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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 4 March 2014

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

North Korea (Human Rights)

1. **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What recent steps he has taken to address human rights abuses in North Korea. [902783]

4. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What steps he plans to take in support of the recent report of the United Nations commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. [902786]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): I welcome the recent United Nations report, which exposes shocking human rights violations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and I urge the DPRK authorities to respond to its contents. The United Kingdom is actively supporting a strong UN Human Rights Council resolution on the DPRK. Yesterday I was in Geneva, working to deliver a resolution that makes clear that there can be no impunity for human rights violators.

Andrew Selous: As the United Nations has found North Korea to be committing crimes against humanity on a scale unparalleled in the modern world, will the Government refer those responsible to the International Criminal Court and lobby the BBC to broadcast the World Service into North Korea, given the increase in demand for the so-called immoral devices of small radios, the ban on which eased last month? We can no longer say we do not know—it is time to act.

Mr Swire: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend's last comment. On the International Criminal Court, in principle it could be an appropriate forum, although the DPRK has not signed up to it. We strongly agree that there should be no impunity for crimes of this sort, so we need to look at the most effective way of holding the DPRK to account.

On the BBC, my hon. Friend will know that I have been in correspondence with and have attended the all-party group on North Korea to discuss the issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona

Bruce) and the noble Lord Alton. We have approached the BBC and are waiting for its detailed response. I must stress, however, that the BBC World Service is operationally, managerially and editorially independent.

Diana Johnson: Does the Minister think that the UN Security Council will agree to a referral to the International Criminal Court, and have there been any discussions about possible targeted sanctions against those responsible for crimes against humanity?

Mr Swire: I remind the hon. Lady that I was in Geneva yesterday for the opening day of the UN Human Rights Council. The commission will formally present its report on 17 March, so these are very early days. The annual resolution led by the European Union and Japan will then be taken at the end of the Human Rights Council and we will work with colleagues there to ensure that we have the best possible mechanism to hold the DPRK to account. Incidentally, I believe that when the curtain is finally lifted on that country, we will see evidence of human rights violations that surpass anything we have seen in any other country in the past 50 years.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the international community's response to human rights violations in North Korea has been wholly inadequate to date and that we must now challenge them with the same emphasis placed on security issues?

Mr Swire: I do and I congratulate my hon. Friend on all the work she has been doing. She has arranged a briefing by Open Doors this afternoon—I have asked officials to attend it—to highlight the plight of Christians in the DPRK. I also commend—this is not a plug—a book I have just read by the noble Lord Alton called "Building Bridges", which is the most shocking account of what has been going on in that country.

Mr Speaker: Lord Alton is, indeed, a great man.

20. [902804] **Naomi Long** (Belfast East) (Alliance): What conversations are the UK Government having with China, specifically about the report's recommendations on the forced repatriation of North Koreans, which is having a devastating impact on Christians who defect to China?

Mr Swire: We have had discussions with our Chinese opposite numbers on refoulement—that is, the repatriation of those who have escaped from DPRK to China. We had a UK-China strategic dialogue last week and I raised the issue with my opposite number, as did my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary with his opposite number.

Ukraine

2. **Stuart Andrew** (Pudsey) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the political situation in Ukraine. [902784]

5. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): What reports he has received on recent developments in Ukraine. [902787]

6. **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Government of Ukraine on the political situation in that country. [902788]

7. **Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): What assessment he has made of the latest political developments in Ukraine. [902789]

15. **Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): What reports he has received on recent developments in Ukraine. [902798]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague): I will make a statement shortly and I visited Ukraine yesterday. The United Kingdom is gravely concerned by the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Stuart Andrew: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer and may I pay tribute to him for his extensive efforts during this crisis? Many of us share his concern about this rapidly developing situation. Does he agree that any allegations made by Russia that its minority in Ukraine is in danger would be best addressed through diplomatic means rather than by any use of force?

Mr Hague: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is a very important point. Allegations have been made about threats to the Russian-speaking minority in Ukraine. I must say that I have not seen any evidence—no evidence has been presented of those threats—and I received very strong assurances from the Ukrainian authorities yesterday that they would not make any such threats. In any case, as he says, such matters should be resolved peacefully, and institutions such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe are always ready to assist with such matters.

Kevin Brennan: As a schoolboy, I took the bus from Cwmbran to Pontypool via the village of Sebastopol, a reminder of how long the Crimea has been of significance in our history. Will the Foreign Secretary ask all Ministers to refrain from any superficial blame games for party political purposes, which are not in Britain's interest, and to work with the Opposition to develop a united diplomatic response from Britain in the face of Russian aggression?

Mr Hague: I hope that when I present my statement to the House later we will see strong unity on many aspects of this crisis. It is of course the Government's responsibility to frame this country's policy and the Opposition's job to hold us to account for that, as the shadow Foreign Secretary often reminds me. I hope that there will be very strong unity about the key aspects and key principles involved in this crisis. We must debate coolly and calmly, across all parties, the measures we should take in response to it.

Mr Hanson: What assessment has the Foreign Secretary made of reports of continuing violence in Kharkiv and Donetsk over the weekend? Does he have any view on ousted President Yanukovich's claims of legitimacy from any particular point of view?

Mr Hague: Former President Yanukovich left his post and then left the country, and the decisions on replacing him with an acting President were made by the Rada, the Ukrainian Parliament, by the very large majorities required under the constitution, including with the support of members of former President Yanukovich's party, the Party of Regions, so it is wrong to question the legitimacy of the new authorities.

On disturbances in Donetsk and other areas of eastern Ukraine, there have been reports of some such disturbances, but it is not clear whether they have been inspired from outside Ukraine.

Damian Collins: Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that without a swift and peaceful resolution to the Crimean crisis, the Government will consider imposing economic sanctions on Russia? Have he and the Government conducted a review of the options at their disposal to apply such economic pressure?

Mr Hague: Our options are open on that. The European Union Foreign Affairs Council yesterday agreed to look at targeted measures. Our options are open on the further action that we can take, and which we will take in conjunction with our allies and partners, because that will make any such action more effective, when we are able to consider developments over the coming hours and days.

Helen Goodman: At this time of crisis, it is clear that the Foreign Secretary must have no conflicts of interest. Unlike the Swiss and the Austrian Governments, this Government have not frozen the assets of members of the Yanukovich regime. Human rights activists in Ukraine have contacted me to complain that the Tories have taken money from members of that regime in the past. Does the Foreign Secretary want take to this opportunity to clear up that matter?

Mr Hague: I find the hon. Lady's question ridiculous in the extreme, and I almost do not know where to begin to ridicule it. Certainly, Her Majesty's Government would not be influenced by any such matters. I discussed with the Prime Minister of Ukraine yesterday our eagerness to assist with the return of stolen assets and their recovery for Ukraine. For the first time, the Ukrainian Government yesterday gave us a list of those involved; they had not done so previously. I have agreed with the Prime Minister of Ukraine to send a team urgently to Ukraine to advise the Ukrainians on the information they need to provide to us for us to be able to act on it. I think she can now see how utterly baseless her question was.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD): May I begin by congratulating my right hon. Friend on his stamina? Does he agree that it is difficult to take the protestations of President Putin seriously in the light of the incident recently reported about Russian soldiers firing warning shots over the heads of Ukrainian soldiers seeking to go about their lawful business and then threatening to shoot them in the legs if they did not desist? Does he agree that that merely emphasises the fragility of the present circumstances, particularly the risk that either provocation or miscalculation could lead to a conflagration?

Mr Hague: My right hon. and learned Friend makes a very important point. It continues to be a serious risk that deliberate provocation, in particular, could give rise to a dangerous incident. I will say in my statement how much I commend the Ukrainian authorities for refusing to rise to provocation. I urged them yesterday, when I was in Kiev, to maintain that posture through all circumstances and at all times. I believe that they are determined to do so.

Mr Peter Hain (Neath) (Lab): May I, perhaps to his surprise, commend the Foreign Secretary for maintaining a cool head in this situation? Clearly, there is tremendous provocation from President Putin. However, in the end, this situation will be resolved diplomatically or it will not be resolved, with terrible costs to the whole world. In that context, will he say now or later what his view is on Ukraine's ability to have a free trade agreement with Europe, as well as a free trade agreement with Russia? Will that not be part of a diplomatic future?

Mr Hague: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his comments. It is important that we never describe the strategic context for Ukraine as a zero sum game. We welcome the idea of closer links between Ukraine and the European Union. We have supported the association agreement and a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement. We believe that those agreements would benefit the economy and people of Ukraine, and the economy and people of Russia. We absolutely recognise that Russia has important and legitimate interests in Ukraine. That, however, is not a justification for the armed violation of the sovereignty and independence of the country.

19. [902803]**Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): Russia's actions in Ukraine represent the ramping up of a strategy of pursuing self-interested, unbridled, robust and determined actions. Will the Foreign Secretary reassure the House that he will seek unification in Europe's approach to finding a solution, with a focus on acting together in a robust and meaningful way?

Mr Hague: We will do that. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe attended the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels yesterday while I was in Kiev. There will be a meeting of the European Council—the Heads of Government of the European Union—on Thursday to discuss these matters, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will attend. Yesterday evening, he telephoned President Hollande and Chancellor Merkel to co-ordinate our approach. I therefore can assure my hon. Friend that we will play a leading role in a united European approach.

Mr Douglas Alexander (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I have stated previously my support for the Foreign Secretary's efforts to find a diplomatic resolution to this crisis, and I repeat that today. However, yesterday in Downing street, there was a very serious blunder at a very serious time, with Government briefing documents mistakenly entering the public domain. Does the Foreign Secretary accept that the impact of that blunder risks being much more than ministerial embarrassment, and that it risks compromising the UK's influence with Russia and our key allies at what remains a crucial and, indeed, dangerous time?

Mr Hague: Any such photographing of documents or making documents available for photographing is absolutely regrettable and should not happen. I hope that all officials will ensure that it does not happen in future. Nevertheless, it must be seen in perspective. I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman that it has those implications. I want to make it absolutely clear that anything that is written in one document that is being carried by one official is not necessarily any guide to the decisions that will be made by Her Majesty's Government. Our options remain very much open on this subject.

Mr Alexander: I find the Foreign Secretary's words reassuring, in part. However, let us pursue the implications of what was revealed by the document. Does he accept that, given the gravity of the moment, if every country were to refuse to countenance any economic or diplomatic action that would affect its bilateral standing with Russia, the cumulative effect would be damaging not just for that individual country, but for regional stability and international order?

Mr Hague: Yes, very much. I absolutely accept that, which is why I repeat that anything photographed, or a partial account of a document from one photograph, should certainly not be taken as a guide to the views of the Foreign Secretary, and not necessarily as a guide to the decisions that will be made by Her Majesty's Government. Our options remain open, and I agree with the point made by the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I am sure the Foreign Secretary will agree it is important that the west, as far as is possible, speaks with one voice regarding this aggression. Is he therefore concerned that, at least modestly, a range of views have been expressed by different capitals, which could weaken—or be seen to weaken—the west's resolve in responding to this crisis?

Mr Hague: My hon. Friend makes an important point about unity in the west, and I draw his attention to a number of things that have already been decided on a common basis. For instance, the decision to withdraw from G8 preparations this week, which we will keep under review, is by all G7 nations, from the United States to Japan, Canada, the UK and the other European participants in the G8. I believe we are acting in a united fashion, and it will be very important to continue to do so in the days ahead.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Last week, when I asked a question about British taxpayers in an austerity-riddled Britain having to hand over money to Ukraine, the Foreign Secretary told the House from the Dispatch Box that the only money would come from the International Monetary Fund. Does he still stand by that guarantee, or does he want to amend it?

Mr Hague: I was explaining to the hon. Gentleman that the money that will come through the IMF is not out of the pockets of British taxpayers and into the pockets of anyone in Ukraine. Since then, given the situation, I announced to the Ukrainian Government yesterday that we will assist them with know-how—[*Interruption.*] Which is money. That is a new announcement. It is, of

course, small in the scheme of Ukraine's entire economy, but we will assist it with debt management, financial management, and all the things that were needed in this country after the Government that the hon. Gentleman supported left office. Ukraine needs that, and it is in our national interest to provide it.

Camp Liberty (Resettling Detainees)

3. **Mike Freer** (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): What reports he has received on the progress that has been made on resettling detainees held in Camp Liberty. [902785]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Hugh Robertson): The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has informed us that as of 20 February, 327 residents from a total of approximately 3,200 have been relocated outside Iraq thus far.

Mike Freer: I thank the Minister for that answer, but in 2013 there were at least four missile attacks that were likely to have been the result of actions by Iraqi or Iranian militia. What can we do to improve security while the resettlement process continues?

Hugh Robertson: The Foreign Secretary raised that specific issue when he met Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari at the end of November—a meeting I attended. We have repeatedly supported the United Nations in its calls for more to be done to protect the residents, and we will continue to remind the Government of Iraq, as a sovereign Government, that they are wholly and totally responsible for the security of the camp.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): There are clearly fears over the security of Camp Liberty because of what has happened previously, which has just been mentioned. Is there anything more we can do to ensure the security of those people inside the camp?

Hugh Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right and there continue to be worries about the security of the camp. We must set those in context with security worries across Iraq at the moment. More than 700 people were reportedly killed by terrorist violence in January, and it is a serious situation across the country. We will continue to remind the Government of that country of their responsibilities, and do all we can to ensure the security of the camp.

Sri Lanka

8. **Sir Andrew Stunell** (Hazel Grove) (LD): What progress has been made on the establishment of an international investigation into alleged war crimes during the Sri Lankan civil war. [902790]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague): The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has reported that Sri Lanka has failed to ensure independent and credible investigations into past violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. She recommends establishing an independent international inquiry, and as the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right

hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire) made clear yesterday at the Human Rights Council, the UK fully supports that view.

Sir Andrew Stunell: I thank the Foreign Secretary for that answer. I am sure he understands the deep concern on both sides of the House and elsewhere about the continuing violations. Will he assure the House that the Government will work with other Commonwealth countries to put pressure on the Sri Lankan Government to desist from their harassment of those who dissent, and to ensure that the international inquiry takes place?

Mr Hague: Yes, those are points that the Prime Minister and I, and the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr Swire), made forcefully when we were in Sri Lanka at the time of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting last November. We are pursuing the issue actively at the Human Rights Council to secure an international inquiry of the type recommended by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. I expect there will be vigorous debates at the Human Rights Council over the next few weeks, but we will certainly stick up for the view that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Sir Andrew Stunell) has put forward.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Given the intimidation and harassment being experienced by many human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers in Sri Lanka, what more can the UK and its international partners do to ensure that those who give evidence at any international inquiry are protected?

