kings Worthy post office and its customers have made many representations to me over the summer, and this decision could very well close the business.

Mr Lansley: I did, indeed, hear the answer rightly given by the new Department for Business, Innovation and Skills Minister. I should put this matter in context. The post office local model is an excellent model, and we are seeing substantial take-up, which is in many instances reviving post office services. The Government are absolutely clear that we will not entertain a process of post office closures, which is what happened under the last Government. On the specific point, this contract process is currently live and it would not be proper for Ministers to comment or interfere during the course of that.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I welcome the new Leader of the House and his deputy to their posts, and as the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr Knight) is on the Treasury Bench, may I also congratulate him on his appointment to his new post of Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household, prompting the headline "MP4 drummer joins Queen"? May we have the debate on the honours system that has just been suggested, because is not giving honours to losers in a reshuffle to console them an example of the "all shall have prizes" culture that the Prime Minister claims to denigrate?

Mr Lansley: I will give the hon. Gentleman the prize of best joke of the day, if I may. I merely reiterate the point I made earlier: in this House, people give public service. It is not simply a job; it is much more than that. People do far beyond what I think people in most jobs

would expect to do. They give of themselves and their time, and their families and their lives, especially when they are in government, as many Opposition Members will know from their past experiences. Being in government is an onerous and demanding task. For example, my parliamentary neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Mr Paice), has had Front-Bench responsibilities for over 22 years. That is a dramatic contribution to public service, and I think it is right that it is properly recognised.

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): Has the Leader of the House had time to see early-day motion 337, standing in my name, welcoming the success of Pendle borough council in promoting tourism over the summer?

[That this House welcomes the success of Pendle Borough Council in promoting tourism; notes that 2012 is the 400th anniversary of the Pendle Witch trials and the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic, whose Bandmaster Wallace Hartley came from Pendle; commends the opening of the Titanic in Lancashire Museum to remember the many Lancastrians caught up in the tragedy; further notes that over the summer events will include the Trawden Agricultural Show and Barrowford Show, the Trawden Garden Festival, the Pendle Cycle Festival, including the Colne Grand Prix Cycle Race, the Pendle Pedal and the Tour of Pendle; further notes that the highlight of the summer for music lovers has to be the Great British Rhythm and Blues Festival in Colne, spanning four days and featuring some of the greatest names in blues, and that the event was named the Best British Blues Festival in the British Blues Awards 2011; further notes that September brings the annual Pendle Walking Festival, which is now the largest in the UK; believes that promoting tourism is vital for economic development across the north of England; and encourages hon. Members to visit Pendle during 2012.]

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman agrees that the tourism sector is vital in the north of England. May we therefore have a debate on this vital sector of the economy?

Mr Lansley: I will perhaps now become more familiar with early-day motions than I have been in the recent past. I will certainly pay attention to the one that my hon. Friend mentions, and he might like to reiterate his important point about tourism at the soon-forthcoming Department for Culture, Media and Sport questions.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): The “rockets and feathers” strategies employed by oil companies are crucifying motorists in Blaenau Gwent, so I welcome the Office of Fair Trading plans to investigate petrol pricing. May we have a debate on how to help our road hauliers and logistics industries to get our economy moving again?

Mr Lansley: I, too, take an interest in this issue, and welcome the OFT call for evidence. I note that the Backbench Business Committee has selected the oil market as a subject for debate, and it would probably be entirely in order for the issues the hon. Gentleman has just raised to be discussed in the course of that debate.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): May we urgently have a debate about the effectiveness of the Government’s bursary scheme for 16 to 19-year-olds? The latest figures show that the proportion of 16-year-olds classed as NEETs—not in education, employment or training—has fallen year-on-year in the second quarter of 2012. Given that this is the first cohort to be affected by the transition from education maintenance allowance to the bursary scheme, does this not show that, despite the hysterical reaction of the Opposition, the scrapping of EMA has not had a negative impact on the number of NEETs, and that the money is now being better spent and better targeted?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend makes important points. The coalition Government have put £180 million into the 16-to-19 bursary fund this year, to enable the most financially disadvantaged young people to participate in education. The most vulnerable young people receive, as a standard amount, £1,200 more than they would have received under EMA.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): May I welcome the dear Leader to his new Front-Bench post? I suspect he will be a very effective Leader of the House—probably more effective than the Prime Minister would strictly want. Is there any sign of a Bill to create a register of lobbyists, which we have been promised for over two years? The Prime Minister said this would be the next big scandal in British politics and he has been proved right. When will a Bill be on the statute book?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I never expected to be called “Leader”; to be called “dear Leader” was beyond my expectations.

At yesterday’s Cabinet Office questions, the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr Letwin), explained the current situation and noted that there have been many responses to the consultation on this matter. They are being seriously considered and he will make a statement in due course.

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): I congratulate the Leader of the House on his appointment. From his previous post, he will be acutely aware of the different approaches to cancer care across the UK. Sadly, my constituents in Wales have less money spent on drugs, longer waiting times and higher mortality rates than those in other parts of the UK. May we have a debate on cancer treatment and the merits of the various approaches, so we can at least show that Wales is getting a worse deal on cancer drugs?

Mr Lansley: I understand, and greatly sympathise with, my hon. Friend’s point, and I will ask my colleagues at the Department of Health to respond to him. The coalition Government should be especially proud of tackling directly the issue of access to new cancer medicines. As a consequence of the Cancer Drugs Fund, more than 12,500 people with cancer have received access to the latest medicines over the last two-and-a-half years who would not have done so under the arrangements the last Government left us.

Speaker's Statement

12.27 pm

Mr Speaker: I thank the Leader of the House and other colleagues. Before I call the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to make his statement, I myself have a brief statement to make.

Mr Greg Knight has written to me in accordance with Standing Order No. 122C giving notice of his wish to resign from the Chair of the Procedure Committee. I therefore declare the Chair vacant. The following will be the arrangements for electing a new Chair of the Procedure Committee. Nominations should be submitted in the Lower Table Office by 12 noon on Tuesday 16 October. Following the House's decision of 26 May 2010, only members of the Conservative party may be candidates in this election. If there is more than one candidate, the ballot will take place on Wednesday 17 October from 11 am to 1 pm, in a Committee Room to be announced. A briefing note with more details about the election will be made available to Members and published on the intranet.

Housing and Planning

12.29 pm

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on housing and planning. The coalition Government inherited a legacy where house building had fallen to its lowest rates since the 1920s, and there was a top-down planning system that built nothing but resentment and a regime of regional planning quangos that created paralysis and confrontation. After six years of preparation, by the general election fewer than 60 councils had completed local plans. The result was no development, no regeneration and no community benefit.

This Government want to get the economy growing, to remove unnecessary red tape and to support locally-led sustainable development. In November, the Government published a comprehensive housing strategy to support a thriving, active and stable housing market. In March, we published a national planning policy framework that condensed 1,000 pages of central planning guidance into just 50. House building is up; it was 29% higher in 2011 than in 2009. However, there is much more to do. So, my Department is announcing a further series of common-sense measures to promote house building and support locally-led economic growth. The technical details were set out in a written statement that I laid before the House, but I will now summarise the key points for hon. Members.

Following on from Sir Adrian Montague's independent report on supporting the private rented sector, we are providing £200 million of new funding to support institutional investment in high-quality rented homes. Thanks to the action we have taken to tackle the previous Government's deficit, we are passing on lower costs of borrowing. We will be issuing a debt guarantee for up to £10 billion to support private investment in the private rented sector and in new affordable housing. We will support up to an additional 15,000 affordable homes through the use of loan guarantees, flexibilities and capital funding. We also intend to extend our successful refurbishment programme to bring an additional 5,000 existing empty homes back into use. The previous Government wanted to demolish Victorian terraces, through John Prescott's pathfinder programme. By contrast, we are getting homes back into productive use. In total, we will invest another £300 million in these measures to support new affordable homes and to bring empty homes into use.

We actively want to support home ownership, which fell under the last Parliament, despite a Labour pledge to increase it by 1 million. We are extending our successful FirstBuy scheme for first-time buyers, with an additional £280 million of funding helping up to 16,500 first-time buyers to purchase a home. To free up more brownfield land for development and regeneration, we will accelerate the release of surplus public sector land and empty offices through a targeted programme of transfers from other Government Departments. We will work with local authorities and developers to unlock locally supported large sites. Just last week, we were able to unblock the Eastern Quarry in the Ebbsfleet valley, a major ex-industrial site that had been stalled for more than a decade.

We are working with local communities and councils, in strong contrast to the previous Government's top-down plans for the so-called "eco-towns", which failed to deliver a single home. But some councils need to raise their game, as they are failing to make planning decisions in a timely way. Planning delays create uncertainty, both for local residents and local firms. We will introduce a series of practical measures to help speed up planning decisions and appeals, and major infrastructure. Some complex developments take time to assemble, so we are allowing for developers to extend the duration of existing planning permissions. We will make it easier for developers to change unrealistic section 106 agreements negotiated at the height of Labour's unsustainable economic boom; these are houses built on foundations of sand which are no longer economically viable after Labour's bust. A development that is not built means no section 106 payments. Common-sense reform will result in more regeneration, more housing and more community benefits.

Sustainable development should go hand in hand with environmental safeguards, so I can confirm that we will protect the green belt, in line with our commitment in the coalition agreement. It has always been the case that councils can amend local green belt boundaries should they wish, and we support councils that choose to do so. They can introduce new green belt protection around new large developments. There is considerable previously developed land in many green belt areas. We encourage councils to make best use of that land, while protecting the openness of the green belt, in line with the requirements of the national planning policy framework.

If we are to protect our countryside, we need to focus more growth in our town centres. So we are introducing measures to make it easier to turn empty commercial buildings into housing. Our high streets will benefit from a greater resident population increasing footfall and supporting local shops. As a nation, we have great pride in our homes. We want to make it easier for families to undertake home improvements, such as building a new conservatory. So we will be seeking to simplify and increase permitted development rights for households. Cutting back municipal red tape in this way should provide a particular boost for small traders and builders. By contrast, the Labour Government wanted to tax conservatories with a council tax revaluation on family homes. The difference could not be clearer.

These practical measures build on the housing, local government finance and planning reforms already in play. They give more power to individuals, to communities and to councils. They provide new incentives to support local shops, local firms and local economic growth. They deliver sustainable development and get the business of building under way. I commend this statement to the House.

12.38 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his oral statement and for the fact that he graciously offered one after my urgent question had been granted. But, once again, Mr Deputy Speaker, we have major changes in policy being announced first to the media and not to the House. We also notice that the Secretary of State has been uncharacteristically silent in recent weeks, while the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chancellor have all been busy changing policy that we all thought he was responsible for.

The Government know that we have a housing crisis, but it is a crisis of their own making. Housing starts fell by 10% last year and affordable housing starts fell by a catastrophic 68%—that was a direct result of the cut in Government funding for affordable housing, which the Secretary of State allowed to happen. The Chancellor has put the economy back into double-dip recession, those who are looking to buy are finding it hard to get mortgages or to raise the deposits needed, and house builders who already have planning permission are not progressing those developments because they do not think that people will buy the houses.

We support measures that will help growth and build more houses—including the debt guarantee—and help first-time buyers. Indeed, we have been urging the Government to bring forward investment in housing. Will the Secretary of State tell the House when he expects that the number of affordable housing starts, which was only 15,000 last year, will match the 54,000 starts achieved in 2009-10 by the last Labour Government? Will he also tell us how many families have benefited to date from the NewBuy scheme?

The fundamental problem is not the planning system and not section 106 agreements, which are very important in providing much-needed affordable housing. The Local Government Association reports that planning permission is already in the system for 400,000 homes—it is the Chancellor's failed economic plan that is preventing them from being built.

On section 106, how many affordable homes does he anticipate will now not be built because of his proposed changes, given that the National Housing Federation said this morning that section 106 provides 35,000 affordable homes a year? Will any replacement homes that manage to be built be built on the same development sites so that we can have mixed communities?

The Deputy Prime Minister suggested on the radio this morning that at present developers have to wait five years before they can renegotiate section 106 agreements. Will the Secretary of State confirm that those agreements can in fact be renegotiated at any time if the parties agree and that a number of local authorities have been doing exactly that because of the current economic circumstances? What evidence will developers be required to produce to show that a scheme is not viable? Will he clarify whether the proposed changes apply only to existing section 106 agreements or also to new ones, given that only last month he announced that for

"all planning obligations agreed after 6 April 2010, the period will remain at five years"?

This morning, the Secretary of State has also just announced in his written statement—I notice that he did not refer to it in his oral statement—a bombshell that threatens local decision making on planning decisions. The written statement laid before the House this morning states that if an authority

"has a track record of consistently poor performance in the speed or quality of its decisions"—

we must ask who will judge that quality—the Government propose

"to legislate to allow applications to be decided by the Planning Inspectorate".

Can he explain why, having consistently denounced centralised decision making, he is now proposing a fundamental change? This is not a technical detail, but

[Hilary Benn]

a fundamental change in which he proposes to take the power in future to decide whether he thinks that local planning decisions are up to scratch. If he does not, planning power will be taken out of the hands of local people. So much for localism. Does he not realise that that will cause alarm up and down the country, including among those on the Benches on both sides of the House?

We have read a great deal about the Chancellor's wish to undermine the green belt, which is much valued by all of us. Will the Secretary of State clarify what is happening? The Chancellor says that it will change, but the Secretary of State says that it will not. Who is right? Why is this shambles occurring?

When does the Secretary of State plan to publish more details on the relaxation of permitted development rights? Will the current height restrictions be maintained? Will he confirm that that will not apply to conservation areas and that where article 4 directions are in place they will remain in place?

Having completed the biggest change in planning policy for a generation earlier this year and trumpeted its success, the Secretary of State, in an extraordinary spectacle, has stood up before the House and, in effect, told us that his planning system is not fit for purpose. When will Ministers stop casting around for somebody and something else to blame, finally admit that it is the Chancellor's failed economic policy has led to a collapse in house building and change course?

Mr Pickles: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for what I think was a partial welcome for these measures. The previous planning Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), had occasion to compare the right hon. Gentleman, whom we all love greatly, to Lady Bracknell. Today, he acceded to Lady Bracknell sucking a wasp.

Given the party the right hon. Gentleman represents, he should remember that under the previous Labour Government the number of social housing units fell by just under 500,000. He wonders why the housing position was so difficult; it was the stewardship of his party that caused the problem.

Let me deal with the various questions that he asked. We will publish the figures on NewBuy very shortly, but I am sure that he will be pleased that it has been welcomed by the sector. That gives people the opportunity to get quality houses that are newly built. On affordable housing, he seems to have missed the point of the statement. We are talking about building additional social houses and will be building up to 15,000. We should celebrate that. The problem with Labour—I say this with lots of respect—is that it seems to think that because a plan has been passed it happens. If social housing is uneconomic and developers build nothing, it does not matter if the ratio for social housing is set at 50%, because 50% of nothing is still nothing. There needs to be a dose of realisation.

There seems to be a misunderstanding among Labour Members about section 106. It can be enormously helpful to builders and gives social housing in certain parts of the country where there is high demand a ready and available customer. In some parts of the country,

however, there have been unrealistic views about what is possible and that is holding back development. That is why earlier this year I wrote to local councils and asked them carefully to consider the process of renegotiation. I am very pleased that, as the right hon. Gentleman said, about 40% responded. I commend them for that and they should be regarded as heroes and as part of the process. However, there still remain a significant number of authorities that have refused to accept the economic realities and that regard this as a badge of honour—

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Name them.

Mr Pickles: I will happily name and shame them in due course.

The question of the green belt is very straightforward. I think people forget what the green belt is about. It is there to act as a buffer between the major conurbations. A certain degree of trickysism occurred under the previous Government, whereby they said that the green belt was growing but essentially pinched the green belt from high-pressure areas where it was needed and redesignated it in places where it was not. We want to make it absolutely clear that the green belt is immensely important, both to London as a green lung and to the wider countryside as part of ensuring that our communities are sustainable. Within the green belt, however, is a lot of land that was previously developed: unused quarry sites and scrap yards, for example. It seems to me to be common sense that we should be able to use this opportunity to swap land—to take a greenfield site that is not in the green belt and to put it in, and to use the former developed land to get development going.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about permitted development rights and I fully recognise that he is a millionaire and an aristocrat, who is probably unused to being able to measure land other than in acres, but speaking as a working class lad who is proud to own a detached house and whose garden is smaller than the right hon. Gentleman's croquet lawn, I must say that we will clearly retain the rights to ensure that the curtilage of houses is respected. Nobody will be able to build beyond halfway up their garden as a maximum and we will not be building enormously into the sky. All those things are related and we will not be building a big extension on Dove cottage in Grasmere.

Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for today's innovative announcement and for the written statement. I particularly welcome the regeneration aspect, which will be led by the community, hand in hand with developers. It is very important to all our constituents that they know that this is not the floodgates opening and that it will be done hand in hand with the community.

Mr Pickles: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. Of course this is about localism; it is about working closely with local authorities. It has been very refreshing to work with local authorities that are willing to renegotiate. The right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) should feel fairly cheerful, as many of them have been Labour authorities—we work with anybody. We have been very willing to help and be part of the process, because many local authorities perhaps lack the necessary

experience to renegotiate a section 106 agreement. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that this is about putting the community in control.

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East) (Lab): We have heard much talk today about affordable housing and social housing. The reality of social housing in London is that between April and September last year only 56 new social rented homes were started, in a city of 7 million people. Is that acceptable?

Mr Pickles: That is why these measures are necessary and why we will be working hand in glove with London local authorities. Only yesterday I heard a quotation used in the housing debate stating how well things were going with regard to social housing in London and praising Mayor Johnson, indirectly, for that process. The hon. Lady should not be confrontational. She should join us so that we can work together, hand in hand, to increase the amount of social housing and affordable housing. That is certainly our intention and why an additional sum for flexibility, including guarantees on borrowing and the like, will be available to help the process.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and thank him for it. With regard to the conservatory policy, will he give the House an assurance that new technologies will be used so that, if the planning process is fast-tracked, they will not increase the risk of future flooding?

Mr Pickles: One of my more poignant memories of opposition is of being with my hon. Friend in her constituency and looking at the devastation caused by flooding. I pay tribute to her hard work locally on that and am pleased that additional anti-flood measures have been put in place. Clearly that is something we have to consider, but I am sure that she will recognise that the conservatories and extensions will not be freestanding; they will be part of existing dwellings.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The statement is a continuation of the Government's attacks on the planning system as being responsible for all our ills. The only difference, of course, is that now the planning system they are attacking is the one the Secretary of State has just created. I wish to ask two simple questions. First, how can it possibly be localist to transfer planning decisions at first instance from elected local councils to the Planning Inspectorate? Secondly, how can we have any assurance that the number of affordable houses being built will increase when there is not a single mention here of the role of local authorities in building homes and when the number of homes built for housing associations will decline as section 106 agreements are revisited?

Mr Pickles: The hon. Gentleman has considerable experience in these matters, so I am surprised by his reaction, because this is about working hand in hand with local people. There might be a degree of muscular localism about it, but we will work together with good local authorities. It is only those local authorities that have been dragging their feet and being wholly unrealistic, operating in a kind of economy la-la land, that we will be dealing with. He should see this as an act of help and

friendship towards local authorities, many of which have responded magnificently to the process of getting houses built. After all, the Labour party never contemplated anything like the guarantee we are offering on social houses; it was too radical for it. I think that we, the Deputy Prime Minister and our coalition partners have been most bold in taking this decision.

Annette Brooke (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): Section 106 agreements have been a really important vehicle for providing affordable housing. If such an agreement is renegotiated for sound and independently assessed reasons, will the council involved be provided with alternative means to provide those much-needed homes?

Mr Pickles: Absolutely. The alternative means will be a touch of realism about the process, which will help. My hon. Friend makes an important point. As well as the process of renegotiation, we are looking at being able to deliver an additional 15,000 affordable homes, on top of what we have already announced. It is a measure of the kind the Opposition would never have dared advocating. I know that she is a keen observer of the media, so she might recall that when the former Prime Minister was interviewed on "Newsnight" he said that the housing market was essentially a private one and that there was a good case for the withdrawal of much of state aid.

Mr Nick Raynsford (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): May I draw attention to my interests in the register? Will the Secretary of State tell us the distinction between the doctrine of muscular localism, which he has just announced, and heavy-handed, top-down centralism?

Mr Pickles: If the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me for saying so, he represented the heavy hand of centralism and I represent muscular localism.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): The confirmation of green belt protection and the fact that county councils will retain responsibility for it are very welcome. We have thousands of empty homes in Newcastle and Northumberland that are not being utilised, so I welcome the further funding. Will the Secretary of State send forth the message that it is those empty homes that will benefit from the refurbishment money and those brownfield sites that local authorities should be building on, not green-belt rural sites?

Mr Pickles: My hon. Friend should also remember the new homes bonus, which is available for getting houses back. The place where I lived a quarter of a century ago in Bradford has benefited enormously as a result of getting homes that were previously not occupied back into use. He makes a very reasonable point about the amount of brownfield land that can be developed, and this is a way we can get building going.

Mr Kevan Jones: For small builders in my constituency, such as Simon Smith, who builds conservatories and extensions, planning is not the problem; the problem is the fact that there is no demand in the economy and even those who are in work are shying away from adding extra developments to their houses. He has had to lay three people off as a result. With regard to

[Mr Kevan Jones]

extensions and the liberalisation on building on gardens, who will arbitrate in disputes between neighbours? Also, in the last Parliament the Conservative party argued strongly against building on gardens. Is that policy now dead?

Mr Pickles: Clearly the change does not allow the old system of garden grabbing. We will be consulting, so Mr Simon Smith will be able to make a contribution—*[Interruption.]* Indeed, I think the hon. Gentleman can go back to Mr Smith and say, “I’ve been down to the Commons and I think you might make a bob or two out of this.” I think he should go out with him at the weekend to leaflet places and get some business going for him. With regard to arbitration between neighbours, we are expecting people to operate in a neighbourly fashion, and there are the safeguards on curtilage and for ensuring that no more than half the garden is built on. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman feels so strongly about this, he should consider making representations during our consultation period. He shakes his head, but he is denying the aspirations of ordinary people. He kindly demonstrates that the Labour party is never on the side of those who aspire.

Sir Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): Will the Secretary of State give an assurance that his statement is not a green light for bad planning? If the glass is full, trying to add another pint will have disastrous consequences for the existing and new populations. I invite him to consider whether building 2,000 houses on the fields of west Mile End, in the fastest growing town in Britain, to be served by a mile-long cul-de-sac, is good planning.

Mr Pickles: My hon. Friend has frequently invited me to Colchester, and I think he will concede that I have frequently attended Colchester on his behalf. As he has shown me all these things, I must now exclude myself from the deliberations.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Residents in Walthamstow will be desperately concerned to hear talk of helping developers to overcome local decision making, given that we have spent nine years and four years respectively trying to restore our cinema and our dog track to help our local economy. The Secretary of State talks of wanting to give local communities the power to make such decisions, so will he meet me to discuss what more can be done when the settled will of local people is so clearly in favour of an alternative solution, to help them to make sure that developers are not the roadblock to reform?

Mr Pickles: The hon. Lady and I have spoken about this in the past, and she has made a number of points about development on Walthamstow dog track. Of course I will meet her again, and it would be good if we could work towards a solution, because she has a very strong interest—I do not mean financially—in getting it right. As someone who spent an evening there when it was a dog track, I recognise how important it is to the local community.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his pragmatic approach. If Labour Members do not think that planning is the problem, I am not sure which world they are living in, because planning is the

problem. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will accept that permitted development rights are merely an extension of what was there already.

Mr Pickles: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, who made an enormous contribution to the national planning policy framework. The truth is that good planning can be the most exciting thing a community can do when it allows people to mould and build things that they are proud of, but not when it becomes a blundering reason for saying no and not really listening to local people or letting them work through their ideas. This proposal will enhance what we are already doing. After all, there is no policy change. Basically, there are a couple of smaller changes—one introduces a three-year extension and the other refers to section 106, which we were already consulting on. The NPPF remains absolutely in place. We promised the House that we would deal with procedural matters, and we are now doing that.

Mr Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State recognise that increasing permitted development rights will cause great concern and alarm in many residential areas such as mine? Will this apply to all areas, including conservation areas, or are conservation areas excluded? If they are excluded, then why conservation areas and not others?

Mr Pickles: Conservation areas are excluded.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I ask the Secretary of State to focus specifically on his brief reference to major infrastructure projects? The greatest threat to my constituency, in all my years representing it, was the prospect of a huge container port being built on sensitive land on the edge of the New Forest at Dibden bay. That was ruled out after a year-long public inquiry. Is my right hon. Friend saying that in future such decisions will be taken more quickly, but that the bar that has to be crossed to reach agreement will remain as high as it was in the past?

Mr Pickles: Of course the process will remain balanced. We introduced the presumption in favour of sustainable development so that the balance between the environment, business and heritage could be finely drawn. As somebody who sees planning inspectors’ reports reasonably regularly—a joy that my hon. Friends the new Ministers will now have—I know that they are clearly taking very seriously the mechanism of looking at those three pillars of sustainable development.

Natascha Engel (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): How does the Secretary of State propose to prevent developers from using this as another opportunity to build on greenfield land—not green belt, but greenfield—instead of being forced to build on the banks of brownfield land for which they already have planning permission?

Mr Pickles: The hon. Lady needs to understand that section 106 is about agreed development—it is not about inviting developers to look at other sites but about existing permissions. The Local Government Association helpfully points out that there are about 400,000 permissions for dwellings. That strengthens our case, because a lot of those developments are locked by section 106. We will go about them on a case-by-case

basis, and developers will have to demonstrate that the development is uneconomic in order for the section 106 provision to be renegotiated. We have played a big part in the process with local authorities that have started it, and it works out extremely well in the sense that social housing then starts to be delivered. This package will deliver housing in a more realistic way.

Dan Rogerson (North Cornwall) (LD): The right hon. Gentleman is clearly still a strong advocate of conservatory values in Government. Does he agree that the case-by-case aspect of his section 106 proposals will be crucial because it will mean that in areas such as mine, which have suffered from plenty of housing being available for second homes but not enough affordable housing being available for local people, those specific circumstances may be taken into account so that the very welcome extra money he has announced for social housing will go as far as it can, along with market housing at the right price for local people?

Mr Pickles: I am delighted to say that from tomorrow we will be open for bids for this, and that the call-in procedures will be implemented as I walk out of the door today. Quite a lot of this is happening over the next few days.

Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): The House is still not clear about the policy on green-belt land. The Minister has not allayed the fears raised in the Chancellor's recent statement. He seems to suggest that as long as some replacement land is declared green belt, we can have a free-for-all on the current green belt. Will he categorically assure the House that green belt land will be protected as it always has been?

Mr Pickles: Yes.

Tessa Munt (Wells) (LD): Will the Secretary of State clarify the situation in one respect? He says that he is seeking to simplify and increase permitted development for household conservatories. May I ask him to be mindful of the fact that in Somerset, the area I represent, housing is very expensive, which has an impact on rents? In dispersed rural communities, there is a serious danger that when small homes are extended their price becomes out of reach to single people, first-time buyers or people starting new families. Will there be some protection to make sure that small homes do not get lost in the system?

Mr Pickles: There are certain restraints on small homes, which is why the existing policy on permitted development rights was 3 metres for houses. This would extend it to roughly 6 metres, provided it does not extend beyond half the garden. I use the example of conservatories just for shorthand—this is clearly about extensions. We should bear in mind that extensions also fulfil a social need. Often, people want a larger home to take care of an elderly parent, or they may want to take in a member of their extended family. I do not think that we should forget that this will also generate quite a lot of money in the local economy.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Has the Secretary of State begun to quantify the extent to which relaxing planning regulations on conservatories will stimulate the local economy in real terms? Does he have any figures to demonstrate that?

Mr Pickles: I think I can help. I think that an independent report suggested that, because of the changes we are making to house construction in England, the cost of constructing a similar house in Wales will increase by slightly over £13,500. If we measure that against the cost of Labour bureaucracy, we see that we are taking a £13,500 tax off of building houses.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I should probably declare an interest, because at the weekend I had a conservatory priced for my two-up, two-down terrace, which, sadly, I cannot afford to buy. Will the Secretary of State confirm that nothing in the proposals will affect or water down any of the planning rules or regulations on flood risk and drainage requirements?

Mr Pickles: I hope that my hon. Friend is not trying to outdo me as a working-class hero. Clearly, this does not represent a watering down—it is strengthening what we are doing. Part of the problem, particularly with the green belt, which is there as a quality buffer between conurbations, is the suggestion that this suddenly means that it will be open season on the green belt. That is clearly not the case. The green belt is what makes this country what it is, but not every little bit of it is a beautiful, shining field—some of it is a scrapyard and some of it is a disused quarry. We can see what can be done for quality housing simply by taking a day trip to Kent to look at what we have done in Ebbsfleet.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Could the Secretary of State clarify whether he is effectively taking all the planning powers away from local authorities and calling in all local decisions? What is the position regarding the right to light and the right to amenities?

Mr Pickles: The right to light and the right to amenities are completely unaffected by this. [*Interruption.*] That certainly is not the case. All I am seeking to do is align my call-in powers with my recovery powers—to make them identical. I have always had the power to call in large developments by way of recovery.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): The Secretary of State rightly says that the Government support locally led housing developments, and I welcome that. Can I be sure that no top-down decision will be made in respect of the CALA Homes site in my constituency, where the local council, Winchester city council, is doing exactly what the Government want by developing a locally driven and locally accountable local plan?

Mr Pickles: That sounds to me like the kind of world that we would all like to occupy. Obviously, I cannot prejudice any decision that I might make as a planning Minister, but that seems to me to be a happy place to be.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State accept that in areas such as mine, which is under enormous pressure for houses in multiple occupation, his proposals on domestic extensions risk an explosion of unsightly and unneighbourly developments that will degrade residential areas and, to repeat a phrase that he used earlier, the aspirations of those who live there?

Mr Pickles: Well, there speaks the voice of moderate Labour: “If you live in a house, forget about a conservatory. If you live in a small house, forget about an extension. They’re not for the likes of you, my lad—we preserve those things for the toffs.”

Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for the boost to the home-owning democracy that this party believes in. Does he agree that we shall take no lessons on top-down interference from a party that introduced targets on non-determination—13-week determinations and 26-week determinations—and then sent in the planning inspectors and chopped off the planning delivery grant when councils did not perform? That was top-down interference.

Mr Pickles: My hon. Friend gives a far better answer than I could to the right hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr Raynsford). The reality is that this works with local people and local councils. It is not like sending in the commissioners.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): With starts for social homes down by 97% and those for affordable homes down by 68%, will the Secretary of State now apologise for slashing the affordable homes budget, which has led to swathes of flattened land and boarded-up housing in parts of my constituency?

Mr Pickles: This is my advice to the hon. Lady: do not take a Whip’s question, because invariably the figures are dodgy. [*Interruption.*] My Whips are a saintly bunch. The level of support that we are offering is not materially different from the previous Chancellor’s planned reductions. The hon. Lady cannot get away from that or from the fact that her party promised not five eco-towns but 10, yet not one foundation has been laid for any building. She should think about that before she takes a Whip’s question.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): The constituency of South Dorset—one of the most beautiful in the land—has always been under pressure from housing. Will our muscular, working-class hero reassure our local councillors that in south Dorset they—and they alone—will have the final say on who builds what where?

Mr Pickles: Provided that they work in partnership with the local community, and provided that they ensure that housing needs are met for future generations of people who want to live and work in and enjoy that beautiful county, and whose children want to be able to stay there, the answer is, of course, yes.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I am not convinced by the Secretary of State’s arguments about the green belt. In many urban areas such as mine, the green belt has been the last buffer protecting open space for urban communities. We have had to fight green-belt encroachment by developers in places such as the Tame valley. Will the Secretary of State explain whether his surplus public land includes playing fields and recreational space?

Mr Pickles: Of course it does not. That hare did not even get off the ground. [*Interruption.*] I do not know whether Opposition Members are jesting, but a hare is like a large rabbit. We are talking about property owned

by Government and land held by my Department, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I can safely assure the hon. Gentleman that, on land transfers, we are not looking at local playing fields—do not be ridiculous.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): I welcome almost all of the Secretary of State’s statement, but does he agree that space for growth cannot be infinite, especially in very high-demand areas, and that, despite the statement’s threat of new powers for planning inspectors, a council’s right to designate and protect local green spaces close to urban areas should remain intact under the national planning policy framework?

Mr Pickles: The national planning policy framework has not been changed one jot. This is administrative work to ensure that the decisions envisaged by that document are delivered. I am sure that my hon. Friend and his council will grasp this opportunity positively to enhance the local green belt and to look at any part of it that might reasonably be regarded as redundant.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): If the Secretary of State is keen to accelerate the building of affordable housing, will he comment on the concerns about the speed at which existing funding available through the Homes and Communities Agency for affordable housing is being disbursed? Will he undertake to consider what more can be done to get all that money out in good time, so that building can be completed before the 2014-15 deadline, including in local authorities such as my one of Trafford, which has a high need for affordable housing and could be ready to progress with development quickly?

Mr Pickles: If there is a specific issue with Trafford, I am sure that the new housing Minister will meet the hon. Lady to discuss it. The Homes and Communities Agency did a pretty good job last year and got ahead of its target for the delivery of affordable housing. We should commend it for that.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): In my constituency, Labour-controlled Nuneaton and Bedworth borough council is delaying the implementation of a local plan unnecessarily, much to the detriment of many of my constituents, who are effectively seeing planning by default at the Planning Inspectorate. What more can my right hon. Friend do to put pressure on the council to do the right thing by the people of my constituency and take up the responsibility that they have been given to put in place a local plan?

Mr Pickles: Without a local plan, development depends more particularly on each application. That makes the process more difficult, time consuming and complex. By refusing to make reasonable progress towards a local plan, the council is harming the environment rather than aiding it, because it is denying local people the opportunity to mould their environment—their villages or towns—in a way that will enable future generations to remain proud of where they live.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): My constituency was flooded badly in 2007 with surface water. What thought has been given to the flood risk of extending permitted development?

Mr Pickles: With respect to the hon. Lady, I have already answered that question. To reiterate, we are talking about extensions to existing buildings. She makes a reasonable point about surface water, but the effect of the additions that we are talking about will be infinitesimal compared with that of Labour's neglect of our flood defences.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): I urge the Secretary of State, while he is finding more work for planning inspectors at failing councils, to say that planning inspectors should not be allowed to overturn the decision of a well-performing council when it rejects a planning application on reasonable grounds. The thing that most annoys local people is when an application is rejected by their elected councillors on reasonable grounds and the decision is turned aside for no good reason.

Mr Pickles: I do not like the decisions that I make being turned around either, but we must always ensure that people who apply for planning permission are treated fairly and reasonably. That is why we have an appeals system. In my experience, both from taking planning decisions myself and from what might best be described as our mystery shopping exercises on decisions that have been made over the last couple of years, reasonable objections are by and large upheld by planning inspectors, with just one or two exceptions such as those to which my hon. Friend refers, although I am not talking about that specific area.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): There are several brownfield sites in my constituency, including one bordering Stockton town centre that has planning permission for hundreds of homes, but nothing has happened since the Government came to power, thanks to sluggish policy making. The Secretary of State spoke about unblocking such sites, so may I tell my local communities that he will ensure that brownfield sites in the area will be developed soon and that the need for expansion into greenfield sites on Teesside will be reduced?

Mr Pickles: The hon. Gentleman is a Member of Parliament and a person of influence, so he should get a wiggle on and get things cracking in his local patch. *[Interruption.]* Not a wig, my dear chum, although you are follicly challenged like me. The new framework gives people who care deeply about their locality, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman does, an opportunity to work with local councils and local developers to get something going.

Lorely Burt (Solihull) (LD): One of the first things that the Secretary of State did when we came into government was to help end the practice of garden grabbing, which was prevalent in my constituency of Solihull and many other constituencies. Will he guarantee that nothing that the Government are introducing will bring back that unpopular practice?

Mr Pickles: One hundred per cent. I give an absolute guarantee. The hon. Lady can hold the Focuses in check.

Alison Seabeck (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to my indirect interests. I have concerns about the conservatory policy, because I think

it will be a lawyers' charter. Will the Secretary of State confirm that where local communities, working alongside their local councils and using all the powers in the Localism Act 2011, have identified a significant local need for social and affordable housing, the new policy will not allow developers simply to ride roughshod over that, supported by the new centralised powers, and override what the local community says it wants and needs? Government Members are living in dreamland if they do not think that will happen.

Mr Pickles: I think that the hon. Lady had to put that last sentence in to retain her credibility on the Labour Benches. The truth is that this policy is intended precisely to allow local people to get together and look towards the development of social housing. I represent a different kind of constituency from the hon. Lady's, but I can think of a number of villages in my area that have got together to look for social housing, have gone out of their way to identify sites and have worked with housing associations to bring in that development. That is exactly the kind of development that we are talking about. That is why we are announcing an additional sum to deliver 15,000 more affordable houses on top of what we have promised. If she has a place in mind, she should get cracking with her local council and developers, and get the application in tomorrow.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): If we could please have brief, single questions, I will get all hon. Members in.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend keep pushing for houses to be built on brownfield sites first and keep bringing empty homes back into use? I welcome the £300 million. With the figures that are being bandied around, will he clarify what number of houses have planning permission and are ready to be built?

Mr Pickles: Clearly, the figure changes almost hourly. It would not be unreasonable to use the figure of 400,000 houses, which has been used by the LGA. It is there or thereabouts. These proposals are necessary to unlock that process and to allow good local authorities to deliver growth.

Mrs Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Further to the Secretary of State's answers on the simplification of and increase in the development rights of householders, will he say exactly what redress and legal rights will be given to neighbours who have an objection and find that good will is not the answer?

Mr Pickles: The same as they currently have.

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): My constituency has seen unprecedented numbers of new developments over recent years, yet across Leeds 20,000 dwellings remain unbuilt and more than 14,000 are empty. What assurances can my right hon. Friend give me and particularly my constituents, who were suspicious of the planning policies effected by the previous Government, that the changes will mean brownfield sites being used first, and that sites such as Kirklees Knowl and Rawdon Billing, which

[Stuart Andrew]

are as important to my constituents as the Yorkshire dales are to the whole nation, will remain greenfield sites?

Mr Pickles: That is a specific area that I know, and a lot of those spaces around Leeds bring their communities together, which is important. My hon. Friend's question raises the problems that we have had, because Labour gave planning such a bad name that it has been difficult to regain the British people's trust in the system over the past two years. I hope that, building on the national planning policy framework, the new measures will lead the British people to understand that planning is on their side.

Gavin Barwell (Croydon Central) (Con): I warmly welcome what the Secretary of State said about the green belt, town centres and the temporary waiver of unrealistic section 106 agreements. However, if we have done everything we can to remove developers' excuses for not developing, why does it make sense to allow them to extend the duration of existing planning permissions?

Mr Pickles: We have recognised that section 106 agreements and existing planning permissions are often part of the same thing, and that it takes a bit of time to get work on big sites together. We are expecting an increase in the number of applications anyway, so it would make no sense to increase the number artificially. We therefore took the decision at the beginning of the summer to extend existing permissions, which was a sensible and pragmatic thing to do.

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): I am a school governor at Whitefield infant school in Nelson, which is located in the 33rd most deprived ward in the UK and was promised a complete rebuild back in 2009. Since that time a protracted planning process, with obscure objections from a number of unaccountable bodies, has added more than £1 million to the cost of building the school and pushed back the building date by three years from March 2011 to 2014 at the absolute earliest. The objections have been overcome, but the compulsory purchase order for the site is now stuck with the national planning casework team in the DCLG. Will the Secretary

of State agree to meet me to discuss that school building project, which is absolutely critical to housing regeneration in my area?

Mr Pickles: I understand that my hon. Friend wasted no time in lobbying the new planning Minister on the subject, and there are officials in the Box who will have heard his question. On my return to the office, I will be expecting an explanation.

Mr Adrian Sanders (Torbay) (LD): Due to low incomes and high property values, there is enormous demand for secure-tenancy, regulated-rent housing in the far south-west. How will the Government ensure that that highly localised demand for social housing will be met, and that the new funds that are being made available for social housing will not end up in other areas of the country where demand is less acute?

Mr Pickles: My hon. Friend should take the advice that I have given to a lot of Members, which is that they should go and see their local authority, talk to developers and get the bids in. One of the things that we have been keenest on has been getting private money into social and affordable housing, which the Labour party was also keen to do. Following the Montague report, we have a real chance to do that. That is why additional money has been made available to pump-prime the system. I hope that all Members will work actively with their local authorities and developers to build things that they can be proud of.

Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): When the Secretary of State mentioned Grasmere, my thoughts turned to the wonderful Lake District national park on this splendid autumn day. That national park authority, like some others in England, gives planning permission only for local affordable housing. Has he given any thought to how his proposals, which I broadly support, will be implemented in national parks, and has he consulted the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on that matter?

Mr Pickles: Special rules apply to national parks. I think I made it absolutely clear that we are not looking at building a big extension to Dove cottage. We do not want artificially to change parts of the country that rely heavily on tourism, with which the nation is familiar and where it spends its leisure time. The nation is rightly proud of buildings in such areas.

Point of Order

1.35 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. You may have noticed yesterday, when my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (John Robertson) was presenting his ten-minute rule Bill on pre-payment meters and levels of debt, that none of the three Energy and Climate Change Ministers was present on the Treasury Bench. Can you confirm that it is customary for an appropriate Minister to attend when a Bill to do with their Department is being presented? If that is the case, have you received an explanation or apology from any of the DECC Ministers for their non-attendance?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I can confirm that it is a courtesy for a relevant Minister to be present during a ten-minute rule Bill. However, I am sure that the House will want to be a little generous about what was going on yesterday, as there may have been some confusion as to who was doing what in Government Departments. In fact, I think I was the only person not waiting by my telephone yesterday.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Oh no you weren't!

Mr Deputy Speaker: I see there were a few others. I am sure that normal service will now be resumed.

BILL PRESENTED

INFRASTRUCTURE (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 50)

Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, Secretary Vince Cable, Mr Secretary McLoughlin, Danny Alexander, Greg Clark, Mr David Gauke and Sajid Javid, presented a Bill to make provision in connection with the giving of financial assistance in respect of the provision of infrastructure.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 66) with explanatory notes (Bill 66-EN).

Backbench Business

Immigration

1.37 pm

Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House calls on the Government to take all necessary steps to reduce immigration to a level that will stabilise the UK's population as close as possible to its present level and, certainly, significantly below 70 million.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for North East Derbyshire (Natascha Engel) and the Backbench Business Committee for providing time for the House to debate this topic, which is of fundamental importance to the future of our country and which badly needs to be addressed on more occasions in this House and the other place. I welcome the new Minister for Immigration, with whom I hope the cross-party group on balanced migration will be able to have as good a relationship as we did with his predecessor.

This debate is in response to a petition launched by Migration Watch UK on the Government's website last autumn, which acquired more than 100,000 signatures within a week. That clearly indicates the grave public concern about the scale of immigration to this country.

We can, of course, all agree that immigration is a natural and essential part of an open economy. There is absolutely no doubt that many immigrants make a most valuable contribution to our society, and I hope that we can take that as read in this debate. The real issue that must concern the House and all our fellow citizens is the scale of immigration. Heads must come out of the sand.

We are currently experiencing the greatest wave of immigration to our country in nearly 1,000 years. One of the worst of the many appalling legacies that the last Labour Government, in their folly, bequeathed this country was their chaotic, ill thought out and deeply irresponsible policy on immigration, which has led to bogus colleges being allowed to flourish by the hundred; nearly half a million asylum files being found lying around in warehouses; a Home Office that, after a decade of Labour government, was declared by Labour's own Home Secretary to be "not fit for purpose"; a new so-called points-based system that has turned out to be a bureaucratic nightmare; and a fivefold increase in net immigration from 50,000 when Labour came into government to 250,000 when it left.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Nicholas Soames: I will not; I will continue, if I may. The outcome was a total of 3.5 million foreign immigrants, during which time 1 million British citizens left our shores. As the Institute for Public Policy Research put it,

"It is no exaggeration to say that immigration under new Labour has changed the face of the country."

All that took place in the teeth of public opinion, and without any proper consultation or debate. Public concern—indeed anger—has been mounting, and opinion polls paint an unmistakable and chastening picture. There are, of course, positive aspects. All of us know that immigration has had a positive effect on entrepreneurial

[*Nicholas Soames*]

skills, premier league football, film, music, art and literature, as well as on food and restaurants. None of that is in dispute but, as I have said, the issue is one of scale.

The most immediate effect of the wave of immigration has been on our population. The results of the 2011 census show that in the past 10 years, the population increase in England and Wales was the largest for any period since census taking began in 1801. Looking ahead, if net migration continues at 200,000 people a year—the average over the past 10 years—we will find that our population hits 70 million in 15 years' time.

Let us be clear about what that means. We would see a population increase of 7.7 million people, nearly 5 million of whom would be purely as a result of new immigrants and their children. Numbers of that kind are hard to grasp, so let me put it like this: in the coming 15 years, just for new immigrants and their families, we will have to build the equivalent of eight of the largest cities outside the capital—Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield, Bradford, Bristol and Glasgow—together with the associated social infrastructure of schools, roads, hospitals, railways and all the rest. Perhaps those who support the continuation of mass immigration will explain where the money will come from to cope with such numbers, particularly at a time when the Government are borrowing £1 for every £4 they spend.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Nicholas Soames: I will not. There are some who try to wave away those figures on the basis that they are only projections. The fact is, however, that for the past 50 years the Office for National Statistics has been accurate to plus or minus 2.5% on its 20-year projections. The other claim is that Britain is not really crowded. That, of course, is a matter of opinion, and the public are crystal clear on it.

Faced with that chaotic situation, the Government have gone about things in the right way. They have carried out a careful and thorough review of the three major immigration routes: students, economic migration and marriage. I commend my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the former Immigration Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green), for their grasp of the issues and their determination to tackle them.

This House should be under no delusion: the public demand and expect the Government of this country to deal with and fix these matters. The most recent numbers are rather disappointing, but it is too early to expect any substantial effect on net immigration. Last week's figures apply only to the first full year of the coalition Government, and that time was needed to review the complex system that they inherited.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Nicholas Soames: I will not because I have a very short period of time in which to speak. Of course, the rules cannot be changed for those who have already arrived. Numbers will come down, but a renewed effort is needed.

Where should that effort lie? I do not suggest any early changes to the regulations on economic migration. Business needs stability and predictability, as well as a system that works quickly and effectively. The first priority, therefore, must be to reshape the shambolic points-based system that was introduced in the last years of the Labour Government and has resulted in hundreds—about 800—pages of guidance, as well as enormously long forms to be filled in by applicants for visas or work permits. I will be writing to my hon. Friend the Immigration Minister about some particularly disgraceful and inefficient episodes in that regard, concerning distinguished people who need to come to this country and whom the country wishes to welcome.

Instead of relying on the common sense of an experienced immigration officer, we now rely only on a box-ticking exercise, which is emphatically not the right way to proceed. The last straw was the introduction of the hub-and-spoke system where decisions are often taken in a consulate miles away—indeed, frequently in a different country altogether—with none of the local knowledge that is vital in such decisions. The futile attempt to base decisions on so-called objective criteria is, in practice, impossible given the huge variety of circumstances among the 2 million visa applications received every year. Common sense has gone out the window. Bureaucracy has taken over and the Government must deal urgently with the issue and get it fixed.

The Government must now take four steps. First, as I have explained, they must move away from this disastrous experiment and get some rational thought into individual immigration decisions. Secondly, they must greatly expand the number of student interviews to ensure that bogus students are refused. There is clear evidence from the National Audit Office and the Home Office pilot scheme that tens of thousands of bogus students have been admitted to this country in recent years. Thirdly, the Government must reduce the validity of visitor visas to three months, and strengthen the powers of immigration officers so that an element of judgment is reintroduced for visitors as well as students. Finally, they must strengthen the removal system, and especially its link with decisions that visas should not be extended.

That will require further sustained effort over many years. The devil will always be in the detail, but the outcome is of the first and most critical importance for the future and stability of the life of our country. The Prime Minister has given his word that the Government will bring net migration down to tens of thousands. Failure to do so will leave our population rising inexorably, pressure on our already hard-pressed public services building up relentlessly and, as a result, mounting social tension. We must stop that happening. I commend the Government's actions thus far, but I warn them, and the House, that the stakes are high. There is a long way to go, difficult decisions to take, and the time scales are unforgiving.

We must all seek at every possible occasion to speak candidly about the serious social and policy implications of mass immigration, and continue to search for an effective, humane and fair way ahead that will command the support of the British people.

1.48 pm

Mr Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): I follow with pleasure my right hon. Friend—in the circumstances of the debate—the Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas

Soames). I underscore his introductory remarks, particularly those addressed to the Backbench Business Committee, which responded so quickly to a request for a debate, and the welcome extended to the new Immigration Minister. It is puzzling why such an effective Immigration Minister should have been moved in the reshuffle to some other task, but we do not need to ponder such questions too much.

My main thanks today go to those voters who quickly seized the opportunity to sign a petition to try to trigger this debate. I believe that the numbers passed 100,000 in record time, and before the authorities could take down the petition, another 38,000 had put their names to it. The huge demand out there is clear, and the House of Commons is correct to respond to it, so my thanks go above all to the voters around the country who wanted the debate to take place.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way; he shows a courtesy that the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) did not. This nasty little motion mentions “all necessary steps”. Does he realise how authoritarian that sounds? The right hon. Member for Mid Sussex mentioned four steps, but what other “necessary steps” would the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) propose?

Mr Field: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman’s introductory remark, but I gave way because I do not have such a carefully crafted speech as my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex had. If the hon. Gentleman can bear with me until I reach the end of my contribution, he will know what steps I would like the Government to take.

I want to raise three issues and to pose three questions for the Government, first on the Olympics, secondly on the mountain we must climb, and thirdly on the action that the Government need to take if they are to fulfil a pledge that is supported not merely by Conservative voters, but by Labour voters.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Field: No—not for a moment anyway.

First, on the Olympics, I am probably the last person to confess that I was disappointed when the announcement that we had won the Olympics was made. I feared that we would not perform well in organising the games, and that they were an opportunity for a terrorist outrage that would indelibly mark our country in the eyes of the world. I am pleased to accept that I was wrong on both counts.

I am also delighted that another success was not only our tally of medals, but the fact that people who won them had come to this country with their families to make a new life. They were so committed to us that they wanted not only to participate, but to win for this country. How does the Immigration Minister interpret those events? So many people come here and are so committed, and yet at the same time some second generation people harbour such terrible thoughts in their hearts about us that, as far as we know, they want to take terrible action against us. How can part of immigration be so successful, and part of it result in those thoughts? That is my first question.

Ms Abbott: As a second-generation migrant, what possible evidence does my right hon. Friend have that more than a tiny fraction of a fraction of second-generation migrants harbours “terrible thoughts”?

Mr Field: I have no evidence, but a constituent of mine was one of those who had their legs blown off in the London bombing.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Field: No; I have given way on that point.

My second question is on the mountain we must climb. I reiterate the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex made. If the Government are not successful within a 15-year period, if not sooner, our population will go beyond 70 million. As he said, in concrete terms, that means that if we wish to maintain existing living standards rather than see them cut, we must build the equivalent of Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Bradford, Bristol and Glasgow. That must happen during a period when we will experience a more sustained number of years of cuts in public expenditure than we have ever experienced. With those cities must come roads, utilities and the necessary extra schools and health facilities. Does any hon. Member believe that if we are not successful in meeting the Government’s objective, we will meet the objective of housing people on an equivalent basis to how they are currently housed?

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Field: I shall finish this point and then give way.

What will happen if we do not meet the objective? Our constituents, whose wages will probably be falling, will be able to buy far less than hitherto with their wage packets. That is the urgency.

Andrew Percy: I associate myself very much with the right hon. Gentleman’s words. Does he believe that part of the mountain we must climb is opening up the issue of EU immigration, which is completely uncontrollable? There have been massive amounts of such immigration to my constituency, particularly in Goole, which is having a big impact on schooling, health, employment and housing. It is a fallacy for any hon. Member to suggest that we have controlled immigration or could ever have it if we leave EU immigration unaddressed.

Mr Field: The hon. Gentleman makes a point with which many hon. Members will sympathise. During the recession, which will clearly last longer than any since the war, the Government ought to think about what temporary measures they should take to ensure that the country’s labour market is protected for those who, until recently, were working, and for others coming to the labour market who wish to work.

Mr Andrew Smith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this debate must be balanced and informed by evidence, as well as addressing people’s fears? In that context, and in relation to his remarks on the fiscal situation, what account have he and other hon. Members who support the motion taken of the Office for Budget

[Mr Andrew Smith]

Responsibility assessment that shows that sharp cuts in immigration will lower economic growth, worsen the fiscal position and bring about greater austerity, which will hit his constituents as well as mine?

Mr Field: If only the Government knew how to achieve that sharp reduction. There is clearly no possibility of doing so in the near future. The task is proving much more difficult than some Back Benchers and some in the Government would have thought when they made a commitment on it.

Martin Horwood: I am concerned about the tone of some of the right hon. Gentleman's remarks and those of the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames). Does the right hon. Member for Birkenhead agree that immigrants can make a positive contribution to our economy and culture, and that we need to take a balanced, evidence-based approach to the debate and not use language that will inflame fears among minority ethnic communities in this country?

Mr Field: I have always underscored those points, but hon. Members who put them to me also need to look at the evidence. What did the House of Lords Committee say about the contribution overall that immigrants make to our economy? It is minuscule. Of course immigrants earn their way and make a contribution, but to think that we are pounds in is mistaken. If hon. Members want to dispute the figures, they will catch your eye, Mr Speaker. I am saying that unlimited migration on the scale that we have seen is not such an economic advantage to this country as some of the proponents of open doors would wish us to believe.

I wish to pose another question to the new Immigration Minister: if he accepts those projections, what measures will he take that make a target limit of 70 million people possible? My third question is about the sources of the growth in immigration. If one looks at the net figures, one finds three major sources: people who have work permits; people who, under the conditions, bring their families here; and students. We know that the work permits that the Government make available are not all taken up, so it is not as if work permits are a main driver of the stubborn level of net migration. On people who bring their immediate family over, the figures show that families do not account for a net migration figure each year of in excess of 200,000.

On students, my question is whether the attempt to meet the Government's target will mean looking critically and resolutely at the size of the student population that probably stays. We have only one piece of information about students returning home. It was a Home Office survey, which showed that after five years one could account for 20% of students who came here under certain conditions who were still here legitimately to work. We simply do not know what happened to the other 80%.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): No, no.

Mr Field: Let me give way to my hon. Friend on that point.

Chris Bryant: I am afraid that my right hon. Friend is completely wrong in his analysis of those statistics. Even more importantly, his motion refers to population. According to every piece of work that has been done, the vast majority of students go home. Their whole point is to study here and go home, and then hopefully become ambassadors for doing business with Britain in their home country.

Mr Field: Of course, but it will be noticeable to people watching this debate that I gave way and the point was not answered. There were some generalities on all this information. There is one survey, which the Home Office undertook, that showed that after five years we could account for 20% of students who passed through our universities. They were still in this country and had every right to be here: we do not know whether the others went home or not.

Chris Bryant: The 2010 Home Office study "The Migrant Journey"—I think that is the one to which my right hon. Friend refers—showed that 21% of individuals who entered as students in 2004 remained in the UK, which is exactly the opposite of what he is saying. In actual fact, some of them were staying on to study because their courses lasted for more than five years and some of them had changed to a different migration route. The only evidence of people staying illegally in that study was 3%, not the 80% that my right hon. Friend mentions.

Mr Field: I would be grateful if Front Benchers would listen. What I said was that the one survey that we have shows that after that period of time we could account for 20% of the students who come to our universities. They were still in this country—they had every right to be here—and they were pursuing studies or, more likely, working. We do not know from that Home Office study what happened to the other 80%.

Gavin Barwell (Croydon Central) (Con): I share the right hon. Gentleman's concern about the scale of net migration, although I do not support the wording of the motion. What is his view of the level of net migration that would be necessary to meet the terms of this motion? According to the research done by the Migration Observatory, even if we had no net migration into this country the population would reach more than 66 million in about 20 years.

Mr Field: We are not talking about 66 million in the motion, but about the rate that would push us over 70 million. One of the points in this debate is to ask the new Minister what steps he has taken to prevent that from occurring and to fulfil the Government's objective to reduce net migration to tens of thousands rather than hundreds of thousands.

Gavin Barwell: I support the manifesto on which I stood, but the terms of the motion are very clear that we are seeking to

"stabilise the UK's population as close as possible to its present level and, certainly, significantly below 70 million."

To achieve that, we would have to end net migration or even have positive emigration.

Mr Field: We will let the Front Benchers arbitrate on that.

If we wish to prevent the population from rising to more than 70 million, net migration must come down from hundreds of thousands to the tens of thousands. That is what the Government have promised, what the motion is about and why I speak in its support. I shall listen with great interest to the Minister's reply and whether he reads the situation differently, how he reads the Home Office data and, specifically, what new steps the Government should take to ensure that the 70 million barrier is not crossed.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. The time limit is being reduced by one minute, to seven minutes, to accommodate as many Members as possible.

2.5 pm

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): I welcome the newly appointed Minister to the post. He was a popular Minister in his last job, but he will now find it easier to have every Conservative Member—and many others—supporting him.

Ever since I became an MP, and indeed since long before, it has been clear to me that we needed to take more seriously people's views about immigration. However, both the Liberals and the Labour party took exactly the opposite view. They believed that there needed to be complete concealment from the public on this issue, and anyone who believed to the contrary was a racist. The fact is, however, that many people were becoming so concerned they were prepared to accept being labelled as racists if the consequence was to do anything good on immigration. The number of migrants allowed into this country was far and away in excess of what we needed for economic growth, and many people in all parts of the country were sickened by it.

Let us go back to the year I was born. We took approximately 3,000 people into the country in 1953. By the 1970s, we admitted an average of 45,000 per year, and that did not include the 27,000 Ugandan Asians from Idi Amin's genuinely racist regime. In the 1980s and early 1990s, 54,000 were admitted each year, rising again in 1999 to around 97,000. Let us make it absolutely clear. It was the intention of the Labour party to admit far more migrants than ever before. Its aim was to create a rainbow coalition—what it succeeded in doing was creating ghettos in many parts of the country. This is something that had long been suspected by Conservatives and was realised with the Labour party's draft policy paper in 2001, which was thought to have mentioned "social objectives" within its overall migration strategy.

Kate Green: I do not recognise the history that the hon. Gentleman portrays, but does he recognise that many of my constituents, who arrived as migrants or are now second and third generation migrant families, will be incredibly hurt and offended by the way in which he characterises them as somehow undesirable in our society?

