

Thursday
25 October 2012

Volume 551
No. 56



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 25 October 2012

House of Commons

Thursday 25 October 2012

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Food Prices

1. **Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effect on families of recent trends in food prices. [124644]

13. **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effect on families of recent trends in food prices. [124660]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr David Heath): My Department actively monitors retail food prices and their impacts on household expenditure. We know that some households are seeing the amount that they spend on food increase. The Government provide safety nets through welfare to support those on low incomes and out of work. We also provide a number of schemes, such as Healthy Start, to help the most vulnerable in our society afford and have access to nutritious food.

Valerie Vaz: The Minister will be aware that the Department's own book of statistics states that there has been a 12% increase in food prices, and that people are going without fruit and vegetables. The Netmums website states that one in five women are going without food to feed their children. What discussions has he had with his colleagues in the Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that families can feed themselves?

Mr Heath: I do not in any way minimise the hon. Lady's point, but I talk not about food poverty but about poverty. The fact that food prices have gone up means that people are finding it more difficult to make ends meet. We need to continue to talk to colleagues in the DWP and others to ensure that we provide as much support as possible. We also need to do what we can with manufacturers, processors and retailers to ensure, for instance, that vegetables that are perhaps not the best quality are available at a lower price that people can afford. If we do all those things, we can help people through what is undoubtedly a difficult period.

Laura Sandys (South Thanet) (Con): I am pleased to hear the Minister talk about waste within the supply chain. I was much involved in a project called Ugly Food. Can we ensure that we do not just target retailers, who say that they have no waste within their system, but increase waste in the supply chain at the producer and consumer end?

Mr Heath: The hon. Lady touches on an important point. Ugly veg is still tasty veg, and there is absolutely no reason it should not be sold. We need to bear down on waste at all points in the food chain. The Love Food Hate Waste campaign is dealing with exactly that and looking at whether we can improve products and practices right the way through the system, to ensure that we minimise waste and get the best possible value for the consumer.

Nick Smith: Ebbw Vale food bank fed more than 1,000 Blaenau Gwent families last year, and each month my office issues more and more food vouchers. I am alarmed that low-income families are struggling to put food on the table. What representations has the Minister made to the Chancellor and the Work and Pensions Secretary about growing food poverty and the impact of universal credit?

Mr Heath: The hon. Gentleman should recognise that, as I said earlier, what we are talking about is poverty. One thing that I have always stressed is that poverty exists right across the country, in rural areas as well as urban ones, and we need to deal with it. The Government have been taking action to help protect the most vulnerable, and we will continue to do so.

Mr Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): What message would the Minister give to my local authorities, which are taking land out of food production to develop on the green belt when there are perfectly adequate brownfield sites available in the borough?

Mr Speaker: Order. That is tangentially related indeed to the question, which is not to be encouraged. I am bound to say that a brief reply of a sentence will suffice.

Mr Heath: I certainly was not going to touch on the planning issues involved, but I will say that food security ought to concern all of us.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Does the Minister accept that the Government's plans for minimum alcohol pricing will make alcohol more expensive for hard-working, moderate, responsible drinkers while doing nothing to tackle problem drinking and the problems associated with it? It will also be devastating for the west country cider industry. Will he make representations to his ministerial colleagues to scrap that ill thought out scheme, which is not based on any evidence whatever?

Mr Heath: I do not think I need any lessons on the west country cider industry, and indeed I was at apple day in Kingsbury Episcopi only last weekend.

I do not think this matter is directly related to the question asked by the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), but of course there is a continuing debate on the issue, which will involve the Home Office and the Department of Health.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): We know that the spending power of hard-working families is being hit by the Government's flatlining economy and wage stagnation. Shoppers are using self-imposed rationing, putting products back at the checkout and skipping meals to feed their children, yet the Secretary of State has urged shoppers to tackle his so-called "dessert deficit" by eating more UK-produced ice cream. Does he ever feel that he is living in a parallel universe?

Mr Heath: This may come as news to the hon. Lady, but there are people in this country who still eat ice cream, and on the whole it is better if they eat British products rather than those imported from overseas. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is absolutely right.

Mary Creagh: The Minister's right hon. Friend is in danger of becoming the Marie Antoinette of the Cabinet, but perhaps I should move on.

Last week, the Secretary of State announced the abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board, and the Minister has spoken about the existence of poverty, in particular rural poverty. More than 1,000 workers in the Secretary of State's constituency will be worse off as a result of his decision, and his own impact assessment states that abolishing the board will take £238 million of pay over 10 years from rural workers and the rural economy—

Mr Speaker: Order. I must ask the shadow Secretary of State to relate her question to food prices, not wages, and in a short sentence.

Mary Creagh: The abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board will take money out of the pockets of workers and put it in those of their employers. On the Opposition Benches we believe that the person who picks the apple should be able to buy the fruit. Why does the Minister not agree?

Mr Heath: The national minimum wage is doing a good job of putting a floor under wages in this country, and I see no reason to have extra bureaucracy on top of that.

Dairy Industry

2. **Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support the dairy industry. [124645]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr David Heath): The Dairy Supply Chain Forum and the Dairy 2020 initiative are focused on the future of the industry and opportunities to boost growth and exports. After months of hard work, not least by my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Sir James Paice), the many beneficial terms of the industry code of practice can be translated into contracts. Implementing the EU dairy package will provide new opportunities for innovation and collaboration, and £5 million of additional funds from the rural development programme for England are available for high-quality projects from the dairy industry.

Neil Parish: Dairy farmers in my constituency are facing high feed costs. Consumers are paying enough for milk, but not enough of that end price goes back to the farmer. What more can we do?

Mr Heath: I am optimistic that with the voluntary code we have for the first time the basis to be fair to producers, processors, retailers and consumers. I want to make that stick, and I believe that it can make a real difference. As I have said all along, if the voluntary code is not successful, we have the opportunity to bring forward a statutory code, and I will consult on that later this year if necessary.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Further to our discussions last week, what discussions has the Minister had with ministerial colleagues in the devolved institutions about the introduction of a similar voluntary code for the dairy industry in Northern Ireland, where prices are particularly volatile?

Mr Heath: That is a matter for the devolved Administrations who have responsibility for agriculture and for what they feel is appropriate for their own jurisdictions. The Government will offer any support and help they can, and provide advice to further the objective of a voluntary code, is that is what is wanted. The Department maintains contact and has conversations with counterparts in the devolved Administrations, and will continue to do so.

Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): In consulting on the European Union dairy package, will the Minister take into consideration the wish of dairy farmers to set up producer organisations to strengthen their hand in the milk market?

Mr Heath: I am very aware of that issue, and once we have the final agreement and settlement, I hope to proceed in that area with the utmost possible speed.

Environmental Protection (Home Security)

3. **Mr Nick Gibb** (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con): If he will make it his policy to intervene when measures introduced by the Environment Agency or Natural England to enhance the natural environment threaten the safety and security of people's homes. [124647]

15. **Hugh Bayley** (York Central) (Lab): How much his Department spent on flood alleviation schemes between (a) 2008 and 2009 and (b) 2010 and 2012 to date. [124663]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Richard Benyon): There are times when legal requirements to protect the environment could make it more difficult or expensive to protect people's homes, such as properties at the top of eroding cliffs that are protected for their natural character. However, such cases are rare. If there is a conflict between meeting a requirement to protect the environment and protecting people, there are clauses that allow things to go ahead for imperative reasons of overriding public interest if there are no other solutions.

Mr Gibb: I do not know how well my hon. Friend knows the West Sussex coast, and the Pagham coast in particular, but over the past few years, a build-up of shingle and sand, known as a spit, has developed at the mouth of the Pagham harbour nature reserve. That spit is causing scouring of the beach through the action of the waves and the seawater trying to escape, and that is eroding the beach by up to several metres a year and beginning to put people's homes at risk. One solution would be to carve a channel through the spit, but both the Environment Agency and Natural England are resisting that approach. Will the Minister come to Pagham so that I can show him at first hand the problem we are facing?

Richard Benyon: I had a premonition that Pagham might be mentioned, and therefore yesterday at some length I consulted Natural England and the Environment Agency. They assured me that there are no environmental reasons why solutions cannot be found on that part of the coast; I know that the coastline is extremely dynamic in that part of the country. I am keen to assist my hon. Friend, and I would gladly make such a visit if that would ensure that local people's fears were allayed, and so that nothing done by any Government agency will be taken as a measure that puts people's homes more at risk.

Hugh Bayley: When places face flooding, it is important not to ignore the human cost. Fortunately, the floods in York a month ago were not as bad as 12 years ago, but I have once again visited constituents who were hacking plaster off the walls in their homes. They will be out of their homes for months to come and must pay for very expensive renovations. One café owner had to throw out tonnes of food. Can the Environment Agency take responsibility for providing advice to local authorities and for getting the insurance companies to move quickly?

Richard Benyon: I am well aware of the hon. Gentleman's concerns. The residents of Water End in his constituency have waited long for a scheme, and it is due to start in the new year. I have huge sympathy for everybody who was flooded throughout the summer. I can assure him that the Environment Agency and any other Government body will take what steps they can to make life easier, including by providing advice to residents through the local authority or directly.

Farmers Markets

4. **Chris White** (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): What recent steps his Department has taken to promote farmers markets. [124648]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr David Heath): I welcome and support farmers markets. I and other DEFRA Ministers have been visiting local communities across the country and encouraging people to eat and drink local produce. I have recently visited a farm near my hon. Friend's constituency, where I saw farmers produce wonderful food. In buying and eating local food, consumers will support rural jobs and help rural economies to grow. Farmers markets are an excellent way of bringing local producers and consumers together.

Chris White: Farmers markets are very important to both rural and urban communities, and provide an opportunity for local people to purchase excellent local produce directly from source. The markets also provide a valuable opportunity for independent retailers to access new customers and help them to compete with their larger rivals. Will the Minister consider working with local authorities to champion the importance of farmers markets and promote awareness to people throughout the country of markets in their area?

Mr Heath: I welcome what my hon. Friend says. The first successful farmers market was established in Bath in 1997, not a million miles from my constituency. There are some 750 regularly occurring farmers markets in the UK. The National Farmers Retail and Markets Association—FARMA—brings them under a membership organisation. I encourage local authorities to establish farmers markets wherever there is local demand. They make a valuable contribution to local choice, and to the vitality of our town centres.

Flood Insurance

5. **Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): What recent progress he has made on flood insurance. [124649]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr Owen Paterson): The availability and affordability of insurance in flood-risk areas is an important issue for this Government. We are in intense yet constructive negotiations with the insurance industry on a range of approaches that could succeed the current statement of principles. In the meantime, the Government are continuing to invest in managing the risk of flooding. We are on course to exceed our target to provide better protection to 145,000 households by March 2015.

Ms Stuart: The statement of principles expires in June next year. It is extremely important that households and small businesses in my constituency get insurance cover and household insurance. They will find little comfort in the Secretary of State's answer.

Mr Paterson: I am sorry the hon. Lady is disappointed. Within two days of taking office I had a meeting with Otto Thoresen, the head of the Association of British Insurers. We are engaged in detailed discussions, which I obviously cannot reveal, because we do not negotiate in public. However, I reassure the hon. Lady that the Government take this matter very seriously. We know that the statement of principles runs out next year and that it must be replaced—I hope by something that is more comprehensive and effective.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): About 450,000 homes and properties in the country are at risk of flooding. People will find it increasingly difficult to obtain flood insurance, particularly for properties that are built on functional floodplains. Will the Secretary of State take a lead, with his colleague the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, to end house building in totally inappropriate areas. Builders leave, developers go away and home owners are left with no insurance.

Mr Paterson: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. She is aware that it was agreed in the national planning policy framework that there would be no more building on floodplains. She is quite right that it is absolutely idiotic to build houses in such inappropriate places. However, I reassure her, too, that the Government take this matter seriously. We want to find a solution that follows from the statement of principles, but that is better and more comprehensive.

Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new role as Secretary of State and to his first DEFRA questions. When he took up his new position, was he briefed by his civil servants that the number of schemes deferred had risen, that spending on defences had fallen, that climate change meant that flood risk had risen and that this announcement was dangerously overdue?

Mr Paterson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming me to my new post.

We are spending £2.17 billion on flood defences. I have visited Nottingham and was in Northwich recently, and there is real value in these schemes, which is why, despite the difficult financial circumstances we inherited from the last Government, these schemes saw only a 6% reduction. They are really good value.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): Many residents in Halesowen were badly affected by flooding in 2008 and are concerned about whether they will be able to obtain appropriate flood insurance in the future. Will the Secretary of State reassure them, as I think he already has, that they will be able to obtain appropriate flood insurance and that the Government are doing everything possible to ensure that they can do so?

Mr Paterson: I would like to reassure my hon. Friend emphatically that we are determined to arrive at a solution to this problem that—I repeat—provides availability and affordability to those who might suffer from floods.

Broadband

6. **Dr Phillip Lee** (Bracknell) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that rural areas have access to reliable and high-speed broadband. [124651]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr Owen Paterson): I recently met my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to discuss speeding up the roll-out of the £530 million rural broadband programme. Together, we are determined to deliver this quickly in order to provide 90% of premises with superfast broadband at 24 megabits per second and elsewhere with standard broadband of at least 2 megabits per second by 2015. The Government's £20 million rural community broadband fund helps extend superfast broadband in the most rural locations.

Dr Lee: Many of the good people of Bracknell and Finchampstead have long had to suffer from poor broadband access despite my constituency being close

to the heart of the UK's IT industry. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is vital that the Government make the right decisions so that all my constituents can take full advantage of the digital revolution?

Mr Paterson: I entirely sympathise with my hon. Friend. If he thinks it is bad in Bracknell, he should come to North Shropshire. This is an absolute priority for us. At one bound, broadband overcomes the centuries-long disadvantage of working in a rural area. We are determined to roll it out, which is why I am working closely with my Cabinet colleagues and why we have relaxed the planning constraints for five years—to get this through and done.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): No, Secretary of State: come to Rathlin Island—the situation there is absolutely abominable. It is an island off an island that requires reliable broadband so that people who require medical scripts and everything else can get them quickly. I hope that he rolls out the new broadband service across the whole of the UK, including Ulster and Rathlin Island.

Mr Paterson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for inviting me to Rathlin Island. He will be pleased to know that I was there a few months ago, in my previous post—it has the most wonderful puffin reserve, which is well worth visiting. He touched on health, which is an important element. We all think about the business angle, but there are real advantages in delivering health care in rural areas. Another key element is helping elderly people, for whom it is a boon, when they are isolated, to be able to contact their relations, shop online and stay in touch with the real world.

Mr Speaker: As we are undertaking a Cook's tour, we might hear about broadband in Cornwall.

Dan Rogerson (North Cornwall) (LD): I am happy to focus on broadband across rural areas, Mr Speaker.

Will the Secretary of State ensure that all the programmes that the Government are funding, such as the one in Cornwall, which involves European Union structural funds, prioritise the areas that are still on dial-up? I am concerned that we are concentrating on superfast broadband—areas that some companies would have got to in a few years anyway—when we need to prioritise those still on dial-up.

Mr Paterson: I entirely sympathise with my hon. Friend's comments about the problems in rural areas—I have already touched on the problems in my constituency. It is an absolute priority for us to get functioning broadband that works right across the country by 2015.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): This week I met representatives of the Federation of Small Businesses, who were almost as eloquent as the Secretary of State in expressing the desire of small businesses in rural areas to play their part in reviving the rural economy. However, they cannot do so because of a lack of rural broadband. Will the Secretary of State admit that abolishing Labour's universal broadband pledge—a pledge to bring broadband to everybody by the end of this year—was a huge mistake?

Mr Paterson: I am happy to accept the hon. Lady's comment on my eloquence, but I do not accept her criticism of what we are doing. We think that what we are doing is going to work. We are working closely with the European Commission, with local government and with BT and the other providers. We have to get this done. We have a plan and we are going to deliver it.

Rural Businesses

7. **Gavin Williamson** (South Staffordshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to support rural businesses in Staffordshire. [124653]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Richard Benyon): A £165 million package of measures to support rural economic growth is being rolled out across England. Of that, £100 million of rural development funding is targeted at improving rural businesses, with 38 projects in Staffordshire already receiving funding under the farming and forestry improvement scheme and seven projects being actively considered for rural economy grants. Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent local broadband plan has also been allocated £7.44 million from the Government's £530 million rural broadband programme.

Gavin Williamson: Halfpenny Green vineyard in my constituency has over the past 30 years been producing some of the finest quality English wines. It has become an important local employer and is a perfect example of the importance of farm diversification. Indeed, Mr Speaker, the wine is so good that I am sure I would even be able to provide you with a bottle—if I was able to get called earlier in statements. *[Interruption.]* Maybe even two bottles. Can my right hon. Friend explain what steps he is taking to encourage rural diversification for farmers?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may wish to develop his thoughts at greater length in an Adjournment debate.

Richard Benyon: I am only mildly piqued that I have not been offered a bribe. I can assure my hon. Friend that this Government are serious about offering encouragement. For years, Ministers have been telling the farming community that it has to diversify its business, but then, in other directions, they have been putting up barriers to that. We are doing that work with highly focused grants, such as the ones I have described. We are also providing broadband, which is a key deliverer, and support across a range of other measures to ensure that businesses precisely such as the one that my hon. Friend describes can function and are economically effective.

Pesticides

8. **Stephen Phillips** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): What research his Department is conducting on the means by which honey bees are exposed to agricultural pesticides. [124654]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Richard Benyon): The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs fully appreciates the importance of honey bees and other pollinators. We

need to understand the possible threats in order to tackle them. To that end, we continue to fund a number of research projects on the potential impacts of pesticides. That will enable us to develop the way in which such risks are assessed and regulated. In addition, DEFRA contributes to the insect pollinators initiative, which supports research into the main threats to insect pollinators.

Stephen Phillips: My hon. Friend will know that research at Stirling university has recently found that exposure to even low levels of neonicotinoid pesticides can have a serious impact on the health of bumble bees. Given the importance of bees, both to our farmers and to all those who are interested in pollinating crops, does the Minister agree that his Department needs to look again at the use of these pesticides?

Richard Benyon: Yes I do, and we are. The Health and Safety Executive's chemical regulation directorate, along with the Advisory Committee on Pesticides and the European Food Safety Authority, have looked in detail at Stirling university's research. They believe that it is interesting and adds to the debate, but that on balance the risks do not require a ban of neonicotinoids. However, in DEFRA we have commissioned further research, through the Food and Environment Research Agency, using expertise from Stirling university, which provided the original piece of research, because we want to make absolutely sure that we are getting this right.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that the Environmental Audit Committee is undertaking an inquiry into hive collapse, bees and pesticides. Will he undertake to ensure that his Department supports the inquiry to the best possible extent and also responds at the earliest possible date to its outcome?

Richard Benyon: I hope that in the reply I gave to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips) I showed the seriousness with which we are looking at this issue. We know that pollinators benefit our economy by around £450 million a year. That is a service that nature provides. We want to make absolutely sure that we are protecting that, and we will work with any organisation that is doing research of that kind.

Badger Culling

9. **Graeme Morrice** (Livingston) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the potential risks of a badger cull. [124656]

11. **Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the potential risks of a badger cull. [124658]

12. **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What recent evidence he has considered on the effects of badger populations on dairy herds. [124659]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr Owen Paterson): The badger culling pilots, which we now plan for next year, will test the effectiveness, safety and humaneness of controlled shooting. Our plans for an independent expert panel to oversee

the design and analysis of the data collection have not changed. Monitoring will include field observations and post-mortems. If monitoring indicates that controlled shooting is an acceptable technique, the policy will be rolled out more widely.

Graeme Morrice: Obviously, I am aware that there will be a major debate on this subject later today, but may I ask the Secretary of State why DEFRA got the number of badgers living in each pilot cull area so wrong? Why did he undertake a survey only last month, weeks before the cull was due to start?

Mr Paterson: The answer is that we did not get the numbers wrong: we got them accurately and in a scientific manner, but the National Farmers Union, which had geared up for a lower number, requested that we postpone the culls. We and the NFU are following the science rigorously.

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): But if we do not proceed with the culls next year is not the risk that the impact on farmers' livelihoods and mental health will continue? This is a dreadful disease and it is extremely distressing to farmers that they have to cope with it.

Mr Paterson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: it is not just the trauma of the appalling loss—26,000 cattle last year—but every time a herd is tested it is difficult for farmers. Some animals become violent, and the disease, not just the culling, is causing regular stress. It is essential that we go ahead with the culls next summer and prove that they work, so that we bear down on disease in wildlife and in cattle.

Bridget Phillipson: If the cull does not go ahead, what is the risk that the Secretary of State will be sued by farmers for the losses they will incur, and what will the chaos cost the taxpayer?

Mr Paterson: I have every intention that the culls will go ahead.

Mr Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute) (LD): Will my right hon. Friend explain why circumstances next year will be different from those this year, enabling the culls to go ahead and reduce the incidence of bovine TB and not spread it?

Mr Paterson: I explained at some length in my statement the other day, in which I spoke for, I think, 90 minutes, that certain circumstances led to the NFU's decision to request that we postpone. There will be time to prepare. There will be no hitches next year: we will deliver this policy.

Mr Sheerman: The Minister might be aware that I made myself very unpopular among Labour Members when I voted against the ban on hunting with dogs. I therefore know what it is like to make an unpopular decision, but the badger cull is wrong: it is wrong because these wonderful creatures roamed this country before we did and it is wrong because it would destroy tens of thousands of living animals. There is no scientific evidence that it would do any good, so the Secretary of

State should stop listening to farmers and listen to the great British public and Mr Brian May.

Mr Paterson: I respect the hon. Gentleman for his independence of judgment but—I am sorry—we disagree. The science is clear: after nine years there was a 28% reduction in the culled area. If we look at New Zealand, Australia or the Republic of Ireland—I talked to a farmer in France on Monday—we see that there is not a single country that is struggling with TB in its cattle industry that is not bearing down on wildlife and cattle, and we will do that.

Mr Tom Harris (Glasgow South) (Lab): The Secretary of State blames the NFU for stopping the cull and the media blame No.10, but either way we can all understand the Secretary of State's reluctance to take responsibility for this setback. May I ask him, on a scale of one to 100—I know that is a risky prospect, as arithmetic is not his Department's strongest suit—how likely it is that the cull will go ahead next June?

Mr Paterson: I am not blaming anybody. I have been working very closely with the NFU since I took office. I have been studying this issue since I was the shadow spokesman and put down 600 questions, taking a serious, detailed interest in it. This is the right policy. It is the policy pursued by every other country, as I have said. Unlike with the vapid pronouncements we have had from the Opposition, this Government will take on a deadly disease, which is a zoonosis, so if we do not get a grip on it, it will prove a risk to human beings.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): In view of that and of my right hon. Friend's answer, it is important to base things on sound science. If he has read the science and understands the answers he has received to the 600 questions, he will know that the 12% to 16% reduction has to be viewed against a rise elsewhere. It will not rise as much as it would have done otherwise, but it is still a rise in bovine TB. Does he not accept that?

Mr Paterson: No, I dislike disagreeing with the hon. Gentleman, with whom I used to work closely on the EFRA Committee and when I was the shadow spokesman. The evidence is absolutely clear: there was a 28% reduction in disease after nine years in the cull area. That is why we are going ahead next year.

Carbon Reporting

10. **Lisa Nandy** (Wigan) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Financial Reporting Council in respect of mandatory carbon reporting. [124657]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr David Heath): Officials are in discussion with the Financial Reporting Council ahead of the introduction of mandatory carbon reporting to ensure effective enforcement of this new requirement.

Lisa Nandy: In a recent written answer, the Minister estimated that the benefits of mandatory carbon reporting stood at £741 million over 10 years compared to just £28 million in compliance costs. Given the clear economic, social and environmental benefits of mandatory carbon

reporting, with he give the FRC the teeth it needs to crack down on companies that continue to flout the law?

Mr Heath: My Department does not have responsibility for the Financial Reporting Council—the hon. Lady will understand that—but it has proved very effective at ensuring that legislation that applies to carbon reporting is upheld. We recently held a consultation on the draft regulation, which closed on 17 October, and we received about 100 responses. We will look very carefully at them.

Topical Questions

Mr Speaker: I remind Back-Bench and Front-Bench Members alike that topical questions and answers are supposed to be brief. We have a lot to get through; let us be brisk.

T1. [124664] **Mr Graham Allen** (Nottingham North) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr Owen Paterson): I begin by paying tribute to the great work done by my right hon. Friends the Members for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) and for South East Cambridgeshire (Sir James Paice). I want to build on their efforts over the past two years by galvanising the rural economy while improving the environment. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome this morning's growth figures. We should not all jump at one set of figures, but growth of 1% is significant, and I really want the rural economy to play a part in future growth. Abroad, I will represent the United Kingdom in the European negotiations and I will promote British exports at every opportunity.

Mr Allen: I welcome the Secretary of State to his new responsibilities. Does he know that in my constituency the big water users such as textiles and brewers are now in decline—and many have disappeared—with the consequence that the water table is rising? Will he meet me, representatives from the city of Nottingham and the Local Government Authority to discuss sustainable urban defences against flooding? Would he please meet us soon?

Mr Paterson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. Happily, I was in Nottingham during my first week in office, looking at a £45 million flood defence scheme. I thought it was brilliant, not only in protecting 16,000 houses but, more importantly—I did not realise this until I went there—revealing 500 acres of previously blighted land that is now open for development by the private sector. I am interested in what he has to say. I will work on this issue with the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who is the big expert, so it might be better for him to meet the hon. Gentleman.

T2. [124665] **Alun Cairns** (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): I was encouraged by the Secretary of State's earlier comments on fixed line broadband, improving accessibility, reducing red tape and speeding up the planning process.

Will he reassure me that that action extends to mobile communications in rural areas, as we need to extend the mast size and reduce red tape in this sector, too?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Richard Benyon): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is dealing with this matter at Cabinet level. This is vital to the roll-out of the broadband scheme. We have already made a decision to relax planning for a five-year period to make sure that nothing can get in the way of the roll-out of broadband 2 for the most remote rural communities.

T6. [124669] **Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): In response to the recent statement on the badger cull in the House of Lords, the noble Lord Krebs urged Ministers to gather together scientific experts and rethink the Government's strategy altogether. Why does the Secretary of State not do just that?

Mr Paterson: We have been over this ground on several occasions during the last few days. We are absolutely clear about the fact that the scientific analysis of the trials conducted by the Government that the hon. Lady supported show a 28% reduction in the culled area. That is the information that we are going on, because it is scientifically based.

T3. [124666] **Simon Hart** (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): What steps is the Department taking to deal with ash dieback disease?

Mr Paterson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this issue. There were reports on the radio this morning about the horrific danger to our 80 million ash trees. We have already launched a consultation on the ground, involving a detailed investigation into whether the disease has taken root in the country. The results of that consultation will be reported to me tomorrow, and I shall discuss it over the weekend with the head of the Forestry Commission. However, on the basis of the evidence that we have seen so far, I intend to introduce a ban on imports and tight restrictions on ash movements in Great Britain on Monday.

T7. [124670] **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): We were told that the Government would help local authorities with the costs of the floods. Now we have been told that those in Newcastle do not count, and that the city council will have to find £10 million from a budget that is being halved by the Government. Why is it that in Newcastle we have the wrong sort of water?

Richard Benyon: An improved scheme called the Bellwin scheme kicks in when spending related to flood damage hits a certain threshold, enabling local authorities to apply to the Government for extra funds. If the hon. Lady wishes to raise specific concerns with me, I shall be happy to consider them, but the Bellwin scheme has been accepted for many years.

T4. [T4] **Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): What assessment has my hon. Friend made of the impact of onshore wind farms on local environments such as Frodsham Marsh in my constituency? Plans for a wind turbine farm there have just been confirmed.

Richard Benyon: Along with the Department for Energy and Climate Change, we are conducting a review of policies relating to onshore wind. I hope that my hon. Friend will contribute his concerns and those of his local community to that review, because we want to ensure that local communities work with the Government and do not feel put upon by them when it comes to renewable energy systems.

T8. [124671] **Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): In 2009, the Minister said :

“any weakening of the Agricultural Wages Board or its abolition would further impoverish the rural working class, exacerbating social deprivation and the undesirable indicators associated with social exclusion”.

What has changed, and how would he explain that change to the 1,020 workers who were previously protected by the board in his constituency?

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr David Heath): I think I know rather more about workers in my constituency than the hon. Gentleman. I am aware of the circumstances in the agricultural industry, and I am also aware that there are now many protections for low-paid workers. I would not be proceeding with the consultation unless I was convinced that this was in the interests of those who work in my constituency and throughout the country.

T5. [124668] **Laura Sandys** (South Thanet) (Con): Forty-eight animals have been slaughtered in the port of Ramsgate owing to the resumption of live animal exports. What procedures have been introduced to deal with the crises that we have been experiencing in Thanet?

Mr Heath: As my hon. Friend knows, the circumstances in Ramsgate—about which we have spoken—were entirely unacceptable. I want to make that absolutely clear. I immediately asked for a report to be drawn up by officials who were working on animal health regulation, which they will submit to me shortly. I shall be happy to share their findings with my hon. Friend.

We have no power to ban live exports, but I do have powers to ensure that the regulations that are in place are enforced strictly and rigorously, and I shall do so.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): When I introduced my Food Waste Bill earlier this year, I thought that I was making good progress in convincing the then Minister in the House of Lords of the need for legislation to protect good-faith donors of food to charities from criminal and civil liability, but I now have the impression that DEFRA is trying to hide behind EU food safety standards. What are Ministers doing to move things forward?

Mr Heath: On the day I was appointed, the hon. Lady very kindly twittered that she did not like me. However, I shall put that aside and say that I shall be happy to discuss the background to her Bill with her if she wishes, and see if the Department can do anything to help.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. So that the Minister does not feel sorry for himself, I should point out that the Speaker likes all hon. Members. I call Mr Bob Blackman to ask Question 9. He is not here.

T10. [124673] **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): Although Thurrock is an urban constituency on the edge of London, a large proportion of it is rural and lacks decent broadband provision. In light of the Minister’s previous answer, can he confirm that villages such as Bulphan, Orsett and Horndon-on-the-Hill will be in line for improved broadband provision?

Richard Benyon: My hon. Friend might like to encourage those villages to apply for the third round of the rural community broadband fund. That will be running from January, so there is time for his communities to get their bids in. He makes a good point: instead of talking only about the most remote communities, we must remember that there are rural communities close to urban areas that have appalling broadband, too.

Mr Russell Brown (Dumfries and Galloway) (Lab): Towards the end of last week I met a constituent whose new insurance premium has gone up by some 8%. She lives in an area that has occasionally been flooded, and the massive increase plus the excessive excess means this lady will have to abandon her home. Does the Minister know how many businesses and residential properties are now being abandoned because people cannot afford flood insurance?

Mr Paterson: The hon. Gentleman makes a highly pertinent point. The statement of principles is not working at present, and affordability is a key part of that. I have meetings coming up shortly with the Association of British Insurers and I will establish its latest figures, but we want to resolve this: we are determined to get to the bottom of it, because I totally sympathise with people such as the hon. Gentleman’s constituent.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that the moneys available in the rural community broadband fund that come from the European Union will not be subject to European state aid rules?

Richard Benyon: We hope in the next few weeks to make an announcement about satisfactory conclusions in respect of negotiations with the European Commission. That will be a major step forward.

Dame Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): The Secretary of State should have banned the import of ash seedlings the minute disease was found in nurseries in this country. He will not be forgiven for any delay by the people of this country, who so value the ash trees. Will he ensure that the Forestry Commission has all the resources it needs to be able to confront this terrible threat?

Mr Paterson: I think the right hon. Lady is being pretty unfair. The minute we heard about this, we launched a consultation. That will report tomorrow. On the basis of evidence—[*Interruption.*] All the right hon. Lady’s colleagues are shouting at me about evidence

and science-based information, and from tomorrow evening I will look at the evidence, and if it is sensible to ban imports, I will take that decision and make restrictions on Monday.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his Department's announcement last week of the launch of an agricultural science strategy. Does he agree that British agricultural science has the potential to boost our great industry and support emerging markets around the world?

Mr Heath: I very much welcome the initiative, which is a joint venture between ourselves and our colleagues in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. I believe we have an enormous amount to offer in both growing our own industry and offering technology which is of value across the world in dealing with issues of food security.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Banbury, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Diocese of Leeds

1. [124674] **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): What annual savings the Church Commissioners expect to make from the creation of the Diocese of Leeds?

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Tony Baldry): Before I answer the question, may I take this opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor, Sir Stuart Bell, who served as Second Church Estates Commissioner for some 13 years, the longest period anyone has served in that post since Parliament created it in the mid-1830s? He did so with considerable diligence and sensitivity. He will be much missed, and may his soul rest in peace.

Following consultation on its initial draft reorganisation scheme for the dioceses of Bradford, Ripon and Leeds and Wakefield, the Church of England Dioceses Commission expects to publish a revised draft scheme on 29 October. Accompanying its report will be a statement on the effect of the proposals, if implemented, on the mission of the Church of England and a detailed estimate of their financial impacts.

Philip Davies: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. We all appreciate that savings need to be made, but with the proposed abolition of the Bradford diocese and its incorporation into a larger Leeds diocese, what steps will be taken to ensure that the communities across the Bradford district will not be given less priority in the Church of England?

Sir Tony Baldry: May I suggest to my hon. Friend that he discuss his concerns with the Bishop of Bradford, who I am sure will be able to reassure him that the Christian and Church of England mission in his constituency will in no way be diminished by these proposals? One of the greatest threats to the Church's mission in his constituency is the continuing theft of lead from churches. No fewer than six churches in his constituency have had lead stolen from their roofs—St Peter's church in Shipley has had lead stolen on four separate occasions, notwithstanding protections such as SmartWater. So may I take this opportunity to entreat my hon. Friend, as I know the Bishop of Bradford

and the Archbishop of York will, not to frustrate the Third Reading of the Scrap Metal Dealers Bill when it comes before the House soon?

Women Bishops

2. **Simon Hughes** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): What assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the likelihood of the Church of England making a decision on women bishops in 2012. [124675]

3. **Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): What recent discussions the Church Commissioners have had with Church of England bishops on the Women Bishops Measure. [124676]

Sir Tony Baldry: The General Synod will resume on 20 November the final approval debate on the legislation to enable women to become bishops. I will be voting for the Measure, and I hope and pray that at least two thirds of the members of every house of the General Synod will vote to ensure that, at last, we can have women bishops in the Church of England.

Simon Hughes: May I associate myself and my colleagues with the thanks and the tributes to Sir Stuart Bell for his service in this area?

The message I hope this House will send via my hon. Friend to the Synod is that not only do we want the Synod to make a final decision this month that clearly says women can be bishops in the Church of England, as a legacy of the outgoing archbishop and as a tribute to his work, but we need the Church of England to catch up into the 21st century if it is to do a good job for everybody. I hope that there is no more shilly-shallying, that the Synod gets on with it and that we get a clear decision so that we can move to having women bishops.

Sir Tony Baldry: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. May I commend to his attention, and to that of other right hon. and hon. Members, an article written by the Archbishop of Canterbury in last week's *Church Times*, which is available in the Library? He stated that "a Church that ordains women as priests, but not as bishops, is stuck with a real anomaly, one that introduces an unclarity into what we are saying about baptism and about the absorption of the Church in the priestly self-giving of Jesus Christ."

We have been waiting far too long to enable women to become bishops in the Church of England—now is the time to take action and resolve this issue, once and for all.

Mr Bradshaw: In his conversations with the bishops, will the hon. Gentleman tell them that just because House of Lords reform has been abandoned they should not feel any less pressure to do this and that a failure to agree a Measure that gives women bishops equal status with male bishops would still lead to a severe constitutional crisis between Church and state?

Sir Tony Baldry: In fairness, I think that the House of Bishops recognises that, and when it met last it amended the Measure in a way that should commend support. Indeed, the bishops took a lead on that from the Archbishop of Canterbury, who, in the same article, made it clear that he thought the ordination or consecration of women as bishops was good for the whole world. He said:

“It is good news for the world we live in, which needs the unequivocal affirmation of a dignity given equally to all by God in creation and redemption—and can now, we hope, see more clearly that the Church is not speaking a language completely remote from its own most generous and just instincts.”

There is clear leadership from the House of Bishops and from the archbishops that we now need to consecrate women bishops.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): May I say how much Sir Stuart Bell will be missed by all in the House?

I hope that a strong message will go out from this House that we support women bishops and that the next Archbishop of Canterbury will be drawn from the widest possible church in this regard.

Sir Tony Baldry: I am sure that that message will be heard by the General Synod.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): I wish to associate myself with the comments about Stuart Bell, who is very badly missed.

The Church has spent many years avoiding this issue, so if the Synod fails to do the right thing, what does the hon. Gentleman think the consequences will be for the future of the Church of England?

Sir Tony Baldry: I think that the consequences for the Church of England will be very grim indeed. I hope that the General Synod, and those who might be tempted to vote against this Measure in it, will reflect on that point.

Cathedrals

4. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the contribution of Church of England cathedrals to the UK’s cultural and spiritual life. [124677]

Sir Tony Baldry: The evidence of a recent report shows a 30% increase in attendance at cathedral services in the Church of England over the last 10 years. The Church of England’s figures estimate that 12 million people visited an Anglican cathedral or royal peculiar, such as Westminster abbey, last year. A recent report confirms that finding by stating that more than 27% of England’s adult population made such a visit in the last 12 months.

Fiona Bruce: I assume my hon. Friend is referring to the recent Theos report, “Spiritual Capital: The Present and Future of English Cathedrals”. Does he agree that cathedrals are much more than vital tourist destinations and play an important role in building social and spiritual capital? They act as a hub to connect communities through social action work, such as that of street pastors or homeless projects, and also allow many people to feel, as the report states, that

“the cathedral gives me a greater sense of the sacred than I get elsewhere”.

Sir Tony Baldry: I entirely agree that cathedrals are centres of spirituality, reflection and history. Some 300,000 children visited cathedrals last year and 15,000 people are regular volunteers at cathedrals. They are a fantastic resource for England and are much to be celebrated.

Richard III

5. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): What assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the potential Church sites available for the reburial of King Richard III. [124677]

10. **Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab): What discussions the Church Commissioners have had on laying to rest the remains of King Richard III at Leicester Cathedral. [124683]

Sir Tony Baldry: The remains that are thought to be those of Richard III are at present with Leicester city council’s museums department and the university of Leicester’s archaeological department, which are carrying out tests to see whether it can be demonstrated that the remains are indeed those of Richard III. Once those tests are concluded, the nature, place and marking of any reinterment will need seriously to be considered.

John Mann: Will the hon. Gentleman let it be known to the warring factions of York and Leicester and to the Church Commissioners of the Church of England that the great priory of Worksop, which is halfway between the two cities at the end of the road through the forest, and which is at the centre of the kingdom of Richard III, can provide the most appropriate final resting place for the king?

Sir Tony Baldry: I can see that there will be quite a lot of competition. If there is conclusive evidence that these are the remains of Richard III, the tradition would be that they would be reinterred in the nearest Christian church or cathedral, which happens to be Leicester cathedral. In such circumstances, I hope it would be possible to arrange a meeting with the dean of Leicester to see how that could happen.

Jonathan Ashworth: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his answer to my hon. Friend. I am sure that Worksop has many fine qualities, but given that it was the Grey friars who took the body of Richard and buried him at what was then the Greyfriars church—a site just a stone’s throw from Leicester cathedral—and that he has been in Leicester for 500 years, is it not most appropriate that he should be finally laid to rest at Leicester cathedral?

Sir Tony Baldry: I understand that point of view, and once we know the provenance of the remains I shall seek to use my best offices to arrange a meeting with the dean of the cathedral and others to ensure that this can be done in a proper and timely way.

I was concerned about how many other kings might come up, as I never thought my career would involve the question of how we might bury kings. I am glad to say that the Church can account for all of them. I am afraid to say that the head of Charles, king and martyr, is still separated from his body, but they are both at St George’s, Windsor. The only one still missing is Henry I, who seems to have got lost somewhere in Reading after the dissolution of the monasteries. I can account for all the other kings and queens being properly and Christianly buried.

Mr Speaker: That is greatly reassuring both to the House and, I am sure, to the nation.

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): I must say to my dear and hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) that it is not 500 years but 527 years since Richard was killed. Despite that passage of time, he is still very well regarded in York. [*Laughter.*] We have a museum to Richard III—

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is he still on the electoral roll?

Hugh Bayley: Do not tempt me down that path.

—and we respect him enormously. But to argue on the Floor of this place over his mortal remains is more like medieval cathedrals fighting over saints' relics. I do not think it is appropriate. I have heard what the spokesman for the Church Commissioners says, and they are wise words.

Sir Tony Baldry: That is very wise advice from the hon. Gentleman.

War Memorials

6. [124679] **Guy Opperman** (Hexham) (Con): What steps the Church Commissioners are taking to prevent metal theft from war memorials in church grounds.

Sir Tony Baldry: The theft of metal from war memorials is a distressing and despicable crime and an affront to the memory of those who gave their lives to the service of this country.

The Church of England has been active in its support of the Scrap Metal Dealers Bill, which will shortly have its Third Reading in the House. At a local level, the Church of England continues to offer advice and support to help churches to implement security measures that will make the theft less attractive while allowing the public to visit memorials without hindrance, and the Church is also working at local level with communities and the War Memorials Trust to preserve the names recorded on memorials and to clean, renovate and repair memorials in advance of the centenary of the commencement of world war one.

Guy Opperman: All of us welcome the Scrap Metal Dealers Bill to deal with this heinous crime, but does the Church Commissioner agree that the churches themselves need to engage with local scrap metal dealers so that there is not the repetition of this offence on a local basis?

Sir Tony Baldry: Yes, and dioceses and churches are already doing that. Responsible scrap metal dealers should be conscious of their responsibilities in that regard as well.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION

The hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Voter Registration

8. [124681] **Gavin Shuker** (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): What steps the Electoral Commission is taking to increase voter registration (a) in general and (b) among young people.

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon): The commission runs public information campaigns before elections and referendums to encourage people to register to vote. The campaigns are targeted towards groups less likely to be on the electoral register, including young people. The commission also provides guidance and sets standards for awareness to be raised locally by electoral registration officers, for which it has provided a range of resources to help them to do this, including template posters, press advertisements and press releases. Where under-performance is found, the commission provides EROs with targeted support.

Gavin Shuker: I am aware that many initiatives focused towards young people involve the use of social media, and I can twitter with the best of them, but will the hon. Gentleman give me the assurance that these social media tools will not be used as a replacement for more practical ways of getting young people to sign up to vote?

Mr Streeter: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. It is important to target public awareness campaigns towards young people in a way that is most likely to attract their attention, for example, by using TV and radio advertising, but on channels that they are likely to watch, which you and I, Mr Speaker, are probably not likely to watch.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Banbury, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Syria

9. [124682] **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the potential support which they can provide to Christian communities in Syria.

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Tony Baldry): Lambeth Palace and the Church of England are in regular contact with Christian development and mission agencies as to how best the Church might support vulnerable communities in Syria. However, the nature of the conflict in Syria means that it is proving incredibly difficult to give support to those communities in most need. The Archbishop of Canterbury remains in regular contact with religious leaders in Syria as well as with religious leaders from neighbouring countries.

Mr Hollobone: The Christian community in Syria is one of the oldest in the world and one of the largest in the middle east. Indeed, was it not St Paul himself who was converted on the road to Damascus? Is there not a very grave danger that if the wrong people come out on top in the present conflict in Syria there could be a bloodbath of Christians on a biblical scale?

Sir Tony Baldry: Yes, and that is why the Church of England is using such influence as we have to talk to the Russian ambassador and others here and in other countries around the world to present humanitarian concerns arising from the conflict in Syria and to encourage the Russian Government to play a more constructive role in resolving the conflict to try to seek to avoid a bloodbath of Christians and others.

Business of the House

10.33 am

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

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Andrew Lansley): The business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 29 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Public Service Pensions Bill.

TUESDAY 30 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Growth and Infrastructure Bill.

WEDNESDAY 31 OCTOBER—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Local Government Finance Bill, followed by a motion to approve European documents relating to EU budget simplification and the multi-annual financial framework.

THURSDAY 1 NOVEMBER—A debate on a motion relating to the beer duty escalator, followed by a debate on a motion relating to air passenger duty. The subjects for these debates have been nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 2 NOVEMBER—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 5 November will include:

MONDAY 5 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the European Union (Croatian Accession and Irish Protocol) Bill.

TUESDAY 6 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the HGV Road User Levy Bill, followed by a motion to approve European documents relating to banking union and economic and monetary union.

WEDNESDAY 7 NOVEMBER—Opposition Day [8th allotted day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. The subject is to be announced.

THURSDAY 8 NOVEMBER—A debate on a motion relating to the medium-term financial plan for the House of Commons administration and savings programme. The subject for this debate has been nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 9 NOVEMBER—Private Members' Bills.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 8 November will be:

THURSDAY 8 NOVEMBER—A debate on regulation of claims management companies.

Ms Eagle: I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. We welcome the fact that Britain has finally emerged from recession, but we should never have been in a double-dip recession in the first place. It was a recession created in Downing street by a part-time Chancellor who cut too far, too fast.

The Jimmy Savile case has rightly caused widespread disgust. There are serious questions for the BBC to answer, questions that were not answered during the director-general's unsatisfactory appearance before the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, but the issue goes much further. As happened in the Rochdale scandal only this year, it appears that in the Jimmy Savile case victims' complaints were not taken seriously. We need to learn these lessons and, for the sake of the victims, uncover the truth. An independent inquiry is needed, so may we have an urgent statement from the Home Secretary?

I have been keeping a list of the occasions when Ministers blame the weather for the omnishambles. So far, the Government have blamed the poor performance of the economy on the snow, before deciding that the reason was in fact too much rain. Then the Immigration Minister blamed the chaos at Heathrow border control on the wrong type of wind. Now the Environment Minister has blamed too much rain for the U-turn on the badger cull. We have seen the badger U-turn, the energy Bill shambles, the west coast main line fiasco, plebgate, and only today it appears that Ministers have got their sums wrong on tuition fees. It is not the weather that is to blame; it is the Government's incompetence. Ministers need to get a grip, so may we have an urgent statement on what has gone wrong from the man who is meant to be in charge of Government competence: the Deputy Prime Minister?

The abolition of child benefit for higher earning taxpayers was one of the Government's first shambles. The complex rules introduced by the Chancellor mean that from January an estimated half a million households will have to complete self-assessment tax forms for the first time. Many people have raised concerns that, weeks away from this change, Revenue and Customs has not written to families to warn them. There are those who have suggested that the Government's reluctance to send out those letters might have something to do with the upcoming elections for police and crime commissioners. May we have an urgent statement from the Chancellor setting out how his Department will let families know of impending child benefit changes?

Only a few weeks ago, following the Prime Minister's botched reshuffle, at business questions I paid tribute to the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Sir George Young), saying:

"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."—[*Official Report*, 6 September 2012; Vol. 549, c. 383.]

And he is back! It is a miracle. Given my predictive powers, the House might be interested to know that my tip for the 4.25 at Doncaster tomorrow is Flashman. I also predict that there will be another omnishambles along soon.

May we have a statement from the Transport Secretary on fare dodgers? Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the conductor on the Virgin train service who refused to let the Chancellor have a free ride? The hapless part-time Chancellor was bundled out of the goods exit at Euston to avoid the waiting media, and it was left to the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Jacob Rees-Mogg) to bat for the Government. His explanation was that "train tickets are so confusing it is easy to get into the wrong carriage." No wonder this Government have gone off the rails.

This week the man in charge of crisis management in No. 10 emerged from the bunker, blinking into the light of day, to offer his own explanation for the shambles. In a bizarre interview, he said that

"you'll get surprised by what's going on"

and that he was

"surprised on a day-to-day basis".

But Government Back Benchers will be pleased to know that Mr Dowden—for it is he—has a strategy:

"the first thing I do in the morning",

he said, is to

“turn on the Today programme and hear what’s going on”.

So two and a half years into office, the Government are divided, Back Benchers are in revolt, and Government policies are unravelling daily, and the best strategy that No. 10 has come up with is to listen to the “Today” programme. We just can’t go on like this.

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to the shadow Leader of the House; I enjoyed that. I am not a betting man, but if I were I would never bet against my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Sir George Young)—that’s for sure. It is a pleasure to have him back among our colleagues, although I have always valued my right hon. Friend the former Chief Whip as a colleague and pay tribute to his time in Government. We should all reflect on what a tremendous contribution he has made around the world as International Development Secretary.

To pursue the hon. Lady’s analogy, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and, indeed, the Government are on the right track. The figures published this morning for quarter three growth, to which she referred for about 12 seconds, are a reflection of the right approach being taken by this Government. I understood her to say that we should not have been in this position; indeed we should not. We were in this position because we inherited an economy that was close to bankruptcy from a Government who had spent without thought and put us into enormous debt. The debt has been at the heart of this, and Labour Members seem never to learn. They never seem to understand that the answer to this country’s problems in resolving the deficit and the debts is not more borrowing.

What the shadow Leader of the House said was entertaining, but, when it comes down to it, it was, frankly, trivia. What really matters is what is actually happening in this country, and she neglected that. This morning’s growth statistics are very encouraging and illustrative of the progress that is being made. The Chancellor said at an early stage that the recovery would be choppy, and indeed it has been, but these figures illustrate where we are going.

Another illustration of our being on the right track is that the employment situation is so much improved. The latest statistics show that there are over 1 million more people in private sector employment since the election, that youth employment is improving, that the number of people on out-of-work benefits is down, that inflation is down, and that new company creation in 2011 was the best ever, with over 1,230 new companies being created per day.

Beyond the economic sphere, the latest figures show that crime rates are down by 6%. In the NHS, which is of course closest to my heart, waiting times are among the very best we have ever seen, including a reduction in the number of those waiting over a year for their treatment in the NHS, which was some 18,000-plus at the time of the last election and is now down to nearly 2,000. I hope that the shadow Leader of the House will reflect on the realities across the country rather than on Westminster trivia.

The hon. Lady made an important point about the investigations relating to Jimmy Savile. Independent inquiries are being undertaken by the police, as a criminal

investigation, and by Kate Lampard on behalf of the NHS, and there are two BBC inquiries led by Nick Pollard and by Dame Janet Smith. All those inquiries are independent and I see no reason at this stage for us to think that there would be any merit in seeking to overturn those inquiries, which are making progress. We must simply make sure that, as I know they will, they all respect and understand the fact that the police’s criminal investigation must take precedence.

The shadow Leader of the House also asked about business relating to—*[Interruption.]* Actually, perhaps she did not ask any other questions, so I will leave it there.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. A very large number of hon. and right hon. Members are, as usual on this occasion, seeking to catch my eye, but I remind the House that business under the auspices of the Backbench Business Committee will follow. There are two pieces of such business, both of which are of intense topical interest. The second piece is a debate and I can tell the House—because I have the list—that it is extremely heavily subscribed. If I am to accommodate colleagues now, within a limited time frame, brevity from Members on the Back and Front Benches alike is essential. We will be led in that by Caroline Nokes.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will no doubt be aware of the announcement by Ford today of the closure of the Transit factory in Swaythling in my constituency, with the loss of 500 manufacturing jobs and potential further losses in the supply chain. Will he please find time for a debate on this serious matter, which affects not just my constituency, but the surrounding constituencies of many right hon. and hon. Members?

Mr Lansley: I am sure that the whole House will share my hon. Friend’s regret at the loss of any jobs, particularly those in a major plant in her constituency. She will know that Ministers will be focused, as they have been elsewhere, on trying to provide whatever help and support they can. She will also know that this is in the context of many very positive announcements in recent months by the motor vehicle industry, including that this country is a net exporter of cars for the first time in many years, and of investments at Honda, Nissan, BMW and Jaguar; but that does not take away at all from the distress that today’s announcement will no doubt have caused in my hon. Friend’s constituency. I undertake that Ministers will respond and keep the House informed on action to support the staff affected.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): May we have a debate on early-day motion 607?

[That this House notes that Ministers have recently repeated the claim that the lives of British soldiers should be put at risk in Afghanistan to counter the alleged Afghan Taliban terrorist threat to the UK; believes that there is no truth in this claim and that the lives of British soldiers should not be sacrificed when no threat to the UK exists; and calls on the Coalition Government to adopt an independent foreign policy.]

[Paul Flynn]

Canadian and Dutch soldiers have returned to their own countries from Afghanistan with their heads held high after large sacrifices in blood and treasure. We have heard today the dreadful news of two further deaths of British soldiers. There will be many tributes to them that will be sincere and heartfelt, but will not history judge that their epitaph should be, "They died to protect the reputation of cowardly Ministers"?

Mr Lansley: The House knows not only that we will pay heartfelt tribute to service personnel, including the two who it was announced yesterday have tragically died in Afghanistan, but that the people of this country and this House will take the view that they have died in defence of the interests of this country and to protect this country and that we are in Afghanistan to combat a terrorist threat and, alongside that, to help put in place in Afghanistan a sustainable and more democratic country for the future. That is why they are there and we should honour and value the contribution that service personnel make.

Mr John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): May we have a debate on the £1 billion-plus of losses in derivative trading by Network Rail? Some of us would like that money spent on trains and bridges over railway lines instead of in a second-grade investment bank.

Mr Lansley: I do not have an immediate opportunity for a debate on that subject, but if I contact my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary, he may well be able to give a reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr Redwood).

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): After nearly 11 years of being held without charge or trial, British resident Shaker Aamer is still in Guantanamo Bay, in spite of the fact that both US and UK authorities have said that he can be released. May we have an urgent debate to try to understand what the obstacles are to getting this man released and make that a real priority?

Mr Lansley: I know that hon. Members of all parties have taken a close interest in the situation of those who are at Guantanamo Bay. The hon. Lady may care to consider raising the matter at Foreign Office questions next Tuesday, but it also seems to me to be a subject on which she might like to seek a debate on the Adjournment.

Sir Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): May we have a debate on the independence of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority? You will recall, Mr Speaker, that in February I established through a written question that Ministers had met IPSA on nine occasions in the previous four months. I suspect the dead hand of the Treasury, because I asked a question in September, and the answer given this Monday at column 636 of *Hansard* refused to give information on the number of occasions on which the Treasury and Treasury Ministers had had discussions with IPSA.

Mr Lansley: I can tell the House that I have met IPSA since becoming Leader of the House, and nobody at that meeting would have regarded it as in any way

compromising IPSA's independence. I regard it as my responsibility to be fully informed, not least as a member of the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, so that we can express views to IPSA. Members have rightly taken the view that there should be independent scrutiny of their pay, pensions and terms and conditions through IPSA. It is important that having established that independence, we make it real.

Mr Dave Watts (St Helens North) (Lab): The Government's council grant cuts, housing benefit cuts, welfare benefit cuts and health funding cuts are having the worst effect on the poorest families and individuals. May we have a debate on the overall impact that all the Government's cuts are having on the poorest families and communities?

Mr Lansley: The hon. Gentleman should recognise that our policy is about the reform of the benefits system. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is making clear today, if we can encourage people into work, that is the best route out of poverty. The benefit reforms will change the culture for good.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): May we have a debate on university technical colleges? They have been a great success story, and Members have not had an opportunity to examine what drives that success so that we might see more and more of them.

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Many Members might envy the position that I am in, because a university technical college is being established in Cambridge, which is enabling many young people to come forward and acquire training in skills that will support the life sciences industry. That is a tremendous step forward, and I pay tribute to the Baker Dearing Educational Trust and those who have taken the initiative forward. I hope that many Members, like my hon. Friend, will encourage UTCs in their area. She might like to raise the matter with our colleagues at Education questions on Monday.

Mr David Hamilton (Midlothian) (Lab): In 2010, the Government decided to defer a decision about sport on free-to-air television, because they were waiting until digital TV came fully into operation. It is now fully operational, but Culture Ministers have told us that there will not be a discussion on the matter. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate? After all, top sport should be for the masses, not the few.

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the matter. I must say, I was struck last week at business questions—perhaps it will be true again this week—that there is a lot of interest in sport, from governance through to the Olympic and Paralympic legacy and on the point that he raises. That might make it appropriate for issues related to sport to be debated in the House at some point. Perhaps those of us who timetable business can discuss that.

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): May I ask my right hon. Friend a question in my capacity as Second Church Estates Commissioner? The Scrap Metal Dealers Bill

will soon have its Third Reading debate. It has had two years of hard work put into it, with consultation with Home Office officials and other Departments, and there is support for it throughout the House. If it is frustrated and talked out on Report or Third Reading by just one Member, will he undertake to find Government time for it to complete its passage through the House? Churches, communities and the transport system up and down the country cannot allow Back-Bench filibustering to prevent the Bill from passing into law.

Mr Lansley: I heard what my hon. Friend said when he responded to questions on that matter on behalf of the Church Commissioners. He knows that the Government fully support the Bill tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Richard Ottaway). Members throughout the House will know, as I do from my constituency, of the damage, distress and expense caused by metal theft. That is true not only in relation to churches but perhaps particularly in relation to the theft of metal from memorials in the run-up to Remembrance Sunday. I cannot give him the undertaking that he seeks, not least because I am hopeful that the Bill will attract the House's support on the day in question.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Has the new Leader of the House seen the Chartered Management Institute's commissioned report on the quality of management in Britain, which shows that 38% of managers—public and private sector—are awful, and that only 40% of managers in our country have any training at all? Does he find it worrying that very few of those GPs who will be running clinical commissioning groups have any management training?

Mr Lansley: The hon. Gentleman may like to look at the composition of clinical commissioning groups with great care. They combine managerial and clinical expertise, and he should not diminish the importance of clinicians being directly involved in the commissioning process. Securing the right medical and clinical services for patients in an area is not simply a managerial task; it is both managerial and clinical.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): May we have a debate on equal pay for women? That request arises first out of yesterday's landmark decision on the issue by the Supreme Court, but also because county councils up and down the country are facing a problem caused by a failure to pay the women they have employed over the years. In Northumberland, for example, hundreds of my constituents face a five-year delay to be paid.

Mr Lansley: The Government very much support equal pay—yesterday's decision seemed a bit of a "Made in Dagenham" moment, did it not? Although the circumstances of that case are particular to it and relate to time limits and jurisdiction, I hope that it conveys a message about how to ensure equality and equal pay in every work force, which should be in every employer's mind.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): May we have a debate on plans by the NHS in south-west England to introduce regional pay? Those plans are opposed by south-west MPs from all political parties, and we are

still waiting for a delegation to see the Minister. I have asked for a debate several times, and we need to have one urgently.

Mr Lansley: I attended Health questions earlier in the week, and thought that that issue was ably responded to by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter). What he said is clear: the Government support the "Agenda for Change" framework and, like NHS employers, we support the reform of that agenda to provide the flexibility that employers are looking for, so that it can be achieved within a national framework. That is what we are looking for.

Simon Kirby (Brighton, Kemptown) (Con): Given today's excellent GDP figures, will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on whether plan B is now redundant?

Mr Lansley: As my hon. Friend will appreciate, the debate scheduled for next week on the Growth and Infrastructure Bill, will no doubt afford an opportunity to demonstrate that the Government are on the right track, as demonstrated by the GDP figures. Quarterly figures have been, and will be, choppy, but it is important to establish the right framework for the longer term. That is about achieving investment in infrastructure, and instilling confidence so that we can see that investment coming through. It is about deregulation and ensuring that business has a lower-cost environment, and recognising that we are in a global race and must ensure we are competitive in terms of tax, regulation and skills. The Government are making positive progress on all those things.

Ann Coffey (Stockport) (Lab): The children and families Bill will be a significant piece of legislation in a complex area, and I fully support its aims. Will the Leader of the House ensure that when it reaches Report, sufficient time will be made available so that hon. Members who may not have been on the Bill Committee will have a full opportunity to discuss the legislation's complex provisions?

Mr Lansley: As the hon. Lady will be aware, since the election we have been able to timetable more opportunities for debate on Report, and I pay tribute to my predecessor and the Whips for ensuring that. Often, not just one but two days have been allocated for the Report stage of major Bills. As the hon. Lady says, the children and families Bill is very important. It has not yet been introduced, although we look forward to that.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): May we have a debate on the issues faced by older people who are seeking to save money for retirement? The all-party group for ageing and older people has just launched a report on older savers which shows that £13 billion is lost through poor advice and a failure by banks to switch accounts.

Mr Lansley: I take note of what my hon. Friend says. People feel strongly about that very important issue. We will of course look at the business, and no doubt the Opposition and the Backbench Business Committee will also consider the matter. It could be considered in

[Mr Lansley]

the context of the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards and the approach taken by banks to their customers.

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House investigate the delay in publishing the results of the pilot scheme on recording Atos assessments, and ensure that they are published as soon as possible?

Mr Lansley: I cannot answer the hon. Lady's question at this moment, but I will ask my colleagues at the Department for Work and Pensions to respond to her.

Gavin Barwell (Croydon Central) (Con): With the economy growing, inflation lower than expected, public borrowing lower than expected and more people in work than at any time in our history, I am sure the Opposition will use the next Opposition day to talk about the economy, but if for some inconceivable reason they do not, will the Leader of the House ensure that Government time is made available?

Mr Lansley: Yes; I reiterate my hon. Friend's extremely good point and commend it to the shadow Leader of the House when she considers the business on—I believe—7 November, when the Opposition will no doubt take the opportunity to debate the latest positive figures on growth, employment and the reduction of inflation, and the simple fact that since the Government came to office, we have cut the deficit we inherited by a quarter.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): I understand the Leader of the House used to have an interest in health. In that case, will he use his influence with the current Health Secretary to persuade him either to have a debate, or at least to make an oral statement, on access to radiotherapy? There was an announcement at the Tory party conference, which the Health Secretary mentioned in question time, but it would be a courtesy to the House if we were allowed to understand the detail. The issue is not just about capital, but revenue.

Mr Lansley: The hon. Gentleman might like to know that the Leader of the House still has an interest in health, and I was at Health questions this week. He is right that the Health Secretary made it clear that he has made an announcement relating to a new radiotherapy innovation fund, which will support hospitals to ensure that patients have intensity-modulated radiotherapy if it is appropriate for them and that there is more access to stereotactic ablative therapy, both of which the hon. Gentleman has asked for and both of which this Government are now supporting.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Northern Lincolnshire has had some promising announcements recently to boost the local economy, but yesterday Kimberly-Clark announced the closure of its factory at Barton-upon-Humber in my constituency with the loss of 378 permanent jobs and 120 others. Will the Leader of the House find time for a statement to give details of additional Government support that might be made available to benefit the local economy?

Mr Lansley: As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), that is further evidence of the choppy waters through which the economy is moving, which are a consequence of global competition. The investment that is coming to this country, which is positive, and contrary announcements that cause us considerable regret are both a consequence of global competition. Our job is to ensure that, whenever we can, we ensure that this country is the best possible place for investment. This is about rebalancing the economy, which is bringing additional investment into manufacturing. Rebalancing is important, but I entirely take my hon. Friend's point that it will also mean that we ensure we give support to individual businesses to maximise their activity in this country—as we are doing, through, for example, the regional growth fund and local enterprise partnerships. I will ask my hon. Friends in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to respond on the issues my hon. Friend raises.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): May we have an early debate on the emergence of two-nation Britain, because, although the figures are good for London and the south, according to House of Commons figures given to me today, in Barnsley unemployment is up 6% on last year, in Bradford 9%, in Leeds 3% and in my own constituency 1%? We are now seeing an emerging disconnect between the north and the Tory and Liberal Democrat shires of the south. We need a one-nation Government, not this Government of the south, by the south, for the south.

Mr Lansley: As a one-nation Conservative, I believe that we are a one-nation Government. If the right hon. Gentleman wanted any more evidence of that, he would have paid more attention to the announcements by the Deputy Prime Minister last Friday, I think, on regional growth 3, which will support the kind of innovative investment in the north of England that is integral to its economic development.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Not only has the number of jobseeker's allowance claimants in Stafford fallen by 14% since April 2010, but we have just had the welcome news that a record 272 new companies were formed in the first six months. May we have a debate on how to support these new companies, so that they create the jobs and pay the taxes we need?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I am happy to say that those figures are reflected in many constituencies across the country. Stafford is clearly working well, and I applaud what they are doing there. Yes, I hope we will have the opportunity, not least in the debate on the Growth and Infrastructure Bill, to see how we are creating that kind of environment. I would draw particular attention to the work being done through the youth contract and apprenticeships to ensure that young people are finding the kinds of jobs with skills training attached that will enable them to support industrial development in the future.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): May we have an urgent debate or statement from a Minister to explain why the Minister with responsibility for welfare reform, Lord Freud, has agreed that in Northern Ireland payment of

housing benefit directly to landlords will continue, while in the rest of the country payment must be made directly to tenants—despite all the problems, highlighted by many people, with that—and to explain the unique circumstances for this decision?

Mr Lansley: I will of course talk to my hon. Friends at the Department for Work and Pensions, so that they reply specifically to the hon. Gentleman, but my understanding is not that the changes to universal credit rule out the possibility of direct payment, but merely that it is important that they be assessed and examined to ensure they are appropriate. Wherever possible, we want those in receipt of universal credit to feel like they are in work. We do not want to change the sense of that, so that they get their pay and it is their responsibility to live within their means.

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Earlier this week, I attended a meeting of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly in Glasgow. One issue discussed was that of marine and renewable energy. It appeared that few people were aware of the role that the south-west was playing in delivering that. May we have a debate on this important issue, so that we can promote the south-west and its contribution in this area?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, not least for attending the BIPA, which I know is valued on both sides of the Irish sea. I hope that we will have the opportunity for that debate. He might want to look to have it when we consider the Energy Bill. The Government attach considerable importance to this matter and have invested more than £17 million in testing and academic facilities for marine energy in the south-west, and are encouraging the region to become the first UK marine energy park. I am sure he will want to illustrate that contribution to our future energy requirements and security during our debate on the Energy Bill.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Last week, the quiet rituals of Friday afternoon in west Cardiff were shattered by a series of hit-and-run incidents that left a young mother dead, her three children motherless and many more injured and traumatised by the events. Will the Leader of the House find a slot where I can put on the record my thanks to the emergency services—the police, the fire service, the ambulance service and the NHS—whose swift and well-co-ordinated actions undoubtedly saved many lives?

Mr Lansley: I am sure that the House will join me in expressing our sincere condolences to the family and friends of the young lady who died and in extending our best wishes to those who were injured. We were all shocked by what happened. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to express appreciation for the emergency services. We in this House should do so every time we have the opportunity, because these terrible, shocking moments illustrate how much we depend on their prompt and effective action.

Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend support the planting of a Red Windsor apple tree in honour of the Queen's diamond jubilee by Mr Speaker on Speaker's Green next Wednesday at

half-past 2? Will he attend the planting and will he encourage Members on both sides of the House to do so too, to support the Woodland Trust, among others, which is planting 6 million trees for the environment of this country this year?

Mr Lansley: Yes, I do indeed support that. I and the Deputy Leader of the House look forward to being there, and I think the shadow Leader of the House hopes to be there too. I am sure that that is supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House and look forward to the Speaker joining us in expressing our appreciation to Her Majesty on her diamond jubilee.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House find time to remember Noor Inayat Khan? She was an operative in Winston Churchill's Special Operations Executive? May I express my thanks to the Speaker for helping in the campaign and to Members of the House who signed early-day motion 109?

[That this House congratulates the Memorial Trust of Noor Inayat Khan set up to honour and to recognise her extraordinary bravery; notes that Noor Inayat Khan was posthumously awarded the George Cross as one of only three women in Winston Churchill's Special Operations Executive and was also awarded the Croix de Guerre by France; recalls that under the code name Madeleine she was the first female radio operator in occupied France in 1943; further notes that despite being tortured she remained silent and her last word was Liberté; further notes that she was executed in Dachau at the age of 30; welcomes the permission given by the Vice Chancellor of the University of London for a bust to be installed in Gordon Square, near the house where Noor lived and from where she left on her fatal mission; further notes that the majority of the funds needed to fund the statue has already been raised by the Trust; congratulates the donors; encourages further donations to the Fund; and looks forward to the unveiling of the first memorial to a British Asian woman when the sculpture by Karen Newman is completed in Autumn 2012.]

May I also thank the university of London, which agreed to my request to place a memorial to Noor on its land in Gordon square? The sculpture by Karen Newman will be unveiled on 8 November. Noor was executed in Dachau concentration camp; this will be an opportunity for us to remember a true British heroine.

Mr Lansley: I am sure that the House is grateful to the hon. Lady, especially at this time of year, for drawing attention to the courage and example of the men and women of the Special Operations Executive, and of Noor Inayat Khan in particular. The House will also recall early-day motion 109 in that respect. I hope that the memorial to her—the sculpture to which the hon. Lady referred—will constantly remind people of the remarkable courage of those in the Special Operations Executive and the contribution they made.

Dr Julian Huppert (Cambridge) (LD): The leader of Cambridgeshire county council recently wrote that global warming “may not exist” and that if it does, it is “not caused by human activity”.

He described it as a theory espoused by “bourgeois left-wing academics”. Does the Leader of the House

[Dr Julian Huppert]

join me in condemning this irresponsible and anti-scientific position, and will he find time for a debate about evidence-informed policy?

Mr Lansley: I will not join my hon. Friend in that respect, although that does not mean that I agree with the leader of Cambridgeshire county council. We are all allowed our views, and he is allowed his. My hon. Friend and I will have talked to many of the scientists at the British Antarctic Survey in Cambridge. When one does so, it amply illustrates the character of climate change, what is really going on and the threat it poses.

Mr Tom Harris (Glasgow South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House offer a helping hand to Scotland's First Minister, who recently mislaid some important legal advice on the future of an independent Scotland in the EU? We have searched everywhere for it. It may be under the sofa; the First Minister may have left it on a bus; his dog may have eaten it—we just do not know. It could have been mislaid in the Foreign Office—and it is the Foreign Office, not the Scottish Government, that has responsibility for external relations with the European Union. Will the right hon. Gentleman implement a cross-departmental hunt for the advice? It must exist; the First Minister says so and the only alternative is that he is a liar, and that would be unthinkable.

Mr Lansley: To be honest, in this context I suspect that the hon. Gentleman would be better to instigate a search for the credibility of the First Minister in Scotland, because as far as I can see, earlier in the year he was saying that he had legal advice, but then it turned out that he had not even asked for it. As the Prime Minister quite rightly said yesterday at Prime Minister's questions, that just exposes the lack of credibility of the arguments being presented by the Scottish National party for the break-up of the Union.

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): My Twitter feed is often packed with comments from Opposition Members whenever there is negative economic news, but today it is remarkably empty. Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate on the economy so that we can discuss today's data as well as recent positive data?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Although parliamentary time is tight, it is awfully tempting to arrange a debate on the economic figures—on growth, employment, inflation and borrowing. I fear, however, that we might not be able to do so. I reiterate the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Gavin Barwell): as the Opposition have time available in the week after next, perhaps they might like to debate the issues.

Dame Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the Clerks and staff of the House, including *Hansard*, on their enabling us to make a smooth transition to our earlier sitting hours? Will he quash the ugly rumours that this is a mere experiment and confirm there are no plans to review the earlier hours?

Mr Lansley: I of course share the right hon. Lady's appreciation of the way in which the Clerk and staff of the House assist us in our business. The House was invited to make a decision and a decision was made.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate on the creation of the excellent new Blue Collar Conservatives group last week? As the Labour party has abandoned the working classes and appears to want to stand up only for people who do not want to work and appears to believe in suppression rather than aspiration, would not such a debate show that the natural political home for anyone in the working classes is the Conservative party?

Mr Lansley: Yes, I share my hon. Friend's view. We are now in a coalition Government, but the Conservative party has always been most successful when it has reached out to all the nation. That is why I am a one-nation Conservative and why in the 1980s more trade unionists voted Conservative than voted Labour. They were right to do so and our country has consequently been transformed. It continues to be my ambition and that of my party that we continue to be a home for people of aspiration, wherever they come from.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): On the theme of aspiration and working people, may we have a debate and statement on why the Government regard people doing unpaid work experience as being in employment?

Mr Lansley: I shall gladly ask my friends at the Department for Work and Pensions to reply on how the statistics are calculated. The latest figures show an increase of more than 50,000 in the number of young people in employment and a decrease in the number of people on out-of-work benefits, and he should celebrate that.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): My local council, Kirklees, is going through the latest stage of its consultation on the local development framework. May we have a debate on the five-year land supply and the scrapping of the regional spatial strategy housing targets to ensure that development is sustainable?

Mr Lansley: I know from my own circumstances of the importance that was attached to abolishing top-down housing targets set under the regional spatial strategy, and why the local development framework is so important. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has said that the local development framework must meet the test of providing locations for sustainable housing sufficient to meet an area's need for a number of years ahead. To help my hon. Friend, I shall ask my right hon. Friend to write to him.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): The Foreign Office is due to publish its landmark strategy on business and human rights any day now. Will the Leader of the House talk to Ministers about exactly when the strategy will be published and ensure that time is found for a ministerial statement to the House to accompany its much-awaited publication?

Mr Lansley: I know that my colleagues at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are well aware of the hon. Lady's points, but I shall draw their attention to them. She might like to bear it in mind that an opportunity to ask that question will arise at Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions on Tuesday.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): E-petitions have garnered considerable public interest and attention, so may we have a debate on their impact?