Mr Hague: This is an important issue indeed, given the intimidation and sometimes the unexplained murder of journalists and human rights defenders in Sri Lanka. That strengthens the case for an international investigation. Of course, we are unable to provide directly protection within another country, including within Sri Lanka, but that strengthens the case for that international investigation. We will use that argument in the call for such an investigation.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I am more than well aware of the efforts the UK has made over the years to give Sri Lanka every opportunity to make good the President's responses on seeking reconciliation and justice through a reasonable examination of the war crimes issue. I welcome the fact that there is a sense that time has run out for those efforts, but how can my right hon. Friend convey to Sri Lanka that it is in its interests to comply with an international inquiry and provide the evidence? If it chooses not to do so, it will make an international inquiry very difficult.

Mr Hague: My right hon. Friend has often done a very good job of presenting that case to Sri Lanka. We continue to make that case. As he knows, Sri Lanka has made progress on de-mining and resettlement, but that is not sufficient to address accountability and human rights concerns, or to ensure that there is stability and democracy in future in Sri Lanka. We continue to ask the Sri Lankans to mount their own domestic investigation

and inquiry, but in the absence of that, it is important that we press for the international inquiry to which hon. Members have referred.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights concluded that Sri Lanka's failure to address the allegations was fundamentally a question of political will. Was it not incredibly naive of the Prime Minister at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting to believe that President Rajapaksa had any intention of conducting his own inquiry? Given the time that has been wasted by setting a March deadline, what has the Prime Minister done to use the UK's position on the Human Rights Council to push for an international investigation, which he should have pushed for many months ago?

Mr Hague: I think there was a lot of unity in the House on Sri Lanka, but the hon. Lady chooses to try to make it a party political issue. Having witnessed the bilateral meeting between the Prime Minister and President Rajapaksa, I assure her that there was nothing naive about it. The Prime Minister forcefully put the case for Sri Lanka to mount its own inquiry and forcefully made it clear that he would press for an international inquiry if it did not do so. That is what he is doing in his contacts with other Heads of Government around the world. I and the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon, are doing the same with other Foreign Ministers. I hope the Opposition concentrate on supporting that rather than trying to snipe about it.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

9. **Nadine Dorries** (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): What recent progress has been made on the transatlantic trade and investment partnership; and if he will make a statement. [902791]

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): TTIP is this country's top trade policy priority, worth up to £10 billion a year for the UK. Negotiations are progressing well and our ambition remains to conclude the deal next year.

Nadine Dorries: Does the Minister agree that TTIP provides an ideal opportunity to look at having a US free trade agreement based on sovereign states and not on political integration, as well as our relationship with Europe?

Mr Lidington: The key advantage of TTIP is that a successful deal would create what would be by far the world's most important free trade area, and would set global regulatory standards for trade on a transatlantic basis rather than our having to wait for other countries to come and set the model for us to follow.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): The partnership does indeed offer great potential to Europe and the United States, but, as the Minister will know, there are fears that it could lead to a watering down of workers' rights and environmental and social protection. What are the Government doing to ensure that that does not happen?

Mr Lidington: I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware that considerable legal and other measures already exist on both sides of the Atlantic to secure proper protection for workers, and those matters are indeed in the minds of negotiators. However, I do not think that we should take our eyes off the enormous prize that a trade deal of this kind would represent in increasing economic growth and mutual trade on both sides of the Atlantic.

Mr Robert Walter (North Dorset) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who campaign for us to leave the European Union would be turning their backs on a free trade area constituting some 40% of the productive wealth of the world, and that we would be unlikely to negotiate similar terms outside the Union?

Mr Lidington: I think it is true that the opportunity for a trade deal with a market of more than 500 million people in Europe as a whole is more attractive to United States negotiators than a trade deal with any single European country. Moreover, as my hon. Friend says, any member state that left the European Union would, unless alternative arrangements were negotiated, be abandoning the free trade agreements that the Union had negotiated with other countries around the world.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Will the Minister ensure in the negotiations that the multinationals pay their proper tax in this country, notwithstanding some of the things that have happened in the past?

Mr Lidington: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to applaud vigorously the initiative taken by our Prime Minister through the G8 to try to secure an international agreement on a system whereby all multinational companies pay their fair share of tax, but I am also sure he will accept that that can be realised effectively only on a global basis.

Burma

10. **Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): What discussions he had during his recent visit to Burma. [902793]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): During my second visit to Burma in January, I met Aung San Suu Kyi, key Ministers, the Speaker, and the Commander-in-Chief. I discussed the need for constitutional reform and continued progress in the peace talks, and I raised in strong terms our concerns about human rights and about the situation in Rakhine state. I was also the first British Minister to visit Kachin state since Burma gained independence in 1948. Among other things, I met a group of Kachin world war two veterans, and paid tribute to their exceptional and brave service during the war.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Minister for his response, and pay tribute to you, Mr Speaker: if you had not raised the issue of political prisoners with the general and Ministers during your recent trip, they would not have been released.

May I urge the Minister to press the Burmese Government? There is still concern about the census. Many people have been displaced, Médecins Sans Frontières

has been suspended from Rakhine, and there needs to be constitutional reform by 2015 if there are to be free and fair elections.

Mr Swire: We approach this issue in a spirit of agreement, and, in accordance with the pledge that I had given the hon. Lady previously, I was able to raise the issue of political prisoners. I believe that there are still 30 whose cases are disputed.

As for the census, the hon. Lady will be aware that we are providing funds for it, and that it is the first census to take place for a very long time. There are issues surrounding it, but we believe that it is the right course. I believe that our engagement with Burma is on the right lines, but serious issues remain, not least the continuing problems in Rakhine.

Sir Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): I welcome what the Minister has said, and his engagement with Burma. Of course there are many challenges within the country, but does he not accept that the steps towards peace and democracy deserve our support and wholehearted engagement while the opportunity presents itself?

Mr Swire: Yes, I do. I have been able to discuss the situation with Baroness Amos, the United Nations under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, in the last couple of weeks. I also discussed it yesterday in Geneva with António Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and last night with Peter Maurer, the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

We are all extremely concerned about aspects of what is still going on in Burma, but we believe that, with our support across the board, the Burmese Government need encouragement on the path towards democracy. It was never going to be easy, but we must redouble our efforts to ensure that they deliver on the pledges that they have made.

Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): On Friday I met representatives of the Karen community who have been settled in Sheffield for some period now. They expressed great concern about Karen people in Burma despite the peace talks. What is the Foreign Office doing to look at the situation of the many ethnic groups in Burma, not just the Rohingya Muslims, and to ensure there really is peace and that they are given support to integrate properly into society throughout Burma?

Mr Swire: The hon. Lady is right to raise that. We are extremely concerned about allegations of human rights violations and inter-communal violence. We have discussed this right across the board with Burma's leaders and with Aung San Suu Kyi herself. The census is an important step. Whatever kind of Government then come about in Burma will, to my way of thinking, have to recognise some of the differences in the different parts of that country. Human rights are universal; we cannot pick and choose them, and everyone in that country is entitled to the same protection as everyone else, regardless of their ethnicity.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Knowledge is key in promoting democracy. Does my right hon. Friend therefore welcome the assistance this House is giving in setting up the library in the new Burmese Parliament?

Mr Swire: Yes I do, and you, Mr Speaker, and others at all levels in this place are trying to show best practice. In effect, we are trying to build a democratic country in a country that has not been a democracy. We are trying to embed democratic institutions and that requires a lot of work, and I pay tribute to those right across this House—officials, civil servants, Ministers, Opposition MPs. All of us have a part to play in this, given our long-standing close affinity and history with that country.

Afghanistan (British Civilian Personnel)

11. **Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op):** What steps his Department is taking to provide protection for British civilian personnel currently working in Afghanistan. [902794]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Hugh Robertson): Government Departments take the duty of care for our civilian personnel serving in Afghanistan extremely seriously and all civilian personnel are provided with a high level of protection, but for obvious reasons, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman will understand, we do not publicly comment on the nature of that protection.

Stephen Doughty: I thank the Minister for his answer. In the light of the recent horrific attacks in Kabul, and, indeed, the risks to British civilians working for peace and development worldwide, can the Minister assure us that the Department will be keeping advice given to civilians under constant review and that proactive communication will continue to be made, particularly with non-governmental organisations, on that matter?

Hugh Robertson: Yes, I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. The travel advice is reviewed on a regular basis and each time there is an attack or any intelligence. It is cross-checked against what we are doing in other parts of Government and is kept under constant review.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): The Minister will be aware that the Afghan elections are approaching. The international security assistance force is drawing down, but the crucial US-Afghan partnership agreement has yet to be signed. Will the Minister update the House on when that important agreement will be finalised?

Hugh Robertson: No, I cannot. We continue to encourage the Afghan Government to sign that agreement for all the reasons my hon. Friend mentions. We believe it is clearly an important part of the future of Afghanistan moving forward, and we will continue to encourage the Afghanistan Government to sign it as soon as possible.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): This Friday morning there will be a meeting to commemorate the life of Alex Petersen, one of the young men who lost their lives in Kabul in January. That highlights the fact that those at risk are not just the civilians who work for the British Government, but the civilians who work for contractors and in other peace-building capacities. Will the Government focus on them as much as on British UK Government personnel?

Hugh Robertson: Absolutely we will, and I join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to all those who lost their lives because they were clearly doing a very valuable job, attempting to make the lives of ordinary Afghans better than they are at present. The point of the travel advice is to provide precisely the sort of guidance she seeks. Some 13 foreign nationals were killed in the attack I think she is referring to, and it is a great tribute to them all that young people continue to go to Afghanistan and carry out that work.

Mr David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): Obviously, one significant threat to civilians is bomb attack, which underlines how despicable it was that my constituent Jim McCormick, a convicted fraudster, made £50 million out of selling to the Governments of Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries a completely bogus and useless bomb detector. Would it surprise the right hon. Gentleman to know that those useless detectors are still being used in Iraq and many other countries, and that a company in Romania is now patenting, and presumably will produce, an identical device, which obviously will be equally useless? Will he take measures to inform as many countries as possible of these eventualities, and prevent them from using this device and thereby putting civilians at risk?

Hugh Robertson: I can only say that I agree with the hon. Gentleman's comments entirely. When the Foreign Office was made aware of this issue in 2010, we attempted then to inform everybody of exactly what had happened and what the consequences would be, and we will continue to do that.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): British civilians working for both the Government and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) stressed, non-governmental organisations have played a crucial role in helping the ordinary people of Afghanistan, especially women, to improve their lot and have a better future, which is why they are targeted by the despicable Taliban. So what are the Government doing to ensure their safety, not only now, but especially after the military draw-down?

Hugh Robertson: I suppose the answer to the question of what we are continuing to do now is the British military presence in Afghanistan, the aim of which is to increase security throughout that country. A series of programmes will continue after the draw-down, particularly the training of the Afghan military and police, and the Government will do all they can. I echo the comments the right hon. Gentleman made about the contribution made by so many people in the voluntary sector.

Illegal Wildlife Trade

12. **Mr Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): What reports he has received on the outcomes of the London conference on the illegal wildlife trade 2014. [902795]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague): More than 40 nations attended the illegal wildlife trade conference and vowed to help save iconic species from the brink of extinction. The London declaration contains commitments for practical

steps to end the illegal trade in rhino horn, tiger parts and elephant tusks, which fuels criminal activity. Botswana will host the next conference.

Mr Burns: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the London declaration marks significant progress made in combating wildlife crime? But can he assure the House that what has been put on paper will be translated into positive action before the Botswana conference next year?

Mr Hague: I very much hope so. In particular, the elephant protection plan, which was endorsed during the conference by five key African states, now needs to be implemented in those states, and funded by other states and by the private sector. If that happens, it can become a game-changing agreement on preserving the African elephant. I certainly hope that major progress will be made on that before we get to Botswana in a year's time.

Mr Speaker: This is an extremely important matter of much interest to a great many of our constituents, and if the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns) or other Members wanted an Adjournment debate on it, they might find themselves successful.

Mr Hague: Thank you for that heavy hint, Mr Speaker.

Syria

13. **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What assessment he has made of the prospects for successful peace talks on Syria; and if he will make a statement. [902796]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague): The Syria crisis is worsening by the day, with no sign of the Assad regime having any willingness to negotiate the political transition demanded by the UN Security Council. The second round of Geneva II negotiations ended on 15 February without agreement. Those supporting the regime, including Russia and Iran, need to do far more to press it to reach a political settlement.

Andrew Bridgen: The war in Syria is a tragedy for its people, who have seen their lives, families and homes torn apart, and for the region, which has seen millions of refugees displaced to neighbouring countries. What steps are this Government taking to alleviate the tragedy, promote regional stability and do all they can to prevent a contagion of this crisis?

Mr Hague: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in his description. I probably cannot describe all those things in one answer to a question, but in our efforts to alleviate the crisis UK aid is now providing: food for more than 210,000 people a month; water for 1.4 million people; and cooking sets and blankets for 300,000 people. So he can see the scale of the assistance that is being delivered. Tomorrow, I will attend the International Support Group for Lebanon meeting in Paris, where we will be working with other nations on providing the necessary assistance to help stabilise Lebanon, too.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I realise that relations with Russia are rather difficult at the moment, but will the Foreign Secretary renew his efforts to talk to Iran and Russia to bring about a renewal of Geneva

II, a ceasefire and then some kind of political solution? The crisis in Syria cannot be ignored just because of events that are happening elsewhere.

Mr Hague: Yes is the basic answer to the hon. Gentleman's question. I assure him that although Ukraine occupies a great deal of attention, all of our work and the pace of our work on Syria will be maintained. We are suggesting to Russia and others that there should be new work and meetings among the permanent five members of the Security Council to try again to make a diplomatic breakthrough on Syria—I cannot hold out any prospect of that at the moment—and of course we will hold discussions with Iran, so the answer to his question is yes.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on winning the 2014 Clinton prize for women, peace and security for his leadership on preventing sexual violence in conflict. Given the widespread violence against women and girls in Syria, what steps is he taking to ensure that women are properly represented and properly heard as he attempts to renew Geneva II?

Mr Hague: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I have advocated the inclusion of women to a greater extent in the peace talks on Syria. A women's action group was formed in parallel with the Geneva II negotiations, and I went to meet its members in Geneva and have invited them to visit the UK. I constantly urge the UN, including the UN Special Envoy, to ensure that women's representatives are included in future negotiations. I am pleased that the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces ensured that women were represented in its delegation.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Recent suicide attacks in Lebanon have shown the intense danger of the Syrian conflict expanding beyond the borders of Syria. After the end of the Geneva talks last month, what efforts is the Foreign Secretary making to discuss with the UN a process to bring back the parties to Geneva and to begin the process of negotiation that is so desperately needed?