Mr Turner: If the hon. Lady would indicate what is wrong with what I have said, I will change it if necessary.

In the period between 1997 and 2010, we admitted 200,000 people per year. That is the same as creating a new city the size of Birmingham every five years, not including illegal immigrants as we had no idea where they were. When Lord Howard of Lympne led the party in the election in 2005, we were called racists for wanting to impose effective limits on migration. It was the first real attempt by even the Conservative party to stand up for the people who live here.

Labour, under the then Prime Minister, began to see the truth after many years of attack on a small minority of politicians, such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) and, even more so, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) for leading the debate. But even during the last election campaign, the then Prime Minister called a pensioner and lifelong Labour supporter a bigot for questioning the scale of migration.

In the 2010 election, we Conservatives promised to reduce the number of migrants to 100,000 per year by 2015. The question is whether we are doing enough, and the answer is clearly no. Our policy is not to offer free health care except in emergencies, to migrants from outside the EU, but there is no effective system in place to enforce that. The same goes for migrants from within the EU. Spain, unlike us, has this system under control, and migrants from the EU cannot get health care unless they produce the right papers. Migrants who intend to live in Spain for more than three months have to produce a job contract or evidence of their ability to support themselves, otherwise their requests will now be denied. We need answers.

There are other points that we need to press more strongly. First, there are still no controls on people coming from the EU. Quite clearly, we must effect such controls. Secondly, there are students. Some of them are false, and we congratulate the Government on how, even this week, they have been reducing their number. On the other hand, however, we do not intend to keep genuine students away. They must fill in the visa forms, and we must make it clear that they are welcome. Thirdly, there are the illegals. We must keep working at them in order to reduce their number, but the law is not 100% behind the Government in this area, and a change from the judges would be much welcomed. Finally, there must be genuine help for those who wish to return to their country of origin.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): My hon. Friend identifies a number of things that need to be tackled. I wonder whether he agrees with me that although we have heard tough words on immigration from both sides of the House, both since the election and before it, what we really need are not only tough words but tough action. That is what we have not seen, but what we need to see from the new Minister.

Mr Turner: I am 100% behind my hon. and learned Friend. I must say that the actions of the Minister's predecessor were very welcome, and I am sure that his own actions will be welcome too.

I was moving on to the question of what to do about those who live here but wish to go home. Europe provides money to pay for some people to get home, and we need to make that clearer, more broadly available and simpler to those who want the help.

Chris Bryant: Repatriation?

Mr Turner: Yes, that is the word.

Chris Bryant: Repatriation?

Mr Turner: Yes, that is the word and that is what it means. If someone chooses to go home, we may help them, and if possible that should be determined by our own Government, not the Europeans.

We are working through the system, but it appears to be a case of taking two steps forward and one step back, and it is one of the few areas where I would welcome more progress.

2.12 pm

Mr Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab): The questions of how many people we need in the UK to sustain the standards of living we all want and of what role immigration can play in answering that question have been taboo subjects for much too long. The reason is that ever since Enoch Powell made his infamous speech in Birmingham back in 1968, most politicians from mainstream parties, with a few exceptions, some of whom have been brave, some foolish and some both, have steered clear of the subject for fear of saying something that would be called politically incorrect and thus being labelled as racist or anti-immigrant by the media. Because mainstream parties and politicians have not debated these issues and the effect that immigration might have—I say “might”—on jobs, wages and public services, we have left the field wide open to those racist and xenophobic parties that want to talk only about immigration and put their own particular spin on it.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to hear the point that the hon. Gentleman has just made. It is such an important point. If the House does not debate these issues sensibly, calmly and rationally, we cede the field to the extremist parties, which none of us wants. Does he agree that the most important people in this debate are the hundreds of thousands of British people, of all races, who are looking for work at this moment but are in strong competition with large numbers of immigrants? They are the people whom we must keep in mind. They are of all races and they are British.

Mr Godsiff: I was going to come to that issue later, but I thank the hon. Gentleman for making his point.

As has been said, this silence on the questions of how large a population the UK should have and of how much more immigration we should allow is not shared by the wider electorate, who want the issue debated, as is confirmed by opinion polls, all of which list immigration as one of the electorate's top concerns. For politicians here to ignore this fact while continuing to peddle the simplistic free-market mantra that immigration always benefits the economy and raises living standards, that immigration, together with the free movement of people and economic globalisation, is wonderful, and that the trickle-down effect benefits everybody, is not only an insult to the people of this country but ignores the pressures that an increasing population puts on public services, particularly housing, health and education, in areas such as mine, which is one of the most multiracial

constituencies in the country. It does a great disservice to the cause of good community relations in our multicultural society.

I want to say a little more about the myth that immigration brings growth. This myth is peddled usually by elements of big business that do not want the responsibility of training young British school leavers and graduates—do not forget that 1 million of them are unemployed and cannot get jobs. Instead, these elements want as big a pool of labour as possible, from anywhere in the world, to hire and fire so that they can push down wages and increase profits, shareholder value and, of course, their bonuses. As much research has shown, the reality is that immigration can add a small percentage increase to gross domestic product, but there is no evidence that it benefits per capita GDP or individual living standards for the vast majority of people. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of the population see their wages fall and have to face increased competition for social housing, education and health facilities.

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): I agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman is saying. Given that he represents a very multiracial constituency, does he agree that some of the strongest advocates of a mature debate on immigration come not from the white British community but from communities of second and third-generation migrants?

Mr Godsiff: The people who visit my surgeries and constituency meetings come from all different backgrounds, including, as the hon. Lady says, many who came to the country in the 1950s, who put down roots and who have contributed enormously to the vitality and well-being of the great city I live in and to the benefit of the country. They are just as concerned as everybody else about the argument over how many people we need in the country to sustain their living standards.

I do not want to talk about how the UK manages the 1 million-plus visitors and students who come to the UK every year, other than to say that I welcome genuine visitors and students, provided, of course, that like everybody else they comply with the terms of their visas. They should return at the end of their visas. As an aside, however, I wish to refer to something that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) said about the number of people entering and leaving the country. Every year in the 1990s, I consistently used to ask, “How many people come to this country on short-term visas issued by the Government?” The answer I got back—every country was always listed—usually said that the figure was something like 950,000 to 1 million. That was very illustrative. However, the second part of my question was: “How many went back?” The answer was two lines: “We don't keep that information.” That was absolute nonsense; indeed, it was ridiculous. We need to put back in place a system whereby we count people in and count them out.

The UK is one of the most crowded countries in Europe. It is not me who said that; it is the European Commission. It estimated that over the next 50 years the figure in the UK would rise by 16 million. Those are not my figures; they are the European Union's figures. It predicted that Britain would become the most populous country in Europe by that time.

I represent one of the most diverse and multicultural constituencies in the country. As I said to the hon. Lady, the multicultural make-up of my constituency has added hugely to the vitality of the great city of Birmingham. Immigration into the United Kingdom since the first immigrants came in after the second world war has added enormously to the life of the United Kingdom. I welcome that, but we have to address the issue of how many people we need in the United Kingdom to sustain our standard of living. If we do not, I fear that the good community relationships that have been built up in my city and many others will be threatened. I do not want to see that happen.

2.21 pm

Mr Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): What a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr Godsiff), who made a remarkable speech.

I, too, want to focus on numbers, as the motion does. It is a strange thing that from the early part of the 19th century until past the middle of the last century it was almost universally accepted that overcrowding and over-population was a major driver of poverty. Indeed, in one scheme alone, between 1922 and 1935, more than 400,000 people received Government assistance to emigrate, principally to Canada and Australia. The Office for National Statistics estimated in 2004 that we would have 67 million people by 2031. Six years later, that figure had gone up to 72 million, or 5 million more. Yet there is widespread concern among reputable statistical agencies—I mentioned the Bank of England as just one that has gone public—that the ONS has lost count. Indeed, if we look at the detailed way in which it calculates the figures—in particular, its assumptions about birth rates, which make no adjustment at all for a changing composition—we find good grounds for thinking that its projections might not be accurate. All are on the same side of the equation—that is, in every case there are grounds for thinking that the ONS's projections are too low, rather than too high.

There is a further issue, which people are very reluctant to address. I hope nobody is going to accuse me of being a racist—if they do, I am not going to dignify the comment with an answer—but we have to look at the detail and accept two facts. The first is that the phrase “net migration” is misleading. To take the age profile of the people coming in and those going out, it is perfectly absurd in demographic terms to equate pensioners retiring to the sun with young people coming in who have not yet started families.

The second point is that many of those coming in are from areas that have historically had much higher birth rates than the indigenous group. The trend in every country in the world is that birth rates among incoming communities tend to trend towards the national average of the country that they are joining, with one important exception: if those groups do not become absorbed into the wider body. Over the last few years, we have for the first time begun to see the very unsettling picture, to which the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) referred, of some groups not assimilating.

Over the last few weeks, we have rightly felt enormous national pride at the performance of our Olympics team. Nobody needs me to say that the racial mixture—the original ethnic origins—of the people who won all

those medals for Britain, and in many cases of those who did very well but did not get medals, covers the full spectrum of people here. What was much less widely discussed, however—and what has started to come out only recently—was a whole string of violent acts by people living round the area against service personnel. Those acts were not only against personnel responsible for guarding the area, but in one case against naval personnel from a visiting ship, to such an extent that I understand that instructions were given out towards the end not to be seen, if possible, in uniform too far from the site.

I mention that not because I would dream for one second of denying the colossal contribution that so many immigrants have made to this country, nor because I am a racist—I am incredibly proud of the fact that my grandfather was a member of the Indian army, the largest volunteer force ever raised in the history of this country and drawn from every conceivable religious background and an awful lot of different racial backgrounds in India—but because we must recognise the important warnings that the right hon. Gentleman gave. We are now starting to attract some groups that do not feel British.

Let me spend the last couple of minutes on a few more statistics that should worry us all. We all believe that every family needs a decent home. I know of no other country, except possibly Japan, where average house prices are seven times earnings despite the recession. House prices here are certainly much higher than in America or Germany, two other prosperous countries where the figures are 4.5 and 4. In London, there is not a single borough left in which one can rent a two-bedroom dwelling for less than 35% of the median earnings, and there are a relatively small number left where the figure is less than a half. We have housing shortages on a scale that is completely unprecedented in the modern era. We have heard a lot of references to infrastructure as well.

I want to end with students. I am proud of the fact that I represent the area with the largest concentration of students in the country, with four universities wholly or partly in my constituency. I am immensely proud of what we do, taking in foreign students, who bring money to this country and provide us with good will. However, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who speaks for the Opposition, was quite wrong in his intervention on his right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead. I have a copy of that study, “The Migrant Journey”, with the note from the Library confirming that it was a purely paper exercise. Although the study shows that 21% had a reason to stay in the country, together with thousands of dependants, nothing is known about where the other 79% went.

Chris Bryant: Because they had left.

Mr Brazier: No, there is no evidence for that at all.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): They were not here.

Mr Brazier: The study did not investigate that.

Let me end by echoing my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames), who said at the beginning that this is one of the great issues facing us. We must address it. The British people demand it of us.

2.29 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) and for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) on bringing this issue to our attention, if not on their contributions. I also welcome the Minister to his new Front-Bench responsibilities. I can just see him going into the office and breathing a sigh of relief at no longer having to account to the Deputy Prime Minister.

This is a nasty, silly, ridiculous little motion. It could almost have come from some shady authoritarian regime. Imagine a motion including the words:

“take all necessary steps to reduce immigration”.

We have already heard what some of those necessary steps might be. We have heard about “repatriation” from the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner). What is next? Is there going to be internment? This motion might be suitable for the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* or some other right-wing rag, but it should not be passed by the House and I urge Members to reject it. It is not worthy of our attention or of our passing it. I will certainly try to divide the House to ensure that it is not passed.

As for the substance of the debate, we have heard the usual stuff from right hon. and hon. Members. What always gets me is that those who are opposed to immigration always tell us, as the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) did, just how much they value immigration and how much it has enhanced their communities and their societies. If it is such a good thing, if they value immigration so much, why do they not want more of it?

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): No one on this side, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames), has said that they oppose immigration. My right hon. Friend said that he opposes uncontrolled immigration because it is unsustainable. That is the point. The hon. Gentleman is misinterpreting it.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Ms Abbott: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: Yes, for the last time.

Ms Abbott: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that I have been a Member of Parliament for 25 years? Year on year, I deal with thousands of immigration cases. There has never been a point in my time in the House when we have had uncontrolled immigration. That is mythology.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, and to the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), because that is exactly the point. The idea that immigration is out of control is nonsense. We know that the Government’s ambition is to reduce immigration from hundreds of thousands to tens of thousands. It is not going to happen. What the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex and Members on the Government Benches fail to appreciate is that we live in an interconnected and globalised world where knowledge, ideas, creativity and talent are an international commodity. That of necessity

means a transfer of people across continents and countries, and that is good for the global economy; it is good for our economy.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I will not give way any more because I have not got any more time.

We are in the fantastic city of London, the most dynamic and prosperous city in the world. A third of the people who live and work in London come from outwith the UK. It is like in Monty Python—“What has immigration done for us?” It has made London into a fantastic, dynamic, prosperous city.

Conservative Members talk about the Olympics. What I saw was a fantastic celebration of multicultural Britain. I saw the little tweet of the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Mr Burley) and how he got a Twitter monsterring for what he said—deservedly so. He could not have been further from the national mood when it came to how we see what immigration and multiculturalism brings to our country and our nation. It is something that is welcome and is celebrated, and so it should be.

I do not go along with this 100,000 *Daily Mail* petition that we are now debating. There is a mood change in this country and people are coming to accept and celebrate what we have and see that immigration is a good thing. That should be welcomed—not this nasty, authoritarian little motion.

I will come now to Scotland. I am sorry if I am boring people by restating that Scotland occupies just over a third of the land mass of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland but has only 8.4% of the population—less than a tenth. Our issue is not immigration throughout the decades and centuries, it is emigration. We lose people instead of attracting them. Scotland is not full up; Scotland is one of the most under-populated parts of western Europe. Yet we are asked to accept an immigration policy that could almost be designed to be the opposite and contrary to what we require.

Henry Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Pete Wishart: I cannot give way to the hon. Gentleman; I have no more time left.

Scotland’s population currently stands at a record 5.2 million. For years we feared that our population would sink below the iconic 5 million mark for the first time since the mid-20th century, but we now have 5.2 million, which is good. What distinguishes Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom is that the Scottish Government issued a press release welcoming the fact that our population was at a record high. Can we imagine even the new Minister issuing a press release welcoming the fact that the UK population was at an all-time high? We have to put up with an immigration policy that is designed not for us but for another country. Thank goodness that in a few years we will have an immigration system in line with our own requirements.

Our requirements are huge. We have an ageing population with an ever smaller active work force. We need to address that. We need to attract the best and the brightest to fill our skills gap. Current immigration policy is

creating havoc with our education sector. In Scotland we are reliant on overseas students. About 19% of the total student body in Scotland comes from overseas, and that is worth about £500 million to the Scottish economy. Almost 10% of all the teaching staff come from overseas, too, because we have three universities in the top 100. People want to come to Scotland because we have this culture, history and heritage of invention and creativity. The Scots practically invented the modern world so of course overseas students want to come to Scotland to study.

Students observe what is happening at the London Metropolitan college and think, "If I go to the UK there is a good chance that some Minister will decide that my college is not worthy of status and I will not get a course." The Government's policies are putting people off coming to our universities and colleges, and I urge the Minister to stop them now because they are harming our universities and higher education institutions.

In Scotland we need our own immigration service that will address our needs. We do not need harsher immigration policies. I bet the Minister that he will never get to these suggested levels of immigration. This is the world we live in, and there is no point in trying to address it. The Migration Observatory wrote to every Member of Parliament to give its view, and even it could not agree with the right hon. Members who have proposed the motion. It pointed to variations throughout the United Kingdom in people's perception of immigration. I am proud that we in Scotland do not perceive immigration as a dreadful, negative thing as so many Conservative Members seem to do.

I, like the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), would like to come to debates such as this to have a proper discussion about immigration. Hon. Members always protest that we do not discuss it properly, but when they get to their feet all we ever hear is that immigration must be curbed or stopped, that it is not a good thing, that it must be reversed.

We have a new Minister in his place, the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper). I hope that we will have a better understanding of the issues than the previous Minister because what we are observing just now is not positive or good. As a Scottish National party member, I hope that he will understand that Scotland's immigration requirements are different. I do not know if he will acknowledge that, but just a cursory recognition that Scotland is lumbered with a system that is not appropriate for our needs would be welcome and then we could make some progress in how we address this. I live in hope that that might happen, but I have my doubts. Scotland would reject this silly, authoritarian and nonsensical motion, and I hope that the House does too.

2.38 pm

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I should like to start by paying tribute to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) for their courage, conviction and determination in tabling the motion. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee for ensuring that the debate was held today; it is a debate that the vast majority of people in this country want us to have.

I have been involved in local politics and parliamentary politics for some years. My constituency of Crawley is multi-ethnic, and one of the most important issues that people raise with me—regardless of their ethnic background, although it is often raised by people from an ethnic minority—is the concern about the sheer number of people coming into this country over the past decade or so. If people continue to enter the country in those numbers, the situation will be unsustainable. A population in excess of 70 million would certainly be unsustainable.

It is worth repeating that, for far too long, the main political parties and the political establishment in this country have not addressed people's concerns about the sheer level of immigration, particularly over the past decade or so. As a result, reasonable people who are not prejudiced or racist have found themselves supporting racist organisations and parties such as the British National party and the so-called English Defence League. That is a great shame, in a country that has traditionally been—and still is—one of the most tolerant nations anywhere in the world. It is appalling that our lack of willingness to address the situation has led to those thoughts being held by reasonable people.

Immigration has played a big part in the history of this nation. There have been various waves of immigration, but we are now, for the first time in a millennium, seeing unsustainable numbers. Some estimates mention 3 million people, but the important point is that we do not actually know the figure because the numbers of people coming to this country are not properly recorded. That has put enormous pressure on our infrastructure. That is evident in my constituency, where the pressure on housing is immense. Areas that were originally designated for commercial development have had to be re-designated as residential development to support the numbers of people coming to live there. That results in pressure on infrastructure—not just the physical infrastructure such as the highways, but, perhaps most acutely, the schools. Many have had to expand their classroom capacity in quite difficult circumstances to accommodate the numbers.

Mention was made earlier of the pressure that immigration has been putting on the national health service. Next Tuesday, I am pleased to be presenting a ten-minute rule Bill on this issue, which will seek to require a proper audit to be carried out in order to recover reciprocal costs incurred in the treatment of foreign nationals by the national health service. At the moment, the figures are not properly recorded or monitored, but they suggest that the health service is paying more than £1 billion a year on supporting foreign nationals who would otherwise not be entitled to free care.

Kate Green: I note what the hon. Gentleman says about the use of the national health service, but does he also recognise the substantial contribution made by immigrants who are employees of the NHS? How does he think the NHS would manage if we were unable to attract migrants to come here and do that work?

Henry Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for using the word "manage". That is what has been missing from our immigration system up to now. My wife was an immigrant to this country, and she used to work in the national health service. The hon. Lady is quite right to say that the NHS has relied on people coming to this country to support it.

[Henry Smith]

However, we need an immigration system in which we know who is coming into and leaving the country, and in which those who come in use a fair and lawful route. When the so-called accession eight countries became part of the European Union in 2004, only the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and Sweden did not exercise their right to a period of controlled immigration. As we were the largest country not exercising the right to control immigration, and as we are an English-speaking country, we saw millions of people coming here in a rapid and unsustainable way. That has resulted in many pressures in communities up and down the country.

Let me start to conclude by congratulating the Government on the work they have already started to do. I very much welcome the new Minister to his post, and I am sure he will continue the excellent work of his predecessor over the past two and a half years. I am encouraged that the number of net migrants to this country has come down, as recently reported, from more than 250,000 to just over 200,000—but we still have to go much further. I congratulate the Minister's predecessor—I know that this good work will continue—in closing down the sham marriage route and the illegal routes to entering this country through bogus college courses. Again, the action we have seen over the past week is to be welcomed, but we need to continue our pressure and our determination to get a grip on this situation. As we heard earlier, it would need eight cities to be built outside London over the next 15 years to accommodate the projected rise in population as a result of immigration, which is clearly unsustainable. I echo other hon. Members in saying that we have a duty to the British people to ensure that we address this issue for our future harmony and prosperity as a nation.

2.46 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): In opening the debate, the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) talked about the need for honesty and open and candid discussion. I regret that many of the contributions so far have, I think, thrown more darkness than light on the subject. I want to concentrate on one specific thing, which I believe unites many Members on both sides of the House—the way we address the issue of students. We need to recognise the important role of UK higher education. I welcome the new Minister to his post and hope he will bring an open mind to this issue. I am sure he will be lobbied by Government Members as much as by Opposition Members.

As we were reminded by the Minister for Universities and Science in this morning's Business, Innovation and Skills questions, UK higher education is a major export earner. It contributes something like £7.9 billion to our economy annually. It is not just about money—we recruit some of the best and the brightest to our universities and they add to the intellectual rigour and to the overall educational experience of UK students, as well as play a vital role in research and innovation, which is greatly recognised by British business—but the direct financial contribution is significant. The money spent through tuition fees is matched by the money spent in local economies. In all our major towns and cities across the country, tens of thousands of jobs are dependent on

international students. In the city I represent, Sheffield, they are worth about £180 million to the local economy and involve more than 2,000 jobs. It is a major success story, but it could be even better.

Driven by the world's growing economies, international demand for university education is expanding rapidly, and BIS estimated that we could double the number of international students in this country by 2025. That would mean another couple of thousand jobs in Sheffield and tens of thousands across the UK. With the world's strongest higher education offer after the United States, we should be seeing huge growth, but we are losing market share. The reason for it is the message we have been sending out to prospective students around the world as a result of changes to the student visa system. The Home Office's own impact assessment of the student visa changes, published just over a year ago, estimated that its proposal would cost our economy a massive £2.6 billion.

At a time when we need growth and should be encouraging our major export earners, I have to say that the situation has been made worse by the handling of the London Metropolitan university issue. Clearly, we need to act if universities are failing in their obligations, but we need to act appropriately and proportionately. How this has been handled, however, has done huge damage. A Google search reveals something like 700 stories in the international media about this issue, and a deeply damaging message is being sent out. They are saying “You can come to the UK, you can comply with visa requirements, you can pay thousands of pounds for your course and contribute to the local economy, you can be making a success of your studies, and, through no fault of your own, you can still be deported at any time on the whim of Government.” What would a prospective international student choose to do when confronted with that situation?

Henry Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that enabling overseas students who are investing considerable sums to come here to feel confident that they are coming to a college or higher education institution that is complying with the law is fairer to them than the random, haphazard system that has existed up to now, which can leave genuine overseas students vulnerable?

Paul Blomfield: I think that genuine overseas students were left vulnerable by bogus colleges that were recruiting them to fairly bogus courses, but London Metropolitan university is not one of those. There may have been failings in its processes and systems—the situation is still being investigated—but the issue is that bona fide students who are succeeding in their courses are being threatened with deportation at a critical stage of the academic cycle.

We should bear in mind the message that that sends to prospective students around the world who are considering their options. They will say to themselves, “Shall I go to the UK? Thanks, but no thanks. I shall go to the United States”—or Canada, or Australia—“because I shall not be deported from that country on the whim of Government.”

Mr Frank Field: Does my hon. Friend agree that, while it is proper for the system to be policed, the way in which the rules are being applied to students who are

here legitimately and have paid their way is appalling? Does he agree that the one thing we want the Government to do is distinguish between how we behave to institutions that break the rules and how we behave to people who have every right to be here pursuing their courses?

Paul Blomfield: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend, who has made his point very well.

What worries me is the wider reputational damage to the higher education sector. Losing out in that market is not just about short-term financial loss. Those who study in the UK develop a great affection for the country. When they have returned home and have risen to prominent positions in business and politics, and are making decisions about trade and investment, they often turn first to the country where they studied. Every one of our universities is full of examples of alumni who have contributed to this country on the basis of that relationship.

Mr Brazier: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Paul Blomfield: No, I will not. I have given way twice, and I am running out of time.

What can we do to return to our historic position as the destination of choice for the world's students? The answer came this morning in the report from the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, echoing the reports from the Home Affairs Committee, the Public Accounts Committee and the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee. All those Committees, and Members on both sides of the House, have said that we should remove students from the net migration targets, but it is not just their view. The case was made recently by the director general of the Institute of Directors, who said:

“International students should not be treated as migrants for the purposes of the government's net migration figures”.

He said that a

“simple statistical change has the potential to neutralise what competitor countries see as a spectacular own goal.”

Treating students as migrants damages our universities, but it also distorts the immigration debate because it leads policy makers away from the real issues of concern. Australia—one of our competitors which is winning the game, building a growing share of the international student market—has undertaken an instructive journey on immigration. Political concerns led the Australians to tighten student visa rules in 2010. A fall in the number of student applications then led them to commission the Knight review, which recommended changes that have reopened opportunities for international students. In the United States, restrictions imposed after 9/11 have been loosened. The US Department of Homeland Security does not include international students in its numbers for migration policy purposes; it treats them, rightly, in the same way as it treats business visitors and tourists—as “nonimmigrant admissions”.

As I have said, while the Government are right to tackle the problem of bogus students and colleges, we need to avoid throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Taking students out of our net migration targets would enable us to look again at the changes that have been introduced by the Home Office. It could, for example, provide a basis for reviewing the restrictive rules on post-study work, which is a key issue as many prospective

students are keen to consolidate their learning in the country of their study. That also has a huge amount to offer our economy. Barack Obama has learned that lesson in the United States. Addressing this debate in the context of his country, he said, “This is crazy. We're taking the best minds from around the world. We're bringing them to this country. We're giving them the skills to apply in a whole range of areas—to develop business, to develop the economy—and then we're kicking them out.” The post-study work route is an important issue, and such work makes an important contribution to the economy.

Taking students out of the net migration targets would, above all, send a positive message at a time when we have been sending nothing but negative messages, by saying, “You're welcome in the UK.”

2.55 pm

Gavin Barwell (Croydon Central) (Con): May I start by paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) for introducing this debate on what is a hugely important subject? I am surprised that none of my Liberal Democrat coalition partners are present to discuss it. The tone in which the subject is addressed is very important, however. I was thrilled that he emphasised the positive impact migration has made to this country, while also explaining why he felt we needed to reduce net migration significantly. I absolutely agree with him about the issue of scale, too; I support the manifesto on which I stood for election. I do not support the terms of this motion, however, and I want to explain why.

My right hon. Friend rightly said that in the past 10 years the scale of population growth has been greater than at any time since the census process began. It is important to note that the pace of change is not that different from throughout much of the 20th century. The point is that the scale is greater, however, because we are starting from a higher baseline, and Members can reasonably argue that that is harder to accommodate because the population is larger.

I have four concerns about the motion. First, we have never had a formal population target, and I do not believe it would be right to have one. That is in part because of my second reason for not supporting the motion, which is that the population growth over the last 10 years is not solely due to net migration. Office for National Statistics and census data show that about 55% of the population increase is down to migration and about 45% is due to people living longer and also to increased fertility rates—which is an interesting phenomenon as many other western European countries are not experiencing it, and there is not yet a clear understanding as to why it is happening. If the country were to adopt a formal population target, the Government might have to look at addressing policies such as the number of children that families are allowed to have, and I would be completely opposed to that.

My third, and most substantive, objection, however, is the costs that would result from the levels of reduction in net migration that this motion would entail. I tried to make that point in an intervention on the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field). I admire him greatly, but in order to attain the terms of the motion, which talks about

[Gavin Barwell]

“population as close as possible to its present level and, certainly, significantly below 70 million”,

the Migration Observatory evidence shows that we would probably need to have either zero net migration or possibly even net emigration from the country. If we take a net migration figure of 100,000, which would be at the top end of the Government target, the population would be just under 70 million in 2035. This motion is not just calling for the Government to achieve their manifesto commitment, therefore; it is arguing for measures that go well beyond that, and they will have consequences.

The Office for Budget Responsibility model that we now all work on assumes that each reduction of 50,000 in migration will result in a 0.1% reduction in economic growth. When the OBR was mentioned earlier, several of my colleagues questioned the reference to it from a sedentary position. I am not an economist or an expert in these matters, but I do know that every Chancellor of the Exchequer must now base their Budget decisions on the figures the independent OBR produces.

Mr Brazier: The key point is not the overall size of the economy, but GDP per capita.

Gavin Barwell: I was about to deal with that, so I am grateful for the intervention. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr Godsiff) had it right in his speech—

Pete Wishart *rose*—

Gavin Barwell: This is an important point and I want to develop it. As I was saying, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green had it right, because there is clear evidence that migration does have an effect on economic growth, but there is no clear evidence that it has an impact on GDP per head. Those things are both important. GDP per head is important in terms of individual living standards, but if we are passionate about reducing the deficit, the level of economic growth is crucial. It affects tax receipts, the number of people out of work and the income coming into the Treasury—

Mr Brazier *rose*—

Gavin Barwell: I am going to give my hon. Friend a full answer to his question. I strongly commend that he reads the OBR’s fiscal sustainability report published in July, which looks not at what will happen over the next five years but at the longer-term consequences of an ageing population. It compares what might happen under its central estimate of 140,000 net migration, which is higher than I would like to see, with what might happen if zero net migration were to occur. It finds that over a 20 or 30-year period zero net migration would mean an extra 8.2% of GDP of fiscal tightening. In other words, very significant spending cuts or tax increases would be involved if that is the road we wish to go down as a country. We need to have this debate, because there is a balance to be struck. A policy of unlimited migration has benefits for our fiscal position, but it has real consequences for our public services, the level of housing we require and development in this country.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman is making a thoughtful contribution, which is unusual from a Conservative Member on the subject of immigration, and he is right to oppose the motion. The motion makes a sinister reference to taking “all necessary steps”. Does he agree that that would require more than has been explained and defined by the supporters of the motion? We heard something about repatriation earlier. Does he appreciate that they will probably have to go much further if they are to achieve these ambitions?

Gavin Barwell: The hon. Gentleman is being very unfair to my colleagues. What they have done in this debate is, rightly, set out the widespread concerns that exist across this country. I am trying to talk about what the consequences of further steps would be, as those are where my concerns lie. I represent part of this great city, with its very diverse population. All the electorate in my constituency want a reduction in net migration and in population growth, but they do not want to see the economic consequences of taking that policy too far. This is a question of striking the right balance.

I wish to make a couple of other quick points. Some question whether there is a correlation between population growth and economic growth, but if they examine the parts of the country that have seen the most significant population growth in recent years, they will see a correlation with the areas that are performing best economically. A sort of chicken and egg situation applies, because an area that is doing well economically tends to encourage people to move there because they think they can find work there. There does seem to be a correlation at a local level within our country.

I briefly wish to pick up on what the Prime Minister said in relation to the reshuffle. He said that every Department should be actively

“involved in the effort to get the deficit down and get the economy moving.”

I agree that that is the central test. The Government must deliver the manifesto commitment on net migration. Equally importantly, we must give people confidence that the system is working and that the people coming into the country are those who are doing so legally through a properly run immigration system. We must also not lose sight of the clear economic benefits that a well managed migration system can bring.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) made an excellent point about the pressure on public services, but he also kindly acknowledged a good intervention—the British Medical Association has sent all Members a briefing on this—on the contribution that migrants make in delivering many of our public services. So, again, there is a balance to be struck.

For many of the things that the public are really concerned about, other solutions are available alongside a reduction in net migration. One of the real issues we have with the pressure on land for development is the significant reduction in household size. If, across this House, we could develop policies to try to prevent the level of family breakdown, that would reduce the pressure on housing. Another issue that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) raised was the regional imbalance around the UK. Parts of this country are very heavily populated, with real density, and they are often the areas that are seeing the biggest increases in population, but that is not the case uniformly

across the UK. Half of all the population growth in the past 10 years was in London, the south-east and the east of England.

We could make much more of a national effort on infrastructure. Personally, I would have liked to see more cuts in current spending and more investment in infrastructure on the capital side.

Finally, if we are serious about this issue, we should consider not only non-EU immigration but migration from within the EU. The debate is a bit more complicated, in my opinion, than the motion makes out.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Gavin Barwell: I cannot, I am afraid.

Although I support the principle of delivering our manifesto commitment, I cannot support the specific wording of the motion.

3.5 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Gavin Barwell), who I thought made one of the most thoughtful speeches from his side of the House in this debate.

I have never shied away from debates about immigration. In fact, I find it odd to hear from people who think that it is very brave to argue, as this motion does, for a cut in immigration, as though those of us who have argued for immigrants' rights over decades have had it easy. My experience has been completely to the contrary: those of us who have argued for immigrants' rights have been those who have been most likely to be pilloried.

I have an interest in this debate as I have a brother, a sister and two uncles who are migrants. They have gone to the Bahamas, Canada and the USA, they have married people from third countries, and they have brought millions into those countries' economies and added to their artistic and intellectual lives. They are an example, as are many of my constituents, of the positive impact of migration around the world.

Ms Abbott: Does my hon. Friend agree that the issue is not immigrants' rights but the need to have a fair and transparent immigration system based on the facts and not on urban myth? Does she agree that the response to the question asked by the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) about who will pay for the houses and hospitals the immigrants need is quite simple? It will be hard-working immigrants who do so, through taxation.

Fiona Mactaggart: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. What I object to most about the motion is its focus on numbers and its failure to focus on the lives of human beings. That is the issue. If we are thinking about migration policy, the first thing we need to do is think about who the migrants are, what they are here for and what the benefits are to them, their families, the communities they come to and the country as a whole.

Frankly, there is a serious consequence of not starting from the question of the lives of human beings, and we saw it in the decision on London Metropolitan university, where there has been a collective punishment of perfectly legitimate students for the failure of the institution at

which they registered in all good faith. I am not saying that every student was necessarily legitimate, but we know that those students who are and who fulfil all the requirements have been collectively punished, absolutely contrary to British traditions, for the failure of the institution in which they work. That is a consequence of trying to decide immigration policy not on its human consequences, but on some abstract numerical basis.

Some of the attempts that the Government have made to date to reduce immigration policy have had serious consequences. I want to take the opportunity of the new Minister's presence in this debate to highlight some of them and to ask him to consider whether things are going in the right direction. A large group of migrants in my constituency have come here as family members of people who are already in this country. Recently, the immigration rules have been changed to require that if a family is to be united in such a way they need to earn, if they have one child, for example, £22,500. That is above the average wage of people who live in Slough. More than half of my constituents, if they marry someone from overseas, will be unable to be united with their spouse. That is cruel. It is unfair to have a means test on the right to a family life.

Mr Brazier: Will the hon. Lady address this point? I represent a constituency where housing is extremely expensive and rents are high. If the person bringing in the family members cannot afford to support or house them, who is to pay for that?

Fiona Mactaggart: Before the regulations were changed, they had an absolute requirement that someone coming in had to be able to show that there would be no recourse to public funds, and I certainly support that. I have never objected to a requirement that a family trying to be reunited in this country should not depend on a public subsidy to do so and must be able to show that they can afford to house themselves and so on. That is perfectly right, but I do not see why ordinary, hard-working, low-paid workers in my constituency should be barred from being reunited with the families, which has been the case since the rule change.

A second change that I would like the Minister to address is the growing Home Office practice—one designed to look tough but not necessarily be tough—of insisting on more temporary steps before someone can become a permanent resident of this country. As a result, people are given three or five years' leave and then must apply at a later time to become a permanent resident, with additional costs for them, and then of course they must be here for longer to acquire British citizenship. I have no problem with people having to be here for a substantial amount of time before they can acquire citizenship, but what I know is that the Home Office cannot administer these applications and is grotesquely inefficient.

I have constituents who can work perfectly legally but, because their applications for an extension of leave to remain or indefinite leave to remain have not even been logged in the Home Office computer two months after they were submitted, the Home Office is unable to tell their employers that they have the right to work. In two of the three cases in my constituency people have been suspended from their jobs, although they are here perfectly legally and have the right to work, simply because the Home Office's immigration system is unable

[*Fiona Mactaggart*]

to confirm that to their employers. That just seems to me to be stupid. It was introduced in order to look tough, but the consequence has been to give the Home Office more work than it is capable of doing, as a result of which it has become even more inefficient than it has been for years. I beg the Minister to look at that again.

Another feature of the temporary arrangements, in my view, increases the risk of human trafficking to the UK: the changes that have been made to the domestic workers visa. Some years ago the Home Affairs Committee produced an excellent report pointing out how important that visa was as a tool for reducing the rate of people being trafficked into the UK to work in people's homes. The visa has been abandoned, and as a result I am certain that we are seeing more human trafficking into the UK. I hope that this Minister can look again at the issue, because one of the horrific phenomena arising from being part of a more globalised society is the terrifying increase in human trafficking into and, increasingly, out of Britain.

One group of migrants that the Minister cannot influence, and that the motion would not influence, is the number of people seeking asylum in this country. One of the reasons why migration levels seemed low in the late '90s was simply the fact that the Home Office made no decisions on asylum seekers; it just took in the applications. It did not always register them; indeed, about 100,000 of them are still lurking in something called the controlled archive.

It is really important that the Home Office makes decisions in real time and delivers on the promises it made. I wrote to many of my constituents to tell them that their cases would be determined by July 2012, yet thousands of people across the country who were told that have still not had their cases decided.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Fiona Mactaggart: No, because I have only three quarters of a minute left; I am sorry.

I beg the Minister to look at the administration of these systems to get the human element at the forefront of his decisions. In doing that, he can take measures that reduce migration—for example, working with women who are tricked by men who use them as taxis in order to get settlement in the UK by marrying them and then disappearing the day after they have got their indefinite leave to remain. This Minister could change some of that. If we start not from numbers but from people, we might get justice in our immigration system; otherwise we will not.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I am meant to be bringing in the Front Benchers at this stage, but we will now have, I hope, two very short contributions.

3.15 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to say a few words; they will therefore be a very few words. First, I congratulate

my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) on the debate and welcome the Minister to his post.

I say to say some Opposition Members that it is very inappropriate to use words such as “darkness” when making speeches in debates such as this, and totally inappropriate to accuse my right hon. Friend of phrasing something in a nasty way. No Government Member is talking about internment camps, torture or whatever else. No one is going down that road, and nor would we, as hon. Members know. It is disingenuous to put that accusation to my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Let me remind the House that for too long we have been unable to have this debate. The subject finally tumbled out, after 13 long years of the Labour party in power, because the former Prime Minister forgot to turn a microphone off. When we heard what he said, we realised that to be concerned about immigration meant that we were bigots, racists and all the rest of it. The wave of anger against the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) was palpable after that, particularly on behalf of the poor lady who was humiliated in such a way. What that said to me to and to everyone else in this House was that we want this topic to be debated reasonably and fairly.

I believe, as do many of my constituents, that this country is full. Yes, of course Scotland has more space, but if it were suggested that we put houses all over its lovely mountains I am sure that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) would be the first to object. It is just not practical. We need only look at the housing debate that is going on right now. We are having to reconsider the planning laws to reduce the restrictions on green belt development because we need to build so many homes. We are full—that is the practicality of the situation in which we find ourselves—and we have to do something about it.

I welcome the way that the Government are going. I hope that we will have a firm and fair system so that people who come into this country have visas and references and have put money into a bank account so that we can count them in and, if necessary, count them out. That must be the sensible way forward. I commend the Government and hope that they will now put the fine words they are purporting to say into action.

3.17 pm

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I cannot support the motion. I welcome the opportunity to debate this issue, because it is very important, but I find it surprising that the House of Commons, through the motion, is inviting the Government to take any measures they want in order to reach a particularly arbitrary target. I cannot possibly support that.

Today, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) said, the Business, Enterprise and Skills Committee reported on its inquiry into student visas. The central recommendation of the report is that student visas be taken out of the net migration statistics. That is consistent with the recommendations made by the Home Affairs Committee, the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, and, earlier this week, the Public Accounts Committee. The evidence in favour of doing so is overwhelming, because there is

currently a contradiction at the heart of Government policy. On one hand, the Government are extolling the virtues of growth and imploring UK Trade & Investment to expand British exports throughout the world, and on the other, the Home Office is sending out a message that because of our migration statistics we have to curb the number of migrants to this country.

Given the fact that students represent about half the current level of migration, there is absolutely no way that the Government can achieve this particular target without curbing student migration. Indeed, it has been estimated that to reach even the Government's figures would cost £2 billion to £3 billion a year in vital export earnings. To reach the motion's figures would mean that the figure for student migration was nil, which would cost vastly more. The simple solution for the Government is to remove those figures from those used to measure net migration, and then we can have a debate on what the public are really concerned about, not the level of student migration.

There was a mini-debate earlier about the Home Office's assessment, but all the evidence shows that only a tiny proportion of those students who come here to study actually stay on as permanent migrants. The existing statistical basis of our migration figures is grossly misleading with regard to the real impact that students have on migration. I would have liked to have had time to address a whole range of other issues, but that is the central point that the Government need to embrace and I hope that the new Minister will listen to the collective wisdom of several Select Committees and act on it.

3.21 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I, like all Members who have spoken in this debate, congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field) and the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) on introducing this debate. I fully agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr Godsiff) that it is right that Parliament should talk about and address one of the issues that is of primary concern to a great number of our constituents. A lot of them take such issues seriously, whether they be migrants themselves, whether their families have been in this country for 1,500 years, or whether they be second or third generation migrants. I have never believed that, just because somebody is concerned about immigration, that, somehow or other, makes them racist. Of course, some such people are racist, but the vast majority are not. They are not bigots; they have a serious set of concerns that we need to address, so I congratulate my right hon. Friend and the right hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. I have to say, however, that I think that the right hon. Gentleman wanted to have his cake and eat it, if he does not mind me saying so.

Nicholas Soames: I have always wanted my cake.

Chris Bryant: The right hon. Gentleman is smiling. I did not mean that to be a foodist comment. He argued in favour of cuts to immigration, but then said that he wants an easier system for distinguished people to come into the country. He said that he wants to get rid of the hub and spoke system, but I would suggest that that would significantly increase the costs of running this

country's migration system, and that he wants to give the officials far more discretion. There is real danger in going down that route. We have to have a system that is manifestly fair and robust and that delivers the same outcome, whatever personal connections somebody may have.

As several Members have said, there are three problems with the motion. First, it links immigration policy to population, and population only. Secondly, it uses the phrase "all necessary steps", which is a very dangerous set of words. Thirdly, there is a danger that if we agree to the motion we would effectively be cutting off our noses to spite our faces, because of the potential unintended consequences for the future with regard to our economy and our society, let alone to the specifics of our education.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Chris Bryant: My right hon. Friend has not even been present during the debate.

Keith Vaz: I have.

Chris Bryant: I apologise and give way to my right hon. Friend.

Keith Vaz: I object to my hon. Friend's comment. I know that he does not have eyes in his head, but I certainly have been present during the debate. *[Interruption.]* I meant to say that my hon. Friend does not have eyes in the back of his head. Prior to this debate, I was chairing the Home Affairs Committee and my hon. Friend will be pleased to know that, in her evidence, the Home Secretary was very clear that she does not believe in an arbitrary cap on the population of this country either.

Chris Bryant: Good. I am glad that my right hon. Friend confirmed that I have eyes in my head, if not in the back of it. Usually, I can sense his presence in the Chamber, but could not on this occasion, so I apologise.

I will make a few introductory remarks. First, it is vital that we have a robust, firm, workable and controlled immigration system that is fair to resident British nationals and to migrants who seek to come here.

Secondly, as many hon. Members have said, sometimes perhaps slightly patronisingly, immigrants have contributed enormously to the United Kingdom. I am sure that we would all agree with that. Few of the people living in my constituency of the Rhondda were not born there. I think that the percentage is the lowest of any constituency in the country. However, 100 years ago, there would not have been the economic growth that there was in the valleys of south Wales without migration from Ireland, England, Scotland and, most notably, Italy. When there was significant unemployment in Italy, many Italians came to work in the south Wales valleys, which is why a café is known as a brachi in south Wales.

Thirdly, British emigrants have contributed phenomenally around the world. One has only to go to Buenos Aires and see that it has more pipe bands than Glasgow to see the positive role that British people have played elsewhere. It would be hypocritical to adopt an attitude that we do not expect British people to face when they travel abroad as emigrants.

Mr Brazier *rose*—

Chris Bryant: I will give way, but I am hesitant as this is a Bach-Bench debate and I do not want to take a vast amount of time.

Mr Brazier: The motion is about numbers. Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that there is a vast difference between people moving from Europe, a largely overcrowded continent, to the emptiest countries in the world, such as Australia, Canada and large parts of south America, and the problems that we face as almost the most congested corner of Europe?

Chris Bryant: It does not feel very congested in the Rhondda, I have to say. Sometimes this debate is conditioned strongly by the problems in the south-east of England. It is also a problem for our economy that we are far more dependent on one area—London and the south-east of England—than many countries in Europe. The more that we can do to shrink the country and extend financial opportunities around the country, the better.

I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis of Latin America. The biggest and fastest-growing cities in the world are all in Latin America and many parts of it face vast congestion. I just think that he is wrong on those facts.

The vast majority of British people value the presence in British universities of international students. We all see that as a positive for the British economy, because if people study in this country and then go back to their country, they are—we hope—more likely to have a positive experience of this country and to do business with us in the future. That is without mentioning the amount of money that having international students pumps into the British economy.

In addition, the vast majority of people in this country want to protect our reputation for welcoming refugees from oppression, torture, violence and oppressive regimes around the world. Although free movement within the European Union undoubtedly has its problems—that is felt not just in the United Kingdom, but notably at the moment in Spain—it is vital to the free market on which the British economy depends.

Linking immigration to population is not as straightforward as many hon. Members have suggested this afternoon. Those who come to this country often leave. If we changed the number of people coming into the country in some categories, we would lose the bounce effect from the people who leave after a few years.

Nicola Blackwood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Bryant: The hon. Lady really has not been here for the whole debate, but I will give way to her.

Nicola Blackwood: The hon. Gentleman is very kind. Speaking as the daughter of a migrant, he is free to patronise my contribution at any moment he chooses. Does he agree that a significant problem with regard to numbers, which as far as I am aware has not been raised, is that it is incredibly difficult to have an informed debate about immigration when the data collection on

those who are in the country and those who exit the country is not complete? We need to fix that problem if we are to form a proper evidence-based policy on immigration.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Lady makes a very fair point, which is related to the next point that I was going to make. Several hon. Members have referred to the number of students, and 60% of non-EU migrants to this country are students. My contention is that the vast majority of those students return to their country of origin. Their whole aim is to come here, study and take their skills back to their own country. The evidence is not cast-iron on any side of that argument, but let those who say that the vast majority of students stay here prove it. I simply do not believe that to be the case.

I return to the number of 70 million mentioned in the motion. Several hon. Members have been profoundly misled about the figures, because if net migration were zero in every category for the next 25 years, the population would grow to 66 million by 2035, up 6% from what it was in 2010. If net migration were tens of thousands, which as a couple of Members have mentioned is the Government's declared aim, the population would be 70 million just after 2035. I do not think the measures that are currently being taken will achieve that declared aim, so they would have to be redoubled, if not trebled, for us to achieve what the motion proposes.

In addition, intra-company transfers under tier 2 were at 29,000 in 2010, roughly the same number in 2011 and 29,571 in 2012, but none of them entitle somebody to settlement in this country, so tackling them would not affect the final figures to which the motion refers.

I also object to the phrase "all necessary steps". Even if the Government were to achieve their declared aim, the population would reach 70 million just after 2035. I suppose that if we were taking all necessary steps, we could theoretically tear up all our asylum commitments. The number of them has fallen in recent years to 19,804, but they are long-standing commitments. Would we really want to tell people fleeing Mugabe or a vicious regime elsewhere in the world that they could not come to this country, and that we would no longer respect those commitments?

We could cut the cap on tier 2 migration below 21,700, but it is already undersubscribed. Only half the certificates of sponsorship were taken up in the last year. If we cut intra-company transfers by installing a cap, I believe that we would dramatically harm the UK's opportunity to act as an international hub.

We could encourage more people to leave the country and make them emigrate by increasing the threshold for settlement to more than £35,000, but that would touch only some 3,000 people at best. We could curtail non-EU migration, but not without cutting demand. According to many employers, the danger is that they would simply seek to employ more EU migrants. The key point is that we have to deal with demand for migrant labour in the UK. For instance, we need to deal with pay and conditions in many parts of the country, so that it makes sense for British people to work. We need to ensure that people have the skills to be able to take the jobs in key industries such as construction and hospitality that are currently being taken by migrants. We also have to tackle the

vectors of mass migration around the world, particularly war, famine, poverty and climate change. On that basis, I do not think it would be right to support the motion.

3.34 pm

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Mark Harper): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) for moving the motion, and his right hon. Friend—at least for the purposes of this debate—and co-sponsor, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field). I also thank my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green), for the many steps he took to start to put our immigration system in good order. I look forward to continuing that. My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex referred to the cross-party group on balanced migration, and if I receive an invitation I will do my best to attend to discuss these matters.

This is a Back-Bench debate, so there is not a huge amount of time. I will not, therefore, be able to deal with every question, but I will consider the points made by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead and my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex, and I may well hold discussions with them at a later date.

The Government have been clear on their commitment to bring control to the immigration system. The rate of immigration over the past decade has led to great public anxiety about its impact on transport, jobs, employment, change within our communities and the provision of public services. We have promised to get a grip on the situation, and that is exactly what we will do.

I will reiterate the comments of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead and thank the Backbench Business Committee and those members of the public who signed a petition for giving me an opportunity—just 48 hours into the job—to listen to the concerns of hon. Members and set out some of the Government's views.

In just over two years following the general election we have reformed every route of entry for non-EEA migrants to the UK. We have increased the level of skill required to come to the UK for work, tackled abuse in the student sector and stopped family migrants who cannot financially support themselves coming to the country. The hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) referred to family links, and our policy is designed to ensure that those who bring family members to the country do not require support from the taxpayer. People should be able to bring family members into the country, but I do not see why they should expect them to be supported by the taxpayer.

Fiona Mactaggart: My point was that the previous rules required people to provide evidence that they did not need support from the taxpayer. The new rules, however, state that they need an income of more than £22,400. Plenty of people in my constituency—about half my constituents—live on an income smaller than that, without recourse to the taxpayer.

Mr Harper: My understanding is that income limits are set because they are linked to qualification levels for various kinds of income-related benefits. That is why limits were introduced and I think that is perfectly sound.

We have also broken the link concerning migrants who come on temporary visas and stay in the country for ever. A work or study visa no longer acts as a route to settlement, and we have made it clear that those on temporary visas are expected to return home.

Many hon. Members have noted that immigration brings significant benefits to the UK—my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex made that clear in his remarks. There are cultural, social and economic benefits and, as the right hon. Member for Birkenhead pointed out, sporting benefits such as those we have seen recently.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), with whom I duelled across the Dispatch Box in my previous post, celebrated multicultural Britain and I am therefore confused why he and his party wish to break it up. As he will know, I campaigned strongly in a previous role to keep our United Kingdom together—a wish I believe is generally shared across the House. The United Kingdom is better together, and I fervently hope that the campaign will be successful and that as Immigration Minister I will never have to deploy the UK Border Force along the England-Scotland border. The Government will do their best to keep our country together. The United Kingdom is better together, which the hon. Gentleman suggested when he celebrated it in his contribution. That belief is shared by those in the Chamber, expect perhaps by the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Angus (Mr Weir) sitting next to him. Other hon. Members will, I think, agree with my sentiment.

Pete Wishart: It is almost impossible to break up Britain; I live in the northern part of the island of Great Britain. The Minister knows that Scotland's immigration requirements are entirely different from those of the rest of the United Kingdom. Will he, unlike previous Immigration Ministers, have a proper look at the issue and please give us a break?

Mr Harper: I will, of course, study the hon. Gentleman's points carefully, but the conclusion he wishes to reach is different from mine. I want to keep our country together; he wants to break it up.

The public rightly expect the Government to have a robust immigration policy to prevent migrants from coming to the UK and relying on benefits, to stop abuse, and to enforce the removal of those who fail to comply with the rules. Controlling migration is an important factor in keeping the UK's population growth at a sustainable level. The Government are clear that annual net migration to the UK of hundreds of thousands is not sustainable. With our reforms focused on the best and the brightest migrants to the UK, we anticipate and intend that net migration will fall to the tens of thousands by the end of this Parliament.

In his thoughtful and excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Gavin Barwell) spoke of striking the right balance between economic growth and gross domestic product per head. We believe that our commitment, which he confirmed he supports, strikes that right balance. I continue to support that commitment, as did my predecessor.

Keith Vaz: I join other hon. Members in welcoming the Minister most warmly to his new post. We look forward to his appearing before the Home Affairs Committee. One point I hope he will take away from

[Keith Vaz]

this excellent debate—it was made by the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith)—is on management. Will the Minister focus, laser-like, on the operation of the UK Border Agency? It is still troubled, but it is capable of improvement with proper ministerial guidance.

Mr Harper: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's comments and look forward to appearing before his Committee—I am sure the invitation will be on its way shortly if it is not already. He was not in the Chamber for all of the debate because he was hearing evidence from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, but I am grateful for his comments. His concerns about the UKBA are well known—I have heard him describe them on a number of occasions. I have already met the chief executive of UKBA and the head of the UK Border Force, on which I intend to keep a close eye. I come from a private sector background in which I was involved in managing people and have experience of working in a large, complicated organisation. I mean to get immersed in the details and keep a very close track on UKBA, as I am sure he would expect.

Things are starting to move in the right direction. Recent data from the Office for National Statistics show that net migration is falling—from 252,000 at the end of 2010 to 216,000 at the end of 2011. Visa indicators for the first half of 2012 show that the downward trend is likely to continue. That is a small step in starting to turn the ship around, but we need patience. We have always said that our policy will take the full course of a Parliament to have effect. There is no quick solution. The system we inherited was broken—even the Labour party has accepted that there was a large number of problems in the system the Government inherited—and we need to take some time to turn it around.

I should address a couple of specific points made in the debate. Several hon. Members commented on students and London Metropolitan university. It is important to say that we have taken tough action against the institution, but we have also set up a taskforce to work closely with and support the genuine students to find another institution where they can continue their studies in the UK. It is absolutely right that we support those legitimate students who are here legally, complying with the terms of the basis on which they are here. However, it is also right that we take firm action against institutions that fail to carry out the steps they are supposed to carry out if they are to be trusted sponsors. The public would expect that.

Mr Frank Field: Is there not a difference between the theory of saying that the taskforce will get students into other universities and what will actually happen? One of the great treasures of our system is that universities are so different. It is inconceivable that university B will do a similar course and allow students to pick up the pieces if they transfer to it from university A. Cannot the Minister grasp that being tough on institutions, on which the House agrees with him, is totally different from being tough on legitimate students? We know full well that the bogus students will have disappeared by now and will not be punished. The current policy will punish the innocent.

Mr Harper: I take the right hon. Gentleman's point, but it is not our intention to punish the innocent students. That is why we have set up the taskforce. I can give him the assurance that I will look at the enforcement action we have taken against London Metropolitan university—

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Andrew Smith *rose*—

Mr Brazier *rose*—

Mr Harper: I will not give way to the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) because he has not been in the Chamber for the debate. The right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr Brazier) have been here, so I will take their interventions and then conclude, because a very important and well subscribed Backbench Business Committee debate will follow this one.

Mr Andrew Smith: Following the answer to my right hon. Friend's question just now, will the Minister give an assurance that he will consider lifting the threat of deportation from the bona fide students at London Metropolitan university?

Mr Harper: We have not threatened anyone with anything yet. We have set out the steps we have taken and we will contact all the students involved. I have only been doing this job for 48 hours and I will look at that very closely. I have heard very clearly the points that have been made in the debate.

Mr Brazier: I very much welcome the assurances that my hon. Friend has given for the bona fide students, but does he agree that we could not go on as we were before, with the National Audit Office reporting that, in the first year in which the last Government's tier 4 arrangements for students were introduced, between 40,000 and 50,000 so-called students came with the intention of working rather than studying?

Mr Harper: I agree with my hon. Friend. We could not go on as we were, and that is why the steps that my hon. Friend the former Minister took were welcome. We need to continue in that light.

I talked about a selective immigration policy. We want the brightest and the best to come to the UK to support economic growth, and we have consulted widely on our reforms with business and the higher education sector. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) referred to the fact that since we introduced the limit on visas, they have been undersubscribed, so we have not prevented a single highly skilled worker from coming to the UK, and we have made the investor and entrepreneur routes more attractive and accessible.

Our aim is to eliminate abuse and focus on high quality, high value sectors. There is no limit on the number of students who can enter the UK to study. Reducing net migration and tackling immigration abuse are completely compatible with continuing to attract the brightest and the best.

Immigration can be beneficial to Britain, but the unsustainable levels we have seen have been damaging. That is why we said that we would get a grip, and we are getting a grip, on immigration. If we complete our work to control net migration properly, we will have a system that is firm but fair, and we will have reassured the public that we have proper control over who comes to and stays in our country.

3.47 pm

Nicholas Soames: I once again welcome my hon. Friend the new Minister and wish him every success in this very difficult brief. I congratulate all colleagues who spoke in this debate. What is most important is that there has been a debate. There need to be more debates. All these views are important and need to be aired. Inevitably, we hold differing views, but from these Benches we urge the Minister to press ahead, above all, with making the process more robust and more effective, and thus more humane and understood. Above all, we must ensure that we honour our manifesto commitment to see these numbers fall.

I take the point made by the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) about humanity and human beings, and I acknowledge that it is of course extraordinarily important. But we do need to fix these numbers. I hope that people outside Parliament will feel that these matters have been properly discussed today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House calls on the Government to take all necessary steps to reduce immigration to a level that will stabilise the UK's population as close as possible to its present level and, certainly, significantly below 70 million.

Community Hospitals

3.48 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I beg to move.

That this House recognises and supports the contribution of community hospitals to the care of patients within the National Health Service; requests the Secretary of State for Health to commission a comprehensive database of community hospitals, their ownership and current roles; and believes that the assets of community hospitals should remain for the benefit of their community while allowing them greater freedom to explore different ownership models.

I warmly welcome my hon. Friend the Minister to her new role. She will know that there are more than 300 community hospitals in England. I used to work at one of the very smallest at Moretonhampstead in the heart of Dartmoor, so I know just how important community hospitals are, especially to isolated rural communities. I may have lost one, but I fortunately gained four, and I am happy to represent Brixham, South Hams, Dartmouth and Totnes.