Mr Lansley: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that. It is worth our making the point in our constituencies and to our constituents that Parliament is connecting with the public in a way that has never happened before. Fourteen e-petitions have crossed the 100,000-signature threshold, and we and the Backbench Business Committee have enabled debate to be held on all of them. In addition, the Government will respond to every petition that passes the 10,000-signature threshold. On behalf of the Government I am putting the responses on the website, and some 20 will have gone up by now. I hope to complete the process of responding to all those that have passed the 10,000-signature threshold in the next few days.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Improving home energy efficiency is essential to combat fuel poverty. The Insulation Industry Forum has just told me that there will be 16,000 job losses in its sector soon. May we have an urgent debate to help prevent this loss of key skills, given that investment in energy efficiency is so important?

Mr Lansley: It is tremendously important, and it is the green deal, which began its implementation at the beginning of October, that will make such a difference in enabling that to happen. The green deal support, the largest such programme we have ever seen, is specifically designed to support some of the measures, such as insulation, that will make the biggest difference to energy efficiency. I hope that exactly that will happen as we get behind this programme.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): Unemployment in my constituency is now at a lower level than it was at the general election. May we have a

debate about how the Government can make it easier for small charities, such as Black Country Foodbank and Loaves and Fishes in my constituency, to take on job seekers on work experience without those job seekers fearing that are going to lose their benefits?

Mr Lansley: I share with my hon. Friend the feeling of encouragement that we get from the employment figures, as they show the number of people in work and reflect the support we are giving them. I will, of course, ask my hon. Friends at the Department for Work and Pensions to address the specific point he raises.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): In the Harrogate area, this year is on track to be the record year for the opening of new business bank accounts. Last year saw a record half a million new businesses created in the UK. Before coming to this place, I was involved in starting businesses, and I am sure they play an important role in our economic recovery. May we have a debate to recognise the progress made and to explore what more could be done to make the UK the best place to start a business?

Mr Lansley: As my hon. Friend says, the progress is tremendously encouraging. The rate of new business creation in 2011 was the highest ever at more than 1,230 a day. Along with my colleagues, I will try to encourage debate on this issue and take advantage of whatever opportunities we can. New business formation is vital. As we know, the support we can give for small business—including finance for lending and small business lending—and the initiatives we have announced will make a considerable difference, but we are looking tirelessly at how we can stimulate effective lending to businesses to enable those businesses that are being created at an unprecedented rate to go on to grow and expand.

[Mr Lansley]

Backbench Business

International Development Committee Report (Afghanistan)

Mr Speaker: We now come to the main business. I would like to remind the House that the first piece of business under the auspices of the Backbench Business Committee relates to the publication of a Select Committee report. This is not a debate; it takes the form of a statement by the right hon. Member for Gordon (Sir Malcolm Bruce), who chairs the Select Committee. There will be an opportunity to intervene on him, but we also have a very heavily subscribed debate to follow. I know that Members, including the right hon. Gentleman, will wish to take account of that important fact in tailoring their contributions.

11.23 am

Sir Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of the publication of the Sixth Report from the International Development Committee, on Afghanistan: Development progress and prospects after 2014, HC 403.

I am happy to accept interventions, while taking Mr Speaker's restrictions into account. It is worth recording that, since 2001, approximately \$30 billion has been spent on development and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and \$243 billion on security. Our own Department for International Development has spent over £1 billion since 2001 and currently spends £178 million a year in Afghanistan.

Sadly, the report has been published on a day on which two more British service personnel have been killed. A total of 435 men and women from our forces have lost their lives in Afghanistan—along with thousands of Afghan people—to enable the country to reach its current position, and the main thrust of our report is that we must not abandon it now.

The Committee visited Afghanistan in June. We thank our adviser, Ashley Jackson—who is a research fellow at the Overseas Development Institute—and we commend the dedication of DFID's staff, including those recruited locally, on their commitment in difficult and challenging circumstances.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend will recall our visit to the hospital of the International Committee of the Red Cross, which was doing incredible, innovative work with amputees who had been injured in land mine and other accidents. He will also recall the workshop next to the hospital, where false limbs were being manufactured. All the people working there were amputees, demonstrating very effectively the possibility of returning to work. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that was a really good example of part-funding by DFID and that we should encourage the Department to increase its funding to ensure that more people are helped?

Sir Malcolm Bruce: I agree with my hon. Friend. Contrary to what Members might think, our visit was truly inspirational in terms of what it told us about

amputees' recovery and recuperation. The Red Cross runs seven such centres throughout Afghanistan, and its valuable work is supported very effectively by DFID, but it could indeed benefit from further support.

Our main concern is that we cannot predetermine where Afghanistan will go after 2014. There will be elections, but we do not know who will be elected. There will also be security challenges. Threats to security and development potential will vary and may fluctuate across the country. We recommend that DFID's engagement should be flexible according to the prevailing circumstances at any given time. That may mean acknowledging that delivering development assistance may be more achievable in some provinces than in others. There are provinces in which virtually no violence has occurred, but not all of them are receiving the aid and support that they need.

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): Given the current security situation, especially in Helmand province, it is much harder for DFID officials to get out and about and supervise and quality-control DFID projects than it was during the Committee's earlier visits. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is important for us to maintain the ability to carry out development work in that province—particularly given the loss of so many British lives in Helmand—and that it might be sensible to appoint more Afghan staff to manage DFID projects in the more conflicted areas of the country, given that they have less difficulty in getting out and about for security reasons?

Sir Malcolm Bruce: The hon. Gentleman puts his finger on a very important point. We acknowledge that Helmand will present difficulties, and we accept that DFID has decided that it will not be able to maintain an office there once the troops have been withdrawn. However, I agree with him that, given that the British forces' engagement in Afghanistan has focused on Helmand, it would be a total negation of that if we could not deliver projects in that province. As he says, we need to find local partners who can probably operate much more effectively than armed foreigners.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on the Committee's report. What role does he see for non-governmental organisations in the delivery of DFID's aid in Afghanistan?

Sir Malcolm Bruce: NGOs will have a substantial role. We recognise that a limited number of very effective NGOs—some international and some local—can operate in circumstances in which foreign Government agencies cannot. The fundamental reason for that is their ability to reach an accommodation with local leaders and to defuse situations that international organisations would sometimes appear to provoke. We argue that we need to develop links of that kind much more effectively in the future.

Mr Michael McCann (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (Lab): The British public are owed honesty, and the media have rightly reported today on whether the development efforts in Afghanistan are worth the sacrifices that are being made. Does the Select Committee Chairman agree that when Committee members visited Afghanistan we witnessed the problems that our aid efforts were having with full military support, so logic

dictates that when that military support is drawn down the current problems will, at best, remain the same, and at worst there is the potential for the situation to deteriorate further?

Sir Malcolm Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, but the point is that we do not know what the situation will be. Our argument is that we need to be flexible. We should make a fundamental commitment to continue to provide support where we can, although we might have to find different ways and mechanisms.

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Alan Duncan): May I begin by joining in the expressions of sadness about the deaths of the two British service personnel? We value enormously the role played by our military in Afghanistan. We simply would not be able to operate without the support that they provide.

I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we welcome his Committee's valuable report, to which we will reply formally in due course. No one is suggesting that Afghanistan is a fully viable state yet, but, as his report says, DFID's efforts have made a big difference to a lot of people by helping to improve basic services and support economic growth. We completely agree that our focus should be on the position of women and girls, and that will remain a key focus of our development work in Afghanistan, so the report's recommendations in this critical area are very welcome. I assure the House that our commitment to that desperately poor country will continue for many years to come.

Sir Malcolm Bruce: I thank my right hon. Friend for that very constructive intervention. Although we are suggesting changes in priorities, our main point is that the UK Government and DFID need to be flexible in what is a very challenging situation.

Of course the Committee would wish to see Afghanistan functioning as a normal state in due course—we certainly do not want it to be a rogue state—but we are a little sceptical about whether a British Government fund of £178 million a year can itself achieve a viable state. The danger is that if that aim becomes the overriding focus, it might be at the expense of delivering material, practical progress in terms of livelihoods, the rights of women and health and education. We are asking the Department to balance those aspects in a way that does not compromise what has been achieved.

We have articulated the view that the post-2014 litmus test on the extent of the changes in Afghanistan and whether improvements have been secured and are progressing will be the status of women. It is about the worst country in the world in which to be a woman, but progress has been made. If that progress is reversed, we will be able to assume that the condition of all Afghans is deteriorating—and if that progress is continued, we can assume that the situation of all Afghans has improved further. The status of women will be the best indicator of whether everyone's quality of life is improving.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): The entire House is grateful to the right hon. Gentleman and his Committee for adding a dose of reality to the myths that have surrounded this topic. Our efforts have been well-intentioned but ludicrously over-ambitious in that we have tried to

change a 13th century society into a modern state. Is not the message of the report that we cannot win hearts and minds with bombs and bullets and that we must do our best not to raise hopes—particularly for women—that will be sadly and cruelly dashed in the future? We should see what we can do not as soldiers and a military force, but as people offering aid, to rescue what we can from the wreckage of the past 11 years of failed policies.

Sir Malcolm Bruce: I accept part of what the hon. Gentleman says, but I do not entirely accept his apocalyptic version of events. Real progress has been made; we should not underestimate that. Although Committee members' opportunities to travel and engage were limited, we were impressed that people, especially women, told us, "Please be in no doubt that what you've done has dramatically improved the quality of our lives, and please don't abandon us when your troops withdraw." That is a crucial point.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): As co-chair of the all-party group on Afghanistan, may I welcome the report and the Minister's comments? I have been visiting the country regularly since 2005 and am worried that the improvements to security that we have seen have not been matched by advances in sustainable economic development and governance. Afghan fatigue seems to be setting in. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, once the US elections are over, the international community must redouble its efforts to assist Afghanistan in preparing for the situation post-2014, when the international security assistance force finally withdraws?

Sir Malcolm Bruce: I absolutely agree. It is important that we say to our taxpayers and to the people of Afghanistan that we have no intention of seeing a curtain come down in 2014, which means that we have withdrawn. There will be a transition, a change and something different.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman and the International Development Committee on this excellent report. I wish to pick up on his point about the UK Government talking a great deal about women's rights in Afghanistan but not following up with substantial action. Does he agree that the UK Government need to place a much greater emphasis on women's empowerment and human rights? Those things need to be at the heart of the development agenda. There are concerns that the idea of development and poverty eradication is too narrow in the Minister's mind and that rights and women's empowerment are not fully understood.

Sir Malcolm Bruce: We argue that there is not enough evidence in DFID's programme that the rights of women are central to its objective, and we suggest that DFID should prioritise those. I am sure that Ministers will say that a lot of what they are doing is beneficial to women, but it is not clearly focused in that direction. ActionAid, which I cite merely because it is an evidence base that we had, said that only one out of 92 listed DFID projects had

"an explicit commitment to gender or women's issues."

Of course we do have a female Secretary of State for International Development, whom we met yesterday,

[*Sir Malcolm Bruce*]

and a female Under-Secretary—I say that with no disrespect to the Minister of State, who I am sure will share their commitment. I think that we can be assured that women's rights will be central to the future commitment.

Margot James (Stourbridge) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend's Committee on making the central point that, unless a significant part of our aid budget is devoted to projects designed to empower women, women will lag behind and the whole development effort will suffer. What assessment did the Committee make on its visit of the capacity of the NGOs that represent women, such as Humanitarian Assistance for the Women and Children of Afghanistan? How strong is the women's NGO sector's capability to deliver on some of the DFID programmes in the future?

Sir Malcolm Bruce: A number of NGOs have a strong commitment, and there are some powerful female voices in Afghan society that speak out for women. However, there is real fear that they will be pushed back after 2014, and they need continued support. There is also a recognition that international NGOs are sometimes compromised because they are seen to be interfering in a traditional culture. So it is important that we develop civil society in Afghanistan, and support those women in Afghanistan who can fight for themselves and ensure that they know that they have extra support outside. I take the view that not only in Afghanistan but across the world the key to development—the single most important thing—is the development of women's rights. That is the most transformational thing that we can do.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): There is no question but that corruption is a real problem in relation to the international community's efforts in Afghanistan and other places. Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that the UK has put in place enough safeguards to ensure that UK taxpayers' money is being used for the purposes for which it was intended?

Sir Malcolm Bruce: The answer is no, it has not. There is no evidence that money has been misspent, but the Independent Commission for Aid Impact has said that the proactive mechanisms are not strong enough. The Department is taking strong action to deal with that, and rightly so. Afghanistan is an extremely difficult place in which to operate. As David Loyn of the BBC said in evidence, it is a rentier society, and where a lot of foreign money is swilling around, all kinds of people try to get in on the action, by whatever means they can. We have to be aware of that and be rigorous, but we also have to recognise that we can spend the money effectively. We can make a change, and the job of the Committee, the independent commission and the Department is to ensure that that is precisely what we do.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I welcome this valuable report, which comes at a crucial time in the run-up to 2014. On maximising the

effort as regards the money going into Afghanistan, what role is DFID taking in ensuring that the other donor nations recognise the need to work beyond 2014?

Sir Malcolm Bruce: DFID has played an active part in the Chicago and Tokyo conferences, and we have of course made our own commitments beyond that period, so we set an example. Ironically, DFID's ability to provide leadership might be strengthened post-2014, when we are freed from engagement in military activity, as it will become apparent that the UK Government's overwhelming priority is to provide development support. That will help the leadership provided by DFID across the world.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that because the Committee tries to be realistic and pretty sober about the situation in Afghanistan, we sometimes receive the response that we are suggesting that nothing has been achieved? After our last visit, the front cover of our report featured a picture of some girls who would not have been in school were it not, in part, for the efforts that have been made. It is important that we focus our activity where we can have an impact. That does not mean that we should focus on areas that are easy; empowering women is not easy in Afghanistan. It is important that we do not oversell or over-claim and that we target our efforts on crucial areas where we can make an impact.

Sir Malcolm Bruce: I absolutely agree, although I would add a word of caution. We visited the same school in June as we did five years ago and we were unable to visit a girls' class, because that was thought to be inappropriate. That shows the negative changes, but at least the girls were still being taught, which is important. We also visited Bamyan, where we were told that there was a rising number of undergraduate women at the university and that fathers were actively pushing their daughters to take university education. That demonstrates that the situation is patchy, with progress in some areas and push-back in others. The job of DFID and the international community is to support the progress and to help resist the push-back, in co-operation with Afghans themselves.

In conclusion, it is important that people understand that the evidence that we have received shows that most Afghans do not want the Taliban back. They want a better Afghanistan that they have some ability to determine, and people need livelihoods and to be free from violence and extortion. Our report says that now that we have gone so far, walking away prematurely, as some people suggest, would be a betrayal of the sacrifice of our armed forces, as well as of the Afghan people. Having intervened, we have a moral and practical obligation to walk beside the ordinary people of Afghanistan, as long as we can improve their quality of life on their terms.

Question put and agreed to.

Badger Cull

Mr Speaker: Apart from the hon. Member who will move the motion, 36 hon. and right hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. As a consequence, I have imposed an eight-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches. That limit will take effect after the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) has made her speech to move the motion, and she knows that she should not exceed 15 minutes.

11.43 am

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I beg to move,

That this House notes the e-petition on the planned badger cull, which has gathered more than 150,000 signatures; and calls on the Government to stop the cull and implement the more sustainable and humane solution of both a vaccination programme for badgers and cattle, along with improved testing and biosecurity.

The motion is supported by a wide-ranging cross-party group of MPs and let me make it clear that I and, I am sure, all those who support the motion do not in any way underestimate the hardship and distress that bovine TB causes to farmers. Indeed, it is because we recognise the urgent need to address the problem that we are anxious to ensure that we have a scientifically robust and cost-effective strategy that actually works.

Although Tuesday's announcement that the pilot cull will be postponed until next summer was very welcome, it does not amount to a change of policy. Today's motion calls on the Government to stop their ill-judged, unscientific and deeply unpopular culling policy for good, not just for a few months. The motion is about an abandonment of the cull, not just a postponement, and that is why it is so important that today's debate goes ahead. That is what the majority of the public want and it is what the science demands. Public opinion overwhelmingly opposes a badger cull, including in those regions where the pilots were to take place. More than 163,000 members of the public have signed the e-petition launched by animal campaigner and Queen guitarist Brian May. I pay tribute to all of them, to Brian himself, to Team Badger and to all those individuals who played a role in mobilising public opposition to the cull.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): Might the hon. Lady accept my paying tribute to the late Peter Hardy, a great Rotherham MP, who introduced the first Badgers Act in 1973, which is why I am proud to stand here in his memory, and honour his dedication to the cause, by voting with her and other hon. Members on this important issue, so that we say no to badgercide?

Caroline Lucas: I very much welcome the right hon. Gentleman's intervention. He rightly reminds me of the precedence in this House of previous battles that have tried to ensure that we do not have a misguided badger cull as a response to the serious problem of bovine TB.

The Government say that they support an evidence-based approach, so let us look at the evidence. Bovine TB cost the taxpayer £91 million in 2010-11 in testing, in the slaughter of animals and in compensation to farmers. The scale of the problem is such that it is deeply

irresponsible and unfair to gamble, as the Government are doing, with farmers' livelihoods and with the future of one of our best loved wildlife species.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): The hon. Lady mentions farmers' livelihoods, but has she seen the NFU briefing, which makes it clear that it regrets the need for culling and says that other methods, such as cattle controls and vaccination, are being deployed? But it says that culling is a vital component and misleading and emotive campaigns that play on sentimental affection for badgers and unfair depictions of farmers threaten to undermine the chance that we now have of getting on top of this horrendous disease once and for all.

Caroline Lucas: I have seen that briefing, but I would say that the emotion is coming from those on the Government Benches. The science is with the Opposition, and I refer the hon. Gentleman to what Lord Krebs said in the House of Lords just a few days ago, which makes it absolutely clear that quite a lot of misinformation is unfortunately being spread by the NFU and others about the seriousness of the issue in terms of how effective a cull can be. It is clear that the best that a cull can achieve, under strict conditions—not the conditions of these pilots—is a 16% improvement.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Caroline Lucas: I will take interventions in a moment.

The planned pilots would not have got anywhere near to that 16%, because they did not follow the rigour of the randomised badger culling trial and other Krebs reports.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Caroline Lucas: I will give way when I have made a little more progress.

The independent scientific group on cattle TB conducted the most thorough and rigorous study of bovine TB in the UK to date—the randomised badger culling trial. That trial took place over nine years, cost the taxpayer £50 million and destroyed 10,000 badgers. The report on the trial is described by Professor Denis Mollison, the independent statistical adviser to the RBCT, as “painstaking, expert and balanced”, and I commend it to Ministers as an exemplar of how to bring high-quality science into public decision making. The consultation from the coalition Government said of this RBC trial that it was the only one that was conducted as a rigorous scientific trial. The conclusions of that ISG report for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, published in 2007, are well rehearsed, but they are worth repeating. It states:

“Detailed evaluation of RBCT and other scientific data highlights the limitations of badger culling as a control measure for cattle TB.”

It goes on to recommend

“that TB control efforts focus on measures other than badger culling”

because

“In contrast with the situation regarding badger culling, our data and modelling suggest that substantial reductions in cattle TB incidence could be achieved by improving cattle-based control measures.”

That is precisely the approach that today's motion advocates.

Sir James Paice (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): The hon. Lady easily reads out what the report says, and she is right that it says “substantial reductions”. But is she not interested in more than substantial reduction, which is elimination of this awful disease? If so, does she agree that even Professor Bourne, who headed the study, has said that it quite clearly cannot be eradicated without eradicating it in badgers?

Caroline Lucas: Were we to eradicate every single badger, we would certainly eradicate bovine TB, but we would also eradicate a very important species.

The ISG concluded that

“badger culling can make no meaningful contribution to cattle TB control in Britain.”

That is the conclusion of what the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs itself says is the most scientifically robust trial that has ever taken place in the UK. We want policy to be based on the science, which is why we should be looking at what the ISG says.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): If we are to talk about eradicating bovine TB, it is important that we go back to the science and try to put emotions aside, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Sir James Paice) mentioned a moment ago. The trials clearly showed that the best possible outcome would be a 16% reduction, but that is a reduction in the context of an increasing incidence of TB. Indeed, the Secretary of State has talked about the incidence of bovine TB doubling in 10 years. In those circumstances, all a cull would do is reduce the increase. It will not result in a reduction in bovine TB.

Caroline Lucas: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I think that it is worth reading what Lord Krebs said in the House of Lords, because it is exactly the point the hon. Gentleman identifies. He said that

“the long-term, large-scale culling of badgers is estimated to reduce the incidence of TB in cattle by 16% after nine years. In other words, 84% of the problem is still there. To reflect on what that means, this is not a reduction in absolute terms”,

as the hon. Gentleman rightly said,

“but actually a 16% reduction from the trend increase. So after nine years there is still more TB around than there was at the beginning”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 October 2012; Vol. 740, c. 148.]

That is the key point that Government Members are not taking on board.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Caroline Lucas: I will make a little more progress before giving way again—as you have pointed out, Mr Speaker, this is a heavily oversubscribed debate.

A number of eminent individuals have also spoken out in opposition to the Government’s proposed course of action. Significantly, the Government’s chief scientific adviser, Professor Sir John Beddington, has refused to back the cull. In a letter to *The Observer* on 14 October, more than 30 scientists wrote that

“the complexities of TB transmission mean that licensed culling risks increasing cattle TB rather than reducing it... culling badgers as planned is very unlikely to contribute to TB eradication.”

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. I rather suspect that in Brighton Pavilion there are few dairy farmers, if any, so will she agree to come to Shropshire and spend the day meeting my dairy farmers and the local NFU to hear their perspective on the crisis and how they believe it should be tackled?

Caroline Lucas: Even coming from Brighton Pavilion does not stop someone reading the science. I would like the debate to be based on the science, not on emotional calls from the Government Benches. Professor Lord Krebs, who devised the randomised badger cull and is firmly opposed to the cull, has said:

“I have not found any scientists who are experts in population biology in the distribution of infectious diseases in wildlife who think that culling is a good idea... People have cherry-picked certain results to try to get the argument that they want.”

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): The hon. Lady is being extremely generous with her time, for which I am most grateful. The arguments about which scientists said what should surely be answered by a paper that was produced by DEFRA following a meeting, held by the Department on 4 April 2011, of the key scientific experts, including Lord Krebs and many other eminent scientists. Its No. 1 conclusion was:

“The science base generated from the RBCT shows that proactive badger culling as conducted in the trial resulted in an overall beneficial effect compared with ‘survey only’ (no cull) areas”.

Scientists at DEFRA were in agreement and came to that conclusion. That is a Government paper. Surely we should move on from going backwards and forwards on which scientists said what. There is some benefit to be had from a cull. It is not the only answer.

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Lady responds, I remind Members that she is due to speak for 15 minutes or thereabouts and has already taken several interventions. I gently encourage Members to be economical with interventions. Many Members wish to speak in the debate. The more interventions, the longer we will take, and you can bet your bottom dollar that people will be queuing up to complain and ask, “Why didn’t I get called to speak in the debate?” Answer: the time was taken up earlier. Let us get on with the debate.

Caroline Lucas: Thank you, Mr Speaker. In order to do so, I go back to what I said just before the hon. Gentleman intervened, which is that Lord Krebs himself is saying that people are cherry-picking certain aspects to try to get the result they want. If the hon. Gentleman looked at the full set of recommendations from the document instead of those that he cherry-picked, he would see that in fact the vast majority of the evidence is that culling does not make a significant contribution.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con) *rose*—

Caroline Lucas: I will not give way; I want to follow what Mr Speaker said and make some progress.

The case against culling on the grounds of efficiency and effectiveness is overwhelming. That approach is also potentially entirely counterproductive. The independent scientific group initially found a decrease in the disease of approximately 23% in the centre of the culled area but an increase of approximately 29% on neighbouring land outside the culled area. Those results can be explained partly by what has been termed the perturbation effect. That has been studied by Professor Rosie Woodroffe of the Zoological Society of London, who has also found that repeated badger culling in the same area is associated with increasing prevalence of the BTB infection in badgers.

The objective of the Government and the NFU is healthy cattle and healthy badgers. I agree with that, but how does culling improve badger health? Professor Woodroffe states unequivocally that it does exactly the opposite and that

“all the evidence shows that culling badgers increases the proportion of badgers that have TB”.

Yet the Government’s approach ignores that evidence. As with the ISG trials, conditions have been imposed to try to limit the effects of perturbation, such as identifying natural barriers to badger movement, but these have generally been less rigorous than those recommended, with farmers essentially being encouraged to develop a “not in my back yard” approach to cattle TB without any real thought for the long-term impact on rates of the disease elsewhere.

Earlier this week, the Secretary of State warned that the cost to the taxpayer of tackling bovine TB will rise to £1 billion over the next decade if the disease is left unchecked. I agree that that is a very alarming prospect. That is why it is crucial that on this, as well as on the scientific evidence, he listen to the experts who, let me remind him, have concluded:

“The financial costs of culling an idealized 150 km² area would exceed the savings achieved through reduced cattle TB, by factors of 2 to 3.5.”

DEFRA has tried to keep the costs down by allowing licensed farmers to do the culling in its planned pilots and allowing for the licences to permit shooting, but by cutting corners in that way it undermines the very effectiveness that it claims for a culling strategy.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I appreciate the hon. Lady’s giving way on this important and passionately felt issue. I speak as a member of the British Veterinary Association, which states in its most recent report, first, that culling is necessary, and secondly, that there is no available vaccination that can address the reservoir of the disease within the wildlife population of badgers. Is she aware that this year 30,000 cattle will have to be slaughtered because of bovine TB? What are we going to do about that problem?

Caroline Lucas: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman’s intervention. In fact, a vaccine is a lot closer to being developed than he and others suggest, so there are alternatives to culling. Earlier in the week, the Secretary of State made much of saying that there no alternatives. The tragedy is that there are alternatives but this Government seem extremely reluctant to bring them forward.

On tackling cattle-to-cattle transmission of the disease, the ISG report states:

“Movement of cattle from infected herds in the periods between routine herd tests has long been recognised as a cause of new herd breakdowns, and it is generally accepted that most of the sporadic herd breakdowns in relatively disease-free areas of the country result from movement of infected animals.”

The evidence suggests that focusing on the role of badgers in the spread of bovine TB is a distraction and that priority should instead be given to preventing the spread of the disease between cattle. That is why the motion calls on the Government to introduce a programme of vaccination, which eminent scientist and former Government scientific adviser Lord Robert May points to as an important tool in tackling TB. He says:

“What is particularly irritating is that we have the vaccines in the pipeline, but the commitment to really go in and test them is...not there”.

DEFRA confirms that. A statement on its own website reads:

“BCG...is the most suitable cattle TB vaccine candidate in the short term. Experimental studies show that BCG vaccination reduces the progression, severity and excretion of TB in cattle...and field studies show that it can reduce transmission of disease between animals.”

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): Does the hon. Lady agree that farmers’ voices are not unanimous on this issue? I have been contacted by Gloucestershire dairy farmers who support the vaccination model being developed by the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and, in the short term, the model of meticulous biosecurity that has been advanced successfully by Gloucestershire farmer Steve Jones, who has managed to contain bovine TB despite the fact that his farm is in the very centre of the bovine TB area.

Caroline Lucas: I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s intervention. He is absolutely right that farmers are not speaking with one voice on this issue. Many of them recognise that we need an effective strategy but that culling is a costly distraction from achieving that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Caroline Lucas: Let me make some further progress. DEFRA cites the EU prohibition on the vaccination of cattle against TB as the reason why studies to date

“cannot provide a definite figure for vaccine efficacy when administered to cattle under field conditions in the UK”.

Vaccinated cows can test positive for TB when using the current tuberculin skin test and the gamma interferon blood test, making it impossible to differentiate between an animal that has been vaccinated and one that has the disease. However, a complementary test called the DIVA—differentiate between infected and vaccinated animals—test has been developed, which confirms whether a skin test positive result is caused by vaccination or by TB infection. That is what should be validated and certified by the end of the year, according to the DEFRA website. It has the potential to open the door to a change in EU regulation. This Government should go to Europe now—they should have done so years ago—and prepare the policy framework to allow us to use the DIVA test; yet there are precious few signs that DEFRA or, indeed, the Government are pressing aggressively for the legal framework in which a cattle vaccine could be widely deployed. I echo the sentiments of those many Members

[*Caroline Lucas*]

who earlier this week urged DEFRA to stop hiding behind the excuse of EU law and to step up its efforts to change it.

A 2008 DEFRA paper on options for vaccinating cattle against bovine TB was endorsed by the NFU and concludes that

“BCG based vaccines will need to be used in conjunction with a DIVA test and that such a programme of vaccination could be cost-effective.”

It identifies the most significant barriers to use as legal and resultant trade implications. That was three years ago and we really should have made more progress than we have to date.

As the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) has said, biosecurity is a very important issue. Vaccination needs to go hand in hand with excellent biosecurity. According to Professor John Bourne, former chairman of the ISG:

“Despite some improvements, the government is still going nowhere near far enough with biosecurity”.

He went on to say:

“It is not badgers that spread the disease throughout the country; it is cattle”.

The most recent European Commission inspection of England’s biosecurity in September 2011 uncovered a catalogue of failures, including missed targets in the rapid removal of cattle infected with TB and

“weaknesses in disinfection at farm, vehicle, market and slaughterhouse levels”.

A belated crackdown has resulted in a slight improvement, but we need to go much further.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned Steve Jones, a farmer who is deeply concerned about biosecurity. He says:

“Water troughs are a reservoir for TB because they are rarely cleaned out. It’s not uncommon for trough water to be left stagnating through the winter, collecting dead birds, rodents and various bacteria, only to be drunk by cattle in the spring. Badgers also use these troughs but it’s unfair to isolate badgers when the culprit is the bacteria soup itself. Making troughs badger-proof is not rocket science, but more fundamental is the adoption of better hygiene standards by the agricultural industry.”

Recent DEFRA data indicate that improving biosecurity would cost farmers an average of £4,000, compared with £27,000 to deal with the TB herd breakdown. That is why the motion has a very strong focus, alongside its other measures, on comprehensive national biosecurity policy.

Mr Laurence Robertson: It is important to recognise the wider context in Gloucestershire. One of the trials was going to take place in my constituency and farmers are very disappointed that it cannot go ahead for the moment. One of the first ministerial meetings that I had in this House 15 years ago was with the then Agriculture Minister, Jeff Rooker, and nothing has happened since. Does the hon. Lady not understand the frustration of farmers, including those in Gloucestershire? Does she not accept that, as the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) has said, the British Veterinary Association says that the disease is being spread by badgers and that a trial cull is necessary?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. A lot of Members want to get in and interventions will slow us down. I am sure that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) will want to get to the end of her speech very quickly.

Caroline Lucas: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman reminding us that farmers are deeply concerned about the matter and feel frustration, but that frustration is because we have had years and years of inaction. Suddenly pulling a badger cull down from the shelf is the wrong way to respond to that frustration. The Government should have gone to the EU and made the case for the DIVA test so that we could get on with vaccination. All the evidence suggests that vaccination, combined with biosecurity, better hygiene and better husbandry, is a much better way of eradicating this horrible disease. No Member is complacent about the seriousness of the disease, but what we differ about is the most effective way of addressing it. The science is on the side of those who oppose the cull, because it shows that it is not the most effective way forward.

As I said, modern husbandry practices place chronic stress on intensively farmed animals, and a number of scientists are also pointing to the way in which cattle have been inbred for many years as a significant contributor to why cattle do not have the resistance to cope with such a disease.

I want to say a few words about vaccinating badgers. I agree that vaccinating wildlife should be given proper consideration, alongside the vaccination of cattle, yet the coalition Government have slashed funding for the badger vaccine deployment project. Only one of the six original five-year trials to learn how best to address some of the practical difficulties of vaccination is still under way. If those projects had gone ahead as planned, we would have been much further along the road towards finding a solution by now. That is exactly why farmers are frustrated. Instead, two years on, nothing more has been done.

Mr David Hamilton (Midlothian) (Lab): I agree with much of what the hon. Lady is saying. Will she explain for a layperson such as myself why, although a third of the land mass of the United Kingdom is in Scotland, Scotland has not taken the decision to do what is being done in England? Wales has also withdrawn from the cull, so we are arguing about an English thing, not a British thing.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, which brings me neatly to the situation in Wales, about which I know something. The Government there have used the same scientific evidence as DEFRA and have begun a five-year badger vaccination programme, starting in parts of Pembrokeshire. More than 700 badgers have been vaccinated since the start of that programme, which is about halfway through the land that it needs to cover. That part of the programme is on track to be finished towards the end of October. I hope that England will be able to learn from Wales and elsewhere to see how the problem can be tackled most effectively.

Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con): Does the hon. Lady not accept that until there is an oral vaccine, it is totally impractical to try to vaccinate the badger population? First, they have to be caught. Secondly, the person

doing the catching has to be licensed by Natural England at huge cost, and thirdly, the cost is estimated at £2,250 per square kilometre.

Caroline Lucas: Trying to kill badgers is also extremely difficult. The original randomised badger culling trial was about killing badgers by capturing them in cages first, but the Government have dismissed that as too expensive. In doing so, they have reduced the likely effectiveness of the policy. It will lead to people trying to shoot badgers, which are difficult to kill outright because of their shape and size. That is extremely costly, and crucially it also spreads the disease even more widely. Vaccinating badgers is not easy, but it is a lot easier than shooting them in the way that the Government propose. It is also an awful lot more effective in stopping the spread of TB. That seems to me a good argument for not going ahead with shooting.

Ian Paisley: Will the hon. Lady give way again on that point?

Caroline Lucas: No, I have given way to the hon. Gentleman.

Rather than pursuing an approach that is widely discredited, should not the Government invest in studies to determine exactly how and whether badger vaccination can work on a larger scale, in co-operation with organisations such as the National Trust and the Wildlife Trusts, which are already taking a lead in carrying out vaccine trials?

I am coming to the end of my speech, Mr Deputy Speaker, because I can see that you are looking a little perturbed. Even were all that I have said about the science, the alternatives to a cull and its lack of effectiveness to be discounted, the Government's proposals remain deeply flawed. Although the pilot culls in west Gloucestershire and west Somerset have been postponed, I am sure that other Members will want to raise concerns that the specific licensing criteria that were set out would not have been met. They will also want to raise concerns about the degree to which the Government's current policy deviates from the conditions of the RBCT, despite advice from experts that the more a future culling policy deviates from the conditions of the RBCT, the more likely it is that their effects will differ and that there will be variability in outcomes between areas. Professor Bourne, chairman of the independent scientific group, claims that the key differences between his team's methodology and the Government's pilot culls—including a very different killing method and much longer killing period—are "significant". Although he has been mentioned by those on the other side of the argument, he stated that the cull,

"could make TB a damn sight worse."

The news that badger numbers are higher than anticipated suggests that methods used by Natural England to set the minimum and maximum number of badgers that can be killed across licensed zones are inaccurate.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Caroline Lucas: I will not.

That inaccuracy makes it impossible to guarantee that local extinctions will not occur. I welcome the fact that the Government and the NFU have concluded that

the pilot culls cannot take place this year. They must now look again at other problems that have been identified, and abandon their culling policy altogether.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. An eight-minute limit on speeches has been imposed, but we want to try and get everybody in. Fewer interventions will ensure that everybody will be able to speak.

12.10 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on initiating this debate so eloquently, and it is an honour to follow her. Although I note that the petition has 150,000 signatures, I firmly and passionately believe that a silent majority in the countryside care strongly about controlling bovine TB and believe in the need for an eventual cull, as well as in other measures such as those called for by the hon. Lady. I am not convinced of the need for Team Badger or a team cattle; I believe there should be one team, one nation and one countryside. I hope that the House will send a message this afternoon that we are convinced there can be both a healthy badger population and healthy livestock.

I will restrict my remarks to the positive role that I believe the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee can play. Only two hon. Members who served on that Committee during the previous Parliament remain—my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Dan Rogerson) and myself—[*Interruption.*] And, indeed, another survivor, my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray). The Committee stated:

"We also recognised that under certain well-defined circumstances it was possible that badger culling could make a contribution towards the reduction in incidence of the disease in hot spot areas. However, we acknowledged that badger culling alone would never provide a universal solution to the problem of cattle TB."

The point is this: we will never eradicate or control the spread of TB by vaccination alone; we need a controlled cull.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady accept that if the vaccine was available, there would be no need for a cull? I think some Government Members House want the cull regardless.

Miss McIntosh: The hon. Gentleman will hear what my right hon. and hon. Friends say when they speak on this issue with some passion.

May I commend the work of the Food and Environment Research Agency, based in Ryedale in my constituency of Thirsk and Malton and, in particular, its work on progressing vaccinations for badgers? I note that it is already undertaking badger vaccines. My hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride) asked about the cost of those individual vaccines, and it would be helpful if the Minister would confirm that.

In the pause before an eventual cull, I believe that the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee can make a major contribution precisely on the vexed issue of vaccination, which was raised by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion. Not only do we have the cost and difficulty of vaccinating badgers, but there is currently no effective test to tell the difference between vaccinated

[Miss McIntosh]

and infected cattle—the wider issue raised by the hon. Lady. It is, therefore, impossible to identify clean animals from infected animals for the purpose of export.

Caroline Lucas: I am sorry to intervene so soon, but that is not correct. The test to differentiate between infected and vaccinated animals—the DIVA test—exists and is ready to be used once we get permission from the EU. The obstacle to the problem is getting that permission—there has not been much effort on that—not that the test does not exist.

Miss McIntosh: I am afraid that is a point of disagreement, which is why I believe there is a role for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee to examine the state of the science. Members of that Committee can use their role to encourage the Government to use good relations with the European Commission and the Council of Ministers, and colleagues in the European Parliament who have co-decision, to make plans to lift the ban on exports. That raises the wider issue of how we can encourage FERA to develop the badger vaccine, and encourage the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency to look fully at developing the efficiency of a cattle vaccination.

There is one issue that I regret the hon. Lady and Team Badger do not accept. Government Members recognise the issue of badger welfare, but I would like to see the whole House rise up and agree that it is unacceptable that almost 60,000 cows in calf—they were carrying an unborn calf—were slaughtered in 2010 and 2011. My hon. Friends have already alluded to the human grief suffered by farmers, and this year everything that could have gone wrong has gone wrong. We have seen a rise in fuel costs for transporting animals, and in the cost of feed. There has been bad weather; the potato crop is going wrong and pig farming is going wrong—everything is going wrong and farmers are battling with the elements.

We are talking about herds of cattle that have been raised by generations of farmers, and when a herd is slaughtered, that lifeline can never be regained. The contribution of such herds to the rural economy should not be underestimated, and they will be lost and gone for ever. I would like the House to unite to show that we care for the loss suffered by farmers, and that we recognise that this broader wildlife and countryside issue goes to the heart of the rural economy and farming in this country.

I have the honour of representing two livestock marts—that in Thirsk is the largest, or joint-largest, fatstock mart in the country. Farmers who produce those animals live in fear of one rogue beast coming into the herd.

Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): My hon. Friend is right to stress the human effects of the difficulties in which farmers now find themselves. Robert Davies, a farmer in my constituency, is an owner-occupier who has a closed herd on one farm. Over the past few years it has been shut for months on the trot, and nearly 400 animals have been tested every 60 days. Just imagine the pain, suffering and difficulty experienced by him and his family, and the welfare of those animals.

Miss McIntosh: I could not have put that better myself, and I hope the House will unite and recognise the contributions that farmers make to the economy. In terms of health and diet, nothing could be more nutritious than milk, dairy produce, beef and other meat products that are the lifeline of hill farmers in the north, and lowland farmers across the country.

No other country in the world has been able to control the spread of and incidence of TB in cattle without a controlled, limited cull. I bitterly regret the circumstances in which the NFU, Natural England, FERA and particularly the Government, have found themselves by postponing the cull. Farmers in my area and across the country will look for a controlled cull, and we should examine the results of that. Let us use this pause to examine the science—including the vaccination of badgers—and establish the cost and efficacy of that. Most importantly, we should look for a vaccination that will not only control levels of infection in cattle, but allow our meat and dairy products to be accepted across the EU and the world. Let us rise as one nation, one team, and one countryside.

12.19 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I challenge Government Members' attempts to portray this subject as an urban against rural issue, as they did with fox hunting. I am a west country MP. Admittedly, I represent an urban constituency, but I occasionally venture outside Bristol. I know from representations made to me from people in south Gloucestershire and the Forest of Dean area, Somerset and around the west country that there is widespread opposition to the badger cull, including opposition from people in rural areas, from farmers who do not want the cull on their land, and from people across the board. It is totally wrong to say, "Only townies who don't understand the country or farming are opposed to the cull." It is incredibly patronising to say that the many people who have written to me and MPs who represent rural areas do not understand the science. I have looked at the science.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The Chair of the Select Committee, a Conservative, spoke of one nation and one countryside. Does my hon. Friend agree that the device of dividing the country between town and country is unhelpful?

Kerry McCarthy: That device is completely unhelpful. I have taken an interest in food policy in my time in Parliament—I introduced a Food Waste Bill. Food policy is about farming only to an extent, but people eat food, including in urban areas. Food policy is also about food distribution networks and supermarkets. It is completely ludicrous to portray the issue as one that is just for farmers.

Richard Drax *rose*—

Kerry McCarthy: I will take one more intervention.

Richard Drax: There has never been a view among Government or Opposition Members that this is townies versus country folk. That has never been said or suggested. The hon. Lady—dare I say it?—is stoking up a political animosity that does not otherwise exist.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. If we are to have interventions, they must be short, but those Members who intervene and wish to speak should recognise that they will go to the bottom of the list. That is just a warning for all.

Kerry McCarthy: The hon. Gentleman is completely wrong, as we have heard in the debate and in the statement on Tuesday.

Many hon. Members will want to discuss vaccination. I am pleased that, in the west country, there have been efforts to roll out badger vaccination programmes. They seem to have been successful, although it is the very early stages. Many hon. Members will discuss the scientific evidence, which seems to me to be overwhelmingly in support of the notion that badger culling would have a limited impact if any—I believe it says there would be a 16% reduction in bovine TB over nine years.

However, in the time available, I want to focus on cattle-to-cattle transmission. The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) probably misspoke when she said that if every single badger were eradicated, we could eradicate bovine TB—she went on to say that we could not eradicate all badgers and mentioned cattle-to-cattle transmission. In response to a question from the shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in September this year, the Government accepted that about 50% of cases of bovine TB in areas where the randomised badger culling trial took place were attributed to badgers. The other 50% were attributed to cattle-to-cattle transmission. In areas where there is lower incidence, there is a much higher rate of cattle-to-cattle transmission.

It is important to address that point. I was concerned that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs did not seem to be willing to acknowledge in Tuesday's statement the very significant role that cattle-to-cattle transmission plays in spreading the disease. Indeed, when he was asked a question about cattle husbandry, he said that the problem was that badgers can get into sheds. He also said that farmers grazing cattle in fields cannot prevent badgers from getting to them. That is not what the cattle husbandry issue is about—the Secretary of State was focused totally on badgers, rather than on what happens when cattle spread disease. The fact is that many of the badgers that carry TB are not particularly infectious—[*Interruption.*] I can cite evidence on that.

Andrew George: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kerry McCarthy: I do not want to give way again in the time I have left.

I was concerned that the new Secretary of State seems not to have got to grips with cattle-to-cattle transmission, but I accept that tighter controls will be introduced from next year, which I welcome. When his predecessor as Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman), made a statement on the cull just before the Christmas recess, she failed to mention cattle-to-cattle transmission, as I pointed out to her at the time, although she did mention it in her statement in July. There is a degree of complacency in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on cattle-to-cattle transmission, which needs to be addressed.

On the history of bovine TB, it is clear is that, in the 1960s, when strict quarantine rules and the rigorous testing of cattle were in place, bovine TB was almost eliminated from the UK. However, farmers were not happy with the regime and complained, and, to quote George Monbiot:

“TB returned with a vengeance”.

Professor Graham Medley of the university of Warwick has said that the only way to eradicate TB in cattle would be a return to the stricter and more effective controls that were in place 40 years ago. Professor John Bourne, who led the randomised badger culling trial—which, as we know, concluded that badger culling could make “no meaningful contribution” to controlling bovine TB—agrees with Professor Medley. Professor Bourne has said that only stricter biosecurity can control bovine TB. The RBCT report states:

“Weaknesses in cattle testing regimes mean that cattle themselves contribute significantly to the persistence and spread of disease in all areas where TB occurs, and in some parts of Britain are likely to be the main source of infection. Scientific findings indicate that the rising incidence of disease can be reversed, and geographical spread contained, by the rigid application of cattle-based control measures alone”.

A European Commission report of September 2011 revealed significant evidence of bad practice in English farms. It found that failure to abide by cattle TB prevention measures was widespread. The Commission gave the UK €23 million in 2011 for bovine TB control measures. Its inspectors found that the removal of cattle with TB was below the target of 90% in 10 days, and that, in the first half of 2011, more than 1,000 cattle had not been removed after 30 days. It found that there were 3,300 overdue TB tests as of May 2011 and that many calf passports, which are used to track movements, were incomplete. It also found that only 56% disease report forms had been completed on time. Funding cuts were cited as the reason for the failure of local authorities to update their databases.

The Commission report concluded that local authority surveys provided evidence that

“some cattle farmers may have been illegally swapping cattle ear tags, ie retaining TB-positive animals in their herds and sending less productive animals to slaughter in their place.”

A couple of Government Members are shaking their heads, but farmers have been prosecuted for that in the west country.

Mr Gray: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kerry McCarthy: I am not going to give way.

The Commission found that there were missed targets on rapidly removing cattle with TB, and on the follow-up of missed tests. It found numerous shortcomings and

“weaknesses in cleaning and disinfection at farm, vehicle, market and slaughterhouse levels, exacerbated by lack of adequate supervision”.

All those problems increase the risk of TB spreading between cattle.

David Fisher, who was a DEFRA-funded TB inspector in Wales until 2011, has said:

“It is an open secret that isolation of [TB] reactors and inconclusive reactors is rare.”

He has said that DEFRA's database showed that, in 2009, there was 20.8% non-compliance on bovine TB

[Kerry McCarthy]

issues. There was only one instance that year of a dairy farm being checked for compliance with an isolation notice.

I welcome the fact that DEFRA has indicated that new rules and a crackdown on cattle movement, and increased TB testing, will take place from 1 January 2013, with restrictions on farms where a TB case is identified, but I support Mark Jones, a vet and executive director of the Humane Society International UK, who has said that Ministers should wait and assess the impact of tighter biosecurity measures. As has been said, in Wales, bovine TB has fallen since the badger cull was stopped in Wales and tighter measures were introduced. He says:

“There is some evidence...that TB in cattle is coming down. There needs to be time to see if there has been an impact, before going ahead with a massacre of badgers...It is cattle, not badgers, that are the main transmitters of bovine TB so it is utterly outrageous for badgers to pay the price for farmers’ failure to abide by proper biosecurity measures.”

I could not end on a better note than that.

12.28 pm

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): In Shropshire in 1997, 47 cows were slaughtered as a result of bovine TB. Last year, more than 2,000 were slaughtered. There has been a huge increase in the disease in my constituency and throughout Shropshire.

I have spent a lot of time with many of my Shropshire dairy farmers and sometimes, having gone around their farms with them, I have found myself sitting at their kitchen tables, having coffee and talking about the impact of that slaughter on them and their families. I do not mind saying that sometimes we—grown men—have sat around the table and cried, such is the emotion. The impact—not just on them but on their families and, in particular, young children—of whole herds being taken away for slaughter is devastating.

I hope that hon. Members who oppose this action will take the time—I invited the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) in good spirit—to come to Shropshire and areas of the country facing this extraordinary crisis, and to meet our constituents and hear the emotion in their pleas for action. Hon. Members would then begin to understand why so many Government Members feel strongly that action must be taken now.

Martin Horwood: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful case. I stood beside a dairy farmer in my constituency as their herd was loaded for slaughter, and it is an extremely distressing experience, but that is all the more reason why we should listen to the science and not make the situation worse. It is simply wrong to suggest that that is not what people on both side of the debate are trying to achieve.

Daniel Kawczynski: Of course, we will be arguing about the science, and both sides feel strongly that their scientific arguments are correct and that they have the correct scientists’ feedback on their side. That will continue throughout the debate.

Angela Smith: I echo the comments by the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) about how much sympathy we all have for farmers and the dairy

industry. We have to deal with this disease. However, the years that the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) mentioned—1997 and, more recently, 2007-12—were marked by one event that changed the picture of disease in cattle, and that was foot and mouth. Will he comment on the contribution that foot and mouth made to increased cattle movement and the decrease in testing for bovine TB in cattle?

Daniel Kawczynski: In the few minutes I have, I would like to focus on my constituents. I am sure that others will take up the hon. Lady’s point.

One of the first things I did when I became a Member of Parliament in 2005 was to form an all-party group on dairy farmers. I did so because of the direct lobbying I received from Mr Stuart Jones of Pontesbury and many of my other dairy farmers, who wanted me to campaign on this issue. More than 190 Members of Parliament joined the all-party group, making it one of the largest in the House of Commons. To my great pleasure, the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Prime Minister, joined it—it was the only one he joined in the last Parliament.

We used this caucus of more than 190 Members repeatedly to try to engage with Labour Ministers, and we took the National Farmers Union—many of our farmers came—to meet various DEFRA Ministers and Secretaries of State. I shall not mention all of them, but I am happy to list all the meetings we had; and yet, month after month, year after year, no action was taken, and this disease continued to spread and decimate the industry in our constituencies. A delegation also went to Brussels to meet the European Commission and to Ireland and France to find out what they were doing and how they were coping with bovine TB. We wanted to find out at first hand how the French had managed to eradicate it almost completely, and part of the solution there, as in Ireland and many other EU countries, was a badger cull.

Shropshire MPs have met the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, whose symbol is a badger. It has more than 8,000 members, making it the largest organisation in our county. The Secretary of State, my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) and I met the trust just last week, and we are having very effective discussions with it as we argue and debate in a professional and peaceful fashion the best way forward. It is extremely important to keep the dialogue going. I highlighted to the trust the triangle in my constituency between Pontesbury, Westbury and Minsterley, where this disease is getting completely out of control. Very kindly, the trust has agreed to come with me to meet my dairy farmers in that part of Shropshire to hear at first hand the problems they are facing.

I am extremely grateful that we have a Secretary of State from Shropshire who understands the problem and who is also a man of great courage, integrity and honour. My dairy farmers and I can trust him to fulfil the commitment he gave the other day that, despite this pause, next summer we will finally start to tackle this problem and take action for our hard-pressed, long-suffering dairy farmers.

12.36 pm

Mr Iain McKenzie (Inverclyde) (Lab): I speak in an effort to unite the House, because the Opposition share the concern for farmers. I have a dairy farmer in my constituency, and my constituency contains a mix of urban and rural areas. I have spoken to that dairy farmer, and we both understand the impact of bovine TB on farmers and their business.

Having said that, most organisations in the UK have united in opposition to the badger cull, while the e-petition against it has been signed by 142,000 people. Even some who live and work in the countryside are not convinced that it will do what it is meant to do. Quite simply, free shooting badgers in the dark is just that—a shot in the dark to control bovine TB. Independent scientific studies have shown that culling would be of little help and probably make the situation worse in some areas.

Mr Gray: I was brought up in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Does he think that the attitude of his farmer or, indeed, his own attitude would be different if there was bovine TB in Scotland, which there is not? There are precious few badgers, too?

Mr McKenzie: I would like to think that farmers in my area would not be convinced.

There is no accurate way of knowing how many badgers there are in an area, so how would we know when a cull had reached its quota of 70%? The culls are non-selective and would equally destroy healthy local badger populations. It is not possible to take out diseased badgers only. The research that the Government cherry-pick to try to justify their onslaught on badgers shows that even in TB hot spots most badgers are not infected. Licensed culling risks increasing cattle TB rather than reducing it. Imminent pilot culls are too slight to measure impacts before wider roll-outs of culling, and badger culling risks becoming a costly distraction from nationwide TB control. Vaccination is now possible for both cattle and badgers, and should be implemented as soon as possible, as it has been in Wales.

Mr John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman deal with the criticism of vaccination, which many feel is not a solution?

Mr McKenzie: What is equally not a solution is going out in the middle of the night and shooting badgers indiscriminately.

Vaccination is the most humane way forward, and, if it can happen, we should pursue it. I understand that the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee will be considering it. How can this be a science-based badger cull, as claimed by the Government and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when the Government's chief scientist is among those who dispute the evidence used to justify killings? The Government should be asking whether the culling of badgers produces a significant effect in eliminating bovine TB. We believe the answer is no, it will not. Is culling badgers cost-effective? The answer is no. Is it morally and ethically appropriate? Again, we feel that the answer is no. The public costs alone of licensing and policing a cull will exceed £1 million in each pilot area. Shooting badgers in the pitch black is not a good idea. There are

serious doubts about whether controlled shooting of free roaming badgers would actually achieve any worthwhile reduction in bovine TB at all.

We know how dreadful bovine TB is—I mentioned that our sympathies are with the farmers whose cattle are struck down by this terrible disease. We need to focus on other measures—those that will protect both cattle and badgers. We believe that vaccination is the way forward. Progress should be made on cattle vaccinations and DEFRA should secure change in the EU to permit commercial use of a cattle vaccine. There are far better ways to deal with bovine TB than the mass slaughter of badgers. We do not support a cull this year, next year or any year. We say: stop the cull and move to vaccinations.

12.41 pm

Mr Adrian Sanders (Torbay) (LD): In some ways it is disappointing that we have got to this point without finding a proper solution to TB. Successive Governments prevaricated over policy, and we are left in a tragic situation, where cattle and badgers continue to suffer and where farmers continue to have their livelihoods threatened by this disease. No one should be under any illusions whatever about what a nasty disease TB is, for both cattle and badgers, or how devastating it is to farmers and farming communities.

I thought that governmental prevarication had ended in 2008, with the recognition that culling was not the solution and that vaccination would provide a much surer way forward in the long term. The coalition agreement originally provided some comfort that TB control would be based on science-led policy. The apparent willingness of Ministers to take a rather curious interpretation of the scientific evidence is far more worrying. The independent scientific group, the bovine TB eradication group and the majority of scientific opinion conclude that culling is not the way forward. Lord Krebs has described the Government's policy as "mindless", so it is even more curious that the Secretary of State maintains that his decisions wholly conform to the science. They might conform to someone's science; they do not conform to the majority of scientific opinion.

Mr Laurence Robertson: Would the hon. Gentleman like to refer to the British Veterinary Association's opinion as well?

Mr Sanders: There is scientific opinion on both sides; the nub of the debate is that the majority of scientific opinion is against the cull.

Although Ministers and the National Farmers Union are clear that what has been announced is a postponement and not a U-turn on policy, the delay gives us an opportunity to scrutinise the evidence properly and to hold a wider public debate. I hope that that is beginning today. It is important to highlight the fact that opponents of the cull are not opposed to bearing down on TB. The ultimate goal for us all is to have better animal welfare—both of cattle and badgers—so it is essential that we find the most effective policy that eradicates the disease. I want to discuss the three main issues that demonstrate why the cull of badgers is the wrong way to deal with the spread of bovine TB: the scientific evidence, value for money and, of course, the overwhelming public opinion that a cull is an inhumane and unnecessary option.

Mr Gray: What's that got to do with it?

Mr Sanders: It has a lot to do with it, frankly. Killing animals that do not carry the disease is simply wrong.

There is a significant body of scientific evidence on the efficacy of culling, both supporting and rejecting the idea. The majority conclusion, however, is that a cull could be not only ineffective, but potentially counter-productive in controlling the disease, by increasing the number of infected badgers and cattle through the perturbation effect. That was highlighted by the research carried out by the independent scientific group in the randomised badger culling trial, which published its results in 2007 and warned against the results of badger culls. Dr Rosie Woodroffe, who was referred to earlier, is a former member of the ISG on cattle TB. She said earlier this month that

“all... evidence shows that culling badgers increases the proportion of badgers that have TB”.

As the Government have now admitted, there is also great unpredictability surrounding the logistical element of the cull. Using so-called shooting, it is unknown how many badgers will be destroyed or whether the shooters will have managed to fulfil their quota. The longer-term consequences on local ecosystems—such as an increase in fox populations, for example—are not entirely foreseeable. The cost of the cull seems to be increasingly complex, but there is a general consensus that it is a bad deal for taxpayers.

As Professor McInerney, emeritus professor of agricultural policy at the university of Exeter—right in the heart of the worst bovine TB-affected area—said,

“You pay about £1.5 million to get the disease avoidance worth about £900,000.”

It seems that not enough research has been done into the most cost-effective way to carry out a cull, but also that spending money on an ineffective cull would be a disastrous step in the battle to control TB. If the Government were to redirect those resources into further research and the development of alternative options, such as a vaccination, they would get far better value for taxpayers.

Let me turn to public opinion. It is obvious to most that the vast majority of the public are against the cull, as is evident from the e-petition. The Government seem to have lost sight of public interest and have developed the cull, which seems to be attractive only to understandably desperate farmers. It seems unfair to present those farmers with a quick fix that has no hope of a sustainable or successful future and to entice them with it. The responsible thing to do would be to back down from the cull altogether and explore the alternatives, to which I will now turn.

Of course, vaccinating cattle is the obvious solution to the problem. However, until we can develop a test that can distinguish between vaccinated and infected cattle, there is no hope of getting EU law changed, although some people contend that there has been a major breakthrough even in this area—an argument that others will no doubt pick up. In the meantime, we could start a badger vaccination programme. We have been vaccinating badgers since 2010, and there have been positive results. Research published by Dr Mark Chambers in 2010, using evidence gained a field trial, showed a 73.8% reduction in positive serological test

results in badgers. Just as in humans, when enough of the population is vaccinated, prevalence of the disease reduces.

According to the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, vaccinating badgers costs £51 per hectare, but that cost could be lowered. Getting groups to combine their operations with nearby areas and to share fridges, traps and other costly items drastically cuts the costs, making vaccination not only a more ethical option, but cheaper than culling. The money saved from not carrying out the cull should be used to fund the development of an oral vaccine for badgers. We know that oral vaccination is a much more practical solution, and the sooner one is developed, the better.

The Welsh Government's TB eradication programme is something that we should monitor closely and consider adopting for England. The programme has combined badger vaccination with stricter cattle controls and improved biosecurity and has had some success.

Andrew George: On top of the efforts that my hon. Friend is talking about and the science, which should taken into consideration, the recent results of research commissioned by DEFRA and headed by Dr Andrew Conlan at Cambridge university showed that one in five of the herds that had been given the all-clear on bovine TB were actually still harbouring the disease. We should be concentrating a great deal of effort in that area as well.

Mr Sanders: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing the House's attention to that research, of which I was not aware.

The Welsh Assembly Government have been offering biosecurity advice to farmers within the intensive action area, and the Government should be doing the same in Devon and other heavily affected areas. It is an easy and relatively cheap way to ensure that farmers have the knowledge and guidance that they need to limit the spread of bovine TB. That of course will not solve the problem overnight, but better farming practices and a general build-up of immunity in the badger population will slowly lead to a much lower rate of TB infection.

As someone lucky enough to have been born and grown up in the county of Devonshire, it is now my privilege and honour to represent a constituency in the county. No one from the west country is unaware of the issue, and what unites us across the south-west, as I hope it does in the House, is a desire to find a workable solution to this appalling plague on our cattle, our wildlife and the lives of our wonderful farmers and the communities in which they live. But a cull is not it.

12.50 pm

Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I want to start by commenting on the use of language in the debate. In his statement to the House a couple of days ago, the Secretary of State, who is not in his place, used the words “evidence” 15 times, “scientific” nine times and “science” 16 times. It is interesting to read his qualifications. On his website, he describes himself as having

“read History at Cambridge University”

and that as

“Agriculture spokesman he became an expert on bovine TB and campaigned for the dairy industry.”

We must use language carefully, because it is pushing the boundaries to say one is an expert on a subject. My good friend Lord Krebs, who chairs the sister Committee of mine in the other place, has considerably more expertise on this subject than I have, but I doubt whether he would call himself an expert. It is bold of the Secretary of State to describe himself as an expert.

This subject is hugely complicated. Humans and animals, especially food animals, are far more mobile than they were, so we must take very seriously the risk of zoonotic diseases. If the Government want to do something positive during the so-called closed season, I strongly advise them to invest in research into zoonotic diseases. I am pleased to say that one of this country's major veterinary schools at Leahurst, which is in my constituency and which the former farming Minister visited, leads the way in zoonotic research.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman, who is not an expert, think that there will be sufficient time before the cull recommences to get a vaccination that works? Most people suggest that we are several years away from that.

Andrew Miller: I know that the hon. Gentleman is fascinated with firearms, but shooting badgers will not work either. I do not say that a cull will have no effect; of course it will have an effect. Killing any of the species that carry TB—not just badgers but including cattle—will have an effect, but it will not solve the problem. Indeed, killing every badger will not eradicate bovine TB. I hope that the step proposed by the hon. Gentleman will not prove necessary in years to come, given the work that is being done on the biology, because I believe we can move closer to eradication by investing the huge sums that we are discussing in research programmes aimed at establishing a vaccination regime.

Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): I have huge respect for the hon. Gentleman, who chairs the Science and Technology Committee. Evidence given to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee in the previous Parliament suggested that this is a question not of money but of time, because we need generations of badgers and cattle, to develop the vaccine.

Andrew Miller: There is a chicken and egg argument and a serious challenge facing us. My concern is that the House is not taking the issue of zoonotic conditions seriously enough. We must take a much more mature view on the inevitable consequences of the greater mobility of people and of animals in the food chain while they are alive; otherwise, we shall be dealing with not only bovine TB but other conditions. I hope that when Ministers press the Treasury on the comprehensive spending view they will pass on the message that, without sensible investment, we will have this debate time and again and that, even if all badgers were culled, farmers would still be disadvantaged by this dreadful disease.

It is easy to criticise one side or the other of the argument, but even DEFRA's nine-point summary states:

“If culling is undertaken, it should be in addition to, not instead of, existing bTB control measures in cattle, which should be maintained and strengthened.”

I have yet to hear a single word from a Minister on the strengthening of the regime.

Sir James Paice: Notwithstanding Mr. Speaker's earlier injunction, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that if he had been paying attention on Tuesday or had read any farming magazines in the past two or three weeks he would know that on 1 January another big tranche of measures will be introduced to which farmers object because they are so tough.

Andrew Miller: The hon. Gentleman speaks of a big tranche, but I have not seen research and the necessary investment, without which we shall be making a dreadful mistake.

I shall use the time remaining to me to refer to the situation in my constituency. The Cheshire Wildlife Trust, which the right hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Andrew Stunell) mentioned when the statement was made on Tuesday, is funding its own vaccination campaign and calling for investment, which is a good move. I have a note from my constituent, Mr Huw Rowlands, a farmer, in which he says:

“Nobody can have missed the controversy raging about culling badgers. Quite how the proposed operations can be described as a cull is beyond me; my dictionary defines a cull as being ‘to take out inferior or surplus animals from a flock.’ We have badgers on the farm which to date have not caused problems”.

He opposes culling but supports the Cheshire Wildlife Trust's campaign. By the way, his farm is part of the higher level stewardship scheme, which is supported by DEFRA, and I recommend using Rowlands's farm to buy red poll meat, if I may advertise on its behalf.

The opinions of local people, including farmers, suggest that there are other ways to address this problem. It is a very challenging one and nobody can stand here and honestly say that they have the 100% correct solution, as the thoughtful speech preceding mine well illustrated. Unless we see serious investment in scientific research into zoonotic conditions, we will not see the eradication of the problem. Without such actions, we will simply delay having a debate that will have to take place in years to come.

This debate is, I suppose, about what happens during the interregnum. I urge the Government to think seriously about making that kind of investment during the interregnum; if we do not make it, we would be quite right to criticise the Government for failing in their duty to care not just for the animals on our land but for human beings, too.

1.1 pm

Sir James Paice (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): I start by reminding the House of my declared interests in this matter. I would like to comment briefly on this week's announcement and statement, but I want to spend most of my time trying to explain how the policy that we are debating was devised. I think I am the only person in the Chamber who was involved right through that development work. I am delighted that it has been taken on by the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr Heath), who is in his place on the Front Bench.

[*Sir James Paice*]

I think, in the circumstances, the Government were right this week to make the decision to postpone the cull. I regret that those circumstances arose. The main reason is that it is far too late in the year to start a cull. Badgers are going into semi-hibernation, slowing down and are not as active, so fulfilling a cull of any size would have been made much more difficult. In my view, it should have happened in the summer, notwithstanding the Olympics, and it should certainly have started by 1 October. I am concerned that the groups of farmers and their contractors were not ready to go when the first licence was issued in September.

I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) refer to the European context. She is absolutely right: the European auditors came here over a year ago to investigate how we go about this matter. She is right, too, to make the point that we get considerable sums of money from Europe. What she was unaware of, understandably, is the fact that this time last year, the European Commission threatened to withdraw our funding because it was not satisfied that we were taking sufficient actions, including dealing with badgers. I had to go to Brussels to make a personal plea to the then commissioner to sustain Europe's support of our programme.

It is interesting that several Members have referred to the situation in Wales. More recently, the Commission has said that the Welsh decision to stop the proposed cull damages the likely fulfilment of its eradication plan. There should be no doubt about the European position. I was as angry as the hon. Member for Bristol East about some of the reports of what was happening on the ground. That is why we toughened up right across the board, as she was kind enough to say, and it is partly why we agreed to this latest tranche of further restrictions, including a significant extension of annual testing into new parts of the country where the problem did not exist. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister has endorsed the position that I had taken.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I happen to represent one of the areas worst affected by TB. I want to commend my right hon. Friend as one of the most outstanding Agriculture Ministers, who knows a great deal about this subject. Does he acknowledge that there is not only a human misery in every case where a farmer loses cattle, but a huge economic cost in all these biosecurity measures, such as pre-movement testing, reactor testing and all the additional measures now announced? Those come at a huge economic cost for farmers.

Sir James Paice: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Several Members, including the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) who introduced the debate, referred to cattle-to-cattle transmission, which is of course a major factor—nobody denies it—that has to be properly addressed. The tranche of new measures to which I referred a minute ago is the third tranche; it started under my watch, but I had already introduced two tranches of much tougher measures. To be honest, the previous Government had done the pre-movement testing as well. The suggestion that cattle-to-cattle movement is not being addressed is nonsense. The other measures

are hugely important, but we come down to the fact that no country in the world has got rid of bovine TB—I mean get rid of, not just reduce—without addressing the reservoir of relevant wildlife. In this country, as in Ireland and France, this means badgers.

Angela Smith: The right hon. Gentleman's point has been made repeatedly over the last few days, but does he not agree that we are not comparing like with like here, in that the methodology used in other countries to deal with the problem has been quite different?

Sir James Paice: I accept that, not least because the reservoir involves different species of animals. Clearly, we do not deal with badgers in the same way as we deal with wild buffalo in the Northern Territory of Australia. That is blatantly clear, but if we are to address the issue of the reservoir of badgers, there are only two ways of proceeding. Either we vaccinate them—I shall come back to that—or we have to cull them.

I hope that the whole House accepts that no Minister from any political party wants to court the unpopularity or, indeed, face the security challenge caused by this. Let us be frank: I, the Minister, other Ministers and officials are all under special security arrangements because of the threats from a small minority of opponents. None of us wants any of that. If there were a better way, we would adopt it. To pretend that we are somehow not interested in vaccines is, I have to say, absurd. The fact is that we have a licensed injectable badger vaccine; no one has mentioned that the Government are making some money available to pay for it where people want to use it. If wildlife trusts want to continue to roll it out, that is fine, but the costs of rolling it out on a national scale are so incredible that I think it is wrong to suggest it is a panacea.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr Sanders) referred to an oral vaccine for badgers. We believed this would be likely for many years, but I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that, for two reasons, it is now further away than ever. First, the intellectual property will be difficult to get hold of; it is owned by a New Zealand institution. More importantly, the promising first tests have never been repeated. All the tests carried out showed much worse problems. That is because the vaccine is being destroyed in badgers' acidic stomachs.

On cattle vaccine, I can tell the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion that, yes, it has been developed and we know, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said the other day, that it is not very effective, although it has an element of effectiveness—about 60%. Yes, too, the DIVA test—differentiation of infected from vaccinated animals—is well on the way to being perfected. The hon. Lady is right about all that, but neither of them are licensed or officially proved and they still have to go through all the processes, which takes time, however much effort is put into it. What the hon. Lady seriously underplayed, however, is the European context when it comes to the cattle vaccine. I can assure her that, almost from day one of taking office, or within a matter of weeks, I pressed the Commission on this issue. I remember talking to the then Commissioner John Dalli, from D G SANCO, who said, “When you have your licensed vaccine and your licensed DIVA test, then we will start thinking about it, but don't forget that it is only you, Ireland and possibly France that want this. All the other

member states will be against it. Lifting the ban will take many years, so the question is what can be done in the meantime.”

Caroline Lucas: The case that the right hon. Gentleman describes is not the same as the discussions that I know have taken place at the European Commission, with very different messages coming back. Of course Britain is the only one that wants this vaccine at the moment, because we are the only ones who have had to face cattle TB this badly, but the suggestion that it is years away is simply not the case. I have in front of me text from DEFRA's own website, which talks about things happening by the end of the year. [*Interruption.*]

Sir James Paice *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order, Sir James. I will make the decisions, although it is good of you to offer advice. I am sure that the hon. Lady recognises that she has had a good run already; we ought to make sure that everybody else has a chance to express their views.

Sir James Paice: In the limited amount of time that is now available, let me deal with the issue of science. Everyone, including the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion, recognises that Lord Krebs and countless others accept that the randomised badger culling trials showed a 16% reduction. There is a great deal of debate about whether that is sufficient justification, but let us start there.

As has already been said, the study group concluded that culling badgers could “play no meaningful part”, but we thought it necessary to delve deeper into the research and to establish what was behind its conclusions. First, that 16% is a net figure. In the culling zone the gain was more like 30%, but it was offset by the problem of an increase in incidence in the perturbation area outside the zone. Some effort was made to reduce perturbation in the original trials, but it was nothing like the effort that is being imposed on the groups as a condition of their licence applications. If perturbation can be minimised, the net effect will be radically increased, although we do not know by how much because that has not yet been done. Let me stress again, however, that the 16% is a net figure which includes a problem outside the zone, and that that problem can be addressed.

As for the “meaningfulness” conclusion, it relates to the costs incurred by the RBCT. We all know that the trials were hugely expensive, but those are the only figures that we have to work on. We wanted to find a way of carrying out a cull more cheaply. We opted for controlled shooting as the predominant method, although cages would have to be used as well. I remind the House that controlled shooting of foxes, rabbits and, more recently, some species of deer takes place almost daily—or nightly—out in the countryside. To suggest that it is brand new is nonsense.

We addressed those two conclusions, and tried to find ways of achieving the same result through slightly different methods. Let me finally remind the House that these are pilots—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. The right hon. Gentleman's time is up.

1.11 pm

Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): There should be no doubt in the minds of Members on both sides of the House that bovine tuberculosis has serious economic and emotional implications for a number of farmers in the United Kingdom. We need to find a sustainable and human solution to this scourge.

According to the scientific evidence, to achieve a significant reduction in bovine TB, badger culling would need to take place over a huge geographical area—as large as 500 sq km. It would also need to be very intensive, virtually wiping out the badger population in the area.

The Government must make clear what they intend to do following the initial trials. Will their policy be to allow culling over a much larger area, with much larger numbers of dead badgers? That could pose a risk to the badger population as a whole. As Members are well aware, the problem is that a cull of less than 70% means ineffective disease control, while a cull of more than 70% means a risk of eradication of the badger population across the country. The Government claim to have devised much more effective culling methods, but how can we know when those methods have not been tried yet? Given that shooting badgers has never been used in the UK before as a means of control, it must be doubtful whether it would lead to the same results in bovine TB eradication as the badger trials conducted by the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB.

A follow-up report on the randomised badger culling trial, published in February 2010, warned of the need for any cull to be well planned and co-ordinated, and of the potential for small-scale or irregular culls to result in increases rather than decreases in bovine TB incidence. The Government have so far failed to co-ordinate the figures for the number of badgers in the cull areas for the purpose of meeting their 70% target. The latest survey data show the number of badgers in each cull area to be double the figure used by DEFRA to calculate the costs of the cull. DEFRA used a figure of 1,300 badgers in each 300 sq km cull area, but on 17 October it revealed in a written answer that the figures were actually 3,600 in west Gloucestershire and 4,300 in west Somerset. The Minister's response to my question about the figures this week was also confused.

It is clearly difficult to monitor the badger population accurately. This week, Lord Krebs referred to a variation of between 1,000 and 5,000 in the space of just a few days. However, Natural England needs to know the actual number of badgers in each area in order to know how many must be killed. Without such accurate population data, it is hard to assess whether the 70% target can be met, or how the results of the trial can be compared with those of previous trials that were conducted on independent scientific basis.