Mr Hague: The hon. Gentleman is right to refer to the dangers in Lebanon. As I have said, we shall hold the international support group for Lebanon, which I shall attend, tomorrow in Paris. He is also right to emphasise the importance of bringing the parties back to the table. For that to happen, the Assad regime has to be ready to discuss the creation of a transitional governing body. The offer that Lakhdar Brahimi made to both sides when the talks last ended was that they would discuss terrorism, as the regime describes it, and a transitional governing body, as the Opposition wanted, in parallel. The regime refused to do that, but it needs to become ready to do that for the talks to get going again.

Persecution of Religious Minorities (Pakistan)

14. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Government of Pakistan on the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in that country. [902797]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mark Simmonds): We remain deeply concerned about the persecution faced by Christians and other religious minorities and continue to raise that with the authorities in Pakistan at the highest level. My right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Warsi most recently raised the matter with the Pakistani Prime Minister during her visit there last October.

Alex Cunningham: Many of my constituents have written to me about the persecution of Christians across the world and want British Government action. The Minister appears to recognise the sectarian bias, which is a significant problem in Pakistan. What talks has the Minister had with the Pakistani authorities to assist them in protecting all religious minorities?

Mark Simmonds: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that important issue. It is something that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office takes extremely seriously across the world. It is vital that Pakistan guarantee the rights of all its citizens regardless of faith and ethnicity. The UK Government are extremely active and raise issues of religious freedom on a regular basis. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met faith leaders in Lahore last year, and my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Warsi has had frank discussions not just with the Prime Minister but with the national security adviser of Pakistan and the then Minister for National Harmony. We did so both on a bilateral and multilateral basis.

Mr Speaker: We shall leave the Minister now to recover his breath.

Topical Questions

T1. [902809] **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague): Yesterday I visited Ukraine, and tomorrow I will attend the international support group for Lebanon in Paris.

Neil Carmichael: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer.

With the Antarctic Act 2013 now successfully passed, what reassurance can Ministers give about encouraging other signatory states to the treaty to ensure that they, too, put into their domestic law measures to protect the Antarctic?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mark Simmonds): My hon. Friend deserves huge congratulations on successfully piloting his private Member's Bill through Parliament and the significant positive contribution that the Antarctic Act 2013 will make. Other countries need to ratify the treaty's provisions quickly so that they can come into effect. I know that through his contacts he is pushing Germany and the United States, and I can inform the House that my officials are in regular contact with their counterparts and will use the Antarctic treaty meeting in April to continue to push other countries to ratify.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Given Chancellor Merkel's confirmation that she does not support a fundamental reform of the European Union's architecture, will the Minister for Europe update the House on when we may expect some clarity the Prime Minister about what powers he wants repatriated to the UK?

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): I was heartened by Chancellor Merkel's strong words about her determination to work with the Prime Minister to secure a European Union that is significantly more competitive, more democratic and more flexible than it is today. I wish that, instead of carping all the time, the hon. Gentleman would join us in that great project of reform.

T2. [902810] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): The coalition Government have set great store by encouraging stronger economic, cultural, religious and tourism links with India. With that in mind, there is constant lobbying for the reintroduction of direct flights from London to Gujarat, and especially Ahmedabad. What diplomatic efforts can Ministers launch to assist that campaign and get that much needed reform in place?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): Of course the issue of direct flights between London and Ahmedabad is ultimately a commercial decision for airlines, but India hosts the largest UK diplomatic network in the world and we now have a British trade office there. I visited Gujarat and met the state's Chief Minister Modi in March 2013, and we would welcome such direct flights because a huge section of the population travels to and does business with that thriving and vibrant part of India.

T5. [902813] **Hugh Bayley** (York Central) (Lab): What impact will our worsening relations with Russia have on our ability and that of our NATO allies to bring military equipment from Afghanistan back home via the overland route through Russia?

Mr Hague: That remains to be seen, but as the hon. Gentleman knows, the Ministry of Defence has important arrangements with not just Russia but several central Asian countries, and there are also other routes out of Afghanistan. There has been no impact so far, but we will keep the House informed.

T3. [902811] **Nadhim Zahawi** (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): Next week will mark three years of devastating bloodshed in Syria and one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State tell the House what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the preventing sexual violence initiative in ensuring that those who have survived sexual violence receive the comprehensive services that they need not only inside Syria but in the wider region?

Mr Hague: We have started our work on that, but there is much more to do. The team of experts that I formed, who can be deployed anywhere in the world to help local groups and authorities to combat sexual violence, have been deployed to the Syrian border. Of

course we have ensured that of those people who will be entitled to come to the United Kingdom, we shall strongly prioritise those who are vulnerable to violence, including the victims of sexual violence. However, we are only scratching the surface of this immense and tragic issue, which we will discuss further at the preventing sexual violence summit that I will host in London in June.

T6. [902814] **Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Following the Israeli Prime Minister's visit to Washington this week, will Ministers give their assessment of the progress of the Kerry talks between Israel and Palestine towards achieving a two-state solution and, especially, regarding illegal settlements?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Hugh Robertson): There remains, I hope, healthy optimism that something positive will come out of the Kerry process. I think Members on both sides of the House will commend the energy that the United States Secretary of State has brought to the issue. He hopes to agree outline terms by the end of March, and at that stage we will be in a much better position to see how we might take the process forward.

T4. [902812] **Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con): On Saturday, more than 100 people were injured and, tragically, 29 were killed as a result of the brutal mass stabbing in the Chinese city of Kunming. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whatever the underlying issues, that horrific attack is no solution to the problem? Will he join me in expressing our condolences to the families of those affected?

Mr Swire: I strongly condemn the brutal terrorist attack at Kunming train station on 1 March. My thoughts and sympathies are with the families of the victims and those injured. Our consular team responded immediately to reports of the incident, speaking to local police and hospitals where the victims were taken for treatment. The Yunnan authorities have confirmed that no British nationals were caught up in the attack. We remain in touch with the local authorities and receive regular updates.

T7. [902815] **Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): One of the main reasons given to this House in 2001 for our involvement in Afghanistan was that 90% of the heroin consumed in Britain came from Afghanistan. Thirteen years later, and after the tragic deaths of 447 of our brave soldiers, 90% of the heroin on the streets of Britain is still coming from Afghanistan, where the heroin crop is at a record level. Helmand is controlled by the Taliban. Can this be described as "mission accomplished"?

Mr Hague: The hon. Gentleman is right that the flow of narcotics from Afghanistan remains a very serious problem that has not been defeated, but of course many other things have been achieved in Afghanistan, and he is losing sight of that in his question. Terrorist bases that were operating for al-Qaeda in Afghanistan have been destroyed, the threat to the world from terrorism originating in Afghanistan is now much less than it was in 2001, and the Afghan people have been able to make

enormous progress in other ways—so that is only one dimension on which we should measure the operations in Afghanistan.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): Touching on the Foreign Secretary's responsibility for GCHQ, in a speech this morning the Deputy Prime Minister initiated an independent review of the intelligent balance that needs to be struck between digital freedom and national security. Even to a keen supporter of the intelligence services like me, that does not seem unreasonable. Why were Conservative Ministers not willing to support it?

Mr Hague: The Deputy Prime Minister was speaking in his own capacity on that issue. I reiterate what I have said to the House before about the extremely strong system of oversight that we have in this country, with which my hon. Friend is very familiar. Of course, there are issues being looked at now by the Intelligence and Security Committee, and I think it wise for most of us to await the Committee's report.

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Lab): There is obviously an appetite for democracy in Bangladesh. Why do the Government not go further in pressing, as the EU and other countries have, for fresh, free and fair national elections in that country?

Mark Simmonds: I understand the point the hon. Gentleman makes, but he needs to recognise that the elections were held in accordance with the Bangladesh constitution. I understand that voters in more than half the constituencies did not have the opportunity to express their will at the ballot box, but the final result of elections in Bangladesh are ultimately a matter for the Bangladeshi people to judge. The United Kingdom will continue to provide support through updating electoral registers and training polling officials.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Ind): In February 2011, I was on an Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation to Georgia. We went to the border with South Ossetia where, through binoculars, we saw Russian troops and the Russian flag displayed. The Russians had invaded in 2008 and they remain there today. Anyone who believes that doing nothing will remove the Russian troops from Crimea should look at history; it will actually do the reverse.

Mr Hague: Of course I will come on to these issues in a minute, in my statement. My hon. Friend is quite right to point to what has happened in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and, indeed, Transnistria, where Russian troops remain stationed on a permanent or long-term basis. There is every indication that the intentions for Crimea are the same.

T8. [902817] **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Notwithstanding the Minister's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk), the political violence and deaths in Bangladesh are deeply disturbing. How are the Government using their good offices to assist the parties there to restore civil order and create good governance?

Mark Simmonds: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight the appalling electoral violence in Bangladesh, which we completely condemn. We continue

to support the Government structures by updating electoral registers, training polling officials and putting in place new systems for publishing details, particularly as people stand for office. Those improvements will, we hope, create and strengthen the foundations for better future elections.

Mr James Clappison (Hertsmere) (Con): What assessment do Ministers make of reports that Iran is stepping up its already considerable military assistance to the Syrian regime?

Hugh Robertson: The simple answer is that those reports are almost certainly credible. One of the most damaging aspects of the conflict in Syria is the help given by both Iran and Hezbollah to the regime forces. That will need to stop before there can be any peace in that country.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): When the Foreign Secretary visited Colombia recently, did he raise the fact that last year 78 human rights defenders, political activists and community leaders were killed—the highest number for a decade? Does that not suggest that the Government's constant reiteration of the claim that things are getting better in Colombia is not the case and that more needs to be done to protect people engaging in perfectly legitimate political activity?

Mr Hague: Yes, in Colombia two weeks ago I raised those issues with the President and other Ministers, including the increase in the number of deaths of human rights defenders last year, which is very important. Part of the answer is a successful peace process, and the Colombian Government have been right and courageous to embark on that. If successful, it will change the entire environment in Colombia, but more needs to be done in other ways to protect human rights defenders, and that is certainly something we discussed with the Colombian Government.

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe agree that although the free trade agreement with the United States is a very good step in the right direction, it is nevertheless very unambitious that the EU spends only 2% of its annual budget on trade, compared with over 40% on subsidising farming?

Mr Lidington: I must say that if the Commission is looking for a way to allocate its priorities better, beefing up its excellent team in the Directorate-General for Trade would be a good way of going about it.

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): There has been international condemnation of Putin's actions as Russian aggression intensifies in Ukraine. However, European leaders seem hampered by the dependence of much of the European Union on Russian oil and gas. What effective action will be taken to stop Putin walking over the will of the people of Ukraine?

Mr Hague: I will be making a statement on Ukraine in a moment, as the House knows, and setting out many aspects of that. It is very important that we maintain a clear and united international response.

Mr John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Government support an independent Crimea if its people vote for that in a referendum, because presumably the Government will support an independent Scotland if its people choose to be independent?

Mr Hague: Here in this House and in the United Kingdom we believe in freedom, democracy and self-determination around the world, but my right hon. Friend will recall that the referendum in Scotland is taking place with the agreement of this House and of

the Government of the United Kingdom as a whole. Under the Ukrainian constitution, that would be the proper arrangement in Crimea as well.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): Why did the UK refuse to join 146 other states at the recent conference in Mexico on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons?

Hugh Robertson: Because we believe that there are other international forums that are most effective for achieving those aims.

Ukraine

12.34 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague): With permission I will make a statement on the situation in Ukraine. The House will recall from my statement last Monday that, on Friday 21 February, former President Yanukovich and the opposition in Ukraine signed an agreement to end months of violence. Shortly afterwards, Mr Yanukovich fled Kiev, the 2004 constitution was restored, early presidential elections were called for 25 May, and an interim Government were appointed.

Last Wednesday, President Putin ordered military exercises involving a stated 38,000 Russian troops near the border with Ukraine. By Friday, unidentified armed men had appeared outside airports and Government buildings in Crimea. On Saturday, President Putin sought and received the approval of the upper House of the Russian Parliament to use Russian armed forces anywhere on the territory of Ukraine, without the consent of the Ukrainian Government, citing a

“threat to the lives of Russian citizens”.

Russian forces in Crimea went on to take control of Ukrainian military sites, including in Belbek, Balaclava and Kerch, and to establish full operational control in Crimea. Helicopters and planes have been deployed. The Russian Government have not ruled out military action in other parts of Ukraine—indeed, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence has reported Russian fighters infringing Ukrainian airspace over the Black sea.

Her Majesty’s Government condemn any violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, which contravene Russia’s obligations under the UN Charter, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Helsinki Final Act and the 1997 partition treaty on the status and conditions of the Black sea fleet with Ukraine. Under that agreement, Russia is entitled to station troops and naval personnel on its bases in Crimea, but not to deploy troops outside those bases without the permission of the Ukrainian Government.

Moreover, Russia’s actions are in breach of the Budapest memorandum, signed in 1994. In return for Ukraine’s giving up its nuclear weapons, Russia joined the United Kingdom and the United States in reaffirming its obligation to

“refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, and that none of their weapons will ever be used against Ukraine except in self-defence or otherwise in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.”

The Russian Government have argued that there is no legitimate Government in Kiev, but the incumbent Ukrainian President abandoned his post, and the subsequent decisions of the Ukrainian Parliament have been carried by large majorities, required under the constitution—including from members of the former President’s party, the Party of Regions. The suggestion that a President who has fled his country then has any authority whatever to invite the forces of a neighbouring country into that country is baseless.

Russia has also argued that Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine are in danger, but no evidence of that threat has been presented. Furthermore, international diplomatic mechanisms exist to provide assurance on the situations

of national minorities, including within the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe. These mechanisms, not the breaking of international agreements and the use of armed force, are the way to secure assurances of protection of the rights of minorities.

I commend the Ukrainian Government for responding to this extreme situation with a refusal to be provoked. The Ukrainian armed forces have been placed on full combat readiness, but the Ukrainian Government have affirmed that they will not use force, and I have urged them to maintain this position. However, there is clearly a grave risk of escalation or miscalculation and a threat to hard-won peace and security in Europe.

This Government have been in constant contact with the Government of Ukraine, with the United States, with our partners in the European Union and with our allies in NATO and the G7—and, indeed, with the Russian Government themselves. Our objectives are, first, to avoid any further military escalation, and instead to see Russia return its forces to their bases and respect Ukrainian sovereignty; secondly, for any concerns about Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine to be addressed by means of negotiations, not force; and thirdly, for the international community to provide Ukraine with urgent economic assistance, provided that it is ready to carry out vital reforms. I will briefly take each of these areas in turn.

First, we and our allies have condemned Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine and warned against any further escalation. The Prime Minister has spoken twice to President Obama, and I have been in daily contact with my counterparts in the European Union, NATO and the G7. We have made firm representations to Russia. The Prime Minister spoke to President Putin on Friday, and I spoke to Foreign Minister Lavrov on Saturday, when the Russian ambassador to London was summoned to the Foreign Office. We have urged Russia to meet its international commitments and to choose a path out of confrontation and military action.