Community hospitals vary in size and function—some are urban, some are rural, for instance—but they share a common theme: they are deeply rooted in their communities and provide an extraordinary level of support with volunteering and charitable giving through leagues of friends. The reason for that support is clear: people value their personalised approach and want to be treated closer to home. Community hospitals score well on things such as dignity, respect and nutrition. We should be treasuring and enhancing their role because, although small is beautiful, unfortunately it can make them a tempting target for cuts.

The need for efficiencies in the health service is nothing new. I remember reading in 2009—before the general election—about the Nicholson challenge. We have known for some time that we have to make £20 billion of efficiency savings over the next four years—that is 4% efficiency gains year on year—but there is a misunderstanding about what this means. It is not about doing less of the same; it is about spending what we spend more efficiently and looking at the needs of our population. Over the next 20 years, the number of over-85s in our country will double.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): In my constituency, Abingdon community hospital has played a fascinating role in supporting the wider NHS in Oxfordshire. It has assisted with the problem of bed blocking by supporting early and late-stage rehab and preventing patients from needing acute beds. I do not think that community hospitals should face cuts, given the role they can play in easing pressures on acute hospitals. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Dr Wollaston: I agree absolutely. Their role in so-called step-down care and rehabilitation is vital, and I am glad to hear that it is happening well in Abingdon.

Seventy per cent. of the total spend on health and social care goes on people with long-term conditions. We should all understand that the burden of disease in England has completely changed—from tackling life-threatening emergencies to managing people with long-term, complex condition.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this timely debate. She mentioned the growing elderly population, and nowhere is that more of an issue than in north Yorkshire. Does she agree that the Government—and this is a good opportunity for me to congratulate our new Minister, whom I hope will respond positively—should not be obsessed only with home care, which has its place, and that there will always be a place for community hospitals in our health care structure?

Dr Wollaston: I wish to make the case for reinvigorating community hospitals as hubs for delivering the right care at the right time and in the right place. Of course, the right place, where possible, will always involve helping people to be independent in their own homes, but community hospitals have a vital role, through both step-up and step-down care, in helping to maintain that independence.

We should look at what community hospitals are capable of, because they are not just about in-patient beds: they provide a full range of diagnostics, minor injuries units, therapies—physiotherapy and occupational—and mental health care. In my constituency, people with cancer can access chemotherapy at Kingsbridge hospital, saving them a long roundtrip to Derriford hospital. Kingsbridge hospital—South Hams, I should say—supports a triangle centre helping people and their families living with cancer, while organisations such as Rowcroft hospice are looking to expand their care-at-home system through hubs in community hospitals and, at times, by utilising their beds and support. We can get so much more from community hospitals if we reinvigorate them.

We should not think of community hospitals as backwaters; they can be centres of great innovation. The nationally recognised Torbay pilot, which provides care based in the community, started at Brixham community hospital in my constituency and is now being considered for nationwide roll-out. That is a very good model.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. She mentions the Torbay model, which is rightly a pilot and flagship for the integration of services, but does she envisage a situation in which not only are medical services integrated in one location but other emergency services can come together? The result could be enhanced training for people, such as firemen and policemen, who could qualify as paramedics and assistants to the medical services.

Dr Wollaston: Indeed I do, and there are many community hospitals that support first responders in the way my hon. Friend describes. That is an important role, and there is perhaps even an extended role in housing, where step-down housing can enable people to make the transition back to full independence. Indeed, there are many such roles.

What are the current barriers to providing the right care at the right time and in the right place? I would like the Minister to deal with five points. First, the biggest challenge we need to address is the tariff and tariff reform. She will know that most acute hospitals are paid through a system known as payment by results, which creates some perverse incentives, whereby acute

hospitals want to Hoover up as much activity as possible. Often, people are treated in an acute setting when they could be more appropriately cared for in a community hospital setting or at home. Can the Minister update the House on the progress we are making on reforming the tariff, by, say, working towards a “whole year of care” model or looking at other ways to remove the incentive in the system that means that people cannot be transferred into community hospitals or provided with the right care in the right place?

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and I entirely agree with her important point about the tariff and acute hospitals. I hope she agrees that it is also important to signpost patients to the right place, which, because we are talking about a caring issue, is in many cases a community hospital.

Dr Wollaston: I thank my hon. Friend for making that important point. Quite often patients are not aware of the full range of services available in their community hospitals. We can do far better in signposting them. It is also important that GPs understand and support those services and make referrals to the right place.

The second issue I would like the Minister to address is the community hospital estate. She will be aware that many community hospitals around the country are being pushed into ownership by NHS Property Services. However, there are examples around the country of community hospitals that are owned by their communities, for example, or by a social enterprise. If those hospitals are unable to have ownership of their premises, that can hold them back if they have ambitions to expand their roles in future. Obviously we want to reassure the public that these valuable community assets remain in public ownership, as it were, but we also want to ensure more flexibility in their ownership model. I would therefore be grateful if the Minister addressed that point.

Thirdly, there is an accountability issue. There are occasions where having multiple providers operating out of a community hospital can cause confusion. Situations can arise where, because everybody is responsible, nobody is responsible, and accountability can end up being shunted around the system. Does the Minister agree that it would make more sense to have a single body, or even individual, with overall responsibility for what happens to patients and the way in which care is organised in a community hospital?

Fourthly, I want to raise an important point that goes beyond community hospitals to the whole way in which we look at a primary care based system, namely the looming crisis in general practice numbers. For the first time we now have a vacancy rate for GPs of 12% in the south-west. On top of that, in about four or five years we will have a retirement bulge—I am afraid that I have not helped the situation—and we are also moving, quite rightly, from a three-year period for general practitioner training to a four-year period. All that coming together means that across the country, the south-west included, we will face a shortage of skilled practitioners both to deliver commissioning and to staff our community hospitals. We need their support. It would be a great shame if GPs who were enthusiastic about getting involved in commissioning and helping out in their community hospitals were unable to do so because of their clinical

commitments. Can the Minister therefore update the House on how we are going to stop the problem, which has been going on for years, of too many medical students going into training in acute hospital specialties? We need more of them to go into general practice.

Finally, will the Minister support the Community Hospitals Association? It does a tremendous job. In 2008 it received a £20,000 grant to help set up a detailed database that documented not only where community hospitals are but what they do. At this time of change I hope she agrees that it is particularly important that we keep track of what they are doing. The CHA has also highlighted innovation and helped to spread best practice, so I hope that she will give it further support.

No debate about community hospitals would be complete without thanking the leagues of friends, which around the country have provided millions of pounds. They do not provide luxuries; we are talking about major building projects, equipment, funds for care, volunteers who come into the hospital—an extraordinary level of support. We could not manage without them in our community hospitals. I know that the whole House will want to join me in paying tribute to our leagues of friends.

This is a call to arms to people listening to the debate. If you value your community hospital, let your GPs know, let your commissioners know, let HealthWatch know, let your local health and wellbeing boards know. If we want community hospitals to be treasured, as we all do in the House, we need to make that very clear.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I advise Members that if I am to get everybody in I will have to introduce a seven-minute limit. If people start to take interventions, I will have to drop the limit again. Everybody will get in, but please be patient and let us try to ensure that everyone gets a fair chance.

4.1 pm

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) and the Backbench Business Committee for securing this important debate. We can see from the number of hon. Members across the Chamber who want to talk about this that it is a valid and timely debate. I also welcome the Minister to her new position in the Health team.

As many hon. Members and the Minister of State will know, community hospitals play a vital role in my constituency; Guisborough hospital and East Cleveland hospital are essential to East Cleveland's health and well-being. I was privileged to secure an Adjournment debate on the future of community hospitals in the north-east on 20 June. While it was certainly good to hear from the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), for instance, about the good work that community hospitals do in his constituency, it was clear from other hon. Members that some community hospitals are struggling. A general consensus was apparent to me that patient choice is key to this whole matter. While patients should be able to receive care at home, that is not necessarily what patients always want, and it is not always necessarily appropriate. Community hospitals therefore have a real role in providing care to such people, as well as in the provision of out-patient services, especially in rural areas.

With the Health and Social Care Act 2012 causing reorganisation that has cost the local NHS tens of millions of pounds on Teesside alone, it is perhaps not surprising that many trusts appear keen to centralise services to larger hospitals. In my constituency, we have already seen a significant reduction during this Parliament in the services available at Guisborough hospital, with the closure of the Chaloner ward and a reduction in minor injuries provision. Similarly, constituents have told me that they have been unable to receive the services that they need at East Cleveland hospital in Brotton. This is deeply worrying, as more than 50% of my constituency is rural, and I know how constituents without a car can struggle to attend hospitals further away, such as the James Cook university hospital near Marton, Easterside and Park End in the south Middlesbrough part of my constituency.

I know that this problem is unfortunately replicated around the country. In the South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust area alone, a district general hospital in Northallerton—the Friarage—and Redcar's primary care hospital are facing problems due to the centralisation of services. With the reallocation of public health funds as well, which are used primarily for community nursing, we are seeing what I can only describe as a vice-like grip between the reduction in services in community hospitals and the reduction in funding for community nursing, especially for palliative care for elderly and vulnerable people.

Guy Opperman: I accept that the hon. Gentleman is a champion for his constituency, but he surely accepts that this is a process that started under his Government. For example, his maternity unit closed in 2006, so it is not something new.

Tom Blenkinsop: I can tell that the hon. Gentleman has a good memory, because that point was raised in my debate. While many services at that hospital have been closed in recent months, the maternity services at Guisborough were centralised at James Cook and the community was consulted on that. However, I did not see any proper community consultation when services at East Cleveland hospital and Guisborough were very much reduced.

Also, a massive number of long-serving, skilled nurses, mainly women, have been leaving Guisborough hospital before reaching retirement age. That is very worrying. They are choosing to go to other hospitals or simply to leave their careers altogether. The trust acknowledges that this is happening, and the reasons include stress, a lack of available nurses on the wards and the low-paying contracts being offered.

This seems to involve a central funding issue for the trust. The James Cook University hospital is now consulting the community on privatising wards at the hospital. So, while the trust is centralising services away from the community hospitals, it is also trying to find other funding sources to pay for the services that it has centralised. That suggests that this is a central funding issue and nothing else.

I sincerely hope, for the sake of my constituents, that the Minister takes urgent action to address the problems faced by district, general and community hospitals. Such action should include commissioning a database of information on what they do, providing trusts with

[Tom Blenkinsop]

the funds that they need to secure the future of those hospitals, and replacing the money that they have been forced to waste on an unwanted, unnecessary, top-down NHS reorganisation.

4.6 pm

Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister to her new position and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) for securing the debate. I should also like to thank the Backbench Business Committee.

Community hospitals are really important in South East Cornwall. It is a rural constituency, and the two district general hospitals serving the area are located far away from my constituents. It takes at least an hour to travel to Derriford hospital in Plymouth, and those living at the western end of the constituency have to travel to Truro, which involves about the same travelling time. It is therefore important that patients and relatives can source many services from the two community hospitals in the constituency. One is in Liskeard; the other is St Barnabas hospital in Saltash, which is housed in a beautiful historic building.

When I met the Liskeard community hospital's friends group, I learned that it had raised and spent more than £30,000 on equipment to assist the treatment of patients since the hospital was built relatively recently. I am proud of and grateful to the local community for donating so much time and effort to keep the hospital well equipped. This ultimately helps many local patients. The friends continue to work to raise money for up-to-date equipment to assist with patient comfort and diagnosis. I was fortunate enough to visit the hospital last summer and to see some of the brilliant equipment that has been provided by the league of friends.

I visited St Barnabas hospital in Saltash before the election, with my right hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr Lansley), and have seen for myself the wonderful facilities that it has, including some operating theatres. They are not utilised to their full extent, however, and I should like to ask the Minister to ensure that such facilities are fully utilised, especially in rural constituencies such as mine.

Liskeard community hospital offers a number of in-patient beds, in addition to a minor injuries unit that is open every day, an X-ray department that is open from Monday to Saturday, and a range of out-patient clinics. St. Barnabas, in addition to the facilities that I have described which could be more fully utilised, offers a small number of in-patient beds and a day-case surgery. In addition, a range of out-patient clinics is held on site, and the minor injury unit is open every day. I believe that there is capacity for expansion at both locations. That would benefit patients living in my very rural constituency, which has limited public transport. I hope that the Minister will take note of this and ensure that as many services as possible are rolled out to our valuable community hospitals.

4.10 pm

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on securing this debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend

the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) on gaining her place on the Front Bench. I wish her luck in her new role.

We are discussing community hospitals, which provide an important service in offering care to all our communities. I think there could be a renaissance in community hospital provision in the coming decades, not least because the vast majority of money in the national health service is spent not on all the exciting acute and surgical kit, but on the provision of care to the chronically unwell. Where better for the chronically unwell to be treated than in their communities?

I am particularly interested in this subject because I have recently published on it—and I commend my own publication to all colleagues in the Chamber! It is a 70-page document that my office and I managed to put together, and it was published in May this year. In it, I call for the closure of some acute hospitals and for the merger of community hospitals around what is commonly described as the hub-and-spoke health care model.

I am told by some experienced and seasoned politicians that this is quite dangerous stuff. I have called in the press for the local maternity unit not to reopen, and I have argued that having a casualty department at my local district general hospital would not be in the best interests of my constituents. People may say, "Good luck with your single term in office, Phillip", but the reality is—I am being serious here—that what I am saying is in all our best interests. I would say that it is in the interests of those on both sides of the House—it is a pity that so few Opposition Members are in their places today—that we get behind the reality of what is happening in the delivery of health care.

I have not met anyone working in the medical profession who does not support the principle of the consolidation of acute and surgical services and the provision of chronic care in community settings, so this is undeniable. If anyone meets such a person, please put them in touch with me, as I would be interested to hear the argument for the status quo.

The reality is that acute and medical/surgical care is becoming increasingly complex, increasingly expensive to deliver and, in particular, increasingly difficult to staff. Nowadays, we do not have the "Sir Tufton Bufton" general surgeon as once there was; we have different qualified surgeons within the broad field of general surgery. If I have something wrong with my upper gastro-intestinal tract, I want to go to an upper GI specialist. I do not want to go to someone who does it occasionally; I want to go to someone who does it daily. This is clearly not possible on every district general site in the country.

We are beginning to see the realities. There is a consolidation of services ongoing in the south of London. It is politically sensitive, I gather, but it is going to happen, so everybody needs to wake up to it. It has already happened in Norwich; it is happening in Cambridge; and I gather it has happened in Swindon. That this is happening everywhere around the country is, I believe, a positive move. I do not seek to make any political point or to any political capital out of it because I know that if there were a Labour Government, it would be happening in any case. I would encourage not just existing MPs, but candidates at the next election to be more honest about this. As I say, it is really in all our

best interests. Ultimately, we are here to try to secure a health service that provides the very best for all our constituents.

Let me move on to my specific regional case. To provide some background, I still work as a doctor, and I intend to continue working as one—not least because one morning in Slough is enough reality to keep my feet on the ground. In that capacity, I have formed the impression that what we need on the ground in Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and south-east Oxfordshire is a consolidation of acute and surgical services.

Having looked after approximately 50,000 patients in about 50 general practices throughout the Thames valley, referred patients to every acute centre and worked with every hospital except the Royal Berkshire, I feel that I may have something to say about this issue. I have concluded that we need a new hospital at junction 8/9 of the M4, and I am not alone in thinking that. Deloitte, which was paid significantly more money than I was to produce its wonderful report in 1989, reached exactly the same conclusion, and that was before Wycombe general hospital had been downgraded as a fully fledged acute surgical site.

I am in favour of the retention of all community hospitals in the region except two. One is Heatherwood, the hospital that has traditionally served my constituency—people may say that I just talk the talk, but in this instance I am walking the walk—and the other is St Mark's in Maidenhead. I want to enhance the delivery of chronic medical services on the Brants Bridge site in Bracknell. That is the plan, and I am trying to build some grass-roots support for it. I am trying to emphasise—this brings me back to the topic of the debate—the importance of community hospitals, the importance of the services that they offer now, and the fact that they can offer enhanced services in the future.

Given an ageing and increasingly retired population and a diminishing economic position, we shall have to sell off sites to find the necessary capital funds. However, this is a positive story. We can have new acute emergency hospitals throughout the country, although I recognise that in rural areas they will have to be supported by helicopters and the like. We can provide better services, both in the community and in the central, specialised hospitals, delivering the very best health care in the 21st century. That is why I am a proud supporter of community hospitals. I hope that all Members of Parliament of all parties will step up to the plate and be honest about the situation, so that care for all patients can be improved in future.

4.17 pm

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), who made an excellent speech. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on having initiated this important debate, and welcome the Minister, who has secured a deserved promotion. I think that we have all appreciated her analytical contributions to debates on health and on other matters.

I have only one simple point to make, which is better than my normal average. The fact is that community hospitals are in a slightly ambiguous category. Some are innovative, valued, highly rated and essential, while others are historical legacies of a previous age—expensive

to run, limited in range, and out on a limb. Some areas depend on them, and some areas, such as mine, have absolutely none. I was a founder member of the all-party parliamentary group on small hospitals simply because my constituency contained a small acute general hospital. Dr Taylor was, of course, elected over an issue involving the closure of hospitals, which has been a shock to the whole political system ever since.

What a community hospital offers, what it consists of, how it is staffed and the services that it offers varies from one community to another, but what is universally the case is that, negatively or positively, we are now deciding what we will do about such hospitals and evaluating their place in the new system. There are three forces working against them. First, there are the perceived and evidenced benefits of specialisation—mentioned by the hon. Member for Bracknell—and the concentration of hospital services across many surgical and medical fields, leading to bigger and more expensively resourced general hospitals. Secondly, there is the encouragement given to GPs to provide more and more services in a primary care setting: tests, dermatology and the like. Thirdly, there is the encouragement given to non-NHS providers to offer clinical services at NHS prices. Given the additional fact that the last Government cut the umbilical cord which, in many instances, joined community hospitals to PCTs and effectively guaranteed their funding, the problem is clear.

The result of all that is that each community hospital has had to establish its own niche within an increasingly tightly regulated and exacting health economy. The range of services they provide varies: recuperative services, palliative services, minor injuries services, clinical and diagnostic services, blood tests, and—very importantly—the provision of satellite services for bigger players. It can look as if they are searching for a role, but their absence, closure or downgrading has the capacity to seriously unnerve communities and their MPs.

Hard-headed health economists and medics regard this as emotional populism; they see people getting upset about the survival of their community hospital as, in effect, a costly attachment to buildings. However, they misunderstand the public—and, to some extent, the rural—psyche. People have reasonable and rational expectations concerning the clinical quality of services, and the NHS tries to state them, define them and meet them. People also have reasonable, but generally unstated, expectations about access to services, and the NHS often dodges them, declines to state them, or shuffles off responsibility to the Department for Transport. People will travel to the ends of the earth for life-saving specialist care, but they see no reason in the modern age to travel 10 miles for a simple blood test or the triaging of bumps and falls.

We have to accept that acute care will increasingly take place only in ever-larger city hospitals, but there will be hassle for everybody, including relatives, if prolonged recuperation or chronic diseases are treated in the same place. It is true that over time GPs will do more and send fewer patients to hospital, but no GP will ever provide 24/7 open access. Very few GPs are now on call, and they do not offer the full raft of community hospital services.

If community hospitals are to have a long-term future, we have to be clear about access, access standards, what the reasonable standards of access are and what each

[John Pugh]

citizen can reasonably expect from the NHS—a subject on which I had an Adjournment debate a few months ago. If that is not done, the future of community hospitals will be left to market forces to play out, which is not a game I see community hospitals winning.

4.22 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on securing this debate. We are discussing an important topic and there are many wide-ranging issues to be addressed. I also congratulate the Minister on having been appointed to her new role. We all look forward to working with her.

Community hospitals do not just provide excellent clinical medical care. They are also places where patients feel the warmth of the community, which adds to a sense of well-being that is also part of their recovery. One reason why people feel so strongly about having community hospitals close and accessible is because it means friends and relatives can attend, which helps to make patients feel well. That is not just emotional clap-trap.

My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes put her finger on a key point when she said that this is about the community and trying to extend and expand the range of community services that are available. My community hospitals in Teignbridge are going from strength to strength, and there is a move towards integrating social and health care. That will be the salvation of community hospitals in the future. I support my hon. Friend's comments about volunteers, too. The league of friends and the community transport in my three hospitals are first class. Without them, our community hospitals would not be nearly as successful and happy.

My three hospitals are quite different, but they all have minor injuries units and X-ray facilities, and provide a variety of services to the old and the young. Dawlish was the first private finance initiative hospital ever built, and patient surveys consistently put it in the top three of the 22 Devon hospitals. Remarkably, Teignmouth still has an operating theatre, as well as a physio unit funded by the league of friends—well done! Newton Abbot got the 2007 PFI deal of the year. Unusually, it has a maternity unit, as well as a first-class stroke unit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes also raised the important issue of ownership. I raised this matter last year in a Westminster Hall debate. It is crucial that we get clarity about how ownership is to be managed once the asset is transferred from the primary care trust. In the case of Teignmouth hospital, the property is owned outright by the PCT. As I understand it, that property will be transferred to NHS Property Services Ltd. My local community has put in £850,000, so how does it feel about that? What will happen on future fundraising? Will the money just go into a central pot? What terms and conditions will be imposed on the service provider?

The situations at Newton Abbot and Dawlish are much more complicated, because those hospitals are the subjects of PFI contracts. That means that the buildings are owned by a private contractor and are, in effect, rented out to the service provider subject to two

charges, an availability fee and a service charge, both of which have historically been extraordinarily high. In those cases, the contracts will be transferred to the NHS Commissioning Board. That raises a number of legal questions about the validity of the transfer, given the nature of that contract, and about the ability of the new owner to renegotiate the contract. Why do I talk about renegotiation? I do so because it is well known from evidence in the press that some of the charges that have been levied are disproportionately high. What can we do to enable such a renegotiation? Clearly it will be completely inappropriate for a local trust provider to undertake such a renegotiation, so will the NHS Commissioning Board do it?

My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) has been brilliant in raising a campaign to look at renegotiating these contracts. The Government have already started to look at the whole management issue of these contracts to see whether costs can be cut, and they reckon that a substantial saving has been made and 5% savings can be achieved. They have established a fund of more than £1.5 billion for this; that is the amount that any one trust can get over 25 years to assist with the blighting cost, but that can be obtained only in exceptional and historic circumstances. The fund has been used, but generally that has been in much larger cases involving much bigger hospitals; I cannot see a community hospital being able to pass the test of having exceptional and historic problems. So what can the Government do to help those hospitals blighted with the burden of a PFI contract? I have heard of hospitals that, under the service charge, have had to pay £333 just to change a light bulb. I am pleased to say that that was not the case in my local hospital, but my goodness me that sort of situation has to change.

Guy Opperman: My hon. Friend rightly raises the issue of PFI and asks what the Government can do. I would venture to suggest that the previous Health Secretary's decision to approve the county council's assistance to the health trust so that it could buy out the PFI contract that was crippling Hexham hospital is exactly the right way forward. Under that approach, a PFI arrangement is bought out and a much better financial basis is put in place—an ongoing future financial basis approved by all.

Anne Marie Morris: My hon. Friend makes absolutely the right point, but the tragedy is that few communities can afford that sort of buy-out. As he rightly says, if we could achieve that, it would undoubtedly be the answer.

All we need from the Minister is some clarity as to exactly how these properties are to be transferred; what the position with the local community will be when properties are owned by NHS Property Services Ltd; and what the position will be on the PFI contracts when they get passed across to the NHS Commissioning Board. Clarification on those matters would be helpful and it is now urgently needed, because local trusts that are looking at continuing to run these hospitals need certainty about what they are going to be including in their budgets, and the sorts of figures that the availability fee and the service charge take out are phenomenal. The availability fees at my local hospitals range from 18 to 35%; that is the fee simply to repay the funding costs of

the overall PFI arrangement. The service charge can also be high, reaching 18 to 20%. Set against that, private investors are currently seeing returns of up to 50%. That is huge and it seems unreasonable. The previous Government entered into a voluntary arrangement whereby any excess profits, particularly as a result of contracts being bundled by external private bodies, should be shared between the taxpayer and the private investor.

All those tools, which are available for the Government, need to be used. We need certainty and manageable budgets so that our community hospitals can thrive and so that money is available for what we really need—the services.

4.30 pm

Mr Aidan Burley (Cannock Chase) (Con): I, too, thank my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) for securing this very important debate, which, as she will see from my speech, is very timely given what is happening in my constituency. I also congratulate the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), on her elevation to the Front Bench. It is always fantastic to see someone from the midlands in that position.

I want to pick up on points that were made in the last two speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) spoke about the ownership of the hospital and the future and the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) said that market forces determined the future of some hospitals. That was apt given what is happening in Cannock, where we have a situation with our community hospital.

Cannock community hospital was built in the 1980s. It is a fantastic facility with many years of life left in it, but over the past 20 years it has seen a gradual decline in use and is now chronically underused. It has gone from having nine wards when it was opened to having only two, and just last week the kitchens were closed to save £200,000-odd a year. Cannock forms part of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust and shares it with Stafford hospital, and many colleagues will be aware of the problems there and the extra funding the Government have had to put in. The trust that controls Cannock and Stafford hospitals has a problem, as it is losing £15 million a year and £8 million of that through running Cannock community hospital. That cannot go on.

There are only three options for Cannock. First, it could be sold off and the remaining services could be transferred to Stafford hospital, which is a bigger acute hospital, with some of the receipts from the sale being used to expand services at Stafford and to accommodate them. That is unacceptable to my constituents, local people and local politicians on both sides of the divide. We are not willing to see our local hospital close—a hospital that was bought with local money from the National Coal Board and with local donations. There are therefore only two other options to secure the future of Cannock hospital, given that it is such a loss-making enterprise; it costs some £34 million a year to run and pulls in about £24 million from the commissioning of services.

The first of those options is for the GPs to fill the hospital. I am sceptical about that because they have not filled it so far and it takes a brave man to persuade

the clinical commissioning groups that they must fill the hospital so that it becomes a going concern that does not lose any money and is fully utilised. GPs simply have not done that in the past. If we cannot fill it with services, I have come to the conclusion—I have just come from giving interviews to the local media on this point—that the only solution to secure the future of our community hospital is for the district council to purchase the facility or purchase a controlling part of the hospital estate. A clause in the contract would mean that the council could use the part of the estate it owned only to meet health and social care needs.

I think the future for our hospital will be for Cannock Chase district council to buy 50% or 60% of the estate—or even all of it—and decant some of the health and social care services that it runs into it, including GPs' surgeries, walk-in clinics, polyclinics, advice centres and so on. The hospital would once again be a going concern. It was valued just four months ago at £34 million, so Members can see that even buying 50% of it would cost the council £16 million to £17 million. As a council with a turnover of several million pounds a year that can borrow £80 million a year, that is feasible. I hope today to set up a working group of local hospital bosses, council leaders and officers, the friends of Cannock hospital and any local stakeholder who wants to be involved. I do not know what the answer is or how feasible this might be, but I see no other way of securing our hospital's future and getting it utilised again unless the district council steps in, buys part of the estate and utilises it itself, or even buys the whole estate and leases part of it back to the trust, which currently uses part of it for rheumatology, orthopaedics and eye surgery but not all of it.

I will conclude briefly by asking the Minister whether she and her Department would approve, in principle, of district councils helping to secure the future of our beloved community hospitals in that way. If so, perhaps she would consider sending an official from the Department to serve on the steering committee we are setting up to investigate the possibility so that they can guide us on how best to secure the future of our community hospital and retain its use for health and social care services, as the current reality is that it is losing money and financially is not a going concern in the long term.

4.36 pm

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on securing the debate and speaking about community hospitals with such passion and experience. May I also congratulate the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), and say how pleased I am that the debate is taking place within a few days of her promotion, which means that she can hear from the Front Bench what a tremendous asset community hospitals are to all our communities? It is disappointing that only the shadow Minister and the Opposition Whip, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), are on the Opposition Benches for this important debate.

Our experience in West Worcestershire can certainly contribute to a debate on the ownership of community hospitals, because we have three in the constituency: Malvern, Pershore and Tenbury Wells. They all have slightly different models of ownership, and I think that

[*Harriett Baldwin*]

diversity of ownership model is something that has led to their success and will lead to their longevity. I thought that it might be worth sharing with colleagues the different approaches that have been used.

I will take this opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor, now Lord Spicer, who fought for a new community hospital for Malvern for most of the 36 years he represented West Worcestershire. We used to have a hospital in a beautiful old building dating from the late 19th century, but it had become too small and too old and, although beautiful, was no longer fit for purpose—to use the famous NHS phrase. Everyone in the community, including the league of friends, accepted that was the case and campaigned for many years for a new build hospital. A site was secured in the 1970s but sat empty and derelict for the better part of three decades until the day when my predecessor got the phone call from the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) to tell him that a new community hospital would be built in Malvern. It was a great day of celebration after so many decades of campaigning. Indeed, if any Members are in Malvern in the near future, they will see what a spectacular hospital has been built for the community. It opened just over a year ago. It is owned entirely by the Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust, which of course is taking the opportunity to sell the old hospital building to help pay for the substantial cost of the new one—about £17 million.

We have another new hospital in West Worcestershire in the town of Pershore. Again, the town had a very old building, although not quite as old as the one in Malvern. Wychavon district council took the unique and unusual decision to create a new build hospital in the centre of town. It used its reserves to do that, and it was able to rent the building out to the local NHS trust. It is paid a much better rate of return on its cash than it would have received if it had left it in the bank—certainly an Icelandic bank, as in the case of some other Worcestershire district councils. This has proved to be a good investment for the district council and a good asset for the community. Both new builds are greatly valued by South Worcestershire clinical commissioning group, which is beginning to review the full range of hospitals, including acute hospitals, in Worcestershire. I am hearing very positive things about finding additional uses for the community hospitals.

Let me finally mention Tenbury community hospital, which has an incredibly successful and active league of friends. The town has only about 2,500 residents, but over the years the league has raised millions of pounds, not only for equipment for the hospital but for its fabric. We have seen two new wards open in the past 12 months. Tenbury hospital therefore almost has a shared ownership not only with the NHS but with the league of friends. Because the league's investment has been so substantial, it would be unthinkable for the NHS to treat the building as an asset that it could sell on. All three hospitals are well used and increasing the range of services that they can provide in the local area.

I may have saved the Department some time in relation to the motion by delivering a comprehensive database of the community hospitals in West Worcestershire. Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to put on record the community's appreciation of the services and buildings that we enjoy in my constituency.

4.41 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on bringing the subject before the Backbench Business Committee.

I welcome the Minister to her seat. I would be grateful if she could nod if she has received a large brown envelope marked "Urgent" which I sent to her office in the House of Commons only two days ago. Perhaps she has not quite got it yet because she has had her feet under the desk for only a couple of days; however, it is sitting there somewhere. I mention it because it contains a report whose author is sitting in the Gallery, as is Jan Turnbull, who is chairman of the Swanage league of friends, and Dr Tim Morris, a former Swanage GP. I think they would like to be assured that I have done my job in getting that excellent report to the Minister.

I suspect that a lot of people have been down to Swanage; it is a beautiful place. I challenge anyone, whether they are healthy or ill, to go into Swanage hospital and not automatically to feel better. They will be in a cosy home where Claire Thompson, the cook, produces cakes to die for; I have been greatly honoured to have one given to me. That wonderful cosy atmosphere not only facilitates a good service but sends people home feeling better, which is crucial.

I ask, plead with, beg the Minister to carry out an audit of the 320 community hospitals in the UK before any are closed. I believe that the Government wish to increase care in the community. I always get slightly nervous when I hear that expression because that approach was tried once before by an eminent Prime Minister and I am not quite sure that it went entirely right.

In our neck of the woods, the proposal is to close Swanage hospital and instead to send community nurses out into residential care homes where mainly elderly people—former in-patients—would be put. I would like to give the House the image of these nurses—albeit well-intentioned, well-trained and all the rest of it—arriving at a certain time of day in their vans, unloading all the medical clutter, crashing into someone's room and saying, "Don't panic, Mrs Jones—care is here", when instead Mrs Jones could be tucked up in bed in Swanage hospital, which has been there since 1890, being looked after 24 hours a day. Surely that is the better option, and I suggest that in the long run the other option would turn out to be far more expensive.

Swanage hospital provides outpatient clinics, 15 inpatient beds and a 24-hour minor injuries unit, and it is particularly noted for post-acute care for stroke victims before they go home. Twenty-one consultants visit the hospital weekly, some performing minor and intermediate surgery in its operating theatre, and one GP attends daily. This is not an underused facility. The hospital staff, the league of friends and consultants want the service expanded, not closed; yet the clinical commissioning group, bless it, or CCG, which sounds rather sinister—I do not like these acronyms—wants to close it and introduce a polyclinic in its place. I had wondered whether this was to be a home for parrots or carrots, but it is for people—a polyclinic is, believe it or not, for people. I am sure that the proposal is well-meaning, that it will be well-funded and built with a lot of plastic, and that patients will go there. Yes, it is true that it will provide minor day surgery and slightly more extended services than those

that GPs can offer at present, but it will not have in-patient beds or general anaesthetic, which are what the consultants want Swanage to retain.

Some miles down the road in Wareham, one of the options being suggested is to build a new hospital at a cost of, I guess, £24 million to £35 million, £36 million or £37 million. Why? Where is this money coming from? The league of friends has raised hundreds of thousands of pounds and invested it in its hospital. It now has £1.4 million sitting in a bank account waiting to be invested.

Sadly, the impetus behind this particular move is those GPs in Swanage who want to move to new premises. To be fair—they are not here to speak for themselves—their building is probably not fit for purpose. However, there is room next door to Swanage hospital, in a lovely, cosy place, for them to put their new clinic—it is in the town and ready to go. Instead, they want to put a polyclinic on the outskirts of town, which would be less accessible.

The situation is a tragedy. Again, I ask, plead with, demand that the Minister hold an audit of the 320 hospitals before any are closed, so that the Government can carry on doing what they are doing. In many ways, we all sympathise: money is tight, the cost of the NHS is rising inexorably and we cannot go on like this. We have to consider a more efficient way of providing a service for our patients, but closing a much-loved and much-used cottage hospital in Swanage is not the way forward. I urge the Minister to see this beautiful place, and I invite her to do so, and to meet Claire Thompson. Jan Turnbull is in the Public Gallery and we can guarantee the Minister a cake when she visits.

Before I close, I want to raise one last point that worries me, namely that there is evidence of referrals being suppressed. I have heard this in other debates and meetings that I have had about cottage hospitals. It is said that the aim of the NHS is to claim that such hospitals are underused, but that is entirely disingenuous and, if true, absolutely and categorically wrong. Again—I make no excuse for this—on behalf of my constituents, the hospital, the league of friends and the matron, Jane Williams, I plead with, beg, ask and demand that the Minister please, please, please hold an audit before anything else is done.

4.48 pm

Rory Stewart (Penrith and The Border) (Con): I feel shy speaking in front of this extremely distinguished audience. It is impressive to take part in a debate involving people with so much expertise. I was impressed by the extraordinary confidence with which my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) said things that we would not dare say to any of our constituents by calling for the closure, no less, of one of the community hospitals in Bracknell on the grounds of efficiency. The sense that expertise can deliver controversial and exciting policies is moving. It is also moving for me to be able to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) for securing the debate, and to congratulate the Minister on her new position.

The debate on community hospitals should be held in a larger debate, and it is a debate that Conservatives should be proud to have: the ancient debate of the big against the small. The reason community hospitals are

under threat, have been under threat and always will be under threat—I mean this not in a political sense, but simply ideologically—is the problem of the small.

In 2005, one in four members of the population in Cumbria signed a petition to keep our community hospitals open. Today, we face serious issues of the internal market and the tariff structure of the NHS, which may make it tempting for commissioners not to refer patients to community hospitals. All of that is about big and small. It is the same argument as that between the big supermarket and the small shop and between the small dairy farm and the big dairy farm.

This argument goes all the way back to the foundation of the NHS. One remembers Bevan's great statement:

"I would rather be kept alive in the efficient if cold altruism of a large hospital than expire in a gush of warm sympathy in a small one."—[*Official Report*, 30 April 1946; Vol. 422, c. 44.]

In that moment, Bevan, in founding the NHS, set up the fundamental challenge. My hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell expressed the problem clearly in explaining that in the choice between acute surgical care and local care of chronic conditions, we have the choice between fancy machines, specialisation and surgeons who perform the same operation again and again, and what is required for a new situation and a new population. We are no longer in the late 1940s.

If I may be so presumptuous in this distinguished company, I will put Cumbria forward as an example. We are an interesting example, because we are ahead of the rest of the country in one thing: Cumbria has more deaths than births, but a rising population. That is not, as one might imagine, because we have discovered resurrection; it is because we have old people moving to our constituency. The population of the constituency is getting older at a national record rate. We are about to go from one in six of the population being over 65 to one in three of the population being over 65. The number of people who are over 85 is about to double. The number of people with Alzheimer's in my constituency is about to double. All that points, above all, to one thing—community hospitals. What people at that age need is not necessarily the technical services and equipment that are provided by acute hospitals, nor the specialties of their surgeons, but preventive care. That can be delivered through the hubs of which we have all spoken.

To give a local example, my neighbour recently broke her hip. To many of us in this Chamber, that seems fundamentally to be a problem of cost. It costs £350 to move her in an ambulance from her home to the hospital, it costs a minimum of £2,000 to admit her to the hospital, and it costs tens of thousands of pounds in ongoing costs as she struggles to get better and gets into other chronic conditions. But why did she fall? She fell because her husband died. The chance of somebody dying doubles in the year following the death of their husband. She was in trouble because she could not get anybody to take her to an optician. She was not eating properly, because nobody was able to take her to the supermarket regularly.

Those are things that the extraordinary network of local charities and community activity is in a fantastic position to provide, guided by the community hospital. In Cumbria, Cruse Bereavement Care provides counselling to people who are bereaved and Eden Carers could perhaps have taken my neighbour to the optician. Every Member has such organisations in their constituency.

[Rory Stewart]

They have their equivalents of Hospice at Home and the Eden Valley hospice. There are also the first responders and other members of the emergency services. My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) champions the air ambulance and others of us champion mountain rescue. It goes all the way down to Age UK and the Alzheimer's Society. Indeed, we have made fantastic progress in neuroscience support at a community hospital level.

I conclude with a plea to the Minister. This is not just about good language. It is easy to talk about prevention, but also very easy to carry out bad prevention and waste an enormous amount of money tacking down carpets in the houses of people who do not need their carpets tacked down. My constituency includes surprised people who have suddenly found themselves given a new shower that they did not particularly feel they needed. What we need is the local knowledge, care and compassion that can target those resources. The Minister is now in a position to move just 2% or 3% of the budget towards community hospitals and community care and away from acute trusts.

4.55 pm

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I join in congratulating the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on securing the debate and the Minister on her much deserved elevation to the Front Bench.

Shortly before I was elected, I was contacted by some nurses from Rowley Regis community hospital in my constituency who had just been told that the hospital's in-patient wards would be closing. Rowley hospital was one of the last community hospitals to be built under the last Conservative Government using central funds rather than through a private finance initiative project. It had always offered a mix of in-patient and out-patient care, and with about 100 beds it was considerably smaller than nearby hospitals such as Dudley's Russells Hall, West Bromwich's Sandwell general or Birmingham's City hospital.

The last Government's preference for large super-hospitals meant that the local NHS trust, like others around the country, felt under pressure to move in-patient services from small community hospitals such as Rowley. Staff at the hospital and members of the local community feared that the closure of the hospital's two remaining wards was part of an agenda to turn it into a polyclinic, which the Government were pushing heavily. There is no question but that without in-patient care, Rowley would be more like a walk-in centre and clinic than what most people think of as being a hospital.

The campaign to keep in-patient care at Rowley brought the whole community together. Working with local residents, staff and patient groups, we gathered petitions against the loss of in-patient care, manned town centre stalls, delivered leaflets and wrote letters. The independent Facebook group alone attracted well over 1,000 supporters. Local people wanted to keep services at their local community hospital.

I know that, as other Members have mentioned, Members of all parties will have run similar campaigns in their constituencies. The campaign was a great success. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who was then the shadow Health Secretary, joined me for meetings

at the hospital with the NHS trust and hospital staff. He promised that under a Conservative Government services would be maintained where the local population, as service users, and local GPs as commissioners, demanded them. I was therefore proud when, last year, the trust invited me to open the Henderson reablement unit, a new in-patient ward that cares for patients recovering from serious illness. The Henderson unit is now a busy and successful part of the hospital, and I know that the trust is exploring ways to bring further in-patient services to Rowley hospital.

Community hospitals such as Rowley are an essential part of the national health service. They are important because the NHS is not just about drugs and operations, it is about care and about helping people make a full recovery in a supportive environment. Rowley Regis hospital cares for patients who are recovering from life-changing illnesses and injuries while they are unable to care for themselves. The care goes beyond medical treatment and physical therapy, helping patients to regain the ability and confidence to carry out necessary everyday tasks in a safe and supportive environment.

The staff at the hospital are fantastic examples of the very best of our national health service, showcasing the blend of professionalism and compassion on which the NHS at its best relies. Patients feel that they are given more individual and personalised care than would be possible at a large district general hospital.

The hospital itself is a pleasant place to be, which is particularly important for elderly patients whose lives, after a lifetime of independence and living at home, have been turned upside down by a serious fall—such as the one mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart)—or a stroke. Patients can enjoy the beautiful gardens, and socialise in the well-designed communal areas, and when I talk to in-patients at Rowley I find that they are overwhelmingly positive about their environment and the care they are receiving. Being at the heart of the local community, rather than in a larger town a long bus journey away, helps to soften the anxiety of being away from families and friends, and it is easier for families to visit and help relatives through their recovery.

People are extremely proud of Rowley Regis hospital, and I would be pleased to welcome the Minister to Rowley so that she can see it for herself. I know, however, that Rowley is not unique, and other hon. Members have mentioned their experiences of local community hospitals. Community hospitals around the country are important to the patients they care for and treat—the kind of care that is extremely difficult to replicate in a larger hospital. I hope the new Minister will ensure that community hospitals remain a key part of a national health service that, at its heart, recognises that one size really does not fit all.

5.1 pm

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): At this moment, Mr Speaker, you must be feeling like Shakespeare's Henry V at Agincourt, and I suggest you will look back on 6 September 2012 as the day when hon. Members in the Chamber heard many potential Ministers speak for the first time. We had the great honour and privilege of hearing my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). She is a doctor and spoke with great

wisdom when she introduced the debate. The other doctor in the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), also made a fine contribution. We then heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Anne Milton), who is now on the Whips Bench but previously distinguished the Department of Health, and throughout the past hour and a half a plethora of Labour Members have indulged us with their oratory and commitment to community hospitals. Finally, I welcome the new Minister who, as you prophesied, Mr Speaker, has a glittering career in front of her. Those were fine words, although I believe that you also admonished her most robustly for being a little too chatty when she was a Parliamentary Private Secretary.

I strongly look forward to hearing the gentle, reticent, shy, self-effacing style that the Minister has characteristically formed throughout the past two and a half years as an MP. Some have described her as Nottinghamshire's modern Boadicea of Broxtowe, which may stick in the future. If she is able to survive the cake-fests of south Dorset, and future requests to visit many a hospital, she will surely go far.

I must make a brief declaration because I would not be in this House were it not for my campaigning as a lawyer on behalf of community hospitals, and the fact that my grandmother was an NHS matron. Furthermore, over the past two and a half years, I have probably spent more time in hospital than any other Member of Parliament, conducting an in-depth study of all aspects of NHS treatment. Due to the fact that I was not a very good jockey, I have conducted an in-depth study of orthopaedic skills because I repeatedly seemed to come a cropper at the second last at Stratford, and various other delightful destinations. I am also fundraiser for various charitable organisations in my constituency—the Great North Air Ambulance service and the National Brain Appeal.

The subject of the debate is community hospitals. Amid the requests for preservation, strengthening and support, I want to enlighten the House with some success stories. The Haltwhistle hospital in Northumberland—a small community hospital in the heart of the town—is being completely rebuilt. There have been efforts to rebuild it for many years, and that is now happening on the same site in exactly the right way. That is what all hon. Members would like for their community hospitals. People in Northumberland would suggest that its integrated care is the way forward. There are standard community beds and care beds, and even one room for the larger patient, which is known in the trade as a bariatric room. That is a proper, integrated, long-term local solution in the community, for the community and involving the community. That must be the way forward.

Jessica Lee (Erewash) (Con): Ilkeston community hospital in my community is held in great affection. Recently, one ward closed—the decision divided opinion among local GPs. We need to examine what services are provided and remind local residents and patients what facilities are available and what procedures they can obtain locally.

Guy Opperman: I endorse entirely what my hon. Friend says and am sure the Minister has taken due note of her comments.

I want to sell and extol the groundbreaking decision in Northumberland in favour of the PFI buy-out of Hexham general hospital. The hospital was built and opened under the former Prime Minister—the right hon. Member for Sedgefield as was—with a substantial PFI that patently impeded its ability to function, but it is among the first in the country to have been bought out by the local community. The way forward must be to try to refinance and improve the financial situation of such hospitals.

Northumberland has a rebuilt community hospital and a general hospital at Hexham, which delivers all the services, including cancer care and maternity, that we would like in local facilities. That should continue, but the problem I want to raise with the Minister is the future of rural health care—the problem will also apply to my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) and any number of representatives of truly rural communities. Community hospitals are clearly at the heart of that, but the way in which community hospitals integrate in rural health care is one of the significant challenges for the Department of Health in the next five, 10, 15 and 20 years. I suggest that the way ahead must be for rural health care to become more automated—we should provide computer facilities for prescriptions and check-ups—but we must also integrate facilities using examples such as the Torbay and Haltwhistle models. We should also attempt to provide paramedic and GP services in an integrated way. It is good that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), the shadow Minister, is in the Chamber, because that will take co-operation between the unions and between local facilities. Any problems should be overcome if we make the point that people in the community are helping one another.

The future of integrated services—health care, fire, police or ambulance services—must be addressed by whoever is in government. I strongly urge the Minister to come to Northumberland to see the flagship model of the health service and the great job that my trust is doing.

5.9 pm

Mr Robert Walter (North Dorset) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on securing this debate. I also congratulate the Minister on her appointment, and all of us who are committed to the future of community hospitals look forward to her comments in a few moments. This is not a party-political debate—I hope—but the complete absence of Labour Back Benchers probably explains the difficulties that we had in promoting the case of community hospitals during the 13 years of a Labour Government.

In an age when large organisations seem to be swallowing up smaller ones, it is refreshing to find that in my county of Dorset we have 11 small hospitals, what we used to call cottage hospitals but now refer to as community hospitals. The term was coined in reaction to the hospital plan of 1962, which pressed for resources to be concentrated into hospitals of 300 beds or more, an inevitable consequence of which was the closure of smaller ones. Opposition to this came from the newly formed Association of General Practitioner Hospitals, now the Community Hospitals Association. It was the association's chairman at the time, Sandy Cavenagh, who revealed that more

[Mr Robert Walter]

than half the patients treated in general hospital beds could be cared for equally well or better—and at lower cost—in a small hospital near their homes.

Community hospitals survived, especially in my area, the south-west, which has 80 of the 300 or so remaining such hospitals. Dorset's 11 community hospitals compares favourably with larger and richer counties. Two of the jewels of this array of community hospitals are in my constituency in Shaftesbury and Blandford, and with the greatest respect to the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh), a little bit of history is important here.

In Shaftesbury there was no formal provision for the sick of the town until 1874. There had been an infirmary in the abbey, but that disappeared along with the abbey itself during the dissolution in 1539. After that there was nothing until the building of the workhouse in 1840, and its sick ward was only for the inmates. So when the Marquis of Westminster's widow and daughter wanted to honour his memory, a cottage hospital for those in and around Shaftesbury seemed appropriate. The marquis had owned large estates in the area and had done much to improve the lot of his tenants, and this project was in keeping with his philanthropic attitude. His widow, the dowager marchioness, therefore gave the area the land. The foundation stone was laid in 1871, and the hospital was formally opened by the bishop of Salisbury three years later. It was originally designed for a mere six patients, the poor of the town, and it was anticipated that they would be attended by their own doctors. The hospital was run by the matron—as indeed it is today.

The building was enlarged in 1907. An operating theatre, donated by another dowager marchioness of Westminster, was opened. It is still there, but it is no longer an operating theatre. The hospital's running costs increased, and the Shaftesbury carnival committee stepped in, and for many years the proceeds from the carnival were donated to the hospital. The committee was rather more powerful than would be expected of such a body nowadays. Indeed, in 1923, it disapproved so strongly of the matron that it refused to hold a carnival that year. The resulting loss of revenue meant that the hospital had to be closed, and the matron then resigned.

Similarly, before 1889 Blandford did not have anywhere to look after the sick and its hospital was funded by the Portman family, which generously donated the land and buildings for the hospital. The present site of the hospital was given by the second Viscount Portman.

About 1,500 patients pass through Shaftesbury hospital, and the friends organisation, which I commend, has estimated that what is done in that hospital saves more than 60,000 miles of travel that would otherwise be covered going to Salisbury district hospital. Such journeys are expensive, stressful and inconvenient to patients, and of course involve unnecessary car use. In its present role, that hospital serves 18,000 patients a year, and the other hospital in my constituency, at Blandford, is thought to serve about 20,000 every year.

The key issue I would like to address is the ownership of these hospitals. Currently, all Dorset's hospitals are run by Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust, which was originally a mental health trust. When the clinical commissioning groups are up and running,

the GPs, who are key to the development of today's community hospitals, should be recognised again as part of the community, and the community hospitals should be owned by the communities they serve. The friends organisations are key to equipping our local hospitals and at the core of that community interest. I believe that we should harness their enthusiasm and expertise, along with that of GPs, in returning ownership of our community hospitals to the communities they serve.

5.16 pm

Tessa Munt (Wells) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on securing this debate.

My part of Somerset has some fantastic community hospitals—Burnham-on-Sea, Glastonbury—but I would like to draw particular attention to Shepton Mallet, which provides a valuable and popular service to local people in my area of rural Somerset, despite the fact that several of its buildings are substandard as a result of serious under-investment. Many patients who cannot be treated at home are admitted to our community hospitals by local GPs, who love these places, instead of being sent to acute hospitals in Bath, Bristol, Yeovil and Taunton. Most of those journeys are about 20 to 25 miles, but local people accept that acute hospitals will be some distance away. There is no expectation that we should be able to access an acute hospital on our doorstep in such a rural area.

There are 174 communities in my constituency, and people will happily travel from them to those main hospitals. Some spend time in our local hospitals following treatment at an acute hospital—it is clearly a stage of recuperation—so that they can be close to their home, friends and family. My father was a patient, and he was a frequent visitor to Wells cottage hospital, which is now unfortunately closed. It was an essential part of his recuperation, and there were many happy visits that kept his spirits up and helped his recovery. People came to read or just talk to him.

The point will not have been missed that community hospitals help to free up scarce and much more expensive beds in the bigger hospitals. Some of our patients are there because caring for them in their homes has failed or is just not an option. Many patients are elderly or infirm, as often are their relatives, and visiting distant hospitals regularly is a great hardship, stressful and, for some, impossible. Public transport provision in Somerset is limited at best, diminishing in many areas and in most cases almost non-existent in rural patches, as a direct result of the withdrawal of support for public transport by the county council.

The latest Somerset joint strategy needs assessment on population changes shows rapid increases in elderly patient numbers in the county over the next 30 years—the expected lifetime of most of our NHS estate buildings. In round terms, the number of over-85-year-olds in the county has doubled in the past 25 years and is expected at least to double again by 2030. Two thirds of our NHS patients are already over 65.

The community hospital is cost-effective and provides an essential and popular service to the people of Shepton and those in what is a vast local area. Losing its beds would mean a significant reduction in the quality of

services to the local community. Despite that, Shepton Mallet hospital is under threat of closure. An NHS review of community services for Shepton Mallet is taking place and is focusing on the 17 beds in the community hospital. There is no review of beds in the other 12 community hospitals in Somerset. Campaigners can only assume that Shepton is being singled out, because the NHS has not maintained the hospital properly, despite spending millions on new and other community hospitals. However, in one of the many meetings that I have held with the save our hospital beds campaign group, I was given figures from the NHS that showed that, even as late as this April, bed occupancy has been extremely high. Indeed, April's figures show the occupancy rate at over 96%.

Last week I was at the summer fete in Glastonbury, and last month I was at the summer fete at Shepton Mallet hospital. I pay tribute to the leagues of friends of the Shepton Mallet and other community hospitals, and to Mid Somerset Newspapers, which publishes the *Shepton Mallet Journal*. The friends have done a fantastic job of rallying the people of Shepton and the local press, including the *Journal*, and have generated enthusiastic support for the save our hospital beds campaign over the past few months. I have received hundreds and hundreds of letters, e-mails and petitions, and have attended many meetings about the issue with concerned local people, which only goes to prove that the hospital is popular and greatly valued. There are now definite indications that the sheer weight of public concern expressed and the influence of our great GPs, working quietly behind the scenes, have had an effect. I pay particular tribute to the local GPs, especially Dr Chris Howes, who keeps trying to retire, but has been busier than ever finding a sensible, practical, realistic and workable solution to the problem facing Shepton. The first aim of the save our hospital beds campaign has been achieved, with the immediate threat of ill-considered cuts averted, and proper evidence gathering and an options appraisal process are now taking place. However, the hospital is not yet safe. Closure would result in short-term savings, but losing the beds would mean a significant reduction in the quality of service to the local community.

I finish by asking the Minister for an assurance that the coalition Government are committed to ensuring that local people and local doctors, as well as other health professionals, are consulted fairly and fully about any changes to the role and ownership of our popular, local and essential community hospitals, and that she agrees that none should be closed without agreement and very good cause indeed.

5.22 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on securing this debate and thank her for doing so. She brings her experience as a doctor, her common sense and some really solid views to the Chamber, and we should listen to her even more.

I think it was my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) who described our new Minister as Boadicea. I would welcome her down to Tiverton for a visit to our hospital, but I would rather she took the knives off the chariot as she comes through. Otherwise, we would be delighted to see her.

I think it was my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) who made the point about rural constituencies. I am sure that his is bigger than mine, but my constituency covers some 400 square miles. We should remember that community hospitals—I have them in Tiverton, Honiton and Seaton—are essential. We also have, like it or not, an ageing population, both among those living in the area and among those who would love to retire there. Devon is a beautiful county and I very much welcome retired people who come there, but the facilities are of course needed. The point has been made by other hon. Members, but the issue is not just the treatment that elderly patients require; it is also about the time it takes to get to a hospital and the need to get there quite quickly. Distance is a problem for many rural patients, especially elderly patients. I would love to have more bus services, but we cannot have them in rural areas, given the sheer lack of numbers of people who travel by bus. It is essential for us to keep our community hospitals running.

I want to talk about one particular hospital and about its management. Dr Frank O'Kelly runs a clinical practice and commissioning service in Tiverton. He works closely with the hospital and is convinced that we need to get much closer to the people when providing services. I will give a bit of history of Tiverton hospital. Until 2006 it was run by a small community-based PCT in mid-Devon with no acute trust. It was at its most productive at this time and was hailed as one of the best in the country. I must declare an interest as in 2008 my granddaughter was born in Tiverton hospital. Since then it has been run by NHS Devon very much from north Devon, and it is not being used to its full potential. That is where Dr O'Kelly has some good ideas.

The Tiverton patient-centred care project has been reviewing since February 2012 what is happening and what is to be done to improve the situation at Tiverton hospital, yet it is still not delivering any practical help. There is no doubt that openness and transparency have been the basis of the project, with all the papers published, and five lay members attend the meetings that Dr O'Kelly organises. The league of friends has been hugely supportive, and with Exeter university devised its own questionnaire for the public. The NHS questionnaire achieved about 800 returns while the league of friends survey produced 3,000. Dr Kelly's idea is to get local people interested in how this service is delivered.

I would like the Minister to know the key points that Dr Kelly wants to raise. The idea for Tiverton could be rolled out across the country. His plan is that the whole hospital is recommissioned and a single accountable provider brought in to run the hospital and community services. This could be NHS, private or a social enterprise. The provider would need to have as its only focus the community service and tailoring it to maximise capability.

Ultimately, clinicians and organisations running facilities come and go, but the population whom they serve do not. The population are left with time-limited results of those changes, depending on the length of tenure of the organisations. So to refer again to Dr Frank O'Kelly, his advice to the politicians would be to give the population much more power so that commissioners and providers are reminded who the customer really is. For a community hospital, this could take the form of a community governing body to which the providers and commissioners were accountable. I want to emphasise that local people

[Neil Parish]

need to have a much more genuine say in how their hospital is run so that they do not feel that they are caught up in a bureaucratic web and cannot put their views forward.

Tiverton community hospital is an excellent facility. It is pretty new and it could be used to deliver a great deal more local services to patients who need them. So Minister, please, if you have time, come to Tiverton and see what we are trying to do.

5.29 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting this important debate today and I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on the eloquent case that she made in opening it. I also congratulate and welcome the new Minister to her place. She was a slightly unconventional Parliamentary Private Secretary to the former Minister of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns). I say “unconventional” because, as the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) observed, PPSs are usually seen and not heard. I am sure that she will be even more vocal now that she has the freedom to speak from the Government Front Bench, and I look forward to our exchanges in the coming weeks and months.

As many Members have testified today, community hospitals play an important role in the communities they serve. They provide rehabilitation and follow-up care, and they can help to move care, diagnostics and minor injury and out-patient services, among others, from acute hospitals back to the community. They provide planned and unplanned acute care and diagnostic services for patients closer to home, and contribute to the local community by providing employment opportunities and support for community-based groups.

It is clear that people generally prefer medical treatments to be taken nearer to their homes and families, whether that involves palliative care, minor injury services or maternity care, and those are exactly the services that community hospitals can help to deliver. Indeed, the Department of Health has estimated that about 25% of hospital patients could be better cared for at home or in the community.

Community hospitals usually also have good relationships with their local communities, and are often supported by local fundraising. We have heard from a number of hon. Members today about the great work being done by friends groups up and down the country. I pay tribute to those groups, and to the staff and volunteers who work to make those groups and the hospitals happen. Staff in community hospitals can also build personal relationships with local patients and carers as they deliver continuous care from outside the hospital environment. That is an important point that should not be overlooked.

It is fair to say that community hospitals continue to play an important part in local health care provision. Their role is valued, and we are right to support it. Labour continues to be committed to community hospitals, when they represent the best solutions for local communities. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) that they might not be the solution everywhere.

My own constituency is served by three large district general hospitals and not one community hospital, but I acknowledge that other parts of the country have a very different geographical make-up, and that community hospitals are the right way forward for the provision of health care in those communities.

Community hospitals can provide a vital step between social care and acute care, and Labour would seek to develop them further. For example, it might be possible for GP or dentistry services to be offered in more community hospitals, which could make some that are only marginally viable at the moment more viable for the future. That possibility should be explored.