Roger Williams: One of the problems with the Krebs trials was that they were interrupted by the foot and mouth outbreak. Instead of five annual culls in five years, there were four culls spread over a period of between five and six years.

Meg Munn: I am not sure exactly how that relates to what I have been saying, but the hon. Gentleman has put his point on the record.

[Meg Munn]

Protecting wildlife is something about which I feel strongly, and I know that many Members in all parts of the House feel the same. The Council of Europe's convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats, also known as the Berne convention, is a legally binding convention that aims

“to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats”.

There are currently 50 signatories, including all the members of the European Union and the Union itself, as well as several other European and north African countries. The United Kingdom Government have been a signatory since the 1970s. Badgers are listed in appendix III of the convention, and contracting parties are committed to prohibiting

“the use of all indiscriminate means of capture and killing and the use of all means capable of causing local disappearance of, or serious disturbance to, populations”.

Article 9 provides contracting parties with the conditions under which exceptions can be made to the rules protecting appendix III-listed species. They include the prevention of “serious damage” to livestock, but only in circumstances in which there is “no other satisfactory solution”, and only when the action taken

“will not be detrimental to the survival of the population concerned”.

Because of the controversial nature of this badger cull, secrecy is required in its planning and start; but we know, farmers know, and the local populations know what is happening, and that must place a question mark over the effectiveness of the operation. The safety of the public in the two areas involved poses a potential problem. If the public are to be 100% safe, the boundaries will have to be revealed, but that would prevent the identity of participating farmers and landowners from remaining secret. Moreover, the taking of precautions to avoid any criminal activity by protesters—not only to avoid damage, but to ensure the effectiveness of the cull—would become harder to achieve. It should be borne in mind that, according to the 2011 consultation, more than 50% of public opinion is against the cull.

The Government's impact assessment has already shown that the cull will cost farmers more than it saves them. In a follow-up to DEFRA's document containing the estimated costs of various culling methods, a report on the randomised badger culling trial pointed out that those estimates did not include any capital cost to farmers or costs of training and co-ordinating efforts, and concluded that the costs of this culling method could exceed the long-term financial benefits. Following Natural England's updated figures for the badger population, the National Farmers Union has admitted that the cost to farmers would be too high. If the ultimate objective is to prevent the slaughter of cattle and therefore a loss of farmers' livelihoods, why do the Government believe that the appropriate solution is to put a greater financial strain on farmers and on the public purse?

The Government recognise that vaccination is the real strategy for the long term, but they are downplaying the current possibilities. As other Members have pointed out, although the oral badger vaccine would have greater potential for more widespread use, we must accept that its development is some years away. However, developing and using the injectable vaccine would be a step in the right direction.

In 2007, the previous Government decided not to licence farmers to cull badgers, but to make vaccination a priority, and increased spending on vaccines. Over the last 10 years, DEFRA has spent more than £7 million on research into badger vaccines, and in March 2010 the first TB badger vaccine was authorised. The plan had been to deploy it in six areas in England, but that was reduced to one area in June 2010. The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr Sanders) has discussed the 2010 study, which showed that positive TB tests among badgers were reduced by almost 74%.

Vaccinating cattle to give the herd a level of combined immunity, which slows the spread of the disease until it reaches zero, should be developed. I will not discuss that point in detail as it has already been addressed. We know, however, that vaccinating cattle and having a DIVA test are the right things to do.

This debate is titled, “Badger Cull”, but it is not just about saving the lives of badgers; it is also about saving the lives of cattle. The key point is that we must do what is effective not only for the short term, but for the long term. I believe that the Government have got this seriously wrong. There is an alternative, and they should take it.

1.21 pm

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I have great pride in declaring that I breed Hereford cattle, and even more pride in saying they all passed their TB test in September.

One of my constituents sent me a book called “The Geek Manifesto” about why we need more scientists in politics. That was very kind of him, and it was a very interesting book. It has served to show me, however, that our current debate highlights one of the problems with science and political discussion. Scientists are constrained in how they write their reports, which makes it too easy for people to quote from them to confirm their prejudices.

I had the privilege of meeting Professor Bourne and asking him how he would deal with TB if he were in charge. The gist of his answer was that he would not do it in the way he did it when worked for DEFRA because the constraints put on him made for poorer science. I agreed with him, and he was good enough to point out the cost-benefit and animal welfare considerations and other barriers to pure research.

From 1992 to 2011, the number of cattle slaughtered annually as a result of TB has risen from 2,000 to 38,000. Therefore, the status quo is not working, so we can safely rule out the “do nothing” option.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who moved the motion, has just left her place, but—[*Interruption.*] I am very sorry; she is still present. In her speech, she barely referred to the current situation. Some 26,000 cattle had to be slaughtered last year. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) suggests, if the status quo continues, cattle will continue to be slaughtered, and that—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Mr Herbert, you should know better. A lot of Members wish to speak. We have asked for short interventions. Please do not make a speech. If you want to speak, you should put your name on the list.

Bill Wiggin: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. He is absolutely right: it is a tragedy not only for the cattle, but for the farmer, and it is also a great tragedy for badgers.

The figure that is hardest to ascertain is how many badgers catch this disease every year. I am not aware of any evidence, but what I do know is that badgers are tough and they can cope with this infection for some time. Some badgers first display lesions in their bladders and then, as the disease progresses, they develop in other organs. The badger will become increasingly sick and eventually be driven out of its social group. When that happens, the badger will leave the sett territory and wander into other badgers' territories where it may have to fight, and fighting is bad, because the risk of passing the infection, through scratches and bites, increases greatly. That, too, is beyond dispute.

I remember tabling a written question some years ago asking what would be the right thing to do if someone were to find an injured badger by the side of the road. The answer that came back was: "Consult your lawyer before doing anything." This situation cannot be allowed to continue. There needs to be a humane way of ending suffering—for badgers, not lawyers, of course!

I have real concerns about the skin test we currently use to identify the disease. Here is a challenge for the armchair scientists. If we carry on testing and culling cattle, we will succeed in breeding cattle that do not show a reaction to the skin test. That is happening already. A constituent of mine tested her cattle, then took one for slaughter, only to find two lesions in different organs of that cow. That meant that the cow was unfit for human consumption and she lost her beef—which was probably worth about £2,000. She was very angry as her cow had been tested and passed and then been condemned. She wanted compensation from the Government for having such a rotten test. She is right. This is another example of what happens if we carry on with the "do nothing" policy we have inherited.

As well as breeding test-proof cows, we are also allowing the disease to spread in the badger population. Not one of the letters I got from supposed friends of the badger pointed out that, by doing nothing, more badgers would become infected. In fact, many said that diseases in wild animals were no concern of theirs—and they call themselves animal lovers. I have nothing but contempt for people who allow badgers to suffer, which is why I pushed for longer prison sentences for genuinely evil people who bait badgers. Sadly, Opposition parties voted down an amendment I tabled on that.

The Dutch vaccinated "to die" during the foot and mouth outbreak, and that is based on the principle that a vaccinated animal must be traceable throughout its life. Perhaps we should be seeking permission to trial vaccination in areas that have not been selected for a trial cull, despite EU directive 78/52/EEC, article 13.

Beef suckler cows could be considered as "not for export". By that, I mean a farmer may decide to keep a beef heifer calf for the rest of her life. She will never be sold for export, nor would her beef go into the export market. This would shift the decision on the risk of TB from DEFRA to the farmer. The risk would be the farmer's. After a cow has passed a TB test, she would be vaccinated. Her passport would be stamped "TB vaccinated, not for export." She would stay in the UK for the rest of her life. At the end of her days when she went for

slaughter, if lesions were found in her body, the meat would be condemned and the farmer would lose the £900 or so she was worth as beef. That decision and risk would belong to the farmer. Any calf born could be tested, and bulls or cattle that would be worth exporting could be left unvaccinated. If the cow were to develop the disease, it would be picked up every time she had a calf, which is annually, and which is when we test for the disease.

Mathematically, every animal that is protected from the disease makes it harder for the disease to spread. Dairy cattle that are to be milked would not qualify for vaccination. Even if bacillus Calmette-Guérin vaccination is not much better than 50% or 60% effective, ways of reducing the costs, reducing the chances, reducing the possible vectors, and reducing the bill to taxpayers are all worth exploring. I urge the Government to look into this as one of the tools in the box.

Data from the randomised badger culling trial led to the conclusion that

"in the absence of transmission from infected badgers, only 3.4% of herds per annum would be expected to have a TB breakdown" and that

"TB in cattle herds could be substantially reduced, possibly even eliminated, in the absence of transmission from badgers to cattle."

I believe that vaccinating badgers could contribute to that, but there are constraints. We do not vaccinate infected cattle; we cull them, and we should do the same for infected badgers. One of the ideals would be a test for badgers. I urge the Government to look at having more research done into the PCR—polymerase chain reaction—test at Warwick university. Accordingly, the British Veterinary Association announced its relief that there has been no U-turn on the badger cull. It reiterated that scientists think culling badgers does reduce levels of infection in cattle herds.

As I said, I am in favour of vaccinating cattle and badgers, but we are all aware that we cannot wait. I am aware of the hundreds of e-mails that colleagues have received, as I have, but they largely cite the alternative of vaccination as the answer to the TB problem. That sounds better in theory than it is in practice: the badger vaccine is injected and is therefore difficult to administer, as badgers need to be trapped; and it is difficult to record which badgers have been vaccinated, and some may be trapped again and again. Furthermore, EU legislation currently bans the cattle vaccine, as it can interfere with the tuberculin skin test. The Government are right to develop the DIVA test.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the ideal in terms of getting rid of this problem is a cattle vaccine as well as a badger vaccine, but the problem is that we are a long way from both of those and a badger vaccine has no effect on badgers already infected with TB?

Bill Wiggin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We do need a suitable vaccination to be developed and to be legal in the UK. No one wants to cull healthy badgers. So an experimental pilot cull in the highest-risk areas, with all the barriers to spreading the disease, such as coastlines or rivers, and with the local farmers in support, would prove whether culling was worth rolling out in other high-risk areas. People should be clear that

[Bill Wiggin]

the whole badger population is not at risk from culling, just those badgers that are highly at risk themselves of being infected.

Professor Bourne told me that a cull would not work the way he did it, so the Government have rightly changed the parameters. Culling will not be done in the way it was done before; it will not be done by the same people and it must be done to a level that commands scientific respect, within hard boundaries and in a specifically large area. Without vectors I believe the chance of infection drops dramatically, although *M. bovis* does live in soil for up to two years. If the chance of infection remains high and the pilot culls do not work, we would be glad it was only a pilot and we could then spend all our time and money on vaccinating alone—that is why we should vote down today's motion. But vaccination is illegal under article 13 of EU directive 78/52/EEC, so that approach may not work either. That is why I think we should seek a derogation so that we can pilot vaccination in this country as well.

1.31 pm

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): May I begin by saying how much I regret that the Secretary of State is not in his place? I regret even more the fact that he left the Chamber chuntering into the microphone that he had had enough of this debate.

I should declare some interests at the outset: I am the proud Member of Parliament for England's most remotely accessible constituency from Westminster; I am married into a dairy farming family; and I am proud to represent scores of farmers. I have not seen for a long time as big a mailbag as has come in against this proposed cull. Today's debate will take many forms and touch on many issues. In many ways, the Government are to blame for that, because this should have always been and should always be a scientific debate. There is no doubt that it should be an environmental debate and a debate about animal welfare, but those debates should always be based on science if they are to carry the weight and meaning that we want them to.

Before I go through the scientific evidence, I wish to pay tribute to all the organisations that have argued against what is clearly a scientifically flawed set of proposals used to support a cull. I also pay tribute to those figures with a high public profile who have used that to forward the aims of this cause. We live in an era characterised by a rampant, feckless celebrity culture that has begun to disfigure our society, where infamy, rather than fame found through any positively worthwhile achievements, leads to instant riches and celebrity status. This has led to the creation of a wealthy, C-list zombie class who do not believe they are subject to the laws of this country. So I applaud those who have used their profile for a cause that is not self-serving, lucrative or glamorous. They deserve our respect; they have rocked this Government.

The science is clear, and Lord Krebs has left no doubt on the efficacy of the proposed cull and its ability to address the problem of bovine TB. He has rightly said that

“bovine TB is a serious problem, and it deserves serious science to underpin policy.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 October 2012; Vol. 740, c. 148.]

He has also pointed out that the proposed cull will result, after nine years, in 84% of the problem still remaining in place. That means that there will be a 16% reduction in the trend increase of bovine TB, and so, after nine years, there will still be more bovine TB around than there was at the beginning. It could not be clearer that this proposed cull simply will not work.

DEFRA's own figures show that fewer cattle have been slaughtered because of bovine TB each year from 2008 to 2011, so it is clear that the Government are cherry-picking data in an attempt to support a flawed case. The question must be asked: why? The answer is really hard to fathom. In one respect, I think it is a genuinely confused attempt to help. One myth I would like to dispel is that this is being done at the behest of the National Farmers Union. We have all noticed the Government's nudges and winks over recent weeks in an attempt to blame the NFU for the proposal, but that simply will not wash. The NFU is an important, effective organisation that is duty-bound to represent the many disparate interests of farms and farmers of very different sorts. Clearly, there is more than one voice of farmers on the issue of bovine TB and the cull.

Farmers want solutions to bovine TB, as we all do. My constituency will never forget the devastating consequences of foot and mouth disease. It was not just an animal welfare disaster and an economic catastrophe; it was a very real human tragedy, as lives were ruined and generations of work were destroyed. Nothing like that must ever be allowed to happen again, so on the issue of bovine TB farmers are well within their rights to look at the Government and wonder why they have been led down the garden path and sold a false prospectus. There can be no doubt that they have been, and they are sick to death of the goalposts for ever moving as the Government continue to drop the ball. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the proposed cull was a sop from a shambolic Government—the political equivalent of magic beans. This shambles is not the fault of farmers and it is not the fault of the NFU.

I am sick and tired of redundant notions of rurality running riot across this House and within all political parties. In some parts of this House, rural areas are seen in the mind's eye as consisting of corpulent farmers chewing a blade of grass and resting on a gate post; they are seen as simply a playground for those who have wealth and have left urban areas to gentrify rural areas with large homes and Range Rovers. Those who think that never see the young farmer struggling to stay afloat, and rarely consider what it means for people to have literally no access to public transport and, as a result, to schools, hospitals and other services, which their taxes pay for just as much as anyone else's. Those who think that never see the struggling villages, which are fighting every day to stay alive and have never known affluence, or the pensioners, parents and children who occupy this forgotten country—that must change. As the economic squeeze worsens, as the public sector and the state retreat further, and as areas of market failure become ever more prominent, all of us need to pay urgent attention to the plight of ordinary people in this forgotten England, because they need our help and they have little or no interest in the colour of our respective rosettes. So I commend those Government Members who will support today's motion.

This Government have done little or nothing for the people I am talking about, and show no signs of doing so. The cull was also a sop based on a redundant and clichéd misconception of farmers and rural life, which can now be seen through. That, in part, has led to farmers receiving anonymous threats about what will happen to them and their property if a cull takes place. That is a despicable state of affairs, and I hope that the Minister, the Secretary of State and the Government in general will join me in urging that the full weight of the law be brought against the people who have made those threats.

For the sake of bovine welfare, for the sake of badger conservation, for the sake of rural businesses and the rural economy, which, in so many ways, relies upon dairy farming, and for the sake of everyone in this House, on either side, who cares about rural England, the Government should urgently begin bringing forward sensible proposals to tackle bovine TB, not pointless, scientifically disproven, dog-whistle policies.

1.38 pm

Mike Weatherley (Hove) (Con): I am sure my hon. Friends are aware that bovine tuberculosis is the most infectious type of TB. It is able to infect most mammals, although, thankfully, the threat of humans contracting TB from animals today is very remote. The disease originated in cattle, it is a farming problem and it has had an impact on wildlife throughout the world, with devastating effects. Culls and mass slaughters have been carried out in an attempt to combat TB, but they have never been successful; no country has eradicated bovine TB by removing a wildlife population. The recent UK randomised badger culling trial—RBCT—is at the centre of this dispute and it is the basis of the Government's policy, which has cherry-picked data to the detriment of our domestic animal populations. "Perturbation" is the scientific term for the effect of spreading an infection to an area outside the cull zone. This occurs when infected populations within the zone migrate out to new areas, and it is highlighted as a concern in the Krebs report.

Hard boundaries were recommended, but DEFRA offered roads and rivers. Badgers cross roads each night and 99% of them survive. They also swim extremely well and in many areas cross rivers and canals nightly to feed. They are sensitive and highly intelligent animals that will flee the culling zone if shooting is prolonged. The entire wildlife population will migrate out of the location in those circumstances, and we know that deer and boar are vectors for bovine TB, along with rats and many other mammals. It is irresponsible at best and dire at worst to displace any of the wildlife population that is suspected of carrying disease.

The recommended period for culling to keep a population within the cull zone is five days of intense culling. That ensures that in most cases the wildlife population stays in place and does not migrate out, spreading bovine TB as it moves. The RBCT took 12 days and saw perturbation have a negative effect on culling. The Government have ignored the recommended cull period and allowed six weeks. That cull period will see the entire wildlife population within the cull zone permanently move out, spreading infection from the cull zone.

It is true that many farms continually suffer from bovine TB, but 40% of all farms in the hot spot areas have been TB free over 10 years. Such migration will

infect the TB-free farms and simply spread bovine TB. The spread of TB slowly across the country has been caused by cattle movements and not by badgers, as they do not migrate. Cattle movements can be the only factor in the spread. Poor and sloppy biosecurity and lapsed testing has led to cattle spreading the disease in many cases.

The cull would be industry-led and would not be carried out by specialists and scientists in the area of population and disease control. Level two hunters will have had only one day of training, which will make them neither an expert at shooting an animal they have never encountered before nor a specialist in population control. Those people might well never have shot a badger and are unlikely to understand how it moves.

The test and cull regime would take decades to achieve official TB-free status. We can kill all the badgers in England and we would still have bovine TB, so what would we do then? Remove all the deer, all the boar and all other wildlife? The cull must be halted and the only alternative is the vaccination of both badgers and cattle, as we heard earlier. Vaccination is the only alternative to culling that does not risk making TB worse. An injectable badger vaccine has been available and in use since early 2010 and trials have shown that it is effective in reducing the severity and progression of TB in badgers. It reduced the incidence of positive tests in badgers by 74%.

One of the reasons cited for not pursuing a wider vaccination programme is that modelling suggests it will take slightly longer to have an impact on bovine TB than culling. However, given the length of time that it has taken to implement a cull, a wider vaccination programme from 2010 could already be bringing benefits for both badgers and cattle. Although one solution is to vaccinate badgers, the permanent solution must be to vaccinate cattle. The preoccupation with badgers has prevented successive Governments from tackling the real issue but the cattle need protecting and we cannot continue to slaughter wildlife that we deem to be infected. We need to address the real issue—the source—and vaccinate our cattle. We will never address bovine TB if we do not stop it at source.

The cost of a cull exercise is increasing and policing will cost millions. The policy will be deeply unpopular and will not solve the problem of bovine TB. The only long-term sustainable and sensible way forward is to vaccinate. A European vaccine is months away, not years as we heard earlier, and needs to be pursued by a committed Government and the farming community. Vaccination is the only sustainable solution that is cost-effective and ethical. Most importantly, it works.

1.43 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hove (Mike Weatherley), who made a very thoughtful speech and showed that just as there is no one opinion on this question in farming there is no one opinion on the Government Benches.

I speak as a former Minister of State at DEFRA who tried to address the issue in 2009-10. I saw at first hand the emotional and financial effect on farmers and their families and the pain inflicted by bovine TB. For most people in the country, except to those who watch the

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

BBC's excellent "Countryfile", that is invisible. In the Adam's farm section of the programme, viewers will have heard Adam Henson's vet confirm that his prize beasts were infected with TB. They will have seen the pain that he felt and how that announcement affected his family. I am sure that that brought the issue home to millions more people than would otherwise have been the case.

Miss McIntosh: Does the hon. Gentleman remember that he had the opportunity to respond to the Select Committee's 2008 report on the incentives and financing that the Government of whom he was a member were giving to farmers for biosecurity measures? We received no answer. Does he regret that now?

Jim Fitzpatrick: I will come on to what the previous Government did at DEFRA when I was Minister of State. The hon. Lady will forgive me, but I do not have the record for 2008. I know that her Committee did sterling work on the subject and respect the activity in which it was involved.

My former boss at DEFRA, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), states in an article to be published today:

"Some of the facts are agreed. Bovine TB is a terrible disease. It has a huge impact on the farmers affected and they are understandably desperate to find their way out of this nightmare."

He goes on to say:

"But we all have a responsibility to take action that will work."

That is the starting point for our disagreement with the Government.

The forced delay to Government plans announced this week shows how difficult the subject is. There is no easy answer and that is why I want to refer to comments made by the Secretary of State on Tuesday. He said in his statement:

"The previous Government took forward the RBCT in a whole series of trials and then stopped and decided to do nothing."

He went on to say that

"after the trials, the Labour Government stopped dead."—[*Official Report*, 23 October 2012; Vol. 551, c. 839-44.]

With the greatest of respect to the Secretary of State, that is entirely wrong. Yes, we decided against a further or widespread cull, but our decisions were based on the evidence of the science presented to the Department and to Ministers at the time. Moreover, my right hon. Friend, who is in the Chamber, implemented the findings of the independent scientific group after the Krebs trials of the 10-year randomised badger cull. As the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) mentioned, John Bourne's recommendation was not to cull but to tighten cattle controls. That is the answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh), the Chair of the Select Committee, and that is what was done.

We went further. We set up the TB eradication group, which comprised members of the British Veterinary Association, the NFU, Government scientists, individual farmers, DEFRA officials and others. For the Secretary of State to say on Tuesday that we stopped dead is

insulting to the dedicated work done by those people on the issue of bovine TB and that was grossly unfair of him.

We also lobbied the Treasury for every penny we could get for compensation for farmers afflicted by the disease and, critically, we kept up support for the search for vaccines for badgers and cattle. In contrast, one of the first things the coalition did at DEFRA, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Meg Munn), was cancel five of the six vaccine pilot trials. That looks like an even poorer decision today than it did then, and it looked pretty awful when it was announced.

For the Secretary of State to say that we stopped dead was plain wrong. If badger culling was proven scientifically to have worked, I am convinced that the Labour Government, having supported the trials with appropriate controls, would have pulled that trigger to protect cattle, to protect badgers and to protect other wildlife. It did not work then, however, and despite the coalition's changes, such as harder boundaries and so on, we do not think that it will work now.

Sir John Beddington was quoted by the Secretary of State on Tuesday. He was reported as having said that

"we might expect a 12 to 16% reduction in bovine TB...after nine years".—[*Official Report*, 23 October 2012; Vol. 551, c. 839.]

That is hardly a vote of confidence. Those figures have been put in perspective in a number of speeches, as well as during DEFRA questions earlier today. I can understand that farmers, some Government Members and others want to be seen to be doing something—anything—and to be doing it now. As we heard in the statement, however, nothing will happen until next year, if then.

As the new Secretary of State has found out, there is no easy solution, no quick fix and no silver bullet. Vaccines and vaccination for badgers and cattle are the way forward. If there is a vote tonight, I will support the motion and I hope that the majority of Members will do the same.

1.49 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I want to concentrate on the effect of TB-infected herds on farmers, especially in the west country, particularly in Devon. For nearly 20 years, and certainly for the past 15 years, cases have been increasing. In Devon, we started off in 1998 with some 1,700 infected cattle, and now there are 5,000-plus. Do not forget that those farmers who have herds with TB have been restricted throughout that period, when they have been testing their cattle every 60 days. Under restriction, dairy farmers can sell their milk and beef farmers their finished animals, provided that they do not have TB, but they cannot sell any young stock. They are restricted throughout the period, so one can imagine the effect on family farms and their finances.

I declare an interest: I am a farmer. Most hon. Members will not have heard me say anything else but that. Farmers whose cattle are restricted and who cannot sell their young stock see only an ever-rising overdraft. Not to put too fine a point on it, every time the bank statement arrives, farmers feel suicidal. They are trapped because nothing can be done; they cannot rid their cattle of the disease. There is not only the emotional impact, but the impact on all the cattle of being forever tested. Cattle do not like being put through a crush

every 60 days and injected. Would any of us? Those are the sorts of things that we have to face up to.

We have talked a lot today about vaccines, which are always a year away. For 20 years, farmers have been told that. The last Labour Government spent virtually all the time saying that to farmers. I have much respect for the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), but the last Labour Government got very close to having a cull and they chickened out, which the Secretary of State has no intention of doing.

Angela Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Neil Parish: No, I think not. I want to carry on in this vein.

I object to Opposition Members' comments that farmers have not restricted cattle movement. There have been a few such cases, but the vast majority of farmers have had ever-stricter regulations imposed on them. They clean those cattle; every summer and winter, they come in and are tested and the TB reactors are taken out. In the spring, those cattle are put back out to grass. I might be being simplistic, but they then graze on grass infected with badger urine. Do not forget that whatever the percentage of badgers with TB, we can be certain that the biggest percentage of infected badgers are where the most TB is in cattle, so they are giving it to one another. However, we are taking out cattle with TB, but we are not taking out and controlling badgers.

We know that the vaccine will not work on infected badgers. Government Members are not bloodthirsty. We do not love the idea of a cull, but we must take out badgers in those areas with the highest concentration of infected badgers. We must not forget that these are pilot culls in areas that have been chosen because they are TB hot spots with harder boundaries. Yes, badgers will cross roads, but with a large motorway, a river or the sea, there will be much less perturbation. We all accept that there will be some, but if it can be restricted, that is right.

Duncan Hames (Chippenham) (LD): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Neil Parish: No, I will not, because I did give way earlier. I will carry on.

This is mainly an Opposition Back-Bench debate—*[Interruption.]* I did say “mainly”. If one looks at the list of speakers, I would not be far wrong. But it is the Government Benches rather than the Opposition Benches that are packed out. We have real concern about prevaricating and doing nothing, as the previous Labour Government did, and the Government are making a real effort to control the disease.

Badger numbers are interesting. Let us not forget that the Badger Trust has argued for years that there are not such numbers of badgers in the country, but the badger population has continually increased and become more diseased. As that population grows, badgers become more adventurous and are much more likely to enter cattle sheds and infect cattle. Increased numbers of badgers and diseased badgers create a problem not only for cattle, but for wildlife and wildlife management.

Duncan Hames: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Neil Parish: As the hon. Gentleman is so persistent, yes.

Duncan Hames: I am very grateful. On perturbation, what happens to the setts of badgers that are culled in the trials? Are they then occupied by healthy badgers or by diseased badgers? Are they destroyed to prevent them from being occupied, or do natural processes mean that they are not occupied by badgers after the trial?

Neil Parish: The whole idea of the trial is to get a 70% reduction in the number of badgers—

Angela Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Neil Parish: I have not really answered the previous intervention, but I will give way.

Angela Smith: The evidence is that the setts are left untouched. That has already been demonstrated. They are often repopulated by healthy badgers, which then pick up the disease.

Neil Parish: My point, in answer to both interventions, is that the whole idea of the trial is to carry out a cull of at least 70% of badgers in the given area over a four or five-year period. That is key to ensuring that we cull the diseased badgers. I cannot say which badger will go back to which sett, but I am certain that if we reduce those numbers, we will reduce their movement, and if they cannot spread beyond the cull area, we will see a reduction of much more than 16% in TB in cattle in those areas. It has been found throughout the world that where infected wildlife are culled there is a much greater effect.

The Government are right to carry on with the culls. I respect what the NFU has had to do. Because of the Olympics, it was late in the day before the culls could be started. We are getting towards much darker nights and we have had probably one of the wettest summers and autumns that I have ever known, so now is the wrong time to go forward with the cull. But I dispute the idea that we can do nothing about the situation and that culling badgers in the infected areas is wrong.

Until we tackle those concerns, farmers in my constituency and across the country, especially in the west, will be unable to rest, because they know that more and more cattle will become diseased and more and more restrictions will be imposed on them, and in the end many of them will decide, because of the weather, the price of feed and the disease, to give up cattle farming. Do we not want to see those farmed cattle healthy and grazing in the fields? Of course we do, which is why we need to take action. I very much respect the Secretary of State for sticking to the plan to have a cull.

2 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) has just given us a wonderful example of how politics can stray down paths that are unwise. Babies cry, dogs bark and politicians legislate. When we have a problem, sometimes even one that is beyond solution on heaven or earth, we feel that we have to do something. It is often better to do nothing,

[Paul Flynn]

as history proves. Under the previous Labour Government, 75 Bills were passed that have never been implemented; they went through the House but nothing happened afterwards. It is the futile urge of the political class—that is what we are—to feel that we must always do something, usually by legislating, but often that multiplies the problem that we are trying to address.

In 1991, my friend and colleague Roy Hughes, who was a Member of the House for 30 years, first for Newport and then for Newport East, managed to bring through the Bill that designated badgers as a protected species. It was part of a movement that has been going on for a long time to ensure that we, as the superior species, treat all other living beings with respect and protect them from gratuitous suffering.

One of the issues that I have with the House is the need to make it more representative of the population as a whole. We have certainly made great progress in that regard by increasing the number of women Members, of which you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are a splendid example, as are the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy). What a splendid debate we have had. I have been tempted to go and have my lunch, for which I have been waiting for some time, because I feel a sense of redundancy as a result of the brilliant way that they put their case in their speeches and in their interventions, some of which were not answered. My hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) intervened on the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) to ask a very pertinent question: why has there been an increase in bovine TB?

One of my jobs in ensuring that the House is more representative relates to a group—there are millions of them in the population—that is grossly under-represented: we have a desperate shortage of octogenarians. I am looking forward to the people of Newport West putting that right in 2015. One of the joys that come with old age is a long memory. I can recall the fuss about bovine TB in 1946, when I was 11 years old. There were then 47,476 cases of bovine TB in 1946, but the figure had fallen to 628 in 1979. It would be simplistic to suggest that that was because of the arrival of Clement Attlee and the glorious dawn of socialism between 1945 and 1951, before the beginning of the dark age of Thatcherism in 1979. It was not Thatcher. We know that we went for 20 years with fewer than 1,000 cases of bovine TB a year.

Roger Williams: Almost eradicating bovine TB in the 1950s and '60s was a truly remarkable achievement, but the difference between then and now is that there was no wildlife reservoir back then.

Paul Flynn: The hon. Gentleman ignores the fact that we went for 20 years without doing anything, as has been suggested. We did not interfere. I do not believe that the cull will do any good, because the evidence suggesting that is overwhelming. The hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) complained about the geek manifesto, which asks for science-based policies in the House, which are rare. He went on to say, "I have absolutely no evidence for this, but..." before putting forward a preposterous claim.

The trouble with the House is that so often we have no evidence for what we do. We are rich in prejudice in what we do. Nowhere is that more obvious than in the way that we treat farmers. As far as the Conservatives are concerned, we know that what the NFU wants, the NFU gets. I suggest that those Members should start to do a little more thinking for themselves, stand up to farmers—I and many other Members have many farmers in our constituencies—and tell them when they are wrong. They are certainly wrong on this.

We went through a long period during which bovine TB being was not a special problem. Why is the concern always about bovine TB, because 10 times as many animals die on the farm as a result of other diseases and no compensation is paid? Why are the farmers no desperate about that? Why do we concentrate on this one disease?

The turning point when the disease became out of control and a major problem was the epidemic of foot and mouth disease. The controls were laid off because the focus was on eliminating the foot and mouth disease and the other problem was restocking. Cattle were moved to different areas, and we suddenly had a massive problem with bovine TB, which was mostly the result of cattle-to-cattle or soil-to-cattle infection. Some people want to seek a simple solution, but the solution is a false one. We should look at the geek manifesto and have policies that are rich in science and in the truth. Otherwise, we will do nothing now to solve a problem that will evolve. In the near future, vaccination will become a practical solution. I believe that the decision taken by the Welsh Government is the right one.

Let us look at what is going on. I believe that last week the coalition Government grabbed the statement by the NFU as manna from heaven because they knew that they were politically embarrassed. They are redefining themselves as a new party that is nastier than ever before. The public do not see the justification for a mass slaughter of a beloved animal as being reasonable or practical. In a year's time, when the coalition Government have done everything they can, having enthusiastically blamed the previous Government, the European Union and civil servants for everything that goes on, and if they get another year and a half to build the incredible ineptocracy that they are creating, where will their courage be then? Will they tell the public, "We need a badger cull now"? Will they get deeper into unpopularity? Will they advertise themselves again as the even nastier party, by attacking defenceless living creatures?

A group of people in my constituency have been caught indulging in badger culling. I think that many of us would agree that there is an element of sport in this that, sadly, many people enjoy. They enjoy killing wild animals. It is not part of the growing civilisation of this country, as we go from decade to decade and treat other living species with greater respect, not contempt.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. A large number of Members still wish to participate in the debate. To ensure that all of them can do so, I am reducing the time limit to seven minutes. Members can sit down, which is normal when the Speaker or a Deputy Speaker is on his or her feet.

2.9 pm

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): I do not know what it is about debates in this House involving animals, but the speech by the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) reminded me that we generate much more heat than light during such important debates, which bring out almost the worst of all our characteristics. However many years we try, we will never quite manage to have a coherent, sensible and measured debate involving animals; goodness knows why. Perhaps we can at least try to do so now.

TB is a dreadful human tragedy just as much as it is a dreadful animal tragedy. It is made worse, as we have all admitted today, by political inaction going back over decades. During the course of this debate, at least eight farm animals—probably 10, perhaps 15—have been slaughtered, some of them needlessly. Herds will have been devastated, businesses will have been damaged, families will have been upset—all sorts of consequences will have occurred only in the time that we have been here lobbing the occasional insult across the Chamber at each other. Many of those animals will have been perfectly healthy. Some of them will have been in calf, and some of those, because they were so much in calf, will probably have had to be slaughtered on the yard, in many cases in front of young children. This is the policy that we have now. It behoves all of us, whether we are in favour of or against the cull, to recognise that not doing anything has some very serious consequences.

To echo my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski), I wish that some people who are opposed to the cull—they have every right to be so and to make their case—would come and examine at close quarters the real human consequences of this. I was going to make an offer to Dr Brian May, had he still been in the Public Gallery, to come to Pembrokeshire. He has been there before, of course; he came at the last election to campaign for the Labour party. Let us not think that there is not some politics in this, because there is. I invite Dr May and some of his colleagues to come and not just speak to a farmer over a cup of coffee at a table but to be there when the farmer has to prepare for a 60-day TB test. They will see the moving of the cattle, the stress that that causes to the family and the cattle, the preparation of the machinery and the buildings—all the things that go with that and have to be fitted in around an already busy lifestyle. These things cause stress to those animals, yet people are apparently disregarding that for the purposes of their arguments, which seemingly relate only to badgers.

Then I would like those who oppose the badger cull to sit with us while the farmer waits for the results of the test and these thoughts go through his mind: “Will we be tested positive again? Will more of our animals have to go to slaughter? Will our business be further damaged? Will our family be further upset?” That is a dreadful experience for farmers who have been through it all before, or in some cases have never been through it before, as they wonder whether this is the beginning of the end for their farming business. Several of my constituents—some of them are sitting in the Public Gallery now having come all the way from west Wales to listen, I hope, to some sense in this debate—are

seriously wondering whether it is worth continuing in the dairy industry because of the decades of inaction to which I referred.

May I ask the shadow Minister to agree with our policy on this? I hope that we can persuade her to condemn what I consider to be a pretty vindictive attack by the RSPCA on our dairy farmers. I have here a letter from Freedom Food, which says:

“Freedom Food members are required to apply all reasonable non-lethal and humane methods of wild animal exclusion/control—the RSPCA believes it is unacceptable to use lethal methods of wild animal control as routine practice.”

Well, for a start, what is being proposed is not routine practice. To threaten a financial penalty for taking part in this is a breach of the RSPCA’s charitable conditions. It would be helpful if the Opposition would join us in that view. I cannot believe that many Freedom farmers do not at some stage control rats, mice, rabbits, deer, or some other farm pest, and they should not be blackmailed by a charity in this regard.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): May I sound a note of caution? While my hon. Friend may have a difference with the RSPCA, it is the leading animal welfare charity in this nation, established by a former colleague in this House—William Wilberforce. What we can agree on, I hope, is that we all want to see healthy cattle and healthy badgers. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government need to do more—far more than the previous Government, I hasten to add—on getting a vaccine as soon as possible? That would satisfy everybody—farmers and those who care for animal welfare.

Simon Hart: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I concur with what he says about the RSPCA, which is why I am so annoyed and disgusted by its behaviour in this particular context. I will turn later to his comments about the need for a vaccine.

What we are trying to do is discover the truth, and it is frustrating that others are always trying to avoid the truth. Of course we want to discover what improved cattle movements will do for the control of this disease, of course we want to clamp down on biosecurity and see what impact that has, of course we want to investigate the legal, effective and affordable vaccines that might be out there imminently or some way down the line, and of course—this is completely consistent—we want to ascertain once and for all whether a cull can play an important part in this. I stress what my right hon. Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Sir James Paice) said: this not a definitive policy but a pilot to ascertain once and for all whether this particular part of the mix is effective or otherwise.

I am frustrated, as I think are fellow Members, that while we are attempting to examine the benefits or otherwise of a pilot cull that might cull 4,000 badgers—slightly fewer than 1% of the UK total—thousands of farm animals, many of which will be healthy, are dying needlessly. Millions of pounds will be lost, more businesses will be damaged, and more families will be upset. The frustration lies in the fact that opponents cannot get over the hump of believing that if something involves the death of a single animal in any circumstances they will construct an argument around it that will prevent it from happening. We have to be more open-minded.

[Simon Hart]

Culling might have a positive effect. We cannot make progress until we accept that there is a case for at least exploring what the implications may be.

As we heard from the hon. Member for Newport West, we in this House can get in a terrible muddle about the difference between cruelty and suffering. It seems that most people look at cruelty as an attribute of human activity, whereas we should be looking at suffering, which is, to some extent, a more measurable scientific judgment. We constantly confuse the two. I ask opponents of the cull this simple question: why is it apparently perfectly satisfactory to continue killing many thousands of farm animals needlessly—one every 15 minutes—whereas culling a relatively small number of wild animals as part of an important experiment is somehow completely unacceptable? We have not got anywhere near to that answer.

Let me finish with a tribute to the British Veterinary Association, with reference to a comment by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas)—she is not in her place now, but I hope she might read this. In her speech in our debate on circus animals she described the BVA as one of the most respected scientific organisations for animal welfare in this country. I agree. The BVA has assessed the evidence just as we have. It has looked at all the pros and cons and concluded that the proposals before the House are important and should be pursued. I might not be a scientist or understand the science, but I do trust the vets. There is an old saying: “You never trust something which has been doctored, but you can always trust something which has been vetted.” I agree with that. The BVA is a shining example of an organisation that has taken a measured view.

The Secretary of State has taken a brave decision. Let us not think for one minute that he would not have gone down the vaccination route if he could have possibly managed to do so. We owe it to our farmers, our cattle and our badgers to give him the support that he deserves.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. I want to take the opportunity to remind the House and the hon. Gentleman that it is not in order to refer either to a person or to the Public Gallery. That is quite clear in “Erskine May”. I did not want to interrupt his flow, given the time limits, and I will be loth to interrupt any other Member, unless, after my having reminded them not to refer to the Public Gallery, they proceed to do so.

2.18 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): In following the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart), let me say that I was disappointed at an attempted politicisation of this debate, which has so far been incredibly cross-Bench and non-partisan. What Members are doing today is putting the issue first. This is not about party politics; it is about animal welfare. More than anything else, it is about the future of farming in our country and the attempts that we need to make effectively to tackle bovine TB.

Tuesday of this week was a day on which a degree of common sense prevailed in DEFRA. Although I welcome Tuesday’s announcement, it was only for a postponement

and I, along with many others, want to see this madness stopped and will not rest until the Secretary of State sees sense and stops the cull permanently. That is what the motion is about.

Let me be clear: there is no doubt that bovine TB is a major problem. If there is one thing on which I agree with the Government it is that bovine TB presents a serious threat to both cattle and wildlife. Where we differ, however, is on the actions needed to tackle this awful disease. In order to answer that question, one has to ask why, after the successful reductions of the disease in the 1950s and ’60s, it has become more prevalent, particularly during and after the 1990s. I do not believe that the rise was due to an increase in the number of badgers, which is an equation often made by the myth makers.

What is clear is that changes to farming practices are not helping matters. The intensification of farming means that we have ever bigger herds, and all the evidence says that the bigger the herd, the faster the disease will spread within it once it takes root.

Husbandry is another issue that we cannot dismiss. Yesterday in the Lobby we had a visit from Steve Jones, who is a dairy farmer in the Forest of Dean. He described eloquently the often less than ideal conditions in which cows were—and still are in some instances—kept, along with the increasingly intensive regimes to which the animals are subjected. For example, water troughs are often said to rarely be cleaned out. Over time, they can become reservoirs of the disease as the stagnating water collects various bacteria, typically over the winter months. He also talked about the practice of some farmers—not all of them by any means—who, even now, collect the slurry deposited during the course of a farming day, spread it over the land and immediately let some of their cattle to feed off those fields.

Neil Parish: I cannot believe that the hon. Lady believes that farmers who have had the disease and who have been testing their cattle every 60 days do not clean their water troughs. If she had suffered the same pain as a farmer, she would not make such a comment.

Angela Smith: I will not comment on particular instances of the husbandry practices of farmers and how they keep their herds. All I can say is that there is some evidence that water troughs, particularly those kept at ground level, can be a source of the disease and that some farmers do not keep them as clear as they ought to of disease.

It is also argued that cows infected are often not quarantined quickly enough and that animal stress levels caused by pain and suffering can reduce immunity and make cattle more susceptible to diseases such as bovine TB.

As the instances of bovine TB started to climb in the 1990s, the then Secretary of State, Jack Cunningham, asked Professor Krebs to report on the matter and to then conduct the randomised badger culling trials, which have been referred to so often today. The important point is that they still stand as the most extensive study ever completed into the relationship between bovine TB and badgers. A two-page paper produced two or three years later does not stand in the context of the extensive trials carried out as the legitimate view of the scientists.

Although it is true that the independent science group concluded that in the cull areas the incidence of bovine TB fell by 23%, it also found that in neighbouring land outside the culled area the incidence of the disease rose by approximately 29%, thanks to perturbation, whereby surviving badgers move to new areas as a consequence of disturbance.

Overall, the study concluded that the benefits of culling were, at best, modest, with an average reduction of just 12% to 16% in the incidence of infection over a period of seven years. The ISG concluded that

“badger culling can make no meaningful contribution to cattle TB control in Britain.”

That point was reiterated by Lord Krebs on Monday when he said in the other place that, after nine years of culling,

“there is still more TB around than there was at the beginning; it is just that there is 16% less than there would have been without a cull. The number is not the 30% that the NFU quoted; that is misleading—a dishonest filleting of the data.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords, 23 October 2012; Vol. 740, c. 148.*]

Another problem is that the test used to check whether cattle are infected with bovine TB—the so called SICCT, or single intradermal comparative cervical tuberculin, test—is not accurate. A recent scientific paper has suggested that as many as two in 10 infected cattle might be missed by the test. That is a staggering 20%, meaning that a significant proportion of cattle-to-cattle transmission of bovine TB may be going undetected and that the role of badgers in the spread of bovine TB to cattle may be overestimated.

Culling, therefore, is not the way forward. Its impact, the science tells us, would be marginal, and if we get it wrong, the results could be disastrous. It is demanded that 70% of badgers in the pilot culling areas must be culled; otherwise, the incidence of bovine TB could get worse—hence this week’s U-turn. Given the lack of credible assessment of the number of badgers in the pilot areas, it is difficult to get the 70% figure right. Equally, it is also difficult to avoid breaching the law by killing too many and taking the species to the brink of extinction in the specified areas.

When I started my contribution, I said that bovine TB is a major issue for farmers and I stand by that. I want the Government to take the opportunity over the next few months to work more intensively on developing the badger vaccination programme, which all experts believe is a better way forward in diminishing the instances of bovine TB in that species. We also have to do more to develop a vaccine for cattle, which is the long-term answer to this problem. I am told that there is now a suitable DIVA test to identify and separate cattle with bovine TB from those that have been vaccinated, and that it is in the process of being licensed.

I appeal to the Minister to take seriously the points that have been made, to invest in getting the cattle vaccine licensed and on the table, and to talk to the EU to get it sorted.

2.27 pm

Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con): I rise to speak against the motion. It strikes me that many who have spoken in its favour have done so having assumed for themselves the mantle of majority support and that the country is behind them, but I can tell hon. Members that my constituents are not behind the motion. I can

say that with some authority, because I surveyed some 30,000 households over the summer and one of the questions I asked was whether they were in favour of the Government’s approach to pilot culls to tackle bovine TB, and the results were that 59% were in favour of pilot culls, 27% were against and the others did not voice an opinion.

The reasons why a majority of almost 2:1 of my constituents are in favour of the Government’s courageous policy are simple and have been rehearsed many times during this debate: the huge loss of our cattle—some 26,000 last year; the huge expense to the taxpayer of almost £100 million last year and £1 billion over the next decade, if this is left unchecked; and a cost for every farm where there is an outbreak of £30,000, of which £10,000 is borne by the farmer. This is unsustainable; it cannot be allowed to continue.

As many hon. Members have said, there is a human cost to farmers, their families and the communities in which they live. That cannot be underestimated. One of my most special constituents is Mr Brian Warren, who runs a voluntary organisation called Farm Crisis Network, which provides pastoral support to farmers in distress. I invite any Opposition Member who supports the motion to come to Central Devon, sit down with Brian and listen to some of the stories about the misery that our farmers are going through as a consequence of this scourge. On most occasions, it is nothing short of harrowing.

I wish to deal with a couple of arguments that have been made by those on the other side of the debate. The first is that we somehow claim that our approach will be 100% successful. We do not. The culls will be pilots, from which we will learn. We accept that we will not eradicate bovine TB in the cull areas, but we have to accept that no other approach will lead to quick and certain 100% eradication either. We therefore have to use the proposed approach, along with increased biosecurity. The Government announced as recently as last week that biosecurity would be tightened up. We also have to look to the ongoing use of vaccination and the development of vaccines in future.

The second argument that has been deployed is that our approach will have no effect whatever on TB, or indeed will make it worse. Many Opposition Members have mentioned the independent scientific group and the Krebs trials as evidence, but time has moved on and so has the assessment of those trials. New analysis and new research has challenged some of their conclusions. I refer specifically to the report of one member of the ISG, Professor Donnelly. As recently as last September, she wrote:

“In the time period from one year after the last proactive cull”—

the Krebs trials—

“to 28 August 2011, the incidence of confirmed breakdowns in the proactive culling trial areas was 28.0% lower...than in survey-only areas”—

as used in the trial—

“and on lands up to 2km outside proactive trial areas was 4.1% lower...than outside survey-only areas”.

As time has gone on, the evidence in favour of the effectiveness of culling has hardened.

Andrew George: Professor Donnelly has also shown that that reduction still represented an increase in the incidence of herd breakdowns, but at a lower level than

[Andrew George]

would have been the case had the cull not gone ahead. That reduction is at the nub of the justification of the Government's policy, but it was not an absolute reduction.

Mel Stride: In the absence of any other factors, that is correct. However, the pilot culls that are now envisaged for next year will be held on a different basis. The area over which they will be held will be substantially larger than for the Krebs trials, which is an important factor. We have talked much about the effects of perturbation, which will be reduced by having hard boundaries such as coastlines, rivers and motorways.

I turn to the issue of vaccination. It is simply impractical, as things stand, to consider the vaccination of badgers as a sensible way forward. Until we achieve a reliable oral vaccine we simply do not have the resources to go out and trap badgers individually, on an annualised basis, and have trained, registered and licensed personnel to go out and inject them with vaccine. That is simply not going to happen. I laud the Government for spending a considerable sum—some £16 million a year recently—to help develop the vaccines that we need.

It must be reiterated that even if we vaccinate cattle, we still do not have a reliable, licensed and usable test to differentiate cattle that have been vaccinated from those that are carrying TB. The DIVA test is not yet licensed and usable.

I have one or two quick points to make to Ministers. First, one reason why the NFU decided to ask the Government to postpone the pilots was that there was a fairly significant under-estimate of the number of badgers in the pilot areas. I press the Government to ensure that the same mistake is not made next time around, and to ensure that the badger survey that is being conducted, which I believe will be concluded next year, is carried out with great rigour and examined extremely carefully. We need to know what the numbers are.

Secondly, I ask that the Government press hard to ensure that the DIVA test is made available, fully licensed and put in place, so that we can use it if we can move forward on the efficacy of vaccinations and our position with the EU.

Thirdly, I ask Ministers to consider the fact that we need the consent of landowners who own 70% of the land in the pilot areas. In fact, it is important that we achieve well in excess of that, because it is quite conceivable that landowners will be leant upon at various points during the pilot, and that some may drop out of the scheme. We need to get well above that threshold.

Finally, we need to press on. We should recognise the courage and decency of the current Secretary of State and the Ministers who came before him, including my right hon. Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Sir James Paice). They have done a sterling job of standing up for our farmers, their families, our communities and those who believe in the rural way of life.

2.35 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride), who spoke with great authority about the impact of this

dreadful disease on cattle, badgers and our farming community, and about the economic cost to the Government and the taxpayer.

I welcome the Government's decision not to go ahead with the pilot cull at this time. The pause is welcome and allows this time to be used not only for debate in the House but for a proper examination of how to make sensible progress on dealing with this terrible disease in future.

Bovine TB is a truly dreadful disease, endemic in cattle in the UK. As we know, there are hot spots in the south-west and the west midlands. About 26,000 cattle were slaughtered in 2011 as part of the control of the disease, costing the taxpayer about £87 million in compensation for farmers. It is a dreadful disease in every respect. As I have listened to the debate, I have heard huge consensus about that. The question is what to do about it. We all fully understand the frustration in communities where bovine TB is endemic, and the desire to do something. As several of my hon. Friends have pointed out, however, it is not right to do something that will be unhelpful and make matters worse.

Bovine TB has consistently been a problem for decades in some parts of the UK. When the disease was found in badgers, it was easy to jump to the conclusion that a solution had been found—kill the badgers, eradicate the disease. Simple. Unfortunately, it has not worked like that. Right from the beginning, there were problems with that theory. There were cases of cattle herds testing positive for TB while local badgers were disease-free, and other cases of cattle being free of TB when local badgers were carrying it. There were also cases in which both badgers and cattle were carrying it. Nobody disputes that badgers can carry the disease, but it is not fully understood whether they infect cattle and how the pathway of the disease's spread works.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): Professor Donnelly has already been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride), and it is worth noting that she also observed that up to 50% of cases of TB in cattle could be attributed to infectious badgers.

Nic Dakin: As we have heard, the weight of scientific evidence goes in a certain direction, but some scientific voices fall outside that. The assumption about proximity and the fact that badger populations in some parts of the country are infected, is based on the balance of fact, rather than on scientific evidence. The history of badger culling to control TB in the UK has, in reality, been one of abject failure. Culling has gone on since 1971 although gassing was abandoned in 1980 as it was considered inhumane. The culling policy was not considered effective and was replaced by the so-called interim strategy in 1986. That followed the Zuckerman and Dunnet reviews which, while supporting badger culling at the time, acknowledged that there were insufficient data on the whole approach to badgers.

The interim strategy, which was based on identifying diseased badgers where there had been a cattle outbreak and then killing the whole sett, was seen largely as a placebo for farmers, rather than to tackle the real issue. It was a complete failure and disease outbreaks continued to rise and spread to other areas of the country throughout the period. I fear that the current Government strategy appears to be repeating that error, albeit confined to smaller areas.

As we have heard, in 1997 the incoming Labour Government stopped randomised culling and oversaw the establishment of a detailed scientific trial introduced by Professor John Krebs and overseen by the independent scientific group, chaired by Professor John Bourne. The trial demonstrated the complexities of the link between badgers and disease in cattle, and, importantly, showed that culling could actually make the disease worse by increasing spread and incidence of TB on the perimeter of trial areas. We have heard from hon. Members on both sides of the debate a recognition that those scientific facts are true.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) spelled out clearly that the Labour Government would have gone ahead with culls had the scientific evidence supported it. Since it did not, however, the process did not go ahead. These matters involve closely balanced determinations.

In the summary of his report, Professor John Bourne states that

“although badgers contribute significantly to the cattle disease in some parts of the country, no practicable method of badger culling can reduce the incidence of cattle TB to any meaningful extent, and several culling approaches may make matters worse... rigidly applied control measures targeted at cattle can reverse the rising incidence of disease, and halt its geographical spread.”

Two weeks ago, that was echoed in a letter published in *The Observer* from 30 leading scientists, including Lord Krebs and Professor John Bourne:

“As scientists with expertise in managing wildlife and wildlife diseases, we believe the complexities of TB transmission mean that licensed culling risks increasing cattle TB rather than reducing it.”

As we have heard, that is the last thing we all want. They continued:

“We are concerned that badger culling risks becoming a costly distraction from nationwide TB control.”

Sir James Paice: Is this not the crucial point? Yes, those scientists have quoted their expertise, but the fact is that nobody actually knows. There is no science to demonstrate whether controlled shooting will effectively reduce the population by 70%, or whether it is humane. There are differing views, but there is no science because—I readily grant this—it has never been done. I believe, however, that it is right to carry out a pilot test to find out whether it will work. Is that not a sensible way forward? Those scientists, however esteemed they are, know no more than the hon. Gentleman or I about whether the cull will actually work. Why can we not find out? It might work.

Nic Dakin: The right hon. Gentleman did some good work as Minister of State, and I welcomed his contribution when he drew attention to measures that will be introduced in January on husbandry and biodiversity. Those measures were driven forward under his watch, which must be applauded.

The right hon. Gentleman puts his finger on the nub of the matter, but there is a danger that these trials will create more TB in those areas, which is what evidence from previous trials appears to suggest. There is therefore a risk in proceeding with them, as well as in not doing so. The opportunity created by this pause allows a vigorous examination of those risks, so that we can

come to the appropriate answer. I think both the right hon. Gentleman and I would agree that that is the right way to proceed.

We have heard about the things to which the Government should be applying their effort and mind. I have mentioned the biodiversity and husbandry measures that have been introduced, and we should apply further pressure in those areas, working with the farming community and others. We must try to proceed with the DIVA test, and ensure that work on a cattle vaccination, as well as a badger vaccination, progresses as fast as possible. DEFRA should be working urgently with the European Union to permit commercial use of the vaccine. We need the Government to apply their energy. The pause provides them with the opportunity to put their shoulder to the wheel and work harder in that direction, and therefore get an outcome that does not risk further increases in TB but tackles the problem in a way that everybody can support. Not only is the science against going ahead with the cull; public opinion is also against it. We need to ensure that we take this opportunity to drive things forward in the best possible way.

2.45 pm

Mr Geoffrey Cox (Torrige and West Devon) (Con): Devon is the county worst affected by bovine TB in the entire country. Six thousand cattle were slaughtered in 2010, and there were 800 herd breakdowns. My constituency is arguably the most densely infected. The toll is taken not only on thousands of animals representing generations of toil and long family traditions of rearing and breeding, which are destroyed by the fatal hand and the stroke of the pen of the inspector who finds a reactor in the herd. There is also the human toll on the families, which has been well described and I will not dwell on it.

I sat on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee in the last Parliament and participated in the production of its report. It was authored not only by Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, some of whom are in the Chamber, but by some very distinguished Labour Members, for whom I came to have considerable respect for the neutral, impartial and thoroughly disinterested way in which they grappled with the problem. It was not necessarily in their interests to subscribe to the political solution that we subsequently recommended, but the report was clear in its recommendation that culling needed to play a role in a package of measures, no one of which would be successful in either dramatically reducing or eliminating the disease.

We had to grapple with the science in making our recommendations. The summary of the report draws attention to the problem that we found as we interviewed the various witnesses who appeared before us. It was apparent that the independent scientific group, which had overseen the random trials, concluded that, in principle

“modest reductions in the overall incidence of cattle TB would result from simultaneous, coordinated and repeated culls of badgers over extremely large areas of the countryside”,

which it defined as around 300 sq km,

“using skilled staff and ideally within geographical barriers to badger movement”.

However, the ISG concluded that

“trying and failing to achieve this”

would

“make matters worse”.

[Mr Geoffrey Cox]

Thus, it was not practically or economically feasible to carry out culling on that scale. It was for that reason, and not for any principled reason that culling might not have a reductive effect, that the ISG rejected culling as contributing meaningfully to the elimination or reduction of the disease.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Sir James Paice), in his tenure as Minister of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, have looked at the conclusions of the Krebs trials and the ISG and drawn the inevitable logical inferences. Professor Bourne, Professor Krebs and the ISG concluded that modest reductions were possible provided the culling was carried out in a sustained way, efficiently and over a significant terrain.

All that those who currently have stewardship of policy are doing is taking that in-principle conclusion, which nobody can doubt is contained in the ISG's report, and applying it and saying, "Let us try. Let us have this controlled experiment in these two areas." They are adding one more dimension that was not included in the Krebs trials, and that is hard boundaries. The sea, large rivers and motorways all have an inhibiting effect on the movement of badgers, and if we place that dimension into the mix, we can help to reduce the effects of perturbation. As my right hon. Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire said, it was not that there was no reduction inside the core area. There was in fact a 23% reduction. That figure, however, was obtained by counting done in the first 12 months, but many scientists believe that the first 12 months of the Krebs trials should be disregarded because of the time lag before the measures took effect. Many scientists believe that the correct figure is 27%.

The problem was not that the trials did not have a dramatic reductive effect within the culling area but that it spread disease on the outer boundaries. As my hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride) said, two things have happened. First, continuing analysis has demonstrated that those perturbation effects diminish with time, and, secondly, we are able to put in place hard boundaries that should reduce that effect. I contend, therefore, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is drawing the logical inference and conclusion from the scientific evidence. That is why he said that he was applying the science and that that was a common-sense and logical thing to do, and it is why his decision deserves the support of every Member and why it commanded the support of the Labour-dominated Select Committee in 2008, when precisely that recommendation and prescription was suggested.

I urge the House to understand that we do this not out of some bloodthirsty desire to kill, as was shamefully and disgracefully suggested by the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), but because it is a serious reaction to a pressing problem. It is sincerely intended to tackle a disease that badly needs tackling for the sake of the country.

2.52 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Bovine TB is a £100 million problem in cash terms but a much larger human problem for dairy farmers, who are devastated

year after year by having to destroy herds that they have nurtured for years and sometimes generations. I do not wish to engage in an either/or dispute, but to speak about what can be done between now, when the cull has been stopped, and next year, when, if the Secretary of State is correct, a cull will go ahead.

Before that, I want to respond to the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), who said that the Labour party was close to a cull but chickened out. That was not a fair remark. I was a Minister when the ISG report came in, and I remember the hours and weeks of deliberation on it. We never saw this as a virility test, and it should not be seen as such by any Government. It is a tremendously serious issue. It was the Labour Government who authorised the trials in the first place. We did so because we wanted to see if they would work, and the decision that was ultimately taken was an honest one based on what we understood of the science of the trials.

The ISG report concluded that substantial reductions in cattle TB could be achieved by improving cattle-based controls, and I welcome the measures that the Government will be putting in place from next January to increase those controls. I simply ask that the Secretary of State provides financial support to farmers carrying out their duty to put in place those increased controls, including on cattle movement through zoning and herd attestation, the pre-movement testing of herds before new cattle are allowed to join them, the quarantining of purchased cattle and the shorter testing intervals. All those things were set out in the ISG report as ways to improve the situation—not as solutions, but as improvements. I am glad that the Government are taking renewed efforts to put them in place, but I hope that when the Secretary of State winds up the debate he will recognise that they will be burdensome and costly for farmers, who should therefore be recompensed and incentivised appropriately to ensure the success of those measures. Those controls should be supported by measures to improve biosecurity on farms, particularly around feeding and water troughs, which hon. Members from both sides of the House have mentioned.

Let me be clear: I will vote against a cull, but I recognise that the Government may get their way. Therefore, when and if the Government go ahead with the cull next year—and in the following three years, because it will take place over a four-year period up to 2016—I would ask the Secretary of State to do one further thing in the next nine months: change the licence condition to allow only cage trapping and shooting, rather than what is referred to as the "controlled shooting" of badgers. He has said that he wants to proceed only on the basis of sound science. I welcome that commitment, and I trust that he will therefore recall that the independent scientific group pointed out that culling required "co-ordinated and sustained effort" and that what it called the "modest overall benefits" came only from a clinically executed trap-and-shoot exercise. Free shooting of badgers was no part of the scientific trials that form the only basis for a sound policy. Indeed, the Game Conservancy Trust stated:

"A...problem with shooting at or near the sett"—

that is, free shooting—

"is that a wounded badger will almost certainly attempt to bolt underground, preventing a second shot (and preventing safe disposal of the carcass)."

If the Secretary of State persists with the cull next year, I would urge him to use the next nine months to change the licence conditions and stop the free shooting of badgers.

I desperately want to see a solution to the scourge of bovine TB. Sometimes we find it difficult to accept that we do not have a solution to a problem. Ultimately, I believe that oral vaccination of both cattle and badgers will bring us that solution, but any frustration at the lack of a current solution should not lead us to adopt a false solution. The proposed cull is a false solution, and I shall vote against it.

2.57 pm

Dan Rogerson (North Cornwall) (LD): The debate has unfortunately become perhaps a little polarised, but we have had a determination to focus on the science. The interesting thing is that the same scientists are being used—if I might use that expression—by both sides.

The hon. and learned Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox), my near neighbour, has highlighted the issue as it was set out to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. I am still a member of the Select Committee, and I have served on it since 2005. As the Chair of the Committee, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh), said earlier, we hope to look again at some of the vaccination issues in the near future. However, the main piece of work that the Select Committee carried out during that period was the one to which the hon. and learned Gentleman referred.

I will come back to the science, but I want briefly to re-emphasise something that many hon. Members on both sides of the debate have pointed out. This is a very pressing issue in terms of cost to the rural economy and to the Treasury—indeed, to all of us as taxpayers—because of the amount of money having to be spent dealing with the effects of the problem, even if we are not dealing with the causes. Those costs will continue to rise, as has been freely admitted on both sides.

There is a human effect, too. We have heard about the disease's effect on farmers—not just the distress caused, but the fact that ultimately it will push some people out of farming. I wrote to a court where a company was trying to repossess a farmer's property, on the basis partly of the farm being under TB restrictions and therefore not being able to trade efficiently. The farmer and his family and others employed by the business constantly live with that worry.

The disease has an animal welfare cost for livestock and the wildlife population.

Roger Williams: Some people who keep cattle are saying, "I can't put up with this any more," so they sell their cows and buy a plough, with the result that more wheat is being grown, which is not what we want for the landscape.

Dan Rogerson: That is absolutely true, although in parts of my hon. Friend's constituency and of mine that choice is not available, so land will go out of production, with the loss of all the environmental "goods" such as stewardship and protection of the landscape.

The only piece of work that we have on which we can base an understanding of the science is, as hon. Members on both sides of the debate have said, the report that the

ISG submitted to the Government based on the randomised culling trials. The hon. and learned Member for Torridge and West Devon was right that its conclusions are crucial to the debate, but the question is whether one stops just before the end of the report, where the group said that culling has an effect and can help, or goes on to the coda, where it outlines its ultimate position and states that it does not think culling is practical. I argue that that is for the Government, politicians and those who will implement the policy on the ground to resolve. That is why the Select Committee felt that we needed to give the Government a chance to respond.

The hon. and learned Member spoke of the Select Committee's membership in the previous Parliament: the late David Taylor, an active Member on many issues and on culling; the former Member for Stroud, David Drew; and Dr Lynne Jones. They were of such independent minds that it was a great comfort to Lord McAvoy when the Committee visited rural North Yorkshire or the south-west to look into the issue, because if instead they had been here, they might have been a little more challenging of the then Government's position on whatever matter was being debated. They freely admitted that they were not convinced that culling was the answer to the problem, whereas others wanted to give those in the farming community the opportunity to show that it could work. The collective view that we reached appears in black and white.

The scientists—Professor John Bourne, Christl Donnelly, Rosie Woodruff and Sir David King—gave evidence before us. The atmosphere between them was interesting; it was probably more of an atmosphere than we sometimes have in here for Prime Minister's Question Time, such was their commitment to the work they had done. None the less, the Select Committee reached the view that it did.

I should like to look at the alternatives to the culling trials. I emphasise that we are discussing pilots, not country-wide implementation overnight, and moving forward carefully, sensitively and in line with the science in two areas to demonstrate that culling is effective.

Andrew George: Of course, after these two pilots merely assess the effectiveness and humaneness of the culling method, the intention is then to roll it out throughout the country at a very much accelerated pace.

Dan Rogerson: We will see what happens during the pilots. Looking at the methodology is one of the key issues, as my hon. Friend rightly points out. It might be that other problems are pointed out, which would make it impossible to continue, but we have to give the people involved the chance to carry out and test what happens. As Opposition Members have said, we will not have the data that we need to move on unless we try to do what the ISG findings point towards: using the hard boundaries, using the wider area and getting on and doing it.

I have heard some hon. Members say that the coalition Government have cut spending on vaccination. Actually, since 1994, just over £40 million has been invested; over the next four years, the Government are planning to invest over £15 million. That means an acceleration of the effort towards vaccination. We still have problems with the tests. It is possible that the DIVA test will get us where we want to be, but we are still not there yet. The

[Dan Rogerson]

practicality of vaccination is another issue. We have talked about the practicality of a cull, but there are huge problems around vaccination.

We would all like to get to a state where it is not necessary to carry out intervention of this sort in wildlife. We would all like farmers and others concerned about animal welfare issues to unite around something—but we are not yet there. Effectively, we are saying, “Let’s do nothing.”

On biosecurity measures, the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), who, as she said, has looked a great deal at food policy, painted a bit of a picture of farmers who were completely lackadaisical and not at all interested in biosecurity. It is in their interests to be interested in biosecurity, as they are the ones who suffer in their businesses from restrictions and all the other problems that we have now. Of course they are taking the issue seriously. The one or two of them who are not will be rejected by the rest of the industry, which is absolutely committed to delivering on the further restrictions that the Government are introducing.

To say that the cull is an easy option and that farmers are going to hang up on biosecurity, forget all about it and just get on with killing badgers is absolute nonsense. I do not want to over-characterise what the hon. Lady said, but the gist was that farmers do not care. Of course, the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) was quite scathing in what he had to say.

I am running out of time. To Members who think that those of us with rural constituencies are doing this because we are after votes, I should like to say that we are not. Huge numbers of people even in my own constituency where bovine TB is a problem have told me that they are worried about a cull of badgers. We are doing this and supporting it because it is the only game in town at the moment—it is the only thing that we can possibly do to bear down on this problem. If we fail, we will deserve to be roundly criticised.

3.7 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on the generous way in which she introduced this debate. It is a difficult debate, but the hon. Lady should be recognised for allowing people to intervene and ensuring that a proper debate took place. She knows that I come from a different perspective, but I congratulate her again on introducing the debate so well.

Bovine TB is a complex, infectious, zoonotic disease in animals and in man. It is caused by a bacterium that presents itself as a serious and significant risk to animal health, and it is especially prevalent among the UK cattle herd and among wildlife—mainly badgers. It is one of the UK’s most significant animal health issues. We discussed earlier in the week the significant cost posed by this disease to the economy—effectively 100 million smackaroos a year. We are talking about 100 million quid every year; that is what this disease costs, and we need to accept that it is a major problem or a crisis.

Frankly, some of the debate has been tainted by misinformation and by some emotion—emotion that is misplaced in this argument, because this nation deserves the House debating this matter properly and with some

authority. I think that that should be put on the record. No one takes the decision to cull wildlife or to cull our national milk herd lightly. For people to suggest otherwise is criminal, and we should recognise that and state it clearly.

We should also recognise some of the myths that have been put about. It is said that this is about town versus country, which is utter piffle. This is about animal health; it is about animal welfare and good animal husbandry; it is about our milking herd and our cattle; and—most importantly—it is about the food that we eat and are prepared to tell our consumers to eat. We should not lose sight of that.

People say that this is a shot in the dark, which will lead to the indiscriminate killing of wildlife. That is misinformation, which has the potential to “felon set” those who are asked to carry out the cull. We should consider the consequences of careless talk about indiscriminate shooting. There is also the nonsense about a readily available vaccine that will solve the problem. There is no vaccine that will have an impact on wild badgers that are already infected. The reservoir of badgers that carry the disease cannot be controlled by a vaccine.

“All badgers will die” is another piece of misinformation. It is said that this is about the mass slaughter of animals. As many Members have pointed out—as, indeed, the Government have pointed out—it is not about mass slaughter, but about a targeted pilot in a limited area of the United Kingdom that will be cordoned off. That cordon sanitaire will allow target shooting.

Caroline Lucas: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his gracious remarks. However, in condemning misinformation, he is also spreading it. He says that vaccination has no effect on infected badgers, but in fact it slows the progress and the severity of the disease. It reduces the risk that the animal will become infectious, and therefore reduces the chance that one badger will pass it to another or, indeed, to cattle.

Ian Paisley: That is a relevant point. I shall say more about the vaccine issue in a moment.

The hon. Lady commended the work of the British Veterinary Association, of which I am a long-term member. Let us hear the expert views of that association. Its most recent report on bovine TB states:

“Whilst the slaughter of cattle found to be infected with TB...has been an essential part of the strategy to control the disease in cattle for many years, the BVA believes that targeted, managed and humane badger culling is also necessary in carefully selected areas where badgers are regarded as a significant contributor to the persistent presence of bTB. In addition, the BVA believes that risk-based biosecurity, surveillance and Farm Health Planning at a national, regional and farm level is essential for the control” of the spread of the disease. In other words, we need a cocktail of measures that includes culling on a limited basis.

Andrew Miller: I acknowledge that, as a member of the British Veterinary Association, the hon. Gentleman has expertise in the subject, but the BVA also says in its briefing:

“We do not know how successful the proposed methods will be.”

Does he agree that what we really need is significant investment in research on zoonotic diseases?

Ian Paisley: It goes without saying that the research must be carried out, that it must be ongoing and that it must not be prevented as a result of what we are trying to do here.

I commend the Republic of Ireland—shock, horror, stop the presses: Paisley commends Republic of Ireland!—which has already carried out a cull. I should make it clear that this has nothing to do with jealousy on the part of those of us north of the border who do not get to shoot. The cull in the south of Ireland has led to a significant reduction in confirmed new infection rates among cattle herds. I believe that if this scheme is tried and proved to be effective, especially in countries where a land border is shared with another nation, we should adopt it. I believe that we should be learning—yes indeed, learning—from the Irish Republic on this important matter. I am happy to concede that point.

The BVA made a strong and significant point about vaccination. Although the badger BCG vaccine is currently available and undoubtedly plays a role in managing the disease, it is not proven to protect fully against infection. It merely reduces the progression and severity of the disease in animals that become infected later, and it has no impact on those infected prior to vaccination. We in Northern Ireland are currently carrying out a trapping test; we are trying to get animals trapped. As has been suggested, perhaps we should only use trapping to cull badgers.

Andrew George: The hon. Gentleman must accept that as badgers die at a very rapid rate—25% attrition each year—vaccination would result in a significant decrease of infection in badgers, whereas culling increases the preponderance of infection in badgers.

Ian Paisley: We have to accept that culling is not a silver bullet—it is not the magic answer—but vaccination is not the magic answer either. We have to try to tackle this problem, however. We have to continue searching for a vaccine that will work and will not destroy our herds and prevent us from selling our product.

We have to try this cull to see whether it can succeed. The costs are £100 million a year. We have to do something. This is robbing money from our hospitals, schools and roads. We are wasting taxpayers' money; we are pouring it down the drain. We have got to address this problem.

The BVA has made it clear that there is no existing data to prove that badger vaccination has an impact on the incidence of BTB in cattle. Even if it does, it will have a much slower impact than the removal of badgers by culling.

I want to say a few words on the impact of TB in Northern Ireland. We have spent £200 million in the last six years trying to eradicate the disease, but we have failed. We want to spend £20 million this year trying to do it, and we are going to fail—and we are going to wipe out a number of our best milking herds. We also have criminals in Northern Ireland who deliberately try to infect herds so that they can get compensation. This problem has got to be addressed now. I hope the Government have got the guts to get on and do it. It will not be nice—it is not going to be pleasant—but we have to solve this problem.

3.17 pm

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): It is a pleasure to have an opportunity to speak in this important debate, and to follow the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley), whom I admire immensely, but disagree with entirely on this issue.

It is an incredibly emotive issue, and one that has caused me to rethink my position. I had originally been in favour of the cull. I had—and still have—enormous sympathy for the farmers who are affected by bovine TB. There is not just the monetary cost to the farm, but the immense strain on farmers. That should not be underestimated. So when the culling of badgers was announced as a means of eradicating bovine TB, it seemed to be a sensible solution. However, it became clear that the science did not stack up. As someone who is rather proud of their track record on animal welfare issues, I began to feel uncomfortable with my original position. Having looked into the issue in more detail—which I am glad I did—I am convinced that the badger cull is absolutely the wrong way to tackle bovine TB.