At our request, the UN Security Council held an urgent meeting on Sunday. Members of the council called for international monitors to be sent to Ukraine to observe the situation and stressed the importance of Ukraine’s territorial integrity and the need to lower tensions. NATO’s North Atlantic Council met on Sunday, and called for Russia to withdraw its troops to bases and to refrain from further provocative actions in Ukraine, in line with its international commitments. The NATO-Ukraine Commission was also convened.

Yesterday, at the Foreign Affairs Council, European nations strongly condemned Russia’s acts of aggression, called on Russia immediately to withdraw its forces to the areas of their permanent stationing, and without delay to agree to the request by Ukraine for direct consultations with Russia as well as under the Budapest memorandum. The council stated that in the absence of de-escalating steps by Russia, the European Union will decide about consequences for relations between the EU and Russia, such as suspending bilateral talks with Russia on visa matters, and considering targeted measures. Heads of Government will meet at a European Council on Thursday. As the Prime Minister and President Obama have said, there must be significant costs to Russia if it does not change course on Ukraine.

EU member states have reconfirmed the offer of an association agreement with Ukraine, including a deep and comprehensive free trade area, and confirmed our commitment to support an international assistance package to support Ukraine, based on a clear commitment to reforms. The Council also agreed to work on the adoption of restrictive measures for the freezing and recovery of misappropriated Ukrainian assets.

In terms of immediate steps to respond to Russia's actions and acting in concert with the G7, we have withdrawn the UK from preparations this week for the G8 summit in Sochi in June. We will not send any UK Government representatives to the Paralympic games beginning this week, while maintaining our full support for the British athletes taking part.

Secondly, we are urging direct contact between the Ukrainian and Russian Governments. We are willing to pursue any diplomatic avenue that could help to reduce tensions, so we have called for urgent consultations under the Budapest memorandum, or the creation of a contact group including Russia and Ukraine. We urge Russia to accept the invitation to attend talks under the Budapest memorandum in Paris tomorrow, which I will attend.

The UK supports the powerful case for the deployment of UN and OSCE monitors to Crimea and other areas of concern in Ukraine given the grave risk of clashes and escalation on the ground. We are taking part in urgent consultations in Vienna. We welcome the Ukrainian Government's support for such deployments and we call on Russia to follow suit.

The Prime Minister and I have both spoken to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to urge him to use the UN's authority to bring about direct contact between Russia and Ukraine, and to urge the peaceful resolution of this issue. I welcome the fact that the deputy Secretary-General is in Ukraine today.

Thirdly, we are working to support the Ukrainian Government, who are facing immense political and economic challenges on top of the invasion of their territory. Yesterday, I returned from Kiev, where I encouraged Ukraine's leaders to make a decisive break with the country's history of pervasive corruption, failed IMF programmes and poor governance. I urged acting President Turchynov and Prime Minister Yatsenyuk to continue to take measures that unify the country and protect the rights of all Ukraine's citizens, including minority groups. I welcome the steps they have taken, including the appointment of new regional governors in Russian-speaking regions, and the veto of recent proposed legislation affecting the status of the Russian language.

In return for urgent commitments and reforms, it is vital that Ukraine receives international financial and technical assistance. The International Monetary Fund should be front and centre of any programme of assistance, an approach I discussed with the IMF in Washington last week, and it sent officials to Kiev yesterday. G7 Finance Ministers have issued a statement declaring our readiness to mobilise rapid technical assistance to support Ukraine in addressing its macro-economic, regulatory, and anti-corruption challenges.

The EU has also previously committed €610 million in financial assistance to Ukraine, which could be made available once an IMF programme has been agreed. In the longer term, through the European Investment Bank,

the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and neighbourhood funding, the EU will continue to provide significant support to Ukraine.

For our part, as I informed the Ukrainian Government yesterday, we will provide immediate technical assistance to Ukraine to support elections and assist with reforms on public financial management, debt management, and energy pricing. We are exploring further UK expertise to assist with programmes to tackle corruption, reform the labour market, and improve the investment climate in Ukraine, and a British team is already in Kiev to co-ordinate these efforts. We have also offered assistance on asset recovery. I agreed with the President of Ukraine yesterday to send a team to assist Ukraine to provide the information we need to recover stolen assets, and to address this problem more widely.

Over the past four years, the Government have sought and secured an improved relationship with Russia, and we continue to work with Russia on immense global issues such as the nuclear negotiations with Iran, and to try to make progress towards peace in Syria.

The UK's national interest lies in a free, democratic, unified, stable and peaceful Ukraine able to make its own decisions about its future. We will continue to do everything we can to support the diplomatic resolution of all the issues I have described, exercising our responsibilities as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and working closely with the nations of NATO and the European Union. We will continue to discuss the situation directly with Russia's leaders.

But we also have a direct national interest in the maintenance of international law, the upholding of treaty obligations, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of independent nations, and the diplomatic resolution of conflicts that affect the peace and security of us all. For that reason, it is important that there is a clear response to these events, and that they are not repeated, and that is what we will pursue with determination in the days and weeks ahead.

12.46 pm

Mr Douglas Alexander (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement and for advance sight of it this morning.

This crisis represents the most serious threat to European security in decades. Russia's actions are a clear and unambiguous violation of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine. There can be no justification for this dangerous and unprovoked military incursion. None the less, the Ukrainian Government are indeed to be commended, as the Foreign Secretary has done, for their calm response to this severe provocation.

The immediate priority must now be diplomatic action to secure a de-escalation of the crisis. Achieving this requires the international community to show both unity and resolve in pursuit of a twin-track approach aimed at stabilising the current situation. First, the international community needs to alter the calculus of risk in the minds of the Russian leaders by developing a graduated hierarchy of diplomatic and economic measures that make clear to the Russians the costs and consequences of this aggression. At the same time, the international community must make it clear to Kiev that the new Ukrainian Government must be inclusive, protect the

[*Mr Douglas Alexander*]

rights of Russian-speaking populations within Ukraine, and make it clear to Russia that strengthening ties between Ukraine and the European Union should not be seen as a zero-sum game that will necessarily prejudice its own bilateral relations.

The obligations on Russia are clear, but so too must be the consequences of inaction. Yesterday's decision at the EU Foreign Affairs Council to suspend further talks on the EU-Russia visa liberalisation programme was an important initial step, but will the Foreign Secretary inform the House whether the UK was advocating further diplomatic measures beyond that?

It is right that the EU Council has called an emergency session for Thursday, but given yesterday's events in Downing street, it is also right that there is more clarity from the British Government, ahead of that meeting, about the types of costs and consequences that they are willing to impose on Russia. So will the Foreign Secretary reaffirm specifically that for the United Kingdom not only all diplomatic but all economic options do indeed remain on the table going into the talks on Thursday? I am afraid that the United Kingdom's words will count for little without more credence being given to these options and a willingness at least to countenance their use in the days and weeks ahead.

The House should understand that the costs and consequences to the European Union of not achieving unity and resolve at this time are clear: a Russia emboldened in its ambitions towards Ukraine; a central Europe fearful of future military intervention; and a United States increasingly concerned about Europe's willingness to act, even diplomatically and economically, in the face of such threats. Therefore, as well as pulling out of the Sochi G8 preparatory meetings, will the Foreign Secretary specifically confirm whether the UK remains open to withdrawing from that June summit?

Alongside diplomatic pressure, it is also right that the international community gives appropriate assurances to both sides about the potential dividends of avoiding a descent into further violence. Recent estimates suggest that the Ukrainian Finance Ministry needs \$35 billion of support over the next two years in order to avoid economic collapse. I welcome the Foreign Secretary's announcement today of technical assistance for economic and political reform in Ukraine and, of course, he has previously highlighted the very serious and real concerns about ongoing corruption in Ukraine. However, given the acknowledged weakness of the present Ukrainian Government, will the Foreign Secretary confirm whether, in his judgment, the IMF will be able to respond in a timescale that avoids the present security crisis being rapidly followed by a financing crisis in Kiev?

Russia's incursion into Ukraine was, of course, unjustified and illegal, but the Ukrainian Government none the less have a key role to play in helping to diffuse the situation by providing the appropriate assurances to Russia about their conduct, intentions and priorities. That includes being clear about the status of minorities in the country, the attitude to the Russian language and the conduct of fresh elections in the months ahead.

Will the Foreign Secretary set out what specific assurances he sought from the Ukrainian Government during his welcome visit to Kiev yesterday regarding the status of minorities and in particular the Russian language, given

the steps previously passed and then vetoed by the Ukrainian President? It is vital, as the Foreign Secretary has indicated, that these assurances are given as part of an open and direct dialogue between Kiev and Moscow. Indeed, a contact group may certainly have a constructive role to play.

The inviolability of Ukraine's borders and territorial integrity reflects deeply held principles of the international system. The situation on the ground certainly remains tense, uncertain and, indeed, vulnerable to misunderstanding or misjudgment. That is why this is a time for cool heads and considered words.

As upholders of that international order, the United Kingdom and our allies have responsibilities that extend beyond regard for each individual country's bilateral relations with Russia. The Ukraine crisis is surely a moment of real geopolitical significance, so the United Kingdom must not now retreat into a new isolationism and should instead keep all diplomatic and economic measures open to us and our partners as we work to achieve unity and resolve in the international community's diplomatic response, and so contribute to the de-escalation of the crisis.

Mr Hague: The right hon. Gentleman called for all diplomatic measures to be used, which, as he and the House will have gathered from my statement, is absolutely what we are doing. Indeed, I think from his questions that there is very strong agreement about the gravity of the threat and the principles that should guide us in responding to it.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke, as I have done frequently over the past few days, about the violation of Ukraine's independence and sovereignty. Like me, he commended the Ukrainian Government on their restraint. I certainly urge them to continue with that and to continue to do everything they can to show that they are being inclusive within Ukraine and that there is no threat to Russian-speaking or other minorities. Indeed, I put it to them yesterday that they could consider positively additional changes to language laws to give an extra assurance. I very much welcome the decision of the acting President not to allow any laws that infringe in any way on the Russian language to go ahead.

On the subject of the Ukrainian Government, the right hon. Gentleman asked whether I thought the IMF would be able to respond. I think there is strong recognition among the Ukrainian Ministers I met that they need to do something quite different economically and that they have to tackle the deep-seated issues that I described in my statement. I think it is entirely possible that the IMF will be able to respond, although possibly in a two-stage process, with the second stage following the elections on 25 May. I met three of the likely presidential candidates while I was there—they are not in the Government, but they are likely to run for President—and I encouraged all of them to support economic reforms, including an end to corruption and much greater transparency in government in Ukraine. I think there is a reasonable prospect of agreeing a programme on the basis of such commitments.

The right hon. Gentleman welcomed the initial step—I think that is the right way to describe it—taken at the Foreign Affairs Council. Certainly, the United Kingdom has strongly advocated that we need to be ready to take further actions. Those actions, however, must be on a

united basis and, of course, be well judged and well targeted. Therefore, I do not think it would be helpful for different countries to announce ahead of the European Council what they want to see. It is important that the European Council agrees a united position and whatever measures it decides to take on Thursday.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether all diplomatic and economic options remain on the table, and the answer is yes, as we discussed during oral questions earlier. No partially photographed documents should be taken as any guide to Her Majesty's Government's decisions on these matters. Those options remain open.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the June summit. We have suspended the preparations for it. As I told the media yesterday, the G7 will be able to hold meetings of our own if that suspension continues and that, of course, is an option. It will be necessary not only to take well-judged measures in our response, but for there to be recognition across the European Union that Russia needs the EU economically just as much, or more, than the EU needs Russia. We need to have the common political will and to organise ourselves in a sufficiently cohesive way in order to have the political will and economic leverage in future to make that much clearer than it is today. I think that doing that may be one of the longer-term consequences of what Russia has done in Crimea.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): May I put it to the Foreign Secretary that Brussels is partly to blame for this Ukrainian crisis? If the already over-enlarged European Union is going to continue to try to extend its borders towards Mongolia, we will indeed finish up with a third world war. Every Russian knows that the capture of Crimea and Sevastopol was the greatest achievement of Catherine the Great—that is why she is called “Great”—and Potemkin. No Russian Government of whatever political complexion could ever give up Crimea or Sevastopol, and we can be absolutely certain that the Russian people are passionately in support of President Putin over this issue.

Mr Hague: I differ with my right hon. Friend a little bit on this. Russia gave Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 and followed that in the 1990s with a series of specific agreements, including the Budapest memorandum and the 1997 agreement on the Black sea bases, in which it forswore the use of armed force or intrusion on to the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Russia chose to do that and it must honour its international obligations.

I assure my right hon. Friend that it is not the ambition of the EU, or of the UK for the EU, to extend its borders to Mongolia. What we are talking about is not Ukrainian membership of the European Union, but free trade; a free trade agreement—an association agreement—between the EU and a country that freely chose to enter into negotiations about it. It should not be possible for any other country to have a veto over any nation choosing to do that.

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): May I commend the work of the Foreign Secretary, and the wise approach of my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary? The Foreign Secretary will be aware that there is a very different narrative in Russia to justify actions that we all regard as completely unjustified. One issue on which

the Russian Government have seized is the decision of the Rada, the Ukrainian Parliament, to seek to change the law guaranteeing regional languages, including Russian. I welcome the Foreign Secretary's commendation of the interim President's veto of that law, but would it not be better to pressure the new interim Government into repealing the legislation altogether? As long as it remains on Ukraine's statute book, it will be a running sore, and it will be used by the Russian Government as a means of justifying their intervention.

Mr Hague: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Just to be clear, the repeal of the law has not gone on to the statute book: the President vetoed it. However, I agree with the thrust of his question, which is that there may well be more that the Government can do to give assurances on that matter, and to make sure that they have language laws entirely satisfactory to all minorities in Ukraine. I put it to the Prime Minister yesterday that that should be one of the things they work on, and we will encourage the Government of Ukraine to do so.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD): I am grateful for this second opportunity to ask a question, Mr Speaker, so I shall be brief. Does my right hon. Friend recognise any parallels between Russia's action in Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia and its current policy towards Ukraine and Crimea?

Mr Hague: Yes, I do, unfortunately. What those actions—there is a parallel with Transnistria as well—have in common is that they can be seen as attempts to impair and permanently obstruct the proper operation or the free and democratic functioning of those countries and of their co-operation with Euro-Atlantic structures. There has been a clear pattern of behaviour towards Moldova and Georgia, and it is now being repeated in Ukraine.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Poland and the Baltic states are increasingly nervous of Russia's expansionist tendency. As the Foreign Secretary has already said, there are still Russian troops in Georgia. Is it not therefore all the more incumbent on us—the European Union as a whole—to stand up, united and calm but extremely robust, lest Crimea become a 21st-century Abyssinia or Sudetenland?