Some concerns remain, however, and I hope that the Minister will be able to offer the House some reassurance today. One of the most pressing tasks for the NHS in the coming years will be better to co-ordinate services around the needs of patients, and that might well mean that community hospitals have to change the way in which they provide services and the buildings from which they provide them. She will know, however, of our concerns about the Government’s structural reforms, which will make the co-ordination and delivery of services far more difficult. We believe that the future requires the integration of care, yet the Government’s policies are driving us more towards fragmentation. We know that they are already having a profound effect on the NHS. A recent survey of NHS chairs and chief executives by the NHS Confederation found that 28% described the current financial position as

“the worst they had ever experienced”.

A further 46% said the position was “very serious”.

It is also clear that the financial challenge will continue for many years after 2015, and all this could have an effect on community hospitals, whether it be the reduction of minor injuries provision, the closure of wards or the downgrading of services. As the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) suggested in what I thought was a thoughtful contribution, these can sometimes be the right choices for an area. Sometimes, however, they will not be and they will just be financially driven; here, there is a danger that community hospitals will provide an easy cut for bureaucrats.

Guy Opperman: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that 3,000 community beds in community hospitals were shut under the previous Government. Is he going to enlighten us about what his policy is, specifically in respect of any particular cuts to community hospitals? Is he in favour of them, against them, or is there no policy?

Andrew Gwynne: Community hospitals have a vital role to play. As we have discussed in the debate, however, they may not be the right approach everywhere. We remain committed to community hospitals. The last Labour Government introduced a fund specifically for them. It is fair to say that that fund was not automatically taken up by primary care trusts up and down the country. Some areas had different viewpoints on the role of community hospitals. The Labour party has a commitment to community hospitals where they are the right choice for the local communities.

A further point about the impact of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 is that with responsibility for commissioning health care services moving into the

hands of clinical commissioning groups and with primary care trusts no longer being in existence, there is a real danger that the role of community hospitals could be overlooked. Will the Minister reassure us that community hospitals will not be unfairly penalised in the new internal market of the NHS?

We should bear in mind further issues about the possibility of creeping privatisation—an issue that we, at least, are concerned about. The whole health service is currently in a state of flux, but as the reforms in the NHS kick in, it is perfectly feasible for commissioning groups to look outside the NHS to the private sector to provide even more of their services than in the past. This has already happened in Suffolk in March, when Serco won a £140 million contract to manage, among other things, the area's community hospitals.

It could well be that when trusts are faced with the choice of reducing clinical services, they will look to being more centralised for financial reasons and take services away from the community and, indeed, in some cases from district general hospitals, too. This will almost certainly have an effect on any extensions to these services in community hospitals. Clearly, community hospitals and other community health services need to be able to compete on a fair playing field with other health providers, and I would ask the Minister how she will support that practically.

I would like to ask about some of the additional funding arrangements in the NHS—an issue raised by the hon. Member for Totnes in her opening comments. Previously in the NHS, payment by results was introduced to finance care and treatment according to a national tariff. It was intended to reduce variation in the prices paid by different parts of the country and to encourage providers to do more work, particularly helping to reduce waiting times.

Community services, however, are not covered by payment by results and are instead paid under a block contract negotiated with the local commissioner. I know that some community hospitals are concerned that they will have to make greater budget reductions than providers covered by payment by results. Some community hospitals are concerned that the commissioner will reduce the size of the block contracts, which is easier to do than stopping activity under a tariff.

From April 2013, the NHS Commissioning Board and Monitor will set the national tariff, and we are encouraged that the Government have expressed an interest in expanding payment by results to community services. If payment by results is expanded, it must be done in a way that supports integrated care and does not disadvantage care that is delivered in a community setting. How will the Minister ensure that we do not have a pricing system that disadvantages care that is delivered in community settings and particularly in community hospitals?

Let me deal briefly with the issue of estate ownership, which has been touched on by a number of Members. Many community hospitals do not own the buildings from which they operate, which affects their ability to raise capital to create new services for patients because they cannot secure finance or loans against the value of their buildings. As we have already heard during the debate, earlier this year the last Health Secretary announced that a Government-owned firm, NHS Property Services Ltd, would take over the ownership and management

of the existing primary care trust estate and dispose of property that was surplus to NHS requirements. Community hospitals will depend on the setting of affordable long-term rents by NHS Property Services Ltd. I hope the Minister will tell us how the firm will work with community providers, including social enterprises.

There should be no doubt that Opposition Members support the principle of community hospitals. Indeed, we rightly established a fund to support and develop the community hospitals that represented the best choice for local communities. A future Labour Government would also aim to develop community services further within community hospitals. For example, as I have already suggested, it may be possible for more GP, dentistry or other services to be offered by them, and I think that that opportunity should be explored further.

We are concerned about some of the wording of the motion, which calls for community hospitals to have “greater freedom to explore different ownership models”.

We would need more details of any parameters before agreeing to such an arrangement. It could lead to an opportunity for further creeping privatisation of our national health service, which is something that the Labour party will not support or give carte blanche. For that reason, Labour will abstain on the motion.

The motion also calls for a national database of community hospitals. Historically their number and location was not monitored, as that was a matter for primary care trusts. However, we believe that in the new NHS, with confusion over where responsibility lies, there may well be a case for a national database. We would be interested to hear more details of what the hon. Member for Totnes has proposed, because we believe that it could give some value to the Department of Health in the future.

We should pay tribute to the important work that community hospitals undertake, the quality of the health care that they give to local people, and the commitment and dedication of all their staff, from medical professionals to porters and cleaners. The Government should be doing all that they can to ensure that patients can make real choices about receiving the health care that they need near to their homes. It remains to be seen how the Government's changes to our NHS will affect community services and community hospitals. I look forward to hearing from the Minister how she will protect the role of community hospitals, which are valued and must continue to have a role in the more integrated and people-centred health care system that I hope we all support.

5.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Anna Soubry): Let me begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on securing the debate, and congratulating not just those who added their names to her motion but all who have spoken in what has been a very interesting and, indeed, passionate debate. In fact it has not really been a debate, because there has been an outbreak of agreement, certainly on the Government Benches, as so many speakers have spoken with such passion about the community hospitals in their constituencies.

I should also say thank you to all who have congratulated me on my appointment, and have said some rather kind things. I am sure that normal service will soon be

[Anna Soubry]

resumed. Sadly, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns), the former Minister with responsibility for health services, has now departed from that post and gone to another place, as it were—to another Department. We all miss him and thank him for his great service and his commitment to the national health service. He explained to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) during a debate in June about community hospitals in the north-east that this Government support improvements in community hospitals across the country. That is because we know that community hospitals make it easier for people to get care and treatment closer to where they live. They allow large hospitals to discharge patients safely into more appropriate care. They free hospital beds for people who need them. Community hospitals allow many patients to avoid travelling to large hospitals—and many of those large, acute hospitals are in cities, with all the attendant problems of transport, parking and so forth.

Our community hospitals provide a wide range of vital services, including minor injury clinics and intensive rehabilitation, on patients' doorsteps. They can also help save the local NHS money by moving services out of acute hospitals and closer to the people who use them. People are often rightly very protective of their community hospitals, as we have heard from many Members this afternoon. They deliver essential services, and provide employment for people who live nearby and spaces for community groups. It is therefore understandable that community hospitals are fiercely defended and inspire such loyalty.

If I am to retain responsibility for community hospitals, I shall be a busy Minister. I shall be going up to the north-east to Middlesbrough and Cleveland, to South East Cornwall, Bracknell, Newton Abbot, Cannock Chase, West Worcestershire, South Dorset, Penrith and The Border, Halesowen and Rowley Regis, Hexham, North Dorset, Wells, Tiverton and Honiton, including Seaton, and Denton and Reddish—although not to Southport as it does not have a community hospital. I am grateful for all those invitations, and if I can, I certainly will accept them.

My hon. Friend delivered a speech that was, as ever, thoughtful, inspiring and well-informed, and she asked a number of questions of me. If I do not answer all the points she raised, I hope she will forgive me, and she will certainly get a letter from me answering all of them. Let me state at the outset, however, that she has made a very powerful case in relation to the Community Hospitals Association and its database. Funding for that database was stopped. I cannot promise that it will be restored, but I can say this: I have asked my officials to look at that decision again with great care.

I anticipate that we will not have a vote on this motion, and it is of interest that the two Opposition Members present will abstain if there is a vote, because we have rightly heard a cacophony of voices from the Government Benches in support of community hospitals.

My hon. Friend asked about tariffs, as did the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne). It may be of some assistance, especially to my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), for me to state that work is under way in the Department,

looking at a payment system for patients suffering from long-term conditions. That includes services delivered in community settings. I trust that provides some hope. From 2013 and into 2014, tariff settings will be decided by Monitor and the NHS Commissioning Board. My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes made a powerful point about the potential importance of tariffs in ensuring the future of our community hospitals.

A good point was made about the decline in the number of GPs in some areas. I hope my hon. Friend will take comfort from the fact that my information is that there is a 50% target in respect of medical trainees going into general practice—I do not much like targets, but this could be a good one—and a taskforce has been set up to try to achieve that.

The future of community hospitals will, I hope, be secure in many of our communities, but it has to be said that many of the concerns Members have raised relate to local decisions, and it would not be right for me, as the Minister, to interfere in any of those decisions. My door is always open and I am always happy to meet hon. Members and any of their constituents. I may not be able to help in Cannock Chase, in Rowley, where there is difficulty, in Wells or in some other places, but I am happy to provide such support, assistance or advice as I am able to give.

Hon. Members have rightly discussed the future of the estate. I am conscious of the time, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I hope you will forgive me if I read out this part of my speech. It is important that hon. Members know and understand that the Health and Social Care Act 2012 required new ownership arrangements for current PCT estates. That means that providers such as community foundation trusts, NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts will be able to take over those parts of the PCT estate that are used for clinical services. That includes the community hospital estate, but—this is an important but—we have put safeguards in place so that providers cannot just sell off newly acquired land and make a quick profit. Estates must be offered back to the Secretary of State for Health if, for example, the provider fails to keep the service delivery contract associated with the property or if the property becomes vacant. In addition, where any former estate becomes surplus to NHS requirements 50% of any financial gain made by the provider must be paid back to the Secretary of State and will go straight to front-line NHS services.

A Department of Health-owned limited company called NHS Property Services Ltd, to which reference has been made, will take on the remaining estate, as announced in January this year. Its key objective will be to provide clean, safe and cost-effective buildings for use by community and primary care services. I would like to assure every hon. Member, and every member of the public, that any community hospital building taken on by this company will be well looked after. Local clinicians will decide how those estates are used; whether new buildings are built or existing ones are closed will be up to them, as will all decisions about local patient services. As I have said, it is right that these decisions are taken locally. In reality, patients and the public will not notice any difference, at least in the short term. In the longer term, they will see that the NHS estate is managed more efficiently, by people who know what they are doing; that money will go to improve properties and front-line services.

NHS Property Services Ltd will own and manage buildings that are needed by the NHS. However, it will also be able to release savings from its properties that are declared surplus to NHS requirements. That money will be used further to improve property provision in the NHS. All PCT properties will transfer to either NHS providers or NHS Property Services Ltd on 31 March 2013. Until the provisional lists of property transfers have been finalised later in the year, I cannot confirm whether any particular community hospital will transfer to either an NHS provider or NHS Property Services. In the latter case, the community hospital services provider will become a tenant of NHS Property Services, in the same way that it is currently a tenant of the PCT.

John Pugh: Should the tenant, be it a community hospital or whatever else, seek to expand and should it need further facilities, is there a dialogue it will be able to have with the company to get it to extend the premises?

Anna Soubry: I am grateful for that question, but I shall be blunt and say that I do not know the answer. I will make inquiries and I will certainly make sure that the hon. Gentleman gets a full report in response.

Under the statutory provisions, while a building is needed to deliver NHS services, no NHS organisation will be allowed to sell it off. So there is no question of useful NHS property being sold to or transferred to organisations outside the NHS. At the same time, this means that a league of friends—a number of hon. Members have spoken with great fondness and admiration in support of leagues of friends, and I am sure that they will relay this to their local league of friends and their community hospitals—is unable to own the freehold of an operational NHS property. A league of friends is able to bid to become an owner of a community hospital only when it is declared surplus to NHS and public sector requirements. Current Government policy is that surplus property should normally be sold by auction or competitive tender. In such cases, the hospital league of friends would be given the opportunity to bid for the property along with all other interested parties. A league of friends could form a social enterprise to compete to provide services from a community hospital but, even then, as a social enterprise rather than an NHS body it could not take ownership of the assets of the community hospital. That might disappoint some, but I hope that in many ways it will give people comfort for the future and go some way towards addressing many of the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes.

In conclusion, the Government have taken steps to secure the assets of community hospitals and ensure they are used for the benefit of their community. Those decisions will be made by people qualified to do so. That is the best thing for the hospitals and it is certainly the best thing for the communities that they serve. It is quite clear why so many people speak out so strongly and forcefully about community hospitals; it is because of the great work that they do. On behalf of the Government, I want to pay tribute to everybody who works in community hospitals and all the organisations that support them. I thank everybody who has contributed to the debate, which has been a very good exposition of the fine qualities of our community hospitals and, in

particular, the organisations, such as the leagues of friends, that do so much to make them the great hospitals that they invariably are.

5.56 pm

Dr Wollaston: I thank the Minister for her reply.

Who could forget the passionate cry from the heart from my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) and the invitation to take cake in Swanage hospital? How wonderful it was to hear an alternative vision for the future from my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) and to hear how we could see community hospitals as the heart of community care provision. I hope that the commissioners in south Dorset will see the light and see that that is a much better alternative.

Many Members have contributed to the debate and I am grateful to them all. We heard from the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) and from my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Sheryll Murray), particularly about the difficulties of rurality and transport. We heard likewise from the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh). We want to tackle rural health inequalities and the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall clearly made the point that if we do not have transport, that contributes to health inequalities. We heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Bracknell (Dr Lee) and for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) about the need for leadership and how we can deliver the right care at the right time and in the right place.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) made a knowledgeable contribution about different ownership models in her constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris), whose constituency neighbours mine, paid tribute to the marvellous stroke service that operates out of her community hospital. She also spoke knowledgeably about the problems with PFI in the NHS that have dogged so many hospitals and burdened the NHS with unnecessary debt. My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) spoke about the campaign to keep in-patient beds at Rowley and it is clearly disappointing that we will not be able to see more direct intervention on unnecessary closures in parts of the area.

It was good to hear the speech from the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), but Labour Members are not so much abstaining as absenting themselves from the debate, which is clearly disappointing. I assure him that I fully understand that there must be reassurance for the future that community hospitals will always stay for the benefit of their local communities and that it is good to hear the Minister reiterate that very important point. If we are going to see the contribution from leagues of friends continuing for the future, they must have absolute confidence that those valuable community assets will always stay for the benefit of local communities.

I thank all Members for their contributions and pay tribute to all the staff and leagues of friends of our wonderful community hospitals.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

[Dr Wollaston]

That this House recognises and supports the contribution of community hospitals to the care of patients within the National Health Service; requests the Secretary of State for Health to commission a comprehensive database of community hospitals, their ownership and current roles; and believes that the assets of community hospitals should remain for the benefit of their community while allowing them greater freedom to explore different ownership models.

School Places (Thurrock)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Greg Hands.)

5.59 pm

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): This year, all over the country there has been a shortage of primary school places. I wish to highlight the issue of pupil place provision in the Chafford Hundred area of my constituency and address the human consequences of the state failing to deliver against the legitimate expectations of parents for a local school place. Before I do, I must welcome the Minister of State, Department for Education, my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws). It is his first time at the Dispatch Box for some time and I think that I speak for many hon. Friends when I say that it is good to see him back as a member of the Government.

In theory, we have a system for managing school place allocations in which parental choice is the guiding principle, but for too many parents in my constituency there is, frankly, no choice. The changing demographics of the area have led to insufficient capacity in the west of the borough, where the population is increasing, and over-provision in the east. The result is that parents, far from choosing schools, too often are expected to take what they are given, as inevitably the most popular schools are over-subscribed. This has been a particular problem in the Chafford Hundred area for a number of years.

To put the problem in context, Chafford Hundred is a settlement of modern, high-density housing that started to come together only in 1989. It is an attractive suburb, especially for families, and a self-contained community hemmed in by major roads such as the A13. It is widely accepted locally that when the modern housing was built insufficient attention was paid to ensuring satisfactory public service provision for the area. Complaints about inadequate GP provision and insufficient school places have been a common complaint ever since. This year the problem has been particularly acute.

The area's changing demographics have been accelerated by the fact that rising property prices and inward migration have led to families occupying less space than would have been expected in the 1980s. Flats in Chafford that were intended for young single people are now occupied by families with children, which has led to increasing demand for school places. Taken together, these factors have made it a considerable challenge for the local education authority to ensure that the provision of school places keeps pace with demand.

This year the three primary schools in Chafford offered some 270 reception places between them. That number was short of the demand by 51. What has made that particularly difficult locally is the fact that many parents had no awareness of the under-provision and the news that they could not send their children to any of the three local schools that serve the suburb came as a real shock and caused considerable distress. Many of the parents have accepted the alternative places offered by the local council, but as of today there are six children without a place.

Thurrock council argues that reasonable offers of alternative places have been made to the parents. I would like to explore with the Minister what constitutes a reasonable offer. The parents object, in particular, to

the fact that some of the school places they have been offered are more than 3 miles away from their home, distances that are clearly not walkable for five-year-old children. The area is also not well served by public transport. Furthermore, five of the six children had attended pre-school at the schools where they were seeking a place. Again, the parents had every expectation that their demands to stay at the schools would be met.

The parents are chastising themselves for being so naive as to assume that their children would automatically get a school place locally, but it really should not be too much to ask. All the families work hard and pay their taxes. The only things they expect from the state are to have their bins emptied, to be able to go to a local doctor and to have a school to send their children to. This seems to be one of the occasions when those who work hard, do the right thing and do their best for their families end up being poorly supported.

One of the worst outcomes is the degree to which this pits parent against parent in the scramble for a place when all are equally entitled. Indeed, one of the parents was told that the LEA cannot discriminate against people who are less articulate than they are, as if being one of the unfortunate ones who missed out on a place was not itself an injustice.

I have been impressed by the spirit that the parents have shown in continuing to press their case. Earlier this year, the children themselves went to Downing street to present a petition to the Prime Minister. The image of the children chanting "Walk to school" as they marched up Downing street will stay with me for some time. I am sad to say that the parents have largely been seen as a nuisance by the LEA and are very bruised by their attempts to press their case. They should not be made to feel that way. These people have not failed; they are victims of a failure by the state to deliver against their expectations. All they want is the best for their children, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. In failing them, the local authority should not be causing further distress.

All of us, as public servants, need to be more honest about where we fail, because we will undermine trust in politicians and the state if we are not. Good leadership is acknowledging when something has gone wrong and doing something constructive about it, not shooting the messenger and hoping they will go away. I am sorry to report that members of the council have been more interested in debating the potential replacement of the GCSE than in exploring practical responses to this problem. It is incumbent on all local councillors to realise that it is their job to ensure that the authority delivers on its obligations rather than debate matters of national policy.

For my part, I am not satisfied that the offers made by the council are reasonable given the circumstances of these children. There are very strong reasons why parents are relying on a local school place. For example, Madison Horwood has a little brother called Mason who requires regular treatment at Great Ormond Street hospital, and her mother relies on her friends and neighbours to get Madison to school while she is taking Mason to hospital. Hayden Agambar has a little brother called Tommy who is attending pre-school at one of the local schools the children wish to attend. When his mother asked the council how she could be in two places at once, she was

advised that as there was no legal requirement to attend pre-school she should remove Tommy from his place. That is not an acceptable response at all.

There appeals process should overrule the LEA where there is a strong case for doing so, and understandably the parents have gone through this process, but they report to me that the system lacked integrity. For example, Hermione Williams's paperwork was lost twice. I am also advised that Thurrock council did not run the appeals process in line with the current guidance issued in February this year. Parents are meant to be given 20 days to prepare and lodge their appeal, but they were given only 14 days. Appellants are supposed to be given 10 days' notice of their appeal hearing, but one parent received one day's notice. Panel members overseeing the appeals were often not presented with papers until the day of the appeal. Another parent felt that the admissions officer made comments regarding her dealings with the council that were prejudicial to her getting a fair hearing. Furthermore, the rules say that an authority should not limit the grounds for appeal, but I am advised that Thurrock council's letter to appellants tried to imply that they could appeal in only two areas. As a result of all this, the parents do not feel that they have had a fair opportunity to appeal against the decision made by Thurrock council and believe that the process was run in a way that would have only one outcome.

In the meantime, five of the parents of these six children still have no school place. The parents are considering developing ways of home educating rather than accepting the offers made to them, which they continue to argue are unreasonable. At the same time, they are worried that removing their children from school may not be the best thing for them. They are wrestling with a very distressing conflict that I am having to witness.

In the longer term, we can deal with these problems. We obviously need additional school provision in Thurrock and in the Chafford Hundred area, and I am pleased to say that the local community has got behind a proposal for a free school. I hope that the Minister will look on that bid with sympathy when it is ultimately submitted. I think that lessons have been learned from this episode. Certainly, as the population of Thurrock grows there will be much more focus on ensuring that we have satisfactory school provision in future.

In the meantime, we have to think about these six children. We are not talking about numbers but individual people: Hayden, Ava, Hermione, Madison, Holly and James. They deserve a school place. I am not generally in favour of forcing schools to take more children against their will, but we have nine reception classes in Chafford, and I would like to make one final appeal to see whether we can make every effort to get a school place locally for these children.

I look forward to the Minister's observations on a very unhappy episode that I know has been repeated elsewhere in the country. I also invite his observations on how LEAs should ensure that they meet their obligations under the Education Act 2011 to ensure that there is adequate provision, particularly against the backdrop of free schools. Bids for free schools will be more forthcoming in some areas of the country than in others, but local authorities still have a responsibility to make sure that there is an adequate supply of school places. I would also welcome the Minister's observations

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

on what he expects of local authorities when they handle an appeals process and on what constitutes a fair hearing.

6.10 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr David Laws): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) for her kind words and congratulate her on securing this extremely important debate for her constituents. I hope, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you and the hon. Lady will indulge me by allowing me to say that this is the first time since the recent ministerial changes that an Education Minister has appeared at the Dispatch Box, and I want to place on record my tribute to those who left the Department as part of the recent changes—my hon. Friends the Members for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr Gibb), for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), for Brent Central (Sarah Teather) and for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes). They all made an enormous contribution to education policy, and many hon. Members will have benefited from the work that they did during their time at the Department.

I know, from my own time as a Member of this House, about the tireless efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock on not just education issues, but a range of things that are of great importance to her constituents. She has worked tirelessly on behalf of her constituents to raise the issue of school places in Thurrock. She has written to the Prime Minister, and I believe that she has received a response from the Education Secretary. She has also forwarded the local community's petition on this matter. It is understandable that she is very passionate, as are her constituents, that children who live in Chafford Hundred should be educated in accessible local schools.

I will respond to the specific questions raised by my hon. Friend. I am grateful to her for giving me advance notice of her particular points. That has been extremely helpful for the departmental officials, who have contacted the council to get more detailed responses to them. I am grateful to those officials for engaging in that process over the past week and, indeed, for resolving some issues today after we discussed the matter this morning.

I hope that the hon. Lady will allow me to start by setting out the national picture, which is relevant to the circumstances in her area and to the requirements placed on councils and the ways in which the Government are seeking to address her concerns. I will then address directly the specific local issues that she has understandably raised about her constituency circumstances.

It is unfortunately the case that currently there are simply not enough places at good and popular schools in some areas of high demand. The Government have shown that they are determined to tackle that problem, whether by addressing underperformance in our schools, by expanding the academies programme, or by making additional capital available in the areas of greatest demand. The Government are determined to give more parents a real choice, and that can only happen when every local school is a good one. Let me say a bit more about the steps that we have already taken to tackle the issue.

On funding, we are facing, not just in the hon. Lady's constituency, but in particular parts of England, a sustained increase in the number of children of primary school age. Since 2002, there has been a continuous rise in the number of births in England and some areas are facing significant pressure on places, as she described effectively. We as a Government have inherited a serious challenge in the problem of growing numbers and we are determined to address it.

That is why, despite the very difficult economic circumstances that we inherited when we formed the coalition Government in 2010, we have prioritised funding to support the provision of additional pupil places where they are needed. We have doubled the rate of annual spending on primary school places from the levels that we inherited and, in addition, we have allocated a further £1.1 billion over the past year, bringing to £2.7 billion the total that we have made available to support basic need. That funding is provided directly to local authorities to help them meet their statutory duty to provide sufficient schools to meet pupil need. As my hon. Friend pointed out, so far under this Government, Thurrock has received £8.7 million in basic need funding, which is more than double the £4.1 million that the local authority received over the entire period of the last spending review under the previous Government.

Local authorities should be best placed to decide how to use that funding and will deploy a range of solutions to create additional places, from reconfiguring existing space to finding temporary or permanent solutions. Where necessary, they will provide transport to ensure that children can attend a suitable place. We are working closely with local authorities and will continue to work to reduce costs so that every single pound goes as far as possible in providing long-term solutions.

Obviously, as my hon. Friend will understand, the Department's capital funding is limited and it is crucial that we target it effectively. That is why the methodology that we now use to allocate funding is focused increasingly on the number of spare places in the system, rather than more bluntly on the growth in pupil numbers. We are going further. For the first time this year, we are collecting information from local authorities that will provide a greater understanding of the more localised place pressures within a local authority, including in my hon. Friend's constituency. That approach will help us direct our limited capital funds to the local authorities where the demographic pressures are greatest, as she would expect.

My hon. Friend is right to highlight the importance of parents having a choice of good schools for their children. The law states that, where possible, parents will be offered a place for their child at their highest preferred school and have the ability to nominate at least three preferences. The Department for Education does not collect preference data on primary admissions. The 2012 secondary data showed that nationally, 85.3% of parents were offered a place for their child at their first preference school, and 97.6% were offered a place at one of their preferred schools. In February this year, we published revised admissions and appeals codes that removed much of the bureaucracy that schools and local authorities previously faced in the admissions process. We have also ensured that they are easier for parents to navigate and understand.

It is, regrettably, a regular feature of the correspondence that the Department for Education receives from parents that they are unable to get their children into their

choice of a good local school. The problem is that there are simply not enough places at good and popular schools, especially in areas of high demand. That means that local authorities need to make difficult decisions. It is essential that they do all they can to make reasonable offers to parents.

I am aware that many parents are offered the option of transport for their children when the school is a distance from home. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that suitable travel arrangements are made for pupils who live further away from the school than the prescribed statutory walking distances, which are 2 miles for children under the age of eight and 3 miles for those aged eight or over. As my hon. Friend hinted, parents are of course nervous about using transport for young children, which is why we seek to increase the supply of places in local schools, as our constituents want.

As hon. Members are aware, regulations limit the size of an infant class during an ordinary teaching session to 30 pupils per school teacher. We have no plans to change that law, as the evidence shows that smaller class sizes can have a significant positive impact on the progress of pupils in that age group.

Parents can be given a real choice only when every local school is a good school. We are determined to tackle underperformance where it exists. This month, we are opening 282 new academies. International evidence shows that a more autonomous school system helps to drive up standards. We are also creating a system of school-to-school improvement. We expect all schools that are performing well and that apply for academy status to partner a weaker school.

Up and down the country, as my hon. Friend mentioned, free schools are being set up in response to parental demand for a school that meets the specific needs of the local area. They respond to a need for greater choice and better educational standards, and many of them are providing pupil places in areas with a shortage of school places as well as in areas of high deprivation.

I am aware that my hon. Friend is a strong supporter of the Gateway academy in its bid to open a new free school in the Tilbury area of Thurrock, and I congratulate all those involved in the successful Gateway primary free school development, which has opened as scheduled this week. I heard her other points and representations on the subject and will ensure that we keep the situation under close review. I believe that my colleague in the other place will lead on the free schools programme, but no doubt officials will note and pass on the comments that my hon. Friend has made.

On the other specific local issues that my hon. Friend raised, particularly those relating to the community in Chafford Hundred, I will address the concerns that she sensibly expressed in advance of the debate to enable me to look into those matters in more detail.

As I said, departmental officials have spoken to officers in Thurrock local authority to seek further information on the arrangements that they have put in place. They have told my officials that a significant proportion of the basic need funding that the council has received has been spent on providing additional places in Chafford Hundred. Some £2.6 million was spent on expanding Tudor Court primary school in time for the new academic year, and I understand that Thurrock council has undertaken a detailed piece of pupil planning work

to examine demand over the next three to five years. It intends to publish it shortly for consultation, with the outcomes informing its spending plans. I fully expect it to engage with my hon. Friend in an early and constructive way to seek her views about those plans and ensure that they are informed by her views and her understanding of local priorities.

Of course, as we have heard, the priority for parents and children is securing a suitable place right now. I am certainly concerned to hear about the circumstances of some children who are not able to access schools. I am assured that all children in the area have been offered places to start school this September, although not necessarily in Chafford Hundred itself, as my hon. Friend indicated. Such decisions are always incredibly hard and must take into account local issues and circumstances, so it would be wrong to prescribe from the centre precisely what constitutes a reasonable offer. However, there is clearly a legitimate concern about what is reasonable in a local context, and it is absolutely right that she should have raised that issue today and that it should be a matter for debate. There should not just be an assumption that, provided a place can be offered within a particular area, that meets the definition of reasonableness.

I am concerned to hear that the parents of children in Chafford Hundred do not believe that they have had a fair opportunity to make their appeal. When parents believe that their appeal has not been heard in a fair and lawful way, there is a clear process for them to challenge the outcome on the grounds of maladministration. My hon. Friend mentioned the issue of parents getting only 14 days' notice, which the Department's officials have raised with the local authority. Our officials have been assured that the local council sent out letters offering the full 20 days of consultation, but I understand that council officials believe that the letters may have been held up in the post. I am sure the local authority will want to improve that situation in future following her powerful points on behalf of her constituents. As she said, it will now be for the local government ombudsman to investigate any outstanding complaints in this particular instance. The authority has stressed to my officials the steps that it has taken to comply with the statutory duties placed on it by the admissions and appeals codes.

In the case of documentation being issued late—another matter that my hon. Friend raised—the local authority has assured departmental officials of the steps that it has taken with affected parents to resolve the issue. Furthermore, the local authority has confirmed that checks are, or will be, in place to ensure—as far as possible—that such a situation does not happen again. The authority remains committed to engaging with the Department and with communities to ensure that best practice on admissions and appeals is fully incorporated, and to continue to improve the service that is delivered to communities.

I hope I have responded to some of my hon. Friend's concerns. The key locally is to secure a proper, long-term solution that meets her reasonable expectations and those of her community. That is why the current detailed planning work is so crucial, and it is important that my hon. Friend engages fully with it once it is completed so that she can speak on behalf of her communities and express whether the work undertaken by the council meets expectations.

[*Mr David Laws*]

6.26 pm

I assure my hon. Friend that I will take a keen interest in this issue, and I hope that she will contact me again if she feels in any way dissatisfied with how things progress.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 6 September 2012

[MR DAVID AMESS *in the Chair*]

Energy Supply

[*Relevant documents: Eighth Report from the Energy and Climate Change Committee, Session 2010-12, HC 1065, and the Government Response, HC 1813.*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(Mr Hayes.)

2.30 pm

Mr Tim Yeo (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a great pleasure, as always, to serve under your charming and skilful chairmanship, Mr Amess.

I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. In view of a lot of traffic on Twitter and on the blogs, I would like, if colleagues will forgive me, to clarify precisely what my interests are. I have two financial interests in the renewable energy field. The first is AFC Energy plc, a UK-listed company that I have chaired for five and a half years. It is developing a fuel cell to convert hydrogen into electricity for applications in static situations—in other words, not on vehicles. That company does not receive any Government help. Its business model does not assume that it will ever be eligible for renewables obligation certificates or feed-in tariffs. Its aim is to compete on equal terms with other forms of generation. I do not believe that, since I have been its Chairman, the Energy and Climate Change Committee has ever discussed the subject of fuel cells.

The second financial interest is TMO Renewables, another UK-based company, which is developing a second-generation biofuel. That company does not receive Government help. It does not plan to market its product anywhere in the European Union, so it is not affected by any UK or EU policy. The company is not seeking any subsidy from taxpayers or consumers. It is promoting its technology in the BRICs—notably in China and Brazil, and also to some extent in India. I would also mention that when the Minister for Universities and Science recently visited that company, it was not at my invitation. I was not informed of the invitation in advance; it was made by the staff. I deliberately did not attend that visit, although it resulted in an invitation for the company to take part in a Government-led trade mission shortly afterwards. I also have a non-financial interest in the Renewable Energy Association as that organisation's first ever president, which is an unpaid post. When I took it on, I made it clear that I could not act as an advocate for the association or for any of its members. Finally, I have a financial interest in Group Eurotunnel SA, which is considering a joint venture that would involve the construction of an interconnector to take electricity to and from France.

I apologise for the length of that declaration, but so many untrue—and sometimes, I think, deliberately false—statements have been made about my interests in the past few weeks that I wanted to make the record absolutely clear.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I simply want to say that during all the time I have served on the Committee, it has always been aware of the Chairman's interests, and at no time have any of us felt that those interests have in any way impeded or compromised the work of the Committee. He has been absolutely scrupulous in declaring those interests and making clear his position. I deplore the journalism that has sought to besmirch the work of the Committee, which I believe is what journalists have tried to do, by suggesting that there has been any compromise. I welcome the fact that the Chairman has made such a statement.

Mr David Amess (in the Chair): The House is very grateful for the hon. Gentleman's contribution.

Mr Yeo: I, too, am grateful for that entirely unsolicited intervention from my colleague.

I also point out that I have been a strong and consistent advocate of greater investment in renewable energy for almost two decades—ever since I first took an interest in climate change when I was rather unexpectedly given ministerial responsibility for it in 1993. I believe that Britain needs investment in many forms of low-carbon technology, which of course includes nuclear power, and the suggestion that my views on the subject could possibly have been influenced by interests that I did not acquire until 2006 is simply absurd.

I warmly welcome the new Minister to his post. He comes in at a very challenging time in his Department's history. We, as a Committee, look forward to working closely with him. We worked very closely with his predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry). I would like to take this opportunity to pay public tribute to him as an exceptionally conscientious, straightforward, knowledgeable and trustworthy Minister. He will be much missed—certainly by me, and I think by the whole Committee—and his knowledge of the issues, at a time when rather complex legislation is going through the House, is something that I hope my hon. Friend the new Minister will also soon acquire. I wish him well in his task.

I also thank my colleagues on the Committee for their work in producing not just the report that we are debating, but an extraordinary number of reports over the past 12 months. I also pay tribute to our very hard-working staff.

It is almost a year since the publication of the report that we are debating, and the concerns that we expressed then are almost exactly the same as those that we would express now. Britain is, of course, very dependent on imported fossil fuels for its energy, and anxieties about the level of generating capacity remain. The concerns about the fact that much of our existing capacity, in the form of the old coal and nuclear plants, will retire very soon, and about the need for that to be replaced, are as acute today—if not more acute—as they were last year. Absolutely enormous investment is needed in new capacity, storage facilities and so on. In the past year, there has still been progress, albeit insufficient, on energy efficiency, and on carbon capture and storage.

Britain remains a big net importer of energy—the figure was 29% last year. We are very lucky to have Norway on our doorstep, which is a friendly and reliable supplier of gas, but it is still desirable that we try to minimise our dependence on imports. In my view, that

[Mr Yeo]

supports the argument for exploiting our shale gas reserves, for which we look to the Department of Energy and Climate Change for early approval, as has been recommended by the Committee. We will soon return to that subject, and I hope that we get the go-ahead soon.

Norway is a friendly supplier of gas, but even that fact cannot insulate us from future gas price spikes. Those who advocate relying mainly on gas to generate our electricity must recognise not only that, without the so far unproven economic availability of carbon capture and storage, gas cannot possibly get us to the 50 grams per kWh emissions target set by the Committee on Climate Change for 2030, but that there is also a real danger, as the Asian economies continue to grow, that global demand for gas will drive prices up, meaning that Britain's economy will become less competitive if gas is our principal source of electricity generation.

Barry Gardiner: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman recalls the "World Energy Outlook" report and our interview with its head, Fatih Birol that drew particular attention to the fact that as Russian gas from western Siberia is gradually going offstream, the eastern Siberian gas fields will then come onstream. The likelihood is that there will be a decrease in the gas from Russia that comes into Europe and that, as the countries of Asia—China and India—see a rise in their need for gas, the eastern Siberian stream will increasingly be pulled down there. The position of Russia will therefore put Europe in a very different situation vis-à-vis gas.

Mr Yeo: The hon. Gentleman—in terms of the Committee's work, he is probably my hon. Friend—is absolutely right about that point. The situation will get much more serious from Europe's point of view in relation to its reliance on imports from Russia. I commend the work of the International Energy Agency, and especially of Fatih Birol, who has a particularly mature and perceptive view of long-term energy trends. The IEA's work gives us a lot of warnings.

Despite all that, in what I hope will be a diversified mix of energy sources—gas, nuclear, low-carbon and renewables—gas will remain important in the next 15 years. We cannot do without it, so I hope that the Government's gas strategy will include a further expansion of gas storage capacity, which is currently only a fraction of that routinely maintained by Germany, Italy, France and the United States.

Our report also recommended that the Government should set up an independent central agency to manage Britain's strategic oil stocks, so we look forward to progress on that. We distinguished, although not everyone does, between independence and security. Independence of energy supplies is not attainable for Britain in the foreseeable future but, in any event, security is more important. Security means much more than just reliable sources and supplies of energy, although that is a prerequisite, as it makes storage and interconnection important factors, too. It means having adequate generating capacity and a mix of generation that delivers value for money to consumers and protects consumers in the event of a much higher carbon price, which may well emerge—indeed, it is likely—in the 2020s and 2030s.

I note en passant, and with approval, the continued spread of emissions trading as a policy instrument. It has been adopted in a growing number of countries, although that trend that was not apparent three years ago. We now see it in countries in Asia, in Australia and in parts of America, and pilots are taking place inside China, as we reported recently. That points to the use of emissions trading and the possibility of a rising carbon price in 15 or 20 years.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): I have just been reflecting on that point about security and diversity going hand in hand. Does my hon. Friend think that France, which is relatively undiversified—it has 70% to 80% nuclear—has inherently less secure energy than us?

Mr Yeo: That is an interesting point. France is exposed to the risk of something that derails nuclear technology. Last year's Japanese accident, which was actually an industrial rather than a nuclear accident, effectively led to the closure of nuclear power in Germany. France has rightly taken a more robust attitude. The factors that led to the Japanese accident would not apply for the most part to French nuclear power stations. None the less, a great reliance on a single technology inherently puts a country in an exposed position, although that is perhaps less the case for nuclear power, given that the supply of uranium is probably reliable for the foreseeable future. Interestingly, France is also quite a big investor in wind power which, again, is not something that depends on imports. I would not say that France is excessively exposed, but would be in the event that something went wrong with its nuclear power stations. It is also struggling to renew its nuclear power stations, and cost overruns and time delays have affected EDF quite badly. None the less, I remain a strong supporter of investment in new nuclear power.

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Mr John Hayes): I thank my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene as I may not have a chance to deal with this issue in my summation. He made two interesting points, which I should like to test a little further. The first is about the relationship between gas and competitiveness. After reading the work that his Committee has done on low-carbon growth links with China and listening to his general comments on China, may I ask him to say something about the changing character of demand, especially from the emerging economies, and the effect that it may have on the world price of gas and our competitiveness? I have another point, but I have gone on long enough. I do not want to test your indulgence, Mr Amess, beyond reasonable limits.

Mr Yeo: I am always encouraged when a Minister intervenes on my remarks. It suggests that he is listening, not that I expect anything else from the present Minister, and that we are debating something that is of some consequence. It is an interesting question. We are likely to see from China and the other Asian tigers huge demand for imported energy. China has a lot of coal and it may have some more gas that we do not yet know about, but the likelihood is that it will become an importer. Countries such as Korea are already huge importers of fossil fuels. I suspect that the world price of gas will tend to be driven up by the growth in these

economies. There will be some interesting consequences. America, which may well be self-sufficient in gas for the time being, will thereby have a competitive advantage because if it wants, it can keep down its gas prices, although if I were a gas producer in America I would wonder about exporting it to a jurisdiction where the price was higher. It would be prudent for Britain to assume that, even if the price of gas remains decoupled from that of oil, we may see a significantly higher gas price by 2030, and that if we were too dependent on gas we might find that we were paying more for our energy than if we had a more diversified mix. A lot will depend on how much investment takes place in nuclear power in some of these countries, because at the moment that seems to be an open question.

David Mowat: I hesitate in trying my hon. Friend's patience further. I was going to mention this earlier. There is no such thing as a world price of gas. There is a European price of gas and a Henry hub price of gas in the United States of America. Currently, the gas price in the US is one quarter of the price here—that is a game changer. Although the demand in China will be high, the US price may represent a constraint on price even in Europe because, if the US lets it happen, liquefied natural gas can be imported into Europe at a cost that is less than the differential between US gas prices and our gas prices now.

Mr Yeo: I agree with my hon. Friend: clearly, there is an opportunity for the very low price in the United States to influence prices here. If the US is allowed to do that—and it is converting some of its terminals to export rather than import LNG—the differential is too attractive not to pursue it. However, I doubt whether that by itself would be sufficient to offset the upward pressure from the much faster-growing and larger economies in the east.

Security also depends on a much greater investment in energy efficiency. As we all know, Britain now needs a huge investment in generating capacity. There is no guarantee that that will be forthcoming unless we have clarity and general stability of policy. I urge the Minister to ensure that there is no slippage in the discussions—not just those about the energy Bill but the negotiations on strike prices for contracts for difference—that are under way. The nuclear industry in particular requires as much clarity as possible as it has enormous capital needs and long delays before any return is achieved. I am sure the Minister will find that matter pretty high up his briefing pack.

Mr Hayes: I hear what my hon. Friend says about certainty being a pre-requisite for getting the kind of investment necessary over the term about which we are speaking. The Committee has spoken about that before: its report on the emissions trading system talks about a strong and stable carbon price signal being another component that is needed to achieve certainty and predictability, which are the pre-requisites of investment. Will he explain that to me? After all, I am on a sharp learning curve.

Mr Yeo: I am sure that the Committee is encouraged by the fact that the Minister keeps quoting from our reports. He could not have a better textbook from which to embark on his learning curve. The signal that

we would like to see of a strong and stable carbon price is one that has been conspicuously absent from the EU emissions trading system, for a variety of reasons. First, the cap was originally set much too high in phase one, and phase two was scuppered by the recession. It will probably be the latter part of this decade, at the earliest, before we see that strong, stable carbon price emerging, but we will see it eventually. I would be surprised if, by the 2020s, we do not see a stable carbon price. Moreover, if more countries, including some large ones, adopt emissions trading as one of their instruments to address climate change, I suspect that the prospects for that strong and stable carbon price will be greatly increased.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): I am listening with great interest to my hon. Friend. My question is about energy storage, to which he has referred a few times. Are the members of the Energy and Climate Change Committee, and indeed the Minister, thinking about energy storage and the technologies involved, including, for example, liquid air? If so, are they considering studying the effect of energy storage on investment and how the impact of energy storage might be calibrated?

Mr Yeo: I am hoping that the Minister can enlighten us about that, if not this afternoon then before long. One thing that we as a Committee recognise is that the present system—the market—is not giving enough incentive to companies to invest in energy storage. That is why no investment is taking place. There are a variety of ways in which that could be remedied. However, at the moment the ball is probably in the Department's court on energy storage, and we look forward to hearing what it has to say in due course.

I will try to make some progress, because I am conscious that my colleagues need to speak in this debate. I will just reiterate the point that I was making before the Minister last intervened. Uncertainty or last-minute unplanned policy changes on which consultation has not taken place—I am happy to point out that such changes might not necessarily come from the Minister's Department but from the Treasury, as we saw in Budget 2011, which contained changes to the tax regime for oil and gas that had not been consulted upon—are simply killers for investment.

Our Committee's report urged that there should be diversity in energy supplies. Of course, the size of the role that gas can play in that regard will depend significantly on progress being made on carbon capture and storage. If that facility becomes available, there is a much bigger opportunity for gas. Therefore, we should focus our efforts on CCS as much—possibly more so now—on gas as on oil. Alongside that, however, we also need nuclear. Many of us regard it as a clean and safe technology. We have some anxieties about the progress on new nuclear power stations. EDF appears to be on the brink of making the decision in that regard, but it is not quite over the line yet. The future of the Horizon consortium is still unclear. I say to the Minister that if the only way to get nuclear power stations built in Britain soon is to accept investment from abroad, even from China, with the right safeguards, that is perfectly acceptable. The aim is to get these things under way.

Even if that alternative—investment from abroad—fails, I wonder whether the time is approaching when we should consider another model, in which the Government

[Mr Yeo]

take the construction risk for nuclear power stations and use their own balance sheet and excellent credit rating, which I pay tribute to the Chancellor of the Exchequer for achieving, to finance the construction stage of a nuclear power station. Then, when it is completed, the power station can be handed over for operation; we can sell it to one of the nuclear power companies. I am just anxious that we may reach next year and find that no one will build under the present policy. I hope that it will not come to that.

Let me turn briefly to renewables. I am encouraged by the price falls that we have seen in technologies such as solar power. I am also encouraged by the further innovation taking place in a range of technologies, including some waste-to-energy technologies, and by the British leadership in non-wind marine technology, such as tidal power and wave power; the Committee has also reported on that technology.

However, I urge the Department to take an evidence-based approach, which the Committee itself has adopted. We must do what we can to protect consumers by rigorously insisting on value for money from renewables. I would love to think that we could get huge amounts of base load power from tidal power, but in practice it is much too expensive at the moment for it to be a big factor.

We must face the facts, however uncomfortable they are to the population. Whenever I mention the subject of onshore wind turbines, I am assailed by hundreds, possibly even thousands, of e-mails, some of which are quite irrational or even offensively pornographic, but never mind. I will not read them out to Members here in Westminster Hall; it would involve using some unparliamentary language. Nevertheless, we cannot avoid the arithmetical fact that at present it is cheaper to generate electricity from an onshore wind turbine than from an offshore wind turbine—or from tidal power or wave power—and it is likely to be so for some years to come. I cannot wish that fact away.

However, I do not suggest that we should impose wind power from wind turbines on any community that does not want them. Any community is perfectly entitled to say that on visual or noise grounds the turbines are too intrusive to be accepted; that view is fine. None the less, we cannot alter the fact that if we ruled out onshore wind turbines completely, the absolutely certain consequence would be to raise the price of electricity for consumers.

Just as we need clarity and stability about policy on generating capacity, we need clarity and stability in the transition process from renewables obligation certificates to feed-in tariffs. We also need clarity about the levy control framework and about what would happen in the event that there is a clash between meeting the requirements of the Treasury, in terms of the framework, and meeting the requirements of the Government as a whole, in meeting the carbon budgets to which they are committed. All of those issues will have to be answered when the House considers the energy Bill in the next few months. We look forward to being given some clues about the Minister's attitude towards these issues.

I was going to say a bit more about energy efficiency, but I hope that everybody takes it as read that for our Committee that is the first and foremost priority. It is

the one area where the needs of security, affordability and reduced emissions all come together; greater energy efficiency achieves all those objectives.

I am keen that the Minister should have plenty of time to give us the first clue about his thinking on these issues, so I will conclude my remarks now and just say that I hope my colleagues will deal with the other parts of the report that I did not have time to deal with myself.

2.55 pm

Laura Sandys (South Thanet) (Con): It is a great privilege to follow my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr Yeo), the Chairman of our Select Committee. As he rightly said, we have been involved in producing a wide range of reports. Subjects such as energy can be quite dry, but every 10 or 15 years, they become the most exciting portfolio across all Government Departments.

I welcome the new Minister to his post, which he takes at a time when energy is perhaps one of the most important and interesting issues that the country faces, with energy security absolutely at the heart of that. I look forward to his first appointment with the Committee, which I am sure will be in the near future.

I also follow my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk in recognising the extraordinary work and success of the Minister's predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry), who was an exemplary Minister with a reputation both here and abroad. I am sure that the new Minister realises that his post is, in many ways, a sales job. It is about knocking on doors around the world to try to ensure that we find the investment we need, which is close to £200 billion. I am sure that fellow members of the Committee will join me in hoping that my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden has an interesting future beyond the portfolio that he has left.

Energy security involves two competing issues, in that we face a significant increase in energy consumption but, at the same time, a decline in UK production. I do not want to make too much of a political point, but that situation did not arise only yesterday—we have faced it for the past 15 or 20 years, so it has been straightforward to predict. It is unfortunate that we are now racing to try to achieve some policy certainty and reinvestment in the energy sector when it has been quite obvious that we have been facing this problem for many years.

Globally, some would say that the last century was dominated by the politics of ideas. This century will be about the politics of resources. That is what makes the energy security debate so important, because it is about much more than the energy sector. It is also about our future industrial growth, our competitiveness and keeping the lights on, and in a much less benign environment than before. There is demand for energy, food and water from domestic audiences, whether they are in the UK, China, Russia, or even countries where democracy is not necessarily the watchword. For the UK and all these other countries, access to resources will be absolutely crucial and will determine their economic success.

No one is proposing energy independence, but I have a personal experience that illustrates why I am particularly sensitive to the issue of energy security. I worked in the energy sector for about 15 to 20 years. Before I came to

this place, I worked for the Georgian Government in the Caucasus, advising them on the Baku-Jehan pipeline. The second time I was in Tbilisi, I came out of my hotel room and saw a man who was not much further away from me than my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk is now. Somebody then went up to that man and shot him in the head. That was related to a large energy deal that was being proposed by a Russian company. The Georgian businessman had turned down the deal, and instead of a shareholder meeting, a P45 or any form of renegotiation, there was a murder in the main street of Tbilisi. That might sound unusual to people in Whitehall, but it is not necessarily unusual in parts of the world where energy is politics.

In addition, when I was sitting having a nice meal in Georgia, the lights went out for 20 minutes. It was apparently a message from the President of Russia to the President of Georgia—"Please will you give me a ring?" He gives him a ring, and 20 minutes later the lights go on. The Georgians then turn around to each other and say, "So, we have lost a bit more of our sovereignty."

Those examples might seem extreme, but this is where politics and resources come together. Although we might not be exposed to the politicisation of energy, the international market will be, and we must clearly understand that the world of benign energy trading might become a bit more difficult.

Unlike for many countries, it will be not the insecurity of supply that we have to address, but the cost of the supply. The cost of volatility in our energy sector will greatly affect the desirability for inward investment into this country. In India, the electricity went down for three or four days, and that was a massive blow to the country's attractiveness as an investment market. We might not have the actual lights out, but we will have a problem when it comes to cost, and the cost to our industrial base is crucial. As a result, we should be looking for consistency and predictability to the same extent as considering the lowest cost at which we can deliver energy.

What does a secure energy environment look like? I agree with the Chairman of our Committee that it looks like a truly mixed energy economy, because that will deliver us the greatest resilience. We need to consider increased domestic production, because international volatility will be one of the most destructive economic factors for British business. Our domestic production will, of course, include nuclear—I am a great proponent of nuclear, but we need to get the investment profile and environment right—wind, gas with carbon capture and storage, and coal.

Neil Carmichael: My hon. Friend makes some interesting points about threats and volatilities. Does she agree that the European single market is a tool that we could extend into energy and thus assist in that area?

Laura Sandys: I had an interesting experience with my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), who has never been known to be a great proponent of Europe. He said in a Chatham House speech before the election—perhaps in 2008 or 2009—that European Union member states should become a co-ordinated and active consumer of energy when it

comes to Russia and certain parts of central Asia. I therefore agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael).

To return to the question of a mixed energy economy, new technologies must also play a part in the resilient energy mix, but anyone who thinks that any of the energy generation sources are pain-free is misguided. Planning applications for shale gas, which I have had in my area, make onshore wind farms look like a walk in the park. The cost of nuclear, including de-risking, will be a lot more than the Government think. In many ways, that reiterates what the Committee Chairman said about considering taking on responsibility for build costs.

The wind sector needs to become much more efficient and to understand how to better engage communities. We must recognise that no energy solution comes without some pain. We must not necessarily look to pick winners and losers, but consider how the mixed energy economy needs to be addressed. We all need to appreciate that opportunities are not simple and straightforward.

The Minister faces an interesting in-tray. Energy security will be achieved through a range of Government policies, although sometimes the policies are so complex that they might create competing behaviours. There are capacity mechanisms, increasing market liquidity, which is crucial, storage policies, which were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud, distributed energy incentives, which have not had sufficient profile and enough focus placed on them by the Department, and smart technologies. A range of interactive measures can help to reduce wastage, increase productivity and hedge costs. If energy security means anything, we must ensure that we closely consider demand reduction. Our Committee was a bit concerned and rather disappointed that the Department did not include in the draft Bill a significant set of policies on demand reduction. That can be a very exciting win for the UK when it comes to competitiveness and to building a resilient and modern economic base.

In conclusion, I want to highlight a significant problem with the country's energy security. This reflects something that the Committee Chair said, and I hope that the Minister will be able to resolve it. The issue is policy certainty. Companies are much less worried—strangely enough—about what incentives there are, or about exactly what they feel they will get out of choosing one energy source or another. However, we currently have rhetoric and we have reality. We have a fast track on the low-carbon economy with one measure, and the brakes appear to be put on with another. We have an opportunity to build a really strong economy around our need for energy investment, but we sometimes confuse the investment community about our intentions. Certainty and clarity of direction will offer the Minister the greatest opportunity for success when he travels the world's energy company boardrooms, selling the UK as one of the most predictable and reliable investment locations in the world.

3.7 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I am delighted to speak in this important debate, and I am particularly delighted to welcome the Minister to his position. His work within his previous skills portfolio was much respected, and I think that many of us hope that he will bring not only the dedication that he showed in that

[Barry Gardiner]

role, but his focus on developing green skills, into this new portfolio, where he is considering the UK's energy supply. It is a difficult time to be taking on the brief, and I think that we all sympathise with him for taking over at this juncture, with so much on his ministerial plate. I assure him that the Committee—both sides of it, I think—will seek to co-operate with him to ensure that he gets his feet under the ministerial desk as quickly as possible and can take the brief forward.

I do not want to go over the ground that the Chairman of the Committee and the hon. Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) have already covered—I entirely agree with most of what they said, particularly the hon. Lady's call for certainty in policy. She is absolutely right; that is one of the key things that will hold back—is already holding back—the investor community from pressing ahead with the sort of investments that we need, if we are to see the £200 billion investment come on stream and ensure that we have the continuity of a secure supply of energy over the next decade.

I want to focus on subsidy and the importance of getting subsidy right. Earlier this summer, there was a contretemps between the Treasury and the Department of Energy and Climate Change on the subsidy for onshore wind. The debate was not phrased in that way; it was phrased, "How much can we cut from that subsidy?" Should the subsidy be cut by 10%, which is the Department's public position? Or should it be the far more severe cut of 25% proposed by the Treasury? Interestingly, the Department won the day in that public debate. In a straight fight between the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, most people in most circumstances would back the Chancellor, but in this case the Department won.

We need to consider the economic case for onshore wind. The new Minister has previously commented on onshore wind. We subsidise the technology, which operates intermittently. Wind does not blow all the time and cannot provide the base load of electricity supply. On a number of occasions, the Minister has remarked on the way in which the technology adversely affects communities in the countryside.

Long-term subsidies are not good. I think we can all agree with that. In my view, we should not subsidise any energy in the long term. Subsidies should never be a permanent feature of any market. Subsidies should be introduced only to address market failure and they should be withdrawn gradually as such market distortions are addressed. I hope even the Chancellor and the Treasury accept the economic rectitude of those remarks. Whether they can square that with this country's ongoing fossil fuel subsidy is an entirely different matter.

Last year, the OECD estimated that, in 2010, UK subsidies for coal, gas and petrol amounted to £3.6 billion. Additionally, the Chancellor announced in his 2012 Budget further exploration and production subsidies of £65 million to develop the west of Shetland fields. The market failures addressed by those subsidies are unclear. On the contrary, fossil fuels appear to have an entrenched subsidy culture in which such taxpayer handouts are regarded as a right, rather than a means of addressing an otherwise unlevel playing field.

By contrast, the total subsidy paid to onshore wind amounted to less than £400 million in 2010-11, or £6 on the average household's annual bill. That gives a better

sense of the subsidy onshore wind currently enjoys against the £3.6 billion in consumption subsidies that fossil fuels enjoy before factoring in the cost of carbon emissions.

David Mowat: I am interested in the make-up of the £3.6 billion. Are we talking about tax reductions, or am I missing something?

Barry Gardiner: I hesitate to speak for the OECD, but my understanding is that the £65 million is composed of production subsidies, VAT subsidies and other things. I am sure information on the figures is available from the OECD, because they are the OECD's figures, not mine.

David Mowat: I am sorry, but I do not understand that answer, because £3.6 billion is a very large amount of money. The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point if that figure is a true reflection of the situation, and it is reasonable to ask how the money is being transferred at that rate to the energy companies and, presumably, their shareholders, because that had previously passed me by.

Barry Gardiner: Members of Parliament are not noted for admitting ignorance, but I am happy to do so. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a detailed breakdown, but that figure has been given by the OECD. As I said in response to his previous intervention, my understanding is that the subsidy is accounted for in VAT subsidies and in other production subsidies, such as the ones I mentioned. I cannot go further than that. I do not claim to be the economist or accountant who worked out the figures published by the OECD, to which I refer him.

The real market failure is that the environmental, economic and social costs of greenhouse gas emissions are not properly factored into our fossil fuel price. The Government recognise that and have tried to attribute a price to carbon emissions through the EU emissions trading scheme. Unfortunately, the carbon price has neither been stable enough, as the Chairman of the Select Committee mentioned earlier, nor high enough to redress that market failure, even for the 40% of UK carbon emissions covered by the ETS. Fossil fuels are operating in a market tilted distinctly in their favour. Those who support renewables such as onshore wind that do not produce polluting carbon emissions are perhaps entitled to claim that there is clear justification for that level—albeit a very low level, as I have shown—of subsidy.