The issue is very sensitive. It affects farmers' lives and livelihoods, and often their mental health, but it is an issue that has been tainted by misinformation. For example, it is often stated that the eradication of TB in badgers would lead to the eradication of the disease in cattle, but that is simply not the case. Cattle-to-cattle transmission would continue, as demonstrated in low incidence areas such as Kent, where there is evidence that cattle-to-cattle transmission accounts for 80% or more of cases.

While there is an indisputable link between badgers and bovine TB, many other animals also carry TB: deer, wild boar, foxes, alpacas and even cats and dogs. We need to be clear, therefore: instead of saying “No other country in the world has eradicated TB in cattle without tackling it in wildlife”, the Government should state, “No other country in the world has eradicated TB in cattle.” Therefore, we need to be realistic about what precisely a badger cull would achieve.

Other cattle-farming countries have learned lessons from attempted culls. In Australia, Asian buffalo—an introduced alien species thought to be spreading TB—were culled by shooting from helicopters. However, TB in cattle was reduced only by draconian testing and the culling of cattle, with whole herds slaughtered—that effectively kept TB under control for many decades. In New Zealand, brush-tailed possums, another introduced species, were poisoned for decades—that went alongside draconian cattle-testing regimes. However, it has since been realised that poisoning is unsustainable, and scientists have recommended the vaccination of possums instead. In the USA, white-tailed deer in Michigan were found to be sharing feeding stations with cattle, thus allowing TB transmission. The simple solution was to separate the deer from the feeding stations.

The proposed badger cull will not eradicate bovine TB from our cattle. Our leading scientists note that it will reduce the incidence by, at best, 16%, so a long-term, large-scale cull of badgers would leave 84% of the problem remaining. I heard what my right hon. Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Sir James Paice) said about this being 16% net, with a more likely figure of 30%, but that still means that 70% of the problem remains. In addition, the Government are not

[Tracey Crouch]

proposing a long-term, large-scale cull; they are proposing two pilots in areas where they do not know how many badgers there are. The original estimates were that it would be necessary to cull only between 500 and 800 badgers in each of the two areas, thus achieving the 70% culling target. However, in the space of a weekend that number was increased to more than 5,000 in the two areas—that represents a massive increase in the badger population in just a few days, and if badgers are breeding like rabbits, we are facing an entirely different problem.

As Lord Krebs eloquently told the upper House:

“What this underlines is that if the policy is to cull at least 70% of the badgers, we have to know what the starting number is. This variation from just over 1,000 to more than 5,000 in the space of a few days underlines how difficult it is for us to have confidence that the Government will be able to instruct the farmers to cull 70% if they do not know the starting numbers.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 October 2012; Vol. 740, c. 148.]

That is why our scientists and animal welfare activists, and many, many of my constituents, believe the proposals to cull badgers when an accurate figure cannot be circulated—leaving aside the welfare issue of indiscriminately shooting badgers, 75% of which will be TB free—are simply mindless.

Other nations have not simply resorted to culling, but have looked at alternative options. Wales, where most of the UK incidences occur, has decided to vaccinate, not cull. The Minister will have heard, and will continue to hear, calls for a stronger focus on vaccination, and he needs to go back to the Department and reinstate the five—out of six—vaccination trials cancelled when we took office.

Sir James Paice: As it was me who cancelled those “trials”, I feel that I need to respond. May I make it absolutely clear to my hon. Friend and to the House that they were not “trials”, as she has just described them, but vaccine deployment projects? They were nothing to do with testing vaccines; they simply sought to work out how to trap, inject and so on. They were about the mechanics. I decided, rightly or wrongly, that we did not need six of these things, costing £7 million or £8 million, and that everything could be learned from one. That is why we did what we did.

Tracey Crouch: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend’s intervention, but I still think that we need to put more investment into our trials programme, in order to learn more.

Reactive culling does not work. It will spread the disease—evidence suggests that it may even increase the incidence of the disease. So it is clear that the Government need to listen to the scientists and rethink their strategy.

3.24 pm

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): There are three principal reasons why I support today’s motion. First, I believe that a badger cull would be damaging to wildlife. Secondly, the science suggests that a cull is unnecessary and that there are more effective solutions. Thirdly, and most importantly, evidence suggests that a cull would not significantly reduce the incidence of bovine TB and would therefore not benefit cattle herds and the agricultural

industry across the country. As we have heard this afternoon, bovine TB is a real and devastating issue for many farmers. I think we all agree that it is vital that we find an effective long-term measure to eradicate the disease.

I welcome the Government’s announcements on improving cattle testing, movement controls and biosecurity. However, the most reliable scientific evidence suggests that badger culling is a short-term, unsustainable and ultimately ineffective approach. Allowing the shooting of free-ranging badgers in TB-affected areas is an untested and dangerous move that has no place in a science-led policy. Indeed, rather than solving the problem, it risks making matters worse by disrupting the social structures and allowing the spread of badgers to new areas.

Licensing the shooting of one of our best loved native species has also, unsurprisingly, generated considerable public opposition. A more sustainable approach to the problem should involve pushing forward with the injectable vaccination of badgers in areas in the south-west and other parts of England along with increasing efforts to develop a vaccine for cattle. The vaccination of both badgers and cattle, together with enhanced cattle testing and improved biosecurity measures, is the publicly acceptable and ultimately effective long-term solution.

If badgers are to be trapped before being shot, as DEFRA suggests, why not simply vaccinate rather than kill the badger while it is caged? The DEFRA announcement comes despite scientific studies that have shown that culling would be of little help in reducing bovine TB and could actually make matters worse in many areas. Indeed, the cull could see badger populations decline by more than 70% and in some areas none might survive.

Culling cannot be selective, so many perfectly healthy badgers will be slaughtered as some awful collateral damage. After 10 years’ work, the independent scientific group concluded in 2007 that

“badger culling can make no meaningful contribution to cattle TB control in Britain.”

Subsequent monitoring of cull areas showed a very modest drop in cattle TB levels, averaging just 16% after nine and half years. Indeed, DEFRA’s wildlife advisory body, Natural England, which will have to implement the Government’s proposals, has said that it has little confidence that such an approach can deliver the predicted benefits.

At least a fifth of cattle herds, and possibly up to half of them, might be harbouring bovine TB even after they are thought clear of infection according to a recent Cambridge university research article. Worse still, there is greater potential for TB to spread within the larger herds that are now becoming more prevalent. Those conclusions further justify an urgent introduction of both cattle and badger vaccination. Those conclusions emphasise that the effect of cattle-to-cattle contact is even greater than previously thought and so wildlife culling is even less significant.

A second problem has been the massive increase in liver fluke, which affects the accuracy of the standard test for bovine TB. This parasite is carried by snails and both thrive in warm, wet summers. Up to a third of cattle with bovine TB could be missed by the standard

test for the disease if they are also carrying the parasite, hampering the eradication programme according to research by Liverpool university. The research carried forward work published in May last year by the veterinary sciences division of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute of Northern Ireland.

The significant scientific doubt over the effectiveness of a badger cull and the strong evidence that it might make the incidence of bovine TB worse means that DEFRA must urgently reconsider the killing of badgers, if it wishes to proceed next summer, until the comparatively enormous reservoir of disease in herds is cleared. It should introduce compulsory annual testing of all cattle with the more sophisticated techniques that are now available.

The killing of a protected wildlife species such as the badger is even less relevant. The Cambridge research estimates that there is a high rate of reintroduction, particularly in high incidence areas. The authors add that the high rate of external infection, both through cattle movements and environmental sources, must be addressed if recurrence is to be reduced. Its results are in line with the main conclusions of the £50 million randomised badger culling trial of 1998 to 2007, that while badgers are implicated in bovine TB, killing them will make no meaningful contribution to its control, and that weaknesses in cattle testing regimes mean that cattle themselves contribute significantly to the persistence and spread of the disease in areas where bovine TB occurs. It added that in some parts of Great Britain, cattle are likely to remain the main source of infection, and called for the rigid application of cattle-based control measures.

Bovine tuberculosis is a serious problem for UK farmers, deserving the highest standard of evidence-based management. Increasingly, that is why many farmers are against the cull, including, I might add, my brother, who has been farming for over a quarter of a century. New figures issued by DEFRA show a marked drop in bovine TB levels, and that is mostly down to increased testing. There has been a notable decrease in the incidence rates over the past six months, mainly as a result of the increased number of tests on unrestricted herds compared with last year. The provisional June 2012 incidence rate is 4.2%, compared with 6% in June 2011.

By increasing biosecurity, something that the British agricultural industry needs properly to address, we can reduce bovine TB. By increasing vaccination in badgers and cattle we can prevent the unnecessary killing of this much loved British species, and by increased testing we can ensure that our agricultural industry recovers from this most damaging disease.

3.31 pm

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): It is always a privilege to be called to speak in the Chamber, certainly in such an important debate as we have today. But let us be clear, the issues being debated today are not pleasant ones. The problems facing the farming industry, and by extension the Government, are neither easy nor straightforward. Likewise, it is important to state early on in my contribution that I am a keen supporter of animal welfare, and I take no pleasure whatsoever in advocating a pilot cull. However, as I shall set out, I believe, sadly, that we have no choice.

To be absolutely blunt, bovine TB is out of control, akin to wildfires raging across our countryside, causing widespread damage.

Caroline Lucas: The myth that the disease is out of control needs to be nailed. Fewer cattle have been slaughtered because of BTB each year from 2008 to 2011. Those are the figures. It is not to underestimate how serious it is, but the idea that it is out of control is simply wrong.

Julian Sturdy: I do not agree. I talk to many farmers and when one looks across the country, and in certain key areas in the west, one can see that it is out of control and that it is causing huge impact on our farming community and the families, on which a number of hon. Members have already touched.

I appreciate that Members on both sides of the debate have already quoted a number of figures, but the striking one for me is that more than 30,000 cattle will be culled this year due to TB—one every 15 minutes. That is five times the number in 1998. Therefore, when we discuss animal welfare, we should consider the welfare of those affected cattle as well as the welfare of badgers.

First, I want to join a number of Members in clarifying a few key points about today's high-profile debate. Increasingly, this choice is being presented as cull versus vaccination. Such an interpretation is deeply flawed. Yes, vaccination must be part of a wider TB crackdown, and Members will look at the Government's policy and see why the badger vaccination is to play a vital role over the coming years, as will, and rightly so, stronger cattle control obligations. However, we must be honest about vaccinations. First, they will not cure infected badgers. Thus, those badgers that have already contracted TB will not be cured by any vaccination currently available. Yes, it might slow the disease, but ultimately they will not be cured. Secondly, the development of an oral vaccine, which ultimately is the only way we will vaccinate the badger population against this destructive disease, is sadly some way off.

Several Members touched on the problems with a cattle vaccine in the short term, no one more thoroughly than my right hon. Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Sir James Paice). Sadly, the reality is that, alongside cattle control and future vaccinations, a pilot cull is essential in the short term. The Government's wider long-term plans to control TB will prove successful only if they are supported by a pilot cull. Put simply, we must break the cycle of infection if we are serious about tackling TB.

The second point I wish to discuss is compensation for farmers who have to slaughter infected cattle. As Members might know, I was a farmer before entering Parliament in 2010, although not a livestock farmer—I have no personal interests in that regard. It is often argued that livestock farmers receive compensation for slaughtered animals, but it is not adequately explained that the compensation does not cover any consequential losses to the farmers. Losing cattle has huge knock-on effects for a herd because of the progeny it loses, with breeding lines that have been built up over many years being wiped out in an instant by the disease.

Farmers also have to meet the costs of additional cattle control measures and frequent testing for the disease. The economic consequences for small farmers

[Julian Sturdy]

and the strain put on their families, which several Members have touched on, can be enormous. The economic factors can have a direct impact on local communities and the rural economy. Of course, there is also an increasing cost to the general taxpayer, as has been mentioned. More than £500 million has already been spent on compensation for farmers, and the figure is estimated to rise to over £1 billion within the next decade unless we act decisively.

Finally, I come back to the idea of animal welfare, which is ultimately the key element of the debate. In a situation in which TB has become so terribly out of control, taking proper action to secure the future of both badgers and cattle is genuinely the responsible thing to do. By doing so, we will be safeguarding the welfare of badgers and cattle in the years ahead. The suggestion that farmers should simply keep their cattle locked up, hidden away from fresh pastures and natural conditions, completely flies in the face of animal welfare, yet some farmers are now doing just that because allowing their herds outside would be akin to a death sentence, given the prevalence of TB in certain areas.

In conclusion, if a practical and effective alternative existed, I would back it. Sadly, no such choice exists at the moment. Therefore, this debate should not be framed as one that is about either vaccination or culling. Rather, it should be a question of a rampant disease that causes widespread damage to our countryside, to sustainable farming and to long-term animal welfare. We must choose action, not inaction, to preserve sustainability and health in our countryside, for both the wildlife and the livestock industry.

3.38 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I ask colleagues to imagine a bowl of fresh green salad, but rather than sprinkling it with the salad dressing of their choice, I would like them to imagine sprinkling it with some diseased badger urine—urine from a badger that has lesions in its kidneys, which sadly is commonly the case. Before pasteurisation made milk absolutely safe to drink, countless thousands of people died from bovine TB, because the disease can be spread through ingestion. It is very important to understand that for several reasons, particularly those related to biosecurity.

I absolutely support the comments that have been made about the importance of biosecurity and preventing cattle-to-cattle spread. However, a farmer can take all the effort he or she wants to keep badgers out of cowsheds, but those cattle are still grazing on infected pastures and will still be at risk. We are talking about closed herds with no concerns about TB being imported from outside, which is an important route for transmission.

Reference has been made to super-dairies and huge herds of cows, thousands strong, being kept inside. We do not want that. We all saw last year's campaign, "Cows need grass, not concrete", and I absolutely support that. However, in parts of South Hams in my constituency, putting cattle out on to infected pastures is tantamount to a death sentence—a form of culinary Russian roulette. We have to take this very seriously.

Let us look at the figures. In 1998 in my constituency, fewer than 600 cattle were culled; in 2010, that figure had risen to just short of 6,000. This is a dangerous

zoonosis that is spreading inexorably year on year; we can look at the geographical maps and see the edge spreading. As other Members have said, sporadic cases are arising elsewhere which are undoubtedly due to the movement of cattle, but the inexorable spread that we see on the charts is due, in part, to the reservoir in badgers. Let us imagine how a dangerous zoonosis like this might spread out to other mammals; we are seeing it increasingly in deer, alpacas and pigs, and now in domestic pets as well. This is a real threat, so why have we not got a grip of the situation?

I should like to say something quite uncomfortable—that we are seeing the rise of the celebrity mammal. Indeed, we have a celebrity mammal here with us today, and very welcome he is too. We are beginning to focus on a single species, and that is unhelpful. I would challenge anybody to come down to south Devon and lay their hand on the side of one of the beautiful south Devon cattle and tell me that that animal is less important than the badger. All these animals are important, but there is a balance to be struck. When I step outside my door of an evening in south Devon, I frequently see badgers; they are a wonderful sight. The last time I saw a hedgehog was over five years ago. That element of balance is sometimes missing from this debate.

The rise of the celebrity mammal has been a barrier to science. Those on both sides of the debate rightly quote scientists, who will disagree about the issue; that is what scientists do. We want a robust debate, and I welcome it. The problem is that there were some flaws in the randomised badger culling trial, particularly regarding the size of the triplets and the edge effect. In that circumstance, the right thing to do is to take matters further and consider pilots that explore the edge effect, but we are prevented from doing so because of the effect on politicians and the public of a focus on the needs of a specific animal, lovely as it may be. We need to tackle that issue head on.

Will the Minister say whether we are exploring the PCR—polymerase chain reaction—test further? We want to have a test of greater sensitivity and specificity that will allow us to test badger droppings, and then perhaps look to a further trial, even on whole-sett humane underground culling. There are also issues to do with perturbation, such as the effect of picking off one animal at a time. I suggest that we would be perturbed in an entirely different way if someone picked off members of our families one by one.

Let us see more focus on the science. Let us tackle this as a dangerous zoonosis. Let us also look at vaccination. The important point is that if any Member in this House developed any sort of TB, they would be looking at weeks and weeks of a complex antibiotic regime. Any doctor who treated them with vaccination would be struck off. It is not possible to cure an infected badger with a vaccination. Of course I want to see vaccination and prevention in disease-free animals. However, we should not pretend that we can extrapolate the results from an injectable vaccine, which may indeed show a slight reduction in the amount of TB excreted in urine by infected badgers, to oral vaccines. Oral vaccines and injectable vaccines are entirely different, and so we must be very careful.

I fully support a move towards greater investment in vaccination, but perhaps that is because I am a people person. I went into medicine rather than go to veterinary

school because I think that people matter more. I was rewarded for that—I was never bitten by a patient in 24 years.

Neil Parish: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr Wollaston: No, I am going to carry on, if I may.

The point is, yes, let us see investment, but we want to see an oral bait vaccine. I want to leave a question in the air: is there something obscene about the amount of money we are going to spend on trapping and vaccinating every single wild badger in this country, year on year, when there are other things that that money could be spent on? I want to see an oral bait vaccine and an improved test, but we have to be honest and tackle a dangerous zoonosis. We have to be honest about the need for further scientific pilots and I am afraid that we have to do it now, because farmers in my constituency are suffering. These are the people who feed the nation—they put food on our plates and care for our countryside.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Unfortunately, I am going to have to introduce a five-minute limit to get everybody in. Everybody will get in if we can be disciplined and not take interventions. I call Glyn Davies.

3.45 pm

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): This is a complex and controversial issue, which is hugely important in my constituency of Montgomeryshire. I declare an interest in that I have been a livestock farmer all my life and have been very much involved in the impact that this disease has on the farming industry.

I want to begin by stating unambiguously that I am in favour of a targeted pilot cull of badgers and deeply disappointed that the proposed cull has been deferred until next summer. I start with that unequivocal statement because I hold other attitudes towards wildlife and farming that sometimes lead my friends to accuse me of inconsistency, although I disagree with them.

I have a great love of wildlife. Before entering this place, I was a trustee of the Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust for three years—I still would be if I was not an MP—which does hugely valuable work. I have been involved in campaigns to promote the interests of the otter, the brown hare and red kites in particular where I live, and of red squirrels, whose protection, ironically, involves the cull of another much-loved mammal. There seems to be very little objection to that, but the issue is exactly the same.

I concede that, although I am very much in favour of a targeted pilot cull, I have never felt absolutely certain that it will have the effect that we want. Ironically, that uncertainty makes me even more sure that a cull is the right way to go. We have to identify ways in which we can deal with this terrible disease, which is having such a devastating effect on the countryside. We need to know whether a cull is the right thing to do. The cull in Ireland was general, as it is in other countries. We need a targeted pilot cull in an area to see how much difference

it makes. If it makes a difference, it will become a general cull, but if it does not work, I would not be in favour of extending it.

Several references have been made to Wales. I was a Member of the National Assembly for Wales for eight years, and for five of those years I was Chairman of the Rural Affairs Committee and this issue was hugely important throughout that time. We spent three days in Ireland, looking at what they were doing there, and almost everything pointed to the need for a targeted pilot cull of badgers in Wales. In fact, three or four years ago the Welsh Government decided to hold a targeted cull and legislated for it under their then system of law-making powers under the Government of Wales Act 2006, but there was an error in the law and the measure fell—it could not happen. The new Labour Government have decided not to go down that road and to introduce instead a system of vaccinating badgers in south-east Wales, but most people I talk to think that it is a complete and total waste of money and that it will be hopelessly ineffective.

I do not have time to go into the scientific arguments for and against a vaccine, which has been discussed a lot. All I will say is that if this Chamber or I were to receive genuine advice saying that a vaccine would deliver the sort of control that we want, I would not be in favour of a cull. I have heard the arguments today, and also the rebuttals. It is highly technical stuff, but as several Members have said, the reality is that we do not have a viable, legal vaccine that the Government are in a position to use. It is only on that basis that we need a targeted pilot cull, and I desperately hope that there will be one.

Bovine TB is a devastating disease for cattle, for wildlife and for people. I would love to spend a lot more time talking about my experiences of foot and mouth disease. For 12 months people were telephoning me to talk about the impact on their families. Usually it was parents and grandparents saying that they had real concerns about their children's mental health. Bovine TB is even worse, because it has lasted longer and spread out over a wider area. The impact is devastating, and we simply have to deal with it. To leave it not dealt with would be completely irresponsible.

3.50 pm

Mr Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): I am delighted to be called to speak, but of course disappointed that we are under such time restriction. I suppose it is a symptom of how engaged Members are with the subject that they want to get on their feet and speak about it.

I draw Members' attention to my declaration of interest. As a Nottinghamshire farmer I am very much interested in the subject, because we have a healthy badger population and I am keen to ensure that it stays that way. We have talked about how TB is spreading across the south-west, and it is now in Derbyshire and certainly spreading towards me, which makes me fearful.

As a farmer operating in that part of the east midlands, it is difficult not to take offence at some of the things that have been said today. It has been implied that farmers do not care about animals and do not have animal welfare at the top of their agenda. I put it to individuals who make those accusations that someone simply does not get out of bed at 5 am every day of the

[Mr Mark Spencer]

week, every week of the year to look after animals if they do not care passionately about their welfare. The implication that people want a cull for the sake of a cull causes great offence in some rural areas, and that needs to be addressed vigorously.

For me, this is not about badgers. It is about TB. It is ironic and pretty disappointing that TB is not mentioned at all in the motion. Members on the opposite side of the argument have attempted to skew it away from tuberculosis control and solely on to badgers. We all have the same aim, which is to prevent the culling of cattle and the spread of bovine TB, and we have to use the tools that are available to us. It would be wrong to rule out one of those tools at this early stage.

I do not want to cull a single badger or a single cow, but this disease is out of control. We are not controlling it. One Opposition Member actually said that we should do nothing, but that seems to me like the Tinker Bell approach of standing still, closing our eyes and hoping it gets better. That does not seem like the answer to me. We have to take action and do something to control the spread of the disease.

We all welcome the fact that a vaccine is coming very soon, but it has been coming very soon for the past 15 years. In fact, we heard earlier that it is months away. I am delighted if that is the case, because then the vaccine will be here by next summer. However, if we get to next summer and no oral vaccine for badgers is available, we will be in the same position as we are in today. We have to take action to prevent the disease from spreading.

We have heard Members say that we should vaccinate badgers, but the practicality of that seems to have escaped them. Individual badgers would have to be physically caught and tagged to ensure that we could identify which had been vaccinated and which had not, so that we did not waste our time revaccinating the same badgers. We would have to go through the whole process again every 12 months, which is simply impractical.

We must somehow break the cycle of infection from cow to badger, badger to cow, badger to badger and cow to cow. We are doing one part of that, and by taking out infected cattle we are breaking the spread of the disease between cows, but we are not tackling the infected badger population, and we must find a way to do that. A vaccine is not available, and unfortunately the only other tool is a cull. We must make use of all the tools available if we are to be effective.

We are short of time so, in conclusion, we must remember the impact that bovine TB is having on UK food prices and milk production. We all get out of bed in the morning and enjoy milk on our cornflakes, but if we do not tackle this issue, the supply of fresh milk from our dairy farmers will be under severe pressure—and I, for one, want my cornflakes in the morning.

3.55 pm

Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): I declare an interest as I am a cattle keeper; indeed, over the past five years I have had a herd that went down with TB. My comments will not be made on a personal or anecdotal basis, and certainly not on an emotional basis, but rather they shall be based on sound science.

It is interesting to reflect a little on the history of this issue. Until 1950, bovine tuberculosis was endemic in British cattle herds. As a zoonotic disease that can be transmitted from animals to humans, that was obviously a danger, so the Government decided to eradicate it. They were spectacularly successful, and by about 1960 there were few instances of bovine TB in cattle herds. That situation was maintained for about 20 years, but in 1971 a dead badger was found to be infected with bovine tuberculosis on a farm where cattle had gone down with the disease, and from then on it became ever more apparent that badgers were involved in the spread of the disease.

The Badger Trust website states that bovine TB

“may also be caught through contamination of feeding and watering sites and from infected wildlife, including badgers”.

That is what led to the trials by Lord Krebs, which I commend as a piece of scientific work, but only in as far as they went.

When that work was concluded, Sir David King, chief scientific adviser at the time, was asked to prepare a report. I do not have time to go through that report, but I recommend it to hon. Members. It is an extraordinarily balanced and insightful piece of work that needs looking at. Sir David King came to the conclusion that by building on trials by Lord Krebs, and by identifying their weaknesses, pilot schemes could be introduced that would lead to the minimisation of bovine TB in this country.

Sadly, in 2007 the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) rejected that report and we have had five wasted years. Although the Government introduced extra measures for farmers, nothing was done to address the wildlife reservoir, and five years on, we must deal with a much more difficult situation than in 2007. Sir David King’s report is a wonderful piece of work, and I commend it to Members.

Let me say a little about vaccination. The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) said that the most appropriate vaccine to use at the moment is the BCG vaccine. That is true because it is the only vaccine. It was developed in about 1910, first used in 1921, and whenever and however it is tested, its effectiveness ranges from about 60% to 80%. In some circumstances, it is not effective at all, and it was withdrawn from human use in this country in 2005. We are told that a wonderful new vaccine is on the horizon—new technology—but no, we will still be using the vaccine that I was given 50 years ago, as, I am sure, were many other hon. Members.

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Gentleman is being somewhat misleading. The DEFRA website states that

“in January 2012 an application for marketing authorisation...was submitted to the UK’s Veterinary Medicines Directorate...for assessment”

in relation to the BCG vaccine. It was submitted almost a year ago, and the website states that it will come to fruition in a year. The DIVA test is also ready to go. The idea that we are going back to 1910 is simply misleading.

Roger Williams: My point is that it is the same old vaccine—we have not made progress and there is no magic bullet.

I am sticking my neck out a bit, but I cannot think of any farmers, and certainly not in my constituency, who, given the choice between culling badgers or having an effective programme based on vaccines for eliminating bovine TB in the cattle herd, would not choose the vaccination route. They would be very strange if they did not in those circumstances. Farmers regularly vaccinate their stock for various diseases, but only because those vaccines have proved to be efficient and effective.

We have reached the stage at which we cannot wait any longer for the promise of an effective vaccine. I support the Government in going ahead with their pilot trial culls of badgers, to take forward the work done by Lord Krebs and to tease out how we can better eliminate the disease in both badgers and cattle. That would benefit farmers throughout the country, and wildlife.

4.1 pm

Mr David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I apologise to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for not being present throughout the debate. I was chairing proceedings in Westminster Hall, and before then I was with you at the Westminster dog show. The House will wish to congratulate you on your rottweiler coming third; my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) on owning the runner-up; and my two rescued pugs, Lily and Botox, on winning best pugs in the show. They were presented with a bottle of champagne by the worshipful mayor of Southend and are now both sloshed.

I hope that my record on animal welfare is well established—it is there in the green bound copies of *Hansard*. Indeed, the Protection against Cruel Tethering Act 1988 is in my name. In 1991, I spoke in the Third Reading debate on the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, which was introduced by my noble Friend Lord Waldegrave. I thank Professor Brian May and Lorraine Platt from the Blue Badger campaign for all the advice and assistance that they have given to me and others.

I welcome the Government's decision to delay the cull. Key alternatives, such as vaccinations and biosecurity, must be considered. They could be a viable alternative to the cull. I now represent an urban area, but I had 32 farms in my constituency when I was MP for Basildon, so I have some insight on the difficult situation that farmers face. However, I have a number of concerns about the cull and the number of badgers that might be injured.

Given that badgers are nocturnal creatures, how will the shooting be supervised at night? I am also concerned about the balancing act required for the cull to be effective. It has been reported that at least 70% of badgers need to be culled to reduce bovine TB effectively, but culling much more than 70% could entirely eradicate local badger populations. Balancing that is very important.

I have listened carefully to what hon. Members have said about vaccinations, but we should take the issue further. DEFRA has wisely invested in research into badger vaccination, which I support, and I welcome measures already taken on biosecurity.

When I spoke in the 1991 debate, I showed some naivety. I said then that I would be joining the badgers at the bottom of my garden in celebrating the passage of the Bill. Little did I think that, over 20 years later, the badgers must have got together and decided to try and

tunnel under my own house. Whether this is a socialist conspiracy to collapse the house on top of me I do not know.

I represent an urban constituency. When my constituents get badgers in their back gardens, it is a nightmare. I do not know whether they have all got together in Southend West and said, "Right, the door's open tonight. Let's get into the back garden." I have three cases in my constituency where it has taken two years to deal with Natural England, English Heritage and DEFRA to get the badgers moved. It is very difficult in urban constituencies to get badgers moved.

In conclusion, this has been an excellent debate, and I congratulate the Backbench Business Committee, of which I am a member, on selecting it. The Government have got a good deal right: they have a policy of action rather than inaction; they are investing £15.5 million over the next four years in the crucial oral vaccine; and biosecurity has been promoted and will continue to be promoted. I urge the House, though, to consider the way forward carefully and how effective the proposed cull would be. I strongly encourage vaccination, including the development of a better oral vaccination.

4.6 pm

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): I have been a livestock farmer for two decades, so I am familiar with the difficulties that cattle farmers in particular face: the eradication of brucellosis, the threat of BSE, the arrival of foot and mouth and now, of course, TB. I am familiar with the challenges both financial and emotional.

The best farmers look after their livestock and have a healthy respect for wildlife. It is important that the House understands that point in this excellent debate. I represent a Gloucestershire constituency, so I know that farmers are suffering from the effects of TB and am fully aware of the devastation that it has caused to many businesses. It has been disastrous for many families. That is something that we have to bear in mind.

It is with huge reluctance that I support the pilot culling scheme. I emphasise that it is a pilot aimed at finding out whether the scheme works. It will be a properly controlled and managed scheme, as ironically the postponement largely demonstrates. The consideration behind the pilot scheme has been intense. I accept that information on the numbers of badgers has not always been completely accurate. It must be a properly managed scheme, however, and enable us to make judgments on the matter in the future.

It is important to emphasise the value of controlling movement and how animals are looked after. I welcome the fact that the Government have further strengthened movement controls. All farmers will welcome that step, because it is part of a package that must be introduced to deal with this threat. My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) was right when she reminded us that there is little point vaccinating something that already has the disease. It just does not help. Instead, we must find a vaccination that works but that is used as part of the process to deal with the problem.

I have mentioned movement, which is one part, and I have mentioned vaccination, which is another. I salute the Government's decision to increase expenditure on developing the vaccination. I hope that it yields results. However, we cannot simply wait and wait, so the two

[Neil Carmichael]

strands of the strategy to deal with TB must also include culling. Some 26,000 cattle have been culled this last year alone. That is a significant figure, and it represents the scale of the problem. It is reasonable for Members to recognise that that amounts to huge difficulties for farmers, as well as huge difficulties for the cows. We talk a lot about badgers, but let us give the cows a boost, because they are animals and deserve fair treatment, too. I love badgers, but I also love cows. That must be how we look at this issue.

There are three things to do: control movements, look at vaccination and run a pilot scheme for culling. That amounts to a reasonable way to proceed, and I certainly hope that people give the cull that opportunity. I have one last question, however. It would be quite interesting to analyse the movements of TB after the slaughtering during the foot and mouth crisis. If there is evidence that there was latent TB, we must explore that issue; it ought to be analysed and discussed. I conclude with this quotation by Professor David King:

“In our view a programme for the removal of badgers could make a significant contribution to the control of cattle TB in those areas of England where there is a high and persistent incidence of TB in cattle, provided removal takes place alongside an effective programme of cattle controls.”

4.11 pm

Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): I remind Members of my declaration of interests.

It is very good news that we are having this debate on St Crispin's day, because what we want from the Government is the sort of leadership that we had on St Crispin's day 597 years ago. I see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State as Henry V in this particular act.

We have talked a great deal today about the science involved and the views that scientists take. I would like also to look at the extraordinary coincidence of the growth in the badger population and the re-emergence of TB among cattle. We heard an excellent speech from the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), who showed the advantages of age and approaching the status of being an octogenarian. That is much to be admired, but one of the things he missed out in his speech was the fact that the fall in TB in cattle was coincident with a programme of exterminating badgers through gassing. Oddly enough, when that stopped in the 1980s, so the incidence of tuberculosis in cattle started to rise again. It is also worth noting that where there is the largest badger population, so there is the most bovine TB. Can it be purely coincidence that Scotland, which has a relatively low badger population, has very little bovine TB, but the west of England—including, of course, God's own county Somerset—has a high incidence of bovine TB? As the badger population has increased—the figures drawn up in 1997 showed a 77% increase in the badger population—so that has coincided with an increase in bovine TB.

So yes, we have listened to all the science about what the effects of a cull may be, but we know what happened in Ireland. We heard from the hon. Member—my hon. Friend in many respects—for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) about what happened in southern Ireland and how that saw a 30% reduction. We have also seen what has happened from our own history, yet we are to put all

that aside and just say, “Well, there may've been some problems with the last pilot.” That cannot be right, and the Government must be right to pursue the strategy that they are following.

We have also talked at great length about the vaccine and the benefit or otherwise of the vaccine in curing the problem. I am glad you are sitting down, Mr Deputy Speaker, because I am going to quote with approbation an official of the European Union, who yesterday said the following in response to articles in the newspapers:

“Vaccination of cattle against TB is forbidden under current EU rules—agreed by all Member States, including the UK.”

That is not such a strong point, because a lot of EU rules are nonsense, but the next bit is much more important:

“This is because there is no effective test to tell the difference between vaccinated and infected animals making it possible to protect the food chain and identify which animals could be exported.”

That was the European Union saying yesterday that there is no satisfactory test. We have heard much talk that there might be tests and that at some future date there will be tests. We have now had years and years of inaction awaiting the tests, yet the livelihoods of farmers in my constituency are being ruined and their lives possibly being put at risk.

Angela Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jacob Rees-Mogg: I would love to, but I am under strict orders. It is the first time I have refused to give way, for which I apologise to the hon. Lady.

The lives of farmers in my constituency might be at risk. A constituent who lives near me keeps bulls. Bulls are not the softest and easiest of animals and they do not like being pricked in the neck on a regular basis before being moved to perform the duties that they carry out. When this is done to them they become uncomfortable and restless and place the health and safety of that farmer at risk.

Are we really saying that we shall continue to do nothing when we know what we ought to be doing, we know from experience that it has worked, we know that if we act we will have a viable dairy industry and make farmers' lives better, and, perhaps most importantly, as Members have said, we will save more cattle, even if we kill a few badgers?

4.16 pm

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Jacob Rees-Mogg), but I would like to return to a point that the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh) made at the start of our discussion: that the debate can easily become polarised between “team badger” and “team farmer”, when what we need is “team science” and “team TB” and to address the issue much more calmly and rationally, because outside the Chamber there has been much light as well as a certain amount of heat.

I should like to emphasise from a constituency point of view and from my farming background the need fully to understand what is driving the issue and the disease's emotional and financial impact over decades on very committed people in west Cornwall. Many Members have this afternoon conveyed the emotions that are felt from the impact of this devastating disease.

I strongly supported the RBCT in my constituency, which involved a proactive cull on the Penrith moors, and faced down the very strong campaign against the line I was taking just over a decade ago in support of the trials because I believe in sound science being the basis by which we take forward policy to bear down on TB. In a climate where the science might encourage legislators to prevaricate, to recognise dilemmas and perhaps to see only the need for further research and not to take action, the Government should ensure that they do not make the situation worse. We say that policy making must be evidence based, but as the Government former chief scientist, Lord Robert May, said in *The Observer* just a couple of weeks ago, the Government risk transmuted evidence-based policy into policy-based evidence.

There are a number of knowns in the science, one of which I put to the Secretary of State at DEFRA questions today—that some of the figures from the RBCT have been exaggerated or cherry picked to justify the policy. For example, there is the argument that TB in culling areas was reduced by 30%. The research itself showed a reduction of somewhere between 12% and 16% in the net impact. Overall, this resulted in reducing only the increase in TB infection.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that two of the other knowns are the recent breakthrough in the DIVA test, which could lead to it being put forward for licensing, and a 60% efficacious BCG vaccine for cattle, which could also lead to licensing, although it would require the Government to negotiate with the European Union for field trials within the UK?

Andrew George: There are certainly significant gathered knowns now that were not available 10 or 15 years ago. To go forward, we need to build a policy on a sound foundation—not simply on selective evidence.

In his summing up, I hope that the Minister will deal with the evidence in support of the Government's policy. Will he recognise that the 12% to 16% reduction in incidence of infection for herds within culled areas in the randomised badger culling trial is not an absolute reduction, but a net reduction, which means only that the incidence is increasing at a lower level than it would have been without the cull. It would be helpful and reassuring if the Government were to acknowledge that.

Let us use the opportunity provided by the pause to go back and speak to the many scientists who are still saying that the Government have got this one wrong. Instead of having a war of words through the media, let us make sure that those scientists—the majority behind the ISG—are brought in. I believe that they should be involved.

Finally, I hope that the Government will accept that we should go to Europe, as was implied by the hon. Member for North East Somerset and, indeed, by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) in his intervention. These matters are not, after all, pre-ordained by God; these are decisions taken by human beings in Europe. We need to take a strong case to Europe in order to sort out the regulations and advance the testing of the vaccine and the DIVA test. That should allow us to come to a solution that is generally workable and does not make the situation worse.

4.22 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I rise to oppose the motion. Farming is an industry vital to the economy of Cheshire. It is an industry that has had difficult times over recent years. In 2001, it was ravaged by foot and mouth disease. More recently, we have seen dairy farmers struggling to sell milk at a price that covers the cost of production, let alone one that provides them with a modest profit.

A few short years ago, farmers told me of their concerns about bovine TB travelling towards Cheshire. Now, it is very much there, and it is causing massive problems across Cheshire East, impacting on dairy and beef farmers and infecting our wildlife. Let me quote some statistics. The National Farmers Union says that in 2006 there were 108 TB reactors slaughtered in Cheshire; in 2011, there were 641. Just last week, on 19 October, the whole of Cheshire was classified as an annual testing region, reflecting the increased incidence of the disease. All cattle must also be pre-movement tested.

As if to highlight the level of concern about this problem in Cheshire, a motion was passed last week by Cheshire East full council. It states:

“That Cheshire East endorses measures to halt the current high incidence of Bovine TB with the ultimate aim of both healthy wildlife and cattle population, never mind vital protection of the economic, social, wealth, health and wellbeing of our rural community. In so doing Cheshire East supports early liaison with both EU and DEFRA to ensure infected areas within the Borough are tackled speedily.”

A proposer of the motion, while not promoting a cull locally—it is not one of the areas for which a cull has been proposed—made things very clear when she said:

“We cannot sit back and do nothing. This insidious disease is causing massive problems for the farming community.”

She also said:

“All options need to be reviewed.”

In my view, one of those options must be the targeted pilot culls proposed by the Government.

What are local farmers saying? Although I live in the farming community, I am not an expert, but those farmers certainly are. Councillor Rhoda Bailey, the wife of a Cheshire farmer, writes:

“the cull should be allowed...in order for it to provide...evidence of its effectiveness”.

Councillor Steve Wilkinson, one of the proposers of the motion, writes:

“It is a public health issue...Cheshire is on the edge of the disease spread as it progresses northwards and whilst any cull may assist with problems in the southwest, we need to take action here in Cheshire to halt the relentless movement further north.”

Another farmer, Stuart Yarwood, writes:

“Culling diseased badgers is the only option.”

In his view,

“If we dither, our livestock industry will disappear...Society has to accept that the only predator to badgers is man and disease and since government protected the species, disease is now doing its best to control its population and polluting the countryside in the process.”

The Cheshire county chairman of the National Farmers Union, Rob Ford, wrote to me this week saying:

“TB is spreading across the county... wildlife infection has been cited...as contributing to the spread of the disease in...Nantwich and Macclesfield...which is illustrated by infection being detected

[Fiona Bruce]

in herds where no cattle have been brought in...Cheshire and Greater Manchester are key to stopping the spread of TB as they are in the periphery of the area of infection...The Science is clear that a well-managed cull will reduce the levels of Bovine TB."

He says that if the problem is not addressed, we will continue to see

"levels of the disease in the county grow and Cheshire will end up in the same situation"

as other parts of the country.

A vet and farmer writes that misleading information must be corrected. According to him,

"no country in the world has ever successfully controlled TB in cattle without culling infected wildlife."

He says that the suffering caused to badgers by TB will be prevented by culling, and that the public need to know that compensation for the animals that are slaughtered is far less than the replacement cost and the full losses of farmers.

Another farmer says that the "misery of TB" cannot be calculated, but

"However unpalatable it may be, there really seems no other option to culling."

He says that

"from a wildlife point of view"

other species will benefit.

"Badger numbers have increased dramatically in recent years, often at the expense of...hedgehogs and bumble bees."

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) shares my concern for the welfare of farmers in our area, and my concern about the distress that the disease is causing to our farming community. I could give many other examples, but shortage of time prohibits me from doing so.

4.27 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): We have heard a range of passionate and fairly well-informed contributions to a debate on what is a very difficult subject. I was pleased to hear from the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh), and I look forward to the Committee's report.

Today's debate certainly forced all of us to view the issue at a much deeper level. My hon. Friends the Members for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) spoke of the weaknesses in on-farm biosecurity. We heard passionate speeches from the hon. Members for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski), for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) and for Central Devon (Mel Stride), the hon. and learned Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox) and the hon. Members for North Cornwall (Dan Rogerson), for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin), for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies), for Sherwood (Mr Spencer), for Brecon and Radnorshire (Roger Williams), for Stroud (Neil Carmichael), for North East Somerset (Jacob Rees-Mogg) and for Congleton (Fiona Bruce). They all spoke about the devastating impact of the disease on farmers.

We heard alternative views from my hon. Friends the Member for Inverclyde (Mr McKenzie) and my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), who spoke of the risk that bovine TB would spread in the

short term as a result of a badger cull. The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr Sanders) criticised the design of the Government's cull. The hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) made a thoughtful speech from an international perspective, drawing attention to the costs of the cull. The hon. Members for Crawley (Henry Smith) and for Southend West (Mr Amess) suggested other options, as did the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Andrew Miller), who gently punctured some of the Secretary of State's claims to expertise in this matter.

We were privileged to hear from former agriculture Ministers, including the right hon. Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Sir James Paice). My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who is in his place, also struggled with these issues when he was in Government, and my hon. Friends the Members for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) and for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) described what happened under the Labour Government. It is important to put on the record that so far only a Labour Government have actually carried out a badger cull and tested the science in the field. I strongly predict that we will remain the only Government to carry out a badger cull in the field. I will explain why I make that prediction shortly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) coined a new word: the ineptocracy. I think it will be put on the record in *Hansard*. The hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) described the heartache of farmers, and the hon. Member for Hove (Mike Weatherley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Mr Reed) talked about the effect of perturbation.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) and the Backbench Business Committee on securing the debate and on making sure such a wide range of perspectives was expressed. The existence of this motion and debate—and vote—have certainly contributed to the Government's decision to drop the badger cull. The Opposition have warned the Government for two years that the cull would be bad for farmers, taxpayers and wildlife. It would be bad for farmers who have to deal with this terrible disease. I also know the toll the disease takes on farmers and their families, both personally and financially, but the Government's own cost-benefit assessment said the cull would cost farmers more than it would save them.

We saw in the last six weeks that farmers were moving away from the free shooting of badgers and moving towards the cage trapping of badgers, yet the Government's statistics show free shooting is 10 times cheaper than cage trapping. Will the Minister tell us the true costs of this to the farmers? I would also like to hear from the Minister about the size of bond that the two farm companies had lodged with Natural England. So far we have heard no mention from Ministers about how much farmers are required to pay up front to cover the full four-year costs of this cull. If there is a move to cage trapping and shooting, what training has been given to those responsible for carrying that out, because that is a different skill from free shooting? We know that the people involved in free shooting had to go on a badger anatomy course so as to get a clean kill when shooting badgers. Pistols are used for cage trapping and shooting,

so that is a totally different technique. Will the Minister tell us whether that training has been given, because it certainly seems from the evidence on the ground that that was what was planned?

There has been a lot of talk in this debate about the science, and we heard a good exposition from the hon. Member for St Ives. It is important that we go back to John Krebs. I do not advocate that we go back to 1997 as the Secretary of State does. I am disappointed that he is not in his place, and I am disappointed about his earlier remark in the House that he “couldn’t take any more.” He has only been in the job six weeks. I have been studying the issue of the badger cull for 18 months—as have other hon. Members, along with farmers out there in the community who are living with this problem—and I think the Secretary of State will have to show a little more backbone.

Professor Lord John Krebs instigated the randomised badger culling trial, and took part in the review of the evidence with Sir Bob Watson last year. Lord Krebs stressed the fact that culling badgers makes TB worse at the beginning by spreading the disease. He stated clearly in the Lords on Tuesday that the badger cull would reduce the incidence of TB in cattle by 16% after nine years, leaving 84% of the problem still there. He said that

“this is not a reduction in absolute terms but actually a 16% reduction from the trend increase.”

In other words, as the background trend is going up, BTB still increases but not by as much as it would have done had the cull not been conducted. This cull is not the silver bullet the Secretary of State makes it out to be. The eminent zoologist Lord John Krebs continues:

“The number is not the 30% that the NFU quoted; that is misleading—a dishonest filleting of the data.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 October 2012; Vol. 740, c. 148.]

Disappointingly, it appears, judging by his response to the debate in this morning’s DEFRA questions, that the Secretary of State has not read the *Hansard* record of that Lords debate, where the scientists were sitting there. He persisted in misusing a snapshot figure—the 28%—instead of using the one figure that the scientists are agreed on, which is the 16% figure. The Minister is looking puzzled. I hope that he is still not confused, because he is going to get a lambasting from the scientists. The Government are cherry-picking the data. Perturbation increases bovine TB, in the perimeter areas, by 29%, but I have chosen not to use that figure in any of the rhetoric or debate on this matter because it represents a snapshot; those perturbation increases happen in the early stages and are not borne out by the reduction that occurs afterwards.

The Secretary of State is not in his place, but he referred to Christl Donnelly as a “he” during his statement on Tuesday—Christl is a she.

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr David Heath): She is a she.

Mary Creagh: Well, that is a relief. I do not know why the Minister has not told the Secretary of State that, because he is reported in *Hansard* as saying that she is a he. [*Interruption.*] He appears not to have read his own *Hansard* record or corrected it. He obviously has not spoken to the scientists, who faced down the animal rights activists during Labour’s badger cull in order to

carry out the Labour Government’s research into culling badgers. We are not talking about some animal rights activists; these are scientists in the field wanting to get the right outcome for farmers and for the nation.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Secretary of State’s comparing the research on a vaccine to Sisyphus, who, as you doubtless know, Mr Speaker, rolled a rock up a hill only to watch it roll down again for all eternity, demonstrates not only a complete lack of understanding of the scientific method, but contempt for scientific research? We can have no confidence in the promotion of a vaccine under the Secretary of State’s leadership.

Mary Creagh: The Secretary of State got his Sisyphus mixed up with his Tantalus. I think he will find that he has undertaken the labours of Hercules in DEFRA—I will not go any further on that, but the Augean stables spring to mind. I agree with what my hon. Friend said, because I am concerned that the scientists are being ripped to pieces on this, and the situation is difficult. She rightly says that there is a scientific method: the scientists are paid to come up with solutions, and then we try to roll them out and test them in field conditions. That is what needs to be done.

I have asked a lot of parliamentary questions. The Secretary of State asked 600, but perhaps some of his data are less than fresh. My data are pretty fresh. Last year, I asked the Government how many cattle herds breakdowns would be prevented over nine years if the cull went ahead. The answer came back that using a 150 square km area, 47 cattle breakdowns would be prevented over nine years. So if we double the cull area and if it was to go ahead in a 300 sq km area, 94 herd breakdowns would be prevented. That, again, is not a fantastic result for the huge investment involved in this cull.

There has been huge concern from the scientists about the lack of Government rigour in the design, implementation, monitoring and efficacy of these culls. We know that there would be no post-mortem testing of whether the badgers had bovine TB, but there would be post-mortem testing to see whether they had been shot cleanly. So those who are interested in science, and who want to know how much of a vector in this disease the badgers are, will again have to go back to Labour’s cull, which showed that only 12% of the animals actually carried the disease.

Sir James Paice: I want to challenge the hon. Lady again on these figures. I did not dispute, in my speech, the 16% figure, and I do not believe anyone else has done. That is the figure agreed by all the scientists. I want her to confirm that that 16% is the net overall figure, and that if we could reduce or even eliminate perturbation, the net figure is bound to be much higher than that. That is part of the objective in the design of these pilots.

Mary Creagh: The scientists gave a range of between 12% and 16% if the cull was carried out under exactly the same conditions as Labour’s RBCT. The cull that the right hon. Gentleman proposed differed significantly, as it would have taken place over six weeks rather than two and would have involved free shooting rather than

[Mary Creagh]

cage-trapping and shooting. As any GCSE science student knows, as soon as we depart from the methodology, we immediately increase the range of the differentials in the results. That is why the scientists were concerned.

The lack of rigour in the methodology was shown in Tuesday's announcement. A cull that depends on killing at least 70% of the animals was about to begin with no reliable estimate of how many needed to be shot. On 19 July 2011, I asked a question in Parliament on that exact point, because it had occurred to me, a mere humble member of Her Majesty's Opposition. I received the answer

"there is no precise knowledge of the size of the badger population".—[*Official Report*, 19 July 2011; Vol. 531, c. 815.]

That prompts the question of why Ministers did not ask that. Why did they not start the count then so that farmers could plan properly? Instead, they allowed the farmers to submit their own estimates of the numbers, thought, "Mm, that looks a bit low," and left it until September to go out into the field and conduct the analysis that should have been done a year ago. I want Ministers to tell us whether those numbers were calibrated to test their accuracy. It seems clear to me that they were not.

Fiona Bruce *rose*—

Mary Creagh: I will not give way, because I want to hear some answers from the Minister.

We also warned that the cull would be bad for taxpayers. What are the taxpayer costs so far? A freedom of information request to the Badger Trust reveals the cost of the big society badger cull. To date, licensing activities by Natural England have cost £300,000. The sett monitoring that only took place right at the very end of the process in September has cost £750,000. The independent expert panel that is meeting to oversee the two pilots has cost £17,000. Since April 2012, there have been 6.5 full-time equivalent staff working on the cull. This cull, which I confidently predict will not take place, has already cost taxpayers well over £1 million. We can add on £500,000 per cull area per year for policing. Let us not forget that all leave has been cancelled for the police in Gloucestershire until Christmas. Although I am sure they will be relieved to have their leave uncancelled, how much has that cost the police? Again, the Secretary of State said on Tuesday that he would write to let us know

What about the future costs? Humaneness monitoring will cost £700,000. Badger post-mortems will cost £248,000. My parliamentary question to Ministers, however, about the net reduction in compensation and testing were the badger cull to go ahead received the answer that it would save just £2.9 million over 10 years in each cull area. That is just not good enough. It will carry on costing taxpayers until Ministers cancel it definitively.

The writing is on the wall for this badger cull. The costs to farmers and taxpayers will continue to stack up if Ministers continue to pretend that the cull will go ahead. We need to ensure that any solution works closely with farmers and I hope for their sake that the Minister will drop this charade that the cull will go ahead. Any solution will also require the consent of taxpayers and we must ensure that we get the best value for them, too.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister of State has the remainder of the time available. If there is a minute or two for the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) to wind up, there will be a winding-up speech. If there is not, there will not.

4.43 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr David Heath): In my previous ministerial role, I instituted the e-petition concept and also introduced the Backbench Business Committee. This is a perfect example of why that was a very good idea, because Back Benchers were given the opportunity to debate matters of real importance that ought to be discussed. I was the first person to say that this matter should be debated in the House. Of course, the Government have only legislative time, so this is the right mechanism to use.

There are some issues on which most of the House will agree. Bovine TB is the most pressing animal health problem in the UK and the importance of the epidemic for our cattle farmers and their families and communities cannot be overemphasised. I hope that we can also agree about the geographical spread, although I was slightly worried by what the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) said at one point. This was once a disease isolated to small pockets of the country, but it has now spread extensively through the west of England and Wales, and the number of new cases is doubling every nine years. So I do think that it is spreading like wildfire, and one has only to look at the map to see that that is the case. Someone mentioned rather hyperbolically the prospect of a massacre. Well, there is a massacre going on: it is the slaughter of 26,000 cattle last year at the cost of nearly £100 million, and we cannot afford to shy away from tackling the rampant spread of bovine TB throughout our cattle herds. If we do not take the action needed now, this disease could cost us £1 billion over the next 10 years. That is the answer to the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick). I will accept that he, within the parameters that his Government set, took action to try to deal with it, but the fact is that it has not worked. The problem has carried on getting worse and worse, and that is why we are determined to do better.

I hope that we will also agree that bovine TB is transmitted from cattle to cattle, badger to badger, badger to cattle and cattle to badger. The task of managing bovine TB and bringing it under control is difficult and complex. I resent a little bit the caricature that we are blundering into an approach not based on evidence; that we are blind to obvious alternatives and guaranteed to make things worse; and that we have failed to understand the science. Ministers do not make decisions in this way, certainly this Minister and the previous Minister did not.

Plenty of people have told us that the cull will not work and what we should not be doing, but none of them—not the critics, the scientists or the politicians—has come up with a single workable alternative to the cull that would give us the positive impact that we need right now. Nobody wants to kill badgers, but no one can deny that they are a significant reservoir of the disease, which is contributing to the spread of TB. All the experts agree that we cannot hope to tackle the disease without addressing the problem in wildlife. That is why we are

determined to use all the tools at our disposal, and continue to develop new ones, as a package of measures to tackle the disease. Some people say that this is not the silver bullet. No, it is not the silver bullet. This is not the only thing that we will do. This will not cure the problem, but it will contribute to curing the problem. People say that it will only be a 16% net reduction. Well, if I were to say that we were reducing cancer incidence in this country by 16%, people would say that it was a very good policy indeed. Let us be clear about that.

Cattle controls have been in place for many years and are vital. In high risk areas, herds are tested annually, any cattle that test positive are slaughtered and infected herds are placed under movement restrictions. Restrictions on cattle movements have been further strengthened to reduce the chance of disease spreading from cattle to cattle. Only last week, we announced plans for a new surveillance testing machine and stricter cattle movement controls. We also continue to look at ways of improving the testing of cattle for TB, and—a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston)—PCR testing to identify infection in wildlife is also important. However, despite the robust use of cattle measures over many years, TB has continued to spread. We need to accept that we are at the point where cattle measures alone are not enough to prevent the spread of disease in the worst affected areas. That is why the Government support a policy of badger control as part—I stress, as part—of a package of measures to tackle bovine TB.

Mark Pritchard: I am unsure whether the matter will be put to a vote, but on the principle of whether people are for or against a cull, will the Minister put on the record that the Government will respect the will of the House?

Mr Heath: We will of course listen to what Back Benchers have to say. As a member of the Government, I will not have a vote today because we do not believe that the Government should be taking over the views of Back-Bench Members. We will listen to Members of the House; that is the purpose of this debate.

The eradication of the badger was mentioned. That is utterly ridiculous. No one is talking about that. I think the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Meg Munn) referred to the Bern convention. We have now had a categorical response that we are not in breach of the convention. Just like every other legal challenge, we have won categorically.

Let us go back to the science and consider what we can do. There has been much discussion about how evidence underpins the policy. Research in this country over the past 15 years has demonstrated conclusively that cattle and badgers transmit the disease to one another. That is what Professor Krebs found in the randomised badger control trials. It has also been demonstrated—there is no getting away from this—that culling badgers can lead to a reduction of the disease in cattle if it is carried out over a large enough area and for a sufficient length of time. That is why we designed the pilots in the way we did, with hard boundaries. The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion said that the hard boundaries are not rigorous enough. I do not know what she thinks would be more rigorous than the Bristol channel.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The Minister referred to Professor Krebs. What does he have to say about the fact that Professor Krebs described the work the Government are doing as a crazy scheme? Surely he also ought to listen to him on that and stop this crazy scheme.

Mr Heath: I listen to a range of scientific opinion and take the evidence that was revealed by Krebs and Bourne in their trials. It shows that a cull would reduce the incidence of the disease by 16%, which the Government believe is a worthwhile objective. Through a range of measures that we can take, we can finally start to bear down on the disease, and not a single country has ever successfully borne down on the disease without dealing with the reservoir in wildlife. The decision to cull badgers has certainly not been easy and has not been made lightly, but we have to take action and get on top of this devastating disease.

The vaccines that we all hope will be part of the solution are still years away, despite what some people would have us believe. It is not as simple as jumping on a plane, going to talk to an official in the European Union and getting the vaccines ready for use. More research is needed. We are demonstrating our commitment to vaccines by investing a further £15.5 million in vaccine development over the next four years. Let us remember that £43.7 million has been spent since 1994.

So that Members understand the process, I will explain what is needed to get a vaccine into use. Six tests have to be passed before we have a usable cattle vaccine. We first need in-principle agreement from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate to a market authorisation for the vaccine. That is what the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion said had appeared on the DEFRA website: the use of the BCG—hardly a new development—which has been partially successful in dealing with cattle, with a 60% to 70% success rate. That is the stage we have reached.

We have to get international validation of the test to differentiate infected from vaccinated animals—the so-called DIVA test. That is quite difficult to substantiate because we must demonstrate that the vaccine is efficacious, which we cannot do in this country because vaccinating cattle here is illegal. Only after that is done can we discuss with the European Commission a joint application to the European Food Safety Authority for an opinion on cattle vaccination. We then need to secure the agreement of member states to remove the vaccination ban. Only then can the Commission remove the ban and will the Veterinary Medicines Directorate be able to grant marketing authorisation, which enables the vaccine to be manufactured and deployed.

If anyone thinks that will be done in a week or so, they are sadly deluded. I would like to have a vaccine that had been shown to be efficacious and that we could use legally in this country, but we do not have such a vaccine—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Glasgow South (Mr Harris) says that the cull will not start until June. The vaccine will take years, not months.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): A reduction of between 60% and 70% sounds pretty good when compared with the 12% to 16% reduction that a cull would yield. The problems the Minister identifies are largely bureaucratic. Surely the Government could take a more robust approach with the European Union and just get on with it.

Mr Heath: I wish it were that easy. I wish we could ignore all the regulations and precautionary measures that are taken for the licensing of vaccines and just go to the EU and say, "Sort this out. Do it tomorrow," and then come back and start using the vaccine. However, it is not that easy. We cannot put at risk several billion pounds-worth of produce from this country by implementing something that is illegal. Last week we saw a lot of nonsense in the newspapers about people going over to the European Commission to sort it all out because we stupid Ministers could not quite bring ourselves to do it. We have had an announcement from the Commission; it was mentioned earlier. It said that the Commission was disappointed to see an article by Brian May in *The Mail on Sunday* on 21 October, that some of the quotes were out of context or inaccurate and therefore misleading, and that vaccination of cattle against TB is forbidden under current EU rules agreed by all member states. That is very clear.

I will happily arrange for those who are genuinely interested in this issue and who want us to develop a vaccine, as we do, to speak to Glyn Hewinson at the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency—our chief scientist who is working on this—and he will tell them directly, as he told me only two weeks ago, the exact state of play with vaccines. I want a vaccine to be in position at the earliest opportunity, but I have to face facts, and wishful thinking is not going to get rid of bovine tuberculosis in this country. We must have programmes and measures that work, and we must use all the tools in the box.

Dan Rogerson: I am glad that my hon. Friend has set out the Government's intention to persist, with determination, with vaccines but also to look at the testing regime, which is crucial in allowing the whole process to work in future. In the meantime, I am pleased that he is also continuing to pursue pilots to ensure that the science is further improved so that we are completely ready and have all the arguments at our fingertips.

Mr Heath: Let me be absolutely clear: we will use every tool in the box to bear down on bovine TB. That is why we are not going to reject something that has been shown by experimental evidence to be efficacious as part of the answer, as some would have us do. That is why we will continue to put a lot more money into research and push ever further on the research into vaccines. That is why we will continue to do everything we can on controls for the movement of cattle and on biosecurity. If the question is, "Will you not do the cull and will you lock up every cow in the country in a shed to prevent them from having contact with badgers?", the answer is no.

The Government are determined to tackle bovine tuberculosis by all the means available to us. Having looked at all the evidence over many years, I am utterly convinced that badger control is the right thing to do. Indeed, the higher than expected badger numbers only serve to underline the need for urgent action. I remain fully committed to working with the farming industry to ensure that the pilot culls can be delivered effectively, safely and humanely next summer.

4.57 pm

Caroline Lucas: This has been a comprehensive debate, and I genuinely thank everybody who has taken part in it and the Backbench Business Committee for granting it.

There is much that we agree on. We agree that bovine TB is a terrible disease that is inflicting huge amounts of harm on people in our farming communities around the country. However, this is not about a split between city and rural or farmer and non-farmer, and it certainly is not about a split between those who want a cull and those who want to do nothing. Those of us who are against the cull are against it because we do not believe that it is the right way to protect cattle.

I will finish now, Mr Speaker, because I want to make sure that we get the chance to put the motion to the vote.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 147, Noes 28.

Division No. 87]

[4.58 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie	Engel, Natascha
Alexander, Heidi	Esterson, Bill
Ali, Rushanara	Evans, Chris
Amess, Mr David	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Anderson, Mr David	Flynn, Paul
Austin, Ian	Fovargue, Yvonne
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Francis, Dr Hywel
Bain, Mr William	Fuller, Richard
Barron, rh Mr Kevin	Gardiner, Barry
Bayley, Hugh	George, Andrew
Begg, Dame Anne	Gilmore, Sheila
Benn, rh Hilary	Glass, Pat
Benton, Mr Joe	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Betts, Mr Clive	Goggins, rh Paul
Blackman, Bob	Goldsmith, Zac
Blackman-Woods, Roberta	Goodman, Helen
Blenkinsop, Tom	Griffith, Nia
Blomfield, Paul	Gwynne, Andrew
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Hamilton, Mr David
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Harris, Mr Tom
Brady, Mr Graham	Hemming, John
Brennan, Kevin	Heyes, David
Brooke, Annette	Hilling, Julie
Brown, Lyn	Hodge, rh Margaret
Brown, Mr Russell	Horwood, Martin
Buck, Ms Karen	Howarth, rh Mr George
Burden, Richard	Hunt, Tristram
Burley, Mr Aidan	Irranca-Davies, Huw
Campbell, Mr Alan	Jackson, Glenda
Caton, Martin	Jamieson, Cathy
Coffey, Ann	Jarvis, Dan
Corbyn, Jeremy	Jones, Mr Kevan
Creagh, Mary	Jones, Susan Elan
Creasy, Stella	Jowell, rh Dame Tessa
Crouch, Tracey	Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Cryer, John	Lammy, rh Mr David
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Lazarowicz, Mark
Dakin, Nic	Leslie, Chris
David, Wayne	Lloyd, Stephen
Dobbin, Jim	Love, Mr Andrew
Docherty, Thomas	Lucas, Caroline
Doran, Mr Frank	MacShane, rh Mr Denis
Dowd, Jim	Malhotra, Seema
Dugher, Michael	Mann, John
Eagle, Ms Angela	Marsden, Mr Gordon
Eagle, Maria	McCarthy, Kerry
Efford, Clive	McCartney, Jason

McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McKenzie, Mr Iain
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Miliband, rh David
 Miller, Andrew
 Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
 Morris, Grahame M.
 (*Easington*)
 Mudie, Mr George
 Murphy, rh Mr Jim
 Onwurah, Chi
 Pearce, Teresa
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Stephen
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pugh, John
 Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
 Reckless, Mark
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reevell, Simon
 Robertson, John
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ruddock, rh Dame Joan
 Russell, Sir Bob
 Sanders, Mr Adrian
 Seabeck, Alison

Shuker, Gavin
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Mr Andy
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Henry
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Stuart, Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walley, Joan
 Watts, Mr Dave
 Weatherley, Mike
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Stephen
 Williamson, Chris
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wright, David
 Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Ayes:
Meg Munn and
Angela Smith

NOES

Baldry, Sir Tony
 Bingham, Andrew
 Bruce, Fiona
 Carmichael, Neil
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Eustice, George
 Freeman, George
 Garnier, Sir Edward
 George, Andrew
 Hart, Simon

Herbert, rh Nick
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Jones, Andrew
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 Mills, Nigel
 Paice, rh Sir James
 Paisley, Ian
 Rees-Mogg, Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence

Rogerson, Dan
 Spencer, Mr Mark
 Stuart, Mr Graham
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Williams, Roger

Wollaston, Dr Sarah

Tellers for the Noes:
Bill Wiggin and
Neil Parish

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes the e-petition on the planned badger cull, which has gathered more than 150,000 signatures; and calls on the Government to stop the cull and implement the more sustainable and humane solution of both a vaccination programme for badgers and cattle, along with improved testing and biosecurity.

Mary Creagh: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May we have an indication from the Minister that the Government will go back and look again at the whole policy of the badger cull, and respect the democratic voice of this Parliament?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady has made her point with force and alacrity and, as she will know, it is on the record of the House. As she will also know, that is not a matter for the Chair; it is not a point of order although it will have been heard by the Minister on the Treasury Bench.

I call Mr Mark Pritchard on a point of order—I hope it is a point of order.

Mark Pritchard: I am sure you will guide me if it is not, Mr Speaker. For clarity, is it still the case, as has been the tradition over centuries in this place, that a vote carried in the House of Commons is binding on the Government?

Mr Speaker: The answer to that, in short, is no. Only legislation binds. The hon. Gentleman will have heard the response, as will other hon. Members. The House has voted and offered its view. I will leave it there. That is as pithy an encapsulation as I can offer to the hon. Gentleman.

Nicola Shipley

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Nicky Morgan.)

Mr Speaker: Before I call the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr Godsiff), who has the Adjournment, I appeal to right hon. and hon. Members who, however unaccountably, are leaving the Chamber to do so quickly and quietly, so affording the same courtesy to the hon. Gentleman as they would wish to be extended to them in similar circumstances. Therefore, the consultation of notes and BlackBerry's and conversations that might be taking place between hon. Members—for example, on the penultimate Government Bench between the hon. Members for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard) and for Rochester and Strood (Mark Reckless)—could usefully cease, so that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green can make progress.

5.14 pm

Mr Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab): I am most grateful for your assistance in clearing the Chamber, Mr Speaker.

I should like to place on record that the overwhelming majority of staff who work in Birmingham's housing department are dedicated and provide a caring service for their customers, but the case that I shall describe raises serious questions about certain individuals, as I shall explain.

My constituent is called Nicola Shipley. She is a young lady who is seeking to carve out a career for herself by working in a very demanding job. She lives alone, having bought a house in Jakeman road, Balsall Heath. That road consists of terraced houses. Most of the properties are owner-occupied and some are owned by housing associations. She bought her house in 2006.

Nicola Shipley lived happily in the house in Jakeman road for five years until October 2010. The property next door to her was owned by the Moseley and District housing association, and she had excellent relations with the tenants, as she did with her other neighbours in the multi-ethnic community living in Jakeman road. In 2010, a new tenant moved into the house next to her. The tenant had formerly been a council tenant who had affected a mutual exchange from his former property in Billesley.

Mutual exchanges within social housing are commonplace, as the Minister well knows. Tenants wishing to exchange need the approval of their respective landlords. On the form that is used by Birmingham city council, the tenant is required to provide certain information, and there is a section headed, "For Office Use Only", where a housing officer carries out a check of the tenant's housing file to ascertain whether there are, for example, rent arrears or breaches of any tenancy conditions, such as antisocial behaviour. The form is then signed by a housing manager and the tenant is advised of the decision.

Since the new tenant moved into the property next to Nicola Shipley in October 2010, her whole life has been turned upside down. I shall quote from the letter that she sent to me in December 2011, when, in desperation, she made contact with me having tried for a year to get

her concerns addressed by the housing association and Birmingham city council's housing department, which was the new tenant's former landlord. She said:

"I am a homeowner and had previously lived peacefully and quietly in this respectful family community and neighbourhood for five years. Since October 2010 I have felt unsafe, vulnerable, harassed, intimidated and threatened in my own home. The constant extreme noise from the playing of loud dance band music and intimidatory and anti-social behaviour has severely affected my quality of life and those of my neighbours".

What is scandalous is that that pattern of behaviour was known to the tenant's previous landlord—Birmingham city council—but the officers in the housing department who approved the transfer deliberately and wilfully conspired to ignore the council's mutual transfer procedures and did not tell the housing association about his past appalling record. The council officers knew that the housing association would not have allowed the transfer to proceed had it known—the housing association has made that clear to me on many occasions. In essence, certain officers in the Birmingham's housing department dumped this problem on the housing association by omitting to tell them the true facts, wrecking the life of a young woman in the process.

As I have said, since October 2010, Nicola Shipley has had to experience constant noise throughout the night until 4 or 5 am. The police have been involved, individuals have been arrested at the property during continuous all-night parties and the tenant has had his children taken into the care of the council. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has been involved with the dogs kept at the property. There have been numerous complaints about the condition of the property's front and back gardens, but neighbours are fearful of the consequences if they collectively complain or offer themselves as witnesses in court. Furthermore, on 13 July 2011, the individual was sentenced to an 18-month community order and £100 costs for having an offensive weapon and neglecting his two children.

My constituent is left scared and fearful of living in her own home, but she cannot put it on the market for sale or rent because she would be obliged to divulge the behaviour of her next-door neighbour to any prospective buyer or person wishing to rent her property, otherwise she could be sued. These problems were not caused by the young lady and her neighbours. They were caused because certain officers in the council's housing department, including the housing manager who signed the transfer form, conspired to get rid of their problem by deliberately withholding information about the tenant's past behaviour, which had resulted in the council taking him to court in August 2009.

On 17 August 2009, it was reported in the *Birmingham Mail* under the very bold headline, "Loud music made Birmingham neighbour's life hell" that a Birmingham dance fan made his neighbour's life a misery for seven months by playing loud music into the early hours. It reported that

"the noise coming from Lee Sinclair's"—

his name is mentioned—

"flat made the victim's kitchen vibrate and although at one point he found his equipment had been confiscated it did not stop him".

Mr Sinclair, aged 25, admitted two charges of failing to comply with an abatement notice and was fined £115 plus costs. The magistrate's chairman, Dr Burton, told him:

“You have caused your neighbour so much stress, anguish and worry”.

The article in the *Birmingham Mail* details the fact that the first complaint about Mr Sinclair’s behaviour was made by his former neighbour in November 2008, and that the city council obtained an abatement order on 9 January 2009. That had no effect on Mr Sinclair’s playing of extremely loud dance band music and a warrant was eventually obtained by the city council to remove the recording equipment, including a CD player and television speakers. Again, that had no effect on Mr Sinclair’s behaviour, and after the council had investigated further complaints made by his neighbour, another warrant was issued. Mr Sinclair’s newly purchased sound equipment was again taken away.

That is surely clear evidence that the tenant breached his tenancy agreement with the council and that his antisocial behaviour towards his neighbours went way beyond an occasional occurrence and was part of a lifestyle whereby he had no regard for anyone else. Those serious breaches of his tenancy agreement ought to have resulted in Birmingham’s housing department pursuing a course of legal action to have him evicted from his property, but instead it allowed a mutual exchange and kept quiet about his background.

When Nicola Shipley first wrote to me, I pursued the matter with Moseley and District housing association and the city council. I wrote to the director of housing, Elaine Elkington, asking for an explanation of why the mutual exchange was sanctioned and why the housing association was deliberately not told about Mr Sinclair’s past case history, which was in the public domain.

Elaine Elkington passed the matter to Sheila Espin, the head of landlord services, who then involved a Tracy Radford, the head of integrated services for landlord services. So began a game of pass the case, which went on until eventually I received a letter from Sheila Espin, dated 1 February 2012, in which she offered apologies on

“how this case was managed,”

and said that she had written to Moseley and District housing association and Nicola Shipley to apologise for the distress caused. There was, however, no explanation of why the mutual exchange had been agreed or who had approved it. The letter also contained a patronising reference to

“a number of learning experiences regarding policies, procedures, systems and Birmingham City Council relationships with external partners regarding such matters”

that Sheila Espin said had been identified.

I then had a meeting with Sheila Espin, Nicola Shipley and the communities manager for Moseley and District on 4 April, at which I was advised that the events leading up to the approval of the mutual exchange were still under investigation. However, despite repeated requests, no explanation has been given since that time, over six months ago, of why the mutual exchange was authorised; why Moseley and District was not told about the council’s problems with Lee Sinclair, despite the fact that there was nothing confidential about them; or which officers had discussed the mutual exchange and agreed that it should go ahead without the true facts being made known to the housing association. No one has held up their hands and taken responsibility for what has happened, least of all the person who was responsible for the housing department.

Moseley and District has tried to assist Nicola Shipley by taking the matter back to court. Earlier this year, the court ruled that Lee Sinclair should give up possession of his property in Jakeman road, but that the possession order will not be enforced if the defendant complies with seven conditions and four undertakings. The order lasts for two and a half years, but since that time Nicola Shipley has reported continual breaches of the order. Eight months on, she is still suffering, as are other local residents, who are terrified of the consequences of appearing in court to support their witness statements.