Mr Hague: Yes, I agree. All the words that the hon. Gentleman has used are important in that respect: in this situation, the nations of the European Union and the European Council when it meets on Thursday are required to be united, robust and calm. As I have explained to the House, the options for further measures are open. As I have also said, it is important that there are costs to behaviour of this kind. I very strongly believe that.

Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con): What conclusions can be drawn from the fact that Russian troops in Crimea have not worn any marks of identification or insignia?

Mr Hague: That happened in the early stages of the Russian operation, and it was clearly designed to try to conceal the fact that it was a Russian operation. However, all pretence about that was subsequently cast aside,

[*Mr Hague*]

because many thousands of Russian troops appear to have been deployed to Crimea. It shows that this was a well-planned, perhaps a long-planned, operation, and that it was put into force in a way that tried to minimise the reaction of the international community.

Mr David Crausby (Bolton North East) (Lab): Will the Foreign Secretary quickly lay out the Government's position on sanctions against Russia in general? In particular, what is his view about calls for a complete boycott of Russia's Olympic games?

Mr Hague: The winter Olympics have happened; the Paralympics are taking place over the next couple of weeks. As I mentioned in my statement, we will not be sending UK Government representatives, but the Government do not believe in sporting boycotts of Olympic events. Our athletes will continue to go to the Paralympics, and I am sure that they will have the support and enthusiasm of this House in the great endeavours they will make.

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend first make it clear that the document, which very unfortunately was partially revealed yesterday, is not a statement of Government policy? Does he agree that Russia's actions are in breach not just of the UN charter, decisions of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Budapest memorandum, as he said, but the agreement establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States, and that Russia's actions have very serious implications for other former Soviet Union territories as well as for Ukraine?

Mr Hague: My hon. Friend makes some very important points. I made it clear during questions that no one official document carried into a meeting is necessarily representative of the decisions that will be made by Her Majesty's Government or by Ministers, but let me make that clear again.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the implications for other former Soviet republics and for their independence. That is why this is not an isolated issue. It is not possible to say, "Well, this is okay. It is just about Crimea, and we don't have to worry about it." It has very important implications for upholding international treaties and obligations, and for respect for the independence and sovereignty of nation states.

Mr Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): The Council of Europe was established to promote respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and Russia is a member of it. What role does the Foreign Secretary see for the Council of Europe in the current situation?

Mr Hague: There is an important role for the Council of Europe, and the right hon. Gentleman is quite right to raise that matter. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe has already spoken to the secretary-general of the Council of Europe about the role that it can play. It of course has an important role to play in any issues about the protection of minorities. It is not acceptable

for a member of the Council of Europe to behave in this way, and there must be consequences within the Council of Europe as well.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): The Foreign Secretary will recall that when he made a statement last week, I asked whether he had received an assurance—a cast-iron commitment—from Foreign Minister Lavrov that Russia would not intervene in Ukraine. We have now seen it intervene, and I wonder whether my right hon. Friend can confirm overnight reports that I have had from a friend in Donetsk that the Russians have bussed in Russian citizens from outside Ukraine to act as agents provocateurs? Does he agree that that kind of action is wholly unacceptable and represents a return to a kind of Soviet-style foreign policy?

Mr Hague: Although I cannot confirm the reports mentioned by my hon. Friend, I have heard other reports to the same effect, including when I was in Ukraine yesterday. That is why I said at questions—when I was asked about disturbances in eastern parts of Ukraine, such as in Donetsk—that it is not clear whether disturbances have been inspired from outside. There is a serious possibility that some of the disturbances are inspired from outside the country, and we should see them in that light.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Citing Russia's central bank, the *Financial Times* reports today that up to two thirds of Russian money in London is from corruption and other crime. At the very least, if Britain's tough words are to mean anything, should not those assets be frozen now?

Mr Hague: We have very important regulations in this country about politically exposed persons—banking regulations cover them—and we have strong laws on money laundering. The right hon. Gentleman will have heard what I said about agreeing with the Ukrainian Prime Minister yesterday about the recovery of assets stolen from Ukraine. Our options are open on that.

Given our experience of applying sanctions to several parts of the world in recent years, I would only add at the moment that if we are to apply sanctions to individuals we must be very sure of our case legally and have the evidence to sustain cases through court proceedings. We have to bear that in mind.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Surely we must ensure that we cannot be accused of double standards. We were rightly prepared to violate the territorial integrity of Serbia to protect the right to self-determination of the Kosovans. Presumably, we should look equally kindly on the right to self-determination of the ethnic Russians in Crimea and Donetsk. Therefore, can we please resist the wilder talk of economic sanctions, which can only damage the fragile recovery of Europe, and instead engage in diplomatic dialogue with Russia and Ukraine?

Mr Hague: As my hon. Friend can gather, we are engaged in every channel of diplomatic dialogue and that will continue. As I have said, I will be in Paris tomorrow at the same time as Foreign Minister Lavrov. Our diplomatic efforts with Russia will continue at all times.

However, as other Members have said, it is right to have a response that goes beyond that. That is why we have announced certain measures in respect of the G8, why the EU has made an announcement about the visa regime and why I have said that other options are on the table. Such a challenge to international order and the maintenance of the UN charter and international law cannot possibly go ahead without costs and consequences.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): France is currently negotiating a €1 billion deal for two Mistral-class ships to be delivered to the Russian navy. Has the Foreign Secretary had any indication that France is considering whether it is appropriate to go ahead with that deal or whether to make it part of the sanctions negotiations?

Mr Hague: We have had no indications from France about that matter. As the hon. Lady will have gathered, there will be further extensive meetings, including between the European Heads of Government at the European Council on Thursday. Arms export licences will, of course, be one of the issues that European nations have to consider. It is important that we consider them together and have a united approach, but we must examine that issue.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): To pick up on the Foreign Secretary's last point, the implication of what he has said is that if the Russians continue with their current strategy, there will be targeted sanctions against Russia from the EU, NATO and the US. Russia will respond by retaliating against individual countries to try to fracture the unity of that policy. Is he confident that he can maintain the unity of that policy in the long run, and what action is he taking to make sure of that?

Mr Hague: As my right hon. Friend will have noticed, I have stressed several times the importance of unity among the western nations, including in the European Union; the importance of any measures being well judged and well targeted; and the importance of any measures being legally sustainable. That is why these matters require calm and careful consideration, rather than quick unilateral announcements by this country or any other member state of the EU.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Russia's action is obviously to be condemned and there should be no apologies for what it has done. However, is it not the case that a large majority of people in Crimea feel a strong attachment to Russia? We all know about Khrushchev's impulsive action of handing Crimea over to Ukraine in 1954, when both places were part of the Soviet Union. If we want to de-escalate the crisis—surely we are not talking about a second Crimean war—is it not possible to find out through the democratic process, difficult as it is, what the people of Crimea want? I think that the majority verdict would be along the lines that I have indicated. Surely the views of the people should be taken into account in this crisis.

Mr Hague: We are not talking about a new Crimean war, although the action that Russia has taken—the use of armed force in Crimea—has risked a new Crimean war for that country. I would make one point to the

hon. Gentleman. There is a Russian-speaking majority in Crimea, although it is of the order of 50% to 60%, but there are also important minorities, including the Tatar minority, and their rights need to be respected as well. It is too simplistic an approach to say that the majority in Crimea would like to be in a different situation from the current one. Any referendum that is held should be consistent with the constitution of the sovereign nation of Ukraine. That is not the current proposal.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that part of the problem is that Ukraine is a deeply divided society, in which both sides have, at one time or another, played winner-takes-all? He talks, rightly, about the importance of maintaining a unified Ukraine. Does he agree with the conclusion of Professor Anatol Lieven that

“the only way to keep Ukraine together may be the introduction of a new federal constitution with much greater powers for the different regions”?

Mr Hague: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. It is for Ukrainians to decide their constitutional structure. I am simply advocating the idea that they should make their decisions in accordance with their constitution. It is a country in which there is a strong case for more decentralisation. There is also a strong case, strategically, for turning away from a winner-takes-all attitude in politics. I have gone out of my way to stress to Russia that we do not see the situation in zero-sum terms. Although we welcome close ties between Ukraine and the European Union, we recognise that Russia has entirely legitimate interests in and an entirely legitimate relationship with Ukraine. We will continue to make that argument.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): I think that we need to send out a search party to find the backbones that many European Governments, including our own, appear to have misplaced. The west has never seemed more unable or unwilling to stand up for its values. That weakness has clearly emboldened Putin—a KGB thug. Surely we should be pressing the case much more robustly for sanctions and asset freezing. What I cannot understand is why Putin is still a member of the G8.

Mr Hague: We have made an announcement about the G8. The hon. Gentleman must remember that we are working through diplomatic channels to make progress at the same time. That is the decision that we have taken. He might disagree and think that our reaction should be entirely about imposing costs. We have chosen, with other western nations, to advocate diplomatic ways forward at the same time as assessing how to ensure that there are costs and consequences. I agree with him about the importance of there being costs and consequences. I simply remind him that it is important for those to be arrived at in the united, robust and calm way that some of his hon. Friends have advocated.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I hope that a bully like President Putin will listen carefully to the strong and clear messages that the Foreign Secretary has delivered at the weekend and today. None the less, Putin will have noticed that, more importantly, the Russian stock exchange has collapsed by 10% and the rouble is under severe pressure. Does my right hon.

[*Mr James Gray*]

Friend therefore agree with me that, in contrast to what my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle said, economic sanctions against Russia will work, even if it is at some cost to businesses in the UK?

Mr Speaker: For the avoidance of doubt, I think that the hon. Gentleman had in mind the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh). It is important not to have cases of mistaken identity, because the Father of the House was looking gravely perturbed by the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr Hague: As I mentioned before, our options are open. I stress again that any measures must be well judged and well targeted, and that the European Union and the western world must be united. My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) is right to point to what happened on the Moscow stock exchange and to the value of the Russian currency yesterday. There are major risks for Russia economically. I expressed the view a few moments ago that, in the medium to long term, Russia needs the economic co-operation of European nations just as much as or more than they need the co-operation of Russia. That has to become part of Russia's calculations in the coming years.

Mr Peter Hain (Neath) (Lab): Given President Putin's increasing international and domestic malevolence, is there not a danger that the west will get caught between saying strong words and taking no action on the one hand and, on the other hand, allowing Russia's legitimate interests, such as its interest in the port of Sevastopol and its Mediterranean port, and its economic interests, to provide some spurious legitimacy for his actions? Is there not a case, therefore, for a new more global deal that addresses the legitimate Russian interests—although not the illegitimate ones—but protects self-determination around Russia's border? That might provide some comfort to the President, and more importantly to the people, that NATO has limited ambitions around Russia's border, because I think that that is part of the problem.

Mr Hague: We must be alert to the dangers to which the right hon. Gentleman correctly refers, and we must be prepared to be imaginative about long-term frameworks and solutions. We have already made the argument—I made it only a week ago to Foreign Minister Lavrov—that we recognise those Russian interests and are not seeking a zero-sum strategic game, and that there will be ways for the Russian economy, as well as the Ukrainian economy, to benefit from closer ties to the European Union. However, the response to us and other countries making that argument has been what we have seen over the past few days. That does not stop our making it, but it shows how difficult it is to construct a global deal, as the right hon. Gentleman said.

Mr David Ward (Bradford East) (LD): In light of Russia's bellicose behaviour, is the Foreign Secretary aware of the danger of Russia perceiving a calm response as a weak response?

Mr Hague: We must be alert to that danger too, which is why—I repeat—it is important that there are costs and consequences of Russia behaving in this way. I assure the hon. Gentleman that Ministers are conscious of the danger he mentions.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe has a huge opportunity to make a difference on the ground and assist with de-escalation. What efforts are being supported at the OSCE headquarters in Vienna to ensure that the largest-scale monitoring mission is dispatched as soon as possible?

Mr Hague: We are working on two things in the OSCE, and I mentioned that urgent consultations are taking place in Vienna. One is the deployment of monitors to try to avoid the flashpoint we have been talking about. So far, Russia is refusing to accept such monitors in Crimea, but perhaps we can do more in other parts of Ukraine. We are also working on the creation of a contact group to try to open a new diplomatic channel and a forum for Russia and Ukraine to discuss things together. So far, Russia has not accepted that idea either, but we are continuing to pursue both ideas.

Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con): Given what the Foreign Secretary said about his recognition of the sensibilities of Russia in this situation, does he recognise that the EU's ambitions for the Eastern Partnership and the association agreement over the past 18 months have borne some responsibility for the relationship between Russia and Ukraine? That is especially so given, for example, the express views of an EU diplomat last November, who stated—even threatened—that the Ukrainian leadership would have to come to the EU on their knees if they did not do what the EU wanted.

Mr Hague: We are talking about an association agreement that remains on the table between the EU and Ukraine, and a deep and comprehensive free-trade area. That is similar to something that Ukraine would willingly enter into. There is no requirement from the EU that it does that, and it is a very different thing to EU membership. It was being discussed with the Yanukovich Administration, because they wanted to discuss it with the European Union. I assure my hon. Friend that from everything I have seen in Ukraine, having been there on Sunday and Monday, there is strong political unity in that country that welcomes seeing the back of President Yanukovich, and that wants to enter into closer association with the European Union. That is its sovereign right and decision, and we should be prepared to defend its right to make those decisions.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): How close is the European Council to agreement on sanctions and other measures in response to Russia's deplorable action, and how does that vary from the approach taken by the US?

Mr Hague: Work is taking place on this now. The Foreign Affairs Council met yesterday and made the announcements that I referred to in my statement, and there will, of course, be further work among EU nations between now and the European Council. On Thursday the Prime Minister spoke to President Hollande, and last night to Chancellor Merkel to co-ordinate our positions, and we will keep in close co-ordination with the United States. The hon. Lady will have to wait, I am afraid, for the Council on Thursday.

Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): I understand that broad economic sanctions would be both counter-productive and harmful to the City of London, and would require the much broader approval of all members of the EU. Surely, however, there is a case for targeted financial and travel sanctions against members of the Russian elite living in the UK and involved in the illegal invasion of Ukraine, and who are strongly suspected of human rights abuses perpetrated against Sergei Magnitsky.

Mr Hague: There is a case for certain measures, and Members of the House, including my hon. Friend, make it well. I do not exclude the possibility of any such measures, but I simply return to what I was saying about them being well judged, well targeted and having a clear legal base. Those will be important considerations over the next few days.

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): Russia's increasingly belligerent foreign policy—its military aggression in Crimea and the continued occupation of parts of Georgia—is funded by exports of its gas and oil. What can the European Union do to make countries in central and eastern Europe less dependent on oil and gas imports from Russia, and also make Ukraine less dependent?