Bringing new technologies to market can be difficult, and many technologies have died in the valley that lies between demonstrating a prototype and full commercial development. If the UK is to develop world-leading renewable technologies, such as those mentioned by the Chairman of the Select Committee, particularly marine technologies, we need further subsidies to enable renewables to make that transition from prototype to full commercial scale. The renewable obligation subsidy introduced by the previous Government was designed to do that to some extent and supported new wind generation as the technology successively improved and economies of scale reduced production costs. It is worth noting that it is onshore wind's positive trajectory in reducing costs that led the Department to argue that the subsidy could

be reduced by 10% in the first place. As the technologies become cheaper, it is right to scale down the subsidies. That trajectory has led some in the industry to project that onshore wind will be cost competitive with gas by 2020, which brings another element to our discussion. Indeed, the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) highlighted that differential and the possibility of seeing cheaper gas in the UK because of shale gas in the United States.

Clear social and environmental costs are associated with shale gas in the United States, and the Committee flagged them up in its report on the potential for shale gas in the UK. However, at every point we should aim to factor the cost of pollution into the true cost of the fuels that we use. That is really how we should evaluate the cost. We do not, for example, factor into the cost of fossil fuels the cost to the health service of people with bronchial or asthmatic conditions caused by carbon emissions from diesel and petrol engines. If we want to get a far better handle on our energy needs and supply, and the security of that supply, let us compare the true costs of the separate parts of our energy mix, and not simply look at the market cost.

I want to go off slightly on a tangent and mention, in response to the shale gas debate, one other aspect that I think it important to draw to the attention of the House. As shale gas provides the USA with increasingly low-cost fossil fuel, there will be a substantial shift in American foreign policy, which has been fixated on the middle east—for good reason. Its fossil fuel supply has substantially depended on stability in the middle east providing continuity of supply. The discovery and exploitation of shale gas in the United States significantly changes that perspective, and when we look to the future of European and UK energy we need to factor that in too. The drivers that caused the US to be so involved with middle east countries will shift. We need to recognise that, as much as we recognise the shift happening in the gas fields in Siberia, and the rise in demand from India and China.

There is one further thing I want to comment on: the fourth pillar of the Government's proposals on electricity market reform—the emissions performance standard, the carbon floor price and the way in which they interact. Is not it strange that the emissions performance standard was set at 450 grams per kWh? Whom did the Department think it was fooling by setting that figure? It is clear that it was set because it excludes dirty coal without carbon capture and storage, but it has a beneficial effect on investment in nuclear, boosting the price.

In the past year and a half, the Committee has spent a lot of time talking to the investment community, which has been generous with its time and views and has made clear the way in which the risks associated with different technologies and energies manifest themselves. There are planning, construction, operational and price risks and, particularly with the nuclear industry, a decommissioning risk. The key matters on which the investment community focused in discussions with the Committee were construction risk and the period during which capital is exposed in the construction of new nuclear, as opposed to new gas, technology, and the different lengths of time needed to get production in place and price coming through. The investment community made clear to the Committee its belief that without Government subsidy—not covert subsidy by way of

price subsidy through the EPS but real subsidy in relation to those risks and the extra cost of capital—there will not be the level of nuclear infrastructure development that the Government have said they want.

I come back to where I began on the question of subsidy: without a much more transparent understanding of the subsidies going to fossil fuels, and the lack of accounting for their cost in damage to health and the environment, and pollution; without factoring those things in; without a clear understanding of the subsidies necessary as technologies develop, and the reduction in subsidy necessary as they become more cost-effective; and without transparency about the real subsidies that the Government are offering the nuclear industry, and the structuring necessary to get the development we need, we will not have a successful energy policy.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr David Amess (in the Chair): Order. The debate finishes at 4 o'clock. I intend to call the Opposition spokesman at 25 minutes to 4. Then the Minister will respond and the Committee Chairman will make his final remarks. Time is tight. I think that two hon. Members want to catch my eye.

3.27 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I shall be extremely brief, Mr Amess. I congratulate the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), on taking on his new responsibility. I also want to express my appreciation of his predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry), who made himself remarkably accessible and reached out to hon. Members like me who have constituencies with significant energy-producing resources and establishments.

I want to mention two such establishments today. One is the largest oil refinery in the country, at Fawley, and the other—also at Fawley—is the power station, whose future is under extreme threat: it is doubtful almost to the point of extinction. Fawley power station is a reserve station. It was set up in the shadow of the great oil refinery next door. Its future is doubtful because of European legislation. Unless an alternative power generation role is found for the site, compatible with European legislation in the future, it will cease to make even a reserve contribution. I will flag up today the point that I used to make to the Minister's predecessor: sometimes emergencies happen to a country—situations of extreme peril—when restrictions must be set aside.

I still feel that it is worth the Government's examining the possibility of keeping the Fawley power station in a reserved condition. If an extreme situation of national danger arose where we needed emergency extra supplies of electricity, inevitably it would involve a temporary setting aside of such things as European and environmental restrictions on what could be allowed in power generation. There could be a strategic role for Fawley power station in an emergency—something that I hope the Minister will consider.

Finally, in the time available, may I say that we are greatly concerned—by “we” I mean local oil refinery people and, nationally, the UK Petroleum Industry Association—that oil refining in this country does not

[Dr Julian Lewis]

compete on a level playing field with oil refining abroad? Unless the Government adopt a somewhat reduced, laissez-faire attitude—they keep saying that they believe in an open and competitive market—the sadly diminished number of oil refineries in the UK could go below a critical mass, to the strategic disadvantage and, indeed, endangerment of this country.

3.31 pm

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): As the second hon. Member to speak who had nothing to do with the report, I congratulate the Select Committee. Three of the report's features strike me as particularly good. It was short, which is always good for Select Committee reports. Secondly, it talked about gas storage. It is odd that we talk so little about gas storage, because it is a structural issue. Thirdly, I want to talk about recommendations 5 and 6, which ask the Department to publish performance indicators on security and the route or road map that we are trying to get through. That is needed, because there is a lot of misinformation on this subject and the Government's response to the recommendations was quite weak; the only part that was perhaps adequate was the last sentence, which stated:

“The Government continues to examine options for further improvements.”

That needs to be considered by the Government, and I would just like to put into the mix four potential issues that have not been talked about.

Biofuels are rapidly becoming the biggest source of renewable energy in the UK. We have to be very careful on this with regard to security. In October, the United Nations described the increasingly prevalent practice around the world of turning corn and wheat into ethanol as a “crime against humanity”. One of the best points in the speech by the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) was about how the geopolitical aspects of shale gas are affecting US foreign policy. That is absolutely right. There are geopolitical issues in continuing to put corn and wheat into cars and power stations, as though we are pursuing some great environmental truth when we are not, and that is difficult.

The unique point about the UK's energy position compared with the rest of Europe is that we have to spend £200 billion in the next decade. We will apparently double the amount of electricity that we currently generate at the same time as decommissioning coal stations—let alone the oil refineries to which my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) referred—and nuclear power stations. It is beginning to look like a very difficult issue indeed, and the Minister has come in just in time to manage it.

We have put ourselves in a position, particularly on nuclear, where we are negotiating with a single supplier. People talk about the cost of nuclear. A colleague of mine who I used to work with once told me that, if he was running a utility and was dealing with the UK Government, the only coherent strategy to take would be to wait until they were desperate enough to pay the money. Roughly speaking, that appears to be what is happening, and I wish the Minister luck with those negotiations. In a scenario in which we are not going to let the lights go out—let us assume that that is going to

be the case—I always thought there would be a dash for gas. When considering a strategy, one always asks, “If this strategy fails, how do we know it has failed?” The dash for gas is obviously the default.

In the past few months, and possibly the past year, there has been another emerging aspect of strategy failure: the increasing amount of imported electricity through the interconnector from France and Holland. Currently, we import approximately double the amount of electricity that we generate from renewables. If there is a policy failure above all policy failures, it is the fact that this country is apparently no longer able to generate its own electricity and has to take electricity from the French and the Dutch, even though much of it is generated using relatively cheap nuclear power.

I add in passing that in the past six months there have been two announcements about increased capacity in the French nuclear grid—1.6 GW in Flamanville and 1.8 GW in Penly—coming on stream in the next 18 months. France appears to be able to do this a lot more easily than we do. This may be an issue for the Select Committee, but I do not wholly understand why the French can get nuclear power stations on stream without the pain that we apparently need to go through. A road map of the Department's plan in this regard would be very useful. The fundamental strategy of putting out the energy market and saying that the market will decide will become increasingly untenable, as we get close to the day when the lights might go out.

Finally, what is causing so much error in policy is the conflict between the Climate Change Act 2008, which I support, and the need to reduce emissions and the EU 20-20-20 directive, which states that not only do we need to reduce emissions, which I support, but that that must be done with renewables. That has caused a huge amount of misallocation of capital resource and expertise. Germany is often used as a great example of a country that has hit the renewable button hard and has done it well. It is true that Germany has four times as many renewables as the UK. It also has 30% more carbon per head than the UK, because it burns more coal. We have to focus on what matters, and the directive is deeply flawed and has caused a misallocation of capital and the resources that go with that. The Minister may wish to consider that in the months and years ahead.

3.38 pm

Tom Greatrex (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Amess. This is a welcome and timely debate. Debates on Energy and Climate Change Committee reports are, by their nature, wide-ranging and touch on a number of issues. As the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) said, the report is relatively short, but issues of energy security and energy independence touch on a wide range of Government policies, not all of which are the responsibility of the Minister. I commend the speeches by the Chair, the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr Yeo), and other members of the Select Committee for touching on some of those issues. Given the time available, I do not intend to repeat points that have already been made, but I will perhaps come on to some other recommendations in the report.

I congratulate the new Minister on his appointment and welcome him to his post. As other hon. Members have said, he takes up his post at an important time for

energy policy. He follows the hon. Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry), who had the respect of hon. Members across the House and the entire industry for the diligent way in which he undertook his duties, and for the accommodating way he would listen to and engage with different views from across the political divide on the areas for which he was responsible. I wish him well in whatever he does next. I wish the Minister well, too. He was well regarded for the seriousness with which he engaged with the skills agenda, his previous portfolio. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) made clear, the skills agenda is perhaps even more important in the energy sector. I look forward to discussing these issues with him in the House in the months, and possibly years, ahead.

Energy security cuts across many areas of Government policy, so there are many challenges for the Government as whole. As the hon. Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) said, this is an ongoing issue, not a new challenge that has suddenly arrived. It is to the detriment of government and governance when a difficult challenge gets left and is pushed along a bit on the agenda. There is a danger in the timing of such things. As the hon. Member for Warrington South said in a slightly different context, people keep waiting until it is almost too late, and sometimes the decisions are not necessarily the right ones and the costs associated with fixing them do not necessarily provide the best value for the taxpayer.

On page 43 of the report, the Committee described energy security as

“keeping the lights on, buildings warm, vehicles moving, businesses operating and electrical appliances running”.

That is a good, practical encapsulation of energy security. Although it is not the most glamorous subject and does not always attract attention in the same emotional way as other aspects of this brief, it is important to the economic future of our country. It is difficult to overstate the importance of those factors, because a safe and secure energy supply is vital to our economic recovery, both in creating jobs, which are desperately needed for millions of people throughout the country, and ensuring that businesses can rely on the energy supply.

I want to mention a couple of recommendations in the report. The report is almost a year old and makes points about the Government’s electricity market reform policy proposals. Since it was published, the Committee has undertaken pre-legislative scrutiny on the draft Bill. It is striking, however, that much of the criticism from the first report, even after pre-legislative scrutiny, remains valid. I am sure that EMR issues are high in the Minister’s in-tray and that he looks forward to responding to the Committee’s report on the draft Bill before it is introduced later this year. The EMR process is a key feature in securing the UK’s energy supply for the future, in terms of securing investment and setting out the certainty and predictability, as hon. Members have mentioned, which are important in getting investment in place.

Both reports touched on the capacity mechanism. I am sure that the Minister will be keen to deal with that as soon as possible. In the evidence to the pre-legislative scrutiny report in March, Ian Marchant of SSE commented—I do not agree with everything that he says, but I agree with this—that the

“the biggest issue at the moment is...uncertainty...the Government has created”,

for want of a better phrase,

“a known unknown.”

Knowing that there will be a capacity mechanism but not exactly what it will be, people will wait and see what the mechanism is, so there is a danger of creating a hiatus in investment. It is vital that we deal with that matter as soon as possible.

The Committee considered the relationship between Government and industry, specifically in relation to the oil and gas offshore industry and the impact that that can have on investment in the UK. It concluded, in reference to the measures announced in Budget 2011, that there is a need for a constructive relationship to restore industry confidence and maximise the benefits from the UK continental shelf. That is important.

I appreciate and acknowledge that since then the Department has done work to reinvigorate PILOT, the industry-Government body, and on establishing the fiscal forum, which is important. Although any Government have the right to adjust their fiscal policies to meet circumstances, the way that the changes were announced at the time—almost without any prior warning or degree of consultation—highlights the possibility and danger of an adverse impact on investment and, therefore, on revenues coming in. Various statements were made at the time about the impact of those changes, but because it is such a long-term industry those will not yet be known for certain. However, the report touches on that important point.

My previous point feeds into the wider, broader issue of certainty. Government decisions in the past couple of years serve to underline the degree of uncertainty. Oil and Gas UK claimed at the time that the UK was regarded as one of the

“most unstable...provinces in the world by many investors”.

Thinking about some other environments, that is quite an alarming statement. I hope some of that damage has been or is in the process of being undone. Similarly, in relation to other measures, including the feed-in tariff, renewables obligation and the banding review, about which there was movement backwards and forwards, sometimes such public discussions and squabbles send a signal to the wider investment community that they cannot necessarily rely on what the Government will do. That is a dangerous position to get into. I hope that the Minister, in his early weeks and months in his new role, seeks to provide the appropriate amount of certainty and predictability.

The hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) mentioned the refining industry. The Government have committed to undertake a refining strategy, which is timely, and they will publish it later this year. However, that is too late for people employed at Coryton refinery. It is worrying when a fully functioning refinery with high environmental standards—perhaps one of the best in the UK—is closed with the loss of an estimated 850 high-skilled and high-paid local jobs that made a significant contribution to the local economy. The strategic issues in relation to our refining capacity are serious, as is our ending up importing refined product as a result. I hope that the Minister and the Committee will consider those issues. The Committee has a full agenda, but it may wish to consider these issues and keep an eye on them, because Select Committees can bring a degree of vigour and impartiality to such discussions.

[Tom Greatrex]

During pre-legislative scrutiny the Committee criticised the draft Energy Bill for not including any measures on demand reduction. Hon. Members have mentioned demand reduction. It is hard to disagree with the Committee's saying,

"It is completely unsatisfactory that DECC's work was not completed in time to be published alongside the draft Bill. This suggests that DECC is still failing to give enough priority to ensuring that demand-side measures contribute to our energy policy goals."

Over the summer the McKinsey report, published for further comment, highlighted 11 key barriers to capturing the potential of energy reduction. Other hon. Members may have missed the Secretary of State's saying that he was intending to graft some demand-reduction measures on to the draft Bill—that was at a Liberal Democrat summer school, so the attendance and attention might not have been huge—but I note the Committee's warning that

"adding last-minute measures to an already pre-determined structure of a Bill may severely limit what can be achieved on demand reduction".

That is important.

Barry Gardiner: The Committee said, in its recent report on climate change, that only 60,000 of the 330,000 solid wall insulations, which the Government indicated were necessary, had been installed. That is an important indication of how serious the situation is.

Mr David Amess (in the Chair): Order. I am worried that the Minister will have little time to respond to the report. The Committee Chairman would also like to say something.

Tom Greatrex: I take that on board, Mr Amess. I concur with my hon. Friend.

There are many challenges for the Minister to deal with—many of them covered in the report—and I am sure that he will seek to do so in his diligent manner. Although we in the Opposition will always seek to scrutinise effectively, we will not oppose for the sake of opposition. We hope, in these areas and many others, to address the energy challenge of the country and be an inquiring, critical colleague for him in the months ahead.

3.49 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Mr John Hayes): As ever, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Amess.

Benjamin Disraeli said, "What we expect seldom occurs, but what we least expect generally happens to us." In that spirit, I stand here as the Minister responding to this important debate. I thank the Committee for drawing the matter to the House's attention.

Energy security is a vital subject with ramifications and implications of all kinds for our economy and for wider society. In addition, there are implications for employment, skills and many other areas, as the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Tom Greatrex), who I look forward to working with closely, said. That is why energy security is at the heart of the Government's energy policy.

Time does not permit me to go into the detail that I would like, but I will happily write to hon. Members about any queries that they might have, in particular those arising from the debate or indeed from the Committee's report, because that is the right thing to do in the circumstances. I also want to take some time to thank my predecessor, as several hon. Members already have. I will of course draw on his experience; I am meeting him for lunch next week—[*Interruption.*] I will be paying. I will also draw on the experience of members of the Committee.

The business of ensuring that we can maintain energy supplies without disruption, and that we have adequate infrastructure investment to do so, is central to our aim. That objective sits alongside and must be delivered with others to which hon. Members have referred. Significant among them is the affordability of energy, but we also have obligations in respect of carbon emissions and renewables. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) made a powerful point about some of their perhaps contradictory effects, on which I shall ask my officials to brief me thoroughly after the debate.

Fundamentally, the basis of our energy security policy is to ensure that there are competitive market structures that incentivise companies to provide reliable supplies at attractive prices, combined with robust regulation. The arrangements must be made to work in the national interest. Obviously, there have been no major physical interruptions to UK oil supplies in recent history, and electricity capacity margins are currently very high. Our gas market coped admirably with the coldest December for 100 years in 2010 and, more recently, with the cold snap that we had this winter. In addition, in recent years, the gas market has brought forward import infrastructure equivalent to some 150% of annual demand.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) is nevertheless right to say that we must not be complacent. Politicians, at least in this country, are accustomed to being fired, but not to being fired at, and I hear what she says about that not being true elsewhere. We certainly need to recognise the challenges that we face with a degree of seriousness that affirms that this is an imperative.

The challenges can be summarised as follows. First, over the coming decade, UK production of oil and gas will continue to decline and our dependence on volatile global fossil fuel markets will increase. In the longer term, the pressure on price from increased global demand creates uncertainties—that was mentioned by the Committee Chairman, with the point clarified still further in an intervention—and supply constraints are expected to increase.

Secondly, many of our coal and nuclear power stations will reach the end of their lives over the next decade, as hon. Members know, and we need to ensure that the market brings forward sufficient generating capacity to replace them. I have asked about that already in the Department, and the Committee is familiar with the issue.

Thirdly, the Climate Change Act 2008 committed the UK to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050. European legislation commits the UK to producing 20% of its energy from renewables. Those are most ambitious goals, which brings me to the fourth challenge: the tough market conditions for energy

investors and developers. With typical courtesy and acumen, the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) made a salient point about the need to ensure the circumstances in which investment is possible. As the shadow Minister said, we must ensure a degree of certainty and predictability in an extremely volatile set of world circumstances if we are to get the necessary investment. Investment requires such a spirit of certainty, and the Government must help to deliver that, irrespective of world conditions which are, to put it politely, challenging.

In addressing the challenges, we have developed a vision for the future of energy security in which low-carbon technologies, including renewables, nuclear, and fossil fuel generation equipped with carbon capture and storage, compete on price. As several hon. Members said, that diversity of provision is at the heart of our vision. Our aim is a secure energy system with adequate capacity, diverse and reliable energy supplies, and a demand side that is responsive to unexpected changes in supply.

As has been said, the policy response involves huge uncertainties—we are predicting for at least a 40 or 50-year period, which is bound to be full of change. The carbon plan explores a range of plausible scenarios of what the UK might look like in 2050. Our energy mix and energy security challenges will depend on which of those scenarios ultimately comes to pass.

I can deal only with headlines in the time available, but there are key elements of policy; we certainly have to focus on adequate capacity, which raises the issue of the reduction in demand, which was mentioned by the shadow Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet. Secondly, we have to look at energy efficiency in business and the public sector—that is critical. The Energy Efficiency Deployment Office will publish the Government's energy efficiency strategy before the end of the year. As the shadow Minister emphasised, we will certainly be looking closely at electricity market reform, which includes the difficult issue of the capacity market, on which I know there are different views in the House, as well as in the sector, as I found out last night when I met a range of players from it. Nevertheless, that debate needs to take place if we are to get our thinking right about certainty and predictability.

[MR GRAHAM BRADY *in the Chair*]

We constantly monitor and assess risks to ensure that there is adequate gas capacity, and the Government are working to ensure that planning and regulatory barriers are minimised so that the market can continue to provide such capacity. The UK oil refining industry, with its good links to other European refiners and access to

North sea crude oil, provides the UK with a secure, reliable and economic source of transport fuels and other petroleum products. I heard what my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) said about that, and I emphasise that the UK's refining industry has developed a strategic policy framework for the UK—we will be saying more about that before the end of the year.

I have talked about the diversity at the heart of our policy. That diversity requires each part of the energy mix to be commercially viable. Many points were made about viability and its relationship with what the Government do and do not do. I do not have time to respond to them, but I assure hon. Members that such points are at the heart of my early investigations into the subject, my discussions with officials and my connections with the industry.

On reliability, it is vital that we have the right electricity grid to connect generation to demand if we are to ensure energy security, to meet our climate change targets and to deliver affordable electricity. The “connect and manage” grid connection regime is enabling the faster connection of new generation projects, and significant transmission investment has been approved in principle by Ofgem to extend and reinforce the onshore transmission network. As has been said, gas plays a vital role in our electricity supply. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South talked about a dash for gas. I would not put it in those terms, but he is right that gas will continue to play a significant role, and it is vital that we have a considered strategic view of what that means.

Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair): Order. I remind the Minister that we have only one minute left for the debate.

Mr Hayes: I am about to leap to my exciting peroration, Mr Brady.

The report, which was introduced with style by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk, is important. It is now for me to sit down and allow him to say a word in conclusion.

3.59 pm

Mr Yeo: I thank the Minister for giving us at least a brief set of headlines in response to the debate. He did not have time to do more than that, so we sympathise with him. I reiterate that we are looking for an energy policy that is made in the Energy Department, not in the Treasury, and for a policy that is predictable, certain, stable and supportive of the goals of affordability, security and low-carbon.

Building Regulations (Electricity and Gas)

[*Relevant documents: Tenth Report from the Communities and Local Government Committee, Session 2010-12, HC 1851, and the Government Response, CM 8369.*]

4 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady, and to introduce the report of the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government on “Building Regulations applying to electrical and gas installation and repairs in dwellings”. It is hardly a short title to trip off the tongue or a subject to get the heart racing, but it is nevertheless an important subject for people’s safety in the home. We are trying to prevent householders from doing the wrong thing, particularly inadvertently, or creating serious difficulties for themselves.

Before I proceed any further, I welcome the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr Foster) to his new position and congratulate him on his appointment. I look forward to many further opportunities for us to discuss this and other matters relevant to the Select Committee. I have known him for many years and have engaged with him on a number of subjects, although not this particular one. I have a lot of respect for him, and I very much hope that we can continue to make progress on the matters before us as well as others. It is entirely appropriate at this stage to mention the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Andrew Stunell), who used to be the Minister dealing with this issue. He came to the Select Committee and gave us the Government’s response. I place on record our appreciation for his work in this area.

I will not detain the House for long. Having taken evidence—our report is evidence-based—the Select Committee reached a consensus about the way forward, which is broadly reflected by the Government in their response. There are one or two details that I will address and an area of disagreement that I want to highlight, but by and large the Government’s response was positive. That has not necessarily been the case with all our reports, so this occasion will not quite be a baptism of fire for the Minister. I accept that this is a complicated policy area, and I do not necessarily expect him to be able to relate to every aspect in detail. When the Committee considered it, we found ourselves on a fairly short and sharp learning curve trying to get our head around the technical aspects.

I will divide my remarks, as our recommendations and report are divided, into gas and electricity. They have common features, as do our recommendations, but equally, there are differences in how the two operate. In some ways, gas involves more complicated arrangements, because of the relationship between Gas Safe and building regulations. I will not try to explain it in detail during this debate, and I do not necessarily expect the Minister to do so either, but the arrangements are complicated.

We received expert advice that despite the complications, by and large, the arrangements work reasonably well. The one difficulty—I will come to it when discussing our recommendations—is that if we as politicians have trouble getting our head around the relationship, heaven help the ordinary member of the public who is having work done in their home. By and large, individual householders put their trust in the person or organisation they employ to do the work, and assume that everything will be okay.

The key to several of our recommendations on gas is simply raising public awareness, whether about ensuring that an installer registered under the Gas Safe scheme is doing the work, the importance of notifying authorities to get approval under building regulations for the work or the potential for carbon monoxide poisoning, the silent killer. It is important that public awareness of those issues is raised. We mentioned them all and called on the Government to embark on more high-profile programmes and work with the industry to increase public awareness, and the Government accepted our recommendations.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend will know that I am a long-term anorak on this issue because the little boy of a wonderful constituent of mine boy died overnight as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning by a faulty boiler and a gas leak from next door. I am a long-term campaigner. We were pleased with the report, but we were less pleased with one aspect of the Government’s response, namely the division between the two Departments. The Department of Energy and Climate Change was positive about the green deal meaning a carbon monoxide detector in every home, but the Department for Communities and Local Government was not as positive. We wanted to knock the two Departments’ heads together so that deaths and serious injuries from carbon monoxide come to an end or are drastically reduced.

Mr Betts: I pay credit to my hon. Friend, who has been a long-term campaigner on the issue of carbon monoxide, the potential for problems and the need for alarms to be fitted. He has done that work over a number of years. He drew my attention to the issue well before we began the Select Committee report, and his credentials are unmatched by anyone else in the House. I was going to come to that point later, but I will raise it now, because it is important. It is the one clear issue of disagreement in the whole report.

The Government have accepted that carbon monoxide alarms should be fitted where new solid fuel appliances are fitted or where, as part of the green deal, a change in a property’s air-tightness is assessed by the installer of heating or energy efficiency systems, but not, as a general rule, where a new heating appliance such as a gas fire is fitted in a property. The Select Committee disagreed. We took evidence, and virtually all the evidence we had proposed that alarms be fitted whenever new relevant heating appliances were installed.

Our evidence suggested that, as a minimum, 12 to 15 deaths a year are due to carbon monoxide poisoning. The reality is that because it is a silent killer and because people, especially elderly people, often have other symptoms that might be deemed relevant to their death, carbon monoxide is not always identified as a problem when someone dies. There could be other deaths that should properly be attributed to carbon monoxide but are not recorded as such. Thousands of people are admitted to hospital each year—maybe only to accident and emergency—suffering the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning. Again, they are not necessarily all identified as such at the time.

That is an area of difference between the Government’s response and the Committee’s recommendations based on the evidence that we took. I know that the Minister

is new in his post, and I do not expect a different answer from him today, but will he take another look? It is an additional complication to say that apart from solid fuel fires, where work happens in a house, air-tightness must be assessed, and only in those circumstances will a carbon monoxide alarm be deemed necessary. It is an undue complication. The public will much more easily understand that if they fit a new gas fire, they should install an alarm. The two go together.

The cost of an alarm is a few pounds. On top of the cost of the gas fire and the fitting, that is a very small amount. The idea that that is somehow extra red tape and bureaucracy is not true. It is a very small additional safety measure that could save the lives of 15 people a year at the very least. It might save more, and it might stop other people from becoming injured. Will the Minister take another look at it?

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): I associate myself with the remarks made by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), with whom I co-chair the all-party parliamentary group on carbon monoxide. I particularly welcome paragraph 27 of the report, which says:

“We recommend that the Government co-ordinate a concerted effort by the various industry organisations to continue to raise public awareness of carbon monoxide poisoning, to be overseen by the Government.”

Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the newly named all-party carbon monoxide group will launch the all fuels carbon monoxide awareness forum in October—just next month—to bring together all those who are running campaigns on carbon monoxide. That should make public awareness campaigns much more synchronised and effective. It is good that the Minister now knows that.

Mr Betts: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I congratulate him on his important work on the matter over the years. There is no difference between the Government and the Committee on our recommendations on awareness. The question is simply about mandatory fitting of alarms when all kinds of new heating equipment are fitted.

The one aspect of the awareness campaign on which the Government seemed a little less than enthusiastic was our recommendation about making things clearer to the public and trying to ensure greater understanding of the public’s responsibility concerning notification and building regulations on appropriate work. The Government said that awareness campaigns must make it clearer that people have a responsibility to use registered installers for gas work, but then said that they do not want to introduce confusion by referring to building regulations. The next recommendation to strengthen compliance with building regulations did not seem to fit with that approach. Perhaps the Minister will have another look at that, because awareness in general is needed, but that includes awareness of the responsibility on householders regarding building regulations, as well as the responsibility to ensure that a registered installer does the work.

That is a complication in the scheme, and everyone accepts that it is a necessary complication, but it is necessary to explain it better. The Committee was alarmed to hear that 50% of work on gas appliances in the home

could be done illegally. That work might involve small jobs, or it might be that work is not registered or reported even when it is done to a proper standard, but that was a concern. We recognise that awareness campaigns, as well as the clampdown on the enforcement of building regulations, to which the Government agreed, are important.

Mr Sheerman: Anoraks of the world should unite on this matter. What is really worrying is that with all the public awareness in the world, the fact is, as all the research that I have done as chair of the Skills Commission shows, that it is terrible that the consumer does not know whether the person coming into their house to do gas or electrical work—the position is a little better in the gas industry—is competent. It is almost impossible to tell. Training and qualifications are all over the place.

Mr Betts: There is a problem with gas and electrical work, and I will come on to that. On gas, the Government response said that 81% of people were aware of the need to use properly qualified and registered gas engineers. There is probably a greater instinctive understanding among the public that gas can be dangerous and that work should be done by someone who knows about it. I suppose the counterpoint is that if 81% of people are aware of that, 19% are not. That 19% could be putting at risk not just their house, but their neighbour’s house. Greater awareness is necessary.

In response to another recommendation, the Government said that a programme of measures is needed to strengthen enforcement of the regulatory regime. We welcome that response, and they have promised to report in due course on how successful such measures are.

Turning to electrical work—and this was something that, in addition to the carbon monoxide issue, triggered the Committee’s inquiry—it was possible that the Government would water down part P of the building regulations. I am pleased to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr Raynsford) in his place, as he has campaigned long and hard on the matter. I do not pretend to be an expert, but he is, and he understands the regulations backwards. It was an important step forward when the regulations were introduced. All the evidence to the inquiry was that they had been successful, had improved electrical safety in homes, and had ensured that more electrical work, although not 100%, was done to a proper standard. The Committee made it clear that it did not want any diminution in the application of the regulations and the requirement to comply with them. The Government accepted in their response that they did not want to water down safety measures, but said that they were still considering the consultation.

I want to pick up one issue on which the Committee was absolutely clear, and to obtain some assurance from the Minister. Having heard the evidence, we said that it would be completely wrong to water down in any way the requirement to use someone belonging to the competent person scheme or to notify the authorities for building regulation approval when electrical work was done in bathrooms, kitchens or outside. There is a potential safety risk, and I should like an assurance from the Minister. I hope that he can give it today, but if he cannot perhaps he could give a quick response in writing to the Committee. It is really important. There have been tragedies in the past, and I think that they

[Mr Betts]

have affected the families of hon. Members. That is one reason why the regulations were introduced. If just one socket is badly fitted in a kitchen or outside, someone could be killed. That is the truth of the matter, and we must be very, very careful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) referred to the importance of public understanding. The Minister is on a learning curve, as was the Committee, and when we asked our first questions it was with quite a lot of ignorance. We asked about the responsibility on householders, and whether, if they employed a properly qualified electrician, it was the electrician's job to ensure that everything was done correctly. The answer was no; it was the householder's responsibility. It is not necessary to ask 100 people in the street to know that 99 of them probably do not know that. Of 100 members of Parliament, 99 probably would not know that. Some members of the Committee said that they had had a kitchen fitted, but were not sure whether the person who came along to fit the sockets was a member of a competent person scheme, although they were probably a qualified electrician.

When members of the public go to a kitchen supplier saying that they want a couple of sockets here and there, and new light under the cupboards, they do not ask whether the person who will do the electrical work as part of fitting a new kitchen is a member of a competent person scheme, whether the work complies with building regulations, or whether it is necessary to notify the council about the work. They are probably more interested in whether the new kitchen looks nice, what the price is and whether they are getting good value for money, which is understandable. The Committee made it clear that the rules should be specific about work in these areas, that there must be compliance with the regulations as they stand, and that work should be done by a member of a competent person scheme or conform to building regulations if substantial work is done anywhere in the house.

There must be more public awareness. The Government accepted that it is a matter for them, local councils, and the industry. The Committee also recommended, and the Government accepted, that something must be done about toughening up the competent person scheme, the concern about conflict of interest, and ensuring that organisations receive levies from the companies and individuals who are part of the scheme. There could be a conflict. The Government have accepted that, and that they must toughen up the requirements and introduce more vetting organisations. There is agreement about the need to toughen up the rules. The whole industry, including the Electrical Safety Council, which expressed concern about watering down the regulations, should be involved. We must raise awareness.

To speed things up, and perhaps reduce costs when small amounts of electrical work were involved and the electrician doing the work was not a member of a competent person scheme, we suggested that a registered scheme member could come and sign off the work. We thought that that would be a safe change that the Government might be prepared to consider.

Finally, I mention the major retailers, to which the Committee has written suggesting that more could be done to alert the public to the requirements. Much of

the illegal work might be done by householders buying electrical sockets from a DIY store, thinking that they are competent to fit them in their own home. Alternatively, it could be carried out by a small tradesperson buying sockets to fit a kitchen, then putting them in, even though they are not classed as a competent person under the scheme.

The other day, we met the British Retail Consortium, B and Q, Homebase, John Lewis and Travis Perkins, to discuss their roles and responsibilities. When new products come online, or when existing products are changed, those retailers will now look at getting an agreed form of words across the industry. Companies will opt in on a voluntary basis but hopefully, 100% will volunteer, so that recommendations on installation requirements can be put on goods or packaging, perhaps accompanied by signs in the store, if retailers want them, or on their how-to cards or websites. Specific information will be available to individuals—whether they are householders or small tradespeople—about the requirements when fitting electrical sockets and other items of electrical equipment in potentially dangerous areas, or when it is done on a large scale as part of the major rewiring of a house. That will ensure that people know a competent person must be used, or that the matter should be reported for building regulations approval.

We think that retailers can do more. We were pleased that the companies we met agreed in principle to talk within their industry about reaching a voluntary agreement, meaning that they can be part of raising public awareness. That is not the solution in itself, but if the industry, Government, councils and the Electrical Safety Council can do more to make the public aware, we can save lives, which is very important.

It is a complicated issue. The reality is that instinctively the public assume that if a person is employed, it is up to that person to do the job properly. We have to get over to householders that the responsibility lies with them. We must explain the basic things that need to be done, in order to ensure that those responsibilities are carried out properly, so that people's safety and that of their families is not compromised in any way.

4.22 pm

Mr Nick Raynsford (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): First, I draw attention to my interests as declared in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Secondly, I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr Foster), to his new post. I have known him for many years—I will not go into the detail of how we put our lives at risk in a context with strong health and safety connotations—and, on the back of that, I know that he will be sensitive to and aware of the significance of the issues that we are discussing. I wish him every success in his new role. Thirdly, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), the Committee Chair, on an excellent report that addresses a difficult, complex subject.

Building regulations are not necessarily the best known or most popular area of policy. Even among MPs, as my hon. Friend rightly said, there is probably widespread ignorance about the implications of the regulations which, nevertheless, play a huge role in not only improving the standards of building work, but protecting the

public from unnecessary risk of injury or death. Given the important role of building regulations, we should take them very seriously, as the Committee has done. Its report is excellent and I am glad that it appears to have had some impact on the Government's thinking. I hope that we can take that further today and in the months ahead.

Among the changes in which I was involved when I was the Minister with responsibility for building regulations—more than a decade ago—were improvements to part B, on fire safety, and part M, on access to buildings, for which I earned the opprobrium of a heritage lobby, which described me as the greatest enemy to the English doorstep ever. I will pass over that point, however. We also looked at part L, on thermal efficiency and energy performance, and changes over the past decade have made enormous advances on energy efficiency and the response to climate change.

During my time as the responsible Minister, I was surprised to discover that no building regulation related to the safety of electrical installations. There were regulations on virtually every other area of building work in which public safety was an issue but, extraordinarily, electrical installations were not included. The recognition that lives were being lost—not only due to electrocution, but because of fires caused by defective electrical installations—was a real stimulus to look closely at the need to bring electrical works within the ambit of building regulations and, in 2005, Parliament eventually agreed that part P should be introduced. I am glad, because all the subsequent evidence shows that there has been a significant reduction in the numbers of fires, injuries, and deaths attributable to electrical installations in buildings. That gain was highlighted not only in the Committee's report, but by virtually every witness who gave evidence to the Committee, so there is a large measure of agreement that part P has helped to improve the quality of electrical installations, reduce risk, save lives and avoid injuries.

The Government's proposal, as part of their deregulatory agenda, that part P might be revoked was a concern to all of us who care deeply about the subject. I welcome the fact that the Government's response to the report sets out that they no longer propose to revoke part P. In my view, doing so would have been a foolish, retrograde step. However, the language in the Government's response still gives cause for concern that the impact of part P could be significantly weakened.

Mr Sheerman: Given my right hon. Friend's experience—and, even more appropriately, because he is the Member for Greenwich—it is worth saying that although many people in the coalition Government do not like regulation at all, we should all be proud that not one person died during the recent Olympic construction work, which is absolutely a first, compared with what happened in Greece, Sydney and Beijing. That was due to good regulation, and the balance between good management and regulation.

On part P, the word on the street, and from people I trust in the industry, is that the Health and Safety Executive is trimming the part down and rationalising it, rather than getting rid of it.

Mr Raynsford: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words about my constituency. I am very proud of it, and particularly of its role in hosting six of the Olympic

events, in which Team GB did extraordinarily well. I am also proud of the wider achievements of the Olympic construction process, which involved no fatalities. That was an extraordinary record compared with international competitors.

My hon. Friend talks about the HSE, but responsibility for building regulations rests with the Minister and his Department. The HSE obviously has an interest, but my understanding is that it is not open to the HSE to water down part P of the building regulations. If it proposes to do so, I hope that someone will talk to it quickly and say that such responsibility rests with the Department for Communities and Local Government, and specifically the Minister who is responding to this debate.

The Government's response sensibly backed away from their initial proposal to revoke part P, but it still left grounds for concern that the part's impact could be significantly weakened. The Government's response is silent on whether they might exclude certain categories of electrical work, including that taking place in higher risk locations, such as kitchens, bathrooms and gardens. The Committee considered such a proposal and strongly rejected it, as the Chair of the Committee emphasised.

Frankly, the Government's response is evasive and couched in language that raises justified concern that they may well be intending to do what the Committee urged them not to. The report's clear recommendation is:

"we do not endorse any diminution of Part P, taking minor works in areas of higher risk such as kitchens, bathrooms and gardens out of its reach."

Paragraph 25 of the Government's response says:

"The Government agrees that any changes should not unduly diminish safety. The Government will consider all responses to the consultation in relation to Part P and electrical safety carefully before implementing any changes."

There are two grounds for concern. First, there is no specific reference at all to the clear recommendation not to proceed with an aspect of the Government's earlier set of proposals: to remove from the remit of part P minor works in high-risk locations such as kitchens, bathrooms and gardens. The second ground for concern is the use of the weasel word "unduly". I know the Minister well. He is a plain-speaking person who speaks his mind, so I hope that he will ensure that the weasel word "unduly" is deleted, because there should be no diminution of safety—full stop. In high-risk locations, minor works can be just as lethal as major installations in any location. A minor work that is done incorrectly in a kitchen can kill people.

During the parliamentary debates that led to the introduction of part P, reference was made to a particularly sad case, which was also cited in evidence to the Select Committee from Paul Everall, the former head of the building regulations division at the Department, who is now the head of LABC—the organisation representing local authority building control departments. The Chair of the Committee has also referred to this case, which involved the daughter of an MP who was electrocuted due to unsatisfactory wiring in a kitchen. That illustrates just how lethal faulty works are, even if they are of a minor nature, so can we please have no weasel words about not "unduly" diminishing safety, and no suggestion that somehow minor works can be excluded without extending the risk to the public?

[Mr Raynsford]

Having said that, I would be the first to agree that if we can reduce the cost of compliance with regulations while maintaining safety, we should certainly explore that option. There is growing consensus that the answer probably lies in enabling DIY installers to have their work certified by a member of a competent person scheme, rather than having to obtain building control approval in all cases. The industry supports that proposal, the Select Committee supported it and LABC also appears to be supportive. It appears to be common sense, and it holds out the prospect of making real savings and reducing the burden of regulation without weakening safety. That should be the objective, so I hope that the Minister will follow that route.

One benefit of part P has been the extent to which it has led to a substantial increase in the number of contractors belonging to competent person schemes and thus being subject to regular checks and regular pressure to raise their standards. Before the introduction of part P, only 13,000 contractors were members of such schemes, whereas I understand that the figure is now about 40,000. That suggests that some 27,000 more contractors enrolled in competent person schemes.

The Committee's report highlights a point about the independent supervision of competent person schemes, but the Government have accepted its recommendations on that, so we can look forward to the operators of such schemes probably having to secure UCAS accreditation, which would be a sensible response to the concern. The key point is that more contractors should be encouraged and persuaded by a variety of means to become members of competent person schemes so that they are subject to regular checks. That would ensure that standards of performance continually improved.

Another key issue is public awareness of the requirements of part P and the implications of undertaking DIY electrical work. As the Chair of the Committee emphasised, the householder is the person responsible, but who can tell how many people are really aware of that? Very little is done to remind members of the public of their obligations and the risks associated with such DIY activity.

The Committee emphasised the importance of better information to extend public awareness and suggested the mandatory labelling of relevant electrical fittings with health warnings. The Government's response to the report shied away from mandatory labelling and instead put faith in voluntary action by retailers and others. There is not much hard evidence to support the Government's optimism that that will have the desired result that retailers will do the right thing and ensure that they do much more to bring to the attention of members of the public who are purchasing electrical fittings the fact that there are certain obligations and risks of which they need to be aware.

After I discussed this with the Electrical Safety Council, Daniel Walker-Nolan, the policy and research manager at the council, sent me a note. I shall quote it because it is relevant:

"With regard to DIY retailers providing information to consumers on Part P, there is a mixed picture. Some don't, B and Q in particular do not appear to mention it in any of their literature. There is some very basic information provided by certain companies such as Homebase but in our experience, generally retailers don't

actively draw attention to its existence or promote it. It would be interesting to see what evidence the government can cite to support their claim. Anecdotally, I'm informed that some retailers did actually promote information on Part P when the requirements were first introduced but stopped doing so quite quickly thereafter because it was having a negative impact on sales."

That is a cause for concern. I hope that the Minister will reflect on it and take further advice to determine what more can be done to ensure that members of the public are alerted to their responsibilities and to the risks of undertaking electrical DIY work without ensuring that it is checked as compliant with the requirements of part P.

I have focused on part P for obvious reasons, but I add my voice to those of hon. Members who have emphasised the need to do more to tackle the problem of carbon monoxide poisoning. The obvious case for doing more to prevent unnecessary deaths due to carbon monoxide poisoning, and, in particular, to get more carbon monoxide alarms into homes where risks exist, has rightly been highlighted by the Committee. I hope that the Government will consider that further, because this is, again, an area where lives are at risk.

I hope that the Minister will enjoy his time with responsibility for this—shall we say—recherché area of policy. As he well knows, individual Ministers, individual politicians and individuals' choices can make an enormous difference. In this area, we are talking literally about a matter of life and death. As he pursues his responsibilities, I hope that he will be mindful of the very real impact that an individual Minister can make to improve public safety and save lives.

4.37 pm

Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I, too, start by welcoming the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr Foster) to his new ministerial post. I am sure that we will joust cheerfully across the Chamber and this room on a number of occasions.

I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr Raynsford) for bringing in the regulations in the first place. He has done a lot to protect and enhance public safety. However, I have to say that by the time I had reached page 3 of the Select Committee report, I was beginning to wonder whether I was actually so pleased that we had part P, because this is not an area that is easy to grasp. I hope that hon. Members will bear with me when they understand that today I have had a range of planning matters to deal with. I am, nevertheless, pleased that we are having this very important debate.

I again thank the Select Committee Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe—

Mr Betts: Sheffield South East. It changed its name.

Roberta Blackman-Woods: Apologies. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) for yet another excellent Select Committee report. I thank the Select Committee for undertaking the report. Given the Government's wish to consult on changing part P and part J of the building regulations, an in-depth analysis was essential to look, in particular, at the extension of the range of simple jobs that could be carried out without notifying building control, and at

possibly revoking, or at best watering down, part P. The Select Committee has done us all a great service with the report it produced.

I welcome recommendations 1, 4, 5, 11, 12 and 13, which all relate to raising public awareness of the potential dangers of gas and electrical works. As we heard from many Members, good public awareness of the potential dangers of such works and of the responsibilities on homeowners could ensure that such works are carried out responsibly and could contribute to an improvement in safety standards. It is important that the report emphasised raising public awareness and doing everything possible to ensure that homeowners are aware of their responsibilities. If we went on to the street outside and took a random sample of people, we would find that a number of them would not be aware of their responsibilities, so the task to be undertaken is huge. I am pleased that the all-party group on gas safety is setting up a forum to bring together organisations working to raise awareness of public safety. I hope that that happens quickly.

I also welcome recommendation 2, which proposes strengthening the enforcement powers. That would enable local authorities to bring prosecutions up to three years after the completion of work that is found to be sub-standard. It would serve as a greater deterrent to cowboy workmen, and I hope that it will come into operation swiftly.

Recommendation 3 deals with carbon monoxide alarms, and I know that the all-party group on gas safety has taken up that issue: the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) said earlier that he would set up a new forum to deal with it. All MPs are concerned about carbon monoxide poisoning, which is a problem in my constituency because of the many students in private lets. It is important that they are protected, and I would like the legislation on carbon monoxide strengthened, not weakened.

Mr Sheerman: The hon. Lady and I know the value of Select Committee work, because we served on one together for a long time. Students often used to be the victims in cases of carbon monoxide poisoning, but when we introduced a regulation that required an annual check on a landlord's premises—without one, a landlord would finish up in prison if one of their tenants died from carbon monoxide poisoning—the problem involving students almost disappeared. Is it not odd that no annual check must be carried out in an ordinary homeowner's premises? We have seen deaths shift from tenants to the regular homeowner.

Roberta Blackman-Woods: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which strengthens what I said about the need for regulation. We strongly wish to ensure that the regulations are not watered down in any way. Indeed, there is a case for extending them to other categories.

Recommendations 6 to 13 deal with part P. All Members will have received an important briefing from the Electrical Safety Council. More than any other information I received, it highlighted that the result of the regulations being in place is an excellent safety record. That is a very strong argument for keeping them as they are. The ESC said that in its opinion, part P

“Contributed to 17.5% reduction in fires... Nearly 20,000 more electrical contractors are having their competence assessed and samples of their work checked regularly... It is easier for householders to identify competent electrical installers... 85%”

of its members

“said Part P should be retained but with some amendments/improvements... 53% had seen an improvement in the standard of electrical work since Part P was brought in... 96% said that DIY work should not be excluded from the need to notify... Only 4.19% found that the standard of work carried out by non-Part P Registered Installers was ‘usually good’”

compared with over 64% of members

“finding that the standard of work carried out by Part P Registered Installers”

was good. That clearly seems to demonstrate that part P regulations work effectively, and I hope that the Minister will take that on board.

Recommendations 8, 9 and 10 relate to changes to the competent person scheme. A number of people think that the scheme could benefit from reform. We will be interested to hear what the Government will do about it. Although the Government's response acknowledges the importance of raising awareness, I am concerned about the lack of a specific plan or a time scale to bring that greater public awareness about or to initiate activities relating to it. Will the Minister clarify what action he will take?

Recommendation 3 recognises the difference that carbon monoxide alarms can make and discusses the Government's new green deal. The detail of what the Government will do on it is not clear. It looks as though rules on carbon monoxide alarms will not go beyond the existing housing regulations. I noted that when the Minister's predecessor, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Andrew Stunell), gave evidence to the Select Committee, he said that he did not think that there was a case for requiring carbon monoxide alarms in all dwellings. Bearing in mind what was said earlier, it is important that the Minister looks at the matter.

Some of the evidence from the safety councils and evidence given to the Select Committee mentions the cost of carbon monoxide alarms. If they were bought in bulk and distributed through the local authority, the cost to homeowners could be significantly reduced. I am not suggesting that the local authority pay for them, but they could be obtained through a local authority buying in bulk. I would like the Minister to think about such a scheme.

Mr Sheerman: Most people take out home insurance—an immense amount of money is spent on advertising home insurance policies on television—so would it not be sensible for the Government to lean on insurance companies to say that unless there is a smoke detector and a carbon monoxide alarm in a house, it will not get insured? That would save an awful lot of worry and work. They cost only £15 to £20 to put in, so why are we still waiting for pressure to deliver a safe environment in the home?

Roberta Blackman-Woods: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. That measure is one of a number that the Government should consider to increase the uptake and use of carbon monoxide alarms. Following this report, I hope that the Government will come back with a range of actions that they will take to raise public awareness and increase the use of alarms, where that is possible.

As we have said, the issue is very important: we want to ensure that public safety is maintained and to avoid fatalities and injuries when possible. I am not totally

[*Roberta Blackman-Woods*]

happy that the Government are relying on a voluntary agreement with retailers in relation to the public being given more information when they buy electrical goods or seek to have them installed, particularly in the areas of higher risk—kitchens, bathrooms—that we have talked about. I know that the Electrical Safety Council has welcomed the Government's initiative to get retailers onboard through a voluntary agreement. If that voluntary agreement does not produce real action by retailers, will the Minister look again at that area?

Finally, I, too, have noticed what the Health and Safety Executive has said about the whole issue, including its concern that regulations dealing with gas and electrical safety are not in any way reduced or watered down by the Government. I know that the Government are still looking at the evidence and considering their approach to part P. While they do so, will the Minister look very closely at the evidence produced for this debate and the evidence contained in the Select Committee's report?

Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair): May I advise the Minister that I understand that the Chairman of the Select Committee would like a brief opportunity to respond at the end of the debate?

4.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Don Foster): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. It is also a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for City of Durham (*Roberta Blackman-Woods*) and I, too, look forward to friendly jousting over the weeks and months to come. I want very much to thank all hon. Members who have spoken, all of whom have considerably more knowledge on these issues than I have had.

I want to put firmly on the record from the start that, as hon. Members have said, although the issue has been described as complex and *recherché* and as one that really matters only to people in anoraks, it is vital and crucial. I was delighted to hear the reference made by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (*Mr Sheerman*) to the specific example of how, more widely, health and safety regulations have played a key role in ensuring the fabulous result on the Olympic park. The work done by the Olympic Delivery Authority has been phenomenal, but that is in part because it built on existing regulations, to which it had to have significant regard. We will all, regardless of our party political allegiances, also be grateful for the fact that Paul Deighton is to be brought into the other place and will contribute to party policy.

I want to make it clear that a really important point was made by the Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee, the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (*Mr Betts*), to whom I will no doubt refer many times later. It is that there is a total lack of awareness, in many places and for many people, about the responsibility of home owners and the crucial need to get that message over. Perhaps this debate, in its own small way, will contribute to doing so.

I congratulate the Select Committee on its report and its Chairman on his excellent work. I am particularly grateful to him for his very generous opening remarks

about my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (*Andrew Stunell*). When he was in my post, my hon. Friend took building regulations extraordinarily seriously. He was a great advocate for them—so much so, that one of his first actions was in relation to them. He recognised not only their importance, but the need for them to be properly maintained and to remain fit for purpose. For that reason, in July 2010, he initiated an opportunity for people to comment. Alongside the parallel work done in the Cabinet Office, through the *Your Freedom* website, that enabled him to develop several proposals that have become the subject of further consultation.

As the House will know, the problem is that when there is a consultation, some people come along and say, particularly about part P, that they want to get rid of regulations, and some say that they want to extend them and their scope. In the light of such mixed views, it became clear that we needed to explore how further to improve part P. We worked with the industry to understand its concerns, and that led to the set of proposals contained in the further consultation on changes to building regulations that was published by the Department on 31 January.

A comment was made about the HSE looking into part P. If I am wrong about this, I apologise to the House—I am a new Minister—but my understanding is that the HSE has no responsibility for building regulations, so I was somewhat taken aback by that remark. During the consultation, the Select Committee decided to inquire into this area, which was very welcome and timely. We very much welcome the report, which has provided more evidence for us to continue to consider.

I want clearly to say that I am going to disappoint all hon. Members present, but also in one sense to please them as well. I will disappoint them by saying that we have made no decisions on any of the issues. We are continuing to consult and to consider, and no decisions have been made. We will make them as quickly as possible. I hope, however, that it will please people to know that my mind is not closed on any issues that have been raised, and I immediately promise that all of them will be considered carefully—not only those raised today, but those raised by other people.

Mr Sheerman: I am delighted to see the Minister in his place—we have known each other for a very long time—and I welcome him to his post. May I say that we are delighted that he has not made up his mind?

I may have been wrong about the HSE. In this House, not many people admit that they might have got something wrong. I had just picked up that the HSE might have been fiddling around in the area, which is not one that I know well. What I know well is that the message is simple, is it not? We do not want people to die unnecessarily from bad electrical installation or from carbon monoxide poisoning. We know a lot about that, and may I extend the hand of friendship and say that, if there is anything that the all-party groups on common monoxide and on home safety can do, we will be happy to do it in talking, helping and supporting the Minister, as he learns his brief?

Mr Foster: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. The Chairman of the Select Committee said that when it studied the issue, it was on a steep learning curve,

although it had several weeks in which to do so. I am on an even steeper learning curve, having had less than 24 hours to try to master the brief. In doing that, the one thing that I have learned is that the issue really is very important.

I am grateful that, as well as part P, the Committee looked at part J. Although it did so, we have concluded that, as the regulations in part J were most recently updated in October 2010, there is probably no need to change them. That is why I want to concentrate on part P, which covers the safety of electrical installations and applies, of course, only to dwellings in England. Certain types of work need to be notified to a building control body unless they are carried out by an installer who is registered with an authorised competent person self-certification scheme. Such schemes oversee the competence of their members, and membership allows the members to certify their own work.

Our proposed amendments to part P, set out in the 2012 consultation, were aimed at reducing bureaucracy and costs for electricians and DIY-ers, particularly for those who do simpler jobs, such as installing additional socket outlets. We also looked at how local authorities could be allowed to step away from a situation in which they currently act, unnecessarily, as an administrative middleman.

The right hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr Raynsford) deserves huge praise for his work on the introduction of part P, and I thank him for it. I especially want to thank him for giving me some advance notice of what he intended to say today. I know that he is concerned about changes to the type of work covered by the regulations. He is also concerned about the weasel words that have been used so far. Although I must disappoint him in this area, I will try to give him a degree of comfort. While we are looking at changes to what work is notifiable, they will not affect the general requirement that all work must be carried out safely. I hope that that gives him a little comfort, but we will have further discussions about the concerns that he has raised.

The right hon. Gentleman has also been concerned about the defined competence scheme, which, for those who are not entirely familiar with it, relates to specific types of electrical work that are often carried out by general trades people, such as the electrical works associated with the installation of a boiler. We are aware of the calls to end such a scheme, which would effectively force people to join full competent person schemes. As with so many issues that we are debating, this is a complex matter. I can only assure the right hon. Gentleman that we will consider very seriously his comments on that issue, and we are grateful to him for making them.

Mr Raynsford: Let me push the Minister a little further. He said that although he had an open mind and was still considering whether there might be changes to part P, there would be, if I remember his words correctly, an obligation that all work should be carried out safely. However, without the remit of part P, that guarantee cannot be met. If works are outside the remit of part P, no one will necessarily know whether or not they have been conducted safely. Will he clarify those remarks and say whether I am interpreting his words correctly, because that would give me great comfort?

Mr Foster: The right hon. Gentleman knows me extraordinarily well, and he has also occupied the same position as me. He knows that there is no possibility whatever, having spent a long time coming to a form of words that I can give him, that I will, on the hoof, change them. None the less, I am grateful to him for his suggestion. Perhaps, on a future occasion, I may end up uttering the very words that he has sought to put into my mouth, but, at this stage, he has not yet succeeded.

Mr Betts: On exactly that point, the Minister said that he was considering the extent of the work that might be notifiable. He did not explain the scope of work that might be required to be done by a competent person. Was there a reason why he said one and not the other?

Mr Foster: I fear that the Chairman of the Select Committee is pushing me as hard as he might, but I will go to this stage and no further. If it gives him any comfort, I do genuinely understand the point that he has made.

Making the public and home owners aware of electrical safety and their own liabilities is crucial. We have already agreed with the Committee in its report in June that new conditions of authorisation, which will require scheme operators to promote and publicise the benefits of competent person schemes, will be put in place. We are also looking at other ways in which we can go further. We see considerable merit in the scheme providers working in partnership with retailers, manufacturers and one another. We will look into that and ensure that the measures that they take to promote the schemes are as effective as possible. However, I am not convinced at this stage that further legislation is required for such things as the labelling of electrical products.

The hon. Member for City of Durham asked me whether, if there was clear evidence that a voluntary code was not satisfactory, we would be prepared to consider an alternative route. The answer is yes, but there is a long way to go before we have such evidence. I hope that the industry and all its relevant parts will come together to work effectively on those issues.

Roberta Blackman-Woods: Has the Minister thought about a time scale for the operation of a voluntary code? In other words, if it is not working, would it be reviewed after one year, three years and so on?

Mr Foster: The straight answer is no, but I will go away and think about it.

The new conditions of authorisation also provide that each scheme must be independently audited, which sits well with the Committee's recommendations for stronger, independent scrutiny of the schemes. The Committee also considered whether registration of electrical installers should be mandatory, as it is for gas installers, and concluded that that was not justified. The Government welcome and concur with the Committee's views on the matter.

The Select Committee report asks on a number of occasions for the Government to report back, within two years, on the progress that they have made in carrying out a number of its recommendations. The Government have agreed to do that, and we will be monitoring the outcome of any changes made to part P

[Mr Foster]

and will report back to the Committee, within two years of when any changes take effect, as set out in the Government's formal response.

With respect to gas safety, the building regulations cover the installation of combustion appliances, such as the provision of chimneys and hearths and energy efficiency. However, safety with gas itself is controlled through the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations. On the face of it, like so many issues, that can seem complex, but there are obvious reasons why such a volatile fuel should attract greater scrutiny than other sources of heat.

Under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations, any engineer carrying out gas work for financial gain or otherwise must be registered with the Gas Safe register, which is operated independently and overseen by the Health and Safety Executive. Installers who are on the Gas Safe register can self-certify their work, which would also be caught by building regulations. That ensures that any legislative overlap does not manifest itself in practice, and that competent installers are able to carry on their business without undue bureaucracy.