Let me conclude. I said at the beginning of the debate that there are many good people working in Birmingham’s housing department. There are also, I regret to say, people who were involved in this case who put their own self-interest and desire for a quiet life before their duties as housing officers and public servants. Those people ought to suffer the full consequences of their actions. However, the fact that no information has been forthcoming about the council’s internal enquiries leads me to the conclusion that senior officers, right up to the director of housing, seem to be more concerned with covering their backs than with seeking the truth of this disgraceful episode and trying to put right the grievous wrong inflicted on the young lady.

Elaine Elkington should have involved herself in the case by taking disciplinary action against those members of her staff who conspired to keep the truth about Lee Sinclair quiet and authorised the transfer exchange. She should have looked at innovative ways to help Nicola Shipley, who is trapped in her own house because she cannot move. Elaine Elkington could, for example, have made the council offer to buy the property and add it to its list of housing resources. She could have authorised compensation to Moseley and District housing association for the costs incurred in management time and for court costs, but she has instead presided over a cover-up, with no one being held responsible and accountable, because Lee Sinclair is no longer a council tenant. Elaine Elkington should take responsibility for what has gone on in her department, and I believe she should go.

5.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Don Foster): I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr Godsiff) on securing the debate, although I suspect he wishes it had not been necessary. I bet he wishes that his constituent, Nicola Shipley, had not had to face such appalling antisocial behaviour over so many years. I hope he will pass to her my very best wishes and my hope that she will shortly enjoy the peaceful life she should have been entitled to for many years.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that I am unable to comment in detail on the specifics of the case, but it might help if I set out a few of the areas in which the Government are acting, which I hope will ensure there will be fewer cases of the type Mrs Shipley has had to endure. He will know only too well as a constituency MP that, sadly, all Members have similar cases, albeit that the one experienced by Mrs Shipley was particularly extreme. She has my best wishes for a more peaceful life.

[Mr Don Foster]

It is important that the Government do all they can to reduce the pain, fear and damage caused by antisocial behaviour, whether it is caused by or inflicted on owner-occupiers or by tenants in the private or social rented sectors. Let me emphasise that antisocial behaviour is not simply a problem that occurs within the social housing sector. The Home Office's White Paper, "Putting Victims First—More Effective Responses to Antisocial Behaviour", produced in May, sets out what we will do to turn our commitment into practical action, working across Government, but in the end it is the quality of responses locally to antisocial behaviour, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, that will change things on the ground. The White Paper moves us from the top-down, centrist approach of the past and instead takes as its starting point the impact antisocial behaviour is having on victims, how they can best be supported and how they and local communities can best hold local agencies to account.

Equally, local agencies need flexibility and the right tools and support to tackle antisocial behaviour. The White Paper proposes replacing 19 existing powers, some of which have proved slow and ineffective, with six simple, flexible and adaptable new ones. My Department is leading on the proposals in the White Paper that make it quicker and easier for landlords to evict their most antisocial tenants. Eviction for antisocial behaviour should remain exceptional: the loss of one's home is a serious sanction and eviction may simply displace the problem rather than provide a long term solution. That is why eviction for antisocial behaviour is used sparingly: there have been only about 2,000 evictions annually by social landlords in the context of around 4 million social homes in England.

Prevention and early intervention, which would have so helped in this case, should be at the heart of all landlords' approaches to tackling antisocial behaviour. One of the Government's initiatives to reduce antisocial behaviour is the troubled families programme, through which £450 million has been made available to provide expert help to local agencies to turn around the lives of the country's most troubled families and make a positive change to those who live alongside them. We know that up and down the country social landlords are engaged in creative and innovative work to provide diversionary activities for young people, to ensure that tenants understand the need to respect their neighbours and to nip antisocial behaviour in the bud before it becomes a problem. Sadly, that did not happen in this case.

There are many good examples of work that is being done. South Essex Homes, one of the 54 arm's length management organisations that manage between them about 50%, or roughly 800,000, of council properties successfully uses what it calls community circles to bring together residents, perpetrators and relevant agencies to seek solutions to problems identified by the community in areas where antisocial behaviour is an issue. But we know, and this case illustrates it well, that where landlords turn to possession as a last resort in order to provide respite to neighbours and communities that process can take far too long. Landlords face delays because, for example, defendants do not turn up or turn up unrepresented, because further evidence is required, or because there are difficulties in finding court time for a trial that may last over a day.

As happened in this case, the court may decide to grant a suspended rather than an outright possession order, meaning that the landlord has to go back to court yet again if the terms of the suspended order are broken. The possession process itself is likely to come after many months and sometimes years during which neighbours and communities have suffered from continued antisocial behaviour. So we are proposing to legislate to provide a faster route to eviction for the most serious criminal or antisocial behaviour, to bring relief to victims and communities more quickly.

Currently, when a landlord seeks possession for antisocial behaviour, the court has discretion in deciding whether or not to grant possession. We are proposing that where serious, housing-related antisocial behaviour or crime has already been proven by another court, the landlord could instead choose to apply for possession on an absolute ground. Where they do so, the court will be required to grant possession, provided the landlord has followed the correct procedure and, in the case of public sector landlords, subject to considerations of proportionality. The discretion of the court to suspend or postpone a possession order would also be limited.

We think this new absolute ground for possession has the potential significantly to expedite the eviction process in the most serious cases of antisocial behaviour. Instead of leading to a potentially lengthy trial, perhaps following adjournments many months after initial hearings have taken place, an absolute ground should significantly increase the chance that the case can be determined quickly in a single hearing. The court will need to establish only that the criteria for awarding possession are met, rather than having to undertake a fuller consideration of the case.

Although we think the absolute ground for possession should help speed up the eviction process, I want to make it absolutely clear that it is not our intention to increase the number of evictions—nor do we think it will do so. Consultation responses to our proposals received from landlords support the view that the availability of a faster, more visible sanction might have a positive effect on changing behaviour, thus reducing the antisocial behaviour or nipping it in the bud. Of course we need to respect the rights of those faced with losing their homes, but we need to focus more on the rights of those victims whose neighbours' behaviour has made their homes places where they live, as Mrs Shipley did, in distress and fear. We must, as the White Paper says, put victims like Mrs Shipley first.

We also need to do more to identify vulnerable victims earlier, assess risks and provide joined-up responses. Some good work is already going on. Community harm statements are being used by a number of social landlords as a way of better demonstrating to the court the damage that the antisocial behaviour of an individual is having on those living in the neighbourhood.

Across the country there are examples of landlords doing good work to support victims and witnesses before, during and after the court process. In Newham, for example, a charter setting out minimum standards for witnesses has been agreed between the local partners, including 22 local housing providers. I am aware that Moseley and District has a witness support group that works with affected residents. Although there is a lot of good practice locally and although we are ensuring local agencies have better tools and powers to tackle

antisocial behaviour effectively, we also need to ensure that when they do not take action, victims and local communities can hold those agencies to account and secure redress. The hon. Gentleman has shown the need for that very clearly.

That is why the White Paper includes proposals for what we have called a community trigger. The trigger would give victims and communities the right to demand that agencies that had ignored repeated complaints about antisocial behaviour take action. The duty could be activated by the public when their complaints reach a certain threshold—I suspect that threshold would have been met many times over in the case raised by the hon. Gentleman—although we think it right for that to be determined locally and not nationally.

Relevant authorities at district council level or above will be required to decide and publish the thresholds, criteria, processes—including a single point of contact—and the reporting mechanism they intend to use locally. The

police and crime commissioner will have a role in ensuring that there is democratic accountability. Local pilots to test the trigger on the ground are taking place in Manchester, West Lindsey and Boston, Brighton and Hove and Richmond.

I hope that my remarks have given the hon. Gentleman a sense of what the Government are doing with the aim of ensuring that fewer people and communities have to endure the type of antisocial behaviour that his constituent endured over such a long period. More particularly, I hope that as a result of the highlighting of this case and the hon. Gentleman's advocacy on Mrs Shipley's behalf, effective action will be taken locally, very soon, to bring the misery that she has been experiencing to an end.

Question put and agreed to.

5.40 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 25 October 2012

[MR DAVID AMESS *in the Chair*]

Working-Age Disabled People

[*Relevant documents: Seventh Report of the Work and Pensions Committee, Session 2010-12, HC 1493, and the Government Response, Session 2012-13, HC 105.*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(*Esther McVey*.)

1.30 pm

Mr David Amess (in the Chair): A number of colleagues want to speak. I understand the time pressures and the arrangements, and I will accommodate everyone. I hope that we can work together so that everyone is satisfied in terms of their commitments. I call Anne Begg.

Dame Anne Begg (Aberdeen South) (Lab): I am glad to hear you say that you hope to accommodate everybody, Mr Amess. Rather a lot of people have turned up, I am glad to see.

As Chair of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, I shall speak to our report published in February. Although the title is “Government support towards the additional living cost of working-age disabled people”, most people know the issue as the switch from DLA to PIP, but we thought that that might be confusing, which is why we used the long title.

I begin with a declaration: since 1977, I have been a recipient of, first, the mobility allowance and then the mobility element of disability living allowance. Therefore, any changes to DLA will directly affect me in terms of the benefit for which I qualify. Some people might think it a handicap that I have to make such a declaration, but I hope that having been the recipient of the benefit in question gives me not a unique perspective, because everybody else who receives the benefit will feel the same, but an unusual perception and understanding, in parliamentary terms, of how important the benefit has been.

When I first qualified for the original mobility allowance, I was an impoverished student finding it difficult to get around. I certainly could not afford to own a car and did not come from the kind of family who could afford one, although I had been able to drive since the age of 17. The mobility allowance and then access to a Motability car revolutionised my life as a young teacher on a not particularly high wage. It made my life so much easier, and I have always paid great tribute to the late, lamented Lord Alf Morris, whose idea Motability was. He will be sadly missed for all the work he did in that area.

Returning to the report, the Select Committee’s first finding was that there is considerable scope for reform of DLA. Much of the evidence that we got, even from people who might be critical of the new scheme, admitted that many things about DLA perhaps needed to change. The claim form was long and complex, the criteria were not straightforward and there was no proper or rigorous system for reviewing awards where necessary. Having accepted the need for reform, many of the people from

whom we took evidence went on to say that that could have been done by reforming DLA, and not necessarily by introducing a completely new benefit, although the Government said that the new benefit could represent an opportunity to address the problems of DLA while improving support for disabled people. In their response to our report, they said:

“These reforms present an ideal opportunity to start afresh, keeping the best elements of DLA... but bringing the benefit up-to-date in order to better reflect 21st century society.”

However—this is a big “however”—the Committee felt strongly that part of the problem was that the backdrop to the introduction of the reforms got them off to a poor start. The first knowledge that anyone had of an intention to reform, and indeed replace, DLA came not from the Department for Work and Pensions, but from a Budget document in 2010. Page 36 of the Budget policy costings said:

“This measure will introduce an objective medical assessment and revised eligibility criteria... The assessment will follow a similar process to the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) used for claims to Employment and Support Allowance, with a points based system to assess eligibility... the central assumption for this policy is that it will result in a 20% reduction in caseload and expenditure once fully rolled out.”

That was the introduction to the change. Because it mentioned a 20% reduction, people in receipt of DLA and many of the disabled organisations that represent them immediately felt that the reason for the change was not to improve the benefit, but to save money. The mention of the WCA and the fact that the Government would follow the kind of framework used for employment and support allowance also rang a large number of alarm bells among disabled people. By the time the Government’s proposals were published, the WCA had already obtained a bad name for being mechanistic, uncaring and unfeeling, and for getting assessments wrong. Putting all those together, we find that the principle of reforming DLA was somewhat overshadowed, because those to whom it would apply were immediately suspicious about the Government’s motives. We said in our report that we thought that that was unfortunate, because it certainly did not get the reform off to a good start.

It is true that during the process the Government listened to some of the criticisms. They dropped the proposals in the original draft of the Welfare Reform Bill to end the payment of the mobility component to care home residents. They also agreed, as the Bill went through the House, to extend the personal independence payment qualifying period, and it is certainly true that the first consultation on the first draft of the eligibility criteria produced some welcome changes, particularly on, for example, people’s ability to get around and preparing a meal. Important changes were made.

However, there are still a lot of questions. I hope that the Minister will not mind, but most of what I am about to say takes the form of questions. I know that she is a new Minister and keen, but I suspect that she will not be able to answer them all today. It will be good if she answers what she can. I know that she has already agreed to appear before the Select Committee some time in November; perhaps this debate will give her a taste of what we might ask her when the time comes. In some cases, she might be in a position to write to us with explanations, and about what has changed.

[*Dame Anne Begg*]

Part of the problem is that we do not yet know a lot of the detail of what will happen. The framework in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 was very vague. Everything is being done through regulation, but we still have not seen the final regulations. The most recent criteria were published in November 2011. Considering that PIP will be paid to new claimants from April next year, time is getting tight, and a lot of people are concerned about exactly how it will be tested and what the impact of the reform will be.

The first issue I want to raise is the lack of an impact assessment. Although the Government introduced the original PIP proposals in December 2010, it was not until January 2012 that they estimated the claimant count reduction—at about 500,000 people by 2015-16, which would be 23% of the claimant cohort. The published criteria included a number of hypothetical case studies that showed which types of claimant would and would not qualify for the new PIP, and at which rate. Crucially though, the case studies did not state whether, and at which rate, claimants would have qualified for DLA, so, without that information, it has been impossible to do a comparison and get an idea of who would and would not get the new benefit, and which types of claimant would lose out.

According to a survey published this week by the Hardest Hit coalition, entitled “The Tipping Point”, some 94% of disabled people fear that losing their DLA would be detrimental to their health, with 65% feeling that they would be unable to work and 75% saying that losing DLA would increase their local authority care needs. Without a full impact assessment, we are unable to answer a number of questions. How many people will lose their adapted Motability cars, and how will that affect their ability to work? Many people use a DLA care component to pay for local authority services, so what will the impact be on local authorities if those people do not qualify for PIP? What assessment have the Government made of DLA’s role in preventing people’s health conditions from worsening? What could the impact be on NHS budgets?

The Government need to consider the cumulative impacts on disabled people of welfare reforms, including the reform of DLA. We also have the 12-month time limit on contributory ESA, the incapacity benefit reassessment to move people on to ESA, cuts to local authority care budgets and the lowering of disability premiums under universal credit. Some claimants might be hit by only one or two of the changes, but some might have to deal with them all as they come in over the next three years. That would be an enormous change for them.

Our report said that we were glad to hear in evidence that there had been a form of co-production of the PIP criteria and the implementation of PIP, involving organisations that represent disabled people. However, we have spoken to some of those organisations, and they said that calling the PIP policy development “co-production” is somewhat absurd. There has been some consultation, but until we get the final assessment criteria, we, and they, will not know whether the Government have listened to them and acted. The Government consulted the organisations and might have heard what they had to say, but action is a different matter.

Disability groups have not been consulted about the framing of the PIP assessment contracts or the guidance to assessors, so, although there has been limited consultation, the wider implications of how the measure will work in practice have not been subject to any kind of co-production. In one meeting, the Disability Benefits Consortium told us that the documents had been counted in and counted up, and that it had been given 15 minutes to look at them. That, again, is hardly co-production.

On the PIP assessment, the Government have said that there will be a requirement for face-to-face assessments for most claimants. That also raises a number of questions. On what basis did the Government come to that conclusion? Will the Government not be able to take account of existing evidence in most cases? That leads me to a question on a slightly different point: will there be any transfer of information already held by the Department for Work and Pensions, so that people do not have continually to remind it of such things as, “This is a glass eye, and of course I am not going to see out of it.” That is not as daft as it sounds. Sometimes, when people have gone for a WCA they have been asked what vision they have in their left eye when they have not had a left eye for decades.

The Department clearly has that kind of information—for example, details of a claimant’s need for different formats—or information that highlights the fact that a claimant is particularly vulnerable or lives in a care home or supported accommodation, which might not be clear from their address, so will it be passed to whoever is administering PIP assessments so that people are not insulted by constantly being asked questions the answers to which would be obvious to anyone who knew them.

There is another question about the face-to-face assessment. Does an arbitrary decision to require a majority of claimants to undergo such an assessment not risk subjecting large numbers of disabled people to unnecessary stress and anxiety, and wasting a considerable amount of public money? I understand that the companies that might deliver the assessments have come up with wildly different figures for the number of home visits there will be.

The other concern regarding the PIP assessment relates to the assessment of fluctuating conditions, which has also been an ongoing problem with the work capability assessment. The activity descriptors attempt to capture the effect of fluctuating conditions by considering impacts that are present on over 50% of days, and that is a welcome change to the provision.

Where two or more activity descriptors apply on fewer than 50% of days individually but reach the 50% threshold when combined, the descriptor that applies for the greatest proportion of time will apply. However, people with such conditions can experience enormous fluctuations; one person might have a condition that fluctuates in such a way that they walk well one day but need an electric wheelchair the next. The difference between their good days and bad days is so extreme that they need the adapted house and all the equipment, although the bad days account for less than 50% of the time. Can the Minister shed some light on that?

The other big concern is the contracts. Atos has won the contract for two of the three areas that cover most of Great Britain, and Capita has won the other. Some of the criticism of the work capability assessment falls unfairly on Atos, and some of it perhaps not. Atos is

delivering a contract that was written by the Government, so any problem with that contract is the Government's responsibility. There has been little public discussion about what the Atos and Capita contracts will hold, so we do not know whether the Government are likely to get those contracts right.

One of the flaws of the WCA contract is that providers get paid for every assessment, regardless of whether they get them right, and right first time. On what basis will the providers be paid? The Committee argued that they should be paid for assessments that are right first time. There might be some leeway, but given the number of wrong WCAs there should surely be a penalty in the contract so that the companies would not be paid regardless of the accuracy of the assessments.

On top of that, will there be robust sanctions for provider failure? Will the Department look at the different approaches of the two providers and compare their accuracy and assessment reports? I think that will be crucial, a number of months in, in judging how the providers compare with each other and how they are doing. I know part of the reason why the Government adopted the framework approach to the contract, rather than a single contract covering the whole country, was, hopefully, to get that information and to see which provider was the most successful.

On the PIP assessments and the new assessments for the transition from IB to ESA, we recommended that the Government be sensitive to the timing of WCAs when scheduling PIP assessments. The Government should not underestimate the cumulative impact on vulnerable people of frequent reassessments. There is ample evidence that the WCA has been damaging individuals' health and may be a factor in some suicides. The Government's response to the Committee's report was vague on that matter. They said they would try to ensure, where possible, that claimants will not be called for multiple face-to-face assessments in close proximity. How will they ensure that? Will there be data sharing from the part of the DWP that deals with employment support allowance and the part of the DWP that will deal with the new PIP?

The claim process is meant to be streamlined and very fast, which is to be welcomed, but that may cause some problems because it might be too fast for some people. We know the Government are saying that PIP claims should take about a month, yet, at the moment, the average waiting time for a citizens advice bureau appointment is six to eight weeks, which may be a problem for people who need expert help.

Will four weeks be sufficient to gather medical evidence and for vulnerable claimants to get the help and advice they need? How many people are likely to drop out of the process? If the claimant has a lifetime award, might they think that the reassessment does not apply to them? If the DWP does not hear back from people, will it send reminder letters to say that there may be an issue that has not been picked up? Again, some people will get the letter and think it is a circular, not realising that it is very specific to them and their position.

If the providers' deadline is to be 30 days to make a judgment, and the end-to-end process is likely to take about two months, will there be flexibility in the time allowed to complete the end-to-end process to ensure that all relevant medical evidence can be collected?

What responsibility will the assessment provider have to seek relevant medical evidence? That is what happens at the moment with DLA, but it looks as if it might be different with PIP. Will all the evidence have to be supplied to the claimant? More crucially—again, this has been a problem with the WCA—who will pay for that medical evidence? Doctors, consultants and other health care professionals are being inundated at the moment with requests to provide such reports. Traditionally, they do not always charge the patient, although they do charge the DWP. Who is going to pay for, in some cases, multiple medical letters, especially as there is a good chance that a large proportion of claimants have a limited income?

Another thing is the scale of the task and the implementation timetable. As I have already said, new PIP claimants will start to be assessed next April. The figures involved are mind blowing. We as a Committee concluded:

"It is...essential that DWP allows itself sufficient time to get the assessment right and to be able to convince disabled people and their representatives that this is the case."

It is very difficult to see how that can happen under the existing timetable. How can the DWP hope to learn from the early implementation of 10,000 new claims a week from April 2013 in time to implement new claims nationally from June 2013? The Department has from April to June to see whether the thing is working for new claimants. Why is there no pause before national implementation to make that assessment and see whether there is anything that has to change? We know that with all welfare benefit changes there are always unintended consequences and difficulties that people did not expect—they start hammering our doors, as MPs, saying, "This is what has happened."

What happens if the assessments are found to take much longer than anticipated in the planning? What if there is found to be a greater need for home visits than was envisaged? All that takes longer. What if the descriptors are simply found not to work in real-life situations? I know there has been some testing, but there seems to be no time to test the final descriptors, which we have not seen yet.

I have done a very quick calculation—I suppose it is called a back-of-a-fag-packet calculation—that we have almost 2 million DLA claimants, and the Government will have 31 months end-to-end to assess all of them. We should remember that, to begin with, they will assess only 10,000 claimants a week, but the DWP will have to reassess some 70,000 claimants a month. That, in itself, is a huge amount. The calculation is fairly rough and ready, and I am not saying that that is the figure, but it will be in that ballpark.

The DWP is already assessing people for the move from IB to ESA. At the moment, the number is meant to be some 11,000 a week, but we know the providers are finding that incredibly difficult to manage. They are finding 11,000 a week—44,000 a month—difficult to achieve, and they will have 70,000 DLA/PIP assessments and 40,000 or 50,000 IB/ESA assessments to do, so to deliver their timetable they are looking at having to assess 100,000-plus disabled people face-to-face each month.

I do not think that is going to be possible, because I do not think there are enough health care professionals in the country for Atos or Capita to get through such a

[*Dame Anne Begg*]

work load. I would not be particularly perturbed if the timetable slipped, which might be what is needed, but the Government have set a rod for their own back by trying to get so many people through the assessments when we know, anecdotally—we do not have the final figures—that they are really struggling to deliver the much lower numbers who are being put through the work capability assessment.

We know that being online might speed up the process—as a Committee, we have some concerns about that—but the online claims system will not be available for April 2013. Is that not indicative of a rushed implementation process? The most important thing is that we need the claimants' outcomes to be tracked. Will the outcomes be tracked as part of an evaluation strategy? What monitoring will the Government put in place to ensure that all that is working and not falling apart?

Mr Amess, you will be glad that I am about to draw my remarks to a close because I know other people want to speak. I realise I have asked a lot of questions, and other colleagues will have questions, too, so I appreciate that the Minister will not be able to answer them all, but we look forward to taking evidence from her.

I have one last question on the legislative process. When will the final regulations and the final assessment criteria be laid before Parliament? Will the criteria be published in draft before the regulations are laid? If so, when?

We think that time is running out and that the Government have, unfortunately, started off on the wrong foot on what could be a useful reform by giving a lot of wrong messages to disabled people. It is understandable why disabled people feel that the reform is not to help them but merely a cost-saving measure.

The people who will be involved in the process are the most vulnerable people in society. It will be difficult for all of them, including those who will qualify for the benefit and for whom there is no doubt that they will qualify. If the WCA and the change to ESA are anything to go by, even those genuine claimants feel very stressed at having to go through this process. It is incumbent on the Government to get the process right and make it as easy for people as possible and to listen to the criticisms and do something about them, because the people who will lose out are those who need the money they receive through the DLA, and consequently PIP, to survive and have any kind of quality of life at all. They depend on that money to participate fully in society. I am sure the Government agree that that is the absolutely correct and laudable aim of any benefit, and they have to ensure that they deliver.

Mr David Amess (in the Chair): I apologise to the hon. Lady for not addressing her by her correct title, which is Dame Anne Begg. Secondly, on behalf of the House, I should have welcomed her back after her awful accident, which I learned about in *The House* magazine. I am sure I speak for everyone in welcoming her back.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

2.1 pm

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Amess. It is also a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Dame Anne Begg), Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, of which I am a member.

Some of my colleagues already know that, unfortunately, and in true DLA style, my hearing aid conked out a few days ago, so I do not have it with me. I am rather deaf, so if the folk on my right want to intervene, they should wave furiously. If I miss that, Mr Amess, please let me know. I apologise, but that is the reality of disability.

Introducing a new disability benefit in place of one that has been around for a number of years is fraught with complexity, anxiety, and often inaccurate media reporting. Consequently, I intend to drill down to a number of the specific features and concerns that the Select Committee has with the new personal independence payment benefit, and the current response from the Department for Work and Pensions. This is a complex issue. The hon. Lady mentioned a number of areas where we have concern. I have flagged some of them up before, and I am going to be precise.

I hope that all of us in the Chamber agree, to a varying extent, that disability living allowance is a benefit based on unclear criteria, is not well understood and has no proper system of reviewing awards. The Committee recognised that. For example, the 2004-05 national benefit review found that approximately £630 million of DLA per year was overpaid as a result of unreported changes in circumstances, while £190 million was underpaid—vital support not reaching the people for whom it was intended.

The concept behind the introduction of PIPs is to ensure that the state, rightly, can continue to support those individuals experiencing the greatest barriers to living an independent life while ensuring that the benefit continues to remain affordable and sustainable. It is also worth noting that the new PIP assessment has been developed in conjunction with a group of independent health, social care and disability experts, and the DWP believes that it will be fairer, more objective and consistent. The theory is that there will be a more responsive and individualised process for ensuring that claimants continue to receive the right support. In taking evidence, the Committee found that the complex DLA claim forms can make it difficult for people to make a claim. Therefore, I and the Committee broadly support the Government's intention to address those issues.

In addition, we found that there is no proper system for reviewing DLA awards; for instance, 24% of working-age DLA claimants have either had no change in, or no review of, their award for more than a decade, which underlines the Government's point.

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): The problem I have with the 24% figure is that it mixes up two things. We have to acknowledge that. It seems to refer to people who have never been reviewed and to people who have had no change, which is not the same as not being reviewed. It could well be that they have been reviewed, but have had no change in their circumstances. The 24% figure is often put across as if people are not assessed. My experience with constituents is that a lot of working-age recipients of DLA are being assessed, because they come to me with their problems.

Stephen Lloyd: That is a moot point, because I know some people, even in my constituency, who have not been reviewed for many, many years, and who, in normal and sensible circumstances, would be going through a review process. The DWP has come up with the statistic and I think it is reasonably robust, but I take the hon. Lady's criticism. Perhaps the Minister will clarify the matter.

Media coverage is one of the most challenging issues. The Department says that it recognises the need to work together and to do more to challenge and change negative attitudes towards disabled people. That is why, according to the Department, it is in the process of developing a new cross-Government disability strategy to give renewed impetus to the Government's commitment to disability equality. Frankly, I do not think it is doing a very good job. I am disappointed with some of the media coverage in the past year or so, and, on occasion, with some of the responses, or even some of the stories that have been set running by either Ministers or the DWP.

The Committee recommended that the Government take on as a priority the fact that public opinion towards disabled people and disability benefits can be and is influenced by the media. We felt that the Government should take more stringent steps to ensure that their own contribution to media stories is accurate and contextualised by actively encouraging robust reporting of their own statistics on benefits.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree—I think this emerged from the Select Committee report—that no Government and no political party can control the byline in a newspaper? I suspect that one of the challenges we have is that while we clearly need accuracy, we need to be mindful that we cannot control what the media write.

Stephen Lloyd: I agree to a great extent. The way that some of the media, particularly some of the tabloids, have been reporting the issue has been disgraceful. I have said that more times than anyone can possibly imagine. However, the DWP and the Government have an enormous responsibility when they are introducing such a seismic change to a benefit. Some of the time, the Government and Ministers have been good and positive, pushing strongly and actively the social model and what they are trying to achieve; at other times, they have been guilty of pandering to people who are more focused on what I might term the tabloid agenda.

The Government have an enormous responsibility, and I would like them to be aggressive. If one of the papers—I do not even need to mention them; we all know the ones I am talking about—comes out with a particularly inaccurate story, I would like to see the Minister and the Secretary of State dealing with it aggressively on the airwaves.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): Bylines in newspapers may not be the responsibility of the Government, but it is certainly the responsibility of the Government and the DWP to point out the fact that DLA is an in-work as well as an out-of-work benefit, which they markedly fail to do. They should also highlight the fact that more than 35% of families who claim

housing benefit are in work, and that the reason they qualify for housing benefit is because their pay is so very low.

Stephen Lloyd: I agree entirely. A lot of people do not understand that the DLA was introduced to help to support disabled people in leading independent lives. I do not know the exact figures, but I know that an enormous percentage of people on DLA are in work. That is a very important point.

I retain doubts about whether that Select Committee recommendation has been followed, either by Ministers in their speeches or by the DWP, and urge that it be made a priority for the Government. However, I strongly support the steps taken by the coalition Government to involve disabled people in the process for devising and implementing PIP, which have proved effective. The DWP has continued to engage extensively with organisations that represent disabled people since May 2011, through its implementation development group, which has more than 50 members and represents a broad range of national and local disability organisations. Engagement at such a level should ensure that the operational design, implementation and ongoing operation of PIPs considers the informed perspectives of disabled people and their representative organisations.

As a consequence of advice and lobbying from me and other Select Committee members, the Department dropped its original proposals to end payment of the DLA mobility component for care home residents, after the Low review, and to extend the three-month qualifying period under DLA to six months under PIP.

I urge the DWP to continue to listen, consult and take on board advice from disabled people and their representative organisations, particularly about the descriptors in PIPs, which I shall come to later. For the record, the disability pressure groups and charities also have a responsibility to be factual in their advice, lobbying and media coverage, as much as the Government do. The victims of misreporting on both sides are disabled people themselves. That simply is not right.

I welcome the Government's decision to support a three-month qualifying period for PIP, rather than extend it to six months as they originally intended. However, I support the Select Committee's view that there is evidence of significant financial hardship caused during the current three-month DLA qualifying period, particularly for those with sudden-onset conditions. I ask the coalition Government seriously to consider the Select Committee's recommendation to implement a facility for early eligibility, which could operate in the same way as that for terminal illnesses.

I welcome the changes made to the first draft of the PIP assessment criteria, which demonstrate that the Government have listened to concerns expressed by disabled people and their representatives. I have had a number of discussions with Lord Freud and his office, drilling down on how some descriptors written into the initial draft were inadequate. I look forward to the final draft, as does the Select Committee.

The DWP deserves credit for the way it has involved disability groups and disabled people in the co-production approach it has adopted to the development of the PIP criteria. However, thus far, mobility descriptors still concentrate too heavily on the ability to move a fixed

[Stephen Lloyd]

distance and do not include barriers to accessing public transport, or the difficulties of some locations for individuals where routes to shops, public transport and so on are particularly challenging.

The PIP assessment criteria also tend towards the medical model of disability. This is an incredibly important point. I value the fact that the DWP understands, or appears to understand, the social model of disability and that it is about providing support for disabled people so that they may lead independent lives. However, within the PIP criteria, we seem to be slipping back to the medical model. I urge the Minister to watch that closely. For instance, those criteria do not properly take on board the barriers to being independently mobile that a blind person may have face. Yes, they may be able get to the shops or their workplace via a route they know, but the descriptors do not take into account the challenges that a blind person might face if they were travelling to a destination they did not know, which is not uncommon for all of us on a weekly basis. If I had a visual impairment and was using a route that I do not know, I would face a series of different challenges. The descriptors need to show understanding of that and to take it into account.

I was encouraged by the language used by the Minister's predecessor, who described the PIP assessment as a conversation between claimant and assessor. It is vital that the PIP assessment does not take the same mechanistic approach, based on an inflexible computer system, as originally adopted for the work capability assessment by the previous Government. In time, though, I would like there to be a checking system or review system—call it what we will—that allowed PIP recipients to be reviewed without having to go through the stresses of face-to-face assessment. I suggest that a letter of support from a consultant or other expert in the field—someone with knowledge of their disability—should suffice once the face-to-face assessments have been completed.

I understand why the coalition Government are going through the process of face-to-face assessment—some people have not been reviewed for many years—but it is important that the DWP take on board the profound worry and stress that many disabled people and their families are going through because of the proposed changes. If the Government do not take this on board, they will be perceived as uncaring and their stated desire—our stated desire—to support the social model of disability and to provide additional support for those who need it while being properly careful with the public purse will turn to nothing. I for one will become not a supporter of the Government's objectives, but a highly vocal opponent. I really do not want this to happen.

My many years in the field of disability lead me to recognise that the system is not good enough. An annual overpayment of more than £600 million and an underpayment of almost £200 million show that it is heavily flawed, but I request that the Government do all they can to ensure that we replace DLA with something better and fairer, and that works. PIP could be that, but it is not yet. I believe it can be and profoundly hope that it will be, by the time it is rolled out in the pilot scheme in April 2013. The coalition Government must get this right, because people's financial security, their level of comfort and their daily lives heavily depend on it.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr David Amess (in the Chair): Order. The winding-up speeches will start at 4 pm. I do not want to impose a time limit and I want to call everyone, if we can share the time out.

2.17 pm

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd). I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Dame Anne Begg), as Chair of the Select Committee, for her prescient, direct analysis of what we have found in our deliberations to be the areas that the Government must address with no small haste, because if they mess this one up, hundreds and thousands of people will suffer grievously for the inadequacies.

Concerns have already been expressed, which all hon. Members must have heard from our constituents, about the whole assessment process. We all have horror stories to tell about the previous Atos regime. It does not seem to have got any better, because the number of appeals against existing assessments, although not necessarily with regard to DLA, are rising exponentially and being upheld almost exponentially.

One of the most glaring holes in the Government's approach to the assessment process is in the area of illnesses and disabilities that fluctuate, the most obvious to me, having had representation from my constituents, being Parkinson's disease. I have also had representations on multiple sclerosis and myalgic encephalomyelitis, and that is long before we get into the variabilities of people who are lifelong sufferers of mental health problems, not least those who are bipolar. My hon. Friend gave an example of someone who may be perfectly capable of getting out of bed one day, but the next day is completely incapable of moving, but under the present structure they would possibly be deemed to be perfectly capable of moving every day. That is simply not the case.

Aside from the Government's black propaganda agenda for people who claim the whole range of benefits, which we touched on earlier, the great irony of what is being proposed is that no one in Parliament or in the country would argue with the concept of assisting disabled people into work. That seems to be fundamental—why else do we have Equality Acts or laws against discrimination? We want people to work, and people with disabilities are themselves desperate to work, but the great paradox of the Government proposals is that they are actively working against the possibility of people with disabilities being able to get into work because the process is so cloudy and unclear, as is the other issue of what passported benefits—to use that good old cliché—they will still be able to claim.

Anne Marie Morris: Throughout the House there is acceptance that we want to do everything we can to enable people with disabilities to take a full part in life, whether working or not. If I may correct or add to what the hon. Lady said, I think it is true that more appeals have been unsuccessful than successful. My second point is the result of an interesting conversation that I had with our new Minister, who is dedicated to helping disabled people get into work. My constituents have said, "Well, that's a lovely idea, but how can we do that when many of the jobs are nine-to-five?" I am pleased

that the Minister is now looking carefully at what is happening in other jurisdictions to ensure that flexibility is available in the work on offer, so that those who have good days and bad days may still participate in the world of work.

Glenda Jackson: On the hon. Lady's point about appeals not being upheld, the length of time taken to hear an appeal is growing exponentially—my favourite word—so we do not know. People are having to wait months before their appeal is heard, because of the increase in the number presented.

On the changes with regard to nine-to-five, with all due respect that applies to every woman who works—that situation already exists for women. The only job that they might be able to obtain is nine-to-five, although they have children who go to school and the times are completely outside their range. That is not something new that the Government have to address in particular for people with disabilities. If we are looking at the accessibility of existing jobs for people with disabilities, I give the example of one of my constituents who is profoundly deaf. One of the Government's arguments on accessing the work capability assessment for DLA is that if people do not get the letter they can phone, but that is of absolutely no use to anyone who is profoundly deaf. It certainly does not help my constituent: if he goes along to the jobcentre because he has read about a job he could do, there is no one there to translate for him, so there are holes in the existing system, and I am concerned that they will become crevasses if the Government do not get their timing right and their assessment of people with DLA done within a reasonable period.

The assessments also need to take on board what we were told when the Government initially introduced their changes to the whole of the benefits system: the assessment process, which they accepted in the past had not been up to snuff, would be infinitely more flexible and sensitive. I see absolutely no signs, given the time scale for assessment of people with DLA, of greater flexibility and more sensitivity, which are absolute givens when talking about people whose lives will be fundamentally overturned if they fail to meet the precepts set down by the Government. With all due respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South, who as I said gave a remarkable oversight of the evidence and the concerns expressed, the organisations that work in concert with and on behalf of people with disabilities remain seriously concerned because such questions are not being answered now. We had evidence before us in Committee last week of a coroner in Leicestershire, I think, who attributed a suicide to the individual's concerns about having to go through the DLA assessment. From our constituents we all know of the anxiety already out there, which is actively having an effect on people now.

That was my introductory rant, but what I am most concerned about is the linkage between services for people with disabilities and local authorities providing such services. Owing to the massive cuts imposed on local authorities, we are already seeing a major downturn in, or removal of, services that many people with disabilities have been or still are dependent on, my favourite example being day centres. They can be a major part of enabling someone who, for example, cares for a person with disabilities to work and to maintain their families. Those

day centres are being closed, without there being any idea how support will be provided in the area and made accessible to all those who need it. That is another major issue, as is the accessibility of affordable transport, which is seemingly being taken away every five minutes. The argument that has always been made is that the kinds of services required by people with disabilities should be in their local communities, where they can be reached. An example given to me was of a six-year-old boy who needs a hydrotherapy pool. There is such a pool at the end of his street, but although it is in a state school, he does not attend it, so he is precluded from using it and his family have to drive 23 miles there and back to take their child to a hydrotherapy pool.

The overarching argument that I am attempting to put forward is that local authorities have a vital part to play in ensuring that people with disabilities can work, and that they can make a contribution not only in the workplace but in their local communities so that their quality of life and that of their whole family is improved. As we all know, in many instances if one or possibly two people in a family are disabled, the entire family is focused on supporting those people. The needs of the family can often be as great, if not greater, than those of the one family member.

I have probably exhausted the points that I wished to make. I am grateful for everyone's patience. I stress to the Minister, however, that this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity not only for her Government but for the people in this country who have disabilities and for the much wider community—namely, the whole country. In future, do we really wish to be presented as a people who rejected the most vulnerable in society and who believed the black propaganda and accepted that the vulnerable were all workshy, when we all know that that is the antithesis of the truth? We have a duty to ensure that our best might possibly be demonstrated by the care we take of our weakest.

2.27 pm

Jane Ellison (Battersea) (Con): Unfortunately, I have to go to a meeting between 3 and 4 pm, so I apologise to all colleagues in the Chamber and in particular to the Front Benchers if I miss any part of the wind-ups. It is nice to get an opportunity to comment, but as someone who hopes to join the Select Committee officially in the next few weeks, once the bureaucracy can be sorted out, I leave the detailed commentary to those who have helped to prepare such a detailed report and can comment with more expertise. I will confine myself to a few general observations and to a couple of things that I have taken from a brief glance at the report and the Government response.

One of the striking things is the consensus on the need to reform DLA. Clearly there are diverging views on how that might be done, but the consensus is interesting to see. I think it is generally agreed that DLA is a confusing benefit. I understand that fraud levels are low, so I agree with those comments, and I shall come back to the points about media coverage and so on. The DWP's own figures estimate, however, that there is more than £600 million of overpayment and, more significantly, nearly £200 million of underpayment. Any benefit involving that level of misallocation of resource clearly needs to be looked at carefully to see how it can be reformed.

[Jane Ellison]

Once I knew I was likely to be joining the Select Committee and, in particular, to be contributing to this debate—although I have tried to speak in other debates on disability-related benefits—I made a particular point of talking to disabled people. I also have a disabled staff member, and over the last few days I have talked to carers of disabled people and looked at the case load that comes to my constituency surgery to try to get an insight into people's lives and how they can be supported.

I took from the Committee's report the concern about a big bang approach, and I note that the Government have said that the reforms will be phased in, although the Chairman of the Select Committee raised some concern about the phasing-in looking fairly big bang-ish, and I am sure the Minister will comment on that. However, it is sensible that some of the reforms have been characterised by not being big bang changes. The previous Government introduced some big bang reforms, and I understand from what former Ministers have said that they spent several years afterwards dealing with the consequences. I am sure that the Select Committee's work is invaluable in trying to advise on how some of the reforms can be introduced without causing people unnecessary problems.

I also took from the Committee's report—this goes partly to the point about coverage—concern about interaction with disabled people and the groups that represent them. The Government have responded positively to that. The snappily named personal independence payment implementation stakeholder forum is now holding a dialogue, and I am sure that the Minister will comment on its work and how it is informing the Government as they proceed.

I was interested to see that the Government have responded to some of the Committee's recommendations, but other issues have been raised today to which they must also respond. I am firmly in the camp of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd) as someone who very much wants the reforms to work, but I will use the knowledge that I have gained on the ground in my constituency and feed it back into areas where we may need to do something differently, because there is a slight danger. To put that into context:

“Our goal is to make responsibility the cornerstone of our welfare state.”

That could have been said by the Secretary of State, but it was in the Labour party's manifesto at the last general election.

There is enormous consensus on the cornerstone of responsibility. I am not being partisan, but there is sometimes a danger that throwing up a series of practical concerns about implementation may add up to a cumulative whole that, if followed to its logical conclusion, might present an overwhelming case for not pressing ahead. I believe that there is an overwhelming case for pressing ahead and working through some of the implementation challenges, because there is a huge danger in not doing so. It may sometimes appear that throwing up such problems amounts to saying, “Let's just put this in the ‘too difficult’ tray and come back to it in a few years.” That has been happening for decades, and it does a great disservice to the welfare state.

I want to pick up something that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne said about the dialogue on

welfare reform, and particularly that involving disability. I completely agree with the comments about some of the tabloid coverage, and I am sure that Ministers have taken on board the need for all of us to be responsible, but there is a flipside, and those charged with representing disabled people—the activist groups, charities and pressure groups—also have a responsibility not to alarm people unduly. I will give a practical example.

I recently went to the annual general meeting of an organisation that provides support and advice to people with disabled children. A lady from a welfare advisory group gave a 25-minute presentation, during which she presented, almost without exception, the possible downsides of the reforms without knowing anything about the personal circumstances of the people in the room, many of whom I knew pretty well because they were constituents and people I had dealt with. Some of them had much to gain from some of the reforms she was talking about, but her starting point was how things could get worse.

Two things struck me about the lady's talk. In 25 minutes, she did not at any point mention work. She made an assumption that none of the people she was addressing were in work or would progress towards work. That was dispiriting. It is important that those on both sides of the argument do not exaggerate for effect, and the Chairman of the Select Committee made the point about some people's vulnerability.

I take issue with the suggestion that all disabled people are among the most vulnerable people in our society. I do not believe that. An obvious and clichéd example is that many of the Paralympians we admired during the summer—they were clearly not vulnerable. They had a disability, and we wanted to help them to get over that disability and make the most of what are already fulfilling lives. My friend who works for me has a disability and needs help to fulfil his working life, but he is not intrinsically vulnerable. I take slight issue with that suggestion.

There are two recent reports—“The Tipping Point”, and “Holes in the Safety Net” which Baroness Grey-Thompson introduced last week.

Stephen Lloyd: My hon. Friend reminds me that I was at a meeting only last week when the partner of a blind person said that because his wife was blind and could not work they needed support. That was frustrating because, although I am sure he loves his wife, he was making the assumption that a blind person could not work. I know blind people who are earning more than £100,000 a year. We need to change public perception.

Jane Ellison: I could not agree more. It is central to these important reforms that we ask people what they can do, instead of what they cannot do.

Glenda Jackson: I take on board the hon. Lady's point about overstatement of the most vulnerable, but some people who are asked that question are totally incapable of answering. A constituent who is 27 years old with a mental age of a six-year-old went to be reassessed. She is already in the system, and the assessor's report was a million miles from the facts and the actuality. Without the new change that allowed her to take her mother with her, she would have been not only vulnerable but completely unsupported.

Jane Ellison: Absolutely. That intervention illustrates two points. First, there is an enormous range of disability; we are talking about huge diversity. We must be mindful of the fact that it is difficult to say anything that is true of all disabled people because of the extraordinary span of people covered, from the example just given to some of the people we saw winning gold medals for Britain during the summer. Secondly, the system has already been changed to respond to that concern, and that is exactly as it should be. I am sure that the Select Committee plays an important part in looking at evidence from life to see how a small tweak to the system can enable someone who is exceptionally vulnerable to be properly represented in the system.

Glenda Jackson: The hon. Lady is missing the essential point that I clearly failed to make. The decider in that instance is someone who has been appointed and financed by central Government. They make the decisions, and we have already spoken about the number of appeals arising. That individual should have said immediately, “This is absurd and no one should have sent you to see me”, but they went through the process. My only point is that the deciders of an individual’s life are sometimes a million miles from understanding. They are appointed by the Government, so it is the Government’s responsibility to ensure that assessors are up to the job.

Jane Ellison: I completely agree, but that is not a reason not to press ahead with important reforms.

To return to my previous point, it is sometime possible to give the impression that when a series of practical concerns amass to so great a number—many have been brought up today—that is a reason not to proceed. That is exactly why we have made the mistake of leaving things in the “too difficult” tray in the past.

Teresa Pearce (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way; she is being very generous. On the problems that are being experienced, is it not the job of Government, the Opposition and all of us here to use our experience to ensure that when contracts are drawn up, they are the best contracts possible? It is not fair to say that it is oppositionism; it is experience. The hon. Lady said that there have been amendments to the Atos contract, and she is right, but this time we would like there to be no need for further amendments. The contract should be right in the first place. What we are saying is, “Let’s look at what could go wrong and what has gone wrong, and let’s get it right this time.”

Jane Ellison: I do not disagree with the hon. Lady, and I have not used the word “oppositionist”. What I am trying to convey is that by constantly focusing on the things that might go wrong or sometimes do, we are not always talking about the things that have gone wrong; sometimes, we project forward and consider things that could go wrong, and that in itself can become a reason to doubt the point of the reform. That is the point I am making. We need to try to show some balance.

Finally, I believe in the welfare state. It is an enormously important, civilising aspect of our modern society. A problem we have at the moment is that there is not a general buy-in from the general public. We have talked about the media and some of the red-top coverage, and

so on. This is a critical juncture for the welfare state. If we care about it and believe that it is vital to everything that we are as a country, that should make us more determined to press on with reforming the parts of it that clearly are not working.

Stephen Lloyd: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. Does she agree that the welfare state, which I, too, passionately support, should be about a hand-up and not a handout? There are many tens of thousands of people with disabilities and disabled people already in work, and many more who would do outstandingly in jobs if they were given the right support to do those jobs and not seen by society as victims, which they are not.

Jane Ellison: I absolutely agree, and that is why it is so important to rebuild the general confidence across our nation in our welfare state. Reform cannot be put off any longer, and although there might be difficulties and practical hurdles, we have to work through them. So long as people do not see the welfare state and disability support through the prism that my hon. Friend described, but instead have an unhelpful, negative, tabloid view of it, we will continue to lose the trust and the buy-in. That point is absolutely fundamental, and I hope that as part of the Work and Pensions Committee I can play a thoughtful and responsible role in holding the Government to account. I support the broad thrust of the Government’s reforms, because the future of the welfare state and the respect in which it is held are at stake if we do not press on and get this right.

2.43 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Amess. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, and I look forward to welcoming the hon. Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison) when she becomes a full member of the Work and Pensions Committee.

This is not a partisan point, but for clarification I should say that the Opposition support genuine reform when there are clear issues. We have never said that we do not. The issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Dame Anne Begg), the Chair of the Committee, is that the reforms are cuts. That is an important point to have made. There are practical issues that we need to address, but fundamentally, the evidence supplied to us independently indicates that the reforms are cuts.

Anne Marie Morris *rose*—

Sheila Gilmore *rose*—

Jane Ellison *rose*—

Debbie Abrahams: I give way to the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris).

Anne Marie Morris: The hon. Lady is very generous. As I understand it, when we look at the figures in terms of the reduced amount available in future—the 20% cut, as she would describe it—and the assessment for the old DLA, which took account of expected changes, there is no difference. I am not sure, therefore, that the

[Anne Marie Morris]

talk about cuts is correct. It is more about recognising that the current system does not work, because people who need the support do not get it, and the people who do not need it, do. The cuts are really about trying to rebalance that.

Debbie Abrahams: I should also have said that I have to leave soon. I apologise because I will not be taking any more interventions, but I am happy to answer that question. What the Chancellor said in the emergency Budget in June 2010 was clear:

“It is right that people who are disabled are helped to lead a life of dignity. We will continue to support them, and we will not reduce the rate at which this benefit is paid. However, three times as many people claim it today than when it was introduced 18 years ago, and the costs have quadrupled in real terms to more than £11 billion a year, making it one of the largest items of Government spending.”—[*Official Report*, 22 June 2010; Vol. 512, c. 173.]

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South said, there will be a 20% reduction in the number of people who are able to have a disability-related benefit awarded to them, and significant savings, again, can be identified within the Government’s impact assessment.

I want to unpick what the Chancellor said in that statement. He was, and is, saying that even if the prevalence of people with disabilities has grown by three times—there was a very unpleasant undertone implying that it had not—sorry, folks, it is just not sustainable. That is the key message that has been coming through, as my hon. Friend made clear. The impact assessment on the personal independence payment was, again, telling. It said:

“The new benefit will help to ensure that expenditure on DLA is sustainable and resources focused on those most in need of additional support.”

It goes on to assert that although there is an association between low income and poor health, there is limited evidence that providing money will improve health, which is correct. However, it continued:

“It is possible that the policy could have positive impacts on health if it leads to more disabled people moving into work.”

That, too, is very telling. First, the evidence was deflated or inflated, depending on what it said, to support the policy to get rid of DLA and replace it with PIP. The evidence was clearly manipulated and the lack of a comprehensive evidence base is shameful; my hon. Friend referred to that. There is real concern that the policy is being railroaded through. As we have discussed, there are a number of independent disabled people who are able to work. That is absolutely fantastic, but there are also some very vulnerable disabled people. The benefit should take them into account as much as it does those who are independent.

Secondly, the impact assessment makes an association with the positive impacts of work on health—which again, there are—when DLA has always been about helping contribute to the extra costs of being disabled. It is not an out-of-work benefit, so that relates to shifting the mindset of what the change is about. That is so important. The allowance has always been about supporting people with disabilities to lead as normal a life as possible.

For the record, the evidence on the trends in disability reflects our industrial heritage. The regions with heavy industries and occupations that did people’s health no

favours have the highest rates of disability and ill health. There are diseases such as coal miners’ pneumoconiosis, asbestosis and silicosis. Of course, many of those diseases have long latencies, and there are industrial accidents that Members will be familiar with. Most work is good for people’s health, but not all, and there is strong evidence about that.

As I have said, we can agree—there is consensus across the House—that the DLA system, as it stands, is flawed. For example, a clear system for reviewing some awards is needed, but we should not restrict the access to support to overcome the barriers to day-to-day living that a person with a disability faces. That is what we need to address.

As I said before, the Government’s own estimates predict that more than 500,000 people will not receive this support. As many expert witnesses in the Select Committee’s inquiry concluded, cutting DLA is nothing more than a cost-cutting exercise. It is part of the wider erosion of the welfare state. As has been said, public buy-in is achieved by changing our view of what welfare is about. Unfortunately, the Government have a willing accomplice in the media to help them to do that.

I am really disappointed. We have talked about the role of the media. We have done a number of reports highlighting the importance of the media’s role and of responsible press releases and statements. However, this morning on the “Today” programme, the Secretary of State was talking as though people who are claiming benefits are a drain on society. It was a very inaccurate portrayal of benefit recipients. It was an attempt once again to suggest that the majority are workshy scroungers when the facts are that most people on benefits are in work and most are net contributors to the Treasury. That was not being reported; it was as though people were really abusing the system. There have been a number of such reports, and that has to change.

In addition to the reporting and the way in which attitudes to welfare are being changed, a system is being created in which people on higher incomes see themselves as separate to or outside the welfare state. We are not in post-war Britain. At that time, there was buy-in to the welfare state by everyone. Everyone saw themselves as contributing to and gaining from it. We were literally all in it together.

The final issue—this happened in the US under Reagan—is the putting in place of policies whose implications are unclear. Little has been done to assess the impact on the people they will affect. We have talked about the shameful impact assessment. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South talked about the lack of information available on the implications of this benefit change.

Despite a detailed, evidence-based inquiry by the Select Committee, the Government have rejected our recommendations out of hand. They seem determined to press on with what they are doing. I really have concerns about that. My hon. Friend mentioned the case in which a coroner reported that a suicide could be directly attributed to the pressure that was felt by someone with mental illness as a result of having to go through the work capability assessment. Is this really the type of society that we want to live in? I ask that question because I have—

Jane Ellison: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Debbie Abrahams: I will not. I am sorry, but I have only a few minutes and then I have to make a school visit.

I appreciate that I am talking about work capability assessments, but we have seen from the evidence that there is a link with the process that is to be adopted.

I want to touch briefly on the issues that have been mentioned in depth by colleagues. I have already talked about access to benefits being restricted. The application process is made as complicated and bureaucratic as possible, so that people already on DLA have to opt in rather than migrate across—the so-called “brown envelope syndrome”.

The assessment process is another issue because of the criteria used. They have little clinical relevance. It is a case of trying to set a very high minimum bar. I know, because I have met their representatives, that the royal colleges and the British Medical Association are really concerned that the criteria have not been developed in conjunction with them; they are often punitive and meaningless.

Similarly, there is an issue about assessors not being qualified in the conditions that they are assessing. That is an absolute nonsense. In addition, little attention is paid to the medical reports submitted in the assessment process. As an aside, I think that it is rather bizarre that Atos was contracted to undertake PIP assessments after such a poor performance on the WCA, but in Scotland it is sub-contracting the undertaking of the assessments to the NHS. What is going on? If this is about saving money, surely that is not the way to do it. In addition, there is little reassurance that someone will not be subjected to myriad assessments, potentially exacerbating their existing condition.

[JIM SHERIDAN *in the Chair*]

On the point about evidence, I have said this already but it is inexcusable that we do not have a comprehensive impact assessment that is able to predict—there are methods by which this can be done; I have used them myself—what the impacts will be, not just on claimants but on other services and on society as a whole. We should be doing that. I welcome the new Minister, but I hope that she will reflect on the recommendations that we have made and reconsider this change, in light of the huge concerns about its implementation.

2.56 pm

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Sheridan. Given the colour of your shirt and tie, you are obviously celebrating “Think Pink” week or whatever it is. That is germane to some of the people who have to claim the kind of benefits that we are dealing with today.

I sincerely welcome the hon. Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison); I am sure that she will indeed be joining the Select Committee. We have missed our Conservative members at the last few meetings. It might be thought that we would find that a bit of a relief, but actually it is very good to have the debate that we usually have. I am sure that the hon. Lady will be relieved to know that it is a Select Committee in which we do not necessarily spend a lot of time berating one another; there is often a wide area of agreement.

I would like to take up a couple of points before going on to the more detailed issues that I wanted to raise. People think that this is a change for the worse because of the context from which it started. That is very important to remember. It is still about reducing the number of people who will be on PIP compared with DLA. That is in the Department’s own impact assessment. It is about saving money. That not only coloured the beginning of the process, but has continued to colour the process. People are very concerned that things may get worse for them or members of their families.

I take slight issue with the comment made by the hon. Member for Battersea that previous Governments left all this in the “Too difficult” tray. My right hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mrs McGuire), who will be answering this debate on behalf of the Opposition, will have the scars to prove that that was not the case. Changes were made to many of the benefits that existed; I do not think that it is true to say that nothing changed.

I find slightly odd some of the language that has been used in relation to the need to reform DLA. The suggestion has sometimes been that it is a very old benefit that has to be modernised and brought up to date. In fact, it is not that old—20 years old is not Victorian; it cannot even be described as post war. There is a tendency to exaggerate some of the claims, and if people do that, there is a danger—

Jane Ellison: On the point about exaggeration, I take the point made a moment ago about where things started—the way a debate starts out and how it is framed can influence the tone of it thereafter. I accept that point.

Would the hon. Lady accept that there is a duty and responsibility on those who support the best interests of disabled people not to assume the worst in every circumstance—not to highlight only the cuts aspect or whatever of reforms, but to present them in a more balanced way? Many important reports, including the two I referred to in my speech, are based on opinion surveys of disabled people or their families. Colouring opinion by misrepresenting the facts feeds directly into how people feel and becomes self-perpetuating. I seek balance on both sides in the tone used in the discussion.

Sheila Gilmore: I would not suggest that exaggerated comments have not been made. In answering or writing to constituents, I certainly find myself at times being careful to say, “I think this is wrong” or “I think this should not be done”, while not panicking people, so I tell them that it is not happening tomorrow, that there is time and that they should seek advice. It is important that people are not unnecessarily concerned.

The atmosphere in which the debate is ongoing is not helping. It is easy to blame the media, but there is still a tendency on the part of Ministers, whether they intend to or not, to juxtapose benefit claimants with hard-working people. Only the other week, the Prime Minister spoke about people heading out to work in the early hours of the morning, seeing their neighbour’s curtains closed and feeling rightly angry.

That neighbour with the curtains closed might be a night-shift worker or someone with an illness, which might not be visible. It is clear that those with mental health difficulties or less obvious conditions are those

[Sheila Gilmore]

who people see and think, “What are they doing on benefit? How is that happening?” It does not help to compare and contrast continually in that way. It engenders some of the responses that we get.

The Government have to be careful about how they present their statistics. There have been improvements of late, in that not quite such provocative statements have been made in response to statistics, but it is not all about media spinning. There is a tendency with the statistics—this week, for example, on the outcome of ESA assessments—to emphasise how many people are found fit for work, with an undertone of, “which means that they were previously scroungers or not entitled to the benefit.” We have not had the migration statistics on ESA, so they were new claimants; they are claiming for the first time.

Let us have a comparator. Let us see what happened previously with incapacity benefit, for example, when people claimed for the first time. I hope that we are careful not to fall into the same trap when the PIP statistics come out. Some 50% of those who try to claim DLA are refused, so if 50% of those who try to claim PIP are also refused, I hope that it will not be hinted at or suggested that that in some way proves that people were getting a benefit that they should not have had. Remember what a baseline is and look at it that way.

Teresa Pearce: Does my hon. Friend agree that a possible unintended consequence of such media reports and skewed statistics is that employers who have read those reports may be more prejudiced against people with disabilities, who already face prejudice, who want a job, and against those who have been on benefit and want a job? It makes it more difficult to get those people back to work.

Sheila Gilmore: I hope that employers would not form that view, but there are dangers.

If the Government wanted to reform, the way to start would have been to discuss seriously the issues around DLA, not to start from an assumption that it was somehow old-fashioned, not working and that people did not understand it, so we had to throw the whole thing in the air and start all over again. That leaves aside how the reform was couched in terms of financial savings.

If the Government wanted to make a change, it would have been helpful to have the discussion and carry out the research. If we think back to when the White Paper came out in late 2010, an extraordinarily short time was given for people’s responses. It was a generalised paper, and the extensive response to it was responded to in a very simplified fashion. That did not help. If we had sat down with a lot of the groups in the first place, we might have come out with a better ending.

Obviously, as a Select Committee, we look at the details. The hon. Member for Battersea was correct to say that we have to be careful that we do not end up seeing the trees and not the wood, but details are part of the job of a Select Committee. One thing that we all say, and we all feel strongly about, is that we must get the assessments right first time, which is precisely what appears not to have happened with the WCA.

We know that the cost of appeals is met by the DWP, not the provider.

Stephen Lloyd: I completely concur with the hon. Lady about the statistics on the WCA and the level of successful appeals. Does she agree that the changes to the WCA that the coalition Government have brought in, with Professor Harrington’s reports, will mean that the first assessment is wrong for fewer people and that the new WCA is more effective and productive?

Sheila Gilmore: Unfortunately, the statistics do not yet show a huge change. The latest statistics show a small reduction in the number of successful appeals, but the number is still very high. Statistics always lag back a few months, so it may be that further improvements are still to come, which would be good. It is particularly important that we get this benefit reform right.

Many people, including those in the disability field and Opposition Members, have asked whether there is any penalty of any sort on the assessor for not doing the job as they should. We are constantly told that we cannot have the information because it is all commercially sensitive. I can understand that perhaps being the case during the tendering process, but I am not clear why it is deemed to be quite so commercially sensitive once the contract is awarded. We still do not know. Public money is going to these organisations, so it is important that we have confidence that this time there is a system in place.

The Select Committee’s recommendation was:

“DWP contracts with private companies for the delivery of the PIP assessment”

should

“directly link the payment of public funds to the production of reliable assessment reports that are ‘right first time’.”

Now that the contracts have been awarded, I hope that the Minister can tell us whether that has been done and whether it will be monitored and reported on. Obviously, if the assessments are much better, there will not be many penalties, but we need to know now whether that link has been made. It would give people more confidence in the process.

The Chair of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Dame Anne Begg), briefly mentioned contracting. The PIP assessments have been let on a regional basis. In Scotland and the north of England, Atos won the contract, but it appears to be subcontracting to NHS Lanarkshire to carry out the assessments.

If Atos is not doing the work, what is it getting out of the contract? How much of the contract price goes to Atos and how much to Salus? Salus is the not-for-profit arm of NHS Lanarkshire; it does other forms of occupational health work, which is why it was selected. It is not unreasonable to ask those questions. Such arrangements are becoming all too typical in this new world of outsourcing to large, all-purpose, public service, private companies.

We saw it in the Work programme. At the apex are the big boys such as G4S, A4e and Serco. Sometimes they do the work themselves; sometimes they subcontract;

sometimes the subcontractors subcontract. At the bottom of the heap some of the sub-subcontractors see little of the payments. That is a major problem.

What are some of those big companies being paid to do? Are they being paid just to put the contract together? Are they just creaming something off the top? They are certainly not shouldering the risk for their subcontractors, because when those get into trouble—with the Work programme, at least—they are not bailed out by the prime contractor. The main contractors do not carry a financial risk of that kind.

We need to know what is happening with the process. The question arises whether it might not have been easier to contract the work in the first place directly to the NHS. If we talk about these things a lot, it is because people naturally think there may be a connection. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) pointed out that in statements that have been made in the past the connection with WCA was made overtly. It is not only we who make it.

The question of targets has been controversial. Atos has said there are no targets in relation to WCA. The Government have vehemently denied that there are targets. However, it now seems clear from people who have worked as health care professionals in this field for Atos—and this came out of the television documentaries in the summer as well—that there are expectations about normal and correct outcomes of assessments. Health care professionals whose performance deviates from those expectations are audited so that their performance can improve towards them. We must ask ourselves at what point an expectation becomes a target, or when there is very little difference between the two.

If there are such expectations, what cognisance will there be of regional variations in ill health—and even variations within regions? Partly because of industrial history, certain forms of ill health are more prevalent in some areas and they are likely to have a greater number of people with certain conditions than others. If there are to be targets or expectations, whatever we may call them, such things must be taken into account. However, since we do not know the guidance, we do not know whether they are taken into account. I hope that they are.

If the Government want people to be more confident about the changes, they must be more open and transparent about them. In the absence of such openness and transparency people reach conclusions, rightly or wrongly, which tend, in modern parlance, to go viral around the disability community. People then get very frightened.

Another aspect of the matter that has, I suppose, come out of the WCA experience, is to do with what kind of assessment is being carried out and the attempt to restrict complex conditions to a simple set of descriptors. The aim from the outset seems to have been, certainly with WCA, to create a system that could perform large numbers of assessments and achieve reliable and replicable results. People have often complained about a tick-box approach, and that seems to me to be a direct result of that attempt.

It is not just bad practice by Atos; sometimes, critics concentrate too hard on Atos and not enough on the underlying system. I think that what happens is inherent in the adoption of what is effectively a computerised

test approach. I am sure it was sold to the Government as the IT answer to carrying out assessments. I think that we all know that IT magic miracle cures are often oversold by those who sell them. Before the Minister says so, I know that it was the previous Government who introduced the WCA and the form of test in question. The fact that they turned out to have inherent difficulties should not mean that we should not criticise them and consider whether we were perhaps naive to think an IT solution could deliver all that was needed.

Mrs Anne McGuire (Stirling) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend also accept that the previous Government had already established some monitoring and evaluation of the WCA as it was initially introduced? They did not go for a big bang approach but were going to role it out gradually, so that lessons could be learned.

Sheila Gilmore: Certainly the system had been operating for some time before the roll-out to all the existing invalidity benefit claimants, but it is not clear that the evaluation was put in place first. I think at the time we said that as some concerns were being considered, and new ways of doing things were being found, it would have been more sensible to put those changes in place before moving everyone else across.

The WCA experience tells us that IT is a tool, and should never become the master of the process. The computerised test should not be the whole of the assessment process. What comes through loud and clear from Professor Harrington's report is the importance of seeing the computerised assessment as only a part of the whole. Gathering essential documentary evidence early in the process is important. I often heard the previous Employment Minister say that people come to WCA appeal tribunals with information that was not there in the first place—as if people keep it hidden at home and deliberately wait for the appeal to produce the information. Many of the appellants say that no one asked them for it. Some people have even said that they turned up at assessments with information that was not looked at. We must ensure that information is made available from the outset.

The other important thing, according to Professor Harrington, was that DWP decision makers should not simply rubber stamp the computerised assessment. They should consider the position in the round—look at the documentary evidence and consider the situation again. That change should now be in place for the WCA, and there are signs that that is happening, although when I have asked the Government questions about how many Atos assessments are changed by DWP decision makers, I have been told that the information is not kept in that form. Again, it is quite difficult to know exactly what is happening.

The Minister's predecessor gave us to understand that the PIP assessment would be very different. In the Government's response to our report, they said:

“The face-to-face consultation, as part of the Personal Independence Payment assessment, is fully intended to be a two-way conversation between the claimant and the health professional, allowing a detailed exploration of how the claimant's health condition or disabilities affect their day-to-day lives. The discussion at the consultations should not be mechanistic and should be tailored to individuals. This is being clearly expressed to potential providers as part of the tendering for Personal Independence Payment assessment contracts and will be set out

[Sheila Gilmore]

in detail in the supporting guidance for providers and their staff. The guidance will stress the importance of positive interaction throughout all aspects of the assessment. The contract will require assessors to have excellent interpersonal and communication skills, including the ability to interact with people sensitively and appropriately.

The Department is not placing targets on the time required for face-to-face consultations and is making clear to potential providers that consultations will need to be as long as necessary to reach evidence-based conclusions on individual cases.”

That sounds wonderful, and if it happens we will definitely have a much better assessment process than the WCA one that we have criticised. I have a problem reconciling it with the contract approach. Has it been built into the contracts? How will it work? If an assessment on one day, for one person, takes as long as is needed, what happens to the other people sitting in the building waiting to be assessed?

Are those people going to be sent home or asked to come back another day? What effect will that have on the number of assessments carried out? What are the targets or expectations of how many assessments should be carried out each week or month? There is a conflict—a tension, at least—between those hopeful and optimistic words and a contract-based system that has expectations of putting through a large number of people over a short space of time.

The Committee was also concerned about the frequency of reassessments. Although we accepted that there should be more reassessments than previously, we had concerns about how often people should have to go back through that process. It is very stressful and expensive for claimants. Stress can affect people’s health and make them worse rather than better.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I am glad the hon. Lady has raised that point. The whole question of getting to assessments has been one of the biggest issues around the WCA for people who live far away and often depend on relatives or friends to take them. It can mean a whole day trip for a simple—and sometimes unnecessary—assessment process.

Sheila Gilmore: That is where I hope we will see a more flexible approach that in some cases allows for a decision to be made without the absolute necessity of a face-to-face assessment. That should certainly apply in the case of reassessment, even if not always for the first assessment. There will be some cases, even when it is the first occasion, when the obviousness of someone’s situation should make a face-to-face assessment unnecessary.

There is sometimes a reluctance to accept that anybody falls into that category. It is important to give people optimism and hope. I had a constituency case concerning WCA, although it could have applied equally to DLA. A constituent’s son has a number of conditions but basically he is a 21-year-old toddler. He had no concept of what he was to be put through, but his mother did. He had been kept at his special education school for some time beyond normal school leaving age. However, he now had to apply for the benefit. His mother asked whether it was absolutely necessary to take him to an assessment. His inability to handle new situations is so great that she cannot get him into strange places and buildings.

When she phoned to ask about that, she was repeatedly told that there would have to be an assessment and that she would just have to do it. She filled in the form and sent it in. She was then told that he had been granted the benefit without an assessment. That is good, but she had been put through a lot of unnecessary stress, because one bit of the Department did not seem to know that that was possible under certain circumstances. Anyone who had met him would quickly see that the young man was clearly entitled to the benefit and to be in the support group. There was no way he could undertake employment any more than any toddler could.

There are real cases of people who should not be put through all that and the extra difficulties. Apparently, one of the providers is proposing to do quite a lot of home visits and that might take out some of the difficulty. However, that prompts the questions of whether the process will take longer and of how to deal with the large numbers involved. It has been described as a much bigger challenge than the migration from incapacity benefit to ESA. The Department is taking on a bigger challenge before it has completed the previous one.

One problem encountered by people who appeal under the WCA process is that the reassessment comes through quickly thereafter. One oddity is that the decision on the reassessment period is based on the recommendation of the original assessment. The original assessment might say that someone should be reassessed within a year. The person might then appeal and win. If the appeal takes 10 months, that person could still be called back for reassessment two months later, even though the decision to call someone back within a year was based on an original flawed assessment. It does not seem sensible to operate such a procedure. There seems to be no reason why a decision about reassessment should not be reviewed if someone wins an appeal.

The Government response said that the recall time for reassessments could be almost any length; they could be a year or 10 years. They would never again be indefinite. A year is a very short time when one considers that to qualify for the benefit in the first instance, it is necessary to demonstrate that the condition is likely to last for at least a further six months. I would suggest that over-short periods will put everybody through unnecessary difficulty.

Other speakers have mentioned the piloting phase. It defies belief that a proper evaluation of a pilot can be done within two months and then the results applied. That is what is being suggested. The initial roll-out in the Bootle office will start in April. The roll-out to new claimants in the whole of the UK will start in June. There is barely time to get enough data to make an appropriate evaluation, let alone carry out that evaluation and then make changes.

The Department constantly tells us in connection with this benefit and universal credit that it now has an agile system that allows details to be changed as things go along and it can keep rolling out in different ways. That was not our experience with the Harrington changes in WCA. It took months for most of those changes to be put in place. When we asked about it, we were told, “We have got to draw up new instructions to staff. They have to be sent out to staff. New training has to be put in place.” In effect, between the first Harrington report in November 2010 and the following summer, some of the changes began to be rolled out. The explanation we

were given for the time lag was that that was the time it takes to go through a process of getting staff ready for the changes.

How is it that suddenly, only a year later, the Department is confident that it can have a pilot, evaluate it and roll out changes and make a real difference to people who are making claims? In October next year, the process of ending people's DLA claims and inviting them to apply for PIP will begin. The whole process is quite tight and does not give opportunity for proper evaluation and tracking of what is happening to people. Perhaps the Minister can tell us whether there will be a proper evaluation of the Bootle pilot. Who is to carry it out? When will the results be known? Does she think it makes sense to move to the full roll-out in June?

Monitoring and tracking changes of this sort is important. We need to know how this will be monitored in an ongoing way. I was appalled to discover how little tracking seems to go on of the results of the ESA process. Parliamentary questions that I have asked about the destinations of people who are found fit for work are often answered with, "We do not keep that information. We may know who is on benefit and who is in employment, but as for other things, we do not know."

The previous Government put in place a research project that started to track such information, but I think that it has now stopped. It had a first and second wave, but there is no sign of the research continuing. Perhaps the Minister will let me know whether I am wrong.

On ESA, the project found that within a year of people being found fit for work, 43% were neither in work nor in receipt of an out-of-work benefit. That is an awful lot of people simply to disappear. There are a whole lot of reasons for that; people may have gone on to jobseeker's allowance, run out of the contributory JSA or they may have a working partner. Some may have a small pension because they were retired from work early on health grounds—even though they were then found to be fit for work, which is not uncommon.

There may be lots of reasons, but, as a responsible Parliament and Government, we really should know the effect that this measure is having. These people are seeing a substantial reduction in their incomes. They may have been in a two-income household, which then becomes a one-income household plus a benefit and then a one-income household possibly with the additional costs of having an illness of some kind.

What happens to those people and their standard of living is important. It is the same with the change we are discussing. Some may say that making the change will be good. We were even told by the Minister's predecessor that some people who previously did not get this benefit—especially mental health applicants—will do so now. We may have even more people getting the benefit. We need to know all the information. I hope that we will have a proper research project and that the Minister will tell us that it is being fully funded by Government.