Mr Hague: There are many things that can be done, some of which are under way. Countries can develop alternative energy supplies—[*Interruption.*] Including fracking, as I hear some Members behind me say. As the United States becomes an energy exporter, there could be alternative sources of energy in the future. In December I attended the inauguration of the new pipeline project from the Caspian sea, which will be a new route for gas supplies into Europe that does not pass through or from Russia. That infrastructure will take time to develop, but it is important to do so.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): The world is becoming increasingly unstable, and this latest example to world peace is a classic case. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that our Government and country must rethink the funding of our armed forces to ensure we have the ships, and the Royal Navy, the Army and the Air Force, to meet potential threats in the future? I do not hint for one minute that we should go to war in this case, but it is surely a reminder that we need to keep our defences up.

Mr Hague: In an unstable world we need to keep up our defences. That is absolutely right and is why the country is investing in very sophisticated military projects for the future. As things stand, we maintain the spending of 2% of our GDP on defence, and I think that many NATO countries have reduced their defence spending too far. We are one of the few NATO countries that maintains spending of 2% of our GDP, and there are countries across NATO that need to re-evaluate that and increase their defence spending in the coming years.

Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): On 9 July 1997 the charter on a distinctive partnership between Ukraine and NATO was signed, and on 21 August 2009, the declaration to complement that charter was

signed. If possible NATO involvement is totally ruled out, are those signatures worth the paper they are written on?

Mr Hague: The NATO-Ukraine Commission has met on the back of those agreements, and there will be further NATO meetings. We in the House are clear, as was said a few minutes ago, that we are not planning another Crimean war from this country's point of view. I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman advocates that NATO should do in addition to the diplomatic moves we have made through NATO. The agreements with Ukraine are important, but they do not include coming to the armed defence of Ukraine.

Dame Angela Watkinson (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): The UK Conservative delegation to the Council of Europe has sought the suspension of Russia from the Council of Europe and, pending a decision on that, has declined to sit on the European Democrat Group under its current Russian chairmanship. Will the Secretary of State say what more the UK delegation or the Council of Europe as a whole can do to contribute towards the restoration of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Ukraine?

Mr Hague: The issue should be raised vigorously in the Council of Europe. I welcome the decisions made by Conservative colleagues in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. There are Russian representatives in other political groups of the Council of Europe, and all political groups from Russia are, in one way or another, approved by the Kremlin. Opposition Members may therefore wish to attend to those matters. I hope that members of all parties in the Council of Europe pursue the matter vigorously at their forthcoming part-sessions.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary has rightly welcomed the vetoing of the legislation downgrading the Russian language in Ukraine, but he will understand that the fact that the Parliament was prepared to pass and propose such legislation caused severe concern to the 20% of the population in Ukraine who are ethnically Russian. What further measures does he believe the Ukrainian Parliament should take to give reassurance to that part of the population that they are not under threat?

Mr Hague: That is a matter for the Ukrainians. As hon. Members understand, it is for the Ukrainians to decide in their country, but I put it to Ukrainian Ministers yesterday that, in addition to consolidating the veto of the legislation, they should think about crafting a new language law that represents the consensus in their country, and the long-term protection and upholding of the rights of minority languages in Ukraine. They are in the midst of a desperate crisis—we must understand that—but I hope they take that proposal seriously.

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): My right hon. Friend mentioned in his statement the creation of a contact group including Russia and China as an alternative to consultations under the Budapest memorandum. What has China so far said or done to assist in this situation?

Mr Hague: My hon. and learned Friend might have noticed that I read that out as “Russia and Ukraine”, but China’s role is important. China has spoken at the UN Security Council of the importance of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. I hope that that is a statement and a position that China can develop over the coming days.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): The incursion of any foreign troops into the Ukraine is wrong and can lead to further war and destabilisation, but does the Foreign Secretary accept that part of the problem is the ambition of NATO expansion further eastwards and more NATO or US-run bases in the region? Is it not time to bring about a long-term neutrality and de-escalation of NATO’s presence on the borders of Russia?

Mr Hague: Russia’s action is hardly designed to produce less NATO presence in countries that border Russia—far from it. The countries in close proximity to Russia will be anxious to have a stronger NATO presence in future. Russia’s action is very counter-productive from that point of view. NATO membership has not been in prospect for Ukraine. In any case, as so many right hon. and hon. Members have said, there is no excuse for Russia’s actions in the past few days. The idea that Ukraine was about to join NATO is certainly no justification for them. That was not in any prospect.

Sir James Paice (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Should we not look back at the lessons of the past couple of decades? The current Russian leadership is clearly not worried about its international obligations or treaties. As we have heard, it invaded and still occupies a part of Georgia; after a few diplomatic rumbles around the world, everything went back to normal. That gave the Russians the impression they can go on doing that with impunity, which is exactly what they have done. Therefore, I urge my right hon. Friend to push for the toughest possible economic sanctions, particularly at Thursday’s European Council. That is the only lesson the Russians will learn. Otherwise, we will see the same happen over and over again. It is not surprising that former Soviet Union countries are worried.

Mr Hague: My right hon. Friend makes his point well. That is why it is important that there are costs and consequences for what has occurred. I cannot add to what I said earlier on measures we can take and how they must be well judged and well targeted, but Russia’s action will lead, over the coming years, to European nations assessing their interests differently. It will have long-term consequences for Russia’s relationship with the rest of Europe. That should be of concern to the Russians, whatever measures we can take in the short term.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): I come from an area with a strong Ukrainian community. Growing up in Newcastle-under-Lyme, I regularly attended our Ukrainian club with friends of Ukrainian descent. Given the troubled history of democracy in the Ukraine since independence from the Soviet Union, will the Foreign Secretary urge the Government in Kiev and all the major political parties to accept international observers in the forthcoming elections to ensure that they are as fair and free as possible to all who take part?

Mr Hague: Yes, the hon. Gentleman can urge me to do that. We will do so. I have already stressed to the Ukrainian leaders the importance of the elections being free and fair and well conducted. They have set a rapid timetable—25 May—given the condition of the country, so international support is important, and I have already offered British expertise. We will certainly pursue the hon. Gentleman’s point on election observers.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I warmly welcome the Foreign Secretary’s statement and his statesman-like handling of the situation. I urge him to work with all western allies of democracy to set out to President Putin with one voice a clear and credible position that the aggressive intimidation and annexation of the new democracies of central and eastern Europe will simply not be tolerated. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the realities of the UK’s and Europe’s dependency on Ukraine and Russia make it crucial, as we set energy policy for the next Parliament, that, in addition to hitting the EU’s green targets, we put our energy security and the geopolitical implications of it at the top of the agenda?

Mr Hague: Yes, my hon. Friend is quite right. I must not stray too far into the responsibilities of my colleagues, but it is important that our energy supply is not only efficient but sufficiently diverse for our national security. That will become an even more important consideration over the next few years.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Given the dangers of any provocative misinformation by Russia, via media or social media, what discussions did the Foreign Secretary have with the Ukrainian Government on ensuring that the Ukrainian people, including those in Crimea, continue to have free and unfettered access to objective sources of information on what is happening in their country?

Mr Hague: That is an important point and a difficult one for the Ukrainian authorities, because Russian state television is broadcast in many regions of Ukraine, where people therefore hear only one partial side of the argument. From what I could see, the Ukrainian authorities are taking every step to correct misinformation whenever they can and are giving maximum information to the world’s media. However, this is one of those occasions when it is important for people to use social media and listen to different sources of information, because they will not receive the truth from just one source.

Mr Robert Walter (North Dorset) (Con): My right hon. Friend has alluded to the danger of Crimea becoming yet another frozen conflict. When Russia occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia, thousands of ethnic Georgians had to flee their homes and cross the border. What steps does he believe the international community should take to protect the rights of ethnic Ukrainians and Tatars in Crimea?

Mr Hague: That too is important. It is one of the reasons we want Ukraine and Russia to be able to talk to each other about the diplomatic settlement of these issues. The position is very complex, given the range of minorities in Crimea. It is currently impossible for people to leave, because road and air access to and from Crimea is now extremely difficult. There could also

be very serious medium-term implications. This is another strong argument for Russia to engage with a contact group, or in consultations under the Budapest memorandum, rather than allowing the problem to build up over the coming weeks.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): For many years the majority of the delegates to the Council of Europe from this Parliament have been members of the same group as Putin's Russian party and Yanukovich's Ukrainian party, and have collaborated with them closely on a number of reactionary policies. Can we take it that the breach with the European Democrat Group is permanent, and that the Conservatives in the Council of Europe will be joining their natural allies in the Christian Democratic Group?

Mr Hague: The hon. Gentleman will have heard what was said earlier by Conservative members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe who made clear their departure from the previous arrangements. However, I believe that for all this time members of the so-called Liberal Democratic party—an extremely nationalistic party from Russia—have sat in the Socialist Group, so some attention needs to be given to the issue on the other side of the House as well.

Patrick Mercer (Newark) (Ind): I have been visiting Crimea every year since 1992. This morning I was speaking to the parents of my godchild in Simferopol. They described the rapture with which the people of Crimea are greeting the Russian troops, but they are extremely concerned about the illegal, rough and appalling behaviour of the Cossack movement—not the Cossack people, but the Cossack movement. May I ask the Secretary of State to give full attention to this gang of unpleasant creatures, and to emphasise that their conduct must be reformed?

Mr Hague: Many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend, have raised important dimensions of the situation, and have drawn attention to problems that need to be gripped. The United Kingdom's ability to take such action is, of course, very small, and that is another reason why we are exerting pressure for a diplomatic settlement. Unless Russia and Ukraine speak directly about these matters—unless Russia is willing to do so—all these issues will become much worse in the coming days, and will become a growing problem for Russia as well as for Ukraine.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): What reassurance can the Foreign Secretary give the Ukrainian community in this country who have made such a major contribution over the years, in the pits in some cases? May I also ask whether he thinks that he will be able to secure unity on sanctions, given that Germany, for example, relies on Russia for 30% of its oil and gas?

Mr Hague: I think that members of the Ukrainian community in Britain, to whom others have referred, have played a very important role in this country, and this is a moment at which to recognise and applaud that. As the hon. Gentleman will understand from everything that I have said today, they can be assured of the importance that we attach to this issue, and the energy that we will put into assisting the achievement of a peaceful, democratic future for Ukraine.

As for the hon. Gentleman's question about sanctions, I have already addressed it several times. It is important for there to be costs and consequences, but it is also important to change, over the long term, the balance of the economic relationship—including the energy relationship—between European nations and Russia, and we will be giving out attention to that.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): We must give whatever credible support we can to the free people and Government of Ukraine. One of Russia's greatest vulnerabilities is its desperate need for capital investment. Can the European Union specifically consider reasonable legal means of interrupting capital investment flows to Russia if Mr Putin does not step back from this illegal and unjustified aggression?

Mr Hague: Several proposals have been made during the questions on my statement, and I have not ruled out any of the options. Economic and financial options are open to us, depending on consultations with other countries and depending on the course of events over the next few days.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): If the UK Government were serious about putting pressure on Russia, they would be considering economic sanctions, including restricting the flow of money and assets from Russia to the City of London. The United States is considering such a course of action, but it would be largely ineffective without a similar European response. Does not the ruling out of such action mean that the interests of the square mile are driving UK foreign policy, and that the international response will be hindered?

Mr Hague: I think that the hon. Gentleman has been here for the last hour and a quarter, but he did not show much sign of that in asking his question. I have not ruled out any of those options. No measure proposed by any of our allies has so far been blocked by the United Kingdom. I have explained that actions that we take—in regard to which we have not ruled out any options—will be taken with our allies, with careful consideration, and depending on the course of events over the next few days.

Mr Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): The Budapest memorandum marks a very substantial piece of nuclear disarmament—total on the part of Ukraine, and substantial in terms of the number of weapons that Ukraine held at that time. The Secretary of State has been clear about the obligations placed on Russia as a signatory to the memorandum, but it now seems that, as far as the Ukrainians were concerned, it was not worth a light. What obligations, either implicit or explicit, are placed on us as a signatory?

Mr Hague: Our obligation is to support, as we do, the independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine. The memorandum does not place on us an obligation to take armed action, but article 6 refers to consultation between the signatories, and that is what we are now seeking. Indeed, that is what we and the United States are proposing for tomorrow, when Secretary Kerry, Foreign Minister Lavrov and I, and the acting Foreign Minister of Ukraine, will all be in Paris. The memorandum gives us that opportunity, and that is the technical answer to my hon. Friend's question.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Further to the Foreign Secretary's comments about energy security, the United Kingdom thankfully receives only a limited supply of Russian gas, but other European countries, particularly Germany, have considerable exposure, with consequences for the rest of Europe. What discussions has the Foreign Secretary had with his European Union counterparts about ensuring the security of European energy supply so that this does not end up limiting our ability to take action against Russia?

Mr Hague: The hon. Gentleman has raised a very important issue, but it is an issue for the medium to longer term. We are doing important things now to diversify energy supplies to Europe. I have already mentioned the new pipeline through Azerbaijan, whose construction we inaugurated in December. That pipeline, however, will take several years to construct.

Although this is, as I have said, a medium to long-term issue, I think that what has just happened will be a sharp reminder to everyone in Europe and in this country that it is also an important issue, and that dealing with it will become one of the important foreign policy and security considerations over the next few years.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): This is a real test for the United States and, indeed, for the Obama Administration, but it is also a test for the European Union. What discussions has the Foreign Secretary had with his German counterpart? He has used the word "united" numerous times during his statement and in his replies. Are the Germans part of that united effort? Of course, other members of the international community are looking on to see whether there is unity and whether there is resoluteness, not least in Beijing, which has its own aspirations in different parts of the world?

Mr Hague: My hon. Friend has made a good point about European unity and the role of Germany in that. I have very regular discussions with my German counterpart, Minister Steinmeier—indeed, I had a discussion with him at the weekend—and the Minister for Europe was with him at the Foreign Affairs Council yesterday. The Prime Minister spoke to Chancellor Merkel last night, having also had discussions with her when she was here last Thursday. We will be working closely with Germany, and we will be working for a clear, united position at the European Council on Thursday.

Mr Brian H. Donohoe (Central Ayrshire) (Lab): Is not part of the explanation for the action taken that Putin and his Government are seriously concerned that the same thing might happen in Russia that has happened in Ukraine, where people power has taken over?

Mr Hague: As with many countries, Russian foreign policy is partly determined by domestic pressures, and what happened 10 days ago in Ukraine was a major reverse for Russian foreign policy. In many ways, many would have thought it a humiliation. There are many explanations why Russia has chosen to take the action it has, and one is that it is an attempt to alleviate, including in domestic opinion, that humiliation of the flight of Yanukovich from Kiev.