In their evidence to the Select Committee, officials from the register suggested that they could improve their work in relation to building regulations. There is a particular concern that many registered installers are not making the necessary notifications under building regulations—the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Sheffield South East, made that point—and that is something that my officials continue to work with officials from the register and with the Health and Safety Executive to try to resolve.

The Gas Safe register also has a programme of consumer awareness campaigns to raise public awareness of gas safety risks. Those include national TV advertising campaigns, as well as national and regional press and radio campaigns. However, as the Chairman of the Select Committee and others have said many times, householders are ultimately responsible for their homes and potentially liable to correct any unlawful work. Nevertheless, the message is clear—to protect themselves, householders should use only Gas Safe-registered engineers.

Mr Sheerman: I know that the Minister is new to his post, but evidence given to Baroness Finlay's committee, which was looking at the long-term effects of carbon monoxide poisoning, showed that with Gas Safe and registration, it is still possible for someone to be a taxi driver one day and 10 days later to be going into people's homes as a gas fitter; as I say, that is evidence, not just my view. Using the register is not as easy and as safe as everyone might think. There is Gas Safe, but there are some real problems about the training of gas engineers, as there are about the training of electricians.

Mr Foster: I am grateful to the hon. Member for drawing my attention to that issue again. It is another thing that I shall be putting in the basket of things that I will have to look at following this debate.

May I also say that I welcome the news of the establishment of the all-party group on gas safety, which has looked at carbon monoxide? I have no doubt that it will have a particular role to play in raising awareness about the dangers of carbon monoxide.

Much has been said already about carbon monoxide alarms. That issue was considered at some length by the previous Administration as part of their review. We agreed with the changes that they proposed and we introduced them in the summer of 2010. However, I suspect that I will disappoint a number of people by saying that that review concluded that it would be disproportionate to require carbon monoxide alarms in all new homes. Research found that the risk from carbon monoxide poisoning is far lower for modern gas appliances, due in large part to their increased safety specifications. Therefore, we have no plans to extend the requirements in building regulations for carbon monoxide alarms, but we will still promote their voluntary use alongside the key messages regarding regular maintenance by registered installers.

Reference was also made to the green deal, and to issues such as retrofitting and so on. We will continue to look at the issues that were raised in respect of the green deal and in due course we will bring forward proposals.

I will end by thanking members of the Select Committee in particular for the work that they have done on this very important issue. As we have seen, clearly there is much that we have agreed on already, particularly the benefits of raising public awareness about gas and electrical safety. We will continue to consider all the proposals from the Select Committee and other proposals that we have received during the period of consultation. I look forward to working in the future with all Members who have shown a particular interest in this issue, so that we can achieve a safe environment which is, after all, what this has all been about.

5.13 pm

Mr Betts: Thank you, Mr Brady, for calling me to speak again.

I shall just make one or two points very briefly, to pick out key issues from the debate. I congratulate all right hon. and hon. Members who have come along to Westminster Hall today. They have made very telling and informed contributions to a debate about what is in the end, despite the technicalities involved, a very serious matter indeed that affects the lives of everybody in a home in this country.

As the Minister has just said, there is clearly a lot of common ground between what the Select Committee proposed and the Government's response, in terms of the need to strengthen the enforcement of the Gas Safe scheme of building regulations with regard to gas installations. The Government have accepted that, in terms of improvements to the competent persons scheme in part P and in terms of raising public awareness. The Government have accepted those things in principle, although we obviously want to see the details. They have also said that they will produce a report to the Committee in due course outlining the measures that have been undertaken and their effectiveness. That is important, because in the end it is the effectiveness of these measures that really matters.

There are just three key issues that, as yet, we have not yet got complete agreement on. First, I was a little disappointed to hear the Minister's last comments about carbon monoxide alarms. It seems to me that such alarms are a very low regulatory burden. There is a very small cost involved, and such alarms can save lives.

The Minister did not read out these words in the Government's response:

"However, we will continue to keep this under review."

I would have thought that the time when a new Minister comes in is the best time to have a review of an issue such as this. I ask him again, especially given the small cost involved, to simplify the issue—with new heating installations, a carbon monoxide alarm should be fitted. The two things go together; installing them together seems to make common sense. I ask him to reflect on that point again.

Secondly, regarding the possible amendments to part P of the building regulations, I will come back to the response that he gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr Raynsford). My right hon. Friend rightly identified the word "unduly" as being perhaps the key word there. The Minister's assurance about not compromising safety was welcome. Obviously, we want to see how that objective will be achieved. If he is suggesting some extension of the competent persons scheme to allow a member of the scheme to sign off work done by another electrician, that might be a way forward. Obviously he is not going to commit himself at this stage, but clearly he has accepted that that is potentially a sensible way forward. It may be what he is thinking about.

Thirdly and finally, there is an issue that, again, we might be making progress on. If we can get voluntary agreements to work, that would be desirable. As I mentioned earlier, members of the Select Committee met retailers the other day and representatives of the

British Retail Consortium have gone away to see if they can get agreement from their members. If the consortium comes forward with a robust scheme about advising members of the public who buy certain electrical equipment of the need to comply with the regulations, that would be a major step forward, and the consortium's members can advertise such a scheme on their websites and on notices in their stores. If that scheme works, that is fine.

However, what the Minister said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods) about what would happen if a voluntary scheme failed was really helpful. The fact that he could not give a time scale is understandable at this stage, but the fact that he said that if a scheme fails there is the long-stop possibility of regulation might concentrate the minds of retailers and others, and encourage them to develop a robust voluntary scheme that actually works. If that happens, that would be a very good way forward, and the Minister should be congratulated for at least beginning his ministerial task by perhaps nudging retailers and others in the direction of voluntary arrangements, which would remove the necessity for him to act in the future.

Once again, I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have participated in the debate this afternoon, and we look forward to hearing further comments from the Minister on these matters in due course.

Question put and agreed to.

5.17 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 6 September 2012

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Reducing Audit Requirements

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): In October 2011, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) launched a consultation on giving more small companies and subsidiaries the ability to make a commercial decision about whether or not to have an audit. It also proposed allowing companies more flexibility to change their accounting framework.

The response to the consultation has helped the Department to refine the proposals. In particular the proposals have been amended to make it easier for parent companies who want a subsidiary to be exempt from audit to provide the requisite guarantee of the subsidiaries' liabilities.

These changes will allow 120,000 additional companies to be exempt from audit and 67,000 dormant companies to be exempt from the need to prepare and file annual accounts. There will also be increased flexibility for companies to change their accounting framework, which will enable them to take advantage of appropriately reduced disclosures.

We seek to achieve our ambition of making the UK one of the best places in Europe to start, finance and grow a business, in part through reducing the regulatory burden on UK businesses. Thus we welcome the broad support received for the overall principle of reducing audit requirements for unlisted companies and the support for proposals which promote flexibility and prevent UK businesses from being at a disadvantage to their European competitors.

BIS is today publishing a response to the consultation, which sets out the Government's intention to introduce legislative changes to enable companies to take advantage of these changes. The proposals are deregulatory and reduce costs for business of at least £100 million per year, and possibly much more.

Legislation is expected to come into force from 1 October 2012, to be available for accounting years beginning on or after that date.

The consultation response, and the final stage impact assessments are available on the BIS website at: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/consultations>.

Regional Growth Fund (Update)

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): The regional growth fund (RGF) is helping to rebalance the economy by helping those areas and communities that are currently dependent

on the public sector. The fund is unlocking private sector investment in the local economy, creating jobs and making Britain open for business.

The RGF is good value for money and delivers funding to parts of the country that need it most—approximately £6 of private sector leverage for every £1 of public money.

The RGF is delivering jobs and having a positive impact on businesses: work to finalise contracts for rounds 1 and 2 is nearly complete and preparations are on track to announce round 3 awards in the autumn.

Rounds 1 and 2

Progress is good on rounds 1 and 2 with over half the bidders (127) contracted and able to draw-down funding and a further 51 completing their due diligence reports. So far, agreed offers have unlocked almost 198,352 jobs.

There is now a firm and agreed position with nine in 10 bidders; they are signing up to agreed terms or withdrawing and allowing the reallocation of the fund or in cases such as Lotus, agreeing a delay.

The priority now is to agree a way forward with the remaining few, which is being done during the autumn.

Currently 149 projects and programmes have started, unlocking almost £4.8 billion of private investment into our economy. Several companies were content to start work before receiving any funds; agreeing terms has given them the confidence to get going and start work.

The number of withdrawn projects and programmes has increased to 24 (10%). For a fund of this size this number is fairly low: withdrawals also point to the robustness of the process—something the NAG has been positive about. See annex A for the full list.

The reasons for withdrawals vary from global market conditions; realisation from their own due diligence that the project could not be supported; to changes in senior management requiring a new strategy.

Long-term impact

All RGF projects and programmes are being monitored; this will continue for years to come, in order to understand the impact of the RGF and continue to protect taxpayers' interests. Monitoring will include an annual review of progress that will be reported to Parliament at the end of each financial year, beginning in the spring of 2013.

Round 3

The round 3 contracting process will be quicker and lessons learned from the previous rounds will be implemented. The contracting process should take no longer than six months to complete from when Ministers allocate support for the bid to the signing of final offer letters.

Of the 414 bids received in round 3, 132 have been declined, four withdrew and 278 were short-listed. All bidders were informed of the outcome of the initial appraisal stage on 14 August.

Assessment of the 278 short-listed bids continues and is on track for final announcements this autumn. Lord Heseltine's panel will meet this month to agree recommendations, and Ministers will meet in October to make final decisions.

Annex A—Withdrawn Projects from Rounds 1 and 2

- | | |
|----|------------------------|
| 1. | Ames Goldsmith UK Ltd |
| 2. | Caparo Precision Strip |

Annex A—Withdrawn Projects from Rounds 1 and 2

3.	CE3—Conitech
4.	Cleveland Potash Ltd
5.	CT5—Exhausto Ltd
6.	CT7—Aggregate Industries Ltd
7.	CT8—W.D. Irwin & Sons
8.	CT9—Arla
9.	Cumbrian Holdings
10.	Diodes Zetex Semiconductors Ltd
11.	Federal-Mogul Friction Product
12.	Heerema Hartlepool Ltd
13.	Messier-Dowty Ltd
14.	Nissan UK P3
15.	Pilkington United Kingdom Ltd
16.	Rapiscan Systems
17.	Shepherd Offshore Ltd
18.	Sirius Minerals
19.	St Modwen Properties Plc
20.	T & N Plastics Ltd
21.	Thales Properties Ltd (Leicester)
22.	Universal Engineering
23.	Vestas Technology UK Ltd
24.	Zegen (Wilton) Ltd

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT**Housing and Growth**

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles): The coalition Government's number one priority is to get the economy growing. We must create the conditions that support local economic growth and remove barriers that stop local businesses creating jobs and getting Britain building again.

In November, the Government published a comprehensive housing strategy and we have rapidly put in place measures set out in the strategy to support a thriving, active and stable housing market.

We are reforming the right to buy by significantly increasing the discounts available to tenants to buy their own home. We launched our NewBuy scheme allowing people access to mortgages with only a 5% deposit. And to unblock stalled sites with the capacity for up to 16,000 homes we launched the £570 million get Britain building fund. We also announced plans to dispose of public sector land with the capacity to deliver 100,000 homes, and invested £770 million in infrastructure for housing and growth through the growing places fund.

House building starts across England were 29% higher in 2011 compared to 2009. But there is far more to do to provide homes to meet Britain's demographic needs and to help generate local economic growth.

Increasing investment in the private rented sector

The rented sector already provides good quality homes for many young people, professionals and families. But growth has been constrained by the lack of large-scale investment. We invited Sir Adrian Montague to report on the barriers to institutional investment and intend to take up Sir Adrian's key recommendation. Today I can announce that we will be investing £200 million in housing sites to ensure that the high-quality rented

homes that are needed are available to institutional investors quickly. And we will be establishing a taskforce to bring together developers, management bodies and institutional investors to broker deals and deliver more rented homes.

The Government will also use their hard-earned fiscal credibility to pass on lower costs of borrowing to support the long-term delivery of new rental homes. To give institutional investors the assurance they need to invest in this area we will be issuing a debt guarantee for up to £10 billion for this scheme and the affordable housing scheme set out below. Under the scheme, the Government will enable providers to raise debt with a Government guarantee, where they commit to investing in additional new-build rented homes. From tomorrow, the Government will be inviting expressions of interest from companies wishing to benefit from the scheme. It is expected that housing associations, property management companies and developers will be amongst those to benefit.

Affordable Housing Guarantees and tackling empty homes

The need for affordable housing remains high. We will therefore be extending the use of guarantees to cover borrowing needed to deliver more affordable homes. Building on the success of the affordable homes programme, the Government will invite bids to provide up to an additional 15,000 affordable homes through the use of loan guarantees, asset management flexibilities and capital funding. We also intend to extend our successful refurbishment programme to bring an additional 5,000 existing empty homes back into use. In total we will invest another £300 million.

Helping first time buyers

To complement supporting the rented sector, we also want to help those who want to get on to and move up the housing ladder.

Building on our existing schemes, we will continue to support house building and to help people into home ownership through NewBuy—making it easier to access a mortgage with only a 5% deposit. We are working with the Home Builders Federation and the Council of Mortgage Lenders to increase take up and grow the number of builders and lenders in the scheme. I welcome Monday's announcement that Aldermore have joined the scheme—taking the number of lenders up to six, over 70% of the market. Homebuilders and lenders will work together on a concerted marketing campaign over the autumn to raise consumer awareness and understanding of scheme.

We will also allocate an additional £280 million, with a matching contribution from house builders, to extend our very successful FirstBuy scheme to March 2014. This will allow up to 16,500 additional first time buyers to purchase a home.

Accelerating large housing schemes

The need for new homes is acute, and supply remains constrained. There are many large housing schemes in areas of high housing demand that could provide real benefit to local communities once delivered. But large schemes are complicated and raise a wide range of complex issues that can be difficult to resolve.

Building on success in working with Kent local authorities and developers to unlock major housing opportunities at eastern Quarry in the Ebbsfleet valley, the Government will work in partnership with local authorities, scheme

promoters and communities to accelerate delivery of locally supported, major housing sites. These will be sites where there is local support for growth, strong demand for new homes, and good prospects for early delivery.

Off-site construction can create skilled jobs, improve the quality of homes and ultimately bring down costs. An industry-led group convened by DCLG and BIS, will look in detail at the barriers holding back the growth of this part of the sector and how increased use of such techniques can be incentivised. We will ask this advisory group of experts to prepare proposals by Budget 2013, with the aim of improving the efficiency of housing supply and unlocking high value jobs in the UK.

Thanks to the Government's credible fiscal strategy, homeowners are benefiting from historically low interest rates. However, the private sector needs to be able to access both finance and land to build the homes we need. The funding for lending scheme, run by the Bank of England with the approval of the Government, provides strong incentives for banks and building societies to boost lending, including mortgages and loans to businesses

Getting surplus public sector land back into use

In response to emerging conclusions from a review chaired by Tony Pidgley, chairman of the Berkeley Group, the Government will accelerate the release of surplus public sector land by strengthening the role of Homes and Communities Agency outside London through a targeted programme of transfers from other Government Departments and agencies. We will also work to accelerate disposals by preparing the land for market and providing a single "shop window" for all surplus public sector land. We will work with the Mayor of London with a view to developing a similar approach in London, and to resolve how other measures are delivered for the benefit of Londoners.

Reducing planning delays

To get more homes built—and more workshops, factories and offices—we need a planning system which works proactively to support the growth that this country needs.

The national planning policy framework is a major step forward. It has been widely welcomed by business, and as a result of its positive influence we are already seeing accelerated plan-making and more positive decision taking.

We are clear that local people—and local authorities—must be at the heart of planning. The last Government tried top-down imposition of growth and unequivocally failed. The imposition of regional strategies built nothing but resentment, with house building falling to its lowest peacetime rate since the 1920s.

The Localism Act has put the power to plan back in the hands of communities, but with this power comes responsibility: a responsibility to meet their needs for development and growth, and to deal quickly and effectively with proposals that will deliver homes, jobs and facilities.

Today we are announcing a series of additional measures to drive the effective implementation of these reforms and remove unnecessary bureaucracy that can hinder sustainable growth.

Given the importance of efficient and effective planning decisions for the economy, we need to ensure that where there are clear failures in performance, that applicants are able to access a better service. We propose to legislate to allow applications to be decided by the Planning Inspectorate, if the local authority has a track record of consistently poor performance in the speed or quality of its decisions. Planning is a quasi-judicial process: justice delayed is justice denied. It is unfair to all parties for local planning authorities simply to fail to make timely decisions on a planning application—creating uncertainty both for applicants and local residents.

In support of this we will also require more transparent reporting of council performance on planning, and will be working with the Local Government Association to increase the use of planning performance agreements for major schemes—which commit both applicants and planning authorities to a clear timetable for determining proposals. In addition, we intend to give planning inspectors more power to initiate an award of costs in planning appeal proceedings, where it is clear that an application has not been handled as it should have been with due process.

Swift determination of appeals by the Planning Inspectorate is also of critical importance. We will consult shortly on options to speed up planning appeals—and for a new fast-track procedure for some small commercial appeals. I have also instructed the Planning Inspectorate with immediate effect to divert resources to prioritise all major economic and housing related appeals, to ensure applicants receive a response in the quickest possible time.

I have also extended a measure that allows developers the chance to seek additional time to get their sites up and running before planning permission expires, for an additional year. This measure will cut the costs of getting developments back on track.

Getting the infrastructure projects that the country's economic success relies upon underway as swiftly as possible is also a top priority. The planning regime for major infrastructure which deals with many of these cases is bedding in well and is bringing benefits through its streamlined and more certain processes. We want to ensure that this planning regime rightly focuses on the most important schemes whilst also extending the benefits of it to other forms of development which are of national importance.

To achieve this we now intend to review the thresholds for some of the existing categories in the regime, and also to bring new categories of commercial and business development into the regime—making it possible for such schemes, where they are of sufficient significance, to be considered and determined at a national level. We will also work to extend the principle of a one-stop-shop for non-planning consents for major infrastructure, and amend the special parliamentary procedures which apply to major infrastructure to ensure they are fit for purpose.

Reducing the cumulative burden of red tape

It is vital that the affordable housing element of section 106 agreements negotiated during different economic conditions is not allowed to undermine the viability of sites and prevent any construction of new housing. This results in no development, no regeneration and no community benefits at all when agreements are no longer economically viable.

The Government estimate that up to 75,000 new homes are currently stalled due to site viability. Section 106 is an important tool to provide affordable housing and we welcome the flexible approach that many councils have already taken to renegotiating these agreements where necessary. The Government are also acting to get developers and councils around the table through its new mediation scheme. However, given the current imperative for growth, we need to do more.

The Government will now introduce legislation, to be effective in early 2013, which will allow any developer of sites which are unviable because of the number of affordable homes, to appeal with immediate effect. The Planning Inspectorate will be instructed to assess how many affordable homes would need to be removed from the section 106 agreement for the site to be viable in current economic conditions. The Planning Inspectorate would then, as necessary, set aside the existing section 106 agreement for a three-year period, in favour of a new agreement with fewer affordable homes. We would encourage councils to take the opportunity before legislation comes into effect to seek negotiated solutions where possible.

Alongside this, the Government are also consulting on legislation that would allow developers to renegotiate non-viable section 106 agreements entered into prior to April 2010.

There is concern that the array of local and national standards used in different parts the country is complex and counter-productive: confusing local residents, councillors and developers. I am announcing today a fundamental and urgent review led by Government working with interested parties to rationalise these standards. This review will result in a clear plan of action by next spring, including legislative approaches if a significant rationalisation cannot be agreed.

Supporting locally led development

We have previously made clear the importance we attach to delivering new large-scale settlements. The recovery criteria already includes large residential developments. To align this with the call-in process, I will also carefully consider the use of call-in for major new settlements with larger than local impacts.

To support locally led development, communities will share in benefits including the new homes bonus, community infrastructure levy contributions towards local infrastructure, and the financial benefits of business rates discounts and forthcoming business rates retention from April 2013.

The green belt is an important protection against urban sprawl, providing a “green lung” around towns and cities. The coalition agreement commits the Government to safeguarding green belt and other environmental designations, which they have been in the new national planning policy framework. The Localism Act allows for the abolition of Labour’s regional spatial strategies which sought to bulldoze the green belt around 30 towns and cities across the country, subject to the strategic environmental assessment process, as outlined in my statement of 3 September 2012, *Official Report*, column 5WS.

As has always been the case, councils can review local designations to promote growth. We encourage councils to use the flexibilities set out in the national planning policy framework to tailor the extent of green-belt land

in their areas to reflect local circumstances. Where green belt is considered in reviewing or drawing up local plans, we will support councils to move quickly through the process by prioritising their local plan examinations. There is considerable previously developed land in many green belt areas, which could be put to more productive use. We encourage councils to make best use of this land, whilst protecting the openness of the green belt in line with the requirements in the national planning policy framework.

Helping homeowners improve their homes

As a nation, we have great pride in our homes, and I want to make it easier for families to undertake home improvements: not just to cut red tape and strengthen individual homeowners’ rights, but also to help generate economic activity which will support small traders in particular.

I am announcing today a further package of simplification measures to remove red tape and ease the burden on local authorities. We will consult shortly on changes to increase existing permitted development rights for extensions to homes and business premises in non-protected areas for a three-year period. This will mean less municipal red tape to build a conservatory and similar small-scale home improvement and free up valuable resources in local authorities.

Getting empty offices into use

We have already undertaken a series of measures to make change of use easier, to help get empty buildings back into productive use.

We will introduce permitted development rights to enable change of use from commercial to residential purposes, while providing the opportunity for authorities to seek a local exemption where they believe there will be an adverse economic impact. This common sense measure will help the regeneration of our towns and cities. Our high streets will benefit from a greater resident population, increasing footfall and supporting local shops.

This package of measures will ensure that the reforms which we have made to the planning system are implemented as effectively as possible, and that the planning system plays as full a role as possible in supporting local jobs and local firms.

HEALTH

“Next Steps for Nursery Milk”

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr Daniel Poulter): The Government’s consultation on the “Next Steps for Nursery Milk” is currently under way. We have received a large number of responses from a range of organisations including child care settings, specialist milk suppliers, and milk industry.

Due to the summer break, we have been asked to provide extra time to schools and nurseries to respond to the consultation. The Government are therefore extending the consultation period for an extra six weeks, to ensure that anyone who wants to contribute can do so. The new closing date of the consultation is Tuesday 23 October 2012.

The Government are committed to continuing the nursery milk scheme. Through this consultation, we are exploring three different options for improving the operation of the scheme.

We will publish a formal response to the consultation on the future operation of the nursery milk scheme taking full account of all the consultation responses.

“Next Steps for Nursery Milk” has already been placed in the Library.

Health Select Committee’s Report on Education, Training and Workforce (Government Response)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Anna Soubry): The House of Commons Health Select Committee published its report on education, training and workforce planning on 23 May 2012. We have today laid before Parliament the “Government response to the House of Commons Health Select Committee First Report of Session 21012-13: Education, Training and Workforce Planning” (Cm 8435).

The Committee welcomed the overall direction of the Government’s reforms in this area, including the establishment of Health Education England and Local Education and Training Boards, though it called for more detail and clarity on particular aspects. The

Government’s response highlights a great deal of progress that has been made in establishing the new system of education and training since the publication of the Committee’s report.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Automatic Enrolment Thresholds (Annual Review)

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Steve Webb): I am pleased to announce that later today I will be publishing the Government’s consultation on the review and revision of earning thresholds for automatic enrolment 2013-14.

This is an annual exercise. The report sets out the context of this review, the evidence base and the proposed rates for 2013-14. We are seeking views both on the factors that should inform next year’s thresholds and the proposed rates. We would welcome responses in particular that tell us more about the tax relief method that schemes are currently using.

The consultation paper will be available later today on the Department’s website: <http://dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2012/> and I will also place a copy in the House Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 6 September 2012

HOME DEPARTMENT

Data Protection

Paul Uppal: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps her Department plans to put in place to protect personal data under the draft Communications Data Bill; and whether she proposes that the Government will be liable for any data stolen. [119331]

James Brokenshire: Communications data retained under the proposals in the draft Bill would be retained by the companies on whom a notice has been served by the Secretary of State. As is the case for data held by companies under existing legislation, retained data should be held in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and, therefore, companies would be responsible for protecting personal data from loss, theft or unauthorised disclosure. Any communications data acquired from communications service providers by public authorities is the responsibility of the public authority concerned and would also be subject to the requirements of the Data Protection Act. Compliance with the Data Protection Act is overseen by the Information Commissioner. In particular, the commissioner would keep under review the security of communications data held by companies under the Bill and its destruction at the end of the retention period.

Companies would also be required to ensure that data is held in a manner accredited to government information assurance standards, and is protected against accidental or unlawful destruction, accidental loss and unauthorised access or disclosure. These proposals would enable the Government to continue investing in the security of communications data, as they have previously.

Human Trafficking: Third Sector

Mr Bone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the role of the Big Society initiative in tackling human trafficking. [118539]

Mr Harper [*holding answer 5 September 2012*]: The Government have supported a number of initiatives to raise public awareness of human trafficking and encourage community involvement in combating the crime.

Non-governmental organisations are engaged through the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group (IDMG), which coordinates work on human trafficking across the UK. In future the Group will perform the National Rapporteur function in compliance with the EU directive on trafficking in human beings, analyse trends in human trafficking and produce an annual report on how the UK is complying with its national and international obligations.

There has been no formal assessment of the role of the Big Society initiative in tackling human trafficking.

Immigration

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether it is the practice of her Department to inform the Department of Work and Pensions when a migrant in possession of a national insurance number no longer has valid leave to remain in the UK. [119743]

Mr Harper: The national insurance number is an administrative reference number used by the Department for Work and Pensions and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs for benefits, tax and national insurance contribution purposes, and does not provide a migrant with automatic access to benefits or employment. The UK Border Agency does not collect data on national insurance numbers held by migrants, but does share data with the Department for Work and Pensions where necessary to establish a person's entitlement to benefits.

Immigration: Married People

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate she has made of the number of UK citizens who will marry abroad and re-enter the UK accompanied by non-EU spouses who have obtained the requisite marriage visa in (a) 2012, (b) 2013 and (c) 2014. [119741]

Mr Harper: When the Government changed the immigration rules concerning migration by families in June 2012, it published an impact assessment. This estimates the numbers coming through the route in future compared with now, as a consequence of the policy changes. In summary it estimates a reduction in family route visa grants by between 13,700-18,500 visa grants per annum. This includes British citizens returning to the UK with a family. As the rules apply equally to partners of British citizens (and persons settled here) regardless of whether they marry in the UK or abroad, the impact assessment does not make a separate estimate of those who marry abroad.

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many UK citizens who had married abroad re-entered the UK accompanied by non-EU spouses who had obtained the requisite marriage visa in (a) 2008, (b) 2009, (c) 2010 and (d) 2011. [119742]

Mr Harper: The UK Border Agency does not record the number of UK nationals crossing the border and whose non-EU spouses hold marriage visas.

Members: Correspondence

Mr Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she plans to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall North of 24 July 2012 on UK entry visas for the London 2012 Olympics. [119506]

Mr Harper: The Minister for Crime and Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire), replied to the hon. Member on 6 September 2012.

Metropolitan Police: Criminal Records

Mark Pritchard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many serving police officers in the Metropolitan Police have received a criminal record and continue to serve as police officers. [118847]

Damian Green: This information is not collected by the Home Office.

Police National Computer: Data Protection

Mark Pritchard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will introduce sanctions for police officers who gain unauthorised access to the police national computer. [118849]

Damian Green: Access to the police national computer (PNC) is subject to rigorous assurance procedures. Safeguards are in place to detect misuse of the PNC by police officers and staff. Forces conduct regular audits of officer and staff usage. Any officer found to be misusing the PNC will be subject to disciplinary procedures that may include dismissal and/or criminal proceedings.

Police: Criminal Records

Mark Pritchard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will take steps to prevent the recruitment of police officers with a criminal record. [118848]

Damian Green: The public is entitled to expect that the police service recruits only those with proven integrity. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has issued the National Vetting Policy for the Police Community to forces which advises how to progress applicants with convictions. Final decisions are a matter for the force concerned.

I will meet ACPO to see what more can be done to ensure that the integrity of those serving with the police is beyond question and whether the current arrangements around vetting could be strengthened.

Police: Disciplinary Proceedings

Mark Pritchard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps she is taking to prevent police officers from avoiding disciplinary hearings by retiring on pensioned medical grounds before those hearings have taken place. [118845]

Damian Green: Police officers may be required to retire on grounds of ill-health under the relevant police pension regulations if they are assessed by a medical practitioner as being permanently disabled for the ordinary duties of a police officer. This assessment should be entirely independent of any disciplinary matters.

The power to require officers to retire on grounds of ill-health is a matter for chief officers and their police authorities.

Police: Firearms

Mark Pritchard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many firearms were lost by police forces in England and Wales in the latest period for which figures are available. [118850]

Damian Green: Police forces have in place stringent controls, laid down in the Association of Chief Police Officers guidance, for the carriage and storage of firearms. The loss of police issue firearms is a rare occurrence.

Police forces in England and Wales are not required to submit this information for central collection by the Home Office.

Police: Retirement

Mark Pritchard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps she is taking to prevent police officers who leave the police service on medical grounds from being re-employed as civilians in (a) the same force or (b) another police force within the same year. [118846]

Damian Green: The employment of police officers and police staff is a matter for chief officers and their police authorities, applying appropriate selection and vetting procedures.

Police: Training

Oliver Colvile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training police officers receive on dealing with people with mental health issues. [119537]

Damian Green: On joining the Police all officers undertake a two year initial Police Learning and Development Programme. Within this programme police officers and police community support officers are provided with training in dealing with people who are vulnerable through disability, mental ill health or learning disabilities.

Prisoner Escapes

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate her Department has made of the total cost incurred by police forces in the apprehension of escapees and abscondee from prison in the last year for which figures are available; and whether the Prison Service compensates police forces for any such costs incurred. [119379]

Damian Green: [holding answer 5 September 2012]: The Home Office does not hold information on the costs incurred by forces during the arrest of an abscondee or escaper.

There is no formal compensation agreement between the police and the Prison Service for any such costs incurred.

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the largest number of people is about whom a communications data request under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, relating to a single incident, has been made (a) since the passage of the Act and (b) in the last year. [117239]

James Brokenshire [holding answer 13 July 2012]: The Home Office does not hold statistics on the number of people that communications data requests relate to.

The Interception of Communications Commissioner's Office provides independent oversight of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and collects statistics from public authorities.

UK Border Agency

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many employees there are in each local immigration team of the UK Border Agency. [119744]

Mr Harper: The UK Border Agency is currently completing a capability review of its Local Immigration Teams to provide a clearer picture of current capabilities, strengths and weaknesses; and to make recommendations, including staffing, for the future of the local teams that will be charged with delivery of the agency's enforcement objectives.

As of April 2012 local management information shows the following staffing by Local Immigration Team:

<i>Local Immigration Team</i>	<i>Full Time Equivalent</i>
North Central London	61.52
Barnet and Enfield, Hackney and Tower Hamlets	61.55
Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge	31.73
Bexley, Greenwich, Lambeth and Southwark	51.24
Newham and Waltham Forest	48.47
Croydon	75.57
Wandsworth, Merton and Sutton	61.35
Lewisham and Bromley	44.3
Brent, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea	34.89
Hounslow, Richmond and Kingston	25.31
Harrow and Hillingdon	29.55
Ealing	39.22
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	33.9
Berks/Surrey	61.05
Sussex	29.4
Kent	69.28
Staffordshire	9.74
Cambridge and East Northants	17.81
E Midlands and Boston	47.14
Suffolk	13
Norfolk	14
Essex and Herts	20.86
Bedfordshire and West Northants	20.78
West Midlands	70.5
West Mercia	18.31
West Yorkshire	64.93
South Yorkshire	57.69
Humberside	46.05
Northumbria	60.3
Teeside	23.41
Merseyside	79.18
Manchester	87.64
Edinburgh	8.73
Aberdeen	6
Northern Ireland	18
Cardiff	14.8
North Wales	12
South Wales	11.81
Bristol	35.28
Dorset	9.97

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for travel documents submitted to the UK Border Agency since May 2010 are still under consideration by the Agency. [119745]

Mr Harper: The data requested are not held in a format compatible with National Statistics protocols.

However, the Home Office publishes immigration statistics on a quarterly and annual basis, a copy of which can be found in the Library of the House. The latest published statistics can also be found at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/immigration-asylum-research/immigration-q2-2012/>

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Floods

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions he has had with (a) the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and (b) the Chancellor of the Exchequer on additional resources to the Fire and Rescue Services in (i) Barnsley Central constituency, (ii) South Yorkshire and (iii) England and Wales at times of severe flooding. [119493]

Richard Benyon: The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has not had any discussions with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and the Chancellor of the Exchequer on additional resources to the Fire and Rescue Services in Barnsley Central, South Yorkshire and England and Wales in times of severe flooding.

The roles of the police and other emergency services, including those available through local authorities, during emergencies of all kinds are set out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The Act provides for category 1 responders, including the Environment Agency, the police and local authorities to maintain plans to deal with emergencies, which amongst other things, threaten life or property. These requirements also include ensuring that the services can continue to perform their functions in an emergency. The Act does not specify the individual functions of each responder, nor which service should take the overall lead in any particular circumstances. Nevertheless, local councils and other responders may decide for the purpose of maintaining contingency plans in accordance with the Act to define the roles of the various responders by agreement.

DEFRA will continue to maintain the current capacity to plan for, and manage emergencies, and operate flood defences.

Organic Food

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what fee is payable for a licence to sell organic meat; and if he will make a statement. [119757]

Mr Heath: DEFRA delegates the certification of organic operators to nine approved UK organic Control Bodies who set their own charges for certification.

A full list of the DEFRA-approved organic Control Bodies, can be found on our website at:

<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/growing/organic/standards/certbodies/approved.htm>

PRIME MINISTER

International Assistance

Ian Paisley: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to establish the high-level panel on developing post-Millennium Development Goals. [118948]

The Prime Minister: The UN Secretary-General announced the members of the high-level panel on 31 July. The panel will hold its first meeting at the end of September.

Members: Correspondence

Mr Baron: To ask the Prime Minister when he plans to respond to (a) the letter of 27 June 2012 from the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay signed by a further 100 hon. Members on a referendum on the EU and (b) the subsequent email of 30 August 2012 from the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay. [119750]

The Prime Minister: I met my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) on 9 July in order to discuss his letter and the issues it raised. A formal reply to the letter will be sent shortly.

TRANSPORT

Airports

Christopher Pincher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the level of runway capacity in (a) England and (b) the UK required to maintain connectivity with emerging markets; and whether the Government has any plans to extend capacity in the next (i) five, (ii) 10 or (iii) 15 years at any UK airport. [118864]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department for Transport's latest estimates of airport capacity and air passenger demand forecasts were published in August last year in 'UK Aviation Forecasts 2011'.

The central forecasts indicate that, with no new runways, the three largest London airports will be at capacity by 2030. However, the forecasts do not provide an assessment of the level of runway capacity required to maintain connectivity with emerging markets.

'UK Aviation Forecasts 2011' is available on the Department's website at the following address:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/publications/uk-aviation-forecasts-2011>

Airports: G4S

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which UK airports currently hold contracts with G4S for security services. [119691]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department for Transport does not hold this information; the provision of security services is a commercial matter for airport operators.

However all airports must operate in accordance with the National Aviation Security programme.

Correspondence

Mr Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions the Chief Executive, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency has signed replies to hon. Members writing on behalf of constituents in the last 12 months. [119507]

Stephen Hammond: In the period April 2011 to March 2012 the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency received 1,597 direct items of correspondence from hon. Members writing on behalf of constituents. It is normal practice for the chief executive to ask a senior manager who has responsibility for the area of work to investigate the case and reply on his behalf.

Equality Act 2010

Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to implement section 165 of the Equality Act 2010; and if he will make a statement. [119787]

Norman Baker: I am sympathetic to the case for commencing section 165 of the Equality Act 2010, but our overall assessment has not yet been completed. I intend to make an announcement in the near future.

Farmers: Driving

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people his Department employs to carry out checks on papers and other records relating to driving hours kept by farmers and their employees; and what the cost of this employment was in the latest period for which figures are available. [119673]

Stephen Hammond: The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency currently employs 220 full-time equivalent traffic examiners (TEs) working on traffic enforcement. A TE's role is to check drivers' hours, both at the roadside and at operators' premises, for all types of vehicles. It is not possible to extract the cost incurred for checking drivers' hours specifically for drivers of agricultural vehicles without incurring a disproportionate cost.

Large Goods Vehicle Drivers: Working Hours

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to introduce an exemption from maximum driving hours for drivers of vehicles carrying live animals in circumstances similar to the existing exemption for drivers of vehicles carrying dead animals; and if he will make a statement. [119660]

Stephen Hammond: The current exemption from drivers' hours rules for the transportation of live animals is set at EU level and includes a maximum radius of 50 km.

However, there are currently proposals at EU level, which the Government is supporting, to increase this limit to 100 km.

Motorcycles: Accidents

Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what estimate he has made of the number of people using quad bikes who have been (a) killed and (b) injured (i) on the highway and (ii) off-road in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement; [119790]

(2) if he will make it his policy that quad bikes should not be permitted to use the highway without the vehicle being licensed and the driver (a) holding a driving licence and (b) third party insurance; and if he will make a statement. [119811]

Stephen Hammond: It is already the case that quad bikes must fully meet type approval, registration and vehicle excise statutory requirements before being used on the highway. The rider must also hold the relevant category of driving licence which will depend on the size and weight of the bike and must have at least third party insurance for use on the roads.

The information requested on quad bike accidents cannot be identified separately. Quad bikes involved in reported personal injury accidents are recorded as part of the 'other motor vehicle' category along with vehicles such as ambulances, fire engines, road maintenance vehicles and motorised wheel chairs.

Furthermore, information for accidents on private roads or car parks or off-road is not held by the Department.

Official Cars

Mr Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many and what makes of car there are in the Government car service fleet. [119702]

Stephen Hammond: There are 92 vehicles in the Government car service fleet of the following makes:

	<i>Number</i>
Jaguar XJ	20
Land Rover Discovery	4
Toyota Avensis	10
Toyota Prius	41
Honda Civic	2
Ford Galaxy	6
Ford Mondeo	1
Vauxhall Vectra	1
Hyundai Santa Fe	4
Mitsubishi iMiEV	2
Ford Transit	1

Railways: Wales

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the timetable is for the completion of electrification of (a) the Great Western Main Line to (i) Cardiff and (ii) Swansea and (b) each of the branches of the Valleys Lines. [119968]

Mr Simon Burns: The current plan for the completion of electrification of the Great Western Main Line to Cardiff is by the December 2017 timetable change date and it is expected that Swansea will be electrified for the May 2018 timetable change. The newly announced Valley Lines electrification project has not yet been sufficiently developed by Network Rail for a firm date to be available yet but it is expected to follow the GW Main Line with energisation in the calendar years 2018 and 2019.

Rapid Transit Systems

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the locations of each monorail in the UK; when each monorail opened; and if he will make a statement; [119793]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with local authorities on the provision of monorails; and if he will make a statement; [119794]

(3) what plans he has to develop monorail transport in the UK; and if he will make a statement; [119795]

(4) how much funding his Department made available for the development of monorails in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [119796]

Norman Baker: There are a number of monorail type systems in various locations in England, including Gatwick Airport and numerous theme parks. The Department for Transport does not, however, hold a central record of these systems and any information could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

The Department for Transport has not held any discussions with local transport authorities in regards to implementing monorail systems. Whether or not an innovative system, such as a monorail, has a potential to be implemented is first and foremost a local decision based on what the identified transport needs are in any particular area. If a need is identified then it would be for local authorities to develop a sound proposal on the basis of meeting the identified transport need and to demonstrate that such a system would offer value for money for the taxpayer.

The Government do not provide direct funding to local authorities for developing monorail systems. It would be for the relevant authority to undertake any feasibility studies at their own cost.

River Thames: Transport

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to work with the Mayor of London on use of the River Thames for (a) passenger and (b) freight traffic; what discussions he has had with the Mayor of London on that subject since May 2010; and if he will make a statement; [119774]

(2) what plans he has to promote greater use of the River Thames for (a) passenger and (b) freight traffic; what estimate he has made of the amount of (i) passenger and (ii) freight traffic on the River Thames in each year since May 2010; and if he will make a statement. [119775]

Stephen Hammond: Under the devolution arrangements introduced in the Greater London Authority Act 1999, the Mayor and Transport for London (TfL) are responsible for transport in the capital. Therefore, it would be for TfL and ultimately the Mayor to consider any matters relating to river services in London.

Since May 2010 the former Secretary of State had no discussions with the Mayor of London on the use of the River Thames for passenger and freight traffic. The former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mike Penning), discussed Thames water freight at a meeting with Peter Hendy, London Transport Commissioner, on 10 July 2012.

Data on freight and passenger movements on the Thames have not yet been published for 2011.

In 2010 there were 6,293,618 passengers on the Thames. This figure includes the following routes:

Embankment—Tower—Greenwich—QE2
Westminster—Greenwich—Thames Barrier
Westminster—Hampton Court
Westminster—Tower—Greenwich
Westminster—St Katharine's
Thames Clippers (Monday to Friday peak)
Tate to Tate
Woolwich Free Ferry.

In 2010 15.68 million tonnes of freight were lifted on the River Thames which accounted for 0.55 billion-tonne kilometres (making it the busiest inland waterway in the UK in terms of freight).

Roads: Accidents

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicle collisions were

reported in the most recent five years for which figures are available; how many such collisions resulted in (a) death and (b) injury; and how many persons considered responsible for such collisions there were in each age group in each such year. [119727]

Stephen Hammond: Information collected by the Department on road accidents in Great Britain is limited to accidents reported to the police and where at least one person sustained an injury. Therefore, there is no information on the total number of vehicle collisions.

The information requested on reported road collisions, in Great Britain, for the last five years for which data is available is provided in the following table:

	<i>Collisions involving at least one fatality</i>	<i>Number Only injured¹ casualties</i>
2007	2,714	179,401
2008	2,341	168,250
2009	2,057	161,497
2010	1,731	152,683
2011	1,797	149,677

¹ Injured includes all casualties who sustained either a serious or slight injury in a road accident.

Information on persons considered responsible for these reported collisions is not held by the Department. However, information is available on the number of reported personal injury road accidents involving a motor vehicle driver by age of the driver. This information is presented for each of the last five years for which data is available, in the following table:

	<i>Number Age of driver</i>							
	<i>17 to 24</i>	<i>25 to 29</i>	<i>30 to 34</i>	<i>35 to 39</i>	<i>40 to 49</i>	<i>50 to 59</i>	<i>60 to 69</i>	<i>70+</i>
2007	61,795	33,347	31,394	32,764	56,663	34,816	18,192	11,332
2008	56,795	30,976	27,667	29,164	53,399	31,802	17,218	11,067
2009	53,656	29,648	26,659	26,636	51,183	31,525	17,275	11,189
2010	46,706	26,926	25,318	24,612	48,978	31,192	16,762	11,056
2011	44,154	25,957	24,762	23,062	47,682	30,888	17,137	11,568

Roads: Safety

Jim Sheridan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to reduce the number of road casualties. [119628]

Stephen Hammond: Since the publication of the Strategic Framework for Road Safety in May 2011, the Department has taken a number of the steps to reduce the number of road casualties, as envisaged in the framework. They include steps on all three of the thematic chapters of the framework.

Firstly on 'improving road safety together', the road safety comparison site, road safety observatory, speed limit assessment tool and a revised speed limit circular are all well advanced and on track for completion during the next few months.

Secondly on 'education' we have already made changes to the driving tests and changes to the educational scheme for drink drive offenders are progressing towards implementation.

Thirdly on 'targeted enforcement and sanctions', we have consulted about the introduction of fixed penalty notices for careless driving and increased penalty fines. The bill containing enabling legislation to create a new specific drug driving offence is being considered in the House of Lords.

Rolling Stock

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he expects work to add pantograph/transformer cars to Class 220 Voyager diesel-electric multiple units to be completed; and how many full-time equivalent jobs such work will generate; [118410]

(2) what representations he has made to Bombardier and Alstom on the addition of pantograph/transformer cars to Class 220 Voyager diesel-electric multiple units; [118411]

(3) what the cost to the public purse will be of adding pantograph/transformer cars to Class 220 Voyager diesel-electric multiple units. [118412]

Mr Simon Burns: An announcement about the E Voyager project will be made in due course.

Severn River Crossing

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had regarding future ownership of the Severn Bridges. [119967]

Stephen Hammond: Officials are in regular contact with the Welsh Government over a variety of transport matters, including the future of the Severn Crossing. However no decisions have been made about the future of the crossing after the existing concession ends.

Taxis: Wheelchairs

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to bring into force the provision of section 165 of the Equality Act 2010 that requires taxi and mini cab drivers to accept and assist wheelchair users at no extra charge. [119732]

Norman Baker: I am sympathetic to the case for commencing section 165 of the Equality Act 2010, but our overall assessment has not yet been completed. I intend to make an announcement in the near future.

Travel: Costs

Dr Offord: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent estimate his Department has made of the comparative cost to the passenger of domestic (a) air and (b) rail travel; and if he will make a statement. [119692]

Mr Simon Burns: No recent estimates have been made of the comparative cost to the passenger of domestic air and rail travel.

West Coast Railway Line

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the timetable is for the introduction of new services to Shrewsbury, Blackpool and Bolton under the new West Coast Mainline franchise. [119797]

Mr Simon Burns: As a result of a legal challenge, which the Government intend to defend robustly, we have not yet signed the contract with First, and therefore the competition remains live. We expect to sign the contract soon.

First West Coast Ltd is required by the franchise agreement to actively consider and use all reasonable endeavours to implement the following new services:

between London Euston station and Blackpool North station from the 8 December 2013;

between London Euston station and Shrewsbury station from the 11 December 2016; and

between Preston station and Manchester Piccadilly station calling at Bolton from the 11 December 2016.

These new services are subject to the necessary track access rights being granted by the Office of Rail Regulation.

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with FirstGroup on redundancies on the West Coast Mainline when it takes over the franchise. [119798]

Mr Simon Burns: As a result of a legal challenge, which the Government intend to defend robustly, we have not yet signed the contract with First, and therefore the competition remains live. We expect to sign the contract soon.

There have been no discussions with FirstGroup relating to redundancies on the West Coast Mainline.

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with First Group on priorities for investment on the West Coast Mainline; and whether such investment is conditional on growth in customer numbers. [119799]

Mr Simon Burns: As a result of a legal challenge, which the Government intends to defend robustly, we have not yet signed the contract with First, and therefore the competition remains live. We expect to sign the contract soon.

My officials held discussions with all four bidders for the franchise regarding their priorities for investment on the West Coast Mainline. The Franchise Agreement with First West Coast Limited includes a number of Committed Obligations relating to investment and the introduction of new train services.

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to announce his decision on Alliance Rail's open access bid on the West Coast Mainline. [119778]

Mr Simon Burns: Applications to run open access services on the national rail network are judged by the Office of Rail Regulation, not by the Department for Transport.

DEFENCE

HMS Argyll

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects HMS Argyll to be retired from service. [119592]

Mr Robathan: On present planning assumptions, HMS Argyll, the oldest Type 23 in the fleet, will be withdrawn from service in 2023 having entered service in 1992.

Procurement

Anas Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many procurement contracts have been placed by his Department with Scottish companies and companies based in Scotland in each of the last five years; and what the (a) nature and (b) value was of each such contract. [119174]

Mr Robathan [*holding answer 5 September 2012*]: The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Type 26 Frigates

Oliver Colville: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the timetable is for the building and base porting of the proposed Type 26 frigates. [118571]

Mr Robathan: The Type 26 Global Combat Ship (GCS) programme is in its assessment phase. The timetable for the build programme of the ships and where they will be based will be determined at the main investment decision, which is currently scheduled for the middle of the decade.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Apprentices

Robert Halfon: To ask the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, representing the House of Commons Commission how many apprentices were employed by (a) the House of Commons and (b) its principal contractors in each of the last five years. [118610]

John Thurso: The Parliamentary Estates Directorate (PED) has directly employed three apprentices in the last five years (one individual from 2005-08, and two other individuals from 2006-10). The last group of apprentices completed their training in 2010 and have been appointed to permanent posts. An apprentice scheme is being developed by PED, with the intention that it recruits and trains people itself in order to backfill craftsmen as they leave.

The Catering and Retail Services has offered a two-year apprentice chef scheme. A recruitment campaign was held in September 2011, but there were no successful applicants.

The House of Commons does not hold information about the number of apprentices working for contractors, but PED is aware of three apprentices employed by a large contractor (Inviron) currently working on site on the Parliamentary Estate.

The House plans to make further apprenticeships available in the coming months. The Director General, Facilities, would be happy to discuss this further with the hon. Member.

JUSTICE

Cats: Animal Welfare

Mark Menzies: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what guidance is given to magistrates on sentencing for offences of deliberate poisoning of cats and other pets under section 7 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006. [118983]

Jeremy Wright: The magistrates courts' sentencing guidelines provides guidance on certain animal cruelty offences, namely those contained in sections 4, 8 and 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Sentencing guidelines do not necessarily cover all offences but focus on the more commonly committed offences. However, in dealing with all offences the courts will apply the same principles of determining seriousness by considering the culpability of the offender and the harm caused, or intended to be caused. The animal cruelty guideline and the overarching

sentencing guideline on seriousness will also assist courts in determining the relevant aggravating and mitigating factors which should be taken into account in an individual case involving other types of animal cruelty where the offence is not covered by a specific guideline.

Courts: Translation Services

Mike Freer: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many court hearings have been adjourned due to an appropriate interpreter not being supplied by Applied Language Solutions in the latest period for which figures are available. [119332]

Mrs Grant: The Department does not centrally hold information on the number of all adjournments due to an interpreter not being provided. Information is available on the number of ineffective trials in Court Statistics Quarterly.

These show that in January to March 2012 out of the 43,110 trials in the magistrates courts, 182 (3%) were ineffective due to interpreter availability. Of the 10,555 trials in the Crown Court, 10 (0.7%) were ineffective for the same reason.

The Department also published statistics about the operation of the Framework Agreement with Applied Language Solutions (ALS) in May. These show that of the 26,059 initial requests for language services 11% were either cancelled by the Courts and Tribunal Service, or the person for whom the translation service has been requested failed to attend. Of the remaining 23,234 request ALS were able to fulfil 18,719 or 81% of the assignments. However, presenting a single quarterly figure hides a very marked trend over the three months of increasing success rates for requests for translators.

During the first month (30 January to 29 February 2012) of the contract ALS were able to fulfil 65% of requests for translations services, this increased to 82% in March 2012, and increased to 90% in April 2012.

All these statistics are published on the Department's website.

Disability Appeal Tribunal

Jim Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many clinically trained medical members there are of disability appeals tribunals in England; [119122]

(2) how many medical members of disability appeals tribunals resigned in each of the last two years. [119123]

Mrs Grant: Medical practitioners sit as medically qualified panel members on a range of appeals in the First-tier Tribunal—Social Security and Child Support (SSCS), including Disability Living Allowance, Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit, Vaccine, Damage, Compensation Recovery and some Employment and Support Allowance appeals where the Work Capability Assessment is a factor. They may be either registered or licensed to practise.

Medically qualified panel members may be deployed across regional judicial boundaries and sit at venues across Great Britain. According to locally held management information there were 884 medically qualified panel members appointed to sit in the SSCS Tribunal as at

3 September 2012. Of these, seven are salaried and 877 are appointed to sit as required by the Tribunal on a fee-paid basis (of these 89 have recently been appointed and will be deployed following induction training).

18 medically qualified panel members resigned between July 2010 and June 2011. 21 medically qualified panel members resigned between July 2011 and June 2012.

Employment Tribunals Service

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) what estimate he has made of the administration costs resulting from the new employment tribunal fee liability structure; [118795]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of people who would have been (a) liable for and (b) exempted from paying the proposed new employment tribunal fees in each of the last two years had the fee structure been in place at the time. [118796]

Mrs Grant: The administration costs, expressed in 2012-13 prices, are estimated to be £3 million one-off implementation costs and £1 million to £2 million recurring administrative costs per annum thereafter with fee income estimated at £7 million to £9 million per annum (gross of the recurring administrative costs). These estimates were included in the Impact Assessment that was published alongside the Government's response to the public consultation 'Charging Fees in the Employment Tribunal and Employment Appeal Tribunal' published in July 2012.

In answer to my hon. Friend's second question, no estimates have been made for this period. However, in the Impact Assessment that was published alongside the Government's response to the consultation 'Charging Fees in the Employment Tribunal and Employment Appeal Tribunal' published in July 2012, it was estimated that approximately 35% of the employment tribunal claimant population could be expected to qualify for a full fee remission when fees are due to be introduced from 2013. It was also noted that a further proportion of the claimant population could also qualify for a partial fee remission through the disposable income means test, the amount of which would be variable depending on disposal income and the level of the fee being charged.

Employment Tribunals Service: Compensation

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to improve the enforcement of tribunal compensatory awards. [119403]

Mrs Grant: Following the "Solving Disputes in the County Court" consultation, on 9 February 2012, the Government set out a range of enforcement reforms aimed at improving the effectiveness of current enforcement processes in the civil courts in England and Wales, including the enforcement of tribunal compensatory awards. These measures include:

- allowing charging orders in applications where instalment orders are in place;

- introducing a minimum threshold of £1,000 in applications for orders for sale, limited to Consumer Credit Act debts;

- streamlining the charging order and third party debt order application processes to make them more efficient.

Matrimonial Causes Act 1973

Richard Fuller: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether his Department has any plans to reform the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 to provide for no fault divorce. [118678]

Mrs Grant: The Government does not intend to amend the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 to change the grounds for divorce or the facts required to prove that the marriage has broken down irretrievably.

The Government intends to reduce the burden on the courts by providing for uncontested divorces to be dealt with administratively. Draft legislation on family justice, including provisions on divorce, was published on 3 September 2012.

Prisoners: Adoption

Mr Timpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what proportion of the UK prison population is adopted. [118727]

Jeremy Wright: Information on the proportion of prisoners in all prison establishments in England and Wales who are adopted is not centrally available.

The only available information comes from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) survey, a longitudinal cohort study of around 1,400 adult prisoners sentenced to between one month and four years in England and Wales in 2005 and 2006. Only 10 of the respondents reported living with adoptive parents when asked who they lived with as a child (up to the age of 17).

Social Security Benefits: Appeals

Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) what the average length of time was for the Tribunals Service to administer a First-tier Tribunal social security and child support appeal in respect of employment and support allowance in each hearing venue in the west midlands in (a) 2010-11 and (b) the latest period for which figures are available; [119500]

(2) what proportion of appeals to the Tribunals Service concerning (a) disability living allowance, (b) employment and support allowance, (c) income support, (d) jobseeker's allowance and (e) tax credits were successful in each hearing venue in the west midlands in (i) 2010-11 and (ii) the latest period for which figures are available; [119807]

Mrs Grant: Appeals against decisions made by the Department for Work and Pensions on an individual's entitlement to social security and child support are heard by the First-tier Tribunal—Social Security and Child Support, administered by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS).

The following table shows the average time taken from receipt of an employment and support allowance (ESA) appeal to disposal by the tribunal in 2010-11 and 2011-12 (the latest period for which figures are available) at the hearing venues in the west midlands.

ESA appeal times from receipt to disposal

Hearing venue	Weeks	
	2010-11	2011-12
Birmingham	21.6	32.7
Coventry	21.1	38.4
Hereford	17.7	22.9
Kidderminster	21.7	32.5
Stoke	26.8	29.7
Walsall	¹ n/a	35.7
Wolverhampton	24.5	36.5
Worcester	16.2	23.8

¹ Walsall has been used as a hearing venue since January 2012.

Source:

The data are taken from management information.

HMCTS has continued to respond strongly to the significant increase in appeal cases received by the SSCS tribunal. Two additional hearing rooms in Leamington Spa and Nuneaton will be used from November 2012 to hear certain appeals which would currently be heard at the Coventry venue. This will reduce the number of appeals listed at Coventry and, therefore, help bring down the average waiting time for an appeal hearing. Other work to increase the tribunal's capacity in the west midlands includes the identification of additional venues in Birmingham (two additional hearing rooms from November 2012), Hereford and Worcester (increased use of existing rooms from December 2012), Wolverhampton (two additional hearing rooms from January 2013), Solihull (two additional hearing rooms from September 2012), Kidderminster (increasing use of venue to five days per week from Autumn 2012), Walsall (additional two hearing rooms in use from January and June 2012). It also includes recruitment of additional fee-paid judges and medical members and increased administrative resource, and administrative work to reallocate hearing to alternative nearby venues to ensure appeals are dealt with as quickly as possible.

HMCTS is also working hard at a national level to increase the capacity of the SSCS tribunal and reduce waiting times. It has implemented a range of measures which include recruiting more judges and medical panel members; increasing administrative resources and streamlining processes; securing additional hearing venues across the country; increasing the number of cases listed in each tribunal session; running double shifts in its largest processing centre; running Saturday sittings in some of the busiest venues; and establishing a customer contact centre to deal with telephone inquiries.

All of this is having a positive effect. The total number of disposals has increased significantly from 279,000 in 2009-10 to 380,000 in 2010-11, and 433,600 appeals in 2011-12, with the capacity for half a million disposals in 2012-13. Perhaps, most notably, the tribunal disposed of more appeals than it received in every month between January 2011 and February 2012 (14 consecutive months) and the outstanding caseload within the tribunals fell by 25% in 2011-12 to reach 145,000 on 31 March 2012. The average waiting time has stabilised nationally, and is beginning to fall across many venues.

The following tables show the proportion of appeals regarding (a) disability living allowance, (b) employment and support allowance, (c) income support, (d) jobseeker's allowance and (e) tax credits which were decided in favour of the appellant in each hearing venue in the west midlands in (i) 2010/11 and (ii) 2011/12 (the latest period for which figures are available).

Percentage of appeals decided in favour of the appellant in 2010-11

Hearing venue	Employment and support allowance					Tax credits
	Disability living allowance	Employment and support allowance	Income support	Jobseeker's allowance		
Birmingham	24	23	32	18	18	
Coventry	38	33	26	20	¹ 0	
Hereford	31	32	19	19	20	
Kidderminster	23	31	21	20	¹ 0	
Stoke	29	35	33	18	¹ 0	
Walsall	² n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Wolverhampton	29	30	34	18	19	
Worcester	37	29	30	16	9	

¹ Fewer than 10 appeals of this benefit type were heard at these hearing venues in the time period.

² Walsall has been used as a hearing venue since January 2012.