As for the housing benefit changes, the Government have put in place a research project, which is being carried out by one of the universities. A baseline piece of work has been done, so that we know what we are measuring against, and then it will look at the effect of the changes. If we are going to do that, we should have been doing the baseline now, but perhaps we are and I simply do not know about it.

Data collection is important as well. There have been some hints that the Government will be doing less reporting and data collection on benefit recipients. However, if we do not collect the data, we cannot do the research, even if we try to do it later. At the moment, we can find out how many people claiming DLA are doing so in relation to different conditions. We can tell the proportions of people who are receiving the benefit because of Parkinson's or other such conditions. If we stop collecting these data—I hope the Minister will reassure me that there is no such intention—we will have a much less clear view of what is happening. Hopefully, we will go on collecting them.

Finally, the implications of the change not being a migration are important. People will consider it to be a migration if they had received incapacity benefit and are now on ESA—of course, not every DLA recipient is in that category. The notion that people will necessarily respond, and respond in time, is fraught with difficulty. Possibly the first time people will notice it is when their benefits stop. Suddenly the benefit will stop, and they will say, "What has happened here?" They will go and get advice and then discover that they have missed the boat—they had not gone ahead as they should have done.

The time scales are short. From the letter's dropping through the door, a recipient has four weeks to get in the first part of the application. When they get the stage 2 form back, they have four weeks in which to return it. Voluntary and advice agencies say that if people are going to get assistance with some of this process—for some people it is very important to get such assistance—four weeks is not a long time. In many areas, people can wait that sort of length of time for an appointment with an advice agency or a welfare rights adviser, so the time scale can be a serious problem.

If people have to get additional information, which the form will apparently ask for, people will need time. The time scale seems short, and that may be revealed by the pilot. Will the Minister assure us that if it turns out that a large number of people are either not making the claim that they should be—they are not responding to the stage 1 letters and are dropping out—or are having difficulty with the four-week period for returning the form, the Government will move to change the process fairly quickly?

We do not want to see a lot of people losing out over this. If, as the Government claim, the change has genuinely been made to improve the situation for people with disabilities and to give them a personal independence payment that enables them to play a full part in our society, we have to get it right. No Government should be unprepared to accept that.

Let me touch briefly on the issue of our Olympians and what people can and cannot do. Sadly, the success of the Paralympics could turn out to be a double-edged sword for some disabled people, although I hope that it will not. Not everyone can be a Paralympian. Just because some people can, it should not be assumed that other people who are not able to find work, volunteer or play sport are somehow not trying very hard. Although it is good for people to see that disability is not about being a victim and that people can do lots of things when they are disabled, we should not make the obverse mistake of thinking that everyone is up to that and that they are just not pulling their weight.

[Sheila Gilmore]

As many of the Paralympians said, DLA was one of the benefits that helped them to achieve some of the important things that they did, whether it was getting to their training sessions or being able to have a carer so that they could concentrate on getting to places, doing their training and having a home. Many of them specifically said how much they benefited from DLA. We must remember that someone can be a Paralympian and still need benefit.

3.37 pm

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): I am sorry that I was not here for the start of the debate, Mr Sheridan, and thank you for calling me to speak. I would like to make a brief contribution.

Since the introduction of disability living allowance in 1992, the number of claimants has increased from 1.1 million to 3.2 million, with a 30% increase in the past eight years alone. It is clear from the escalation of those figures that a proportion of the claims need to be reviewed. The Government are committed to disabled people's services, will continue to spend more than £40 billion a year on them and anticipate spending £13 billion on personal independence payments next year. We also know that reform is needed.

We understand that each individual's situation is different, and we also know that circumstances change—illnesses can progress or, on the other side, treatments can help to manage symptoms or even provide cures. No one person is the same as anyone else, and someone's health can change rapidly. That is why it is vital that we look to guarantee that each person is supported according to their own needs, not according to a checklist, which was ably shown in the speech of the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Sheila Gilmore).

The Government will not write off people as unable to work, pushing them to the sidelines to feel that they can never contribute to society. DLA is considered a benefit for life: 130,000 people have not had their award changed since the inception of the policy two decades ago, in 1992. Some 71% of people receiving DLA do so on a permanent basis. That is clearly wrong. The state has failed to recognise and adapt to the changing needs of claimants.

There has been about £630 million DLA overpayments—clearly, that is wrong—but it is much more important to focus on the fact that £190 million has been underpaid. It is our duty to ensure that we provide vital support to the most vulnerable in our society. A more tailored approach will prevent those failures.

About 50% of assessments are made without any additional medical evidence being provided. That is a deeply concerning state of affairs, especially when we consider individuals with mental health issues or learning difficulties who might struggle to identify needs that a medical professional could identify. The best way to make assessments is to use face-to-face consultations, dependent on the individual's personal conditions, to find out how people's disabilities affect their day-to-day lives.

I also welcome the increased number of definitions of criteria in the assessment, to ensure that we make assessments objective and consistent. Examples of that

include splitting the “communicating with others” category into “communicating” and “engaging socially”. I am sure that my colleagues will agree that those are two very separate issues that affect an individual's interaction with society very differently.

I welcome the Government's overhaul of an outdated and inefficient system that forces a one-size-fits-all mentality on the welfare of disabled people across the UK. We have a duty of care and a duty to enable. PIPs will provide us with a way to achieve that.

3.41 pm

Mrs Anne McGuire (Stirling) (Lab): Thanks very much, Mr Sheridan, for calling me to speak. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

First, I welcome the Minister to what I think is her first set-piece debate on an issue in her portfolio. She follows a distinguished line of Conservative Ministers for Disabled People. We should never forget that her colleague, the Foreign Secretary, piloted the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 through the House. Frankly, he did so in the teeth of opposition from his own party, and he should be recognised for the contribution that he made with that first step along the road of legislating for the rights of disabled people. I welcome the new Minister to her post.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Dame Anne Begg) for mentioning Lord Morris of Manchester, who was the first Minister for Disabled People, and certainly a great source of advice and opinion to me when I was the Minister. Along with his colleague, Lord Ashley, he made sure that we all kept on our toes on these issues. They were at the forefront and the pioneers of parliamentary activity, as well as activity outside Parliament, in ensuring that the rights of disabled people were recognised. The memorial service for Lord Morris will be held soon and I hope that many colleagues can attend.

I also particularly thank members of the Work and Pensions Committee for their valuable report. I appreciate the time and effort that have gone into accumulating the evidence and presenting the report to Parliament. It is an interesting comparison that we in Westminster Hall this afternoon are competing with a badger cull debate in the main Chamber. I will let that comment stick to the wall and say no more.

I offer a vote of thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South, who has been a Member of the House since 1997. She came into Parliament with me as one of the so-called Blair babes. At times, we felt like Blair's grannies, but never mind. My hon. Friend has served the House with distinction since that time, no less than during the past two years in her chairmanship of the Work and Pensions Committee. She brought to the report, and indeed to her contribution to our deliberations today, her very particular and personal insight into disability benefits.

Sometimes I think that MPs give the impression that somehow they are not real people, and that we do not live lives out there that have nothing to do with politics. I know from my hon. Friend's activities, both as a teacher and as a political activist, that she has provided inspiration to many people who are disabled—not only in the way that she conducts campaigns and is articulate on behalf of disabled people, but because of a very

particular knowledge. We should recognise that and not hide her particular light under a bushel. I want to pay that particular compliment to her. She has done that work while managing yet another difficulty, having just spent more than three months in hospital.

I thank the Work and Pensions Committee for providing a pretty comprehensive picture of the changes that are taking place. I appreciate that the report is a little dated now in some respects, but the views that underpin it have not dated, not least the view of the context and environment in which the changes are taking place. I will come back to that point shortly.

I also welcome the Government's response to the report, although I must say that in many places it is pretty inadequate. It is full of fine words, but as some people in some parts of the country say, "Fine words butter no parsnips." There are a lot of people out there who think the Government response is camouflage rather one of substance.

However, I welcome the Government's recognition that more work needs to be done before personal independence payments are introduced in April 2013. We have heard some of the reasons why more work needs to be done. We are talking about an incredibly tight timetable for a change that will throw the financial stability of many disabled people in this country up in the air. We should not run away from that, and I hope that the Minister will not run away from it. Therefore, will she update us on the progress on her deliberations on those changes that are necessary and that the Select Committee report has identified as necessary?

I hope that the new Minister will not underestimate the distress that the uncertainty is causing out there; I do not think she will. Yesterday, I met with some young people from a Royal National Institute of Blind People group called Hageye. You, Mr Sheridan, will not be surprised to learn that that is a Scottish group; they have amalgamated our national food with their own disability to name the group. They were joined by some other young blind and visually impaired people from other parts of the country. They had a tour of Parliament, and they met with some MPs and Mr Speaker.

At one point during the day, I had a conversation with them and I must say to the Minister that that conversation with those young blind and visually impaired people encapsulated many of the discussions that I have had, and I am sure other Members of the House have had, during the last several months. We talked about their fear of the future. One young woman said to me, "I don't think I'm going to qualify." There are grave concerns out there among visually impaired people about whether they will qualify for the new PIP. She also asked, "What happens to me?" The financial underpinning that allows her to conduct her life could be taken away.

The Government must accept responsibility for the environment that they have created. I welcome the words of, I think, the hon. Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), and indeed of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), who are supporters of the coalition Government. They recognised that throwing a hand grenade into the debate on the disability agenda in June 2010, without any warning or consultation, did not set the right tone for the debate.

The Minister needs to look again at what is meant by "co-production". The hon. Member for Eastbourne made a valiant attempt to say that that announcement in June 2010 was an example of co-production. It was not co-production; co-production would have meant that disabled people were involved in discussions before the announcement was made. If he wants to see some experience of co-production, in 2005, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Mr Blunkett) started on the route to our welfare reforms and he did so by talking to disabled people and involving them from the beginning, rather than saying, "The Chancellor has said that and we now need to manufacture a new benefit around it." The Chancellor effectively said that there would be a cut of whatever billions of pounds he happened to conjure up at that time. I appreciate that the Minister is new to her post, but the Government must accept some responsibility for that environment.

I also want to highlight some other issues that I hope the Minister will address. I note, for example, that the response by the Department for Work and Pensions fails to reply effectively to the evidence given by Professor Sainsbury, who, at paragraph 38 on page 15, says that "he was 'at a loss' as to where the 20% figure came from" and did not know how it could have been put into the public domain

"before any work had been done on the criteria and thresholds for the benefit."

Although we have heard fine words that the change is about serving the needs of disabled people and so on—we all know the script—the reality is that the figure was put into the public domain and policy arena as a savings target, not to define a new benefit to meet the needs of disabled people. No matter how much work has been done in recent months to try to ameliorate that impression, it still sticks, because that is where it emanated from. I hope the Minister will allude to that initial statement by the Chancellor.

Moving on, the Government's response says on, I think, page 5 that the 20% figure was "a high level assumption"

and that further work is being undertaken on

"assessment criteria and the detailed policy that will underpin primary legislation. More detailed and updated expenditure savings figures will be provided".

Will the Minister provide us with some of that information to allow people to start to flesh out exactly what is meant by this new benefit? It is disturbing that anguish has been caused to many disabled people on the basis of a high-level assumption of a 20% cut, translated into the withdrawal of benefit from between 500,000 and 640,000 people—that is the rough spectrum, depending on how we cut the statistics. I hope she will refer to that. Are there current working assumptions for the reduction in spend and numbers? If so, will she share them with us?

I was pleased that various Committee members here, and indeed the Committee as a whole, highlighted the issue of media coverage. The reality is that the Government set the initial context. We should not run away from that, and I hope that the Minister will not because some of her ministerial colleagues were disgraceful in how they never or rarely rebutted any of the scrounger stories in the national newspapers. I was delighted that

[Mrs Anne McGuire]

the hon. Member for Eastbourne mentioned some of those issues. Indeed, on occasion, the Secretary of State fuelled such media stories. I remember one about disability living allowance for children and Motability cars. He said—it was in quotation marks—that all people had to do was fill in an application form for DLA and, Bob's your uncle, they could move almost directly into their new Motability car.

Dr Whiteford: The right hon. Lady is making an important point about how disabled people have been vilified in the press in recent months. Does she agree that far from being a benefit paid to people who cannot help themselves, DLA actually helps a lot of disabled people keep themselves in work, making them and their families less dependent on the state?

Mrs McGuire: That is right, and it is a part of this debate that has been missed. Although a significant number of people on DLA are not in work, an equally significant number are, and they use their disability cars, if they have them, to get from home to their workplace. If they are not on the higher rate, they can use their allowance to meet some of the additional costs. One of the young visually impaired people I met in my discussions with Haggeye yesterday said that he used his DLA for a taxi to work, because it was too difficult for him to navigate the roads. He worried about that. The hon. Lady is quite right.

I will give the Minister a bit of flexibility, as this is her first outing, but the newspapers have been awash with stories equating in the public mind those on disability benefits with scroungers. Glasgow university, commissioned by Inclusion London, delivered a report showing that the number of negative stories about disability had increased. Frankly, many people felt that the Government had set up an Aunt Sally and then knocked it down. Instead of being honest about what disability living allowance is for, they set up the image that everybody who claimed it was not entitled to it. There have been instances of hate crime, with people being harassed because others did not think they were as disabled as they made out to be. The way that the debate has been conducted has had a domino effect.

I thought optimistically that the Secretary of State had seen the error of his ways but, disappointingly, he has proved himself a serial offender. He was at it again this morning, this time talking not about disabled people but about people with families. I use this to illustrate my point about setting the context. I was aghast to hear him say in his interview this morning that there are tens if not hundreds of thousands of families out there on benefits who have multitudes of children. A freedom of information document published by the DWP on 12 September shows that there are 10 families in receipt of benefits who have 13 children. It is not until we get to families with one, two and three children that the numbers run into hundreds of thousands.

I do not think that a family with three children is large. I certainly do not think that a family with four children is large, having come from one myself. To set a context by saying that reform—in this case, reform of other benefits—is essential because tens of thousands of people are out there abusing the system is disrespectful

to the people who, more often than not, want to get out of the benefits system. The Government certainly set the context quite nicely in terms of disabled people, because disabled people have been feeling threatened since then.

I was interested to read on page 5 of the Government response that the Department is

“developing a case study approach to illustrate the contribution disabled people make to society”.

Again, what exactly is happening? When is it happening? What newspapers have been approached? It is fine for the Minister for Disabled People to write features for major disability organisations, but it is not the opinions of those organisations that we need to change; it is those of the mainstream press. I am interested to hear her response.

I appreciate that we have taken a lot of time and will probably run out of time, and that the Minister has a lot of questions to answer. On the assessment of the impact of introducing PIP, will she consider a cumulative impact assessment of all the benefits affecting disabled people? The previous Minister used to say that it was too difficult, but it is astonishing to me that a Department with more than 100,000 civil servants should find it too difficult to come up with a cumulative impact assessment of their policies on disabled people. Disabled people know what the impact will be, and if the Government are not prepared to accept some of the findings of the Hardest Hit campaign and Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson's report earlier last week, they are duty bound to come up with their own impact assessment. They cannot just discredit everyone else's and say, “We're not going to do one.” I hope that the new Minister will think about that.

Can the Minister tell us when we will see the final regulations? Time is getting tight; there is no doubt about that. PIP is coming in next April, and we have not yet seen the final regulations. I am also interested in knowing what the Minister's interpretation of co-production is. It is not just consultation after the effect; it is the involvement that I have mentioned.

I, too, welcomed the comments made by the previous Minister for Employment, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), about the idea of there being a “conversation”, but let me test the logistics of that idea because this is a crucial issue. The Government's response says that there will be no time limit, which I am sure is a welcome statement, but although there might not be explicit targets, if a company has to carry out some 100,000 reassessments in a short time, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South has said, there is an implied target. There might not be a target in the contract, but one is certainly implied, particularly I understand that Capita has already found out that 60% of people would like home visits. I just do not know how the Government will do this.

On the prime contractors, many colleagues have identified that there is no great confidence in at least one of them, and the Minister might be aware that in Scotland Atos has contracted with an NHS social enterprise called Salus. Atos told *Third Force News*, the newspaper of the voluntary sector in Scotland, that

“subcontracting the work to the NHS would help assessors make more informed decisions as they would work alongside local health boards when it came to assessing claimants.”

Why would Atos contract with an NHS unit only in Scotland? Is there a particular reason, perhaps concerning the politics of Scotland or because Atos feels that there is more sensitivity there? To whom is it subcontracting in the other areas in which it has the contract? Regarding the trail of public money, is it not ludicrous that the Department for Work and Pensions, as a public sector organisation, is contracting with a private sector organisation, in this case Atos, which is then subcontracting to a public sector organisation? What way is that to run a business?

Dr Whiteford: The right hon. Lady asks a valid question. Does she share my view that we might now get more accurate assessments?

Mrs McGuire: The expectation would be that there might be more accurate assessments, but we must also take on board the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Sheila Gilmore), who said that the assessment criteria are set not by Atos but by the Government. The issue is how those assessment criteria are interpreted further down the line. We might get better, more valuable assessments, but as the previous Minister said on more than one occasion in this House, the ultimate decision is made by the decision maker in the Department for Work and Pensions, and the criteria are set down by that Department. We must always remember that.

I want to come on to an issue relating to Atos, of which the Minister may or may not be aware. I understand that this afternoon some major disability organisations are up in arms about the fact that Atos has apparently named them in the contract. They did not know anything about it. As a matter of fact, they are incandescent with rage, because their being named in the contract has given the company an element of credibility. In one instance the contract states, I think, that those voluntary organisations are going to carry out the disability training of Atos staff and do various other kinds of partnership work with the company. Someone in one of the organisations has said, "It is difficult to know whether we should fall about laughing, because it is so ridiculous."

Will the Minister tell us whether Atos named in the contract organisations that it had not contacted? What is happening now that those organisations are challenging the fact that Atos has put them down there? If the contractual system has proved to be flawed, will the Minister say that she will have to review the contracts? We cannot have a situation in which a private sector contractor uses as cover disability organisations in the voluntary sector, when those organisations have not given their permission and have in some instances said that they would have nothing at all to do with Atos.

Sheila Gilmore: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is all part of the opacity of the contracts? Public money is going out, and we do not know what is in the contracts or, in the case of the subcontracting, who is getting what money and what Atos is even being paid for, if it is getting other people to do the work.

Mrs McGuire: My understanding is that the disability organisations involved did not know that they were listed as Atos partners, if I can call them that, until some of the information was published recently. There are

serious questions here. I do not know whether the Minister will have an answer this afternoon, but if she does not, I suggest that she might need one pretty quickly, because some organisations are up in arms.

Finally, I want to come on to young people. I note from page 19 of the Government's response that they still think that the age of 16 is the appropriate cut-off. There is a myth that the changes will have no impact on young people and children, but by the end of the roll-out of the process a 14-year old who is in receipt of disability living allowance now will be affected by the changes brought in with PIP. The previous Minister told me that 16 was the appropriate age because it is the natural point at which a child transitions to adulthood, but I suggest that the Minister reconsider that. The school-leaving age is going up, and I assume that that will have an effect on disabled young people at school. If a child or a young person was moved from a benefit at the age of 16, when they were still going through their school career, they could be in the ludicrous position of having qualified for DLA but not for what the Government have promoted as the tighter benefit of PIP. Young people in what would be fourth year in the Scottish education system—I do not know what it would be in England—should not be put under such additional stress. I suggest that 16 is no longer the appropriate age. The Government have stated that they are considering a transitional arrangement for people aged 16 to 18, and I am keen to find out the Minister's view on that.

In conclusion, I will quote an optimistic sentence spoken by the Chancellor just before the emergency Budget, which is highlighted in the Hardest Hit report:

"Too often, when countries undertake major consolidations of this kind, it is the poorest—those who had least to do with the cause of the economic misfortunes—who are hit hardest."—[*Official Report*, 22 June 2010; Vol. 512, c. 180.]

There is a strong sense out there that disabled people are the hardest hit. [*Interruption.*] I am delighted that the hon. Member for Battersea is back in her place. I am sure that she will be a great asset to the Select Committee.

In the Hardest Hit report that I have mentioned, the Paralympian David Clarke stated:

"There are hidden costs [to being disabled]. Computing what those costs are is very difficult...but fundamentally they exist. Withdrawal of [that] additional funding to cover those additional costs, if that is being planned, will jeopardise the independence of disabled people."

Paralympians did wonderful things this summer, but many of them will say that one reason why they could do those things was because of the additional support from something like disability living allowance. I hope that the Minister will address that issue because we need to consider that there are extra costs to disability. PIP will, according to the Government, recognise the people who are most severely disabled and those in the greatest need, but there are people in great need, and people in greater need. No matter how laudable, if we concentrate all the effort and finance on those who are most severely disabled, there will still be disabled people who require some help to meet those additional costs. That is the dilemma the Government face.

Jim Sheridan (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister, I remind colleagues that we are scheduled to conclude at 4.30 pm. As has already been said, the Minister has

[*Jim Sheridan (in the Chair)*]

been asked to answer a number of serious questions, but the Chair of the Select Committee has indicated that she would like a few minutes at the end to conclude.

4.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Esther McVey): I begin by congratulating and thanking the Liaison Committee for calling this debate. I thank the members of the Select Committee and other hon. and right hon. Members who have spoken today, some with very personal knowledge of this most important subject.

In summing up I hope to get through all the questions. As Members can see, I have papers on those questions across my desk, but should I not get to answer all of them, I am sure Members will catch my eye and pursue the matter that most concerns them.

I am pleased, Mr Sheridan, that you are chairing the debate today. Thank you.

I believe that the change will be of the same quality and standard as the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which was introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague). I thank the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mrs McGuire) for mentioning that Act, because I think all of us here are concerned about, committed to and believe in the rights of people with disabilities. We want the changes that we seek to be implemented as best they can be and brought about for the right purposes. The coalition Government are committed to enabling disabled people to fulfil their potential and to have opportunities to play a full role in society.

We have been clear about our welfare reform plans, which are designed to rebalance the benefits system so that it is fair to claimants and affordable for the taxpayer. Key to ensuring those objectives is replacing the disability living allowance with personal independence payments for people of working age.

Sheila Gilmore: Will the Minister give way?

Esther McVey: I have only just begun, but the hon. Lady may intervene if she wishes.

Sheila Gilmore: I regret that the Minister has fallen into the trap of counterpoising claimants and taxpayers. Many claimants are indeed taxpayers. Many are income tax payers, but they all certainly pay VAT. The two groups are not distinct.

Esther McVey: I never sought to put them in two distinct groups. I said “affordable for the taxpayer”. I am afraid that it is the hon. Lady who distinguishes between the two. I certainly did not.

The Government currently spend almost £50 billion a year on disabled people, including more than £15 billion on adult social care, £1 billion on free transport for elderly and disabled people, £13 billion on disability living allowance, £15 billion on a range of other benefits and £320 million on disability employment programmes. We are also putting an extra £15 million into Access to Work. We should be proud that we are doing all of that.

We spend a fifth more than the EU average, and we are acknowledged as world leaders, which is a very good point to start this debate.

Those services enable disabled people to make their own choices and live independently, and for the services to continue to be available they must be sustainable and keep pace with the needs of disabled people today, which is considered no longer to be the case with disability living allowance. As hon. Members may be aware, from May 2002 to February 2012 the number of people claiming DLA rose by almost 34%. DLA, therefore, is financially unsustainable. We, like many others, including the Select Committee, consider DLA to be outdated and in need of fundamental change.

Dame Anne Begg: Those figures have been mentioned elsewhere today, and they should be put in context. The growth in the numbers claiming DLA is because people are living longer. Most of that growth comes from those over 65, because if people qualify before they are 65, they effectively keep DLA until they die. Of course, the introduction of PIP does not apply to that cohort. It is therefore wrong to say that the growth in DLA will be halted by the changes, because the large proportion of the growth is purely down to demographics.

Esther McVey: I checked the numbers before I came here today, and the over-65s are not the vast majority, but a third of the total. Interestingly—I think my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans) brought this up, although many people have touched on it—DLA is not a static benefit; it is a dynamic benefit in so far as 3.3 million people are on it and the conditions they have will change. Some might stay the same and some might get worse, but some people’s condition may get better, and we have to acknowledge that when people get better, they will move off the system. There is a natural movement within the system, and we have to consider all those incidents, which is why we believe the reform is required.

I know I am short of time, so I will address the assessment and answer as far as I can some of the specific questions that were raised. If I do not have enough time, because there were so many points, I will write to hon. Members.

Mrs McGuire: Will the Minister address the Atos contract for PIP?

Esther McVey: I will get to that at the very end. Perhaps the right hon. Lady should wave to me about a minute before the end so I can ensure that I get there with what I have.

Jim Sheridan (in the Chair): Order. That will need to be a few minutes before the end so that the Chair of the Select Committee can wind up.

Esther McVey: Thank you, Mr Sheridan.

I have been corrected, so perhaps the right hon. Member for Stirling could wave to me a few minutes before the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Dame Anne Begg) speaks.

When hon. Members spoke about the whole DLA reform and consultation, I do not think they necessarily knew the full length of the consultation that has been

embarked on. The consultation has been very thorough and has taken place over a long period. The Government code of practice on consultation recommends a minimum of a 12-week consultation, but I will put into context how we set about this consultation.

When there was a debate on whether we should change DLA to PIP, there was a consultation with disability groups, health groups and social care groups. That consultation was long before any change came into being and lasted for 10-and-a-half weeks. After that, there was a 10-week consultation on the reforms to which more than 5,500 people responded. There was then a 16-week informal consultation on the initial drafts of the assessment, followed by a further 15-week formal consultation on the second draft of the assessment, after which there was a 14-week consultation. In total there have been 55 weeks of consultation, which is a year-plus. By anybody's reckoning that is a considerable amount of consultation. The consultation has been a real listening exercise, because there is no point in having it if we do not amend and change things as we see fit. As the Bill progressed and became the Act, key things were altered. Again, we are listening, and when we do finally table all the assessments, I believe the consultation will be reflected in them, too. Questions have been asked about when that will happen; it will be later on in the year, but it will be as soon as possible. There are many things to balance: we have to fit a specific timetable, which, as the hon. Member for Aberdeen South said, begins in April, but it would be incorrect to put something in play if we had not listened to everyone for as long as we possibly can.

I will pick up some of my notes, because the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Sheila Gilmore) asked whether there are targets for the length of assessment. No, there are no targets for how long an assessment should take or for how many assessments should be completed in a week or a day. She is right: there are challenges, and it will be tough, but this is written into the contract. I met the two key providers yesterday to discuss how they have to engage with people and how the system has to be humane. They have to listen and be caring and all of those things, because—she is right—we need rigour and confidence in the system.

On the monitoring of quality and consistency across the PIP providers, guidance has been very strict, and training will be strict, too. They will be closely monitored for quality, auditing and the work of the health professionals. We are seeking feedback from claimants. They will be monitored again in two years, as well as this being ongoing. Should we see any discrepancies in appeals and reassessments where there seem to be issues, that will be monitored, too.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh East asked about other types of targets. There are no targets or expectations for assessor performance in the work capability assessment, and there will not be any in PIP. Yes, performance is monitored and assessors are audited. Where abnormal results occur, we will look into them, but everything has to be of the highest possible quality.

The hon. Lady talked about the initial start-up in Bootle and how it would roll out across the country. The Department will test the effectiveness of the IT system, and the assessment and referral and claiming process. The Department will also be able to validate assumptions about the timings of the process: the initial

telephone call, the claim form, the completion and the assessment duration. All of that will be tested in the original bit, which goes from April to June.

The hon. Lady asked many more questions, but I wonder whether I should move on to another question, which I think all hon. Members asked, about how disabled people are portrayed in the media. The right hon. Member for Stirling correctly pointed out that the superheroes of the Paralympics make up a tiny percentage of people with disabilities. Just as I will never be an Olympian, most people with disabilities will never be a Paralympian. However, the Paralympics shone a light on an area that we hope to capitalise on and open up disabled people to mainstream media. To that end, as somebody who worked in the media for 14 years, I hope that I can bring some insight and knowledge. I have asked straight away for—I would like to say a media summit, but that might make it sound even more highfaluting than it actually is—for a media round table. When one considers that there are 11 million people with disabilities in the UK and what percentage of the population that represents, it seems only right that such organisations as the BBC or ITV would look at that as a significant audience they should be reflecting, not just occasionally but daily, in all their programmes, whether they are dramas, news or current affairs.

It may be that we have to be even more careful about the language we use. If we know that the issue will be polarised and put into headlines and TV captions—we know that that will happen—then we need to be more careful about how we talk. I have never mentioned the word “scroungers”. I am mentioning it now because other hon. Members have mentioned it, and maybe we should all stop using it.

Stephen Lloyd: I thank the Minister for giving way. She is covering a lot in a very short time, and I forgot to congratulate her on her new post. As I asked in my speech, will she commit, when the Government get it wrong, to going out on behalf of disabled people and very aggressively putting it right in the media?

Esther McVey: I agree that we should all do that, and that is what I am aiming to do. I have, in fact, been interviewed myself and felt that the interviewer was using the wrong language. I picked up on that, because I thought it was inappropriate. Whether that was to catch me out or whatever, I felt it was inappropriate.

I am aware of the time, so I would like to answer some of the questions raised by the right hon. Member for Stirling. Many hon. Members brought up the figure of the 20% cut. The right hon. Lady said that the impression sticks, so let me try to unstick it. Where did the 20% figure come from? I have to say, and I say this hand on heart, that when I walked into the Department and took on this daunting position—a huge task, with huge shoes to fill—I said, “I want to know how those numbers came about, because I do not honestly believe I can stand up in front of people unless I know the integrity of what I am saying.” If it is not right, I will change my words accordingly. As the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd) said, if this is not what he thinks it will be, he will be a vocal opponent of it.

I have the figures. I have the numbers of what the spend would be, and this is what it was about. I asked all the medics who were setting the assessment, “Where did the numbers come from?” They said, in all honesty, they

[*Esther McVey*]

were given the task of looking at what a benefit would be for 2013—looking at the disabilities now as we perceive them. We are not looking at DLA of the 1990s—that was very much skewed towards people with physical disabilities. This had to take in everything: sensory, mental conditions, learning difficulties, and how that would be done and how it is best placed to fit. They said that they came back with this assessment, this is how it was structured, and these were the results.

The actual sums that were paid out were £12.5 billion in 2010-11, and by 2014-15 the expected, real-terms spending will be £13.2 billion. The 20% cut that people talk about was the cut in the expected rise in the benefits, because they had risen exponentially by 40% in 10 years and everybody felt that that was unaffordable. Therefore, if we wanted to give the benefits people wanted, if we wanted to look after those who were most in need of support, but equally those with great needs as well as the greatest need, this is what had to be done to be sustainable. Those were the figures and those were the facts I was given. I believe them, and that is why I am standing here today.

Let me see if I can come on to any more questions. The hon. Member for Aberdeen South asked rather a lot. I reaffirm my commitment to working with people on disability benefits. Wherever possible, we will be working with everybody. As I am running out of time and the hon. Lady will be speaking in a moment, I will come to a conclusion and send her my response.

In conclusion, the London 2012 Paralympic games truly captivated the hearts of the nation, and undoubtedly helped to shift attitudes towards and perceptions of disabled people. We now have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to capitalise on that. The Government want to build on that success and I am adamant that I will do so.

I have just remembered that the right hon. Member for Stirling asked a question about Atos. I am not fully aware of the answer, but it is of concern. I will address it, and my team will look at it straight away.

We have to ensure that those who face the greatest barriers get the support they need. By replacing DLA with PIP, we are safeguarding that support for the future. Not only are we doing that, but we are modifying a benefit to ensure it keeps pace with the needs of disabled people today.

I hope my comments have reassured hon. Members. I know that they wanted more reassurance, but I do not have the time. Our proposals have been developed following extensive collaboration and consultation with disabled people and, when viewed as part of a wide package of support available, are intended to enable those disabled people who face the greatest barriers to lead full, active and independent lives.

4.28 pm

Dame Anne Begg: The hon. Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison) rightly pointed out that not all disabled people who receive DLA are vulnerable, but—this is a big “but”—the most vulnerable in our society are all disabled and will all qualify for DLA. That is why the Government must get this right. That is why the Select Committee must do its job of scrutinising the Government’s proposals, which does mean ringing alarm bells and asking lots and lots of questions.

DLA has been an extremely useful benefit and has helped to transform lives. PIP must do the same, which means that the assessment must be sensitive and supportive so that disabled people have the wherewithal to continue to be all that they can be, be that a Paralympian, an MP or a person incapable of any independent movement. It is imperative that the Government get this right. If they do not, we will turn the clock back to a time when disabled people were neither seen nor heard, and we cannot let that happen.

4.30 pm

Sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(11)).

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 25 October 2012

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Concurrent Jurisdiction (DPP Interim Guidelines)

The Attorney-General (Mr Dominic Grieve): The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) has today published interim guidelines to prosecutors on decision making in certain cases involving concurrent jurisdiction. The guidelines, which take immediate effect, follow a recommendation in the report of the review of the UK's extradition arrangements by Lord Justice Sir Scott Baker that there should be more transparency about the principles that are applied by prosecutors in this jurisdiction when determining whether criminal proceedings should be brought here or in another jurisdiction.

The guidelines have been issued on an interim basis and are the subject of a consultation exercise that will last until 31 January 2013. The DPP will publish his final guidelines early next year, once he has considered the responses to the consultation, and any cases that have fallen to be considered by prosecutors during the period in which the interim guidelines have been in place will be reviewed in the light of the final guidelines if changes have been made.

The director of the Serious Fraud Office has indicated that his prosecutors will consider themselves bound by this guidance.

Copies of the interim guidelines will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

National Minimum Wage

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Jo Swinson): I am pleased to announce that the Government have written to the Low Pay Commission setting out what we would like the Commission to consider on the national minimum wage. The document contains the Government's interim evidence on economic and non-economic issues, including the minimum wage rates, the youth labour market and apprenticeships. An updated version of the evidence will be published later when the latest information on earnings and economic forecasts will be included.

A copy of the evidence will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and will be available from the BIS website at: www.bis.gov.uk.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Business Rate Retention Scheme

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Brandon Lewis): I am today publishing for consultation, drafts of the key regulations that will underpin the business rates retention scheme.

The scheme will give all councils a strong incentive to go for growth and could add a £10 billion boost to the wider economy by 2020.

The publication of these regulations in draft form is intended to give local authorities and interested parties greater clarity about the detailed implementation and operation of the scheme. It will also give local authorities the opportunity to make comments on the draft regulations, to help ensure that they work as intended so that billing authorities are able to implement the scheme smoothly.

Five sets of regulations are being published in draft form today:

The Non-Domestic Rating (Rates Retention) Regulations 2012—which include the key income definition for the purposes of calculating central, billing authority and major precepting authority shares, the making of payments and operation of billing authorities' collection funds under the rates retention scheme.

The Non-Domestic Rating (Levy and Safety Net) Regulations 2012—which provide for calculating whether levy or safety net payments from/to an authority are due and the amount of any such payments, including provision for safety net payments on account.

The Non-Domestic Rating (Transitional Protection Payments) Regulations 2012—which make provision for payments to/from local authorities where their income is less/more as a result of the operation of transitional arrangements.

The Non-Domestic Rating (Designated Areas) Regulations 2012—which enable local authorities to retain a greater proportion of the income in enterprise zones and new development deal areas. They also provide the means by which authorities will be reimbursed for qualifying rate relief given to ratepayers in enterprise zones.

The Non-Domestic Rating (Renewable Energy Projects) Regulations 2012—which enable local authorities to retain a greater proportion of income from renewable energy projects.

Following consultation, and subject to the passage of the Local Government Finance Bill, the Government intend to lay regulations in Parliament with a view to them coming into force before the start of the 2013-14 financial year, subject to parliamentary approval.

I am placing copies of the consultation and draft regulations in the Library of the House. The Government are inviting responses by 23 November 2012.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Offshore Oil and Gas Licensing

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Mr John Hayes): After thorough consideration of the applications made in the 27th offshore oil and gas licensing round, I am very pleased to be able to announce an initial tranche of offers of 167 production licences. The number of licence offers is a very good result from this latest licensing round, continuing the trend in recent years of encouraging results.

This demonstrates the continuing attractiveness of the United Kingdom continental shelf as an oil and gas producing province. Oil is a global business and the companies are deciding where to allocate their capital in a very competitive environment. The UK remains a favoured destination, with the industry clearly seeing lots of potential and new opportunities.

These new licences will help us to continue to make the most of our indigenous energy resources.

As required by the habitats directive, my officials have carried out a screening assessment of the blocks applied for. As a result, licences for 61 of those blocks, those which are close to, or in, certain special areas of conservation (SACs) and special protection areas (SPAs), will be subject to environmental assessments before any offer is made. The EU habitats directive requires that “appropriate assessments” be conducted where proposed activities are likely to have significant effects on any SACs and SPAs. The assessments will examine the implications for these protected nature conservation areas of awarding oil and gas licences, and will be subject to appropriate consultation, before any decision is made on whether to offer any of these blocks.

Details of the offers that have been made can be viewed on the DECC oil and gas website at: www.og.decc.gov.uk

Environmental Council

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Mr Edward Davey): My noble Friend, Lord de Mauley, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Resource Management, the Local Environment and Environmental Science, and I will represent the UK at the Environment Council in Luxembourg on 25 October.

At this Council, the presidency will hold a legislative orientation debate on a proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on ship recycling (First Reading). This item is on the agenda as it is currently going through the First Reading ordinary legislative procedure (OLP—formally co-decision) process in the Council and the European Parliament.

The presidency has confirmed that the focus of the debate will be on some of the bigger issues such as safeguarding the competitiveness of the EU-flag; enforceability and effectiveness; whether the regulation should be closely aligned with the Hong Kong convention or should introduce additional requirements; and whether it should set out detailed provisions on penalties and access to justice or leave these matters to member states.

Ministers are then expected to adopt non-legislative Council conclusions on Rio+20: outcome and follow-up to the United Nations conference on sustainable development (UNCSD) 2012 summit. Rio+20 initiated four intergovernmental processes on: sustainable development goals (SDG); a financing strategy; a new high level political forum; and on strengthening the United Nations environment programme (UNEP). This item is on the agenda as the EU’s attention is now turning to implementation. The UK will seek conclusions demonstrating support for the Rio outcomes and a commitment to take a constructive role in follow-up activities, in particular keeping a broad view of what SDGs might look like.

Following the morning session the presidency will host a ministerial lunch which will focus on climate change. The topic of this lunch is a

“presentation and discussion on the outcome of the pre-COP 18/CMP eight ministerial meeting on climate change held recently in Korea”,

which I attended.

In the afternoon session, Ministers will seek to adopt non-legislative Council conclusions on preparations for the 18th session of the conference of the parties (COP 18)

to the United Nations framework convention on climate change (UNFCCC) and the eighth session of the meeting of the parties to the Kyoto protocol (CMP 8). COP18 will take place in Doha, Qatar from 26 November to 7 December 2012, and these conclusions will form the basic framework of the EU’s negotiating position at COP18.

At the end of the day, the following topics will be covered under “any other business”:

Information from the Commission on the Nagoya protocol on access and benefit sharing of genetic resources (ABS)/proposal for a regulation on EU implementing measures.

Information from the Belgian delegation on the importance of the EU legislation for meeting environmental objectives—the example of the air quality.

Information from the Swedish delegation on chemicals in textiles.

Information from the Commission on the emissions trading scheme in aviation.

Information from the presidency and the Commission on the timing of auctions of greenhouse gas allowances (“Back loading”)—state of play.

Information from the Czech delegation on guidelines for the mutual acceptance of low emission zones vignettes and the exchange of best practice.

HEALTH

Dementia Funding

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): I am announcing a £50 million capital funding in 2013-14 for the NHS and local authorities to work with providers to create care environments to help people with dementia live well with the condition.

Dementia is one of the biggest challenges we face as a society as our population ages and we are determined to transform the quality of dementia care for patients and their families. In March, the Prime Minister launched his challenge on dementia, which sets out the Government’s ambition to increase diagnosis rates, raise awareness and understanding and to double funding for research by 2015.

Research by the King’s Fund demonstrates that good design can help with the management of dementia. People with dementia are less likely to get confused or become distressed within an environment designed with their needs in mind. Examples include an intelligent use of colour to mark out different areas to aid memory, clearer signage and the opportunity to take part in activities such as gardening.

Local authorities working in partnership with social care providers and the NHS will have the opportunity to bid for a share of £50 million capital funding to invest in 2013-14 in improved care environments to help people with dementia and their carers manage their condition better. The funding is aimed at expanding the range of health and care services offering dedicated dementia friendly environments—and to stimulate further use of supportive environments to help the growing number of people with dementia get the best possible care.

Projects that are successful in securing funds will form part of a national pilot to disseminate best practice and evidence across the NHS and social care system of the best examples of “dementia friendly environments”. The findings and evidence will be used to develop future guidance in this area, assisting organisations that provide

services to people with dementia as well as commissioners of services and local health and wellbeing boards to become one of the best in Europe.

The criteria for applying for funding and the deadline for receipt of applications will be announced shortly. The successful projects will begin from April 2013 and will be subject to national evaluation.

TRANSPORT

EU Transport Council

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): I will attend the first Transport Council of the Cypriot Presidency (the presidency) in Luxembourg on Monday 29 October.

The presidency hopes to achieve general approach on three proposals:

The first is a proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on common rules for the allocation of slots, repealing Council Directive 95/93/EC. The proposed regulation has been subject to intense official-level scrutiny by Council working groups and these discussions are ongoing. Progress to date has been mixed, but the proposition remains acceptable from a UK perspective. I believe that the resulting regulation could help promote the most effective use of airport slots and build on the existing transparent, market-based approach to encourage the more efficient use of scarce capacity at congested airports, while minimising administrative and financial burdens for industry. However, at this stage, it remains unclear whether or not it will be possible to seek a general approach at the October Council.

The second is a proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the enforcement of certain provisions of the maritime labour convention by flag states. The proposed general approach represents a satisfactory outcome for the UK and I will support it as it allows appropriate flexibility to member states, and will not require the UK to make any substantive changes to its proposed implementation of the provisions of the maritime labour convention on flag state responsibilities.

The third is a proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2009/16/EC on port state control. I will support the proposal which will not require the UK to make any substantive changes to its proposed implementation of the provisions of the maritime labour convention on port state responsibilities.

An orientation debate will be held on a proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on roadworthiness testing for motor vehicles and their trailers (First Reading). The UK strongly supports the ongoing roadworthiness testing of vehicles as a worthwhile contribution to road safety.

However, the UK is very concerned by the potential cost burden of the European Commission's proposal as it is currently framed. The UK alone has identified costs of over €1 billion without any discernible benefit in road safety. We have also identified significant administrative burdens embedded in the proposal that similarly would produce no road safety benefit. In the current economic climate the UK does not wish to see

any additional cost to European citizens, businesses or Governments unless clearly justified by road safety benefits.

The presidency will be seeking a political agreement on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EEC) No 3821/85 on recording equipment in road transport and amending Regulation (EC) No 561/2006 of the European Parliament and the Council (First Reading). The UK supports the proposal which strikes a sensible balance between improving the security of the tachograph while ensuring that additional burdens on industry and enforcement authorities are minimised.

The Council will be expected to adopt a proposal for a Council decision on the signing, on behalf of the European Union, and provisional application of the agreement providing a general framework for enhanced co-operation between the European Union and the European organisation for the safety of air navigation (Eurocontrol). The UK supports the proposed agreement. It is important that the significant work Eurocontrol performs on behalf of the European Union is put on a sound contractual and financial basis to help ensure value for money from the proposed €40 million expenditure over four years.

High Speed Two

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): In January the Government announced that we would proceed with plans to build a high speed rail network linking London with Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester. High Speed 2 (HS2) will have a transformative effect on Britain, bringing cities closer together and providing the new transport capacity we need to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

We need to drive forward with this vital national project. In doing so we need to provide support for those facing the disruption that the plans for the railway are causing, while also protecting the interests of taxpayers who will ultimately pay for compensation. We have been clear throughout that we are committed to providing appropriate compensation and assistance for those affected by the building of HS2.

The statutory system of compensation already provides fair compensation for the vast majority of infrastructure schemes. However, given the particular circumstances of HS2, in this case I believe it is right to go above and beyond what is required by law. Today I am launching a generous proposed compensation and support package for public consultation.

Under the proposals set out today all those living closest to the route of HS2, in the so-called "safeguarded area", will be able to choose to sell their home to the Government—whether it is required for construction or not—at any time after the HS2 route is safeguarded, which is currently expected to happen in spring 2013. Those choosing to sell their homes will receive its full unblighted value (that is, what the property would have been worth had there been no plans for HS2), a home loss payment of 10% of the value of the property (up to a maximum of £47,000) and be reimbursed for reasonable moving costs, including stamp duty on the purchase of a new property of equivalent value.

In rural areas we will establish a “voluntary purchase zone”, extending out from the boundary of the safeguarded area up to 120 metres either side of the line, within which homeowners will have the option to sell their homes to the Government at their full unblighted value at any time after the HS2 route is safeguarded.

For those living beyond both the safeguarded area and voluntary purchase zone but who need to move house during the development of HS2 and find they are unable to sell their property, there will also be a “long term hardship scheme” under which the Government will buy the homes of successful applicants at their full unblighted value.

In addition, under the new sale and rent back scheme, homeowners whose property will need to be acquired will have the option to sell their homes to the Government early and stay in them as tenants until the properties are required for the railway.

We recognise that the owners of properties above tunnels may also be concerned about the potential impact of HS2 and therefore we are bringing in a series of measures designed to provide confidence in these properties.

Finally, we will work with local authorities, housing associations and affected tenants to agree a joint strategy to replace any social housing which is lost.

I must stress that we have already written directly to all those whose homes we currently expect to need to buy in order to build and operate HS2 on the London—west

midlands route. The wide-ranging proposals set out today reflect the significant nature of the concern that currently exists in the property markets near the HS2 line of route, they are not a reflection of what the Government believe the long term impacts of HS2 will be. We fully expect that the impacts of HS2 will be considerably less than feared and that property prices will recover over time. However, we recognise that the current property markets near the HS2 line of route may not reflect this.

HS2 will be the backbone of a new transport system for the 21st century, offering the new railway capacity that our country will need to compete and grow. However, we fully recognise that the line will have unwelcome impacts on people living close to the route and I believe that this package of compensation demonstrates the strength of the Government’s commitment to provide the right compensation and assistance to those affected.

Alongside the property consultation published today, we are also publishing a consultation on safeguarding directions for HS2. This will set out the proposed area of land considered necessary to protect the line of route from conflicting developments, that is to say planning permission being granted for developments on land that will be required for the construction or operation of HS2. This will also set the “safeguarded area” within which compensation measures will apply.

Both consultations will close on 31 January 2013.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 25 October 2012

DEFENCE

Aircraft Carriers

Mr Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to use US ISTAR air assets with the Queen Elizabeth class of carrier. [123829]

Mr Dunne: There are no current plans to operate US ISTAR assets from the Queen Elizabeth class carrier; but the ship has the ability to operate with the US ISTAR assets subject to a range of agreements and the nature of the operation which the UK and US would be undertaking.

Apprentices

Mike Crockart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many apprentices working in his Department are (a) paid and (b) completing a qualification as part of the apprenticeship; [123075]

(2) how many (a) paid apprentices and (b) paid interns are employed in his Department. [123076]

Mr Francois: As at 17 October 2012, there were 172 apprentices on the Ministry of Defence (MOD) civilian payroll, all of whom are paid and working towards qualifications as part of their apprenticeship. The MOD employed five interns for an eight-week period in the summer of 2012, all of whom were paid.

Armed Forces

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many foreign and commonwealth armed forces personnel there were in the UK armed forces, by country and service, in the latest period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [122509]

Mr Francois: The following table shows the strength of UK armed forces personnel by service and nationality, at 1 September 2012:

		Total	Naval service	Army	RAF
Total		179,320	34,900	105,720	38,700
UK	Total	166,460	34,090	93,860	38,510
	British	166,170	34,080	93,580	38,500
	British Hong Kong	100	—	100	—
	British Overseas Territory Citizen	200	10	180	10
Non-UK	Total	12,860	800	11,860	190

	Total	Naval service	Army	RAF
Antiguan	—	—	—	—
Australian	80	20	60	10
Austrian	—	—	—	—
Bahamian	—	—	—	—
Bangladeshi	20	—	20	—
Barbadian	10	—	10	—
Belgian	—	—	—	—
Belizean	50	—	50	—
Bermudan	—	—	—	—
Botswanan	30	—	30	—
Cameroonian	100	—	100	—
Canadian	60	20	40	—
Citizen of Fiji	2,260	140	2,110	10
Citizen of Seychelles	20	—	20	—
Citizen of Sri Lanka	20	—	20	—
Citizen of St Christopher (St Kitts) and Nevis	—	—	—	—
Citizen of Vanuatu	—	—	—	—
Dominican	40	10	30	—
Dutch	—	—	—	—
Gambian	320	20	300	—
German	—	—	—	—
Ghanaian	910	10	900	—
Gibraltarian	—	—	—	—
Grenadian	150	10	140	—
Guyanese	20	—	20	—
Indian	150	—	140	—
Irish	490	60	400	30
Jamaican	460	30	420	10
Kenyan	270	10	250	—
Lesotho	—	—	—	—
Malawian	250	10	240	—
Malaysian	10	—	—	—
Maltese	10	—	10	—
Mauritanian	—	—	—	—
Mauritian	70	—	60	—
Namibian	—	—	—	—
Nepalese	4,160	—	4,160	—
New Zealander	80	10	60	10
Nigerian	250	10	230	—
Norwegian	—	—	—	—
Pakistani	20	—	20	—
Papua New Guinean	—	—	—	—
Polish	—	—	—	—
Rwandan	—	—	—	—
Sierra Leonean	40	—	40	—
Singaporean	—	—	—	—
South African	910	110	790	10
St Helenian	10	—	10	—
St Lucian	280	10	270	—
Swazi	20	—	20	—
Tanzanian	10	—	10	—
Tongan	10	—	10	—

	Total	Naval service	Army	RAF
Trinidad and Tobago citizen	100	30	60	10
Ugandan	90	—	90	—
United States citizen	—	—	—	—
Vincentian	570	240	330	—
Yugoslavian	—	—	—	—
Zambian	50	10	40	—
Zimbabwean	350	20	320	10
Unknown	80	—	10	70

Armed Forces Covenant

Dr McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the armed forces covenant includes soldiers and veterans from Northern Ireland. [124229]

Mr Francois [*holding answer 22 October 2012*]: The Armed Forces Covenant extends to members of the armed forces community wherever they originate and wherever they live in the United Kingdom.

Armed Forces: Business Interests

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the procedure is for briefing retired senior military personnel on the rules regarding business appointments. [123284]

Mr Francois: The rules regarding business appointments for retiring and retired members of the armed forces are

regulated by the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments. On appointment/promotion to OF6 (1 star) level in the armed forces, military officers are required to sign an acknowledgement that they have seen the rules contained in this policy document. A similar acknowledgement is requested on retirement or resignation from the armed forces.

Armed Forces: Children

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what funding under the Barnett consequential has been given to the Welsh Assembly Government by his Department for the implementation of the Service Pupil Premium in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [122939]

Danny Alexander: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Treasury.

Funding for the Service Pupil Premium was allocated to Department for Education at the 2010 spending review and therefore was taken into account in determining the Welsh Government Block Grant for the spending review period.

Armed Forces: Courts Martial

Duncan Hames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many courts martial were conducted in each rank range of each armed service in each year between 2000 and 2011. [122567]

Mr Francois: The information on the number of courts martial by Service conducted in each year between 2000 and 2011, for the years it is available, is shown in the following table:

Service	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Army	454	632	505	471	522	645	530	653	646	522	535	549
Royal Air Force	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	50	31	31	18
Royal Navy/Royal Marines	1	1	1	1	61	53	55	50	45	51	68	57

¹ Not known.

This information is broken down by grade in each Service, where it is available in the following table:

Courts martial by rank 2000-11

		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
<i>Army</i>														
Colonel	OF-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	0	5
Lieutenant Colonel	OF-4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Major	OF-3	3	4	3	0	0	2	2	4	2	2	0	2	24
Captain	OF-2	2	5	3	5	2	5	2	3	3	1	2	1	34
Lieutenant	OF-1	1	0	3	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	9
2 Lieutenant	OF-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Warrant Officer 1	OR-9	1	1	3	0	2	2	1	0	0	3	3	0	16
Warrant Officer 2	OR-8	6	4	5	4	4	6	4	3	7	5	8	4	60
Staff Sergeant	OR-7	8	18	8	8	9	14	4	12	11	8	2	12	114
Sergeant	OR-6/5	18	24	25	16	28	22	23	28	16	17	16	14	247
Corporal	OR-4	41	79	38	41	60	65	56	51	50	45	37	41	604
Lance Corporal	OR-3	56	76	57	64	65	84	66	82	81	71	65	70	837
Private	OR-2/1	316	411	356	327	351	434	465	465	475	465	394	405	4,864
Civilian ¹	N/A	2	9	4	5	1	10	7	2	—	3	5	—	48

Courts martial by rank 2000-11

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Total	454	632	505	471	522	645	630	653	646	622	535	549	6,864

¹ Civilians subject to Army/Service discipline.

Notes: 1. The Army figures include Royal Marines up to 31 October 2009.

2. Army OR-2/1 includes all variations of the lowest Army rank.

		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
<i>Royal Navy</i>														
Captain	OF-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Commander	OF-4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
Lieutenant Commander	OF-3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Lieutenant	OF-2	0	¹ —	0	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	3	0	9
Second Lieutenant	OF-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Midshipman	OF-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Warrant Officer 1	OR-9	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Warrant Officer 2	OR-8	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chief Petty Officer	OR-7	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	0	1	0	2	8
Petty Officer	OR-6/5	0	0	0	0	5	4	3	8	3	1	3	5	32
Leading Hand	OR-4	0	0	0	0	8	15	7	12	8	13	8	14	85
Able Seaman	OR-2/1	0	0	0	0	44	39	38	28	34	36	44	30	293
Total		0	0	0	0	61	63	55	50	45	51	61	53	439

¹No records

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
<i>Royal Marines</i>													
Captain	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Warrant Officer	0	0	¹ —	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Colour Sergeant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Sergeant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Corporal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Lance Corporal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Marine	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	3	3
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	4	11

¹ Included in Army.

Information on the ranks of RAF personnel who have faced court martial is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Duncan Hames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many defendants of each rank and in each service in courts martial pleaded (a) not guilty, (b) guilty, (c) not guilty and were convicted, (d) not guilty, were convicted and subsequently appealed to the Court Martial Appeal Court, (e) not guilty, were convicted, subsequently appealed to the Court Martial Appeal Court and were acquitted and (f) not guilty, were convicted, subsequently appealed to the Court Martial Appeal Court and had their sentence reduced in each year between 2000 and 2011; and what the case names of neutral citation references were in cases where the Court Martial Appeal Court acquitted or reduced a sentence. [122607]

Mr Francois: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Armed Forces: Disciplinary Proceedings

Duncan Hames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many summary hearings were conducted in each rank of each armed service in each year between 2000 and 2011; and at what level such hearings were conducted. [122568]

Mr Francois: The information on the number of hearings, for the years where this is available, is provided in the following tables. A breakdown by rank could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Royal Navy

The following table shows how many summary trials and appeals were held between 2001 and 2011. These figures do not represent personnel, but rather the number of hearings and appeals.

	Summary trials	Summary appeal court
2001	2,498	21

	Summary trials	Summary appeal court
2002	2,396	17
2003	3,049	7
2004	2,609	5
2005	2,442	11
2006	2,677	15
2007	2,004	5
2008	1,624	10
2009	1,152	12
2010	1,327	18
2011	1,290	11
Total	23,068	132

These figures represent both Royal Navy and Royal Marine Corps personnel dealt with under the Navy Chain of Command. Royal Marines dealt with by the Army Chain of Command are not included in these figures. The summary trial figures only represent those found guilty. Discontinued or acquitted summary trial results were not recorded prior to 2010.

Army

The following table shows how many proven summary hearings and appeals were held between 2001 and 2011. The figures for 2001 to 2004 are approximate as the legacy database that stored these figures is not considered fully accurate.

	Summary hearings	Summary appeal court
2001	12,043	343
2002	12,518	326
2003	12,078	363
2004	11,600	327
2005	7,138	300
2006	6,945	200
2007	5,711	160
2008	4,379	103
2009	4,973	112
2010	4,703	82
2011	4,930	102
Total	87,018	2,418

The above figures may include RN and RAF personnel who were dealt with under Army jurisdiction.

The significant drop in numbers from 2005 represents the introduction of warnings and sanctions. Before this, everything was conducted at the summary hearing.

Royal Air Force

The following table shows how many summary hearings, regardless of outcome, were held between 2009 and 2011. The RAF no longer retains the information requested on summary hearings prior to 2009. I can confirm there were 462 appeals between 2001 and 2011, but it is not possible to break this down by year.

	Summary hearings
2009	1
2010	27
2011	38
Total	66

Duncan Hames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what legal advice is provided to service personnel charged with an offence under (a) the summary hearing system and (b) the courts martial system; and what the public cost of such advice was in each of the last five years. [122569]

Mr Francois: All those who either elect for trial or lodge an appeal during a summary hearing and all those who are referred for court martial may apply to the Armed Forces Legal Aid Scheme for financial assistance towards legal support. The scheme is based upon the same principles as the civilian criminal legal aid system in England and Wales, and is designed to mirror it while making necessary adjustments for service life. As such, access to advice and representation provided by civilian legal representatives under the Armed Forces Legal Aid Scheme to service personnel is of the same level as that provided in civilian cases proceeding through the Crown court.

All applications to the Armed Forces Legal Aid Scheme are subject to a means test and those whose income, and where applicable, capital exceeds, the relevant thresholds may be required to contribute towards their legally aided costs where they are convicted or unsuccessful in appeal. The total cost of aid provided in each of the last five years is:

Financial year	£ million
2008-09	1.9
2009-10	2.1
2010-11	1.3
2011-12	1.4
2012-13 (up to 14 October 2012)	0.8

These are gross figures for each financial year and do not take account of monies reclaimed from convicted offenders and unsuccessful appellants by way of contributions.

Duncan Hames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many defendants in summary hearings pleaded (a) not guilty, (b) guilty, (c) not guilty and were convicted, (d) not guilty, were convicted and subsequently appealed to the Summary Appeals Court, (e) not guilty, were convicted, subsequently appealed to the Summary Appeals Court and were acquitted and (f) not guilty, were convicted, subsequently appealed to the Summary Appeals Court and had their sentence reduced. [122606]

Mr Francois: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Armed Forces: Morale

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the state of morale in the armed forces. [123654]

Mr Francois [holding answer 18 October 2012]: The principal measure in place to monitor changes in morale within the military is the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey, the findings of which are used extensively

in shaping policy for terms and conditions of service. The results of the 2012 survey were published on 23 August 2012.

In the 2012 survey, 42% of military personnel described their morale as 'high', 31% as 'neutral' and 28% as 'low'.

The recommendations of the strategic defence and security review have necessitated a series of tough decisions, including reshaping our armed forces as we move towards 'Future Force 2020'. While issues such as headcount reductions and pay restraint have inevitably had an impact on morale, I continue to be impressed by the dedication of our military personnel.

Armed Forces: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers who are currently operational exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

[122336]

Mr Francois: The Ministry of Defence takes the issue of mental health very seriously, and we will continue to offer a high standard of treatment and care to those who need it. In Afghanistan, a Field Mental Health Team (FMHT) provides assessment and treatment for our deployed personnel. Many of those who are assessed as having a mental disorder will be successfully treated by the FMHT, although those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (one of the most severe and uncommon disorders) would be removed from operational duties and returned to the UK for treatment.

The UK Armed Forces Mental Health Report Annual Summary shows that between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2011 (the most recent full 12-month summary available), 142 persons were assessed by the FMHT as having a form of mental disorder, none of which were PTSD. During the same period, 35 persons were aeromedically evacuated back to the UK from Afghanistan for psychiatric reasons. Of these, 24 were described as "mildly disturbed psychiatric patients", with the other 11 being classed as either "intermediate" or "severe".

Service personnel with PTSD, including those returned to the UK from operational deployment, will normally be referred to and treated in one of our 15 military Departments of Community Mental Health (plus centres overseas). These offer a wide range of psychiatric and psychological treatments, including medication, psychological therapies, and environmental adjustment where appropriate. In-patient care, when necessary, is provided in specialised psychiatric units under contract with the NHS.

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to reduce the incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder among former and serving soldiers.

[122337]

Mr Francois: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) takes the issue of mental health very seriously, and we recognise that operational deployments will inevitably expose personnel to stressful experiences. The psychological welfare of troops (which covers general well-being as well as mental health) is a fundamental chain of command responsibility, and personnel benefit greatly, in terms of mental health, by being within well-led units with good support from their colleagues.

Measures are in place to increase awareness at all levels and to mitigate the development of operational stresses. Primary preventative measures include selection for fitness at recruitment, provision of good leadership, and robust training for all personnel. Secondary preventative measures include psycho-education, use of Trauma Risk Management (TRiM), and post-operational stress management, all of which aim at early detection of problems. Unit-based non-healthcare professionals such as chaplains, TRiM practitioners and welfare staff also have a vital role in supporting the chain of command in maintaining a good state of mental health among unit personnel and in signposting those in need of treatment to the Defence Medical Services. The families of returning personnel are also offered advice on the possible after-effects of an operational deployment.

Another key aim is to reduce the stigma that is sometimes attached to mental illness, which is an issue in the civilian world as well as the armed forces. This is being actively addressed through such programmes as the Army's 'Don't Bottle It Up' campaign, and in the deployment briefings provided to personnel and their families. By encouraging people to come forward as soon as they begin to feel ill, we can provide treatment at an early stage and hopefully prevent the illness developing further or recurring at a later date, including after they have left the armed forces.

Personnel leaving the armed forces are given advice on seeking help at an early stage if they have concerns about their mental health. The MOD and Department of Health (DOH) are working together to improve the mental health care provided to ex-service personnel and veterans' mental health is an area which has received significant attention from this Government in the past two years. Following the publication of the report by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison)—'Fighting Fit', the Government has committed £7.2 million over the remainder of the spending review period to implement its recommendations. Much work has already been completed, such as the launch of a 24-hour veterans telephone helpline, a trial of the online well-being service 'Big White Wall' and an e-learning package for NHS general practitioners to familiarise themselves with veteran-specific health problems.

There has been a doubling of the number of mental health professionals conducting veterans' outreach work to 30. In addition, the number of professionals working for Combat Stress in partnership with the NHS takes this total to nearer 50. Plans are in place to establish a national veterans' mental health clinical network.

Furthermore, each of the 10 Armed Forces Networks (based geographically in the old strategic health authority areas) has received £150,000 from the DOH with which to build up enhanced community veterans' mental health services in their areas. These services are now up and running in almost every region with the remainder planned to come on line by the end of this calendar year. These services were developed in conjunction with local groups, for the local population.

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department monitors the incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder in a military setting.

[122338]

Mr Francois: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) publishes the 'UK Armed Forces Mental Health Report' four times a year, which includes the numbers of patients attending a MOD Department of Community Mental Health (DCMH) who were initially assessed with post-traumatic stress disorder. The latest report, including previously unpublished data for the period 1 April to 30 June 2012, was published on 2 October 2012, and can be found at:

<http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=66xpubType=o>

Armed Forces: Prosthetics

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel were fitted with microprocessor-controlled prosthetic knees in specialist rehabilitation centres in each of the last five years. [124099]

Mr Francois: The Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC) at Headley Court prescribe and fit prosthetics for armed forces personnel. The first microprocessor knee prescribed by DMRC was in 2008. To date, 96 armed forces personnel have been prescribed microprocessor knees which were fitted by the DMRC.

The number of armed forces personnel prescribed and fitted by DMRC by year is as follows:

	<i>Armed forces personnel</i>
2008	5
2009	17
2010	42
2011	20
2012 ¹	12

¹ January to 18 October.

Armed Forces: Retirement

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions and for what reasons his Department's Permanent Secretary has met with retired senior armed forces personnel since May 2010. [123286]

Mr Francois: The Permanent Secretary's meetings with external organisations, including individuals external to Government, are published in accordance with the Cabinet Office's transparency guidelines on the Ministry of Defence website at the following link:

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/CorporatePublications/FinancialReports/Expenses/>

Armed Forces: Sexual Offences

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what training is provided to Commanding Officers in relation to the treatment of armed forces personnel who have reported a rape or sexual assault; and if he will make a statement; [122503]

(2) what (a) information and (b) training was made available to commanding officers regarding the implications of a guilty finding at a court martial or summary hearing following the implementation of the Armed Forces Act 2006; when such information or training was made available; and if he will make a statement. [123067]

Mr Francois: There is a designated course for commanding officers which includes briefing on their legal and disciplinary responsibilities, service complaints and the operation of the Service Justice System.

They are briefed on a Joint Service Publication which provides definitive advice for commanding officers on the treatment of armed forces personnel who are victims of crime, including an offence of a sexual nature.

There is no specific training relating to the implications of guilty findings at a court martial or summary hearing. However, the Manual of Service Law (MSL) provides extensive policy guidance and reference material on the Armed Forces Act 2006 to all those responsible for operating and administering the Service Justice System. This includes commanding officers, the service police forces, lawyers and court administrators. The MSL is available to all service personnel internally, via the Defence intranet, and to the general public through the MOD internet site. A copy of the MSL is in the Library of the House.

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussion he has had with veteran support agencies and charities who have worked with veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder linked to (a) sexual assault and (b) rape while serving in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [122617]

Mr Francois: Ministry of Defence officials meet regularly with a number of veteran support agencies and charities. During those meetings a number of topics are discussed, including post-traumatic stress and other forms of mental ill-health, but there is no record of specific discussions relating to post-traumatic stress disorder linked to sexual assault or rape.

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 18 September 2012, *Official Report*, column 616W, on armed forces: sexual offences, whether members of the armed forces who report a rape or sexual assault incident have access to civilian support services; and if he will make a statement. [122679]

Mr Francois: I can confirm that members of the armed forces who report a rape or sexual assault in the United Kingdom are entitled to access the full range of civilian support services available. This is in addition to the extensive network of single service support which is also available.

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many calls to the Speak Out helpline have been related to reports of (a) rape and (b) sexual assault in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement; [123116]

(2) how many calls to the Speak Out helpline have been made by foreign and Commonwealth armed forces personnel in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [123117]

Mr Francois: The Speak Out helpline provides support outside the Army chain of command relating to bullying, harassment and unfair treatment. Since the helpline opened in November 2010, it has handled one call related to sexual assault, which was made during 2012. It has received no calls relating to reported rapes.

The helpline does not record the nationality of callers, therefore it is not possible to state the number of calls made by foreign and Commonwealth personnel.

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what requirements and documentation his Department needs to meet claims by veterans for compensation as a result of (a) sexual assault and (b) rape that took place when they were serving in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [123293]

Mr Francois: When an individual is pursuing a compensation claim as a result of alleged sexual assault or rape, the Ministry of Defence would normally expect to see some or all of the following: proof of the claimant's involvement with the organisation against whom the claim is made, whether proof of employment or proof of contact with the organisation, e.g. membership of the cadets if the alleged abuser was a cadet leader; notification to the police of the allegations including a police statement and, possibly, police interview; evidence of other allegations, if there are any; and medical records indicating that the allegations have been disclosed outside of the litigation.

Armed Forces: Smallpox

Dan Byles: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many armed forces personnel are vaccinated against smallpox; [123160]

(2) how many Defence Medical Service personnel are vaccinated against smallpox. [123196]

Mr Francois: A small number of armed forces and Defence Medical Services personnel are vaccinated against smallpox. However the precise figures are not released into the public domain as its disclosure would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of the armed forces.

Armed Forces: Yemen

Mr Holloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British nationals of Yemeni origin serve in the armed forces; and how many such personnel are deployed in that region for their linguistic abilities. [123935]

Mr Francois: Around 20 armed forces personnel have declared that they were born in Yemen and hold British nationality.

None are currently deployed in the Yemeni region for their linguistic abilities.

Bale Baleiwai

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the proposed deportation of Lance Corporal Bale Baleiwai. [122380]

Mr Francois: The issue of deportation for any individual is a matter for the United Kingdom Border Agency and not for the Ministry of Defence (MOD). It is not appropriate to comment on individual cases. However, officials from the United Kingdom Border Agency and the MOD meet regularly to discuss a variety of issues including those relating to the immigration policy for Foreign and Commonwealth personnel.

Defence Munitions Longtown

Rory Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans are in place to protect the unique resource and skilled workforce at Defence Munitions Longtown. [124374]

Mr Dunne: A ministerial decision on the future of Defence Munitions operations at Longtown is expected to be made in the near future.

Defence Technology Centres

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much funding his Department gave to each defence technology centre in each of the last five years. [123609]

Mr Dunne: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) placed contracts for four Defence Technology Centres (DTCs): Defence Information Fusion (DIF) DTC, which expired in March 2009, Electromagnetic Remote Sensing (EMRS) DTC, which expired in May 2010, Human Factors Integration (HFI) DTC, which expired in March 2012, and Systems Engineering for Autonomous Systems (SEAS) DTC, which expired in March 2012. The MOD's annual spend on each DTC contract over the last five years is shown in the following table.

	DTC				
	£ million (Exclusive of VAT at current prices)				
	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
DIF	5.0	4.9	—	—	—
EMRS	5.9	5.0	5.4	—	—
HFI	3.1	2.8	3.3	2.5	3.6
SEAS	6.2	5.2	5.0	3.8	1.8

Elbit Systems

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which (a) Ministers, (b) civil servants and (c) senior military personnel have worked on contracts between his Department and Elbit Systems since May 2010. [123922]

Mr Dunne: Four Ministry of Defence civil servants worked on one Ministry of Defence contract placed with Elbit Systems. That contract was signed on 1 December 2010.

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts Elbit Systems has agreed with his Department since May 2010; and what the monetary value is of each contract. [123923]

Mr Dunne: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has agreed one contract with Elbit Systems since May 2010. Contract Apache 020 with Elbit Systems of America, worth \$127,420, signed on 1 December 2010, was for the procurement of 42 visors for Apache helicopter crew helmets.

This contract, as with all equipment programmes, is overseen by an internal MOD Committee chaired by the Director General of Finance with majority civilian

membership. This committee has an independent scrutiny team which reports to Ministers and the permanent secretary. The equipment plan is reviewed by both the committee and the scrutiny team on a quarterly basis, when all new projects are heavily scrutinised.

Hong Kong

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for (a) the Home Department and (b) Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on granting UK passports and right of abode to people from Hong Kong who served as enlisted members of the Army during the period of UK rule. [122957]

Mr Francois: There have been no recent discussions with either the Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), or the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), about granting UK passports or right of abode for people from Hong Kong who enlisted in the Army during British rule. Issues of nationality and immigration are matters for the Home Office.

Joint Strike Fighter Aircraft

Mr Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which other countries were involved in the (a) procurement process and (b) purchase of the Joint Strike Fighter. [123259]

Mr Dunne: The partner nations involved in the procurement and purchase of Joint Strike Fighter are USA, UK, Australia, Canada, Italy, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands and Turkey.

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the combat range is for the (a) F-35B and (b) F-35C. [123529]

Mr Dunne: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Peter Luff), gave on 3 July 2012, *Official Report*, column 626W, to the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson).

Mr Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many joint strike fighters will be for the exclusive use of the Royal Air Force. [123580]

Mr Dunne: The UK Joint Strike Fighter (Lightning) capability will be jointly manned by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. The Lightning Force will be held at high readiness to be deployed from land or sea as required by Defence.

Aircraft numbers are due to be confirmed as part of the next Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2015.

Marchwood Sea Mounting Centre

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 12 July 2012, *Official Report*, columns 41-2WS, on Marchwood Sea Mounting Centre, (1) what assessment

he has made of the effect that the privatisation of this facility will have on the (a) operational activities, (b) operational effectiveness and (c) training programmes of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary; [124266]

(2) which Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels docked at Marchwood in each of the last three years; and what the vessel's task or purposes was on each such occasion. [124267]

Mr Robathan: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by the previous Minister for Defence Equipment, Support and Technology, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Peter Luff), on 12 July 2012, *Official Report*, column 42W, in which he makes clear, our intention that the arrangements we are putting into place for Marchwood Sea Mounting Centre will take account of planned and contingent defence activity and will therefore not affect the operational activities and effectiveness of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. The Royal Fleet Auxiliary does not focus training on or around Marchwood Sea Mounting Centre and therefore any change of status is anticipated to have no effect on their training.