Mr Andrew Tyrrie (Chichester) (Con): This is nothing less than a land grab and the biggest strategic shock on the continent for decades. If Putin gets away with this,

sooner or later more trouble will follow in central and eastern Europe. Does the Secretary of State agree that the west now needs to unify around a much more robust response than we have seen so far, and that in support of it the UK should demonstrate that it is actively considering all forms of economic sanctions?

Mr Hague: I can assure my hon. Friend that we are actively considering a wide range of options, and I have not ruled out any options in my responses to questions, as I am sure he will have noticed. Clearly, I think the response we have made so far is correct. We have emphasised the need for new diplomatic openings as well as for there to be costs and consequences from this Russian action, but in the absence of a change of policy from Russia we will, of course, have to move on to making sure those costs and consequences happen.

Gemma Doyle (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned arms export licences earlier. In considering what sanctions may be used against Russia, has he had any discussions with his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence about the forthcoming military and technical co-operation agreement, which I understand is due to be signed in the next few weeks?

Mr Hague: The hon. Lady is right that we have been due to agree to sign a military and technical co-operation agreement with Russia in the near future. Clearly, in the current situation the chances of us doing that are rather reduced, to put it mildly, but we have not made a formal decision about that. We are certainly reviewing that, and we will decide about it in conjunction with any other measures we choose to adopt.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Russia may well be trying to repeat in Crimea what it has been allowed to do in Moldova. Why should the Russians fear that the international community will act differently from how it acted over Moldova?

Mr Hague: My hon. Friend is right that, as I have said in answer to earlier questions, there are parallels with Transnistria, and, indeed, with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are part of Georgia. Russia has certainly been able to live with any consequences of those actions in the past. This is a repetition of that, but on an even greater scale, so there must be costs and consequences in response, to deter the repetition of such events in future.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): But what are the other costs and consequences that the Secretary of State is actively considering? He has mentioned visa restrictions, but surely just restricting a few people from entering is not sufficient to meet the bar of significant costs given how much Russia clearly feels it has to gain from its current actions in Ukraine? Will he say what else is actively on the table?

Mr Hague: No—to be consistent with all the answers I have given before. The European Union has referred to targeted measures and I have referred to well judged, well targeted legal measures. I have not excluded anything. Many hon. Members have made interesting proposals during the course of this statement, but I stressed before that when we take such measures it is important

for there to be unity on them, as well as for them to be well judged and well targeted. That means we must work on them together in the European Union, and that is what we are doing now.

Dan Byles (North Warwickshire) (Con): Why does my right hon. Friend believe President Putin feels that he will get away with this? What are we and the rest of the free world doing wrong if Putin believes he can act with impunity, as he clearly does?

Mr Hague: As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), there have been previous Russian actions in Georgia and Moldova which might be considered a model for this action, and Russia has not felt sharp consequences as a result of them. That is no doubt an emboldening factor, but I think Russian policy has also been driven by the imperative I referred to a few moments ago of trying to alleviate, or reverse in some way, the major setback for Russian foreign policy that took place only 10 days ago in Ukraine, and also possibly by the desire—which I referred to much earlier—permanently to impair the free and democratic operation of Ukraine and its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. There is a mixture of motives, and I entirely accept that it is important that we raise the penalties and consequences for acting on those motives.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): Even if Russia will not agree at this stage to having international monitors in the areas under its control, if the Ukrainian Government agree is there not a case for a rapid deployment of international monitors to other areas of Ukraine, particularly those where there is potential conflict? That may well deter further incursion by Russia and those aligned with it, and will also allow the truth of what is happening to come out.

Mr Hague: Yes, there is. That is a very important point and it is one of the things we are pursuing at the OSCE. We hope the United Nations representatives will also discuss it in Ukraine. We will continue to pursue that point.

Mr Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): Two years ago this week the House unanimously endorsed the principle of the Magnitsky sanctions, which are visa bans and asset freezes on those responsible for crimes against humanity in Russia but also beyond. In light of the situation in Ukraine, may I urge my right hon. Friend to look closely at the Magnitsky model of targeted sanctions for those responsible for ordering the military incursions into Ukraine, a clear violation of the cardinal rule of international law?

Mr Hague: My hon. Friend has consistently pursued this matter over a long time and he has heard the previous answers of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe about it. We already have the power to refuse entry into the UK to people who we believe are guilty of serious human rights violations, but I say again that I am not excluding any options on what we might decide to do in this situation.

Gavin Williamson (South Staffordshire) (Con): With all that is unfolding in Ukraine, there is great concern in nations such as Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland

about their future. What reassurance is my right hon. Friend giving our NATO partners that we stand shoulder to shoulder with them in the defence of their sovereignty and independence?

Mr Hague: I think they know we do. Those countries are very important members of NATO. I mentioned earlier our strong commitment to NATO, including maintaining the strongest armed forces in Europe all round, but it will be important for other countries across NATO to strengthen their own military budgets and defences over the coming years. I have advocated that for a long time, and I think that would be of additional assurance to them.

Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con): President Putin has shown very clearly that under his leadership Russia will not respect the border and the sovereignty of a friendly neighbour. As a president who prides himself on advancing Russia's self-interest, should he not be profoundly alarmed by the market reaction to that action? Regardless of what individual nation states or the European Union decide, will not many businesses across the world be looking at this and asking how, if Russia can act so cavalierly on something so big, they can invest in Russia?

Mr Hague: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I think Russia has underestimated the longer-term consequences of the action it has taken, because there is an important read-across to upholding international law on other issues. The reaction of the world over the long term will tend to diminish the influence of Russia in the world. This will also, of course, shed new light on Russia's insistence on sovereignty in other international disputes. It will have very far-reaching consequences, and I do not think they have yet been fully appreciated in Moscow.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Huddersfield has a vibrant Ukrainian community, which I know is very concerned about family and loved ones across the whole of Ukraine. The attention in the past few days has been on Crimea, but what assessment does my right hon. Friend make of the civil unrest across the rest of the country in cities such as Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk?

Mr Hague: The situation in those cities and areas is an important consideration, too. New governors have been appointed in some of those areas, and they have been drawn from those areas. The acting President of Ukraine has told me of the care he has taken to do that so that there is an inclusive approach to regional and local government. There have been disturbances in some of those cities, although, as other hon. Members have said, there is some evidence that those have been planned externally—we do not have any proof of that, but there is some evidence of it. I hope that calm will return to those parts of Ukraine.

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): I wish to pursue the question from the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly). Should the people of Crimea and elsewhere in Ukraine seek a plebiscite to determine their sovereign future, what concrete support can the

[Christopher Pincher]

British Government give to ensure that such plebiscites are conducted freely and fairly, and not down the barrel of a Russian gun?

Mr Hague: We cannot give much assistance in ensuring that if a plebiscite takes place in an area entirely controlled by the Russian military—clearly we will not be able to give any such guarantees. It would be far better for such plebiscites or referendums to be held under the Ukrainian constitution, with international observers, exactly in the way that my hon. Friend has described. The referendum currently planned for Crimea on 30 March, under the eyes or guns of the Russian military, is not one to which we could give that same level of assistance.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): May I seek clarification from the Foreign Secretary that in the event of there being a legally and freely constituted referendum on sovereignty in Crimea, under the Ukrainian constitution, the Budapest memorandum of 1994 would not be an impediment to it?

Mr Hague: My hon. Friend puts big ifs into his question, because the situation at the moment is not at all the one he describes; the referendum proposed for Crimea is not properly and legally constituted under the Ukrainian constitution. So we are a long way from that situation but, as he knows, the UK will always try to respect democracy and the principles that we believe in of human rights, which so often include self-determination, whenever they are truly, freely and legally expressed.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I welcome the statement, but the interest, complexity and severity of this crisis justifies not only a statement, but a full debate in the House on the matter. As a soldier, I had to study the Geneva conventions and the Hague regulations, which both state that combatants must wear a

“fixed distinctive emblem recognizable at a distance”.

Does the Secretary of State agree that Russia must abide by the Geneva conventions in order to avoid incorrect or confused targeting or engagement, with the possibility of igniting a more serious and deadly conflict?

Mr Hague: My hon. Friend makes a crucial point; despite having one of the last questions he has managed to make a new and pertinent point. There are reasons

why soldiers should wear the insignia of their country, and the most terrible misunderstandings can occur without that. So he is right about that. On the subject of a debate, the Leader of the House is not in his place but I am sure that he is always aware of such requests and he will have heard that particular one.

Mr Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Russia’s provocative war mongering exposes its long-term weakness and will serve to drive more and more Ukrainians to the ineluctable conclusion that their future lies with the west? Rather than being frightened of that, should we not warmly welcome Ukraine as a potential ally within the institutions of Europe?

Mr Hague: So far as I could see yesterday, the effect of the Russian intervention has been to solidify the determination among Ukrainians about their own independence, including among leading figures in the Party of Regions, which usually represents the east and south of Ukraine. My hon. Friend is also right to say that this action is born of weakness rather than strength. As I was arguing a few minutes ago, it is a response to a major reverse and an effort to alleviate that. The people of Ukraine will be all the more determined to pursue their own sovereign rights, including closer association with the European Union.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con) rose—

Mr Speaker: The prize for patience today goes to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner), who has stayed in the Chamber for an hour and a half without any indication of frustration or irascibility at hearing his colleagues. We are grateful to him.

Mr Turner: That is very kind, Mr Speaker. How long will it take for Ukraine to become a member of the EU, assuming that is what it wants? Should Ukraine not prefer trade with all its neighbours?

Mr Hague: I hope that Ukraine will be able to trade with all its neighbours, including Russia. European Union membership is not what is on offer to Ukraine—that is not what is being discussed or debated. Association with the EU and a deep and comprehensive free trade area with the EU are the things on offer. Any possibility of EU membership is too distant to be a realistic possibility in the foreseeable future.

Point of Order

2.7 pm

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On 5 November, in a Westminster Hall debate, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) stated unequivocally that hepatitis C is not a curable condition. It has been drawn to my attention by the Hepatitis C Trust and a number of others that the Minister may have inadvertently misled Parliament, because with current treatments the cure rates are about 70%—or even higher, according to the NHS Choices website. Hepatitis C is a hugely overlooked and under-diagnosed condition, and I seek your guidance, Mr Speaker, on how we can have the record corrected so that the public are not misled by the Minister's comments.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. My response to him, a persistent fellow, is twofold. First, all Members have responsibility for the veracity of the statements they make in the Chamber. In the event that an error is made, it is incumbent upon the Member, be they a Back Bencher or a Front Bencher, a Minister or an Opposition Member, to correct the record. Secondly, on the strength of what I have heard, and I use those words advisedly, it seems to me that this is, in essence, a matter of political debate.

Grahame M. Morris *indicated dissent.*

Mr Speaker: I am weighing my words carefully, notwithstanding the evident frustration of the hon. Gentleman, and it is not obvious to me that there is a role for the Chair here. He asks my advice and my advice to him is that he should be persistent—I am not sure he needs this advice—and repetitive. Doubtless he will find other opportunities to raise his point, courtesy of the use of the Order Paper. He has been doing it for the past nearly four years and there is no reason to suppose that he will change the habits of what, thus far, has been his parliamentary lifetime.

Sale of Tickets (Sporting and Cultural Events)

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

2.9 pm

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to regulate the selling of tickets for certain sporting and cultural events; and for connected purposes.

The Bill I am proposing today speaks to anyone who has loved something enough to want to see it live. For me, that is rugby. In 2015, this country will host the rugby world cup, one of the premier events in the sporting calendar. On the field, our teams will be doing their best to bring the cup to these shores, but who will be cheering them on from the stands? In an ideal world, the most committed fans will be rewarded with a chance to see a once-in-a-lifetime event—Wales becoming rugby world cup champions.

Many fans will be forced to pay sky-high prices in a rigged secondary market. I used to believe that ticket buying was a fair lottery where a quick phone call or a mouse click would give someone the chance to see their heroes. Unfortunately, all too often, the true fans do not stand a chance. The touts have evolved from blokes in sheepskin jackets lurking outside stadiums trying to sell spare tickets to becoming sophisticated people, harvesting thousands of tickets just seconds after they go on sale. These people have been described as power sellers. Using multiple credit cards and sometimes computer programmes called “botnets”, they are able to make thousands of attempts to get tickets each second, manipulating the market and claiming large pools of tickets.

This is a story that has been repeated across the country. Monty Python fans discovered that just three months ago. The much-anticipated comeback show sold out in 43.5 seconds. In 2012, the Rolling Stones attacked secondary sites after sky-high prices—up to £1,300 a ticket—meant that their 50th anniversary tour was littered with empty seats. Even the Chelsea Flower Show is not immune. Prince Harry's attendance in 2013 saw record ticket sales, with £22 tickets going for as much as £466.

This Bill calls for two things. The rugby world cup should be designated an event of national significance, and it should be illegal to resell tickets for profit. For all other events, there should be a cap on the amount for which a ticket can be resold. We are letting down the fans by not giving them a chance of a fair deal. We must call time out, and stop new internet spivs fleecing honest fans.

To see what sort of prices the secondary sites command, I took a look at the prices for a rugby world cup game that I will be watching with great interest—Wales' victory over England. Tickets are not even on sale yet, although the organisers have said that they will range from £75 for the cheaper seats to £315. However, a quick search on Google turned up a range of prominent secondary sites already offering tickets at prices ranging from £920 to £1,725. That kind of ticket touting is parasitic. It leeches off fans who are desperate to see their heroes and organisations that are charging fair prices.

[Nick Smith]

The Rugby Football Union tells me that it puts every earned penny back into the game. It has ambitions to grow the sport as part of the rugby world cup legacy, just as the Olympics inspired our next generation of superstars. However, these grossly inflated ticket prices will not result in a single extra ball for a school's kit bag.

I have heard the argument that resales do not cost the event organisers a penny, as they have already earned the face value of the ticket. That could not be further from the truth. Kilimanjaro Live, an events promotion company, estimates its costs of policing resale of tickets to be more than £100,000 a year. The National Theatre spends tens of thousands a year, as does the RFU. The misleading nature of online ticket touting means that many people buy tickets believing that they are coming from fellow fans. The first web page they come to may be a secondary sales site and the uninitiated could believe that they are buying from the only outlet or paying a fair price, when really they are being ripped off. Unfortunately, despite evidence of touting in the secondary market, the Government refuse to designate the rugby world cup 2015 as a competition of national significance as was done for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games.

Designating the games in such a way would make it illegal to resell tickets for the tournament. It is urgent that the Government act to protect genuine rugby fans from being exploited by online rip-off merchants. Tickets for the rugby world cup 2015 will be sent to rugby clubs in May and go on general sale this autumn. Even at this late stage, if the Government were to bring forward legislation to make the rugby world cup an event of national significance, Labour would give them their support.