Source:

The data are taken from management information.

Percentage of appeals decided in favour of the appellant in 2011-12

Hearing venue	Employment and support allowance					Tax credits
	Disability living allowance	Employment and support allowance	Income support	Jobseeker's allowance		
Birmingham	25	32	29	14	7	
Coventry	43	35	51	20	17	
Hereford	29	34	26	12	33	
Kidderminster	24	28	23	15	14	
Stoke	31	34	23	15	13	
Walsall	28	33	21	3	¹ 0	
Wolverhampton	32	35	36	16	20	
Worcester	33	43	35	21	¹ 0	

¹ Fewer than 10 appeals of this benefit type were heard at these hearing venues in the time period.

Source:

The data are taken from management information.

TREASURY

Air Passenger Duty

Mark Menzies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make an assessment of the effect of the level of the air passenger duty on business competitiveness. [118263]

Sajid Javid: The Government froze air passenger duty in 2011-12 and Budget 2012 announced 2013-14 rates will rise in line with inflation.

Sound public finances help ensure a stable economic environment for businesses to grow and compete. Air passenger duty makes a vital contribution to the public finances.

Children: Maintenance

Nigel Adams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to address the issue of absent parents not paying maintenance for their children using tax loopholes that may exist in IR35. [118921]

Mr Gauke: The rules surrounding child maintenance mean that the Child Support Agency is able to take into account the total amount of an absent parent's income from employment or self-employment. However, because dividend income legally derives from a shareholding and not from earnings, such payments are not included as a matter of routine.

Child maintenance has a variations scheme which enables more exceptional circumstances to be included when setting maintenance. These include the ability to take account of income, including dividend income, not taken into account under standard calculation rules.

There is no loophole in IR35 that allows absent parents not to pay child maintenance.

Corporation Tax

Joseph Johnson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect changes to corporation tax have had on UK businesses. [119426]

Mr Gauke: The Government aims to create the most competitive tax regime in the G20. The main rate of corporate tax has been reduced from 28% in 2010 to 24% in April this year, and will then fall to 23% in April 2013 and 22% in April 2014.

The OBR estimate that the additional 1% tax cut announced at Budget 2012 will

“increase the level of business investment by 1 per cent over the forecast period”

(EFO, p.46). This is equivalent to an increase in the total amount of business investment of £3.4 billion over the next five years.

Reforms to the corporate tax regime have made the UK more competitive, stemming the flow of businesses leaving and encouraging companies to come back, or to move here for the first time.

Guy Opperman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of changes in corporation tax on businesses. [119477]

Mr Gauke: The Government aims to create the most competitive tax regime in the G20. The main rate of corporate tax has been reduced from 28% in 2010 to 24% in April this year, and will then fall to 23% in April 2013 and 22% in April 2014.

The OBR estimate that the additional 1 % tax cut announced at Budget 2012 will “increase the level of business investment by 1 per cent over the forecast period”. (EFO, p.46) This is equivalent to an increase in the total amount of business investment of £3.4 billion over the next five years.

Reforms to the corporate tax regime have made the UK more competitive, stemming the flow of businesses leaving and encouraging companies to come back, or to move here for the first time.

Equitable Life Assurance Society: Compensation

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the compensation for individual Equitable Life policyholders under the Equitable Life Payment Scheme was calculated; and if he will publish details of each method used. [119738]

Sajid Javid: The scheme published the detailed calculation methodology for each policy class in May 2011 and this information can be found on the scheme’s website:

<http://equitablelifepaymentscheme.independent.gov.uk/resources/index.htm>

Infrastructure

Ian Paisley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) with reference to his Department’s infrastructure programme announced on 18 July 2012, whether funds for infrastructure developments have been allocated to Northern Ireland; [118931]

(2) with reference to his Department’s infrastructure programme announced on 18 July 2012, what private sector companies are expected to benefit from new guarantees provided for major infrastructure projects; [118932]

(3) with reference to his Department’s infrastructure programme announced on 18 July 2012, which major infrastructure projects are being developed; [118933]

(4) with reference to his Department’s infrastructure programme announced on 18 July 2012, what assessment he has made of the potential effects of the programme on youth unemployment. [118934]

Danny Alexander: The UK Infrastructure Guarantee scheme is designed to ensure that major UK infrastructure projects that are struggling to access private finance because of adverse credit conditions can go ahead. An estimated £40 billion of projects in the public and private sectors in the UK and Northern Ireland could qualify for the provision of guarantees, subject to meeting the published minimum eligibility criteria and a robust approvals process. These projects could come from a range of sectors including transport, utilities, energy and communications.

LIBOR

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the policy of his Department on the role of banks in setting LIBOR was in (a) January 2007, (b) November 2008 and (c) May 2010; and what consideration he has given to arrangements for more effective supervision of the LIBOR (i) in general and (ii) in a banking crisis. [118130]

Greg Clark: HM Treasury is responsible for the implementation of the policies of the Government of the day in respect of financial services regulation and its other policy responsibilities. It has no specific departmental policies in respect of these matters.

Consideration of the structure and governance of LIBOR, and the corresponding criminal sanctions regime are the subject of an independent review being conducted by Martin Wheatley, chief executive-designate of the Financial Conduct Authority. This review will report shortly; any necessary legislative changes resulting from the Wheatley Review will be considered for inclusion in the Financial Services Bill currently before Parliament or the proposed Banking Reform Bill.

As part of his review, on 10 August Martin Wheatley launched a discussion paper setting out initial proposals for reforming the current framework for setting and governing LIBOR, which can be found at the following link:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/press_73_12.htm

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what discussions his Department had with (a) Barclays, (b) RBS and (c) other major UK banks on the subject of reducing the LIBOR between

1 January 2007 and 31 December 2010; and if he will publish any associated correspondence or briefings held by his Department; [118182]

(2) whether officials, special advisers or Ministers in his Department discussed LIBOR setting with any senior representatives of Barclays in the week after the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England discussed LIBOR with Barclays on 28 October 2008; and if he will publish any associated minutes, correspondence or briefings; [118131]

(3) whether officials, special advisers or Ministers in his Department discussed the level of the LIBOR set by UK banks at a meeting with representatives of banks on 6 November 2008; and if he will publish any associated minutes, correspondence or briefings; [118132]

(4) whether officials, special advisers or Ministers in his Department raised any questions (a) in meetings and (b) by correspondence in respect of the reduction in the LIBOR following his Department's meeting with representatives of banks on 6 November 2008; [118133]

(5) what briefings his Department provided to Ministers between 1 January 2007 and 31 December 2010 on the concerns raised by regulators on (a) the credibility of LIBOR setting and (b) the associated investigation in the United States; and if he will publish any associated correspondence or briefings held by his Department; [118183]

(6) whether officials in his Department recommended that Ministers make a statement to the House on any occasion between 2007 and 2009 on concerns about the credibility of LIBOR in the context of a liquidity crisis and confidence and trust in LIBOR; and if he will publish any associated correspondence or briefings held by his Department. [118185]

Greg Clark: Treasury Ministers and officials have meetings and discussions with a wide variety of organisations as part of the process of policy development and delivery. As was the case with previous Administrations, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings and discussions. Furthermore, the Government will not say or do anything that might pre-judge or pre-empt the outcome of investigations into the attempted manipulation of LIBOR and other benchmarks.

In accordance with established practice, the current Government do not have access to departmental papers relating to the period of a previous Administration.

Regulation

Richard Fuller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether his Department has made an estimate of the (a) cost and (b) time required for a business to comply with each piece of regulation for which it is responsible. [118680]

Sajid Javid: The Treasury estimates the cost to business of its regulations through Impact Assessments. In general, time required for businesses to comply is accounted for in these costs. The Treasury's Impact Assessments from 2008 onwards can be found in the Impact Assessment library. This is available online at:

<http://www.ialibrary.bis.gov.uk/>

Scotland

Margaret Curran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date he last had a bilateral meeting with the Secretary of State for Scotland; and what matters were discussed. [119617]

Danny Alexander: The Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Scotland, my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (Michael Moore), meet regularly to discuss a range of topics.

Tax Evasion

Guy Opperman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to tackle tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance. [119476]

Mr Gauke: The Government has been robust in its response to tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance schemes, taking action to prevent, detect and tackle such behaviour. We have underlined our commitment to tackling non-compliance in those areas by investing over £900 million in HM Revenue and Customs over the spending review period. That will allow HM Revenue and Customs to better tackle evasion, criminal attacks, unpaid tax debt and avoidance and is on course to bring in around £7 billion in additional tax each year by 2014-15. HM Revenue and Customs' reinvestment in tackling criminals has resulted in 413 convictions, with over £1 billion in revenue and revenue loss prevented as a result of its investigations. We are also soon to introduce the UK's first ever General Anti-Abuse Rule, to tackle artificial and abusive avoidance schemes, and are consulting on ways to strengthen our avoidance disclosure regime and associated publicity, including improving the information available to taxpayers on avoidance.

Taxation: Business

Ben Gummer: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of HM Revenue and Customs company tax inspections were (a) held at random, (b) following up suspected irregularities in company tax returns and (c) triggered by reports to HM Revenue and Customs' hotline and DirectGov service of suspected tax avoidance in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [118868]

Mr Gauke: 2011-12 is the last full year for which information is available.

In this period:

(a) the total number of random corporation tax interventions carried out by HMRC was 277

(b) the total number of corporation tax interventions carried out by HMRC was 15,838 (including the 277 random interventions)

(c) It is not possible to identify inspections triggered by reports to HMRC's hotlines DirectGov service.

Taxation: Golf

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason private members' golf clubs are exempt from (a) charging VAT on membership and (b) corporation tax; for what reason golf clubs run as businesses are subject to such taxes; and if he will make a statement. [119659]

Mr Gauke: European law requires member states to apply a mandatory VAT exemption to supplies of sporting services by non-profit making organisations. Subscription fees charged by non-profit-making golf clubs are therefore exempt from VAT. There is no similar VAT exemption for sporting services supplied by profit-making organisations.

Golf clubs that are unincorporated associations or companies are within the scope of corporation tax and are not exempt. Where these clubs are established by their members for their own social or recreational objects they are not liable to corporation tax on any surpluses which arise from transactions with their full members. This is because the surpluses on transactions with such members are not trading income. However, receipts from outsiders such as visitors or temporary members are subject to corporation tax as trading income and other income and gains of members' clubs are chargeable to tax in the normal way.

Taxation: Pensions

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue forgone from offsetting pension contributions against tax for (a) ordinary rate and (b) higher rate taxpayers in the latest period for which figures are available. [118442]

Mr Gauke [*holding answer 3 September 2012*]: Available estimates of the total tax cost of pension relief can be found in Table PEN6 on the HMRC website at the following link:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/pensions/pen6.xls>

SCOTLAND

Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Bill

Margaret Curran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the effect on Scotland of the proposals in the Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Bill. [119748]

Michael Moore: The UK Government announced in July that they will issue guarantees for major infrastructure projects. The infrastructure guarantee programme will extend to Scotland and will be available to projects that may have stalled because of adverse credit conditions and that meet set criteria. All applications received will be subject to detailed assessment by the UK Government, in consultation with the Scottish Government where appropriate.

Universal Credit

Margaret Curran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on the implementation of universal credit in Scotland. [119751]

Michael Moore: The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell), and I are in regular contact with ministerial colleagues on a range of issues relating to welfare reform in Scotland.

West Coast Railway Line

Margaret Curran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he had with the Secretary of State for Transport on the recent award of the West Coast Main Line passenger rail franchise. [119749]

Michael Moore: There has been regular contact between the Scotland Office and the Department for Transport on cross-border rail issues related to Scotland. My officials have discussed the award of the West Coast Main Line passenger rail franchise with counterparts in the Department for Transport in recent weeks and will continue to receive updates on the matter.

Working Tax Credit

Margaret Curran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the potential effect on Scotland of reductions in the child care component of working tax credit. [119752]

Michael Moore: The budget deficit we inherited from the previous Government has meant we have had to make some very difficult choices. The Government has been clear that it sees reducing Britain's deficit as its most urgent task, in order to put the public finances on a stable footing. Despite this reduction, the child care element provides important support and will continue to make child care more affordable for working parents.

CABINET OFFICE

Charities

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office with reference to the answer to the hon. Member for Arfon of 24 April 2012, *Official Report*, column 796W, on charities, on what date he plans to lay the orders to make provision for the status of charitable incorporated organisations. [118611]

Mr Hurd: The Government will shortly lay the secondary legislation that will enable the new form of charity, the Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), to be created. Commencement will be subject to parliamentary approval.

Charity Commission

Mr Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many recent candidates for the position of Chair of the Charity Commission were interviewed by or met (a) the Minister for the Cabinet Office and (b) other Ministers; and if he will make a statement. [119382]

Mr Hurd: The selection panel considered 26 applications and selected for interview the five candidates they consider best met the criteria. Three candidates were deemed appointable to the post and the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr Maude), met with all three candidates.

Public Sector: Greater London

Mr Evennett: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the net change in the number of private sector jobs was in (a) Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency, (b) the London Borough of Bexley and (c) Greater London in the latest period for which figures are available. [119633]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated September 2012:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking what the net change in the number of private sector jobs was in (a) Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency, (b) the London Borough of Bexley and (c) Greater London in the latest period for which figures are available. (119633)

The official estimates of public and private sector jobs are compiled from Work Force Jobs (WFJ) series. However, WFJ do not produce private/public sector job statistics at any geography smaller than Regional level, so private sector employment has been provided from the Annual Population Survey (APS).

Individuals in the APS are classified to the public or private sector according to their responses to the survey.

Table 1 as follows shows the net changes in private sector employment from the APS in London, London Borough of Bexley and Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency between the 12 month period ending in March 2012, (the latest available period) and the period one year earlier.

As with any sample survey, estimates from the APS are subject to a margin of uncertainty.

National and local area estimates for many labour market statistics, including employment, unemployment and claimant count are available on the NOMIS website at

<http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

Table 1: Net change in private sector employment between the 12 month period ending March 2011 and March 2012

	<i>Thousand</i>		
	<i>Private sector employment</i>		
	<i>12 months ending:</i>		
	<i>March 2011</i>	<i>March 2012</i>	<i>Net change</i>
London	2,882	*3,006	124
Bexley	76	**85	8
Bexleyheath and Crayford	29	***29	0

Note:

Coefficients of Variation have been calculated for the latest period as an indication of the quality of the estimates, as described below:

Guide to Quality:

The Coefficient of Variation (CV) indicates the quality of an estimate, the smaller the CV value the higher the quality. The true value is likely to lie within +/- twice the CV—for example, for an estimate of 200 with a CV of 5% we would expect the population total to be within the range 180-220.

Key:

* 0 = CV < 5%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered precise

** 5 = CV < 10%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered reasonably precise

*** 10 = CV < 20%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered acceptable

**** CV ? 20%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered too unreliable for practical purposes

CV = Coefficient of Variation

Source:

Annual Population Survey.

Unemployment

Luciana Berger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent estimate his Department has made of the number of (a) two parent non-working families

and (b) single parent non-working families in (i) the UK and (ii) each parliamentary constituency in the Liverpool metropolitan borough. [119747]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated September 2012:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking what recent estimate has been made of the number of (a) two parent non-working families and (b) single parent non-working families in (i) the UK and (ii) each parliamentary constituency in the Liverpool metropolitan borough (119747).

For the UK, the latest information available is for April to June 2012. In April to June 2012 there were 278,000 non-working couple households with dependent children and 694,000 non-working lone parent households with dependent children. It is not possible to provide estimates for each parliamentary constituency in the Liverpool metropolitan borough due to small sample sizes.

Unemployment: Females

Luciana Berger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent estimate his Department has made of the number of unemployed (a) women who are single mothers and (b) women with children who have a working spouse or partner. [119746]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated September 2012:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking what recent estimate has been made of the number of unemployed (a) women who are single mothers and (b) women with children who have a working spouse or partner (119746).

The latest estimates available are for April to June 2012. In the UK, in April to June 2012, there were 190,000 unemployed female lone parents and 165,000 female parents living with a partner who was employed.

Voluntary Work: Young People

Mr Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what size of capital bond organisations wishing to bid for National Citizen Service contracts for financial year 2013-14 were required to guarantee; and if he will make a statement. [119383]

Mr Hurd: There were no capital bond requirements.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Higher Education

19. **Steve Rotheram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what plans he has for participation in higher education. [119412]

Mr Willetts: We expect there to be more full-time students studying in Higher Education this year than in any year under the last Government.

Business: Regulation

Julian Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent discussions he has had on the introduction of regulatory budgets. [119205]

Michael Fallon [*holding answer 5 September 2012*]: The 'one in, one out' system is based on the net cost to business of domestic regulation which requires Departments to work towards a 'net zero budget'; and is designed to cap the cost of domestic regulation. In July we published the fourth Statement of New Regulation showing that Departments have reduced the net domestic burden by over £850 million. We are therefore reversing the rise in regulation that is constricting enterprise and stifling growth; and working hard to change the regulatory culture in Departments.

Sunday Trading

Fiona Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what assessment he has made of the likelihood that the removal of Sunday trading legislation would lead to an overall increase in (a) retail sales and (b) jobs in the retail sector; [119268]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the effect of the removal of the provisions of Sunday trading legislation on small stores; [119269]

(3) what data his Department is collecting on the effect of removing Sunday trading rules during the period between 22 July and 9 September 2012; and whether he is considering abolition or amendment of the Sunday Trading Act 1994. [119270]

Michael Fallon: The suspension of the current Sunday Trading regulations applies to the specified period from 22 July to 9 September, and new legislation would be required for any extension.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has requested data on the impact of the suspension from a number of large retailers including the impact on sales and employment. BIS will now also analyse the impact on the retail sales of small retailers.

Tobacco: Packaging

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) whether his Department has had any (a) discussions and (b) correspondence with the Department of Health on the compliance of the consultation on plain packaging for tobacco products with the standards specified by the Better Regulation rules; [119160]

(2) whether his Department was consulted by the Department of Health on the nature of the consumer surveys used as part of the consultation on plain packaging for tobacco products. [119161]

Michael Fallon [*holding answer 5 September 2012*]: All proposed regulatory measures are subject to collective discussion before public consultation.

This consultation was subject to the Code of Practice on Consultation set out on the Department's website at: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/files/file47158.pdf>

Each Department is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of its own consultation exercises.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**Overseas Aid**

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department has taken to ensure that UK development assistance is not misused as a consequence of corruption. [119230]

Justine Greening: The Department is committed to ensuring that aid money is used for the purpose for which it was intended. The Department has a range of controls and measures in place to protect UK aid. These include rigorous risk assessments and monitoring requirements to track results against agreed objectives for all projects and programmes, and regular internal audits.

In any country where financial aid is provided directly to partner governments, the Department carries out a fiduciary risk assessment.

The Department is also testing new approaches to results based aid, such as cash on delivery aid, to link payment of our aid conditional on proof that results have been achieved.

Where any corruption involving UK aid is uncovered, or suspected, the Department always takes action to investigate and, wherever possible, recover funds.

Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of her Department's aid to countries in (a) Africa, (b) Asia and (c) the Americas was allocated to (i) agricultural support, (ii) education and (iii) healthcare in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [119736]

Mr Duncan: The following table provides the information requested.

DFID publishes details of Official Development Assistance (ODA) by country in its annual publication, *Statistics on International Development*:

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/About-us/How-we-measure-progress/Aid-Statistics/Statistics-on-International-Development-2011/>

Additionally, DFID produces details of ODA by country and sector in additional tables available online:

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/About-us/How-we-measure-progress/Aid-Statistics/Statistics-on-International-Development-2011/SID-2011-Additional-tables/>

	2008-09	2009-10	Percentage 2010-11
<i>Africa</i>			
Agriculture	1.78	3.02	2.38
Education	16.20	13.49	17.27
Health	22.91	19.85	19.45
<i>Asia</i>			
Agriculture	2.64	2.53	1.97
Education	16.17	15.12	17.02
Health	23.16	22.63	19.24
<i>Americas</i>			
Agriculture	0.97	0.15	0.19
Education	3.52	3.04	24.32
Health	8.14	7.80	2.90

WORK AND PENSIONS

Employment Schemes: Young People

Mr Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have received youth contract wage subsidies since the launch of that scheme. [119733]

Mr Hoban: The Youth Contract, including wage incentives, went live on April 2012. From this point any young person attached to the Work programme could be placed into work with a wage incentive being offered to the employer. In most cases wage incentives are paid after a young person has been in work continuously for 26 weeks.

Following the collection and quality assurance of this data, I expect the first set of Official Statistics on the wage incentive to be available from early 2013. The Department is working to guidelines set by the UK Statistics Authority to ensure we publish statistics that meet high quality standards at the earliest opportunity.

Housing Benefit

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had with housing charities on the proposal to withdraw housing benefit for people under the age of 25. [118600]

Steve Webb: While all aspects of welfare expenditure remain under review, there are currently no plans to remove entitlement to housing benefit from people under 25 years of age.

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the need for assistance to tenants (a) who are foster carers and (b) with disabilities affected by the reduction in housing benefit as a result of over-occupation; and if he will make a statement. [118764]

Steve Webb: We have made an additional £30 million available for the discretionary housing payment budget from 2013-14 aimed specifically at two groups: foster carers; and disabled people who live in significantly adapted accommodation. There is a strong argument not to expect someone living in a property which has been specially adapted for their needs, often at quite considerable cost, to move into a different one. We are also keen to protect the position of foster carers so that they are not discouraged from taking up or continuing their caring role. Based on information from a variety of sources we estimate that this additional funding could assist around 40,000 claimants affected by the under occupation measure.

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefits

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much in (a) housing benefit and (b) council tax benefit was disbursed to foreign nationals in 2011. [119761]

Steve Webb: The information requested is not available.

Housing Benefit: Young People

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people under the age of 25 years were in receipt of housing benefit in (a) England and Wales, (b) the east midlands, (c) Nottinghamshire and (d) Ashfield constituency in each of the last three years. [118992]

Steve Webb: The number of people aged under 25 who were in receipt of housing benefit in England, Wales, east midlands and Nottinghamshire in each of the last three years is given in the following table.

Information is not readily available for housing benefit claimants aged under 25 at parliamentary constituency level, and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost. A one-off exercise was carried out on the January 2011 data to provide a breakdown by parliamentary constituency of all housing benefit claimants. The results are published on the DWP website at:

<http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=hbctb>

<i>Housing benefit claimants aged under 25</i>			
	<i>May 2012</i>	<i>May 2011</i>	<i>May 2010</i>
England	326,560	324,870	328,460
Wales	22,160	21,710	21,270
East Midlands region	28,430	27,510	27,310
Nottinghamshire county	4,410	4,180	4,140

Notes:

1. The data refer to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
3. Recipients are as at second Thursday of the month.
4. Age groups are based on the age on the count date (second Thursday in the month), of either:
 - (a) the recipient if they are single, or
 - (b) the elder of the recipient or partner if claiming as a couple
5. SHBE is a monthly electronic scan of claimant level data direct from local authority computer systems. It replaces quarterly aggregate clerical returns. The data are available monthly from November 2008 and May 2012 are the most recent available.

Source:

Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE)

International Labour Conference

Alison McGovern: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representation the UK sent to the International Labour Conference in June 2012. [119570]

Mr Hoban: The Department for Work and Pensions sent three officials to attend the International Labour Conference in June 2012, with support from FCO officials based at the UK Mission in Geneva.

In addition there were four representatives each from both the CBI and TUC, in accordance with the tripartite structure of the International Labour Conference.

Jobcentre Plus

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the Jobcentre Plus outcome targets for each of the last four years. [119805]

Mr Hoban: Jobcentre Plus outcome targets for each of the last four years are recorded in the Jobcentre Plus business plans, which are placed in the Library each year.

For 2008-09 ISBN 978—1—84763—319—4 Ref: JPBP0809

For 2009-10 ISBN 978—1—84947—019—3 Ref: JPBP0910

For 2010-11 ISBN 978—1—84947—326—2 Ref: JPBP1011

For 2011-12 ISBN 978—1—84947—528—0 Ref: JPDP1112

Legionnaires' Disease: Edinburgh

Mr Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects the Health and Safety Executive in Scotland to publish the results of their investigation into the outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in Edinburgh in May 2012. [119571]

Mr Hoban: The investigation into the deaths from Legionnaires' disease in Edinburgh is being jointly investigated by Lothian and Borders police and the Health and Safety Executive under the direction of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS). The results cannot be published until the criminal investigation has been concluded and the matter has been reported to COPFS.

State Retirement Pensions

Meg Munn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what consideration he has given to ensuring that all state pensions are paid from the date of the qualifying birthday rather than from a day within the week of the qualifying birthday. [118614]

Steve Webb: State pension is payable in whole weeks and not individual days, so payments start from the first full benefit week that follows the date a person reaches state pension age. If a person's birthday happens to fall on the same day of the week as the first day of their benefit week, there is no gap between that birthday and the first day for which payment is due. For most other people, there will be.

There are administrative costs associated with making part-week payments and it is important that we continue to deliver the Department's service as cost-effectively as possible. If we made part-week payments at the commencement of a claim then logically we should seek to recover any days' overpayment at the end and this would add to the Department's administrative costs.

The Government has no plans to change this arrangement at the present time.

Universal Credit

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he has made an assessment of the potential effects of introducing universal credit on the network of women's refuges; and if he will make a statement. [118829]

Steve Webb: The Government is committed to tackling domestic violence and to providing better support for victims. It is our intention that universal credit will not cause a reduction in support levels for victims of domestic violence.

The housing benefit rules that currently apply for those living in refuges and other supported housing are complex to administer and understand. We do not intend to reduce the overall level of support that the sector currently receives from housing benefit but we do intend to simplify and streamline the current arrangements.

We have conducted a consultation on proposals to redesign and simplify these arrangements and we received a substantial number of often comprehensive replies. We are continuing to develop plans for new funding arrangements under universal credit and we expect to announce further information in due course.

Work Capability Assessment

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of (a) work capability assessment and (b) initial employment and support allowance entitlement decisions made that were right first time in each of the last four years. [119804]

Mr Hoban: Atos Healthcare carries out work capability assessments (WCAs). Once completed, WCAs are forwarded to DWP where a decision maker reaches a decision on the claim—taking account of all of the evidence, including the WCA.

In new ESA claims made between October 2008 and May 2011, DWP has made 1,048,000 decisions following receipt of a WCA from Atos.

636,500 (61%) of these claimants were found "fit for work" following their initial work capability assessment. 258,100 appeals had been heard against those decisions by May 2012. This represents around 41 % of those who were found "fit for work".

The tribunal upheld the DWP decision in 160,700 of those cases. So DWP decisions were overturned in 97,500 cases, around 9% of all decisions made.

The statistics quoted above were taken out of the publication *Employment and Support Allowance: Outcomes of Work Capability Assessments, Great Britain—new claims*. This publication can be found at the following link:

http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/index.php?page=esa_wca

Please note that on 12 September the Department plans to publish statistics on Atos recommendations and post appeal work capability assessment outcomes. These will be available at the following link:

http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=adhoc_analysis

Work Programme

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will publish a table showing the number of subcontractors that have received referrals from prime contractors under the Work programme; and how many people have been referred to date. [119564]

Mr Hoban: The Department does not collect information on the number of subcontractors receiving referrals from Work programme primes and has no plans to publish a breakdown of referrals by subcontractor.

Official statistics on Work programme referrals and attachments up to the end of April 2012 were published on the Department's website on 8 August:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=wp>

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the reasons for regional variations between the proportion of Work programme referrals made from the early access payment group. [119758]

Mr Hoban: No formal assessment for regional variations in the number of referrals to different payment groups has been made to date.

The Work programme JSA early access group provides optional entry from three months of pre-Work programme activity (for vulnerable groups including disabled people, ex-offenders, carers and ex-HM armed forces personnel, among others) and mandatory entry from three months (including for those claimants who had previously claimed JSA for 22 out of the last 24 months and have undertaken three months pre-Work programme activity).

Given the number of reasons for referrals to this group, it would not be unexpected for there to be some variation in the number of referrals between regions.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Combined Heat and Power

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the potential effect of removing levy exemption certificates on (a) investment in industrial combined heat and power (CHP) and (b) reductions in emissions associated with using industrial CHP over the next 10 years. [118771]

Gregory Barker: The Department has not made a specific assessment of the impact of withdrawal of levy exemption certificates on investment in new industrial Combined Heat and Power (CHP) capacity or carbon dioxide emissions. The impacts of the changes announced in Budget 2011, and confirmed in Budget 2012, are summarised in the Tax Information and Impact Note published alongside Budget 2012. This can be found on the HMRC website at:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/budget2012/tiin-0700.pdf>

The Department produces projections of CHP capacity growth for inclusion in our annual updated energy projections, which will be published in October. The latest CHP projections account for withdrawal of levy exemption certificates, as well as our latest energy price projections and improved assumptions on the proportion of power exported by CHP schemes. These projections predict continued growth in CHP capacity from the current level of 6.1GW electrical capacity to 11GW by 2020.

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (1) what role industrial combined heat and power plays in his Department's plans for future emissions reductions; and what assessment he has made of how that role might be affected by the abolition of levy exemption certificates; [118772]

(2) whether his Department has any plans to replace levy exemption certificates with an alternative means of support for industrial combined heat and power technology; and if he will make a statement. [118773]

Gregory Barker: Renewable CHP in all sectors benefits from effective support under current renewables obligation arrangements. The forthcoming consultation on the renewable heat incentive will consider the case for specific support for heat from new renewable CHP schemes.

The Department believes natural gas fired CHP also has an important role to play, as an industrial energy efficiency measure and a cost-effective carbon reduction measure in industries that continue to rely on gas. Our analysis identifies that high required rates of return and short required payback periods can be barriers to development of new natural gas industrial CHP capacity.

Levy exemption certificates were not a value for money way of addressing these barriers. The Department is looking at alternative ways of addressing the barriers to investment.

Electricity

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps his Department is taking on demand reduction for electricity. [119129]

Gregory Barker: The Government have a number of policies aimed at reducing electricity demand including Green Deal, the smart meter programme and product standards. The Electricity Demand Reduction project is assessing whether there is any need for additional measures. The project's initial assessment suggests significant further potential for efficiency may exist, and my Department will consult later this year on potential policy approaches that can best unlock further electricity efficiency.

Energy: Business

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to the answer of 12 July 2012, *Official Report*, columns 429-30, on consumer protection, what steps his Department has taken to help small businesses with their energy bills. [118637]

Gregory Barker: Ofgem is the regulator for gas and electricity supplies, including supply to the non-domestic sector. In November 2011, Ofgem published a consultation on a package of measures to ensure businesses are better protected, including extending the protections currently available to micro business to small business, and will publish updated proposals before winter. They are also committed to reviewing the automatic rollover and termination rules that apply to businesses.

Ofgem has also been working with industry and consumer groups to assess the financial impact of backbilling on small businesses. This has led to the introduction of a new set of voluntary standards for the treatment of micro-businesses and Ofgem is continuing to monitor this issue.

Energy: Conservation

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to the answer of 12 July 2012, *Official Report*, columns 434-36, on energy efficiency, what the role and objectives are of the office of energy efficiency deployment; and if he will make a statement. [118625]

Gregory Barker: The Energy Efficiency Deployment Office (EEDO) has been set up to advance energy efficiency across the UK economy. EEDO was launched by the Secretary of State on 8 February 2012 and will come forward with a national energy efficiency strategy by the end of the year.

Energy: Meters

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change if he will assess the merits of using the universal credit system to help prepaid meter customers move onto credit meters. [119288]

Gregory Barker: Universal credit will be paid monthly and we will support claimants with monthly budgeting. This may enable them to use direct debits for household bills: paying by direct debit can help households to save on their energy bills. Government and Ofgem are working with energy suppliers to ensure households receive good information about the best tariff and how to get it and Ofgem monitors the differences energy suppliers charge for different payment methods, to ensure pre-payment meter customers are charged a fair price.

Energy: Prices

Jim Sheridan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps he is taking to protect vulnerable customers from rising energy bills. [119627]

Gregory Barker: The coalition Government is committed to supporting low income and vulnerable consumers to heat their homes at an affordable cost.

We continue to fund the Warm Front scheme, providing low income vulnerable households, living in energy inefficient properties, with a range of energy efficient heating and insulation measures. Since the start of the scheme in June 2000 the scheme has assisted 2.3 million households across England.

The Community Energy Saving Programme is targeted at the 15% lowest income areas in Scotland and Wales and lowest 10% in England. It is designed to deliver comprehensive energy efficiency retrofits on a street by street basis with expected permanent fuel bill savings of up to £300 a year per household.

Under the Super Priority Group of the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target some 600,000 low income households across Great Britain are expected to receive heating and insulation measures, either for free or at a subsidised price.

We recently published the consultation response regarding the new Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation (ECO), which will be our flagship policy for improving the energy efficiency of the nation's housing

stock. ECO will run alongside the Green Deal and will have twin objectives to help reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty. ECO requires energy suppliers to help households access more expensive insulation measures such as solid wall and hard to treat cavity wall insulation through the Green Deal and to provide measures to low income and vulnerable households to help reduce the costs of staying warm and healthy. Through ECO around £540 million will be spent annually by suppliers to assist low income households and low income areas.

In addition to energy efficiency measures, in 2011-12 the Warm Home Discount scheme provided energy supplier funded discounts to around 700,000 of the poorest pensioners across Great Britain with a core group discount of £120 off electricity bills. Nearly 600,000 of these customers received the discount without having to claim, as a result of data matching between Government and energy suppliers. This is a significant benefit for a group which may struggle to claim. Other low income vulnerable households may also be assisted through the scheme. Overall we expect 2 million low income vulnerable households a year to be assisted through the Warm Home Discount scheme.

Government provides pensioner households with winter fuel payments to help with additional heating costs during the winter. Cold weather payments are also made to low income and vulnerable households where there is an average temperature of 0° C or below for seven consecutive days. These payments have been permanently increased to £25 per week and in winter 2011-12 over 5 million cold weather payments were paid in Great Britain worth an estimated £129 million.

In addition, Big Energy Saving Week, brokered by Government and led by Citizens Advice, aims to connect consumers, particularly the vulnerable, with sources of help with their energy bills. Big Energy Saving Week is week beginning 22 October 2012.

Fuel Poverty: Glasgow

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps his Department is taking to reduce levels of fuel poverty in Glasgow North West constituency. [118762]

Gregory Barker: The coalition Government is committed to tackling fuel poverty and supporting low income and vulnerable consumers to heat their homes at an affordable cost. Fuel poverty is a devolved issue for the Scottish Government, but the following policies span Great Britain.

In winter 2011-12, the Warm Home Discount Scheme provided energy supplier funded discounts to around 700,000 of the poorest pensioners across Great Britain with a Core Group discount of £120 off electricity bills. Nearly 600,000 of these customers received the discount without having to claim, as a result of data matching between Government and energy suppliers. This is a significant benefit for a group which may struggle to claim. Other low income vulnerable households may also be assisted through the scheme. Overall we expect 2 million low income vulnerable households a year to be assisted through the Warm Home Discount scheme.

We recently published the consultation response regarding the new Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation (ECO), which will be our flagship policy for improving the energy efficiency of the nation's housing stock. ECO will run alongside the Green Deal and will have twin objectives to help reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty. ECO requires energy suppliers to help households access more expensive insulation measures such as solid wall and hard to treat cavity wall insulation through the Green Deal and to provide measures to low income and vulnerable households to help reduce the costs of staying warm and healthy. Through ECO around £540 million will be spent annually by suppliers to assist low income households and low income areas.

The Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) is targeted at the 15% lowest income areas in Scotland and Wales (10% in England). It is designed to deliver comprehensive energy efficiency retrofits and a street by street basis with expected permanent fuel bill savings of up to £300 a year per household. 36 CESP schemes in Glasgow had been submitted to Ofgem for approval by June 2012.

Under the Super Priority Group of the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target some 600,000 low income households across Great Britain are expected to receive heating and insulation measures, either for free or at a subsidised price.

In addition, Government provides pensioner households with winter fuel payments to help with additional heating costs during the winter. Cold weather payments are also made to low income and vulnerable households where there is an average temperature of 0° C or below for seven consecutive days. These payments have been permanently increased to £25 per week and in winter 2011-12 over 5 million cold weather payments were paid in Great Britain worth an estimated £129 million.

Hydroelectric Power

Jonathan Reynolds: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what measures he is considering to speed up the time taken from inception to commissioning of hydro-electricity schemes. [119975]

Gregory Barker: There are several steps that a hydropower scheme needs to go through before it is built, including a feasibility study, environmental report, planning consent, environmental licences, grid connection and raising finance. Further advice can be found in the publication "Hydropower: a Guide for you and your community" which is downloadable at:

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/water/32022.aspx>

The Government are working to ensure the administrative burden of meeting essential environmental standards is kept to a minimum. The Environment Agency has streamlined administrative arrangements for the application and determination processes for those applying for the necessary permissions. The Environment Agency is also working with stakeholders to revise its good practice guidelines for hydropower. We will continue to seek to maintain the right balance between encouraging growth in this sector and ensuring that sufficient environmental protection standards remain in place.

Licensing

Richard Fuller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what permits and licences his Department and its public bodies issue to businesses. [118819]

Gregory Barker: The Department and its public bodies issue the following permits and licenses to businesses:

Nuclear regulation

For nuclear regulation, permits and licences may be issued for:

- design of low dispersible radioactive material;
- designs of Type B(U), Type B(M), Type C packages;
- designs for packages to contain uranium hexafluoride;
- designs for packages to contain fissile material;
- certain types of shipments;
- shipments under special arrangement;
- modifications or amendments to existing approvals.

authorisations may also be issued permitting carriage of radioactive material contrary to the prohibitions or requirements arising elsewhere in the regulations.

Nuclear development

The Environment Agency issues the following permits to businesses under legislation that is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change:

environmental permits under the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2010 for radioactive substances activities, i.e. (i) for non nuclear sites, for keeping and using radioactive materials, and for their storage or disposal, and (ii) for nuclear sites, for the discharge and disposal of radioactive wastes;

authorisations under the Transfrontier Shipment of Radioactive Waste and Spent Fuels Regulations 2008, for international shipments of radioactive wastes and spent nuclear fuel.

Energy technology list

DECC currently funds the Carbon Trust to administer the energy technology list (ETL) on our behalf. This includes issuing the ETL certification mark to manufacturers whose products have met the set criteria and can qualify for enhanced capital allowances (ECA). The ETL certification mark is used by manufacturers to certify that their products are energy efficient.

Oil and gas offshore environment and decommissioning

greenhouse gas emissions permits under the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme Regulations 2005 (as amended);

atmospheric emissions permits under the Offshore Combustion Installations (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Regulations 2001 (as amended);

chemical use and discharge permits under the Offshore Chemical Regulations 2002 (as amended);

oil discharge permits under the Offshore Petroleum Activities (Oil Pollution Prevention and Control) Regulations 2005 (as amended);

marine licences under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009;

other environmental approvals, consents etc are also issued under the Offshore Petroleum Production and Pipelines (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1999 (as amended); the Offshore Petroleum Activities (Conservation of Habitats) Regulations 2001 (as amended); the Merchant Shipping (Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation Convention) Regulations 1998; the Offshore Installations (Emergency Pollution Control) Regulations 2002 and Part 4A of the Energy Act 2008 (as amended);

written approvals for decommissioning programmes under section 32(1) of the Petroleum Act 1998 are issued to operators of offshore oil and gas installations and pipelines.

Oil and gas licensing exploration and development

under the Petroleum Act 1998. DECC issues petroleum exploration and development licences. Consents for drilling, development, production, flaring and venting are issued under these licences.

Coal Authority

the Coal Authority issues licenses and leases for coal mining operations in Britain. It also issues permits to organisations seeking to enter the authority's coal estate to undertake site investigation work and other access agreements for coal methane extraction.

Electricity generating stations

consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for onshore electricity generating stations with a capacity greater than 50 megawatts; and deemed planning permission under section 90(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for that station¹;

consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989² for offshore electricity generating stations with a capacity greater than one megawatt;

the making of an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992;

consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989³ or the making of an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 for offshore electricity generating stations with a capacity greater than one megawatt;

issue of notices under section 95 of the Energy Act 2004 declaring safety zones around offshore renewable energy installations;

approval under the Energy Act 2004 of decommissioning plans for offshore renewable energy installations;

declarations under section 99 of the Energy Act 2004 extinguishing the public rights of navigation where these pass through the places where renewable energy installations are situated;

approval of Development Consent Orders under the Planning Act 2008.

permission under section 14 of the Energy Act 1976 to use gas and/or hydrocarbons as the fuel in generating stations with a capacity greater than 10 megawatts.

Overhead electric lines

consent under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 for overhead electric lines⁴;

Onshore pipelines

pipeline construction authorisation under the Pipelines Act 1962 for pipelines longer than 16.093 km⁵;

consents pursuant to Gas Transporter Pipe-line Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 1999 for the construction of gas pipelines by registered gas transporter⁶.

Onshore gas storage facilities

gas storage authorisation order under the Gas Act 1965⁷.

Hazardous substances

deemed hazardous consent under section 12 of the Planning (Hazardous Substances) Act 1990.

Compulsory purchase orders and compulsory wayleaves

compulsory purchase order under the Acquisition of Land Act 1981.

compulsory wayleave for overhead electric lines under schedule 4 of the Electricity Act 1989.

Miscellaneous

joint decisions with appropriate Minister where any proposal which impacts on a gas or electricity "statutory undertaker" has to be determined, for example a planning application for a new sub-station has been refused by the planning authority and the statutory undertaker has appealed.

Note:

The Secretary of State will take the final decision on all energy applications submitted to the National Infrastructure Directorate after consideration of its report to him.

Ofgem

While not one of our public bodies, we contract the following functions from Ofgem:

wind licensing;

under gas and electricity legislation, Ofgem is responsible for granting licences covering the following activities:

electricity generation, transmission, distribution and supply;

gas transportation, shipping or supply;

operating an electricity or gas interconnector.

¹ Since 1 March 2010 such applications are now submitted to the National Infrastructure Directorate (NID) of the Planning Inspectorate under the Planning Act 2008.

² Since 1 April 2010 applications are submitted to the Marine Management Organisation.

³ Since 1 April 2010 applications are submitted to the Marine Management Organisation.

⁴ Since 1 March 2010 applications for overhead electric lines with a nominal voltage of 132kV and above are submitted to NID.

⁵ Since 1 March 2010 applications are submitted to NID.

⁶ Since 1 March 2010 applications for such pipelines which are in England are submitted to NID.

⁷ Since 1 March 2010 applications for such facilities with a storage capacity of at least 43 million standard cubic metres of gas are submitted to NID.

Micro-generation

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate he has made of the current initial cost for a micro-producer to connect to the National Grid. [118984]

Gregory Barker: No charge applies for the connection of a domestic-scale generator (less than 16 amps per phase). Larger micro-generation projects connecting to the grid will pay an up-front charge commensurate with the cost of making that connection. These charges will vary by location depending on such factors as the distance to the nearest part of the network and the capacity of the existing network in the vicinity. Due to the project-specific nature of grid connection charges for micro-generation projects, DECC has not developed a set of specific assumptions, although grid connection costs were included in the technology cost estimates developed by Parsons Brinckerhoff for parts 2A and 2B of the Feed-In Tariffs Comprehensive Review.

Renewable Energy: Feed-in Tariffs

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to his statement of 24 May 2012, *Official Report*, columns 1303-7, on the feed-in tariffs scheme, what progress he has made on the inclusion of solar power in the updated renewable energy roadmap; and if he will make a statement. [120074]

Gregory Barker: Solar PV will be included in the updated renewable energy roadmap.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to his statement of 24 May 2012, *Official Report*, columns 1303-7, on the feed-in tariffs scheme, if he will make it his policy to include geo-thermal power in the updated renewable energy roadmap. [120077]

Gregory Barker: Geo-thermal power will be included in the updated renewable energy roadmap.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to his statement of 24 May 2012, *Official Report*, columns 1303-7, on the feed-in tariffs scheme, if he will make it his policy to include hydro power in the updated renewable energy roadmap. [120078]

Gregory Barker: Hydro power will be included in the updated Renewable Energy Roadmap.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to his statement of 24 May 2012, *Official Report*, columns 1303-7, on the feed-in tariffs scheme, when he expects the renewable energy roadmap to be updated. [120079]

Gregory Barker: We plan to publish the next update of the Renewables Roadmap during the autumn.

Solar Power

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate he has made of the total amount of electricity generated by domestic solar installations up to 1 January 2012; and what this figure represents as a proportion of total domestic electricity consumption for England. [118840]

Gregory Barker: The latest data available are for financial year 2010-11 and are for the UK as a whole. Total generation from sub 4kW PV systems—the vast majority from domestic installations—in 2010-11 was 14.4GWh. The overall UK domestic electricity consumption for 2010-11 was 116.8TWh, so the proportion contributed by domestic-scale PV is approximately 0.01%.

It takes some months for Ofgem to reconcile data from the Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) database with the annual generation data from the electricity suppliers. Data for 2011-12 will be made available in December this year. In future, we intend to collect more detailed generation data, and we are consulting the electricity supply companies on this via the FITS Licensees consultation.

As a proxy for generation data, it is useful to compare the sub 4kW PV capacity on Ofgem's Central FIT Register at end March 2011—64.7MW—with what it was at end of March 2012—676.6MW, i.e. a more than 10-fold increase in installed capacity.

Warm Front Scheme

Dr Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much funding his Department allocated to the Warm Front scheme in (a) 2010-11, (b) 2011-12 and (c) 2012-13; what the actual level of expenditure was in (i) 2010-11 and (ii)

2011-12; what steps he is taking to ensure allocated funding is spent in 2012-13; and if he will make a statement. [118604]

Gregory Barker: The total budget for the Warm Front scheme in 2010-11 and 2011-12 was as £366 million and £145 million¹ respectively. The total budget of £366 million was spent in 2010-11. Total expenditure for 2011-12 was £108.6 million².

Warm Front remains open to applications with a budget of £100 million in 2012-13 to provide insulation and heating measures to qualifying households.

Government is committed to doing all it can to drive up demand for the scheme and continues to work closely with local authorities, charities and the energy companies to encourage pensioners and those on low incomes apply for the help to which they are entitled.

The Government has recently taken steps to broaden the eligibility criteria for the scheme to align the income-based qualifying benefits with those to be utilised for the forthcoming Affordable Warmth group of the Energy Company Obligation. The qualifying SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) threshold for the property will also be increased from 55 to 63. These changes will come into force on 12 September 2012 from which time applications will be assessed against the revised criteria allowing an even greater number of households to benefit.

¹ The total budget of £145 million consists of £110 million allocated to Warm Front and associated activities secured through the spending review 2010. In addition DECC allocated £25 million to support the completion of outstanding work from 2010-11 with a further £10 million allocated to Warm Front in 2011-12 from the Department of Health.

² The original budget for Warm Front and associated fuel poverty expenditure for 2011-12 was £110 million. During 2011-12 total expenditure was almost £108 million with a further £0.6 million committed but not yet paid. Therefore, of the original Warm Front budget £1.4 million was unspent. The budget was increased by £35 million during the year. We also received agreed rebates from Carillion Energy Services of nearly £14 million. These rebates were used to offset expenditure in 2011-12 bringing total reported expenditure for the year to £94.4 million. Against the total budget of £145 million for 2011-12, £50.6 million was unspent.

Wind Power

Graham Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate he has made of the number of wind turbines which will come into operation in each (a) year until 2020 and (b) month during the next two years. [119231]

Gregory Barker [*holding answer 5 September 2012*]: No assessment has been made of the number of wind turbines that will come into operation each month during the next two years and each year until 2020.

However, within the Renewable Energy Roadmap

<http://www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/11/meeting-energy-demand/renewable-energy/2167-uk-renewable-energy-roadmap.pdf>

published July 2011, the central scenario shows generating capacity of up to 13 GW of onshore wind and up to 18 GW of offshore wind by 2020.

Details of wind farms, both onshore and offshore, that are currently within the planning system can be found within the Renewables Energy Planning database (REPD) monthly extract

<https://restats.decc.gov.uk/app/reporting/decc/monthlyextract>

Estimates based on this information are likely to fluctuate because not all projects in the planning system may receive consent, not all projects consented may follow through to construction and as new projects are introduced. The following table shows the breakdown of wind turbine numbers and capacity for May 2012.

Wind technology	Source	Number of operational turbines	Planning applications—number of turbines		
			Submitted	Awaiting construction	Under construction
Wind offshore	REPD	568	1,072	323	863
Wind onshore	REPD	3,311	2,809	1,819	925
	RESTATS	318	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total		4,197	3,881	2,142	1,788

Wind Power: Seas and Oceans

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to the answer of 12 July 2012, *Official Report*, columns 436-7, on renewable energy, how his agreement with the offshore wind industry will work to ensure that 50 per cent of the supply chain involves UK companies; and if he will make a statement. [118639]

Gregory Barker: The Government welcomes the recent announcement by the Offshore Wind Developers Forum (OWDF), which stated its vision for “the UK to be the centre of offshore wind technology and deployment, with a competitive supply chain in the UK, providing over 50% of the content of offshore wind farm projects”.

The Government will work with developers to understand how this will be achieved including to develop a methodology for reporting the level of UK content in future offshore projects to measure how developers are delivering against the vision.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

British Overseas Territories

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to strengthen relations between the UK and its Overseas Territories; and if he will make a statement. [119739]

Mark Simmonds: We published, in June, a White Paper—‘The Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability’, 28 June 2012, *Official Report*, column 24WS—setting out a broad and ambitious vision for the Territories in the 21st century. We want the Territories to be vibrant and flourishing communities, proudly retaining aspects of their British identity and generating wider opportunities for their people.

Our strategy for the Territories is based on three practical policy goals:

- to strengthen the engagement and interaction between the UK and the Territories;

- to work with Territories to strengthen good governance arrangements, public financial management and economic planning where this is necessary; and

- to improve the quality and range of support available to the Territories.

We announced specific plans to :

- support the exchange of expertise between UK and Territory public servants through a Jubilee Programme supporting training and work placements;

- support the Territories to engage productively with the wider world, particularly the EU and the Commonwealth;

From this year we will upgrade the annual ministerial meeting with Territory leaders to give it a mandate to lead work to review and implement the commitments in the White Paper.

Correspondence

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the average time taken was by his Department to reply to correspondence from hon. Members and Peers in the last 12 months; and for what proportion of letters the time taken to send a response was longer than (a) one month, (b) six weeks, (c) two months, (d) three months and (e) six months in that period. [118683]

Alistair Burt: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) aims to respond to correspondence received from hon. Members and Peers in 20 working days, as specified by guidance issued by the Cabinet Office available at:

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/guide-handling-gov-correspondence.pdf>

Our correspondence database is designed to record our ability to meet this deadline and between August 2011 and July 2012 the FCO answered 91.5% of 9,957 MP and Peer letters within this timeframe.

Because our system is designed to measure our effectiveness on the Cabinet Office guideline, to give a further breakdown on other specified dates would incur a disproportionate cost.

The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on the performance of Departments in replying to Members’ and Peers’ correspondence. The report for 2011 was published on 15 March 2012, *Official Report*, columns 31-33WS.

Cultural Relations

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to promote the UK to London-based international media. [119653]

Mr Lidington: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is in daily contact with London-based foreign journalists on behalf of our department and others across Whitehall. They are invited to ministerial and official briefings on a range of policy areas, which can include the promotion of the UK as a place to visit, do business and study. They are also invited to interview Ministers as and when appropriate. Recent

interviews have included those on the Olympics and Paralympics, which have promoted the UK's ability to deliver large scale projects, the rights of disabled people and the UK as a great place to invest.

Euro 2012

Gareth Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the number of British nationals who were arrested in (a) Poland and (b) Ukraine during the 2012 European Football Championship. [119025]

Mr Lidington: We are not aware of any arrests of British nationals in Poland and Ukraine during the 2012 UEFA European Football Championships.

European Union

Mr Bone: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress his Department has made on the review of the balance of competences of the EU. [119531]

Mr Lidington: As set out in the Command Paper published on 12 July, the Government's review of the balance of competences will be a rolling programme of work across Whitehall. More detail on the publication of reports will be announced this autumn.

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects his Department's review of the balance of EU competencies to be published. [119707]

Mr Lidington: As set out in the Command Paper published on 12 July, the Government's review of the balance of competences will be a rolling programme of work across Whitehall. More detail on the publication of reports will be announced this autumn.

Iran

Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what recent reports he has received on access to education by Baha'i students in Iran; and if he will make a statement; [118632]

(2) what recent reports he has received of raids and arrests on businesses run by Baha'i in Iran; and if he will make a statement. [118634]

Alistair Burt: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is aware of an apparent increase in harassment of Baha'is, particularly in Semnan, Iran, including the closure of businesses run by Baha'is and restricted access to education by Baha'i students. We continue to monitor Baha'i persecution in Iran and to condemn publicly the appalling treatment of this minority group. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), made a statement on 24 August condemning the harassment of Baha'is and other minority groups in Iran. We continue to call for Iran to respect the rights and freedoms of the Baha'i community and other minority groups and immediately to cease persecution of them.

Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he plans to take to increase international scrutiny of Iran's human rights record, and its treatment of religious communities such as the Baha'i and the Christian house churches; and if he will make a statement. [118633]

Alistair Burt: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office continues to raise awareness of Iran's human rights record publicly and with our international partners, including the situation of religious minorities. There is already a strong international consensus on the need for Iran to improve its record as demonstrated by the support for the annual resolution at the UN General Assembly. We will work further to build support for this year's resolution and the work of the UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Iran. We will encourage their continued monitoring of the situation of the Baha'is in Iran which is of grave concern to the UK Government. The UK has been at the forefront of EU efforts to tackle impunity for human rights violations with the imposition of restrictive measures against those responsible. We will continue to review and add to these measures with our EU partners.

Israel

Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of nuclear weapons in Israel. [119809]

Alistair Burt: We have regular discussions with the Government of Israel on a wide range of nuclear-related issues. Israel has not declared a nuclear weapons programme. We encourage Israel to sign up to the non-proliferation treaty and call on them to agree a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Middle East

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has had discussions with his counterpart in the Israeli government on that government's response to the requirement in UNSC Resolution 1860 that it should reopen crossing points to Gaza. [118769]

Alistair Burt: In close co-ordination with our EU partners, we continue to press the Israeli Government to ease access restrictions on Gaza. As I saw when I visited in July 2011 the Israeli restrictions on movements of goods and people do tremendous damage to the economy and living standards of ordinary people in Gaza. The current situation fosters radicalisation and empowers Hamas, while punishing the ordinary people of Gaza. An improved economy is not only essential for the people of Gaza, but firmly in Israel's security interests.

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department holds on whether EU research funding has been granted to Israeli companies that operate in illegal settlements in each year since 2005. [118779]

Alistair Burt: We are strongly opposed to Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: they are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace. No UK public funds have gone in direct support of settlements. We understand that Ahava Dead Sea Laboratories received an EU contribution totalling 1.13 million Euros under the Fifth and Seventh Framework Programmes for Research, Development and Technological Development. We are following up with the European Commission to outline our concerns.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the government of Israel about the applications made to the Israeli High Court of Justice by the organisation Kfar Adumim calling for the Israeli Civil Administration to demolish the Jahalin School in Khan Al Ahmar; and if he will make a statement. [118919]

Alistair Burt: This issue was raised most recently by our ambassador to Israel and our Consul-General in Jerusalem when they called on Israel's Co-ordinator of Government Activities in the Territories on 17 July.

We have been informed that on 13 September, a panel of three judges of the Israeli High Court of Justice will hear the petition in order to reach a verdict, whether to accept the petition to demolish the school or to deny the petition.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to his Israeli counterpart on the proposed demolition of homes in the Al-Bustan neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. [119381]

Alistair Burt: We have raised this issue with the Israeli Minister of Interior, the Israeli ambassador to the UK and the Municipality of Jerusalem.

We are urging Israel to desist from the demolitions and evictions, which we consider to be contrary to Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law, harmful to the peace process, as well as causing unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians.

Russia

Mr MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Russian authorities on the House of Commons resolution of 7 March 2012 on Sergei Magnitsky. [119489]

Mr Lidington: We have concerns about the Magnitsky case and continue to make those concerns clear to Russia at the highest levels, noting the strong parliamentary and media interest in the case.

In a meeting with the Russian ambassador on 3 September, I raised the continuing lack of progress in the investigation into Magnitsky's death and urged the Russian authorities to press forward with their investigation, and hold those responsible to account. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), raised the lack of

progress in bringing those responsible to justice with Foreign Minister Lavrov when he visited Moscow at the end of May. The Prime Minister raised our concerns about the human rights situation in Russia with President Putin when they met in Downing street in August.

Mr MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings and correspondence his Department has had with the Home Department in connection with the death of Sergei Magnitsky in 2012 to date. [119490]

Mr Lidington: Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials consulted Home Office officials this year as part of preparations for parliamentary debates which called for visa bans on those allegedly involved in Magnitsky's death. There has also been routine contact with the Home Office over correspondence and parliamentary questions relating to proposed visa bans over the Magnitsky case. During the backbench debate on human rights and the death of Sergei Magnitsky on 7 March, the Government set out that foreign nationals from outside the European economic area (EEA) may only come to the UK if they satisfy the requirements of the immigration rules. Where there is independent, reliable and credible evidence that an individual has committed human rights abuses, the individual will not normally be permitted to enter the UK. The UK remains seriously concerned about the lack of progress in the investigation into Sergei Magnitsky's death, and has set out these concerns to the Russian authorities at the highest levels.

Syria

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the situation in Syria; and if he will make a statement. [118766]

Alistair Burt: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), to the House on 3 September 2011, *Official Report*, columns 59-68.

Turks and Caicos Islands

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the proposed imposition of value added tax in the Turks and Caicos Islands; and if he will make a statement. [119735]

Mark Simmonds: During the visit of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (Mr Bellingham), to the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) in June this year, the implementation of VAT was raised with him. It was also a topic for discussion during the recent visit to London by the leader of the Progressive National Party, Dr Ewing. We received copies of letters sent to the TCI Government on this subject, together with correspondence from members of the public.

The British Government has consistently made it clear that the introduction of VAT is a decision for the TCI Government. We support their decision to introduce VAT on the basis of an assessment that it will provide a more stable, fairer and broader based system of revenue.

The VAT Bill was signed into law by the Acting Governor on 18 July 2012.

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements his Department made for monitoring the 9 November 2012 elections in the Turks and Caicos Islands. [119740]

Mark Simmonds: The Turks and Caicos Islands Government is inviting, with our financial support, observers for the forthcoming elections. They have agreed with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (UK) to organise an observer mission including UK and regional monitors.