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels which docked at Marchwood in each of the last three years are shown in the following table:

<i>Unit</i>	<i>Task</i>
<i>2009</i>	
Lyme Bay	Alongside
Mounds Bay	Embarkation
Lyme Bay	Embarkation
Mounds Bay	Disembark
Diligence	De-store
Largs Bay	Embarkation
Largs Bay	Disembark
Mounds Bay	Embarkation
<i>2010</i>	
Largs Bay	Alongside
Largs Bay	Cargo load
Largs Bay	Cargo load
Mounds Bay	Disembark
Largs Bay	Cargo offload
Largs Bay	Embarkation
Largs Bay	Alongside
<i>2011</i>	
Cardigan Bay	Alongside
Cardigan Bay	Embarkation
Mounds Bay	Embarkation
Mounds Bay	Embarkation
Mounds Bay	Disembark
Cardigan Bay	Disembark
Mounds Bay	Exercise Hawser Link
Mounds Bay	Cargo load
Mounds Bay	November Ceremonies

Military Aid

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which countries have hosted a British Military Advisory Training Team since 2007; and in each such case on what dates and at what costs. [123895]

Mr Robathan [*holding answer 22 October 2012*]: British Military Advisory Training Teams are small military teams based permanently within the country

where they are delivering military training and advice. The following table also shows other permanent small military teams that have delivered similar effect since 2007.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Operating costs</i>	
			<i>Year</i>	<i>£ million</i>
Czech Republic	British Military Advisory Training Team	2000-present	2007-08	13.0
			2008-09	2.9
			2009-10	2.2
			2010-11	2.3
			2011-12	2.3
Ghana	British Military Advisory Training Team	Until 2010	2007-08	1.4
			2008-09	1.4
			2009-10	20.4
Jordan	British Military Advisory Training Team	2010-present		3—
Kenya	British Peace Support Team (East Africa)	2000 ⁴ -present	2007-08	2.8
			2008-09	3.1
			2009-10	2.8
			2010-11	2.5
			2011-12	2.5
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	Royal Naval Liaison Team	1986-present		3—
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	British Military Mission to the Saudi Arabian National Guard	1964-present		3—
Kuwait	British Military Mission	1992-present		3—
Libya	Defence Advisory Team	January 2012-present	2012	51.1
Nigeria	British Military Advisory Training Team	2008-present	2007-08	62.0
			2008-09	0.9
			2009-10	0.6
			2010-11	0.8
			2011-12	0.9
Oman	British Loan Service Team	1970s-present		3—
Qatar	British Loan Service Team	2009-present		3—
Sierra Leone	International Military Advisory Training Team	2000-present	2007-08	12.0
			2008-09	6.8
			2009-10	7.0
			2010-11	6.8
			2011-12	4.8
South Africa	British Peace Support Team (South Africa)	2003-present	2007-08	0.9
			2008-09	0.6
			2009-10	0.7
			2010-11	1.3
			2011-12	1.4

Country	Organisation	Dates	Operating costs	
			Year	£ million
United Arab Emirates	British Loan Services Team	2001-present		3__

¹ Annual budget allocation. Costs include a small element of training provided by external teams.

² Costs for completing training courses and extraction of team.

³ Host country pays.

⁴ Originally established as British Army Training Team (Kenya).

⁵ Annual platform costs and operational costs.

⁶ Last year of BMATs predecessor organisation—the British Defence Advisory Team, Nigeria.

Military Aircraft: Helicopters

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many helicopters belonging to each of the armed services are in (a) the UK, (b) Afghanistan and (c) other locations. [124283]

Mr Dunne [holding answer 22 October 2012]: The total number of helicopters currently in service with the armed forces is shown in the following table:

Service	UK	Other Locations ¹
Royal Navy	129	0
Army	120	15
Royal Air Force	125	2

¹ Other locations where helicopters are permanently based are the Falklands, Germany, Brunei and Canada.

Of those helicopters permanently based in the UK a proportion will be deployed on operations and exercises. However, I am withholding the actual number of helicopters deployed in Afghanistan as disclosure would, or would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of the armed forces.

Navy: Pay

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce the salaries of senior officers in the Royal Navy. [122280]

Mr Francois: There are no plans to reduce the salaries of senior officers in the Royal Navy.

Reserve Forces: Employment

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how he plans to encourage employers to release reservists for the required extended periods of service; and what incentives and rewards he plans to provide. [122630]

Mr Francois [holding answer 17 October 2012]: A greater reliance on reserves will demand a closer relationship that benefits Defence, the employer and the reservist. We want to move towards relationships with employers based on partnering and giving greater predictability and certainty to when a reservist will be required for training or deployment.

The Ministry of Defence will examine the effects which the adoption of the Whole Force Concept will have on employers, through the Future Reserves 2020 consultation exercise later this year. In spring 2013, following analysis of the responses, we expect to publish a White Paper detailing the future policy.

Royal Military Police: Sexual Offences

Duncan Hames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases of rape were reported to Royal Military Police in each year between 2001 and 2012; how many such cases proceeded to courts martial in each year; and in how many such cases of these cases the Service Prosecuting Authority (or its antecedent bodies) secured a conviction. [122566]

Mr Francois: In the event of an allegation of rape being made against a member of the armed forces serving overseas, the appropriate service police for each of the three services will usually investigate; this is normally the Royal Military Police in respect of the Army. In the UK, however, while there may be concurrent jurisdiction, the civilian police usually have primacy for investigation.

Information relating to the number of rape allegations reported to the Royal Military Police against members of the Army for them to investigate is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The following table details the number of courts-martial and number of convictions of Army personnel for rape and attempted rape:

	Number of courts-martial of Army personnel for rape and attempted rape	Number of convictions at courts-martial of Army personnel for rape and attempted rape
2001	6	12
2002	4	0
2003	2	1
2004	1	1
2005	6	2
2006	1	1
2007	5	1
2008	4	1
2009	3	1
2010	10	2
2011	4	3
2012 (to date)	6	2

¹ One was later quashed on appeal

These data may include civilians under Army jurisdiction across the period and, until October 2009, Royal Marines.

Sir John Kiszely

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any brigadiers have met Sir John Kiszely in an official capacity since May 2010. [123926]

Mr Philip Hammond: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Territorial Army

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce the average age of the reserve forces by encouraging younger people to join the Territorial Army. [122428]

Mr Francois: The Territorial Army (TA) currently recruits officers and soldiers from the age of 18. There are no specific plans to reduce the average age of those currently serving in the TA but the TA are currently recruiting to achieve the manning required for them to become an integrated part of the Army under the Army 2020 plans. The TA offers interesting and challenging opportunities for a wide range of individuals; applications from young adults are encouraged.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 14 September 2012, *Official Report*, column 418W, in which I stated the Army intends to spend £5 million in financial year (FY) 2012-13 on the TA recruiting campaign and are now drawing up plans for the marketing campaigns in FY 2013-14.

Current incentives for younger people include the Officer Training Corps which is part of the TA and whose purpose is to develop the leadership potential of university students, raising awareness of the Army and building interest in its career opportunities without obligation.

Mr Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider renaming the Territorial Army the Army Reserve to reflect its revised role. [123378]

Mr Francois: As announced by the Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), on 5 July 2012, *Official Report*, column 66WS, we are currently in the process of reshaping the Reserves for their future role as part of the integrated Army 2020 force. A Green Paper is being prepared, setting out proposals on how we can establish the right relationships with society as a whole, and with employers and reservists in particular, to sustain our Reserve Forces in the future.

Following consultation, we will be able to make informed decisions early next year. One of the areas being considered is renaming the Territorial Army as part of wider work to rebrand the Army's Reserve to better reflect its future roles in the integrated force. It should be noted that any future change to the name of the Territorial Army would ultimately require legislation.

Veterans

Karen Lumley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what support his Department provides to former service personnel to (a) help them find civilian work and (b) offer financial advice to them and their family. [124772]

Mr Francois: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer given by the Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), on 22 October 2012, *Official Report*, column 679, to the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Hazel Blears).

Advice given to service leavers includes "financial aspects of resettlement" briefings, to which spouses and partners are also invited, covering budget and debt management. Some 70 briefings are delivered across the UK and overseas each year. Included in the brief is advice on managing pension schemes and the charity-led 'Benefits and Money Advice' service.

Service leavers also have access to lifelong employment support through the Regular Forces Employment Association and Officers Association.

Veterans: Radiation Exposure

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent steps his Department has taken to reach agreement with nuclear test veterans over their claims for damages. [124518]

Mr Francois: There have been no recent steps by the Ministry of Defence to reach agreement over claims for damages in view of the Court of Appeal ruling in November 2010 and the Supreme Court ruling in March 2012 against the Atomic Veterans case proceeding.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Servants: Pensions

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he expects to bring forward legislative proposals to extend the New Deal proposals to allow members of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme who have been transferred to a private contractor under TUPE regulations to retain membership of the scheme. [122998]

Mr Maude: On 4 July 2012, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury announced in a written ministerial statement, *Official Report*, column 53WS, that the Government had reviewed the Fair Deal policy and agreed to maintain the overall approach, but deliver it by offering access to public service pension schemes for transferring staff. In order for access to be extended to the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme, it will be necessary to amend current legislation. The proposed amendment is contained in the Public Service Pensions Bill (clause 26 and schedule 9). Subject to being passed by both Houses and receiving Royal Assent the provision will come into force on the day the Act is passed (clause 37(1)(a)).

David Hartnett

Mr Godsiff: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what process HM Revenue and Customs followed to inform David Hartnett prior to his retirement as Permanent Secretary for Tax of the requirement to make an application under the Rules of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments when taking up employment outside government. [121945]

Mr Maude: It is for HMRC to remind all retiring employees of their obligations under the Business Appointment Rules, as set out in the Civil Service Management Code.

Duchy of Cornwall

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will publish the criteria used to determine when Departments and the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel should consult the Duchy of Cornwall to gain its consent before proceeding with primary legislation. [124758]

Miss Chloe Smith: The signification of the Queen's and the Prince of Wales's consent for certain Bills is a parliamentary requirement. The Cabinet Office 'Guide to Making Legislation' provides advice to Government Departments on seeking the Queen's and the Prince of Wales's consent and is available on the Cabinet Office website.

Embassies

Mr Spellar: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office which UK embassies and high commissions process applications for visas originating in other countries. [123386]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Home Department.

Although based in Foreign and Commonwealth Office premises, UK Border Agency officials process visa applications.

Decision-making hubs in the following locations process applications from outside their host country:

British high commissions: Accra (Ghana), Nairobi (Kenya), Kingston (Jamaica), New Delhi (India).

British deputy high commission: Chennai (India).

British consulate general: Pretoria (South Africa), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), New York (USA), Istanbul (Turkey).

British embassies: Bangkok (Thailand), Beijing (China), Belgrade (Serbia), Bogota (Colombia), Manila (Philippines), Cairo (Egypt), Abu Dhabi (UAE), Amman (Jordan), Rome (Italy), Warsaw (Poland), Madrid (Spain), Stockholm (Sweden), Paris (France).

An additional location for decision making is the UK Visa Section.

Employment Schemes

Stephen Timms: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will estimate how many people engaged in Government-supported employment and training programmes will enter employment in the next quarter. [124895]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson, dated October 2012:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking for an estimate of how many people engaged in Government-supported employment and training programmes will enter employment in the next quarter. (124895)

This information is not available, as the Office for National Statistics does not forecast estimates of employment.

Immigration: EU Nationals

Mr Stewart Jackson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how many people are resident in the UK under Article 12 of European Directive 2004/38/EC, on the grounds that their associated national from an EU country has departed the UK; [124745]

(2) of those nationals of other EU countries and their associated family members who are resident in the UK on the basis of Article 7(1)(a) of European Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of citizens of the EU and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of EU member states, how many are resident on the basis of (a) Article 7(3)(a), (b) Article 7(3)(b), (c) Article 7(3)(c) and (d) Article 7(3)(d) of that directive; [124249]

(3) how many nationals of other EU countries and their associated family members are resident in the UK on the basis of each of the following provisions of European Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of citizens of the EU and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of EU Member States (a) Article 6, (b) Article 7(1)(a), (c) Article 7(1)(b), (d) Article 7(1)(c) and (e) Article 14(4)(b). [124251]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson, dated October 2012:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking:

1. Of those nationals of other EU countries and their associated family members who are resident in the UK on the basis of Article 7(1)(a) of European Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of citizens of the EU and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of EU member states, how many are resident on the basis of (a) Article 7(3)(a), (b) Article 7(3)(b), (c) Article 7(3)(c) and (d) Article 7(3)(d) of that Directive. [124249]

2. How many nationals of other EU countries and their associated family members are resident in the UK on the basis of each of the following provisions of European Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of citizens of the EU and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of EU Member States (a) Article 6, (b) Article 7(1)(a), (c) Article 7(1)(b), (d) Article 7(1)(c) and (e) Article 14(4)(b). [124251]

3. How many people are resident in the UK under Article 12 of European Directive 2004/38/EC, on the grounds that their associated national from an EU country has departed the UK. [124745]

The Office for National Statistics collects data on nationality from the Labour force Survey (LFS), which is a household survey of residents of the UK. It should be noted the survey does not include people living in most types of communal establishment.

The LFS does not collect any information from respondents on the specific Article of the European Directive that allows them to reside in the UK. However, Table 1 provides figures on the number of nationals resident in the UK and their economic status.

Table 1: Economic activity of residents in the UK, by nationality, three months ending June 2012, United Kingdom, not seasonally adjusted

	In employment	ILO unemployed	Inactive	Aged 16 and over population	Population of people aged 0-15
UK nationals	26,834	2,263	17,293	46,390	10,927

Thousand

Table 1: Economic activity of residents in the UK, by nationality, three months ending June 2012, United Kingdom, not seasonally adjusted

	<i>In employment</i>	<i>ILO unemployed</i>	<i>Inactive</i>	<i>Aged 16 and over population</i>	<i>Population of people aged 0-15</i>
Non-UK EU nationals	1,398	107	436	1,990	388
Non-UK Non-EU nationals	1,130	148	769	2,093	333
Total	29,414	2,519	18,569	50,502	11,655

Note:

Includes people who have not stated their nationality.

Source:

Labour Force Survey

Nottinghamshire

Mr Spencer: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what ministerial visits to (a) the City of Nottingham and (b) Nottinghamshire have taken place since May 2010. [121767]

Mr Maude: Diary information for all Ministers is not held centrally. However, as part of this Government's transparency programme meetings with external organisations and individuals are published on departmental websites.

Older Workers

Martin Horwood: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will estimate the number of people over 65 who have formed part of the working population in each of the last 30 years. [124920]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson, dated October 2012:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking for the number of people over 65 who have formed part of the working population in each of the last 30 years. [124920]

The table shows the number of people aged 65 and over in employment for each year from 1993 to 2011. There are no annual figures available for this series prior to 1993.

These estimates are sourced from the Labour Force Survey, a survey of households. There is a degree of uncertainty associated with these estimates as is the case with all estimates derived from sample surveys. The sampling variability attached to the estimate of 872,000 people for 2011 is +/- 74,000.

	<i>Number of people in employment aged 65 and over</i>
	<i>Number (thousand)</i>
1993	425
1994	429
1995	444
1996	419
1997	438
1998	434
1999	457
2000	450
2001	445
2002	479
2003	522
2004	538
2005	580
2006	625
2007	642
2008	694

Number of people in employment aged 65 and over

	<i>Number (thousand)</i>
2009	740
2010	832
2011	*872

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:

* $0 \leq CV < 5\%$ —Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered precise

** $5 \leq CV < 10\%$ —Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered reasonably precise

*** $10 \leq CV < 20\%$ —Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered acceptable

**** $CV \geq 20\%$ —Statistical R

Note:

The above estimates exclude people in most types of communal establishment (e.g. hotels, boarding houses, hostels mobile home sites etc.)

Source:

Labour Force Survey

Terrorism: Greater London

John Mann: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many complaints his Department has received about the 7 July London terrorist bombings from victims or victims' families that remain unresolved. [123402]

James Brokenshire: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Home Department.

The Home Office is the lead Government Department on the cross-Government response to the London bombings of 7 July 2005. Investigations indicate that the Department does not have any outstanding correspondence with either the victims or victims' families.

The Home Office understands that there remain three outstanding claims with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority which relate to the 7/7 bombings. The Ministry of Justice in England has lead Government responsibility for the authority.

The Government submitted a formal response to the coroner in June 2011, and a report was published on 21 May 2012 setting out what progress had been made since June 2011 by the Government and by other organisations in response to the coroner's recommendations and other comments.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Anti-slavery Day

Mr Bone: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities what steps the Government is taking to promote anti-slavery day. [123680]

Mr Harper: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Home Department.

Ministers from the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on human trafficking, including myself, undertook a range of activities to raise awareness of this important issue.

SCOTLAND

Cleaning Services

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to require all cleaning contracts held by his Department to stipulate that the cleaning products used and their ingredients should not have been tested on animals. [125025]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office does not contract for cleaning services. Cleaning services are obtained through central procurement contracts set up by the Scottish Government and the Ministry of Justice.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Council Tax

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) how the freeze in the council tax grant for 2013-14 will be calculated for each local authority; [124824]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the methodology which calculated the amount of the 2013-14 council tax freeze grant on the basis of a one per cent increase in council tax. [124893]

Brandon Lewis: The Government's press notice of 8 October set out the details of the scheme:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/press_89_12.htm

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how the council tax freeze grant for 2013-14 will be funded; whether any money will be top-sliced from the 2013-14 Local Government Finance settlement to contribute to the grant; and if he will make a statement. [124896]

Brandon Lewis: As the Government's press notice of 8 October said, the Government will set aside an extra £450 million to help freeze council tax bills in England:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/press_89_12.htm

This will be funded as part of the autumn statement package.

Council Tax Benefits

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) what estimate he has made of the likely change in the number of people of working age claiming council tax benefit between 2010-11 and 2013-14 in each local authority area; [124049]

(2) what estimate he has made of the likely change in the number of claims for council tax benefit in the year 2013-14 for each local authority area; and if he will place in the Library copies of all relevant documentation used in making that estimate. [124050]

Brandon Lewis [holding answer 19 October 2012]: The change in the number of working age claimants by local authority for council tax benefit between 2010-11 and 2013-14 is not available. National forecasts by the Department for Work and Pensions indicate that council tax benefit caseload (the average number in receipt), for those below state pension age, in England, will fall from 2012-13 to 2013-14.

This does not take into account the potential benefits from localisation, which will give councils new incentives to help people get back into work and off benefits.

Electric Cables

Chris Williamson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what discussions he has had with UK electrical cabling manufacturers on preventing the import and installation of counterfeit or falsely marked electrical cabling. [121604]

Michael Fallon: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

Officials from BIS and its predecessor Department have been discussing the issue of unsafe cables with UK manufacturers since 2009. This directly led to a market surveillance investigation into the state of the market by the Health and Safety Executive which concluded that while some cable did not meet the standards it claimed it was generally not unsafe and complied with product safety legislation. Industry representatives have also attended the Market Surveillance Co-ordination Committee Stakeholder Group which discusses the UK's strategic approach to market surveillance in relation to product safety.

Marketing falsely marked products to businesses in the UK would fall within the scope of the Business Protection from Misleading Marketing Regulations 2008 which are enforced by local authority trading standards services.

Empty Property: Lancaster

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will place in the Library a copy of the bid form submitted to his Department by Lancaster city council for the Clusters of Empty Homes Funding outlining its commitment to match funding for the scheme. [123656]

Mr Foster [holding answer 18 October 2012]: A copy of Lancaster city council's application for funding for the Clusters of Empty Homes programme will be placed in the Library of the House.

Fire Services

Chris Williamson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) whether any decision has been made on funding for the Fire and Rescue Service in 2013-14; [124443]

(2) when he plans to make decisions on funding for Fire and Rescue Service in 2013-14. [124444]

Brandon Lewis: We expect the Local Government Finance settlement for 2013-14 to be announced in late December after the autumn statement.

Chris Williamson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the evidential basis is that will inform his decision on fire and rescue service funding for 2013-14. [124643]

Brandon Lewis: The basis for the Business Rates Retention scheme under which fire and rescue authorities will be funded was set out in the recent technical consultation on Business Rates Retention that began on 17 July and ended on 24 September 2012. The consultation is available at

<http://www.local.communities.gov.uk/finance/brr/sumcon/index.htm>

We will also take into account any broader representations on fire funding and the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2013-14.

Housing

Martin Horwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what criteria in respect of (a) housing need and (b) housing demand his Department requires to be used in drawing up local plans. [124902]

Mr Prisk: The Government's planning policies for housing are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. Local planning authorities should prepare a Strategic Housing Market Assessment to assess their full housing needs, working with neighbouring authorities where housing market areas cross administrative boundaries. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment should identify the scale and mix of housing and the range of tenures that the local population is likely to need over the plan period which: meets household and population projections, taking account of migration and demographic change; addresses the need for all types of housing, including affordable housing, and the needs of different groups in the community; and caters for housing demand and the scale of housing supply necessary to meet this demand.

Local planning authorities should use their evidence base to ensure that their local plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, as far as is consistent with the policies set out in the framework.

Housing: Construction

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer of 17 October 2012, *Official Report*, column 304W, on housing: construction, what questions Glenigan ask of developers (a) to ascertain the commercial unviability of sites and (b) in respect of the effect on viability of affordable housing requirements. [124918]

Mr Prisk: Glenigan Researchers contact developers about individual sites with planning permission and ask 'is the site going ahead', if the response is 'no' they are asked 'why' and the individual response is then recorded in free text.

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer of 17 October 2012, *Official Report*, column 304W, on housing: construction, if he will place in the Library a copy of the Glenigan database. [124919]

Nick Boles: The Glenigan database is not publicly available and therefore a copy cannot be placed in the Library of the House. Glenigan—<http://www.glenigan.com/>—is a private company which supplies its customers with information on the status of planning applications and tracks UK construction developments through to completion. This information is supplied purely for internal business use by its clients. Under its licence agreement with the Homes and Communities Agency, Glenigan allows DCLG to publish information on the number of stalled residential sites at a national level.

More detailed information is available commercially from Glenigan.

Local Government Finance

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the percentage change in formula grant in real terms was for each local authority between 1997-98 and 2009-10. [123700]

Brandon Lewis [*holding answer 18 October 2012*]: Meaningful, like-for-like comparisons for individual local authorities over the period cannot be made, due to changes in the function, structure and funding of local government from 1997-98 to 2009-10.

Planning Permission: Appeals

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what proportion of planning decisions made by each planning authority in England have been overturned on appeal in each of the last 10 years. [124511]

Nick Boles: The proportion of planning decisions overturned on appeal is not centrally available.

The Planning Inspectorate publish information on the number of appeals by local authority, including the proportion that have been allowed. This can be found at:

<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/planning/planninginspectorate/statistics>

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Digital Broadcasting

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what measures she is taking to promote the development and use of (a) international and (b) national digital television standards in the UK's digital industries. [124584]

Mr Vaizey [*holding answer 24 October 2012*]: The Government continues to maintain direct links with the formal standards bodies that cover television standards, i.e. the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI), and we also maintain an ongoing engagement with the Digital Television Group (DTG), Intellect and UK broadcasters. This enables us to maintain our visibility of future television technology and standardisation developments and provides the assurance that European and international television standardisation efforts remain linked and relevant to the UK market.

Government Art Collection Advisory Committee

Margaret Curran: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport on what date the most recent meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection took place. [124908]

Mr Vaizey: The most recent meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection took place on 12 July 2012.

Music: Tickets

Christopher Pincher: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport whether she plans to review the regulation of the ticket resale market for music and other popular cultural events to ensure a supply of reasonably priced tickets to customers. [122372]

Hugh Robertson: The Government has no plans to regulate the ticketing market. We will, however, continue to monitor this area, and, if new evidence comes forward of severe market failures that need addressing, we will review this position.

Richard III

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what plans her Department has for the potential burial of the remains of King Richard III. [122379]

Mrs Grant: My Department issued a licence to exhume human remains which could be those of Richard III. Remains have now been exhumed and archaeologists are currently carrying out tests to determine the identity of the remains. Should they be found to be those of Richard III, the current plan is for them to be reinterred in Leicester Cathedral.

Television: Sports

Mr David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what assessment her Department has made of the potential link between high profile sporting events being broadcast free-to-air and participation in amateur sports. [124507]

Mr Vaizey: In 2009, as part of the Department's review of free-to-air listed events, the independent panel addressed the impact of listing on participation, and the widespread assumption that the larger the audience that watched top-level sport, the greater the impact on

participation and excellence at grassroots level. The panel commissioned two research projects—the British Market Research Bureau's 'Free-to-air events—Understanding the Public's Views' and Frontier Economics' 'The Impact of Listed Events on the Viewing and Funding of Sports'. The findings from both, which can be found at the following link:

http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/6434.aspx

could not establish any causality between participating in sport and viewing habits.

PRIME MINISTER

Leveson Inquiry

Chris Bryant: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to the answer of 19 October 2012, *Official Report*, column 449W, on the Leveson Inquiry and with reference to his letter of 18 October 2012 to the right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham, (1) if he will place in the Library all (a) texts, (b) emails and (c) details of any form of communication between himself and Rebekah Brooks since May 2010; [124827]

(2) if he will place in the Library all (a) texts, (b) emails and (c) other forms of communication between himself and Andy Coulson between 23 January 2011 to date; [124828]

(3) how many (a) texts, (b) emails and (c) other forms of communication between himself and (i) Rebekah Brooks, (ii) Andy Coulson, (iii) Rupert Murdoch and (iv) James Murdoch since May 2010 have not been provided to the Leveson Inquiry or put in the public domain; [124829]

(4) if he will place in the Library a copy of the criteria used to determine whether (a) texts, (b) emails and (c) other forms of communication between himself and (i) Rebekah Brooks, (ii) Andy Coulson and (iii) News International should be (A) provided to the Leveson Inquiry and (B) made public; [124830]

(5) if he will place in the Library an estimate of what the cost to the public purse has been of assessing whether (a) texts, (b) emails and (c) other forms of communication between himself and (i) Rebekah Brooks, (ii) Andy Coulson and (iii) News International since May 2010 should be provided to the Leveson Inquiry and made public. [124831]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 24 October 2012, *Official Report*, column 921, to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello).

TRANSPORT

A1

Jim Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of the A1 have no road markings; and what his Department's policy is on replacing worn or damaged stretches where road markings are absent. [124594]

Stephen Hammond: There are no sections of the A1 or A1(M) managed by the Highways Agency that have no road markings.

Where defects to road markings require prompt attention because they represent an immediate or imminent hazard, Highways Agency service providers are required to repair them within defined time scales to ensure safety of the road users.

Where there is a case for a more comprehensive renewal of road markings, service providers will develop planned maintenance schemes for consideration by the Highways Agency. The value for money of these schemes will be assessed alongside others to ensure the best use of available funds.

Driving Tests

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps he has taken to increase the number of multi-purpose driving test centres; [124588]

(2) what target he has set for the number of operational multi-purpose driving test centres; and how many are currently in operation. [124589]

Stephen Hammond: The Driving Standards Agency (DSA) currently has 51 test centres delivering car driving tests and module 1 motorcycling tests.

In June 2010, Ministers announced a review into the delivery of the practical motorcycling test. The review is still under way and, pending publication of its recommendations, the DSA will not invest additional sums in multi-purpose test centres.

However, as an interim measure, additional low-cost "casual hire" sites are being considered. Negotiations are under way for a site in Stoke-on-Trent and another site is being assessed for suitability on Stornaway. Other casual hire sites will be considered as they become available.

Driving: Licensing

Ann Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the waiting time is for driving licences being reissued by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency medical advisory panel. [124519]

Stephen Hammond: The time taken for a driving licence to be issued where medical investigations are necessary will vary depending on the complexity of the case. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency categorises cases as simple and complex. Those where further medical information is required from the licence holder or the medical professional managing their treatment are considered complex.

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's target is to complete 90% of simple cases within 15 working days and 88% of complex cases within 90 days. So far this year the agency has achieved an average performance level of 89% for simple cases and 87% for complex cases.

High Speed 2 Railway Line

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when (a) he and (b) his predecessor last met with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to discuss plans for HS2. [125147]

Mr Simon Burns: There have been no formal meetings between either the Secretary of State for Transport or his predecessor specifically to discuss plans for HS2. However, officials from both Departments meet regularly to discuss HS2.

Motor Vehicles: Testing

Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether vehicle testing is regarded as a sovereign matter by the European Union. [122672]

Stephen Hammond: The European Commission in proposing a regulation about roadworthiness tests states that 'Roadworthiness is a sovereign activity'. The Commission proposes a regulation because it considers the implementation by member states of technical requirements set at an EU level has led to a high diversity in requirements with negative impacts both on road safety and the internal market.

The HoC Scrutiny Committee have referred the proposed legislation for a debate on a Reasoned Opinion which questions the justification by the EC for this approach in respect of competence to act at a supranational level.

The Department intends to challenge strongly any provisions that imply costs for Government, the public or industry.

Motorcycles

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make an assessment of the possible effect on jobs in small and medium-sized enterprises which produce motorcycle parts and accessories due to proposals at EU-level for legislation on anti-tampering for motorcycles. [124548]

Stephen Hammond: There are no plans to make a separate assessment of the possible effect on jobs. However, an impact assessment of the EU regulation, including anti-tampering measures, was carried out to support negotiations on the new regulation, and this included a small firms impact test.

The impact assessment is available on the DFT website and can be found at:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/dft-2011-26/>

Motorcycles: Driving Tests

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he plans to publish the review of the Driving Standards Agency's implementation and delivery of the module 1 part of the motorcycle test; [124547]

(2) how many participants have taken part in his trial of a unified motorcycle test; [124591]

(3) what assessment he has made of his trial of a unified motorcycle test; and when he expects the results of that trial to be published. [124592]

Stephen Hammond: The technical aspects of module 1 were revised in May 2011, as part of interim changes to the motorcycle test:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/news/stories/dsa-news-20110328>

The number of participants that have been involved in the research trials, to date, is 250; this includes test ready learner riders, trainers and DSA driving examiners.

An assessment of the trials will be made once the research has concluded. The results of the research will be published alongside the public consultation, on any proposed changes to the motorcycle test, which is expected to commence in the spring.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many individuals have completed two or more compulsory bike tests, since the introduction of the new testing procedures. [124549]

Stephen Hammond: As at 22 October 2012, there have been 68,187 individuals that have completed two or more practical motorcycling tests since the introduction of the two-part test on 27 April 2009. These include those who have taken either:

- more than one module 1 test but no module 2 test; or
- module 1 and module 2 tests with more than one attempt at either or both modules.

In addition, 70,478 individuals have taken a single module 1 and single module 2 test.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport with reference to the establishment of the module 1 motorcycle test, what estimate he has made of the (a) rate of accidents during the new test and (b) effect of weather conditions on the rate of accidents. [124550]

Stephen Hammond: Since the introduction of the 2-part practical motorcycling test on 27 April 2009, there have been:

- 776 incidents on module 1 tests, and
- 223 incidents on module 2 tests.

The rate of incidents has been monitored closely since the test was introduced. The Driving Standards Agency conducted around 62,500 tests in the last 12 months to August 2012. There were 2.7 incidents per 1,000 tests for that period—which is a reduction from 3.3 incidents over the previous 12 month period.

The incident rate is currently 1.3 incidents per 1,000 tests. The majority (83%) of these were minor in nature and only 26 were serious reportable incidents. Serious incidents are defined as those where the candidate received medical attention and was taken straight to hospital from the test site.

No analysis has been carried out into the effect of weather conditions on incidents on test.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has undertaken a comparative assessment of the pass rate of motorcycle tests in the UK with that of other EU countries. [124551]

Stephen Hammond: CIECA, the international commission for driver testing authorities compiles data about driving and riding test rates. The comparative

pass rates of those member states who declared their category A1, A2 and A test pass rates (measured in % passed) in 2011 were:

CIECA country	Percentage		
	A1	A2	A
Bulgaria	86.8	—	92.4
Denmark	—	—	89.9
Estonia	72.9	76	83.5
Great Britain	60	64	71
Latvia	51.1	70.6	70.6
Lithuania	57.5	72.35	72.82
Netherlands	—	—	73.8

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motorcycle driving instructors and trainers he estimates were operating in (a) August 2008 and (b) August 2012. [124552]

Stephen Hammond: No data is available for the number of motorcycle instructors in 2008. In October 2009, 2,675 certificates were held by motorcycling instructors delivering compulsory basic training and direct access training.

Since April 2011, the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) has published official statistics on the Department for Transport (DFT) website about the number of certificates issued to motorcycling instructors delivering compulsory basic training and direct access training. These figures are produced quarterly and in June 2012 there were 2,849 certificates held.

Other types of motorcycling instruction such as pre-test training are unregulated and no data is held about the number of instructors operating in those sectors.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to seek a derogation from the EU requirement of a 50 kilometre an hour speed for certain elements of the module 1 motorcycle test to allow the merger of that module with module 2 of the motorcycle test. [124587]

Stephen Hammond: The Department for Transport review into the delivery of the practical motorcycling test is still ongoing. One of a range of options under consideration is for the higher speed manoeuvres to be carried out on road at or around the urban speed limit of 30 mph. Once the review is complete we will be in a position to determine whether a derogation is necessary.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what comparative estimate he has made of the rate of accidents at permanent motorcycle test centres and that at casual sites. [124590]

Stephen Hammond: The Driving Standards Agency (DSA) monitors the rate of incidents during all testing and training activity at all DSA and trainer owned locations—including on road training and testing.

The number of incidents, at both permanent and casual testing sites, since the two-part practical motorcycling test was introduced, is shown in the following table:

<i>Test</i>	<i>Permanent site</i>	<i>Casual site</i>
Module 1 (off road)	614	162
Module 2 (on road)	180	43

All serious incidents are followed up and investigated where appropriate to determine the cause and to provide advice and support to those involved.

Network Rail

Mr Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when a Minister last reviewed Network Rail's derivative losses; [125154]

(2) what limits he plans to place on Network Rail's derivative dealings. [125155]

Mr Simon Burns: Network Rail is a private company operating as a commercial business. Network Rail is directly responsible to its members and is regulated by the independent Office of Rail Regulation (ORR). The issue of Network Rail's derivatives is therefore a matter for the company and the ORR.

Piracy

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice his Department has issued to UK merchant shipping on anti-piracy measures. [124792]

Stephen Hammond: The Department for Transport published 'Interim Guidance to UK Flagged Shipping on the Use of Armed Guards to Defend against the

Threat of Piracy in Exceptional Circumstances' on 6 December 2011 with a subsequent revision published in June 2012 (version 1.1). The guidance was produced in consultation with key industry stakeholders including the Chamber of Shipping and other Government Departments. It contains specific reference to the industry developed 'Best Management Practices for Protection against Somalia Based Piracy' (BMP).

The Department recommends that the armed guards guidance is read alongside the DFT 'Guidance to UK Flagged Shipping on Measures to Counter Piracy, Armed Robbery and other Acts of Violence against Merchant Shipping' which was published in November 2011.

Roads: Repairs and Maintenance

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investment the Highways Agency has made in roads (a) in Essex, (b) in the Braintree district, (c) in the Malden district, (d) in Colchester borough, (e) along the A12 and (f) along the A120 in each of the last five years; and what investment plans are in place over each of the next five years. [122847]

Stephen Hammond: A breakdown of annual spend by county, local authority area or by route is not available. The available information for capital¹ expenditure along the A12² and A120³ for the most recent five year period is shown in the following table. The figures in this table exclude some capital expenditure on the A12 and A120 that was funded from area wide or non route specific budgets. Route specific information for this type of expenditure is not available.

<i>Route</i>	<i>2008-09</i>	<i>2009-10⁴</i>	<i>2010-11</i>	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>2012-13⁵</i>	<i>£</i>
A12	427,064	16,358,345	5,096,070	6,611,071	4,107,831	
A12 VMS and CCTV ⁶	158,094	962,458	242,467	0	0	
A120	391,236	324,769	650,245	723,526	1,063,037	
A120 VMS and CCTV ⁶	49,614	569,218	66,187	0	44,000	

¹ Capital expenditure is investment in items such as new roads, resurfacing, replacement of lighting columns, central reserve safety barrier, etc as opposed to Resource expenditure which is generally routine maintenance such as minor repairs, grass cutting, light bulbs etc. Information on annual resource expenditure by county, local authority area or specific route is not available.

² Includes the sections of the A12 between the M25 and Ipswich and between Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

³ Includes the sections of the A120 between the M11 and the A12 at Marks Tey and between A12 Junction 29 (Colchester) and Harwich.

⁴ From 2009-10 onwards all schemes valued over £100,000 are treated as capital expenditure.

⁵ Forecast expenditure for 2012-13 as at 3 October 2012.

⁶ Estimated capital expenditure for Variable Message Signs (VMS) and CCTV cameras. Actual expenditure by route is not available.

Future spend is dependent on annual funding allocations by the Department for Transport. Funding allocations for 2013-14 will be available in January 2013 when budgets for the coming year have been finalised.

Investment for future major schemes is set through the spending review. There are currently no plans for major schemes on the A12 and A120 in Essex in the current review period to 2014-15.

Jim Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how the Highways Agency monitors contracts requiring the repair or replacement of road markings at times when a section of road is not being renewed. [124553]

Stephen Hammond: Highways Agency maintenance contracts require service providers to maintain the paved carriageway, including road markings and studs, to defined standards. These standards include performance requirements for the repair of serious defects within defined timescales.

Service providers are subject to regular audit and performance monitoring by the Highways Agency to ensure contractual requirements are being met.

Roads: Safety

Jim Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what safety rating system for the UK roads network is used by his Department. [124611]

Stephen Hammond: The Department does not have a safety rating system for the UK roads network but takes note of the output from the work done by the Road Safety Foundation and European Road Assessment Programme (EuroRAP) to assess the risks associated with the UK roads network.

Thameslink Railway Line

Chris Williamson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether his officials have provided him in the last six months with an estimate of the date the new Thameslink rolling stock will be delivered; and what that date is; [124445]

(2) whether his officials have provided him in the last six months with an estimate of the date the new Thameslink rolling stock will be delivered; and whether that date differs from that previously announced by his Department. [124446]

Mr Simon Burns: We expect the first trains to be delivered for testing on the network in summer 2015 and deployment of the full fleet to be completed towards the end of 2018.

Chris Williamson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his officials have provided advice to him on what steps the Government would need to take to secure the provision of new rolling stock for Thameslink if it is not possible to reach financial close with Siemens. [124447]

Mr Simon Burns: Department officials are working with Siemens to secure financial close early in the new year for the new trains for Thameslink. I am aware of the consequences of failing to conclude the procurement and as you would expect, my Department is closely monitoring progress, including assessing options were it not possible to secure financial close.

Tonnage Tax

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which shipping companies qualified for the tonnage tax scheme in each year since 2000-01. [125182]

Stephen Hammond: The question of whether or not a particular company or group qualifies for inclusion in the tonnage tax is, in the first instance, a matter for HM Revenue and Customs.

HM Revenue and Customs administer tonnage tax and are prevented from disclosing the names of companies and groups within it, in accordance with their duty of confidentiality set out in the Commissioners for Revenue and Customs Act 2005.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect on (a) jobs and growth in the shipping industry and (b) the operation of the tonnage tax scheme of the European Commission's Limassol Declaration of 7 October 2012. [125183]

Stephen Hammond: This Department welcomes the emphasis in the Declaration upon the importance of facilitating growth and hence employment in the maritime

sector. No assessment has been made of the effect of the Declaration. However, growth and jobs in the maritime sector are of significant importance to the UK economy and tonnage tax continues to help maintain the competitiveness of the UK shipping industry.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Airguns

Margot James: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were investigated by the police for the illegal use of airguns in each of the last five years. [124227]

Damian Green: This information is not collected centrally.

The Home Office collects data from police forces on the number of offences committed that involve air weapons, but not the number of people who are investigated by the police.

Burglary: Self-defence

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will review the law on self-defence in the event of a burglary; and if she will make a statement. [123961]

Damian Green: As my hon. Friend will be aware, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State recently outlined plans to give householders greater legal protection to protect themselves from burglars. These proposals will mean that if a householder fears for their safety when confronted by a burglar and acts in the heat of the moment to protect themselves or their family or guests using force that was reasonable in the circumstances as they genuinely believed them to be, they will not be guilty of an offence if it is found in the cold light of day that their actions were disproportionate. They will only be guilty if the level of force used was grossly disproportionate. This should give householders greater confidence that the law is on their side. Procedures to legislate will be undertaken as soon as parliamentary time allows.

College of Policing

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she expects to appoint an interim chair of the College of Policing. [124382]

Damian Green: We will update Parliament shortly.

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date she expects the College of Policing to become operational. [124383]

Damian Green: The College of Policing will be operational in December this year.

Crime

Jenny Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many incidents of rape were reported in each of the last five years; [124087]

(2) how many incidents of robbery were reported in each of the last five years; [124088]

(3) how many incidents of theft from a vehicle were reported in each of the last five years. [124089]

Mr Hurd: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Cabinet Office.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson, dated October 2012:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Questions asking the following:

how many incidents of robbery were reported in each of the last five years. (124088)

how many incidents of rape were reported in each of the last five years.(124087)

how many incidents of theft from a vehicle were reported in each of the last five years. (124089)

The table shows the number of incidents recorded by the police in England and Wales for each of the offence types in question, from 2007/08 to 2011/12. These data are published each quarter, with the latest figures available from Table A4 within 'Crime Statistics: Appendix tables - Crime in England and Wales, year ending June 2012'. The table includes the latest period for completeness, and gives the codes of the individual offences that make up each group, as used in Table A4.

The data provided in the table cover England and Wales only. Crime figures for Scotland are published at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice>

and data for Northern Ireland are published at:

http://www.psnl.police.uk/index/updates/updates_statistics/update_crime_statistics.htm

Police recorded crime for selected offences, 2007-08 to 2011-12, England and Wales

<i>Offence</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>	<i>2009-10</i>	<i>2010-11</i>	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>12 months to June 2012</i>
GBH ¹	—	40,206	39,501	34,789	32,355	23,691
ABH ²	—	378,176	359,483	331,448	303,909	223,867
Rape ^{3,4}	12,673	13,096	15,074	15,892	16,043	15,669
Robbery ⁵	84,773	80,130	75,105	76,189	74,689	71,444
Theft from a Vehicle ⁶	432,412	396,976	339,170	313,467	300,378	293,666

¹ Current GBH classifications were introduced from 1 April 2008 and replaced an earlier classification. This group of offences includes offences 5A 8F, 8H. It therefore includes endangering life and racially or religiously aggravated inflicting GBH as well as GBH with intent, though GBH with intent is the major part of this category.

² This group covers offences 8G and 8J. Current ABH classifications were introduced from 1 April 2008 and replaced an earlier classification. This group of offences includes racially or religiously aggravated inflicting ABH.

³ This group covers offences 19A-19H, covering rapes of males and females of all ages.

⁴ Prior to 2009-10, a small number of offences continued to be recorded relating to offences repealed by the Sexual Offences Act 2003. While these may have been legitimately recorded for offences committed prior to May 2004 it is also possible that some may have been recorded in these old categories in error, so any changes based on small numbers should be interpreted with caution.

⁵ This group includes offences 34A and 34B, covering robberies of business and personal property.

⁶ This offence has a code of 45.

Domestic Violence

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent estimate she has made of the number of incidents of domestic violence (a) committed and (b) reported to the police in each region in the last 12 months. [123249]

Mr Jeremy Browne: Estimates of the number of domestic violence crimes committed against adults, as reported to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (formerly the British Crime Survey), cannot be broken down by region.

The number of domestic violence incidents reported to the police in 2011-12, by police force area and region, is shown in the table. These figures are provisional and have not been verified by forces.

Number of domestic violence incidents, by police force area and region, 2011-12¹

<i>2011-12</i>	<i>Number</i>
Cleveland	14,883
Durham	13,330
North Yorkshire	7,336
North East Region	35,549
Cheshire	4,186
Cumbria	6,422
Greater Manchester	47,496
Lancashire	29,465

Number of domestic violence incidents, by police force area and region, 2011-12¹

<i>2011-12</i>	<i>Number</i>
Merseyside	32,511
North West Region	120,080
Humber-side	17,014
Northumbria	27,406
South Yorkshire	24,079
West Yorkshire	36,725
Yorkshire and the Humber Region	105,224
Derbyshire	14,797
Leicestershire	17,172
Lincolnshire	8,762
North Wales	12,901
Nottinghamshire	5,532
East Midlands Region	59,164
Staffordshire	16,457
Warwickshire	7,805
West Mercia	16,523
West Midlands	30,137
West Midlands Region	70,922
Bedfordshire	8,250
Cambridgeshire	11,249
Essex	26,876
Hertfordshire	12,644

Number of domestic violence incidents, by police force area and region, 2011-12¹
2011-12

	Number
Norfolk	9,878
Suffolk	7,471
East of England Region	76,368
London, City of	90
Metropolitan Police	118,079
London Region	118,169
Hampshire	24,206
Kent	22,509
Surrey	11,755
Sussex	16,732
Thames Valley	32,715
South East Region	107,917
Avon and Somerset	15,356
Devon and Cornwall	25,521
Dorset	7,425
Gloucestershire	2
Wiltshire	4,413
South West Region	52,715
Dyfed-Powys	2,325
Gwent	8,948
Northamptonshire	11,898
South Wales	27,656
Wales	50,827
England and Wales total	796,935

¹ Figures are provisional and have not been verified by forces.

² Data not available. Force was not able to supply data at the time of collection.

Domestic Violence: Peterborough

Mr Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government is taking to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse in Peterborough constituency; and if she will make a statement. [124749]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The Government's Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan sets out our steps to tackle all forms of violence against women. This includes ring-fencing funding of nearly £40 million until 2015 towards specialist domestic and sexual violence services. As part of this, we are contributing £20,000 a year towards an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser in Peterborough.

Foreign Workers

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many companies applying for the right to sponsor overseas employees have had their application fee reimbursed after refusal. [122356]

Mr Harper: No sponsor has had their application fee reimbursed after refusal.

Sponsors pay a fee for the consideration of their licensing application.

If the UK Border Agency refuses, the application the fee is not refunded. Where there is evidence to show that the UK Border Agency made an error in considering

the application, the prospective sponsor submits a new application and the UK Border Agency will process the new application without a fee.

Immigration: EU Nationals

Mr Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationals of other EU countries her Department has (a) told to leave the UK and have left voluntarily and (b) removed from the UK on the grounds that they no longer fulfil the criteria for the right to residence under Chapter III of Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the right of citizens of the EU and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of EU member states in each year since 2007. [124746]

Mr Harper: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what requirements there are for nationals of other EU countries and their associated family members who have moved to the UK under European Directive 2004/38/EC to register their presence in the UK; what evidence such people must present to satisfy the criteria for the right to reside in the UK; what sanctions there are for non-compliance with such registration requirements; and what follow-up checks are carried out to ensure such people continue to satisfy the criteria for the right to reside in the UK. [124747]

Mr Harper: Under Directive 2004/38/EC EEA nationals and their family members who wish to reside in the UK for longer than three months must be exercising 'treaty rights' as a worker, or self-employed person, a self-sufficient person or a student.

There is no mandatory requirement to register though many apply for confirmation of their right to reside as it is the only means to evidence this right. As registration is not mandatory there is no sanctions regime for non-compliance.

The UK Border Agency has strict requirements in place to ensure that EEA nationals and their family members prove that they are exercising a treaty right. For example, employed workers must provide evidence from their employer and payslips or bank statements as evidence of income.

EEA nationals and their family members' right to reside in the UK is conditional upon them continuing to meet the requirements of the directive. The UK Border Agency will undertake checks to ensure the requirements remain satisfied with each application for residence documentation.

National Policing Improvement Agency

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed by the National Policing Improvement Agency in work streams transferred to the Home Office on 1 October 2012 on (a) 1 January 2011, (b) 1 January 2012 and (c) 30 September 2012. [124389]

Damian Green: Of the functions that transferred to the Home Office on 1 October 2012:

(a) On 1 January 2011 there were 717 staff involved in those functions.

(b) On 1 January 2012 there were 665 involved in those functions.

(c) On 30 September 2012, 623 staff transferred from the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) to the Home Office under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE).

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff are employed by her Department to undertake work transferred to her Department from the National Policing Improvement Agency on 1 October 2012. [124390]

Damian Green: Over 600 staff transferred from the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) to the Home Office on 1 October 2012. The transfer took place under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006.

The transfer was led jointly by the Home Office and the NPIA. The project team in the Home Office is staffed by four permanent Home Office civil servants who were dedicated to this transfer work. The NPIA's project team is made up of three dedicated NPIA staff. Both teams will be closed at the end of October 2012, and the staff will be reallocated.

These small teams were supported in elements of the project by other Home Office and NPIA staff (for example HR professionals).

Police and Crime Commissioners

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate she has made of the likely level of turnout for the election on 15 November 2012 for police and crime commissioners. [124386]

Damian Green: The Government will not be making an estimate of the likely level of turnout for the elections.

However, every household will receive information about the elections from the Electoral Commission, and candidates will of course circulate information themselves. The Home Office has also launched an advertising campaign, including TV and radio, which we estimate will reach 85% of voters across the 41 forces to explain the reforms and encourage participation in the elections.

The Government wants and will encourage everyone to have their say, and is confident that, come 15 November, the public will not only be aware of the elections, but also have the information they need to make informed choices.

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total cost of the advertising campaign for Police and Crime Commissioners was for (a) television, (b) radio, (c) print media, (d) online and (e) other media. [124388]

Damian Green: The Police and Crime Commissioner campaign runs until 24 October and while it is still live the costs may be subject to change. On this basis we are unable to provide final total costs for advertising media until the campaign has finished.

Nic Dakin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 16 October 2012, *Official Report*, columns 263-64W, on police and crime commissioners, what level of turnout in the police and crime commissioner elections she would view as acceptable. [124861]

Damian Green: The Government will not be making an estimate of the level of turnout for the elections.

The Government want and will encourage everyone to have their say, and is confident that, come 15 November, the public will not only be aware of the elections, but also have the information they need to make informed choices.

Police: Demonstrations

Mr MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make it her policy to require the police to consult with elected representatives of local communities on the route of marches and location of rallies of organisations promoting race hate. [124403]

Damian Green: The policing of marches and demonstrations is an operational matter for chief officers. The Association of Chief Police Officers' guidance "Manual of Guidance on Keeping the Peace" (2010) makes clear that police forces should engage with all key stakeholders and affected communities to build trust and confidence in the policing plan.

Police: Lambeth

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the number of (a) Metropolitan police officers and (b) police community support officers serving on Safer Neighbourhoods teams in Lambeth was in May (i) 2000, (ii) 2001, (iii) 2002, (iv) 2003, (v) 2004, (vi) 2005, (vii) 2006, (viii) 2007, (ix) 2008, (x) 2009, (xi) 2010, (xii) 2011 and (xiii) 2012; [123620]

(2) how many vacancies existed for Safer Neighbourhood teams in Lambeth in May (a) 2000, (b) 2001, (c) 2002, (d) 2003, (e) 2004, (f) 2005, (g) 2006, (h) 2007, (i) 2008, (j) 2009, (k) 2010, (l) 2011 and (m) 2012. [123621]

Damian Green: The requested information is not collected by the Home Office.

Prisons: Drugs

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders were referred to treatment for using MCAT in the last year for which figures are available. [123488]

Mr Jeremy Browne [*holding answer 18 October 2012*]: Information is not collected centrally about the number of users of the drug MCAT (mephedrone) within the criminal justice system. The most recently published data from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System show that in 2010-11, 461 adults and 411 young people identified MCAT as their principal drug but the data do not record whether a person was within the criminal justice system at the time of treatment.

Treaties: European Union

Jacob Rees-Mogg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of whether, in the case of the opt-out under article 10(4) of the Protocol to the Treaty on the Funding of the European Union is exercised, any measures that are opted back into would be subject to the ratification processes laid out in the European Union Act 2011 *ex nova*. [124570]

James Brokenshire [*holding answer 24 October 2012*]: If the UK opts out en masse pursuant to Article 10(4) of Protocol No 36 to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the ratification processes set out in the European Union Act 2011 will not be applicable to any measure that the UK may decide to opt back in to. This is because the European Union Act 2011 sets out restrictions relating to very specific areas and the measures on the 2014 opt-out list do not fall within its scope. For example, the opt-out decision clearly flows from existing Treaty obligations so any decision to opt back in to any measures would not require a Treaty change.

TREASURY

Aerospace Industry: Investment

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what fiscal steps his Department is taking to assist the UK aerospace industry to invest in emerging technologies; [122247]

(2) what fiscal steps his Department is taking to encourage long-term investment in the UK aerospace industry. [122248]

Danny Alexander: The Government has taken fiscal measures to support the UK's position as a global leader in aerospace. Budget 2012 announced £60 million for the creation of a UK centre for aerodynamics to support research and innovation in aerospace technology. At the Farnborough International Airshow in July 2012, the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills announced details of how that funding will be used, alongside £120 million of new investment from government and industry in aerospace research and technology.

The industry is also able to bid for support from wider funds such as the Advanced Manufacturing Supply Chain initiative and the Regional Growth Fund. In addition, the High Value Manufacturing Catapult centre, bringing together seven institutions of excellence to better support UK manufacturing and assist UK businesses to innovate and bring new cutting edge commercial products to market, is expected to benefit companies in the aerospace sector.

More generally, the aerospace sector will benefit from the Government's policies to create the most competitive tax system in the G20 and a more educated work force that is the most flexible in Europe.

Broadband

Ms Ritchie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any Barnett consequential will arise from the sale of the 4G spectrum licence. [123061]

Danny Alexander: The Barnett formula applies to public spending allocation, not to general Government receipts. Therefore no Barnett consequential will arise from the sale of the 4G spectrum licence.

Cru Investment Management

Mr Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his most recent assessment is of the adequacy of the compensation offered to CF Arch Cru investors; and what assessment he has made of (a) the role played by (i) Capita, (ii) HSBC and (iii) BNY Mellon in the operation of CF Arch Cru funds and (b) the use of the Channel Islands Stock Exchange for the listing of open-ended investment companies. [124877]

Sajid Javid: The Financial Services Authority (FSA) is responsible for the regulation of financial services firms and operates independently from Government under the powers given to it in the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. HM Treasury sets the legal framework for the regulation of financial services, but does not have investigative or prosecuting powers of its own.

The FSA has been investigating the issues surrounding the suspension and winding-up of the Arch Cru funds and on 21 June 2011 announced a £54 million package for investors. The Government is not able to comment on the outcome of the FSA's investigation. As the independent regulator, it is in the FSA's remit to provide investors with a fair and reasonable payment scheme. Considering factors such as the number of investors, the complexity of the matter, the number of parties involved and the difficulties consumers may otherwise face, the FSA believe this payment scheme to be the best outcome for investors.

Employee Ownership Scheme

Mr Umunna: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to the Exchequer during the financial year 2017-18 of the employee ownership scheme announced on 8 October 2012; what estimate he has made of the cumulative cost of the scheme by April 2018; and what estimate he has made of (a) the likely sums foregone in capital gains tax revenue and (b) the likely other costs of the scheme to the public purse in each case. [124894]

Mr Gauke: The Government expects that the scheme could cost up to approximately £100 million in 2017-18 in foregone capital gains tax receipts due to employees taking up the new employee owner status.

This initial estimate will be refined following the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills consultation on the implementation of the new employee owner status during which the Government will engage with employers and employees to explore the likely impacts and take-up of the status in more detail. This consultation opened on 18 October and closes on 8 November. An annual breakdown of the estimated Exchequer cost of the policy will then be published at the autumn statement on 5 December 2012.

Infrastructure

Esther McVey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what steps he is taking to monitor and ensure the implementation of the National Infrastructure Project after 2015; [117693]

(2) what plans he has for reinvestment of the infrastructure efficiency saving; [117694]

(3) what advice his Department has issued to local authorities on funding of investment in local infrastructure; [117697]

(4) what advice his Department provides to public bodies on sources of finance for infrastructure projects. [117698]

Danny Alexander: The National Infrastructure Plan sets out a pipeline of-planned investment in UK infrastructure including over 500 projects and the programmes, worth over £250 billion to 2015 and beyond. The infrastructure investment pipeline data will be refreshed annually. In order to deliver the most significant infrastructure projects on time and as efficiently as possible, I chair a Cabinet Sub-Committee on infrastructure to ensure that all Departments play their part in tackling delays and addressing key issues. An update on progress was published alongside this year's Budget and the Treasury will be publishing a further progress update around the time of the autumn statement.

The Government is working with industry to put in place mechanisms through which real reductions in the costs of delivering infrastructure can be achieved and sustained—to enable taxpayers and utility bill payers to get more for less. Efficiency savings have been planned for in Government Departments' budgets, and further savings made beyond this are generally reallocated with Departments.

Ultimately, local authorities are autonomous bodies that make their own investment decisions. However, the Government is committed to supporting private sector investment in local infrastructure and wider economic development. For instance, the Growing Places Fund will provide £730 million to Local Enterprise Partnerships and £150 million has been allocated to support three Tax Increment Financing Type 2 projects. The Government has provided stronger incentives for infrastructure investment through the 'City Deals' process and through the introduction of 24 new Enterprise Zones across the country. Furthermore, the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) allows local authorities to charge on new developments in their area to help fund infrastructure.

Infrastructure UK, a unit within HM Treasury, provides finance and commercial expertise to the wider Treasury and other public organisations, in support of the delivery of major infrastructure projects where there is capital investment from the public sector. Local Partnerships, a joint venture between the Local Government Association and HM Treasury, provides commercial expertise and for local public bodies, including local authorities.

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the likely total cost will be of all planned Government-funded infrastructure projects in the (a) London area and (b) rest of the UK in the next six years. [124483]

Danny Alexander: In November 2011 the Government published a pipeline of over 500 infrastructure projects as part of the National Infrastructure Plan. This pipeline is estimated to be worth over £250 billion to 2015 and beyond, and almost 20% of the projects contained within it are expected to be wholly publically funded. These figures are available via the HM Treasury website, and will be updated around the time of the autumn statement in December.

National Loan Guarantee Scheme: Scotland

Mr Bain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many applications the Scottish Government has made under the UK Guarantees Scheme for loans, guarantees, repairs, operation costs or any other kind of financial assistance in relation to capital or public investment projects in the current financial year; [122282]

(2) what specific schemes under the National Infrastructure Plan 2011 will apply to Scotland; and what discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on funding such schemes. [122283]

Danny Alexander: The UK Guarantee Scheme uses the strength of the UK balance sheet to help secure the required finance for crucial infrastructure projects across the UK, including eligible projects in Scotland.

Any projects which are listed in the National Infrastructure Plan 2011 are eligible to apply against the published criteria, including those projects which are based in Scotland.

Private sector project sponsors can apply to the UK Guarantee Scheme directly. In the case of public sector infrastructure projects then the project sponsor should initially apply to the sponsor authority. Officials are working closely with the Scottish Government to identify those public sector projects that could be eligible to apply for the UK Guarantee Scheme.

NHS: Finance

Ms Ritchie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether there are any Barnett consequential to Northern Ireland arising from the announcement of £140 million of additional funding for NHS training and technology provision. [123063]

Danny Alexander: This funding will come from within the existing Department of Health budget. There will therefore be no additional Barnett consequential to Northern Ireland arising from the announcement.

Pay

Jeremy Lefroy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 20 June 2012, *Official Report*, column 1054W, on pay: public appointments, how many appointments to senior posts with a salary in excess of £142,000 were made in the two-year period to 29 May 2010. [119329]

Danny Alexander: Since May 2010, I have been asked to approve the remuneration packages of individuals earning more than £142,500 in areas under ministerial control.

The Government do not centrally hold information on the number of such appointments with a salary in excess of £142,000 that were made in the two-year period to 29 May 2010.

However, since May 2010, the Government have published details of the number of individuals earning over £150,000 in central Government—and these figures show that since May 2010, the number of these individuals has fallen by 36%. Further information is available at:

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/senior-civil-servants-high-earners-salaries

Pensions

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure that those with pension plans taken out prior to 1990 with a guaranteed annuity provision which would mean that the recipients receive a better pension at no extra cost are aware of what they need to do to receive the additional benefit. [124741]

Sajid Javid: In March 2011 a Government working group was asked to identify and agree feasible options for a default 'open market option' to stop consumers from making an uninformed annuity purchase from an existing provider. As a result, the Association of British Insurers (ABI) announced on 5 March a new Code of Conduct for Retirement Choices, binding on all annuity providers who are members of the ABI. The code will come into effect on 1 March 2013.

The Code of Conduct includes the requirement that providers must,

“highlight any applicable guaranteed annuity rate (GAR) or other guarantee”,

“both through the wake-up and follow-up packs, and when approached by a customer about their retirement options”.

The code requires that this is highlighted on the front page of any cover letter. In addition,

“unless the customer has requested an alternative, an illustration must clearly set out at least any applicable GAR or other guarantee”.

To ensure customers consider what type of annuity may be best suited to their needs, providers must

“highlight the benefits of shopping around, and set out options including deferring retirement, commuting or amalgamating pension pots”

and

“explain the range of ways in which a customer can receive their retirement income, including the different annuity options and products available, particularly the possibility of medical conditions or lifestyle choices leading to a higher level of retirement income, and including joint and escalating annuities and ways to keep savings invested.”

Further details can be found on the ABI's website:

http://www.abi.org.uk/Information/Codes_and_Guidance_Notes/63419.docx

In addition, the Money Advice Service and the Pensions Advisory Service offer free information and guidance on pensions and annuities.

Pensions: Scotland

Mr David Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether his Department has imposed (a) non-financial constraints and (b) reporting requirements on the Scottish Government in respect of

its ability to set pension terms for those public-sector workers whose pension is controlled by that Government. [123265]

Danny Alexander: Legislative competence for public service pensions policy is reserved to Westminster and the Public Service Pensions Bill is currently before Parliament. The Bill sets out the framework for the operation of public service pensions in the future. In order to reassure public servants as to the scale and nature of the changes to their pensions the Government has decided that there are some core elements of the reformed framework that must apply to all defined benefit public service pension schemes. These elements were recommended by Lord Hutton's Independent Public Service Pensions Commission which the Scottish Government accepted as a basis for negotiations with, public service stakeholders last year.

Clause 13 of the Public Service Pensions Bill compels scheme managers or responsibly authorities to publish or provide to HM Treasury such scheme information as HM Treasury directions require.

Mr David Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on its ability to set pension terms for those public sector workers whose pension is controlled by that Government; [123266]

(2) if he will place in the Library any correspondence between his Department and the Scottish Government on the ability of the Scottish Government to make any changes to public-sector pension schemes in Scotland that would differ from those in England and Wales. [123264]

Danny Alexander: HM Treasury has had regular discussions with the Scottish Government on public service pension schemes.

As was the case with previous Administrations, it is not the Government's practice to make correspondence with the Scottish Government public.

Public Expenditure

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures departmental underspends from (a) 2010-11 and (b) 2012-13 have been used to fund to date. [123492]

Danny Alexander [holding answer 18 October 2012]: Departmental underspends that are identified throughout the financial year can be reallocated to new areas of spending. Where re-prioritisation results in amendments to Departmental budgets, these are included in the respective Department's estimates for the year, as voted by Parliament and published at Supplementary Estimates.

We have used underspends to fund high priority areas of expenditure in line with Government objectives. This includes the council tax freeze, the Growing Places Fund and the freeze in fuel duty, announced in June 2012.

Public Service Pensions Bill: Scotland

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on the implications of the Public Sector Pensions Bill for the Local Government Pension Scheme Scotland. [124039]

Danny Alexander: The Public Service Pensions Bill was introduced in Parliament on 13 September. HM Treasury has had regular discussions with the Scottish Government on public service pension matters.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on a legislative consent motion for the Public Service Pension Bill; [124040]

(2) whether the Public Service Pensions Bill will require a legislative consent motion in the Scottish Parliament. [124041]

Danny Alexander: The Public Service Pensions Bill contains provisions that trigger the Sewel convention in Scotland.

The Government has sought “in principle” agreement from Scottish Ministers to seek a legislative consent motion for these provisions.

Revenue and Customs

Gregg McClymont: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many additional jobs will be required by Tracing Unit Cumbernauld following the transfer of work from HM Revenue and Customs Shipley. [124563]

Mr Gauke: No additional posts are required at present.

Gregg McClymont: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what HM Revenue and Customs policy is on the redeployment of staff and the protection of staff with disabilities. [124564]

Mr Gauke: HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) seeks to redeploy staff wherever possible when current roles are coming to an end. It places emphasis on forward planning across lines of business so that alternative work can be considered in advance, facilitating bulk and individual moves of staff. A redeployment pool has been introduced to support staff who need to be redeployed, giving them priority for vacancies in HMRC and other Government Departments. Proposed moves take account of individual circumstances and allow as much personal choice as is reasonable. HMRC complies with the 2008 Cabinet Office/Council of Civil Service Unions protocols for handling surplus staff situations.

Members of staff with disabilities are protected under the Equality Act 2010 and the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. The Act places responsibility on the employer to make reasonable adjustments to enable staff to work as normally as possible. The responsibility applies from pre-recruitment to post-employment. Reasonable adjustments are formally agreed and staff are encouraged to complete a reasonable adjustment passport which is taken into consideration if the individual needs to move to a new role or workplace.

Scotland

John Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many inquiries his Department has received from Members of the Scottish Parliament on reserved constituency issues in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [122968]

Danny Alexander: Treasury Ministers and officials receive correspondence from a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors as part of the process of policy development and delivery.

The Treasury publishes a list of ministerial meetings with external organisations, available at:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/minister_hospitality.htm

Tax Avoidance

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals whose gross annual income exceeds £100,000 he estimates were being paid via personal service companies in the most recent financial year for which figures are available. [124740]

Mr Gauke: HMRC data show the total annual income of individuals by income type, but not which type of business this income derives from. Further, there is no statutory definition of a personal service company which would enable HMRC to make this assessment. As such, it is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the incomes of those being paid by PSCs.

Tax Incentives: Natural Gas

Dan Byles: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the tax incentive for the production of shale gas which was announced in Birmingham on 8 October 2012 will apply (a) only to shale gas or (b) to other unconventional gas sources such as Coal Bed Methane. [124699]

Sajid Javid: The Government announced on 8 October that it will be engaging with industry on an appropriately targeted tax regime for shale gas. The Government would consider the implications of any future changes to the oil and gas fiscal regime in the round, in the context of its overall objective of maximising the economic recovery of UK hydrocarbons while ensuring a fair return for the Exchequer.

Taxation: Broadband

Chris Leslie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the revenue likely to accrue to the Exchequer from the auction of the 4G mobile broadband spectrum; and if he will make a statement. [124534]

Danny Alexander [holding answer 23 October 2012]: Ofcom is conducting the auction of spectrum to support the delivery of fourth generation mobile services independently of Government, and has set a reserve price of £1.4 billion. HM Treasury has not formally assessed likely revenues from this commercial auction.

Transport for London: Finance

Mark Reckless: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much funding his Department allocated to Transport for London in each year since 2000; and what funding has been allocated to Transport for London in each remaining year of the comprehensive spending review period. [122589]

Danny Alexander: The Department for Transport provides grant funding to the Greater London Authority (GLA) which is required to forward it to Transport for London (TFL). The Department provided £331 million of funding in 2000-01. Outturn funding from 2001-02 to 2005-06 is set out in pages 209 and 212 of the 2007 DFT Annual Report:

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20070603181925/http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/publications/apr/ar2007/appendixa_pubexpendcoretables

Equivalent figures from 2006-07 to 2011-12 are set out in the Department's 2011-12 annual report:

<http://assets.dft.gov.uk/publications/dft-annual-resource-and-accounts/annual-report-and-accounts-1112.pdf>

There are a number of mostly smaller grants that the Department has paid TFL over the period in question which will not be included in the GLA Transport grant figures above because they were paid under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003.

Alongside these smaller grants, £1.7 billion was paid to TFL in 2007-08 also under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. This was in relation to the collapse of the Metronet PPP contracts. This is explained on page 9 of the DFT's Resource Accounts for 2007-08:

www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/hc0708/hc06/0673/0673.pdf

TFL's 2010 funding agreement was amended in a letter in 2011. A copy of this letter, setting out the expected funding for TFL for the remainder of the current spending review period is published on the TFL website:

www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/corporate/gla-grant-re-profile-november-2011.pdf

Ministers recently announced their intention to provide the Mayor and TFL with funding to enable them to hold fare increases for 2013 and 2014 to RPI plus 1%. A revised funding letter will be issued to TFL shortly setting out a new funding profile for the remainder of the spending review period.

www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/about-tfl/investorrelations/1466.aspx

UK Research Partnership Investment Fund

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer from which source of funding the £200 million of additional support to the UK Research Partnership Investment Fund, announced on 8 October 2012, will come. [123493]

Danny Alexander: Additional funding of £200 million will be provided to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to support this announcement.

Welfare Tax Credits

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the aggregate annual value was of tax credits paid in respect of dependants who reside outside the United Kingdom; [122579]

(2) how many dependants in respect of whom tax credits are paid reside outside the United Kingdom. [122580]

Mr Gauke: The main purpose of the child tax credit is to support families in the UK. Consequently, the child tax credit rules generally do not provide for it to be paid in respect of children who live abroad other than in limited circumstances (for example, in the case of the children of a UK Crown servant posted overseas and the Crown servant's accompanying partner) or to meet the UK's obligations under EU law, specifically EC Regulation 883/2004. This regulation protects the social security rights of nationals of all member states of the European Economic Area (EEA), including the UK, and Switzerland when they exercise their rights of free movement under EU law.

Out of a total of approximately 5.2 million families currently receiving the child tax credit for almost 9.3 million children, at 30 September 2012 there were 3,447 ongoing awards of the child tax credit under EC Regulation 883/2004 in respect of 5,962 children living in another member state. This equates to around 0.06% of all child tax credit awards.

Information about the value of child tax credit awarded by the UK under EC Regulation 883/2004 is available only at disproportionate costs. This is because under the priority rules in that regulation not all awards of UK family benefits are made at full UK rates.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

British Nationals Abroad

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens were deported to the UK from (a) all other EU member states, (b) France, (c) Germany, (d) Poland and (e) the Netherlands in each year since 2004. [124906]

Mr Lidington: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office captures only information that is brought to our attention on deportations (and extradition) cases. Our electronic records on this only go as far back as April 2008. There is no international obligation on behalf of foreign governments to inform our consular staff of an impending deportation; no obligation either within the EU. An exception occurs where there are formal arrangements for notification between the UK and most Commonwealth and some foreign countries. Otherwise, the information may come to staff by way of a request that the deportee be provided with a travel document, or through some other means.

On this basis the figures we have between 2008-12 are:

France: None throughout whole period.

Germany: None throughout whole period.

Poland: None throughout whole period.

The Netherlands: 1 in 2011, none in other years.

The EU:

	<i>Number</i>
2008	16
2009	21
2010	15
2011	12
2012 (January-September)	11

Business: Human Rights

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent progress he has made on the development of his business and human rights strategy. [124607]

Mr Lidington: The Government's draft strategy on business and human rights is currently going through a final round of consultation across Whitehall and we hope to publish it in the near future.

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he plans to open his proposed strategy on business and human rights to public consultation. [124608]

Mr Lidington: The Government's work is currently focused on finalising and launching the Government strategy on business and human rights which is, in effect, our interpretation in the UK context of the UN Guiding Principles on business and human rights.

We are actively giving consideration to how to monitor implementation—including through consultation with interested groups from outside of government—as we move forward and believe this an essential part of the process.

Gibraltar

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his (a) Spanish and (b) Gibraltarian counterpart on Gibraltar's sovereign territorial waters. [124797]

Mr Lidington: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers have regular contact with their Spanish counterparts on a wide range of issues, including Gibraltar-related issues. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), held a meeting with the Foreign Minister of Spain on 14 October in Brussels, where both Ministers were attending an EU meeting. We also keep in close touch with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, whom we inform and consult on relevant diplomatic discussions with Spain. The Foreign Secretary and I both met the Chief Minister in Birmingham on 7 and 8 October. We do not systematically disclose the content of meetings with Spanish and Gibraltarian Ministers, which are subject to diplomatic confidentiality.

Indonesia

Mr Buckland: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will press the government of Indonesia to act on the recommendation to stop human rights violations by military and police officers

and lift the climate of impunity in West Papua made by the UN Human Rights Council during its Universal Periodic Review. [124407]

Mr Swire: We regularly discuss the situation in the Indonesian provinces of Papua and West Papua with the Indonesian Government. The UK takes seriously all reports of human rights violations in the provinces and we will continue to raise our concerns with the Indonesian authorities. Our ambassador discussed Papua with the co-ordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs on 26 September. He also visited Papua in September this year and met with senior police and military officials where he emphasised the need to respect human rights and ensure full and transparent investigations into any violent incidents. It is UK policy to encourage effective responses and implementation of Universal Periodic Review recommendations including those on addressing impunity.

Latin America

Mr MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries in Latin America he has visited since taking office. [124400]

Mr Lidington: Since May 2010, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), has visited Brazil and Panama. In addition to this, the former and current Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Mr Browne) and my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), have visited the following countries: Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Panama, Guatemala, Brazil, Uruguay, Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru and Costa Rica.

Single European Act

George Eustice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether steps were taken by his Department to investigate allegations made in the book by Peter Schweizer entitled *Friendly Spies*, published in 1993, that a British diplomat briefed the French Directorate General for External Security on internal discussions within his Department on the UK's negotiating position prior to the signing of the Single European Act and the Brussels Summit of June 1987. [124539]

Mr Lidington: I will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested as the historical nature of the details required demands research into 27 year old archives.