UK Membership of EU

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received calling for a referendum on the UK's continuing membership of the EU. [119638]

Mr Lidington: I receive regular representations from MPs and members of the public on all matters relating to the UK's relationship with the EU, including a referendum on membership.

United Arab Emirates

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has raised any concerns with the government of the United Arab Emirates on the treatment and care of UK citizens who are in custody in that country, either in prison or on remand, since May 2010. [118718]

Alistair Burt: When a British national raises concerns over their mistreatment in detention anywhere in the world, we will, with their permission, raise it with local authorities. We have done so in the United Arab Emirates.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Boxing

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport how much she plans to allocate to boxing in 2013. [119101]

Hugh Robertson: In the period 2009-13 the Amateur Boxing Association of England (ABAE) is receiving £4.5 million from Sport England to support grassroots sport. Sport England is currently assessing the plans put forward by the ABAE to maintain and increase grassroots participation in boxing over the period 2013-17. Its funding decisions will be made at the end of the year.

The total UK Sport funding to support elite Boxing in 2013 will depend on the investment the sport receives for the 2013-17 Rio 2016 cycle which will begin 1 April 2013. Boxing's funding for the London 2012 cycle, which totals £9,551,400, will continue until 31 March 2013. Final decisions on funding the Rio 2016 cycle will be made in December.

Broadband

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport with reference to her announcement on 20 August 2012 that it is the Government's ambition for the UK to have the fastest broadband of any major European country by 2015, which European countries does she consider to be major. [119387]

Mr Vaizey: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport considers countries such as France, Germany, Italy and Spain as being the major European nations which we compare ourselves with regarding broadband speed and other key performance indicators.

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the number of households in urban areas that receive broadband speeds of less than 2 mbps as a consequence of being connected to telephone exchanges that are more than five kilometres away from their home. [119388]

Mr Vaizey: The Statistical Digest of Rural England 2012 estimated, using modelled distance data, that 5% of households in urban areas in England had no or slow broadband in 2010:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2012/06/12/pb13782-stats-digest-rural-england> (page 71)

Ofcom published data for the percentage of premises receiving less than 2 Mbit/s for individual local authorities in summer 2011:

<http://maps.ofcom.org.uk/broadband/>

Local Broadcasting

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (1) what her future plans are for local television in Plymouth and Swansea; [119389]

(2) what assessment she has made of the reasons why no bids were made to her Department for new local television stations in Plymouth and Swansea. [119390]

Mr Vaizey: Ofcom may choose to re-advertise the licences for Plymouth and Swansea in a future round of licensing; this will depend on the overall demand by potential providers of local TV in those cities. Licences were advertised in locations where there had been expressions of interest and where there was good spectrum coverage and, ultimately, it is up to market participants to decide whether or not to bid. Ofcom will take a view on the timing and location of the next tranche, once the first licences have been awarded.

Olympic Games 2012: Overseas Visitors

Gareth Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what estimate she

has made of the number of foreign nationals who visited (a) London and (b) the UK to attend the Olympic and Paralympic Games. [119021]

Hugh Robertson: These statistics will be collated through the International Passenger Survey and published by the Office for National Statistics shortly. However, a regional breakdown will not be available for some time.

Olympic Games 2012: Tickets

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what London 2012 Olympics tickets were allocated to (a) Ministers, (b) politicians and (c) special advisers. [119102]

Hugh Robertson: In the autumn, the Government will publish a list of those dignitaries to whom, and events for which, it allocated tickets, the cost to Government of those tickets, and the number of staff who purchased tickets.

Public Libraries

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what data on libraries her Department gathers on a regular basis. [119496]

Mr Vaizey: I refer the hon. Member for Barnsley Central to the answer I gave him on 5 September 2012, *Official Report*, column 349W.

Sports

Simon Hart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what assessment her Department has made of the uptake of less well-known sports following the London 2012 Olympics; and what (a) financial and (b) other assistance is being made available to groups and clubs to assist with this. [118797]

Hugh Robertson: Recognising the opportunity of a home Olympic and Paralympic Games to promote participation in sport, Sport England has, for the first time, invested in all Olympic and Paralympic sports to maintain and increase grassroots participation between 2009 and 2013. This Exchequer and national lottery investment is made through the sports' national governing bodies. Many of these organisations have reported a surge in interest since the London 2012 Olympic Games got under way. Official figures on sports participation levels will be available in December when the Active People Survey results for the period are published.

Other financial assistance is being offered to grassroots sports groups and clubs via Sport England's legacy programme Places, People, Play, including the inspired Facilities fund which is currently accepting bids from sports groups to improve local sports facilities, in addition to financial assistance, the Club Leaders programme is providing free training and support to those doing the day-to-day running of community sports groups, helping to create an economically sustainable and enterprising club network.

Sports: Disability

Karen Lumley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what the proposed budget is for Paralympic Sport in each of the next four years. [119313]

Hugh Robertson: Final funding decisions will be made by UK Sport in December. UK Sport cannot speculate on the future funding of paralympic sports at this stage, but the total funding available will depend on the investment each sport receives for the 2013-17 Rio 2016 cycle. Planning for this cycle is already well under way and every sport is being given the opportunity to make its case.

HEALTH

Abortion

Mr Virendra Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many repeat abortions there were on women aged (a) under 20, (b) 20 to 24, (c) 25 to 29, (d) 30 to 34 and (e) 35 years old and over resident in each primary care trust area in England in the last year for which figures are available. [118905]

Dr Poulter: The available information has been placed in the Library.

Ambulance Services

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulance stations were closed in (a) England and Wales, (b) the east midlands, (c) Nottinghamshire and (d) Ashfield constituency in each of the last three years. [118993]

Anna Soubry: This information is not centrally collected. The management of ambulance estates is a matter for individual ambulance trusts.

Gareth Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulances were involved in road accidents in each of the last 10 years. [119017]

Anna Soubry: This information is not centrally collected. Individual ambulance trusts may keep records of accidents involving ambulances.

Gareth Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulance drivers were prosecuted for dangerous driving while on duty in each of the last 10 years. [119018]

Anna Soubry: This information is not centrally collected. Individual ambulance trusts may keep records of any prosecutions of their staff for dangerous driving while on duty.

Apprentices

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many apprentices were employed by (a) his Department, (b) its principal contractors and (c) the NHS in each of the last five years. [118606]

Anna Soubry: The Department has employed three external apprentices over the past five years. They joined the Department in February 2010 and, on 3 January 2012, they became permanent members of staff, on completion of their apprenticeships.

Of the Department's current principal contractors, EMCOR (the Department's facilities management provider) had one apprentice during both 2010 and 2011 but has none at present. The Department's catering provider Quadrant had one apprentice during 2010 but also has none currently. Information on apprenticeships with other current and previous contractors is not available.

The national health service is now one of the largest public sector employers of apprenticeships and one of the top three employers of apprentices in the country. It has the biggest range (80 plus) of apprenticeship frameworks of any national employer. Over the last few years, the rapid expansion in apprenticeships across the wider economy has been mirrored in the NHS. This increase has been delivered through the Department's investment of £25 million in 2009-210 and a further £10 million in 2010-11. The numbers of NHS apprenticeships commissions were:

2008-09: 1,300

2009-10: 8,167

2010-11: 9,547.

Although there is no allocated central funding for this policy, strategic health authorities had 10,313 apprentices in training in 2011-12.

Contained in these figures are the number of current NHS staff who have begun to undertake an apprenticeship programme as well as new start apprentices who are entering into employment within the NHS.

Breast Cancer

Jim Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to ensure that older breast cancer patients (a) receive a personalised, written care plan, (b) have their individual physical, psychological, social and financial needs assessed regularly as part of their care and (c) are offered appropriate support and treatment to address their needs in relation to their body image. [118726]

Norman Lamb: Through the National Cancer Survivorship Initiative (NCSI) we are working to ensure that all cancer survivors, including older breast cancer patients, get the care and support they need to lead as healthy a life as possible for as long as possible. The NCSI Assessment and Care Planning workstream has been looking at how best to ensure that survivors needs are identified and plans put in place to meet them from an early stage. Having a needs assessment during and at the end of treatment helps to identify issues and allows a personalised care plan to be developed in partnership with the cancer survivor.

The care plan is 'owned by' the cancer survivor and can cover a range of topics such as planned surveillance and follow-up care; the symptoms of possible reoccurrence and consequences of treatment; signposting to support groups and local services; lifestyle advice around diet and exercise; psychological support; and work and finance concerns.

Over the past two years, the NCSI and NHS Improvement have been piloting the Assessment and Care Planning process, as well as other survivorship models of care, across a number of sites in England. The evidence gathered will inform the NCSI's future recommendations for commissioning cancer services to support the care, advice and information needs of people living with and beyond cancer.

Caesarean Sections

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much NHS funding was provided for caesarean operations in each of the last five years; and what the funding will be in each year until 2015. [119324]

Anna Soubry: Funding is currently allocated to primary care trusts (PCTs) on the basis of the relative needs of their populations. These revenue allocations are not broken down by service or policy area. It is for PCTs to commission services to meet the health care needs of their local populations, taking account of local and national priorities.

The allocation of resources to clinical commissioning groups from April 2013 are a matter for the NHS Commissioning Board.

Care Quality Commission

Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many hours were spent by staff in the Care Quality Commission on staff forum duties in the last year for which figures are available; [119300]

(2) what the cost to the public purse was of the provision of a staff forum in the Care Quality Commission in the last year for which figures are available. [119301]

Anna Soubry: The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has informed the Department that, from October 2011 to September 2012, 478.50 hours were spent by staff on staff forum duties. Within the same period, management time spent on staff forum duties amounted to 147.50 hours.

The staff cost of the forum from October 2011 to September 2012 is £9,827.15.

The management cost of the staff forum from October 2011 to September 2012 is £5,595.57.

Chiropody

Charlotte Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the potential benefits of including toenail clipping within chiropody services as part of preventative care and public health measures. [118828]

Norman Lamb: No assessment has been made centrally. It is for local health and care organisations to commission services to meet the needs of their communities including the provision of chiropody and other foot care services. Most toenail cutting can be safely delivered by family members or by the voluntary or private sector, with the necessity for chiropodist led services being limited to those with clearly defined clinical needs, for example diabetes.

Circumcision

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many male circumcisions were performed on the NHS in each of the last five years; what the ages were of these patients; and what the total cost to the public purse was in each such year. [119325]

Anna Soubry: Information on the cost of male circumcisions performed in the national health service is not available. Such information as is available is in the following table:

Count of finished consultant episodes¹ with a primary or secondary procedure² of Circumcision (N30.3) by age from 2006-07 to 2010-11

Age at start of episode	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Less than 1 year	676	783	1,016	1,124	870
1	684	701	694	745	697
2	672	686	731	697	584
3	985	1,056	1,060	1,042	896
4	1,088	1,118	1,094	1,013	936
5	987	1,141	992	1,032	910
6	1,083	1,020	948	912	862
7	1,052	1,021	926	866	802
8	936	934	927	872	755
9	771	882	829	779	719
10	726	811	761	728	736
11	632	640	661	676	615
12	519	552	531	504	508
13	352	387	381	409	368
14	261	288	249	303	264
15	197	217	294	304	294
16	284	320	344	439	362
17	341	415	419	467	426
18	353	404	485	449	499
19	384	436	471	446	458
20	363	431	457	470	489
21	403	413	426	421	470
22	333	387	388	430	429
23	342	371	363	389	432
24	348	355	389	350	399
25	305	336	340	332	378
26	329	334	344	323	319
27	295	368	322	335	337
28	262	305	302	340	301
29	257	298	288	307	301
30	239	247	261	298	286
31	254	288	292	227	300
32	255	280	259	253	256
33	240	270	241	245	244
34	258	276	230	246	228
35	269	289	288	246	247
36	269	291	257	289	268
37	284	274	292	280	239
38	258	299	274	306	247
39	310	287	283	265	284
40	222	277	288	277	295
41	258	280	275	269	302
42	256	260	257	277	278
43	250	266	280	278	298
44	255	266	294	286	305
45	248	246	293	298	291
46	234	285	259	283	292
47	233	262	268	288	297
48	225	242	219	277	313
49	213	236	229	263	306
50	192	208	233	278	290
51	200	205	210	260	268
52	218	203	238	248	237
53	190	236	210	230	248
54	192	206	217	200	256
55	194	213	244	237	212
56	189	208	194	235	261

Count of finished consultant episodes¹ with a primary or secondary procedure² of Circumcision (N30.3) by age from 2006-07 to 2010-11

Age at start of episode	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
57	208	203	228	204	237
58	190	183	215	222	208
59	194	199	200	196	224
60	195	227	194	215	200
61	163	193	216	223	216
62	183	165	205	240	249
63	152	190	187	232	232
64	159	203	196	204	212
65	165	184	199	193	212
66	166	160	173	177	199
67	177	169	168	217	205
68	171	175	176	180	185
69	153	189	172	179	188
70 years and over	2,217	2,500	2,600	2,685	2,811
Unknown	23	25	106	100	159
Yearly total	27,141	29,275	29,552	30,110	29,501

¹ A finished consultant episode (FCE) is a continuous period of admitted patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. FCEs are counted against the year in which they end. Figures do not represent the number of different patients, as a person may have more than one episode of care within the same stay in hospital or in different stays in the same year.

² The number of episodes where the procedure (or intervention) was recorded in any of the 24 (12 from 2002-03 to 2006-07 and four prior to 2002-03) procedure fields in a HES record. A record is only included once in each count, even if the procedure is recorded in more than one procedure field of the record.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), The Health and Social Care Information Centre

Compulsorily Detained Mental Patients

Jack Lopresti: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change there has been in the number of places of safety as defined in the Mental Health Act 1983 available since July 2011; and what steps he has taken since that date to ensure that people detained under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 are taken to an appropriate place of safety. [119056]

Norman Lamb: The Mental Health Act 1983 defines a wide range of places that could act as a place of safety. The Department does not collect information on the number of places that have been or could be used for this purpose. Uses of hospital-based places of safety increased from 12,038 in 2009-10 to 14,111 in 2010-11. The Department issued the Code of Practice Mental Health Act 1983 in 2008. National protocols developed by the National Policing Improvement Agency were issued in 2010. They were endorsed by the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Department of Health. The Royal College of Psychiatrists issued their most recent standards on the use of section 136 of the Mental Health Act in July 2011. Since then there has been no further guidance on this topic.

Diabetes

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether (a) diabetes and (b) the role of diabetic specialist nurses were discussed at the informal Health Council on 10-11 July 2012. [118873]

Norman Lamb: There was no discussion of diabetes or diabetic specialist nurses at the Informal Health Council on 10-11 July 2012.

Diabetes: Leicester

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions for diabetes were given in Leicester City primary care trust area in (a) 2009, (b) 2010, (c) 2011 and (d) 2012 to date. [118605]

Norman Lamb: The number of prescription items written in the Leicester City primary care trust area and dispensed in the community in the United Kingdom in the period requested for drugs classified as drugs used in diabetes in the British National Formulary (BNF) section 6.1. is shown in the following table.

Number of items prescribed in Leicester City primary care trust and dispensed in the UK for drugs used in diabetes

	Items
2009	325,438
2010	361,243
2011	387,927
2012 (Q1 and Q2)	198,240

Notes:

1. Please note that 2012 quarter 1 and quarter 2 covers 1 January to 30 June 2012, which is the latest data available. Other years are full calendar years from 1 January to 31 December.

2. ePACT Data—This information was obtained from the Prescribing Analysis and CosT tool (PACT) system, which covers prescriptions prescribed by GPs, nurses, pharmacists and others in England and dispensed in the community in the UK. For data at PCT level, prescriptions written by a prescriber located in a particular PCT but dispensed outside that PCT will be included in the PCT in which the prescriber is based.

3. Prescriptions written in England but dispensed outside England are included. Prescriptions written in hospitals/clinics that are dispensed in the community, prescriptions dispensed in hospitals, dental prescribing and private prescriptions are not included in PACT data. It is important to note this as some BNF sections have a high proportion of prescriptions written in hospitals that are dispensed in the community.

4. Prescription Items—Prescriptions are written on a prescription form known as a FP10. Each single item written on the form is counted as a prescription item.

5. BNF Classifications—The Prescription Cost Analysis system uses the therapeutic classifications defined in the British National Formulary (BNF). No information on why a drug is prescribed is available and since drugs can be prescribed to treat more than one condition it is impossible to separate the different conditions that a drug was prescribed for.

Source:

ePACT data

East London NHS Foundation Trust

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost is of an unplanned emergency mental health hospital admission in the East London NHS Foundation Trust for each night of stay. [119009]

Anna Soubry: This is a matter for the East London NHS Foundation Trust. We have written to the Trust's chair, Baroness Molly Meacher, informing her of your enquiry. She will reply shortly and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Food Standards Agency

Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many hours were spent by staff in the Food Standards Agency on staff consultation groups or staff fora in the last year for which figures are available; [119298]

(2) what the cost to the public purse was of the provision of staff consultation groups or staff fora in the Food Standards Agency in the last year for which figures are available. [119302]

Dr Poulter: The information requested is not collected centrally by the Food Standards Agency.

Food: Labelling

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department holds on how many of the 10 largest restaurant and pub owning companies have agreed to provide calorie information on menus. [118784]

Dr Poulter: Of the top ten largest restaurant and pub owning companies, as measured by numbers of outlets, the following companies are signed up to the out of home calorie labelling pledge:

Burger King United Kingdom Ltd
KFC UKI
McDonald's Restaurants Ltd
Pizza Hut (UK) Ltd
Subway International BV.

Gender Recognition

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were treated for gender dysphoria in each of the last five years; what the ages of these patients were; and what the total cost to the public purse was in each such year. [119323]

Norman Lamb: The Department does not centrally collect this information.

The commissioning of gender identity services is currently the responsibility of primary care trusts (PCTs). PCTs are being abolished and, following the passing of the Health and Social Care Act 2012; the NHS Commissioning Board Authority is now responsible for the transition of specialised commissioning, including gender identity services. From April 2013, the NHS Commissioning Board will come fully into being and we anticipate that it will commission and fund gender identity services.

General Practitioners

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what arrangements govern the outer practice boundary areas for GP patients; [118647]

(2) what discussions his Department has had with GP surgeries about extending practice boundary areas. [118648]

Anna Soubry: As part of the general practitioner (GP) contract agreement reached with the General Practitioners Committee of the British Medical Association last year, GP practices should agree with their primary care trust an outer practice boundary area where they will retain, where clinically appropriate, existing patients who have moved house in the outer boundary area. In addition, following a consultation on opening up choice of GP practice and discussions with the British Medical Association, we are piloting new models of accessing GP practices in areas of central London, Nottingham, Manchester and Salford. In these areas, patients who live outside the practice boundary area may register with a GP practice participating in the pilot or visit the practice for a consultation without registering.

Richard Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time was for a GP appointment in (a) Gloucester, (b) the South West and (c) England in the latest period for which figures are available. [119351]

Anna Soubry: The GP Patient Survey asks patients about their experiences of general practitioner (GP) services. The latest results were published on 14 June 2012. No information is collected on the average time

patients have to wait for a GP appointment. Results relating to waiting in surgeries prior to GP appointments are as follows:

How long after your appointment time do you normally wait to be seen?

	South Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust (PCT)	Gloucestershire PCT	South West SHA	Percentage National
I don't normally have appointments at a particular time	4	3	4	3
Less than 5 minutes	8	10	10	10
5-15 minutes	59	61	59	58
More than 15 minutes	24	22	23	24
Can't remember	4	4	4	4

Full results can be found on the GP Patient Survey website:

www.gp-patient.co.uk/results/

Figures are net plus agency fees and commissions (rounded to nearest £10,000). Figures exclude VAT and Central Office of Information fees.

Health Education

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department spent on mass media public health campaigns in each of the last five years. [119373]

Anna Soubry: The following table shows spend figures for mass media public health campaigns in each of the last five years:

Campaigns	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
	<i>£ million</i>				
Alcohol	0.61	4.77	4.65	—	0.98
Antibiotics	0.39	1.15	—	—	—
Children's Health/ Pregnancy	—	—	—	0.40	—
Cancer—Lung	—	—	—	—	0.59
Cancer— Bowel	—	—	—	—	3.17
Child Immunisation	—	0.29	—	—	—
Dementia	—	—	—	—	1.63
Drugs Advertising and FRANK (Share with Home Office)	0.67	1.45	1.66	—	—
Flu Immunisation	0.98	1.45	0.81	—	—
Hepatitis C	1.34	1.30	1.39	—	—
HPV Vaccination	—	2.80	4.07	—	—
National Dementia Strategy	—	—	1.67	0.59	—
Obesity/ Change4Life	—	7.69	16.16	1.32	2.07
Pandemic Flu	—	—	11.24	—	—
Respiratory and Hand Hygiene	0.32	1.53	2.63	0.80	—
Sexual Health Awareness	3.11	2.83	8.16	—	—
Smoking— Tobacco Control	16.17	23.38	24.91	0.46	3.16
Stroke Awareness	—	4.52	2.45	0.54	0.80

Heart Diseases and Strokes

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects the NHS Commissioning Board to publish its recommendations on the future of cardiac and stroke networks; [118175]

(2) what steps he plans to take to ensure that the NHS Commissioning Board provides adequate funding and support for cardiac and stroke networks beyond 2013; [118176]

(3) whether the NHS Commissioning Board plans to establish existing cardiac and stroke networks as strategic clinical networks. [118177]

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the NHS Commissioning Board Special Health Authority plans to publish its recommendations on the future of cardiac and stroke networks. [118236]

Anna Soubry: The NHS Commissioning Board Authority's plans to establish a small number of national strategic clinical networks to improve health services for specific patient groups or conditions were set out in "The Way Forward: Strategic clinical networks", published on 26 July 2012. A copy of the document has been placed in the Library.

Strategic clinical networks, hosted and funded by the NHS Commissioning Board, will cover patient groups or conditions where improvements can be made through an integrated, whole system approach. The networks will help local commissioners of national health service care to reduce unwarranted variation in services and encourage innovation.

The conditions chosen for the first strategic clinical networks are:

- cancer;
- cardiovascular disease (including cardiac, stroke, diabetes and renal disease);
- maternity and children; and
- mental health, dementia and neurological conditions.

The NHS Commissioning Board will determine levels of funding and the arrangements for supporting strategic clinical networks.

Heart Diseases: Children

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children had heart attacks by (a) age, (b) gender and (c) location in each of the last five years.

[119320]

Dr Poulter: The following tables provide figures of the number of finished admission episodes (FAEs) for children aged 17 or under with a primary or secondary diagnosis of heart attack, by age, gender and strategic health authority (SHA) of residence for the years 2006-07 to 2010-11.

These data are not a count of people as the same person may have been admitted on more than one occasion within the year. The table includes episodes classified as acute myocardial infarction or subsequent myocardial infarction.

Count of finished admission episodes (FAEs)¹ for patients aged under 18 with a primary or secondary diagnosis of heart attack² by (a) age, (b) gender and (c) SHA of residence³ for the years 2006-07 to 2010-11⁴: Activity in English NHS Hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector

Age group	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
0	7	11	12	9	3
1	—	1	—	—	1

Count of finished admission episodes (FAEs)¹ for patients aged under 18 with a primary or secondary diagnosis of heart attack² by (a) age, (b) gender and (c) SHA of residence³ for the years 2006-07 to 2010-11⁴: Activity in English NHS Hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector

Age group	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
2	—	1	—	—	—
3	—	1	—	—	—
4	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	1	—	2	—
6	—	1	—	1	—
7	1	—	1	1	—
8	—	—	—	1	1
9	—	—	—	—	—
10	—	—	—	—	—
11	—	—	—	—	—
12	—	—	—	1	—
13	1	—	1	—	—
14	1	—	—	1	4
15	—	—	—	—	—
16	3	2	1	1	2
17	4	5	3	2	4

Gender	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Male	11	14	14	10	13
Female	6	9	4	9	2

Strategic health authority of residence	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Q30—North East SHA	—	—	1	1	—
Q31—North West SHA	2	3	2	2	3
Q32—Yorkshire and the Humber SHA	—	3	4	3	2
Q33—East Midlands SHA	3	1	1	2	1
Q34—West Midlands SHA	3	1	1	2	1
Q35—East of England SHA	—	4	4	1	3
Q36—London SHA	8	3	1	1	3
Q37—South East Coast SHA	—	4	3	2	1
Q38—South Central SHA	—	—	—	3	1
Q39—South West SHA	1	1	1	1	—
X—Foreign (incl. Isle of Man and Channel Islands)	—	2	—	1	—
Y—Unknown	—	1	—	—	—

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 Number of episodes in which the patient had a (named) primary or secondary diagnosis

The number of episodes where this diagnosis was recorded in any of the 20 (14 from 2002-03 to 2006-07 and seven 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.

ICD-10 Codes used:

I21—Acute myocardial infarction

I22—Subsequent myocardial infarction

³ SHA/PCT of residence

The strategic health authority (SHA) or primary care trust (PCT) containing the patient's normal home address. This does not necessarily reflect where the patient was treated as they may have travelled to another SHA/PCT for treatment.

⁴ 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 out-patient settings and so no longer include in admitted patient HES data.

Activity included

Activity in English NHS Hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Health and Social Care Information Centre

Hormone Treatments: Males

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many men of each (a) ethnicity and (b) age were treated for a hormonal imbalance in each of the last five years.

[119286]

Dr Poulter: The Department does not collect data in the form requested. However, the Department does collect data on a range of conditions which could fall under the umbrella term "hormonal imbalance". If the hon. Member would like information on any specific condition then it may be possible to provide data to support her inquiry.

Licensing

Richard Fuller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what permits and licences his Department and its public bodies issue to businesses. [118815]

Anna Soubry: The Department does not issue licences or permits.

Six of the Department's 19 public bodies issue permits and/or licences to businesses, as shown in the following table:

<i>Arm's length bodies</i>	<i>Permits issued to businesses</i>	<i>Licences issued to businesses</i>
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority	Nil	The authority grants licences described in section 11 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 (as amended), which broadly cover fertility treatment, the storage of human gametes and embryos and the use of human embryos in research
NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement	Nil	Licences to sell and deliver Productive General Practice Licences to sell and deliver all Productives (excluding Productive General Practice), Organising for Quality and Value, ThinkGlucose Licence to use Productive series materials in e-learning modules Licence for the development and commercialisation rights in the Scenario Generator NHS Institute Worldwide licences (placed in the Library as separate Annex)
Human Tissue Authority	Nil	Tissue for Patient treatment Anatomy Post Mortem Public Display Research ODD
The Health and Social Care Information Centre	Nil	Data Sharing Agreements Data Re-use Agreements
Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency	Good Laboratory Practice Good Distribution Process Good Clinical Practice GPhVP ¹ certificates Export certificates Blood Establishment Authorisation Clinical trials authorisation	Traditional herbal registrations Homeopathic registrations Marketing authorisations Parallel import licences Wholesale dealer licences Manufacturers Licences Good manufacturing practice
NHS Blood and Transplant	Nil	Licence to use RUM-1 anti-D blood grouping diagnostic reagent Licence to use MAD-2 anti-D blood grouping diagnostic reagent Licence to use BRIC 8 anti-C3d blood grouping diagnostic reagent Licence to use BIRMA-1 anti-A blood grouping diagnostic reagent Licence to use BIRMA 17c anti-CD66 markers on stem cells and white blood cells to characterise cell types during stem cell harvesting and processing Licence to use BIRMA-K3 anti-CD34 markers on stem cells and white blood cells to characterise cell types during stem cell harvesting and processing Licence to use 5B12 anti-CD41 markers on stem cells and white blood cells to characterise cell types during stem cell harvesting and processing Licence to use Pulse Blood Supply. Management System (software) ²

¹ Good pharmacovigilance practice

² This is licensed to the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service and the Isle of Man Blood Service. Both are national blood services rather than businesses in the normally understood sense.

Low Birthweight Babies

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has made an assessment at ward level of the incidence of low birthweights around industrial sites which emit gases. [118646]

Dr Poulter: The Department has made no such assessment.

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) has assessed the impact on health of emissions to air from municipal waste incinerators. The agency concluded that modern, well managed incinerators make only a small contribution to local concentrations of air pollutants. It stated that it is possible that such small additions could have an impact on health but such effects, if they exist, are likely to be very small and not detectable.

The HPA has also considered the impact on health of emissions from landfill sites. It concluded that a well-managed modern landfill site does not pose a significant risk to human health.

Both documents can be found on the HPA's website at:

www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1251473372218

www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1309969974126

Mental Health Services: Telephone Services

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which NHS mental health services have introduced a telephone crisis service; and what assessment his Department has made of the extent to which unplanned emergency mental health hospital admissions can be avoided through the provision of such a service; [119054]

(2) if his Department will make an assessment of the cost-effectiveness of providing a telephone mental health crisis service as a means of avoiding emergency mental health admissions. [119055]

Norman Lamb: We do not collect these figures centrally. We have not assessed the effect telephone crisis services have on the amount of emergency hospital admissions, nor their cost-effectiveness.

The purpose of Crisis Resolution Home Treatment services is to provide treatment to mentally ill patients in order to prevent hospital admission. The criteria for crisis teams is to be available to respond 24 hours, seven days a week. Teams work as part of a mental health system and should pick up all appropriate cases within the primary care trust. People known to services should be supplied with emergency access numbers to call in a crisis.

Midwives

Karen Lumley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to the recent findings by the Care Quality Commission, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that all hospitals have the sufficient number of midwifery staff to provide women with good quality care during childbirth. [118780]

Dr Poulter: The Government are absolutely committed to ensuring that we have the right number of trained midwives, especially given the increased numbers and complexity of births in recent years. Women should receive personalised maternity care focusing on the best outcomes for women and their babies, and the woman's experience of care.

The number of midwives in the NHS has increased by 922 between May 2010 and May 2012. We are keeping training numbers at a record high, with 2,484 places available in 2011-12, and 2,578 places planned for 2012-13. There are currently around 5,000 midwives in training.

It is the responsibility of local hospitals and other national health service organisations to plan and deliver a workforce appropriate to the needs of their local population, based on clinical need and sound evidence.

NHS Commissioning Board

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 5 July 2012, *Official Report*, column 760W, on health services, when the Clinical Advisory Group analysing the specialised services national definition set will recommend which services would be appropriate for direct commissioning by the NHS Commissioning Board; and when the final outcome will be announced. [118006]

Anna Soubry: Ministers are currently considering the recommendations made by the Clinical Advisory Group on the list of services that will be directly commissioned by the NHS Commissioning Board from April 2013. It is expected that Ministers will be in a position to make an announcement shortly.

NHS: Ancillary Staff

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time equivalent NHS healthcare assistants were employed in each London NHS trust (a) in cash terms and (b) at current prices (i) in total and (ii) per capita in (A) 2009-10, (B) 2010-11 and (C) 2011-12. [119384]

Dr Poulter: Information on the cost of employing national health service staff is not held centrally. The following table provides information on the number of full time equivalent NHS healthcare assistants employed by each organisation within the London strategic health authority area as at 30 September in each of the years 2009, 2010 and 2011.

NHS hospital and community health services: health care assistant¹ in the London strategic health authority area by organisation as at 30 September each specified year

		Full time equivalent		
		2009	2010	2011
London strategic health authority area		6,503	6,827	7,215
Barking and Dagenham PCT	5C2	5	6	6
Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust	RF4	553	595	589
Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	RVL	10	14	328
Barnet PCT	5A9	16	31	0

NHS hospital and community health services: health care assistant¹ in the London strategic health authority area by organisation as at 30 September each specified year

		Full time equivalent		
		2009	2010	2011
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust	RRP	322	291	306
Barts and the London NHS Trust	RNJ	5	4	26
Bexley Care Trust	TAK	19	0	0
Brent Teaching PCT	5K5	54	56	0
Bromley PCT	5A7	141	98	31
Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust	TAF	50	51	40
Camden PCT	5K7	27	27	73
Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust	RV3	45	39	31
Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	RQM	151	163	161
City and Hackney Teaching PCT	5C3	9	9	4
Croydon Health Services NHS Trust	RJ6	0	2	2
Ealing Hospital NHS Trust	RC3	154	154	198
Ealing PCT	5HX	2	2	0
Enfield PCT	5C1	44	27	1
Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust	RVR	202	203	203
Great Ormond Street Hospital For Children NHS Trust	RP4	113	120	113
Greenwich Teaching PCT	5A8	38	31	0
Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust	RJ1	134	272	364
Haringey Teaching PCT	5C9	5	1	0
Harrow PCT	5K6	1	1	0
Havering PCT	5A4	59	67	45
Hillingdon Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	RAS	267	251	261
Hillingdon PCT	5AT	33	41	34
Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	RQX	139	140	136
Hounslow PCT	5HY	18	0	0
Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust	RYJ	332	385	430
Islington PCT	5K8	28	24	0
Kensington and Chelsea PCT	5LA	23	4	0
King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	RJZ	411	432	439
Kingston Hospital NHS Trust	RAX	183	191	188
Lambeth PCT	5LD	26	33	0
Lewisham Healthcare NHS Trust	RJ2	143	185	174
Lewisham PCT	5LF	0	0	8
London Strategic Health Authority	Q36	0	0	3
Newham University Hospital NHS Trust	RNH	5	31	7
North East London NHS Foundation Trust	RAT	0	22	177
North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust	RAP	36	2	2
North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	RV8	282	272	286
Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust	RPG	0	16	20
Redbridge PCT	5NA	2	2	1

NHS hospital and community health services: health care assistant¹ in the London strategic health authority area by organisation as at 30 September each specified year

		Full time equivalent		
		2009	2010	2011
Richmond and Twickenham PCT	5M6	27	46	52
Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Foundation Trust	RT3	63	84	90
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	RAL	209	253	275
Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust	RPY	23	31	69
Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust	RAN	73	86	102
South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust	RV5	81	84	74
South London Healthcare NHS Trust	RYQ	594	562	541
South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust	RQY	366	337	284
Southwark PCT	5LE	0	43	0
St George's Healthcare NHS Trust	RJ7	335	347	331
Sutton and Merton PCT	5M7	0	0	4
Tower Hamlets PCT	5C4	9	26	0
University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	RRV	351	349	400
West Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust	RFW	135	141	117
Westminster PCT	5LC	5	0	0
Whipps Cross University Hospital NHS Trust	RGC	4	6	6
Whittington Hospital NHS Trust	RKE	141	137	182

¹ Health care assistants are defined as those staff included in the Non-Medical Workforce Census with the H1 occupation code. Further information about staff coding can be found here:

<http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/data-collections/information-supporting-our-data-collections>

Data Quality:

The Health and Social Care Information Centre seeks to minimise inaccuracies and the effect of missing and invalid data but responsibility for data accuracy lies with the organisations providing the data. Methods are continually being updated to improve data quality where changes impact on figures already published. This is assessed but unless it is significant at national level figures are not changed. Impact at detailed or local level is footnoted in relevant analyses.

Notes:

1. Full time equivalent figures are rounded to the nearest whole number.
2. 2012 Annual Census data is not yet available, and is due to be published in spring 2013.

Source:

Health and Social Care Information Centre Non-Medical Workforce Census

NHS: Telephone Services

Stephen McPartland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will provide information to consumers on steps to avoid high charges of calling NHS customer helplines from mobile telephones.

[118835]

Anna Soubry: The Department published Directions to the national health service in December 2009 and issued further guidance on 23 February 2012 on the cost of telephone calls. These Directions and guidance prohibit the use of telephone numbers which charge people more than the equivalent cost of calling a geographical number to contact any part of the NHS from landlines and mobile telephones. Where NHS bodies are charging people more, all reasonable steps

should be taken to rectify this. It is for primary care trusts to ensure that local practices are compliant with the Directions and guidance.

Obesity: Surgery

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people had weight loss surgery in each region in each of the last two years of each (a) age, (b) gender and (c) ethnicity. [118787]

Dr Poulter: The NHS Information Centre has provided a count of the number of finished consultant episodes (FCEs) with a primary diagnosis of obesity and a main or secondary procedure of bariatric surgery, by age, gender, ethnic category and strategic health authority of residence for the years 2009-10 and 2010-11.

This information has been placed in the Library.

Organs: Donors

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in (a) Barnsley Central constituency, (b) South Yorkshire and (c) England and Wales died in (i) 2005, (ii) 2007, (iii) 2009 and (iv) 2011 because an organ for transplant was not available; what steps he is taking to increase the levels of organ donation; and if he will make a statement. [119495]

Dr Poulter: The information requested on deaths on the organ transplant waiting list for 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011 is provided in the following table:

Area	2005	2007	2009	2011
Barnsley Central	2	0	0	0
South Yorkshire	11	9	8	7
England and Wales	438	471	491	440

Source:

NHS Blood and Transplant

The Government has supported a number of initiatives to encourage people to add their name to the organ donation register (ODR) or to agree donation. Much of this work is led by NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) in conjunction with a number of partners. For example, people may sign up to the ODR when they register with a new general practitioner, when applying for a new passport, when applying for a European Health Insurance Card and when applying for a Boots advantage card.

We have also established a prompted choice scheme/working in partnership with the Department for Transport and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, which requires people applying for a driving licence on-line to answer a question about organ donation.

There are now over 200 highly trained specialist nurses for organ donation based in hospitals across the country. Clinical leads for organ donation have also been appointed in every acute hospital working closely with hospital organ donation committees to increase donation rates.

Due to the challenges of recruiting donors from some communities, we have also set up the National Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Transplant Alliance to increase numbers of black, Asian and minority ethnic people on

bone marrow and whole organ registers and who consent to donate. It attempts to do so by raising awareness of inequalities and promoting the importance of transplantation.

Ovarian Cancer

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to raise awareness of ovarian cancer and to encourage women to visit their GP if they are concerned that they may have the disease; [119648]

(2) what support his Department provides to GPs to ensure that they have access to the tests necessary to diagnose ovarian cancer in its early stages; [119649]

(3) what steps his Department is taking to ensure that people with cancer receive appropriate post-treatment care and support; [119650]

(4) what steps his Department has taken to improve the early diagnosis of ovarian cancer. [119656]

Norman Lamb: On 12 January 2011, we published "Improving Outcomes: A Strategy for Cancer", which sets out how the Government have committed over £450 million over the following four years to support earlier diagnosis of cancer. This money is being used to raise awareness of the symptoms of cancer; fund increased general practitioner (GP) access to diagnostic tests; and pay for more testing and treatment in secondary care. One of the tests we are increasing access to is non-obstetric ultrasound to support the diagnosis of ovarian cancer and we have now published best practice referral guidelines for GPs on how to access this test.

The strategy also set out our commitment to work with a number of rarer cancer-focused charities to assess what more can be done to encourage appropriate referrals to secondary care and to diagnose rarer cancers earlier. Further work has been undertaken with a number of these charities, including those concerned with ovarian cancer, with the aim of identifying some of the barriers to early diagnosis and to discuss potential solutions.

As a result, we are hoping to pilot a more general symptom awareness campaign later this year. In addition, in July 2012, we announced that we would trial a specific ovarian cancer signs and symptoms campaign in early 2013. We intend running local pilots in three different parts of the country and we will work with key stakeholders, including the ovarian cancer charities, to agree the key messages for the campaign. These campaigns will be evaluated to assess the potential for regional campaign activity and any subsequent national activity.

Through the National Cancer Survivorship Initiative (NCSI) we are working in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support to ensure that all cancer survivors get the care and support they need to lead as healthy a life as possible for as long as possible. Over the past two years, the NCSI has been working with NHS Improvement to prototype transformed pathways of care for adults and for children and young people in a small number of health communities. The evidence gathered will inform the NCSI's future recommendations for commissioning cancer services to support the care, advice and information needs of people living with and beyond cancer.

Plastic Surgery

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many procedures performed for the revision of scars were funded through the Restricted Treatments Funding Panel in (a) Devon primary care trust, (b) each primary care trust in the South West and (c) nationally. [118576]

Anna Soubry: The information requested is not held centrally.

Prescription Drugs

Charlotte Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions of (a) individual benzodiazepine drugs and (b) antidepressants were dispensed in 2011. [118624]

Dr Poulter: The information requested is shown in the following tables:

Table 1: The number of benzodiazepine prescription items written in the United Kingdom and dispensed in the community in England in the year 2011, as classified as hypnotics and anxiolytics in British National Formulary (BNF) Section 4.1.1 and 4.1.2.

BNF chemical name	Prescription items (thousand)
Alprazolam	└—
Chlordiazepoxide Hydrochloride	195.3
Diazepam	5,219.6
Flurazepam Hydrochloride	└—
Loprazolam Mesilate	78.6
Lorazepam	989.8
Lormetazepam	50.7
Nitrazepam	956.5
Oxazepam	163.2
Temazepam	2,627.7
Total for BNF Section 4.1 ²	10,281.4

¹ Less than 50 prescription items dispensed.

² Figures may not sum to total due to rounding.

Source:

Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) system

Table 2: The number of benzodiazepine prescription items written in the United Kingdom and dispensed in the community in England in the year 2011, as classified as antiepileptic drugs in British National Formulary (BNF) section 4.8.1

BNF chemical name	Prescriptions items (thousand)
Clobazam	200.4
Clonazepam	683.5
Midazolam Hydrochloride	2.5
Midazolam Maleate	37.7
Total for BNF Section 4.8 ¹	924.2

¹ Figures may not sum to total due to rounding

Source:

Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) system

Table 3: The number of benzodiazepine prescription items written in the United Kingdom and dispensed in the community in England in the year 2011, as classified as anaesthesia drugs in British National Formulary (BNF) section 15.1.4

BNF chemical name	Prescription items (thousand)
Midazolam Hydrochloride	102.4
Total for BNF Section 15.1	102.4

Source:

Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) system

Table 4: The number of antidepressant prescription items written in the United Kingdom and dispensed in the community in England in the year 2011, as classified as Antidepressant drugs in British National Formulary (BNF) section 4.3

BNF chemical name	Number of items (thousand)
Antidepressant drugs	46,677.8
Total for BNF Section 4.3	46,677.8

Source:

Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) system

Prescription Drugs: Misuse

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to answer to the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood of 6 December 2010, *Official Report*, column 80W, on departmental manpower, on what dates the Steering Group met to oversee the policy on addiction to prescribed medicine; who the attendees were at each of those meetings; what the present membership of the group is; and what future meetings the group has scheduled. [119034]

Dr Poulter: The Department's steering group on addiction to medicine met on 18 August 2010, 1 February 2011 and 5 May 2011. Additional discussions took place between meetings, and since the most recent one, by correspondence. No face-to-face meetings are currently scheduled. The policy areas represented were as set out in the answer of 6 December 2010, *Official Report*, column 80W and the membership of the steering group by officials in the senior civil service has not changed. At the first meeting officials at grades below the senior civil service represented the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

Primary Care Trusts

Debbie Abrahams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total resource cost was of exit packages in each primary care trust area in 2011-12. [119737]

Anna Soubry: The information requested will be available in October 2012, once the Department's Annual Report and Accounts are laid before Parliament.

Prostate Cancer

Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to improve diagnosis and treatment for men with advanced prostate cancer. [119785]

Norman Lamb: In 2008, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) published the clinical guideline "Prostate cancer: diagnosis and treatment". This sets out recommendations on the tests, treatment, care and support that men who have suspected or diagnosed prostate cancer should be offered, including those men who have advanced prostate cancer.

To ensure that these recommendations continue to reflect the latest available evidence, NICE is currently updating this guideline. NICE is also developing a prostate cancer Quality Standard alongside the update of the clinical guideline. Quality Standards are a concise set of statements designed to drive and measure priority quality improvements within a particular area of care.

They are derived from the best available evidence such as NICE guidance and other evidence sources accredited by NICE.

Spinal Muscular Atrophy

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department has allocated for research into spinal muscular atrophy in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [119497]

Norman Lamb: Estimated spend by the Department's National Institute for Health Research on directly-funded research on spinal muscular atrophy is shown in the following table:

	£ million
2007-08	0.0
2008-09	0.1
2009-10	0.1

Count of finished consultant episodes (FCEs) for patients with a primary or secondary diagnosis of spinal muscular atrophy by SHA of residence for the years 2006-07 to 2010-11

SHA name	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
North East Strategic Health Authority	384	486	500	520	569
North West Strategic Health Authority	1,067	1,271	1,374	1,509	1,533
Yorkshire And The Humber Strategic Health Authority'	850	777	877	873	866
East Midlands Strategic Health Authority	742	678	678	841	782
West Midlands Strategic Health Authority	697	666	647	832	984
East Of England Strategic Health Authority	1,046	1,173	1,335	1,555	1,783
London Strategic Health Authority	1,055	923	1,056	1,356	1,485
South East Coast Strategic Health Authority	609	596	669	652	684
South Central Strategic Health Authority	604	650	687	624	724
South West Strategic Health Authority	819	896	1,062	1,084	1,133

Notes:

- 1. Finished Consultant Episode (FCE)** A finished consultant episode (FCE) is a continuous period of admitted patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. FCEs are counted against the year in which they end. Figures do not represent the number of different patients, as a person may have more than one episode of care within the same stay in hospital or in different stays in the same year.
- 2. Number of episodes in which the patient had a (named) primary or secondary diagnosis** The number of episodes where this diagnosis was recorded in any of the 20 (14 from 2002-03 to 2006-07 and seven 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. ICD-10 Code used: G12.—Spinal muscular atrophy and related syndromes.
- 3. SHA/PCT of residence** The SHA or primary care trust (PCT) containing the patient's normal home address. This does not necessarily reflect where the patient was treated as they may have travelled to another SHA/PCT for treatment.
- 4. 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.
- 5. Activity included** Activity in English NHS hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector.
- 6.** Please note that these data should not be described as a count of people, as the same person may have been admitted on more than one occasion.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Health and Social Care Information Centre.

Information on the number of deaths from SMA is not collected centrally by the Department. However, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) does have data on the number of deaths arising from SMA and related syndromes in England and Wales during 2010. More information can be found at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/mortality-statistics--deaths-registered-in-england-and-wales--series-dr-/2010/dr-tables-2010.xls>

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress his Department has made on achieving an agreed standard for the treatment of spinal

	£ million
2010-11	0.4
2011-12	0.3

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of spinal muscular atrophy were diagnosed in each region in each of the last five years; and how many people died from spinal muscular atrophy in each region in each of the last five years. [119498]

Norman Lamb: The information is not available in the format requested.

The NHS Information Centre for health and social care collects information on the number of people diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) following an admission to hospital. This is collected by strategic health authority (SHA) region. The data available does not include the number of people diagnosed with a condition, only the number of hospital episodes where a diagnosis is recorded.

muscular atrophy in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [119499]

Norman Lamb: The Department has referred for development a quality standard for relatively uncommon neurological problems including spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) to the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) in March 2012, following advice from the National Quality Board. The primary purpose of NICE quality standards is to make it clear what quality care is by providing patients, carers and the public, health and social care professionals, commissioners and service providers with definitions of high-quality health and social care.

Strokes

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of patients presenting with a transient ischaemic attack were assessed and treated within 24 hours in each stroke network in the latest period for which figures are available; [118878]

(2) if he will estimate the proportion of stroke patients who spent 90 per cent of their time in a specialist stroke unit in each stroke network in the latest period for which figures are available. [118879]

Anna Soubry: The Department does not collect the information at stroke network level. However, information at primary care trust level has been placed in the Library. This provides information on Transient Ischaemic Attack cases with a higher risk of stroke who are treated within 24 hours and percentage of patients who spend at least 90 of their time on a stroke unit. The information is derived from Integrated Performance Measures.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to review implementation of the National Stroke Strategy across England against the framework of quality markers identified in the strategy; and if he will make a statement. [118886]

Anna Soubry: Currently we have no plans to review implementation of the Stroke Strategy. The Stroke Strategy along with the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) quality standards provide the framework for improving stroke services and we expect health and social services to continue to implement them.

The Department receives very significant, and independent information from various sources which alert us to both progress and issues. These sources include audit data from:

the National Sentinel Stroke Audit and Stroke Improvement National Audit Programme (SINAP) conducted by the Royal College of Physicians;

quarterly data on the stroke integrated performance measures.

We are continuing the Accelerating Stroke Improvement Programme in 2012-13 to ensure that improvements continue to be made in line with the Stroke Strategy and NICE quality standards. We are also considering how best to build on the strategy in the development of the Cardiovascular Outcomes Strategy.

Thalidomide

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what progress his Department has made in assessing the thalidomide grant pilot scheme; [119008]

(2) what recent assessment his Department has made of support from the NHS to Thalidomide survivors. [119104]

Paul Uppal: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to the publication of "Looking to the Future, Evaluation of the Health Grant to

Thalidomide Impaired People" in July 2012, what steps he is taking to provide financial assistance for Thalidomide survivors. [119330]

Norman Lamb: The Department provided £20 million over the three years 2010-11 to 2012-13 to the Thalidomide Trust to fund a pilot scheme in England to explore how the needs of Thalidomide survivors can best be met in the long term. The former Minister for Care Services my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Burstow) met with the Thalidomide Trust and members of the National Advisory Council on 12 June 2012. At that meeting he committed to making and sharing a decision on future funding in the autumn, following a thorough assessment of the evaluation report into the second year of the grant. The Department received the report on 11 July and departmental officials are currently carrying out that assessment.

Urinary System: Infectious Diseases

Christopher Pincher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many urinary tract infections were recorded in NHS hospitals in (a) England and (b) each NHS trust area in each of the last five years; [118859]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the cost to the NHS of treating urinary tract infections in the last year for which figures are available. [118860]

Anna Soubry: Data on urinary tract infections (UTIs) are not collected in the format requested. However, data from the Hospital Episode Statistics database suggest that urinary tract infections have increased overall in the last five years from 167,918 consultant episodes with a primary diagnosis of UTI in 2006-07 to 245,478 consultant episodes in 2010-11, and currently form about 1% of all admissions in England. The relevant Hospital Episode Statistics are at:

www.hesonline.nhs.uk/Ease/ContentServer?siteID=1937&categoryID=214

The Plowman report, which was published in 1999, showed at that time the cost of treating a urinary tract infection in a national health service hospital was £1,122 per case. No more recent estimates have been made.

Christopher Pincher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to reduce the number of urinary tract infections occurring in NHS hospitals. [118861]

Anna Soubry: The Government is encouraging health care organisations to focus on driving up quality, and reducing the harm from a number of common patient safety issues, including urinary tract infections, through the use of the NHS Safety Thermometer and incentive payments are provided if healthcare organisations collect and submit data using the NHS Safety Thermometer.

The Government has also asked the Advisory Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infections to consider further measures to improve infection prevention and control, in particular in relation to catheter use in intensive care units.

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 6 September 2012

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS	361	BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS—continued	
Apprenticeships	361	London Metropolitan University (Visas)	373
Automotive Industry	374	Port of Liverpool	374
Bioethanol Industry	375	Recession (Small Businesses).....	363
City Deals	376	Regional Growth Fund	370
Community Learning.....	371	Skills (Young People)	365
Employee Ownership	369	SMEs	371
Employment Law (Low-paid and Vulnerable Workers)	366	Start-up Businesses	368
Graduate Employment.....	368	Topical Questions	376

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Thursday 6 September 2012

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS	27WS	HEALTH—continued	
Reducing Audit Requirements	27WS	Health Select Committee’s Report on Education, Training and Workforce (Government Response)	35WS
Regional Growth Fund (Update).....	27WS		
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT..	29WS	WORK AND PENSIONS	36WS
Housing and Growth	29WS	Automatic Enrolment Thresholds (Annual Review)	36WS
HEALTH	34WS		
“Next Steps for Nursery Milk”	34WS		

WRITTEN ANSWERS

Thursday 6 September 2012

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS	400W	ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE—continued	
Business: Regulation	401W	Energy: Conservation	409W
Higher Education.....	400W	Energy: Meters	409W
Sunday Trading.....	401W	Energy: Prices	409W
Tobacco: Packaging	401W	Fuel Poverty: Glasgow.....	410W
		Hydroelectric Power.....	411W
CABINET OFFICE	398W	Licensing.....	412W
Charities	398W	Micro-generation	414W
Charity Commission	398W	Renewable Energy: Feed-in Tariffs	414W
Public Sector: Greater London	399W	Solar Power.....	415W
Unemployment	399W	Warm Front Scheme.....	415W
Unemployment: Females	400W	Wind Power	416W
Voluntary Work: Young People.....	400W	Wind Power: Seas and Oceans.....	417W
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	423W	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL	
Boxing.....	423W	AFFAIRS	378W
Broadband	424W	Floods.....	378W
Local Broadcasting	424W	Organic Food	378W
Olympic Games 2012: Overseas Visitors	424W		
Olympic Games 2012: Tickets	425W	FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE ...	417W
Public Libraries.....	425W	British Overseas Territories.....	417W
Sports	425W	Correspondence	418W
Sports: Disability	426W	Cultural Relations.....	418W
		Euro 2012	419W
DEFENCE	386W	European Union	419W
HMS Argyll	386W	Iran	419W
Procurement.....	386W	Israel	420W
Type 26 Frigates.....	387W	Middle East	420W
		Russia	421W
ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE	407W	Syria.....	422W
Combined Heat and Power.....	407W	Turks and Caicos Islands.....	422W
Electricity	408W	UK Membership of EU	423W
Energy: Business	408W	United Arab Emirates.....	423W

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
HEALTH	426W	JUSTICE—continued	
Abortion	426W	Courts: Translation Services.....	388W
Ambulance Services	426W	Disability Appeal Tribunal.....	388W
Apprentices	426W	Employment Tribunals Service.....	389W
Breast Cancer.....	427W	Employment Tribunals Service: Compensation.....	389W
Caesarean Sections	428W	Matrimonial Causes Act 1973.....	390W
Care Quality Commission.....	428W	Prisoners: Adoption	390W
Chiropody.....	428W	Social Security Benefits: Appeals	390W
Circumcision.....	428W		
Compulsorily Detained Mental Patients	430W	PRIME MINISTER	379W
Diabetes.....	430W	International Assistance.....	379W
Diabetes: Leicester	431W	Members: Correspondence	379W
East London NHS Foundation Trust.....	431W		
Food: Labelling.....	432W	SCOTLAND	397W
Food Standards Agency.....	431W	Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Bill.....	397W
Gender Recognition	432W	Universal Credit.....	397W
General Practitioners	432W	West Coast Railway Line	398W
Health Education.....	433W	Working Tax Credit	398W
Heart Diseases and Strokes.....	434W		
Heart Diseases: Children.....	435W	TRANSPORT	379W
Hormone Treatments: Males.....	435W	Airports	379W
Licensing.....	437W	Airports: G4S	379W
Low Birthweight Babies	439W	Correspondence	380W
Mental Health Services: Telephone Services	439W	Equality Act 2010	380W
Midwives.....	439W	Farmers: Driving.....	380W
NHS: Ancillary Staff.....	440W	Large Goods Vehicle Drivers: Working Hours.....	380W
NHS Commissioning Board	440W	Motorcycles: Accidents.....	381W
NHS: Telephone Services.....	442W	Official Cars.....	381W
Obesity: Surgery.....	443W	Railways: Wales	381W
Organs: Donors	443W	Rapid Transit Systems.....	382W
Ovarian Cancer.....	444W	River Thames: Transport	382W
Plastic Surgery	445W	Roads: Accidents	383W
Prescription Drugs.....	445W	Roads: Safety	383W
Prescription Drugs: Misuse.....	446W	Rolling Stock	384W
Primary Care Trusts.....	446W	Severn River Crossing.....	385W
Prostate Cancer.....	446W	Taxis: Wheelchairs	385W
Spinal Muscular Atrophy.....	447W	Travel: Costs	385W
Strokes	449W	West Coast Railway Line	385W
Thalidomide.....	449W		
Urinary System: Infectious Diseases	450W	TREASURY	392W
		Air Passenger Duty.....	392W
HOME DEPARTMENT	373W	Children: Maintenance	392W
Data Protection	373W	Corporation Tax	393W
Human Trafficking: Third Sector.....	373W	Equitable Life Assurance Society: Compensation ..	393W
Immigration.....	374W	Infrastructure.....	394W
Immigration: Married People.....	374W	LIBOR.....	394W
Members: Correspondence	374W	Regulation	395W
Metropolitan Police: Criminal Records.....	375W	Scotland.....	396W
Police: Criminal Records.....	375W	Tax Evasion	396W
Police: Disciplinary Proceedings	375W	Taxation: Business	396W
Police: Firearms	375W	Taxation: Golf.....	396W
Police National Computer: Data Protection	375W	Taxation: Pensions	397W
Police: Retirement	376W		
Police: Training	376W	WORK AND PENSIONS	403W
Prisoner Escapes	376W	Employment Schemes: Young People	403W
Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.....	376W	Housing Benefit	403W
UK Border Agency.....	377W	Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefits.....	403W
		Housing Benefit: Young People.....	404W
HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION	387W	International Labour Conference	404W
Apprentices	387W	Jobcentre Plus.....	404W
		Legionnaires' Disease: Edinburgh	405W
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	402W	State Retirement Pensions	405W
Overseas Aid.....	402W	Universal Credit.....	405W
		Work Capability Assessment	406W
JUSTICE	387W	Work Programme.....	406W
Cats: Animal Welfare	387W		

Members who wish to have the Daily Report of the Debates forwarded to them should give notice at the Vote Office.

The Bound Volumes will also be sent to Members who similarly express their desire to have them.

No proofs of the Daily Reports can be supplied. Corrections which Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked in the Daily Report, but not telephoned, and *the copy containing the Corrections must be received at the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Thursday 13 September 2012**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF THE VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their Speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), on application to the Stationery Office, c/o the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons, from whom the terms and conditions of reprinting may be ascertained. Application forms are available at the Vote Office.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY PARTS

Single copies:

Commons, £5; Lords, £3.50.

Annual subscriptions:

Commons, £865; Lords, £525.

LORDS VOLUME INDEX obtainable on standing order only. Details available on request.

BOUND VOLUMES OF DEBATES are issued periodically during the session.

Single copies:

Commons, £105; Lords, £40.

Standing orders will be accepted.

THE INDEX to each Bound Volume of House of Commons Debates is published separately at £9.00 and can be supplied to standing order.

All prices are inclusive of postage

CONTENTS

Thursday 6 September 2012

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 361] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills

Business of the House [Col. 383]

Statement—(Mr Lansley)

Speaker's Statement [Col. 399]

Housing and Planning [Col. 400]

Statement—(Mr Pickles)

Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) [Col. 417]

Bill presented, and read the First time

Backbench Business

Immigration [Col. 418]

Motion—(Nicholas Soames)—agreed to

Community Hospitals [Col. 454]

Motion—(Dr Wollaston)—agreed to

School Places (Thurrock) [Col. 488]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Energy Supply [Col. 137WH]

Building Regulations (Electricity and Gas) [Col. 159WH]

Debates on motion for Adjournment

Written Ministerial Statements [Col. 27WS]

Written Answers to Questions [Col. 373W] [see index inside back page]