Stabilisation Unit

Sir Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 17 July 2012, *Official Report*, columns 126-7WS, on building stability overseas, if he will publish the recommendations of the internal review of the tri-departmental Stabilisation Unit. [124858]

Mark Simmonds: A review of the tri-departmental Stabilisation Unit was commissioned by Ministry of Defence, Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in December 2011 and completed on 30 March 2012. The review found that the Stabilisation Unit had demonstrated clear successes in the rapid deployment of experienced people to fragile environments. It set out more clearly the vision for the Stabilisation Unit—a high-quality deployment capacity; plus an agile and focused role on planning, analysis and lessons which responds to the needs and prioritised tasking of parent departments. It recommended that we should strengthen the leadership of the unit, provide increased strategic direction to the unit by its three parent Departments, and drive value for money and efficiency changes.

Good progress is being made in implementing these findings. We have increased the seniority of the head of the Stabilisation Unit and appointed a senior civil servant at director level to lead the unit through these changes. We have established a senior tri-departmental management board to provide increased strategic direction. Work is ongoing to implement structural and efficiency changes to the unit.

Yemen

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when and where the next Friends of Yemen meeting will take place. [124354]

Alistair Burt: It was agreed at the Friends of Yemen meeting on 27 September in New York that the next Friends of Yemen ministerial meeting would be held in March 2013. Exact date and venue are yet to be decided.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to restore consular services in Sana'a. [124355]

Alistair Burt: The British embassy in Sana'a continues to offer as full a consular service to British nationals in Yemen as it is possible to do in light of on-going security challenges within the country. Any decision to provide a fuller range of consular services will be judged against the security implications for staff serving at our embassy in Sana'a, and will be fully reflected in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office travel advice which, at the present time, advises against all travel to Yemen.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Biofuels: Timber

Graham Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what tonnage of biomass

co-fired in coal fired electricity generation was (a) UK-sourced and (b) externally sourced wood in (i) 2010-11 and (ii) 2011-12. [124870]

Mr Hayes: As required by the Renewables Obligation, generators have reported to Ofgem the following amounts of wood co-fired with coal in electricity generation for which Renewables Obligation Certificates were claimed:

	Tonnes
<i>(a) UK sourced wood</i>	
(i) 2010-11	98,785
(ii) 2011-12	86,893
<i>(b) Externally sourced wood</i>	
(i) 2010-11	741,465
(ii) 2011-12	999,987

Carbon Monoxide: Publicity

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what plans his Department (a) has and (b) had considered to require any suppliers to fund carbon monoxide awareness publicity and research through a levy from Ofgem. [122333]

Mr Hayes: Gas suppliers are obliged under the terms of their licence conditions to provide specific gas safety information to each domestic customer at least once a year. This information includes the safe use of gas appliances, the dangers of carbon monoxide and the benefits of fitting an audible carbon monoxide alarm and the undertaking of gas safety checks.

Under the RIIO-GD1 2013-21 price control framework, gas distribution network (GDN) companies are expected to play a greater role in combating the risks associated with carbon monoxide poisoning. Having engaged with stakeholders, the GDNs have now submitted their RIIO-GD1 business plans to Ofgem, which include activities on carbon monoxide awareness. Further details on RIIO-GD1 price control review is available at:

<http://www.ofgem.gov.uk/NETWORKS/GASDISTR/RIIO-GD1/Pages/RIIO-GD1.aspx>

Energy Distribution

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the (a) proportion and (b) quantity in MW of energy lost during the distribution phase of each source of energy in each of the last five years. [122273]

Mr Hayes: The following table shows the quantity and proportion of energy (in GWh) lost in the distribution of electricity and gas, for 2007 to 2011.

	Electricity			Gas		
	Distribution losses (GWh)	Electricity available for distribution (GWh)	Distribution losses (% of electricity available for distribution)	Distribution losses (leakage assessment) (GWh)	Gas available at terminals (GWh)	Distribution losses (% of gas available at terminals)
2007	19,827	372,000	5.3	5,123	988,731	0.5
2008	20,195	371,747	5.4	5,297	1,032,742	0.5
2009	20,138	351,637	5.7	4,880	951,544	0.5

	Electricity			Gas		
	Distribution losses (GWh)	Electricity available for distribution (GWh)	Distribution losses (% of electricity available for distribution)	Distribution losses (leakage assessment) (GWh)	Gas available at terminals (GWh)	Distribution losses (% of gas available at terminals)
2010	19,987	358,142	5.6	5,314	1,016,327	0.5
2011	20,664	347,252	6.0	4,389	873,592	0.5

Note:

1 GWh = 1,000 MWh

Source:

Electricity distribution losses are included in the losses figures in table DUKES 5.1, available at: http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/statistics/energy_stats/source/electricity/electricity.aspx

A breakdown of losses for 2011 can be found in paragraph 5.14 of chapter 5 of the 2012 Digest of UK Energy Statistics (see link in table).

Electricity available for distribution is electricity available less transmission losses.

Electricity available can be found in table DUKES 5.5 (see link in table).

Gas data from table DUKES 4.3, available at:

http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/statistics/energy_stats/source/gas/gas.aspx

Gas leakage assessment is the National Grid's assessment of leakage through the local distribution system, based on the National Leakage Reduction Monitoring Model. Gas available at terminals is gross production plus imports less exports and producers' own use.

Ministerial Policy Advisers

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much special advisers in his Department have claimed in expenses since May 2010. [121996]

Gregory Barker: According to the Department's finance system, special advisers in this Department have submitted claims totalling £479 in respect of travel and subsistence expenses on official business during the period 20 May 2010 to 30 September 2012.

This figure covers, for example, taxi expenses for travelling to/from meetings. It does not include flights or hotel expenses for trips accompanying the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr Davey), e.g. to Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings, for which central records are not held. Those expenses were paid for directly by private office, expense claims were not submitted by SpAds.

Renewable Energy: Heating

Graham Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what information his Department holds on the (a) number of exhaust air source heat pumps that have been installed in the UK, (b) total level of public subsidy that has been given for exhaust air source heat pumps to date and (c) number of such installations likely to be removed due to excess cost to the householder. [124859]

Gregory Barker: The Department does not collect or hold information on the number of exhaust air heat pumps (EAHP) installed in the UK. EAHP are not subsidized through the renewable heat incentive, as it is not a renewable technology. One of the conditions of

funding for affordable housing is to meet the Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH). Small scale low carbon technologies such as EAHP may be used to help meet parts of the code. However, there is now less reliance on such technology because of the more frequent use of the building fabric—the walls, roof and windows—to meet the code.

Affordable housing delivery is administered by the Homes and Communities Agency on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government, neither of whom collect information on the number of EAHPs installed or those that benefit from Government funding.

Graham Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change if he will publish the data from the heat pump metering programme in the Renewable Heat Premium Payment scheme; and what proportion of such heat pumps conform to renewable standards. [124860]

Gregory Barker: We will publish these data as soon as a suitable amount has been collected over a period of at least one year and they have been thoroughly audited and analysed. The earliest this is likely to be is summer 2013.

Graham Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what information his Department holds on the number of ground source heat pumps in the UK which receive the renewable heat incentive subsidy. [124869]

Gregory Barker: Ofgem is responsible for administering the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme on behalf of DECC and publishes data on the number of renewable heat installations which have been accredited into the scheme. This can be found at the following link:

<https://rhi.ofgem.gov.uk/Public/ExternalReportDetail.aspx?RP=RHIPublicReport>

This data is updated on a daily basis. As of 23 October 2012, 19 ground source heat pumps had been accredited into the scheme.

Wind Power

Chris Heaton-Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what onshore wind energy generation capacity (a) was installed, (b) has gained planning consent and (c) was seeking planning permission on 1 October 2012. [R] [124837]

Mr Hayes: The Renewable Energy Planning Database showed that in September 2012 5,183 MW of onshore wind were operational, 6,542 MW had gained planning consent and 6,678 MW were seeking planning permission.

We do not anticipate that all consented projects will be built and not everything in the planning system deserves to be consented.

EDUCATION

Email

Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether he continues to use a private email account for Government business; and whether civil servants in his Department have access to that account in order to allow them to fulfil requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. [124074]

Elizabeth Truss [*holding answer 22 October 2012*]: The Secretary of State for Education, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), uses equipment supplied by the Department and his own IT equipment as appropriate, depending on his location and circumstances. Where information is generated in the course of conducting Government business, it is stored on departmental systems.

Email: Freedom of Information

Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to his answer of 21 May 2012, *Official Report*, column 399W, on email, what the cost was of the legal advice his Department has taken in respect of claims relating to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 request for emails about official business sent from non-departmental accounts from September 2011 to date. [110126]

Elizabeth Truss [*holding answer 11 June 2012*]: The Department has spent a total of £12,539.50 on legal advice and litigation services. This includes advice relating to the application of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to non-departmental email accounts and the handling of appeal EA/2012/0072.

Free Schools

Jonathan Ashworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to ensure that the enrolling of students and hiring of staff to free schools is not dictated by religion. [124380]

Elizabeth Truss: All free schools are required to adopt fair and open admission arrangements that comply with, the School Admissions Code. A free school that is designated as a school with religious character is able to select up to 50% of their pupils with reference to faith, if it is oversubscribed.

As part of their application to the Department to set up a free school, proposers are required to set out how they will ensure the highest quality of teaching and leadership in their schools. No school is allowed to proceed without robust plans for doing so. Faith designated free schools are able to prioritise recruitment of staff on the basis of faith to help support their vision and ethos.

Free Schools: Coventry

Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many groups have applied to establish a free school in (a) Coventry local authority area and (b) Coventry North East constituency; [124114]

(2) how many groups who applied to establish a free school in (a) Coventry local authority area and (b) Coventry North East constituency have received advice and assistance from the New Schools Network. [124115]

Elizabeth Truss [*holding answers 22 October 2012*]: Since the launch of the Free Schools Programme in June 2010, one group has applied to establish a free school in the Coventry local authority area; this was not in the Coventry North East constituency.

The Department does not hold information on the advice and assistance given to proposer groups by the New Schools Network.

Freedom of Information

Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish the total cost of (a) external legal advice, (b) advice from the Treasury Solicitor's Department and (c) civil service time incurred in dealing with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 request EA/2012/0072 at the moment that the Information Commissioner's Office issued its decision notice on the issue. [122801]

Elizabeth Truss [*holding answer 17 October 2012*]: The Department spent a total of £1,575 in April 2012 on external legal advice relating to compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA), which included advice in relation to this request. The Department had not incurred any costs relating to advice from the Treasury Solicitor's Department at the time of the Information Commissioner's Decision Notice. The costs of internal civil service time are not held in such a way that they can be separately identified.

Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish the total cost of (a) external legal advice, (b) advice from the Treasury Solicitor's Department and (c) civil service time incurred in dealing with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 request EA/2012/0072. [122802]

Elizabeth Truss [*holding answer 17 October 2012*]: The Department has spent a total of £4,875 on external legal advice from counsel in relation to this request (this figure includes £1,575 for advice relating to compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which was in part advice in relation to this request). The Department has paid £7,664.50 to the Treasury Solicitor's Department on dealing with appeal EA/2012/0072. This covers the legal advice and litigation services provided by TSol, including administrative charges and disbursements. The costs of internal civil service time are not held in such a way that they can be separately identified.

Higher Education

Shabana Mahmood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which universities he has visited in the last 12 months. [116290]

Elizabeth Truss: The Secretary of State for Education, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), visited the university of London in November 2011 and the university of Reading in June 2012.

UK Council for Child Internet Safety

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish the dates of future meetings of the UK Council on Child Internet Safety. [124433]

Mr Timpson [*holding answer 23 October 2012*]: There is a meeting of the UKCCIS Executive Board scheduled for the 17 December 2012.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish the names of all the members and board members of the UK Council on Child Internet Safety. [124434]

Mr Timpson [*holding answer 23 October 2012*]: The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) is jointly chaired by myself, as Minister for Children and Families, and the Minister for Crime Prevention, the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Mr Browne). The Minister for Culture, Communications and the Creative Industries, my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey), is also an executive board member.

A current list of UK Council for Child Internet Safety executive board members is as follows:

Joe Godwin—BBC
 Susie Hargreaves—Internet Watch Foundation
 Peter Davies—Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre
 Scott Dodds—Microsoft
 John Carr—Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety
 Mike Short—O2
 Jo Twist—The Association for UK Interactive and Entertainment
 Sonia Livingstone—London School of Economics
 Elizabeth Kanter—RIM BlackBerry
 Philip Raines—Scottish Government
 Chris Woolard—Ofcom
 Eillis McDaniel—Northern Ireland Government
 Simon Milner—Facebook
 David Happy—Samsung
 Dido Harding—Tall Talk
 Will Gardner—Safer Internet Centre
 Andrew Uden—Tesco
 Vicki Shotbolt—Parentzone
 Sue Warrington—Chace Community School
 Peter Liver—NSPCC.

A full list of all UKCCIS member organisations has been placed in the House Libraries. This list is correct as of 24 September 2012.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER**David Laws**

Thomas Docherty: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many (a) civil servants in his Department and (b) military personnel will be tasked to assist the Minister of State in the Cabinet Office, the Rt hon. Member for Yeovil, in his review of the options for replacing the UK nuclear deterrent. [121505]

Danny Alexander: I have been asked to reply as the Minister responsible for the Trident Alternatives Review.

The review continues to be led by officials in the Cabinet Office, consulting relevant military and civilian experts in the Ministry of Defence, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and other Departments on an as-required basis. The number of experts in each Department varies with the different stages of work and the type of expertise required.

Lord-Lieutenants

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the process is for the appointment of Lord-Lieutenants. [124909]

Miss Chloe Smith: In England, the process of consultation is carried out by the Head of Honours and Appointments Secretariat in the Cabinet Office. S/He will write to a wide range of individuals with knowledge of the county, including local MPs, local government chief executives, representatives of the magistracy, the constabulary, religious groups, voluntary bodies and charities, academics, health sector, the territorial armed services, industry and agriculture, the High Sheriff, Lord-Lieutenancies of neighbouring counties and the Minister for the region. S/He will also spend two or three days in the county having face to face discussions with some individuals who may have particularly relevant knowledge. The results of the consultation are reported to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister for consideration. The Prime Minister makes the eventual recommendation to the Queen.

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what arrangements govern the standing for election to public office of Lord-Lieutenants' secretaries. [124910]

Miss Chloe Smith: Lord-Lieutenancies do not currently have arrangements in place for governing the standing for election to public office of Lord-Lieutenants' clerks or secretaries. If the clerk is a local government official, then the individual would be subject to any local government rules that may apply.

HEALTH**Clinical Commissioning Groups**

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration his Department has given to the capacity of local authorities to scrutinise effectively the work of clinical commissioning groups. [124415]

Anna Soubry: Local authorities have the power to review any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in their area. From April 2013, this will include the power to scrutinise the work of clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) as well as all national health service bodies and relevant service providers from the independent sector. These powers of scrutiny provide an important mechanism for councillors to hold health services to account for the quality of their services and give greater influence to local people over NHS decision-making.

CCGs will work with elected councillors, local authority commissioners and representatives of patients and the public through health and well-being boards to develop a comprehensive analysis of health and social care needs in each local area through Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs), and translate these into action in Joint Health and Well-being Strategies (JHWSs). CCGs, the NHS Commissioning Board and local authorities will also be expected to develop their commissioning plans in line with any relevant JSNA or JHWS, and must be able to justify any parts of their plans which are not consistent.

When preparing or significantly revising its commissioning plan, a CCG must consult the health and well-being board on whether it has taken proper account of the JHWS, and the board must give its views—a statement of the final opinion of the health and well-being board must be included in the CCG's published commissioning plan. The health and well-being board can express concerns to the NHS Commissioning Board, which would be able to take action where deviation from the relevant JHWS is not adequately justified.

As a committee of the local authority, health and well-being boards will also be subject to overview and scrutiny committees of the local authority who will be able to review and scrutinise the decisions and actions of health and well-being boards, and make reports and recommendations to the authority or its executive.

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of clinical commissioning groups have been judged to have limited capacity to perform to the required standard to date. [124416]

Anna Soubry: The authorisation process is still under way for all 211 applicant clinical commissioning groups, and the results will not be known until the NHS Commissioning Board takes its final decisions.

Eyesight: Testing

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take further steps to encourage the uptake of regular sight tests for hard to reach communities and minority ethnic groups in (a) Hackney North and Stoke Newington constituency and (b) England; and if he will make a statement. [124359]

Dr Poulter: The Government recognises that regular sight tests are an important measure in preventing avoidable sight loss.

Free national health service sight tests are available to many, including children, people aged 60 and over, people on benefits and those people at particular risk of developing eye disease. The uptake of NHS sight tests is

increasing. In 2011-12, there were 12.3 million NHS sight tests, an increase of 367,000 (3.1%) compared with the previous year.

Information about the extensive arrangements for providing help with NHS optical services and other health costs is published in leaflet HC11 "Are you entitled to help with health costs?"

It is for local health commissioners, taking into account the needs of the communities they serve, to make decisions about local strategies for promoting eye health. From April 2013 local authorities will have a greater role to play in public health. The Public Health Outcomes Framework includes an indicator on avoidable sight loss.

The new Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies will provide a vehicle for local communities to plan action to meet identified needs, including eye health.

The Department has worked, and continues to work with NHS Choices on the development of articles and videos to raise the profile of visual health and promote the importance of regular sight tests.

Fertility

Tracey Crouch: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the cost to the NHS was of semen cryostorage for conditions that impair fertility or that need treatment likely to impair fertility in each primary care trust area in each of the last three years; [124889]

(2) what consideration his Department has given to the regulation of semen cryostorage charges. [124890]

Anna Soubry: Information on the cost to the national health service of semen storage is not collected centrally.

The Department's view is that the level of charges for the provision of private treatments and services, including cryopreservation (frozen storage), is a matter for Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) licensed clinics and storage centres to determine. However, the schedule of charges must be clear to those who will pay them. The HFEA's code of practice requires that before treatment, storage or both are offered, the clinic or centre should give the person seeking those services a personalised, costed treatment plan.

Health Services: Armed Forces

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many serving members of the Army have been treated by the NHS for each category of illness in each of the last five years. [123374]

Mr Francois: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Ministry of Defence.

Primary and intermediate health care for serving members of the Army, wherever they are based in the world, is normally delivered via a combination of Army and Defence primary health care organisations. These provide military general practice, general dentistry, specialist occupational health services, rehabilitation and community mental health.

There may, however, be occasions when Army personnel access the NHS for some services such as out of hours treatment and NHS general practitioners as temporary patients. This generally arises when personnel are staying

at another location away from their unit. Within the UK, all secondary hospital based care is also accessed via the NHS.

Information relating to the number of Army personnel treated by the NHS over the last five years is not currently held by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). However, this should change from April 2013 when, under the NHS Commissioning Rules, the MOD will be provided with data about the services armed forces personnel have accessed.

Health Services: Foreign Nationals

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what circumstances a GP whose list is closed may refuse to register an overseas visitor as a patient. [124766]

Dr Poulter: Where a general practitioner practice has formally closed its patient list to new patient registrations, it may only accept new applications to join its lists of national health service patients from immediate family members of patients who are already registered with it.

Health Services: Homelessness

Mr Buckland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to ensure that homeless people are able to register with a GP. [124404]

Dr Poulter: Homeless people are entitled to access national health service primary medical services in the same way as everyone else in the country. General practitioner practices are therefore expected to register homeless patients, and we are aware of practices using a temporary address—which may be a friend's address, a day centre or a hostel address, or even the address of their premises in order to register someone who is homeless or without a permanent address.

Mr Buckland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to improve hospital discharge procedures for homeless people. [124405]

Anna Soubry: There are a number of hospitals joining up care and support services effectively to ensure safe and appropriate discharge for homeless people and our aim is to ensure this happens across the country. The Government's report 'Making every contact count: A joint approach to preventing homelessness' encourages local authorities and the national health service to integrate services to improve hospital discharge for the homeless. As part of a broad ranging programme of work, we are also working with Homeless Link to ensure medical professionals discharging patients who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless know who to approach for help with meeting housing needs.

Newspaper Licensing Agency

Ian Murray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to his Department and associated agencies has been of Newspaper Licensing Agency licences for scanned content in each year since 2010. [124826]

Anna Soubry: The Department receives printed copies of its national press cuttings and electronic copies of regional cuttings. The Department's Media Centre holds a licence from the Newspaper Licensing Agency (NLA) which covers both these printed and electronic cuttings.

The figures for financial years 2010-11 to 2012-13 are provided in the following table:

<i>Department of Health</i>	
<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Total payments (£)¹</i>
2010-11	23,303.84
2011-12	20,409.84
2012-13	7,047.36

¹All payments are inclusive of VAT.

Financial years 2010-11 and 2011-12 include NLA costs for Connecting for Health, which joined the Department's Media Centre from NHS Connecting for Health following the merger of the media relation functions of the two organisations in April 2009.

Payments made by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to the Newspaper Licensing Agency (NLA) for the financial periods 2010-11 to 2012-13 are in the following table:

<i>MHRA</i>	
<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Total payments (£)¹</i>
2010-11	12,366.66
2011-12	9,493.43
2012-13	11,833.87

¹ All payments are inclusive of VAT.

North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial resources were allocated to North Tees and Hartlepool Foundation NHS Trust in (a) 2009-10, (b) 2010-11, (c) 2011-12 and (d) 2012-13; and what the planned budgetary allocation for the trust from his Department is in (i) 2013-14, (ii) 2014-15 and (iii) 2015-16 expressed in (A) cash terms and (B) adjusted for inflation. [124419]

Anna Soubry: The Department cannot provide the information requested. The Department currently allocates funding to primary care trusts (PCTs) and not to individual national health service foundation trusts. A national weighted capitation formula is used which determines each PCT's target share of available resources to enable them to commission services to meet the health care needs of their local populations.

The current formula calculates each PCT's target share of available resources based on the age distribution of the population, additional need over and above that accounted for by age, which includes factors such as deprivation, and unavoidable geographical variations in the cost of providing services (the market forces factor).

The NHS Commissioning Board is responsible for the allocation of resources to clinical commissioning groups for 2013-14 which are to be announced by the end of the year. In addition, the Department will allocate a ring-fenced grant to upper tier and unitary local authorities for their future public health responsibilities.

The financial resources data requested at trust level can be obtained directly from North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust.

Out of Area Treatment: Scotland

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on the estimated numbers of referrals from patients residing in Scotland to the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases in Bath in (a) 2012, (b) 2013 and (c) 2014; [124755]

(2) what the value of reimbursement received from the Scottish Government was in respect of care provided to patients resident in Scotland who attended the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases in Bath in each of the last five years; [124756]

(3) how many patients residing in Scotland have attended the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases in Bath for treatment in each of the last five years. [124757]

Anna Soubry: The Department has not had any discussions with the Scottish Government with respect to patients resident in Scotland being referred to the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases NHS Foundation Trust.

The number and cost of such referrals is a matter for the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases NHS Foundation Trust. We have written to the trust's chair, Peter Franklyn, informing him of this enquiry. He will reply to the hon. Member shortly and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Patients: Death

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the number of patients dying in hospital who were admitted to hospital over the weekend in the latest period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement, [124408]

(2) how many patients who died in hospital were admitted to hospitals over a weekend in each year since May 1997. [124409]

Anna Soubry: Data on the number of patients who died in hospital by day of admission for 2010-11 are given in the following table.

Activity in English NHS hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector

All Admissions¹ (elective, emergency and other)

Admission day	Discharged			Percentage	
	Dead	Alive	Total	Dead	Alive
Monday	35,785	2,540,166	2,575,951	1.4	98.6
Tuesday	34,398	2,627,200	2,661,598	1.3	98.7
Wednesday	34,072	2,619,214	2,653,286	1.3	98.7
Thursday	34,209	2,628,181	2,662,390	1.3	98.7
Friday	34,885	2,387,122	2,422,007	1.4	98.6
Saturday	27,708	1,076,497	1,104,205	2.5	97.5
Sunday	27,929	961,494	989,423	2.8	97.2
All days (inc. Unknown)	228,986	14,839,889	15,068,875	1.5	98.5

¹ The method of admission recorded at the beginning of the spell for the relevant discharge group where:

Elective includes HES codes:

11—Elective from waiting list

12—Elective booked

13—Elective planned

Emergency includes HES codes:

21—Emergency—via Accident and Emergency (A&E) services including the casualty department of the provider

22—Emergency via the General Practitioner (GP)

23—Emergency—via Bed Bureau, including the Central Bureau

24—Emergency—via consultant out patient clinic

28—Other means including patients who arrive via the A&E department of another health care provider

Other includes HES codes:

31—Maternity—where the baby was delivered after the mother's admission

32—Maternity—where the baby was delivered before the mother's admission

81—Transfer of any admitted patient from another hospital provider other than in an emergency; this does not include admissions to High Security Psychiatric Hospitals

82—Other—babies born in health care providers

83—Other—babies born outside the health care provider, except when born at home as intended

Note:

Similar data for the period 1997-98 to 2009-10 have been placed in the Library.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Health and Social Care Information Centre

It is important that people have access to services that are consistently safe and high quality every day of the week. The Royal Colleges and specialist societies are leading the way on how to do this through the development of standards and guidance, and the Department will work with these organisations and others to make this happen across the national health service.

Pedicures

David Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the safety of pedicures using fish. [124358]

Anna Soubry: The Health Protection Agency, Health Protection Scotland, and the Health and Safety Laboratory reviewed the available evidence in 2011 and produced guidance to minimise any potential risk of infection.

On the basis of the evidence identified and the view of experts, the risk of infection from a fish pedicure is likely to be very low.

The Health Protection Agency and Health Protection Scotland are currently unaware of any confirmed cases of infection associated with the use of fish spas pedicures in the United Kingdom.

Visual Impairment: Waiting Lists

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time was for (a) an initial appointment with a hospital consultant and (b) follow-up treatment of patients diagnosed with (i) age-related macular degeneration, (ii) glaucoma, (iii) diabetic retinopathy and (iv) cataracts in each of the last five years. [124360]

Anna Soubry: The available information is shown in the following table.

The average waiting times for out-patient appointments for these diagnoses have not been calculated because of the poor quality of diagnosis coding in nationally available out-patient data.

Median time waited for booked and waiting list finished admission episodes (FAEs) for primary diagnoses of macular degeneration, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and cataracts, 2006-07 to 2010-11, from decision to admit: Activity in English NHS Hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector

Primary diagnosis	Median time waited (days)				
	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Macular degeneration	26	23	21	18	17
Glaucoma	34	35	34	34	34
Diabetic retinopathy	28	28	28	27	27
Cataracts	69	64	56	57	57

Notes:

1. 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. Planned cases have been excluded.

2. 'Age related macular degeneration' is not specified in HES, therefore information is provided for 'degeneration of macula and posterior pole'.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Health and Social Care Information Centre

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Basic Skills

Caroline Dinenge: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) what recent steps his Department has taken to reduce the number of functionally illiterate adults; [124596]

(2) what steps his Department has taken to ensure that literacy and numeracy programmes are accessible to the most hard-to-reach functionally illiterate and innumerate adults; [124597]

(3) with reference to page 11 of the New Challenges, New Chances report published on 1 December 2011, what progress he has made on implementing a national mathematics campaign to tackle innumeracy; [124637]

(4) if he will make an assessment of the implementation of measures to tackle adult illiteracy and innumeracy. [124639]

Matthew Hancock: In the last spending review the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) secured continued funding of English and maths courses for adults who lack these basic skills. This is funding over 600,000 adults to take maths courses and over 600,000 to take English courses each year, and we are now funding GCSE English and maths qualifications

for adults from the 2012/13 academic year. We have brought in new freedoms and flexibilities whereby further education colleges and providers have a single Adult Skills Budget which enables them to respond to learner and employer needs locally.

Awarding organisations have responded to BIS' call for new unit-based qualifications that are tailored to the differential needs and learning patterns of adults, and which provide the necessary rigour and flexibility to support progression from lower levels towards a GCSE or other training.

New pilots have commenced which are seeking to determine how providers can be funded on the basis of the skills gained by their learners, to incentivise providers to maximise skills acquisition.

As set out in 'New Challenges, New Chances', BIS is raising demand for maths improvement working through stakeholders rather than using a top-down approach as has been the case with previous campaigns.

Caroline Dinenge: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent progress his Department has made on increasing participation in literacy and numeracy programmes for functionally illiterate and innumerate adults. [124601]

Matthew Hancock: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) funds English (literacy) and maths (numeracy) provision for those aged 19 and over who lack these basic skills.

The following table shows the number of adult learners aged 19+ participating in Skills for Life English and maths courses, by level. The academic years 2009/10 and 2010/11 are based on final data; year 2011/12 is based on provisional data.

	Adult Skills for Life English and Maths participation, by level, 2009/10 to 2011/12 (provisional) ¹		
	2009/10 Final	2010/11 Final	2011/12 Provisional
<i>English</i>	555,700	639,000	788,600
of which entry level	112,400	103,800	107,800
of which level 1	226,700	285,900	385,000
of which level 2	252,100	286,800	334,700
<i>Maths</i>	525,000	630,500	778,500
of which entry level	101,400	98,500	102,900
of which level 1	236,800	314,800	401,700
of which level 2	228,800	265,700	322,800

¹ Information on the number of learners participating on a Skills for Life course is published a quarterly Statistical First Release (SFR). The latest SFR was published on 11 October 2012:

http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_current

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100.

2. Figures relate to learners aged 19 and over and include a small number of learners with an unknown age.

3. Provisional data for the 2011/12 academic year.

Source:

Individualised Learner Record

Business Links

Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many start-ups have accessed publicly-funded sources of assistance from the business support finder section of his Business Link website in each year since 2005; and how many such start-ups are still in existence. [124842]

Michael Fallon: The business support finder section of the Business Link website was only launched during November 2011 so I am unable to report traffic to that particular tool back to 2005. I can however confirm that the business support finder received 228,992 visitors during the period November 2011 to October 2012, although it is not possible to report how many of these would have been by start-ups.

Toby Perkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the budget for the Business Link website was in 2011-12; and what that budget is in 2012-13. [124843]

Michael Fallon: The Department is not responsible for the budget for the Business Link website as this falls to HM Customs and Revenue. However, I can confirm that the budget for the Business Link website for 2011-12 was £26.746 million and for 2012-13 is £4.728 million. The lower amount for 2012-13 is as a result of the closure of the Business Link website on the 17 October 2012 when it was replaced by the new single domain for government:

www.gov.uk

Conditions of Employment

Mr Bain: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will make an assessment of the potential effects on growth and levels of labour market participation in the first two years following the introduction of his Department's proposals to permit staff to forfeit employment rights in respect of (a) unfair dismissal, (b) flexible working and (c) flexible dates of return from maternity leave in exchange for shares in the company for which they work. [122981]

Jo Swinson: The Government is currently carrying out a consultation on the proposed new 'employee owner' employment status. As part of the consultation, we are seeking views on how we can implement the new status and its likely impacts including on growth and levels of labour market participation, employee engagement and labour market flexibility.

The consultation closes on 8 November.

Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

Mike Weatherley: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will commission further evidence-gathering to monetise the potential effects of the repeal of section 52 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. [123416]

Jo Swinson: The Government has no plans to commission further evidence gathering on this issue. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 23 October 2012, *Official Report*, column 852W, for information.

Mike Weatherley: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) whether a date has been set for the commencement of a public consultation on the implementation of the transitional provisions for businesses affected by the proposed changes to section 52 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988; [124737]

(2) if he will take the steps to ensure that any transitional periods granted to businesses affected by the proposed changes to section 52 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 will be granted on a case-by-case basis. [124738]

Jo Swinson: As the repeal of section 52 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 has not yet been approved by Parliament, no date has been set for the commencement of a consultation on transitional provisions. Questions of what transitional periods might apply, including whether or not these might be granted on a case-by-case basis, would be matters for that consultation and have not been decided.

Employee Ownership Scheme

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills with reference to the employee ownership scheme he announced on 8 October 2012, whether the employee ownership shares will be treated as employee related securities as defined under the Income Tax (Earnings and Pensions) Act 2003. [123611]

Mr Gauke: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Treasury.

It is anticipated that shares issued under the employee owner status will be employment related securities as defined in the Income Tax (Earnings and Pensions) Act 2003.

A Department for Business, Innovation and Skills consultation on the implementation of the new status opened on 18 October and will close on 8 November 2012. The consultation document is published on the BIS website and contains further information on the Government's proposals.

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills with reference to the employee ownership scheme he announced on 8 October 2012, whether employees will be required to have paid market value as defined in sections 272 and 273 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 to qualify for exemption from capital gains tax on disposal. [123613]

Mr Gauke: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Treasury.

It is anticipated that employees taking up the new employee owner status will not be required to pay market value for the shares they receive in order to be eligible for the associated capital gains tax exemption.

A Department for Business, Innovation and Skills consultation on the implementation of the new status opened on 18 October and will close on 8 November 2012. The consultation document is published on the BIS website and contains further information on the Government's proposals.

Green Investment Bank

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the implications of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights for the Green Investment Bank. [124171]

Michael Fallon: The board of the UK Green Investment Bank is required under the company's Shareholder Relationship Framework Document to ensure that each investment of the bank is made in accordance with responsible investment criteria set by the board. The criteria must be in line with best practice and cover areas such as the environmental, social, safety and governance standards of investments. The UK Green Investment Bank responsible investment criteria will align with Government policy, which is fully committed to the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Growth Implementation Committee

Ian Murray: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he expects to be appointed a member of the proposed Cabinet Growth Implementation Committee. [124868]

Michael Fallon: The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable), is the Deputy Chair of the Growth Implementation Committee. A full membership list will be published in due course.

Higher Education: Mental Health Services

Oliver Colville: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what support his Department gives to universities to assist students with mental health issues. [124503]

Mr Willetts: Universities have duties under the Equality Act 2010 (which incorporated the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995) to support disabled students in higher education, including those with mental health conditions. Higher education institutions have clear duties and responsibilities with regard to ensuring that disabled students do not face discrimination or less favourable treatment while applying to, and studying in, higher education. However, the detailed decisions of how an institution will comply with legislation and, more broadly, support disabled students will be determined by the institution itself within the requirements of the law.

The Government provide financial support to disabled students in higher education (HE). They are supported via (i) the institution they attend and (ii) individually through disabled students' allowances (DSAs).

The Government provide funding to HE institutions, through the Higher Education Funding Council for England, to help them recruit and support disabled students; £13 million has been provided in academic year 2012/13.

In addition, the Government also provide direct support to disabled students through disabled students' allowances (DSAs). In England, £87.8 million was spent on providing DSAs to 41,700 students in 2009/10. DSAs can help pay the extra costs a student may incur because of a disability when undertaking a course of higher education. DSAs are provided in addition to the standard student support package, are not income-assessed, and do not have to be repaid.

The Government has established a new framework with increased responsibility placed on universities to widen participation. This includes arrangements for

new annual access agreements from higher education institutions which wish to charge above the basic amounts for tuition, £6,000, to demonstrate what more they will do to attract students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups. In 2012/13 and 2013/14, 86 higher education institutions have milestones in their access agreements relating to disability (around 55% of all institutions).

There is guidance available to universities on supporting students and staff with mental health conditions from a range of sector and medical bodies, including the Heads of University Counselling Services, the Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE), the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the former Disability Rights Commission and most recently from the Universities UK/Guild HE Working Group for the Promotion of Mental Well-Being in Higher Education.

London Metropolitan University

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what calculations were used to form the evidential basis for the Government's decision to set up a fund of £2 million to help overseas students at London Metropolitan University affected by the decision to revoke the University's highly-trusted status. [124565]

Mr Willetts: The Government's decision to make available up to £2 million from existing funding took account of the potential numbers of students affected; the known costs of repeat visa applications; and estimates of possible additional costs, for example in respect of lost deposits on accommodation due to having to move somewhere else to study. The recent decision of the High Court allowing legitimate non-EU students to remain at London Metropolitan University until their course has ended or the end of the academic year, whichever is sooner, is expected to reduce the number of claims on the fund.

Secondment

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the average length was of a secondment undertaken by staff in his Department to business and industry in the latest period for which figures are available. [124863]

Jo Swinson: The average length of a secondment undertaken by a member of staff from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to business and industry was just under 12 months in 2011-12 and is currently 13 months (for the period 1 April 2012 to 30 September 2012).

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the average length was of a secondment undertaken from business and industry to his Department in the latest period for which figures are available. [124865]

Jo Swinson: The average length of a secondment from business and industry to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills was a little over 10 months during 2011-12 and is currently around four months (for the period 1 April 2012 to 30 September 2012).

Students: Fees and Charges

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what information his Department holds on the average (a) fees paid for higher education and (b) proportion of such fees paid by the student in higher education systems overseas. [124123]

Mr Willetts [*holding answer 22 October 2012*]: Average tuition fee levels are published by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) when the Director of Fair Access announces his decisions on institutions' Access Agreements. OFFA estimates average fees under the new funding regime will be £8,385 per annum in academic year 2012/13 before fee waivers and institutional support are applied. Starting from 2012/13 the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) will collect information on tuition fees charged to students studying in the UK; information will be available from January 2014. No eligible student has to pay for their tuition up front. Loans of up to £9,000 are available for full-time and full-time distance learning students to meet the full cost of tuition at publicly funded institutions.

Comparative information on how much tertiary education students pay in tuition fees across OECD countries is published by the OECD in their annual report 'Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators'. This is shown in table B5.1. Figures specifically relate to home students, unless stated otherwise in the table. The table does not distinguish between countries which charge tuition fees up front and countries where fees are repaid after graduating via an income-contingent loan, though further details of the funding models applied in each country are available in the report:

<http://www.oecd.org/edu/highereducationandadultlearning/eag2012.htm>

Mr Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what estimate he has made of the effect of changes in tuition fees in England on the level of the consumer price index in (a) 2012-13, (b) 2013-14 and (c) 2014-15. [124321]

Mr Willetts [*holding answer 22 October 2012*]: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills does not make estimates of this, but the Office for Budget Responsibility has some forecasts in its Economic and Fiscal Outlook.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bangladesh

Nick de Bois: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact's report from November 2011 on her Department's climate change programme in Bangladesh. [124361]

Mr Duncan: The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) report on DFID Bangladesh's climate change programme made five recommendations, listed as follows, which the programme team is implementing. DFID Bangladesh provides an update every six months

to Ministers, which feeds into an organisation-wide progress update to the International Development Committee on the implementation of all the ICAI review recommendations.

Recommendation 1:

DFID should ensure that organisations implementing UK aid are selected competitively and managed according to clear performance targets, set out in a service level agreement.

Recommendation 2:

DFID should ensure that all UK resources that support Bangladesh's response to climate change are managed in a co-ordinated and integrated manner.

Recommendation 3:

DFID should support monitoring by local and international civil society organisations of the activities and achievements of the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

Recommendation 4:

DFID in Bangladesh should use the programme to fund research and activities to address migration caused by climate change over the next 20 to 30 years. It should support building capacity to deal with such effects of climate change.

Recommendation 5:

DFID should plan more explicitly for what will happen at the end of the programme. In particular, more effort is needed to build capacity within government to enable activities and administration to be led by local, not international, institutions.

The detail of how we are addressing the recommendations are available to view at:

<http://icai.independent.gov.uk/publications/dfid-response-to-icai-reports/>

Nick de Bois: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what assessment she has made of the position of the Results and Evaluation Advisor appointed in 2011 as mentioned in her Department's Operational Plan in Bangladesh 2011-15; [124363]

(2) what the salary is of the Results and Evaluation Adviser appointed in 2011 as mentioned in her Department's Operational Plan in Bangladesh 2011-15. [124364]

Mr Duncan: The results and evaluation adviser for DFID Bangladesh was appointed in October 2011. This is an A2/civil service grade 7 position and the salary range for this post is £49,168-£56,293.

The position is held by a member of the Statistics Cadre and has proved valuable in increasing the capacity of the staff and delivery partners to improve the evidence base in programmes, by improving the use of data sources and more effectively applying rigorous methodological approaches for tracking results. The post holder is also working across teams to embed improved monitoring systems and independent evaluation into programme design.

Nick de Bois: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much and what proportion of her Department's aid to Bangladesh is implemented through the Bangladeshi Government and its connected agencies. [124365]

Mr Duncan: The 2012-13 budget for programmes implemented by DFID Bangladesh is £197 million. Of this, £19 million is allocated for the Government-led Health Sector Development Programme and £20 million

for the Government-led Education Development Programme. In addition DFID also allocated £3.5 million to the 'connected' agencies of the Micro-Finance Regulatory Authority and Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) to strengthen the micro-finance sector.

In total these amount to 22% of the DFID Bangladesh allocation for 2012-13.

Crimes of Violence: Females

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which Minister in her Department is responsible for the elimination of international violence against women. [124468]

Justine Greening: The Under-Secretary of State for International Development, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Lynne Featherstone) is the Ministerial Champion for tackling Violence against Women and Girls Overseas. My Department's policy on gender and women's rights is cross-cutting and I have overall responsibility for these issues.

EU Aid

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much and what proportion of her Department's budget is spent via the EU. [124465]

Justine Greening: Approximately 16% of DFID's total programme and programme capital budget was spent in the EU in 2011-12.

India

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with representatives of the Indian Government on the UK's bilateral aid programme. [124466]

Justine Greening: I met Indian Finance Minister Chidambaram during the World Bank Annual Meetings in Tokyo on 13 October. We discussed the future of the India-UK development partnership.

Overseas Aid

Nick de Bois: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the Bilateral Programme Budget's funding of (a) training for journalists on capacity development for investigative reporting on financial management and accountability and (b) training for diplomatic reporters on foreign affairs and diplomatic issues. [124362]

Mr Duncan: We do not have a specific assessment on funding of DFID's bilateral aid programme for capacity development for investigative reporting on financial management and foreign affairs issues.

DFID sees the media as an important element in governance. Training for journalists and other media professionals is delivered through the £90 million global grant to BBC Media Action 2011-16 which helps citizens in 14 countries to hold governments to account. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a £13 million media

support programme is delivering training and support to media professionals and has increased the number of investigative reports in six provinces.

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether the estimated spending on climate change-related activities will remain under 10 per cent of the overall official development assistance budget in 2013. [124464]

Justine Greening: Estimated spending on climate change-related activities will remain under 10% of the overall official development assistance budget in 2013.

Yemen

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent estimate she has made of how many people in Yemen are being supported by UK aid. [124356]

Mr Duncan: The UK supports Yemen in four main areas: Poverty, Hunger and Vulnerability; Humanitarian Relief; Governance and Security; and Wealth Creation.

In 2011-12 UK support reached the following beneficiaries:

300,000 people benefitted from UK funded emergency food assistance;

111,000 people received essential health services;

87,000 people received cash transfer (including through public works employment);

11,700 people benefitted from access to financial services including loans and deposit accounts;

6.6 million people voted in the elections in February 2012 which were supported by the UK.

Our planned results for the next three financial years have been published in our operational plan 2012-15. This can be found on the Department's website.

JUSTICE

Alternatives to Prison

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what his policy is on alternatives to a custodial sentence for offenders who have been diagnosed with severe mental health problems. [124417]

Jeremy Wright: If an offender is suffering from mental disorder that is of a nature and degree that makes it appropriate for them to be detained in hospital for medical treatment then it is unlikely they would be eligible to receive any order other than a hospital order, rather than a custodial sentence or a community order.

A community order with a mental health treatment requirement is available where an offender's mental health problem is such as to require and be susceptible to treatment, but not serious enough for a hospital order or a guardianship order. In addition to this sentencing option, the Ministry of Justice is working with the Department of Health, and the Home Office to deliver the Government's commitment to diverting offenders with less severe mental health problems from the criminal justice system or from custody at the earliest opportunity, where appropriate. To develop this further, £19.4 million

has been provided by the Department of Health in 2012-13, which will include exploring options for treatment based community sentences for offenders with mental health vulnerabilities.

Approved Premises

Mike Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many and what proportion of people were resident in an approved premises in England and Wales whose index offence was (a) sexual and (b) violent in the latest period for which figures are available. [124694]

Jeremy Wright: The number of (a) sexual and (b) violent offenders accommodated in approved premises in England and Wales will vary from time to time. Statistical information about the offending history of offenders residing in approved premises at any one time is not collected centrally, although offenders' assessed level of risk of harm at the point of admission is.

Approved premises provide for enhanced supervision, particularly of high risk of harm offenders on release from custody. It would be much more difficult to provide that level of supervision, were such offenders to be dispersed into less suitable accommodation in the community on release from custody.

Courts

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what proportion of court time in England and Wales was split between (a) lay magistrates and (b) district judges in each of the last 10 years. [124560]

Mrs Grant: We do not collate data on the division of court work between district judges (magistrates courts) and magistrates. It is, however, the Government's firm view that an appropriate balance of both magistrates and district judges (MC) is vital to run an effective and efficient justice system.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many victims of dog attacks under 18 years of age received compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme in each of the years (a) 2009-10, (b) 2010-11 and (c) 2011-12. [124832]

Mrs Grant: The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) does not have reliable figures for this. Compensation for victims of violent crime is based on the injuries people sustain not the particular crimes of which they were a victim. The injuries for which CICA can compensate, and therefore provide reliable figures for, are set out in the Tariff of Injuries in the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme 2008, but the tariff does not contain any injuries specific to dog attacks.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many victims of crime who received compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme did not report to the police but to another body or person considered by the authority to be appropriate for the purpose in each of the years (a) 2009-10, (b) 2010-11 and (c) 2011-12. [124833]

Mrs Grant: The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) cannot say definitively how many victims of crime who received compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme did not report to the police but to another body or person considered by the authority to be appropriate. The CICA holds information at that level of detail only within individual files, not in its main database. The exact information requested could be obtained only by a member of staff manually sifting through around 1,600 files at a disproportionate cost.

The CICA can, however, provide figures based on cases resolved where the victim did not report the crime to the police but did receive an award. These are set out in the following table. To be eligible for compensation, within the terms of the scheme, any victim who did not report the crime to the police must have reported to another body or person considered by the CICA as appropriate.

Financial year	Number of successful claims
2009-10	600
2010-11	563
2011-12	512

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how much each of the Tariff Bands in the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme would be worth if they had been increased by the rate of inflation since 1996 using each of the indices (a) RPI and (b) CPI; [124834]

(2) if he will publish the figures used and calculations made, referred to in paragraph 58 of the Impact Assessment of the proposals to reform the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme which produce an estimate that the average total payment for loss of earning would fall from £40,000 to £30,000 under the proposal to pay loss of earnings at a flat rate of £4,243 per year. [124836]

Mrs Grant: The following table sets out the value of each of the tariff bands in the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (CICS) along with how much each of the tariff bands would be worth if they had increased by the rate of inflation since 1996 using each of the indices (a) RPI and (b) CPI:

Band	Tariff amount	£	
		(a) Inflated amount (RPI)	(b) Inflated amount (CPI)
1	1,000.00	1,540.28	1,357.55
2	1,250.00	1,925.34	1,696.94
3	1,500.00	2,310.41	2,036.32
4	1,750.00	2,695.48	2,375.71
5	2,000.00	3,080.55	2,715.10
6	2,500.00	3,850.69	3,393.87
7	3,300.00	5,082.91	4,479.91
8	3,800.00	5,853.05	5,158.68
9	4,400.00	6,777.21	5,973.21
10	5,500.00	8,471.51	7,466.52
11	6,600.00	10,165.82	8,959.82
12	8,200.00	12,630.26	11,131.90
13	11,000.00	16,943.03	14,933.03
14	13,500.00	20,793.71	18,326.90
15	16,500.00	25,414.54	22,399.55
16	19,000.00	29,265.23	25,793.42

Band	Tariff amount	£	
		(a) Inflated amount (RPI)	(b) Inflated amount (CPI)
17	22,000.00	33,886.05	29,866.06
18	27,000.00	41,587.43	36,653.80
19	33,000.00	50,829.08	44,799.09
20	44,000.00	67,772.10	59,732.12
21	55,000.00	84,715.13	74,665.15
22	82,000.00	126,302.55	111,318.96
23	110,000.00	169,430.25	149,330.31
24	175,000.00	269,548.13	237,570.94
25	250,000.00	385,068.75	339,387.06

Note:

ONS RPI and CPI indices have been used for these calculations.

The figures used to estimate the initial average total payment for loss of earnings of £40,000 were based on a sample of 138 cases from 2009-10 (out of about 1,100 who received loss of earnings in that year). As well as total award value, we have detailed information on most members of the sample including years of past and future loss.

The £30,000 average total payment for loss of earning under the proposal to pay a flat rate of £4,243 was estimated using information on past and discounted future loss for these members. Multiplying the flat rate of £4,243 by the total years of loss across the sample and dividing across the size of the sample gives an average total payment of approximately £30,000.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many of the 73 Pre-Tariff cases which were outstanding at 31 March 2012 were settled during the period 1 April to 30 September 2012. [124835]

Mrs Grant: The number of outstanding Pre-Tariff cases at 31 March 2012 was 63 not 73. 28 Pre-Tariff cases were settled in the period 1 April to 30 September 2012.

Prison Sentences

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the average length of custodial sentences handed down was in each year from 1994 to 2011. [124603]

Jeremy Wright: The average custodial sentence length (months) received for all offences at all courts in England and Wales from 1994 to 2011 can be viewed in the following table.

Average custodial sentence length received for all offences at all courts, England and Wales, 1994 to 2011^{1, 2}. England and Wales

	Average custodial sentence length ⁴ (months)
1994	12.1
1995	12.0
1996	12.8

Number of persons found guilty and sentence breakdown at all courts for offences of robbery, rape, theft from a vehicle, grievous bodily harm and actual bodily harm, England and Wales, 2011^{1, 2}

Offences	Found guilty	Total sentenced ⁷	Absolute discharge	Conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with
Robbery	9,265	9,271	1	12	1	2,900	541	5,561	255
Rape ³	1,153	1,153	—	—	—	38	2	1,098	15
Theft from a vehicle ⁴	4,515	4,485	11	493	382	1,977	348	1,119	155
Grievous bodily harm ⁵	1,779	1,777	1	—	—	42	22	1,652	60

Average custodial sentence length received for all offences at all courts, England and Wales, 1994 to 2011^{1, 2}. England and Wales

	Average custodial sentence length ⁴ (months)
1997	12.7
1998	11.8
1999	11.5
2000	11.4
2001	11.8
2002	12.6
2003	12.6
2004	12.9
2005	12.6
2006	12.4
2007	12.4
2008 ³	13.3
2009	13.7
2010	13.7
2011	14.7

¹ The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

² Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

³ Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates court for April, July and August 2008.

⁴ Excludes life and indeterminate sentences.

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services within the Ministry of Justice.

Sentencing

Jenny Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many people convicted of robbery received a (a) custodial and (b) non-custodial sentence in 2011; [124473]

(2) how many people convicted of rape received a (a) custodial and (b) non-custodial sentence in 2011; [124474]

(3) how many people convicted of theft from a vehicle received a (a) custodial and (b) non-custodial sentence in 2011; [124475]

(4) how many people convicted of grievous bodily harm received a (a) custodial and (b) non-custodial sentence in 2011; [124476]

(5) how many people convicted of actual bodily harm received a (a) custodial and (b) non-custodial sentence in 2011. [124477]

Jeremy Wright: The number of persons found guilty and sentence breakdown at all courts for robbery, rape, theft from a vehicle, grievous bodily harm and actual bodily harm, in England and Wales for 2011 can be viewed in the following table:

Number of persons found guilty and sentence breakdown at all courts for offences of robbery, rape, theft from a vehicle, grievous bodily harm and actual bodily harm, England and Wales, 2011^{1,2}

Offences	Found guilty	Total sentenced ⁷	Absolute discharge	Conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with
Actual bodily harm ⁶	13,786	13,750	11	250	202	5,117	3,614	4,125	431

¹ The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

² Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

³ Includes offences under: Sexual Offences Act 2003, s1 and s5

⁴ Includes offences under: Theft Act 1968, s1

⁵ Includes offences under: Offences against the Person Act 1861, s18

⁶ Includes offences under: Offences against the Person Act 1861, S.47 (in part)

⁷ The number of offenders sentenced can differ from those found guilty as it may be the case that a defendant found guilty in a particular year, and committed for sentence at the Crown Court, may be sentenced in the following year.

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice

Social Security Benefits: Fraud

Mr Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many individuals in the Peterborough city council area have been convicted of welfare benefits-related fraud in the most recent period for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [124177]

Jeremy Wright: The number of persons found guilty at all courts of benefit fraud offences in the Cambridgeshire police force area in 2011 can be viewed in the table.

Court proceedings data are not available at local government authority level therefore data for Cambridgeshire police force area have been provided in lieu.

Number of persons found guilty at all courts of benefit fraud offences¹, in the Cambridgeshire police force area, in 2011^{2,3}

	Number found guilty
Benefit fraud Offences	78

¹ Includes offences under Social Security Administration Act 1992 as added by the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act 1997, Sections 111A & 112.

² The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

³ Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice

Unpaid Fines

Jason McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the monetary value is of outstanding fines imposed by the Health and Safety Executive on businesses which have remained unpaid for more than (a) six and (b) 12 months. [124614]

Mrs Grant: HM Courts and Tribunals Service systems do not identify the outstanding balance of fines imposed by specific prosecutors or for specific offences and therefore this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost as it would require a manual search of all fine accounts.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Anaerobic Digestion

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many anaerobic digestors have been (a) given planning approval and (b) built since May 2010; and if he will make a statement. [124066]

Richard Benyon: Statistics from the Department for Communities and Local Government show that 55 anaerobic digestion (AD) projects received approval between April 2010 and March 2012. Data provided by the Waste and Resources Action Programme show that four more have received approval between then and July 2012. These were for projects identified as waste infrastructure. We estimate that a further 71 AD projects based on farms have received approval since May 2010. Nine of these 130 projects are currently operational.

The Government's AD Strategy and Action Plan, published in June 2011, sets out our commitment to increasing the energy from waste produced through AD. We identified 56 actions to tackle barriers to the uptake of AD.

In July 2012, we published a progress report on the action plan. This showed that the number of plants had increased from 54 to 78 since the strategy was compiled and that the capacity of the industry had doubled. The Strategy and Action Plan and the progress report are available on DEFRA's website.

Water

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the High Level Group on Water last met; when it will next meet; and if he will make a statement. [124412]

Richard Benyon: The High Level Group on the Implementation of Market Reform in the water sector first met on 7 September and is due to meet next in November. The group has agreed to meet every six to eight weeks. The note of the first meeting is available on the Ofwat website.

The group draws representation from the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments, Ofwat, the Water Industry Commissioner for Scotland, the water and sewerage

industry and customers to support the UK Government in delivery of the market reform proposals set out in the draft Water Bill.

Water Companies

Kelvin Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will commission a study to compare the performance of UK water companies with their publicly-owned European counterparts. [124652]

Richard Benyon: Since privatisation in 1989, the stable regulatory framework for the water sector has enabled companies to attract over £108 billion in low cost investment to upgrade water and sewerage infrastructure, improve customer service and environmental standards.

The evidence shows that charges and standards are broadly consistent across Europe. There are no plans for a comparative study.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Access to Work Programme

Mrs McGuire: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many disabled people have received support through the Access to Work programme in each year since 2009-10, by Department for Work and Pensions district. [124463]

Esther McVey: The following table shows the number of individuals helped by the Access to Work programme in each financial year between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2012. The figures are broken down further by Jobcentre Plus (JCP) district.

JCP district	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	840	860	760
Birmingham and Solihull	1,000	940	800
Black Country	800	680	550
Cumbria and Lancashire	1,300	1,200	970
Derbyshire	560	500	410
Devon and Cornwall	1,070	1,000	850
Durham and Tees Valley	910	840	600
East Anglia	1,440	1,380	1,150
East London	870	940	860
East and South East Scotland	780	810	750
Essex	990	940	840
Glasgow, Lanarkshire and East Dunbartonshire	1,060	1,070	940
Gloucestershire and West of England	1,030	1,010	890
Greater Manchester Central and Cheshire	1,300	1,330	1,140
Greater Manchester East and West	1,300	1,320	1,060
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	890	900	810
Kent	840	920	730
Leicestershire and Northamptonshire	920	870	740
Lincoln, Nottinghamshire and Rutland	980	910	820
Mercia	910	820	640

JCP district	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Merseyside	1,350	1,280	1,030
North East Yorkshire and the Humber	970	940	700
North London	870	920	910
North and Mid Wales	440	380	420
North of Scotland	590	510	470
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	1,240	1,130	860
South East Wales	650	510	430
South London	1,360	1,390	1,300
South West Wales	600	550	430
South Yorkshire	1,130	940	780
Staffordshire and Shropshire	900	870	700
Surrey and Sussex	1,030	1,060	960
Thames Valley	850	890	860
Wessex	1,030	970	770
West London	1,010	1,060	990
West Yorkshire	1,590	1,460	1,280
West of Scotland	370	380	330
GB total	37,290	35,830	30,690

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

2. Due to missing or erroneous postcodes, there are a small proportion of cases where we have been unable to generate a JCP district. Therefore JCP district totals may not sum to GB total, due to summing rounded figures and areas where the JCP district is missing.

Source:

Access to Work database.

Atos Healthcare

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people participating in the Atos Quality Survey in Scotland rated Atos Healthcare's performance as (a) very good, (b) good, (c) poor and (d) very poor in 2012 to date. [122486]

Mr Hoban: Unfortunately the information requested above is not available in the format requested.

The answer could be provided in the requested format only at disproportionate costs exceeding the disproportionate cost limit of £800 for parliamentary questions.

Employment Schemes: Young People

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many companies have employed young people through the wage subsidy incentive in the Youth Contract since its inception. [124903]

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.

From late July 2012, in selected "youth unemployment hotspots", wage incentives became available via Jobcentre Plus to employ eligible 18 to 24-year-olds.

In most cases the wage incentives element of the Youth Contract are paid after a young person has been in work continuously for 26 weeks. Following the collection and quality assurance of this data, the first set of Official Statistics on the wage incentive should be available from early 2013.

Housing Benefit

Jeremy Lefroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people under 25 years in (a) Stafford constituency and (b) England are in receipt of housing benefit. [124536]

Steve Webb: Information is not currently available for housing benefit (HB) recipients aged under 25 at parliamentary constituency level. The table gives the figure for HB recipients in England.

<i>Housing benefit recipients in England - May 2012</i>		
<i>All HB recipients of which are aged under 25</i>		
Number	4,295,670	326,560

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)

Housing Benefit: Private Rented Housing

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the (a) absolute and (b) percentage change was in the number of housing benefit claimants in the private rented sector who were in work in each local authority area between May 2010 and January 2012. [124838]

Steve Webb: The available information will be placed in the Library.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of new claims for jobseekers' allowance were submitted using the online delivery channel in each month from March 2012 to date. [124867]

Mr Hoban: The Department reports performance against the Business Plan 'Proportion of new Jobseeker's Allowance claims submitted online indicator in the Annual Report and Accounts'.

The Business Plan indicator is comprised of a single Jobseeker's Allowance measure which is the Business Case measure. There are however two measures of jobseeker's allowance available, the Business Case measure and the Management Information System Programme (MISP) measure.

The following table shows the percentage of jobseeker's allowance claims made via the online channel from March 2012 to September 2012 based on both measures of jobseeker's allowance online performance.

	<i>Business case measure</i>	<i>Percentage MISP measure</i>
March 2012	34.6	19.6
April 2012	45.0	23.7
May 2012	44.0	23.4
June 2012	61.4	29.5

	<i>Business case measure</i>	<i>Percentage MISP measure</i>
July 2012	54.4	30.9
August 2012	55.4	32.1
September 2012	66.5	39.0

Social Security Benefits: Medical Examinations

Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Atos assessment centres there are in (a) England, (b) Scotland, (c) Wales and (d) Northern Ireland; and in which such assessment centres mental health champions are based. [122373]

Mr Hoban: There are 146 assessment centres currently used to conduct health and disability assessments for the DWP and the Social Security Agency in Northern Ireland. These are located as follows:

England: 97

Wales: 19

Scotland: 30

Northern Ireland: 10.

60 mental function champions are employed by Atos Healthcare for the DWP contract and five for Northern Ireland. They provide a telephone service to all health care professionals regardless of location.

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Atos Healthcare assessment centres there are in (a) the UK and (b) Scotland; and how many in each such category operate during (i) core office hours, (ii) weekends and (iii) evenings. [122491]

Mr Hoban: There are 146 assessment centres currently used to conduct health and disability assessments. These operate according to customer demand within the locality. They normally operate during core hours although when required may open at a weekend.

Universal Credit

Mr Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of (a) the number of universal credit claimants who will receive transitional protection and (b) the expenditure on such transitional protection for each year between 2013 and 2017. [124759]

Mr Hoban: We will offer transitional protection to universal credit recipients, which will ensure that households will not receive less as a result of their move to universal credit, where circumstances have remained the same. The number of transitional protection recipients and costs in each year between 2013 and 2017 are subject to the incremental caseload of universal credit over this time period, and the final policy design. The detailed approach to managing this increase is currently under development.

The cost of transitional protection is included within the £2 billion spending envelope allocated for the introduction of universal credit over the spending review period.

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of

the merits of recent proposals for a self-care addition to universal credit. [124904]

Mr Hoban: The Department has sought the views of stakeholders as we develop universal credit and we will continue to do so. We are currently considering the proposals made in the recent report: 'Holes in the safety net: The impact of Universal Credit on disabled people and their families'.

Work Capability Assessment

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether employment and support allowance claimants undergoing a work capability assessment are entitled to view the full documentation on that assessment compiled by Atos Healthcare. [122489]

Mr Hoban: On completion of a work capability assessment, claimants in receipt of employment and support allowance can contact DWP to request a copy of the Atos Healthcare assessment report.

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints his Department has received in relation to the work capability assessment in each month of (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012 to date. [122495]

Mr Hoban: The DWP Medical Services Contracts Correspondence Team has received the following number of complaints in relation to the work capability assessment (WCA), in each of the year's requested:

2010—correspondence not categorised to identify complaints by type

2011—117 items of WCA correspondence

2012 (to date)—147 items of WCA correspondence

To provide a month by month response to this question would involve undertaking a detailed review of all the correspondence cases to ascertain the relevant month in which the complaint was lodged and exceed the disproportionate cost limit of £800 for parliamentary questions.

All complaints received are taken seriously and are properly investigated prior to a response being issued.

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on how many occasions a Decision Maker from his Department requested additional medical information from a claimant after the work capability assessment had taken place but before a final decision had been made in each month of 2012 to date. [122498]

Mr Hoban: This information is not captured by DWP, although the requirement to undertake telephone calls to all claimants prior to a decision is mandatory.

In all cases, the claimants are given the opportunity to give further evidence before the final decision is made.

Work Programme

Sir Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many (a) prime contractors and (b) sub-contractors have voluntarily withdrawn from the Work programme since it began; and how many such contractors were charitable and voluntary organisations. [124762]

Mr Hoban: No prime contractors have withdrawn from the Work programme.

The most recent published stock take information, which represented the supply chain as at 30 January 2012, showed 412 organisations from the voluntary and community sector involved as sub contractors, a net decrease of eight from the August 2011 return. Overall there was a slight net increase of seven in the total number of subcontractors. A further stocktake will be published shortly.

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit sanctions have been issued by Work programme providers in each month since the programme started. [124905]

Mr Hoban: Benefit sanctions are not issued by Work programme providers. Work programme providers are able to raise sanction doubts, for example if they do not consider that a person is available for work and actively seeking work, but the ultimate decision to enforce a sanction sits with Jobcentre Plus.

Information on how many jobseeker's allowance sanctions have been applied by Jobcentre Plus for failing to participate in the Work programme in each month since the programme started can be found at:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=tabtool>

Guidance for users is available at:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/tabtools/guidance.pdf>

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Theft: Metals

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the hon. Member for Banbury, representing the Church Commissioners, what the cost of metal theft from Church of England property was in (a) Manchester and (b) Chester diocese in (i) 2010, (ii) 2011 and (iii) 2012 to date. [124703]

Sir Tony Baldry: The following table shows the value and amount of metal thefts from Church of England property in the dioceses of Manchester and Chester in 2010, 2011 and 2012. The figures for 2012 display the situation as of 30 September.

Diocese	2010		2011		2012		Total over 3 years	
	Claims	Cost (£)	Claims	Cost (£)	Claims	Cost (£)	Claims	Cost (£)
Manchester	103	170,127	90	114,776	24	34,710	217	319,613
Chester	37	65,007	78	142,535	19	35,323	134	242,865

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 25 October 2012

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
CHURCH COMMISSIONERS	1067	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS—	
Cathedrals.....	1069	<i>continued</i>	
Diocese of Leeds.....	1067	Broadband.....	1057
Richard III.....	1070	Carbon Reporting.....	1062
War Memorials.....	1071	Dairy Industry.....	1053
Women Bishops.....	1068	Environmental Protection (Home Security).....	1054
Syria.....	1072	Farmers Markets.....	1055
ELECTORAL COMMISSION	1071	Flood Insurance.....	1056
Voter Registration.....	1071	Food Prices.....	1051
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL		Pesticides.....	1059
AFFAIRS	1051	Rural Businesses.....	1059
Badger Culling.....	1060	Topical Questions.....	1063

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Thursday 25 October 2012

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
ATTORNEY-GENERAL	63WS	ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE	64WS
Concurrent Jurisdiction (DPP Interim		Environmental Council.....	65WS
Guidelines).....	63WS	Offshore Oil and Gas Licensing.....	64WS
BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS	63WS	HEALTH	66WS
National Minimum Wage.....	63WS	Dementia Funding.....	66WS
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT..	63WS	TRANSPORT	67WS
Business Rate Retention Scheme.....	63WS	EU Transport Council.....	67WS
		High Speed Two.....	68WS

WRITTEN ANSWERS

Thursday 25 October 2012

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS	1039W	COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT—	
Basic Skills.....	1039W	<i>continued</i>	
Business Links.....	1040W	Council Tax Benefits.....	993W
Conditions of Employment.....	1041W	Electric Cables.....	994W
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.....	1041W	Empty Property: Lancaster.....	994W
Employee Ownership Scheme.....	1042W	Fire Services.....	994W
Green Investment Bank.....	1042W	Housing.....	995W
Growth Implementation Committee.....	1043W	Housing: Construction.....	995W
Higher Education: Mental Health Services.....	1043W	Local Government Finance.....	996W
London Metropolitan University.....	1044W	Planning Permission: Appeals.....	996W
Secondment.....	1044W	CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	996W
Students: Fees and Charges.....	1045W	Digital Broadcasting.....	996W
CABINET OFFICE	988W	Government Art Collection Advisory Committee..	997W
Civil Servants: Pensions.....	988W	Music: Tickets.....	997W
David Hartnett.....	988W	Richard III.....	997W
Duchy of Cornwall.....	989W	Television: Sports.....	997W
Embassies.....	989W	DEFENCE	967W
Employment Schemes.....	989W	Aircraft Carriers.....	967W
Immigration: EU Nationals.....	990W	Apprentices.....	967W
Nottinghamshire.....	991W	Armed Forces.....	967W
Older Workers.....	991W	Armed Forces: Business Interests.....	969W
Terrorism: Greater London.....	992W	Armed Forces: Children.....	970W
CHURCH COMMISSIONERS	1060W	Armed Forces: Courts Martial.....	970W
Theft: Metals.....	1060W	Armed Forces Covenant.....	969W
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT..	993W	Armed Forces: Disciplinary Proceedings.....	972W
Council Tax.....	993W	Armed Forces: Morale.....	974W

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
DEFENCE—continued		HEALTH—continued	
Armed Forces: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.....	975W	Out of Area Treatment: Scotland.....	1037W
Armed Forces: Prosthetics	977W	Patients: Death.....	1038W
Armed Forces: Retirement	977W	Pedicures.....	1037W
Armed Forces: Sexual Offences.....	977W	Visual Impairment: Waiting Lists	1039W
Armed Forces: Smallpox.....	979W		
Armed Forces: Yemen.....	979W	HOME DEPARTMENT	1006W
Bale Baleiwai	979W	Airguns	1006W
Defence Munitions Longtown	980W	Burglary: Self-defence	1006W
Defence Technology Centres.....	980W	College of Policing.....	1006W
Elbit Systems	980W	Crime	1006W
Hong Kong.....	981W	Domestic Violence	1007W
Joint Strike Fighter Aircraft.....	981W	Domestic Violence: Peterborough	1009W
Marchwood Sea Mounting Centre.....	981W	Foreign Workers.....	1009W
Military Aid.....	982W	Immigration: EU Nationals	1010W
Military Aircraft: Helicopters	985W	National Policing Improvement Agency.....	1010W
Navy: Pay.....	985W	Police and Crime Commissioners.....	1011W
Reserve Forces: Employment	985W	Police: Demonstrations	1012W
Royal Military Police: Sexual Offences.....	986W	Police: Lambeth	1012W
Sir John Kiszely	986W	Prisons: Drugs	1012W
Territorial Army	987W	Treaties: European Union	1013W
Veterans	987W		
Veterans: Radiation Exposure.....	988W	INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	1045W
		Bangladesh.....	1045W
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER	1032W	Crimes of Violence: Females.....	1047W
David Laws	1032W	EU Aid	1047W
Lord-Lieutenants.....	1032W	India	1047W
		Overseas Aid.....	1047W
EDUCATION	1029W	Yemen	1048W
Email	1029W	JUSTICE	1048W
Email: Freedom of Information	1029W	Alternatives to Prison.....	1048W
Free Schools	1029W	Approved Premises.....	1049W
Free Schools: Coventry.....	1030W	Courts.....	1049W
Freedom of Information.....	1030W	Criminal Injuries Compensation.....	1049W
Higher Education.....	1031W	Prison Sentences	1051W
UK Council for Child Internet Safety.....	1031W	Sentencing.....	1052W
		Social Security Benefits: Fraud	1053W
ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE	1025W	Unpaid Fines	1053W
Biofuels: Timber	1025W		
Carbon Monoxide: Publicity.....	1026W	PRIME MINISTER	998W
Energy Distribution	1026W	Leveson Inquiry	998W
Ministerial Policy Advisers.....	1027W		
Renewable Energy: Heating	1027W	SCOTLAND	993W
Wind Power	1028W	Cleaning Services	993W
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL		TRANSPORT	998W
AFFAIRS	1054W	A1	998W
Anaerobic Digestion	1054W	Driving: Licensing.....	999W
Water	1054W	Driving Tests.....	999W
Water Companies.....	1055W	High Speed 2 Railway Line	1000W
		Motor Vehicles: Testing	1000W
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	1022W	Motorcycles	1000W
British Nationals Abroad.....	1022W	Motorcycles: Driving Tests	1000W
Business: Human Rights.....	1023W	Network Rail	1003W
Gibraltar.....	1023W	Piracy.....	1003W
Indonesia	1023W	Roads: Repairs and Maintenance.....	1004W
Latin America.....	1024W	Roads: Safety	1004W
Single European Act	1024W	Thameslink Railway Line.....	1005W
Stabilisation Unit.....	1024W	Tonnage Tax	1005W
Yemen	1025W		
		TREASURY	1013W
HEALTH	1032W	Aerospace Industry: Investment.....	1013W
Clinical Commissioning Groups	1032W	Broadband	1013W
Eyesight: Testing	1033W	Cru Investment Management.....	1014W
Fertility.....	1034W	Employee Ownership Scheme	1014W
Health Services: Armed Forces	1034W	Infrastructure.....	1015W
Health Services: Foreign Nationals	1035W	National Loan Guarantee Scheme: Scotland	1016W
Health Services: Homelessness.....	1035W	NHS: Finance	1016W
Newspaper Licensing Agency	1035W	Pay.....	1016W
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation		Pensions.....	1017W
Trust	1036W		

	<i>Col. No.</i>
TREASURY—continued	
Pensions: Scotland	1017W
Public Expenditure.....	1018W
Public Service Pensions Bill: Scotland	1019W
Revenue and Customs.....	1019W
Scotland.....	1020W
Tax Avoidance	1020W
Tax Incentives: Natural Gas.....	1020W
Taxation: Broadband	1020W
Transport for London: Finance.....	1021W
UK Research Partnership Investment Fund.....	1021W
Welfare Tax Credits.....	1022W
WOMEN AND EQUALITIES.....	992W
Anti-slavery Day	992W

	<i>Col. No.</i>
WORK AND PENSIONS	1055W
Access to Work Programme	1055W
Atos Healthcare	1056W
Employment Schemes: Young People.....	1056W
Housing Benefit	1057W
Housing Benefit: Private Rented Housing.....	1057W
Jobseeker's Allowance	1057W
Social Security Benefits: Medical Examinations.....	1058W
Universal Credit.....	1058W
Work Capability Assessment.....	1059W
Work Programme.....	1060W

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 1 November 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, £60.

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 25 October 2012

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1051] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Church Commissioners
Speaker's Electoral Commission Committee

Business of the House [Col. 1073]

Statement—(Mr Lansley)

Backbench Business

International Development Committee Report (Afghanistan) [Col. 1089]

Motion—(Sir Malcolm Bruce)—agreed to

Badger Cull [Col. 1095]

Motion—(Caroline Lucas)—on a Division, agreed to

Nicola Shipley [Col. 1181]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Working-Age Disabled People [Col. 319WH]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Ministerial Statements [Col. 63WS]

Written Answers to Questions [Col. 967W] [see index inside back page]