Before I finish I would like to place on the record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) and other colleagues in the all-party group on ticket abuse who are showing important leadership on consumer rights. Our concerns include the business practices by companies such as Viagogo. Just last night I pressed it on its supply of tickets from the power sellers and the public selling tickets they cannot use. It said there was none. We are also concerned that the secondary market and its exorbitant prices are the only game in town thanks to mass ticket touting, and that there are links to organised crime as identified by police Operation Podium.

Like my hon. Friend, I believe we can only address the industrial ripping off of consumers with regulation. To deal with the power sellers, resale prices should be capped at say 10% or 20% of face value. Although that needs further discussion, our overall objective must be fairness to fans.

Fans need to know that they can buy a ticket in confidence without being gouged financially. When it comes to nationally significant events such as the rugby world cup, fans also need to know that if they cannot attend the event, they can sell their ticket back to the organisers and recoup the cost. The Bill would not stifle the right of the genuine fan to buy and sell tickets for most events at a fair price when they can no longer attend. Instead, real fans would get back the first-come, first-served fairness of buying direct. They would be protected from

internet chicanery, crowding them out and ripping them off. We need to end the market manipulation for sporting and cultural events in this country.

2.17 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I rise to oppose the Bill not just because of the delusional prediction that the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith) made about the forthcoming match between England and Wales but because of the nature of the Bill itself. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman starts off by looking at the report, which was produced in the last Parliament, of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee of which I was, and happily remain, a member. It found that the secondary ticketing market was perfectly legitimate. Furthermore, the Office of Fair Trading also concluded that the secondary ticket market worked in the interest of the consumer.

The hon. Gentleman might want to consider the evidence given to our Select Committee by the right hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) when she was a Member of the previous Labour Government. She gave a particularly robust defence of the secondary market and why Labour did not want to interfere in it. He would be wise to read her evidence because it was compelling.

One misapprehension is that ticket touts and people in the secondary market are guaranteed to make a substantial profit, but that simply is not the case. For example, 50% of tickets sold on Viagogo are sold at face value or below and people can make a loss. As far as I am concerned, this is a matter of clear principle. If someone buys a ticket, that ticket belongs to them and they should be able to do what they please with it, just as they should with any other commodity that they buy. For argument's sake, there are times on the high street when designer handbags come out in limited edition. Some 30 or 40 may be available. It is first come, first served. People rush into the shops to snatch one. They then immediately put them on eBay to make a massive profit. I do not see what the difference is between that and those people who want to sell on a ticket at an inflated price if they think that demand outstrips supply.

That also happens with toys. One Christmas, Buzz Lightyear was an especially popular toy, so people bought the limited stock and immediately sold the toys on eBay at a huge profit. I do not understand why tickets should be treated differently, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman wants to restrict people's ability to resell any commodity above the price that they paid for it.

The hon. Gentleman fairly made the point—he then disagreed with it—that a promoter or organiser does not lose anything as a result of the secondary ticketing market. If a promoter puts on an event for which there are 50,000 tickets and charges £20 for each, they have decided that they want to realise £1 million from that event. After all the tickets have sold, that £1 million has been made, so whatever happens subsequently makes no difference to the event's viability or that promoter. The hon. Gentleman talks about people spending money on policing the secondary market, but I suggest that they do not bother, because they then do not waste money doing so and can realise the amount that they get in the first place.

It is absolutely essential that there is a resale mechanism for tickets for the rugby world cup. The supporters of the some of the successful rugby teams, such as the All Blacks, are likely to buy many of the tickets for the final in the expectation that their team will reach it. That might well be the case, but the All Blacks could equally find themselves knocked out in the semi-final and if that happens, surely it would be in the best interests of the competition for there to be a mechanism through which New Zealand supporters may sell on their tickets to the supporters of the teams that reach the final. If those All Blacks supporters are not allowed to resell their tickets in the way that I would like, we will have the ridiculous situation that the crowd at the final is full of people who do not support either team, yet the people who want the tickets cannot buy them.

The hon. Gentleman talked about real fans, but I am not sure what the definition of a “real fan” is. I suggest, Madam Deputy Speaker, that if someone is prepared to pay £1,200, £1,500 or £2,000 for a ticket, you can bet your bottom dollar that they are a real fan. I do not understand the suggestion that selling tickets at inflated prices stops real fans attending events because if people are prepared to pay such prices, the chances are that they are especially keen fans. There is a simple premise that if someone does not want to pay the price that a seller asks, they should not do so. No one forces someone to pay an inflated price for a ticket—it is a free choice. If I decide at the last minute that I want to attend a sold-out event, the secondary market is the only place I can go to access a ticket. I am not sure why the hon. Gentleman wants to remove that choice from people. If I think that the price being asked is too high, I will just walk away and not attend, but at least I will have had a chance to go to that event, although I would have had no such opportunity without the secondary ticketing market.

The hon. Gentleman should be aware that the promoters of many events such as concerts do not offer people a refund if they buy a ticket but then find that they cannot attend. What on earth are such people supposed to do except the perfectly legitimate thing of selling their ticket to someone else?

If event promoters and sports organisers—perhaps the organisers of the rugby world cup—are so concerned about ticket touts and the secondary ticketing market, why do they not do something about it themselves? If they are worried, why do they put all the tickets on sale right from the word go meaning that they sell out in 43.5 seconds, to use the Monty Python example that the hon. Gentleman cited? Why do not they sell a few tickets each week so that tickets are still available at face value in the week before the game or concert, meaning

that no one would have to pay inflated prices through secondary ticketing? If this is such a big issue for the organisers of events, sporting fixtures and concerts, they could do something about it at the drop of the hat. However, they do not anything about it, which can lead us to conclude only that they are shedding crocodile tears and are actually rather pleased that they can sell all their tickets in 43.5 seconds because that is good for their cash flow and guarantees a sell-out. I do not think that organisers are as bothered about the situation as the hon. Gentleman would have us believe.

It is often said that public opinion favours restricting the secondary ticketing market, but let me share the results of ICM polling with the House. ICM asked people to agree or disagree with the statement:

“If I had a ticket to a sporting event, concert or other event that I could no longer use, then I should be allowed to resell it”—and 86% agreed. Some 83% of people agreed with the statement:

“Once I’ve bought a ticket it is my property and I should be able to sell it just as I can any other private property.”

Despite such agreement with that premise, the hon. Gentleman argues against it.

I am extremely proud of the fact that when I worked for Asda, before I entered the House, it challenged and overturned the net book agreement, under which publishers set a book’s price and no one could sell it at a different price without the publisher’s agreement. Overturning that agreement has driven down the price of books for consumers throughout the country, but the hon. Gentleman wants a system such as the net book agreement whereby event organisers sell tickets at a particular price and no one can sell them at a different price, which would represent a massive retrograde step for this country’s free market. The Office of Fair Trading concluded that such a system would not work in the best interests of the consumer, but the current arrangements do, as was endorsed by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. I do not intend to press the motion to a Division, but I hope that the Minister has listened to my objections and that the Government will not go down the route that the hon. Gentleman encourages, which is a rabbit warren that it would be best to avoid.

Question put (Standing Order No. 23) and agreed to.

Ordered.

That Nick Smith, Mrs Sharon Hodgson, Mike Weatherley, Roger Williams, Steve Rotheram, Julie Elliott, Chris Evans, Nic Dakin and Fiona O’Donnell present the Bill.

Nick Smith accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 June, and to be printed (Bill 177).

Estimates Day

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

ESTIMATES 2013-14

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Defence and Cyber-security

[*Relevant documents: Sixth Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2012-13, on Defence and Cyber-security, HC 106, and the Government response, HC 719.*]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2014, for expenditure by the Ministry of Defence:

- (1) further resources, not exceeding £1,672,884,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 1006,
- (2) the resources authorised for use for capital purposes be reduced by £1,863,070,000 as so set out, and
- (3) a further sum, not exceeding £1,400,160,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—(*Mr Evennett.*)

2.28 pm

Mr James Arbuthnot (North East Hampshire) (Con): Given how long I have been in this House, I really ought to know whether I should be thanking the Backbench Business Committee, the Government, the Chair of the Liaison Committee or you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for my securing the debate. Just to be on the safe side, I will thank them all, and especially you.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I apologise for interrupting my right hon. Friend so early in his speech, but he makes a good point. In the old days, we had regular, sensible defence debates throughout the year, but they are now at the discretion of the Backbench Business Committee, which is a retrograde step.

Mr Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend makes a good point, but it rebounds slightly on the Defence Committee because we have been told that we are responsible for applying for such debates and, I have to confess, we have not done so in recent months, so perhaps we ought to revisit that.

The Defence Committee launched an inquiry into defence and cyber-security in January 2012, as part of a series of debates and inquiries looking into emerging threats. It was the first time the Committee had investigated cyber-security as a discrete topic, although in 2009 we had looked at Georgia and Estonia, and visited Tallinn, as part of another inquiry. The UK Government had identified cyber-threats as one of four tier 1 risks to national security, and in November 2013 published a UK cyber-security strategy, updating its 2009 strategy and setting out four objectives: first, to make the UK one of the most secure places in the world to do business in cyberspace; secondly, to make the UK more resilient to cyber-attack and better able to protect our interests in cyberspace; thirdly, to help to shape an open, vibrant and stable cyberspace that supports open societies; and fourthly, to build the UK's cyber-security knowledge, skills and capability.

The programme is to be implemented via a four-year national cyber-security programme costing £650 million, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced an extra £210 million investment after the 2013 spending review. The funding is shared between the security and intelligence agencies, the Ministry of Defence, the Home Office, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Cabinet Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but most will be spent by the security and intelligence agencies.

During our inquiry, the Committee investigated whether the high profile given to the cyber-threat in the UK was matched by a coherent plan and a chain of command in the event of a major cyber-attack on our national infrastructure or our national interests. The complexity of the threat must be matched by an agile, many-layered response; accordingly, many different agencies are involved in the cyber-security effort, ranging across cybercrime, cyber-espionage and cyber-commerce. Cyber-security is therefore to some extent everybody's responsibility, but we must avoid its ending up being nobody's responsibility as a consequence. Someone has to be in charge.

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): It is good to see so many colleagues here to take part in the debate. If we contrast the approach taken in the United States, where there is a unified structure under CYBERCOM, with the disparate approach taken in the United Kingdom, does the right hon. Gentleman share my concern that we seem to have a number of lessons still to learn?

Mr Arbuthnot: Well, there are pluses and minuses to having a unified structure, and there are risks in having a siloed approach. I said this is the responsibility of everyone, and so it is. I shall explain how wide that responsibility extends.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): Further to that, although a number of Departments have an interest, was my right hon. Friend assured by the MOD—within his sphere of responsibility—that there is a single individual in charge? I understood from reading his Committee's report that the Joint Forces Commander is currently responsible, but the intention is to have the Chief of Defence Intelligence involved as well, and perhaps to appoint a three-star Defence Chief Information Officer. The report did not make it clear to me where we intend to go. The Americans have a four-star in charge. Is my right hon. Friend convinced that there will be an individual clearly responsible for the MOD's part of the spectrum?

Mr Arbuthnot: Things have moved on since our Committee reported. There is somebody in overall command and that is my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces, who will, I have no doubt, set out precisely how things have moved on when he responds to the debate. That is the purpose of Select Committee reports, and I am pleased about that.

The Committee was particularly concerned that the armed forces are now very dependent on information and communications technology and if those systems suffered a sustained cyber-attack, their ability to operate might be fatally compromised.

Sir Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): We are talking about cyber-technology, but may I use an old-fashioned phrase in warning of the danger of having all our eggs in one basket?

Mr Arbutnot: Yes, and I entirely agree. I have discovered a new organisation being set up in Cambridge called the centre for the study of existential risk, which is right up my street. Being a gloomy sort of person, that is precisely the sort of thing I am worried about, and the hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that I am already in deep contact with the centre.

Mr Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): I have heard of that work at the University of Cambridge, too, and I am in favour of it, but may I take my right hon. Friend back to his point on co-ordination? Surely the bottom line of the response to any major threat to this country, whether it is flooding or rioting and so on, is the armed forces. Does he share my concern that there seems to be no mechanism for referring problems in other sectors through to the MOD and, crucially, that there are no rehearsals taking place?

Mr Arbutnot: I do, and I hope that in answering the debate my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces will take that point straight on the chin, because in many respects the armed forces are the resource of last resort, and cyber-security may be an area where the armed forces do not accept that responsibility.

There is a necessary focus within the defence world on securing the systems and networks needed by the MOD and the armed forces from cyber-threats. It is not only contemporary civil society that is utterly dependent on network technology; our armed forces are increasingly reliant on such technology for the tools of warfare, and the next step must be to ensure that the supply chain for those systems and their components is secure. That will require a trusting, transparent relationship between Government and their suppliers, with full disclosure of attacks and possible vulnerabilities, which runs all the way down the supply chain. The UK has world-class expertise and facilities on which to draw, but will the Government be able, in competition with the private sector, to keep enough of that expertise and experience in the service of the state? Are there enough such people to serve both and how should we prioritise?

The announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in September 2013 about the establishment of a joint cyber reserve unit is a significant development, but that will rely on FTSE companies and other, smaller companies releasing key personnel to participate. Will my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces tell us what progress has been made? According to the Government, the number of ICT and cyber-security professionals in the UK has not increased in line with the growth of the internet. Are there enough experts in industry willing to join a cyber reserve? Will technology experts—the geeks of our world—fit well within highly regimented military structures, or will a more flexible structure be required to facilitate their work?

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman is rightly raising just some of the myriad questions about the future in cyberspace.

Does he agree that these questions are so wide-ranging and fluid, given the incredible acceleration in technology, as to pose the question whether in future we should have vari-speed defence and security reviews? On larger items we should look beyond the 10-year horizon, but in cyber, five years is far too long for what is happening.

Mr Arbutnot: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr Brazier), the hon. Gentleman contributes so effectively to the Defence Committee and makes an interesting point—one I had not heard before. That is the value of these debates. We will all have to think about that issue.

We must seek to defend ourselves, but we must also, as has been suggested, expect to develop a capability to respond to threats in cyberspace. When doing that, we face some of the same considerations as when developing conventional military capabilities. Where does the balance lie between international collaboration and sovereign capability, for example? What sort of international arrangements will best suit our aims?

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State also talked about how the UK was developing a full spectrum military cyber-capability, including strike capability. This is an interesting and novel declaration. Everybody knows it has happened but nobody has been prepared before now to announce it. Will this declaration act as a deterrent or will it make the UK a more likely target for hackers and foreign states? What about the legal implications of establishing a strike capability for the personnel involved? The necessary rules for engagement for cyber-attack need to be put into place, although of course we will not be told about them.

Some maintain that cyber is just another military domain and that we can expect to do everything in cyberspace that we do in the air, on land or at sea to prevent, deter, coerce or intervene. But has the distinctiveness of the cyber domain been fully grasped? It is not clear, for example, that deterrence is a concept that can apply to a domain where there are real difficulties in discovering quickly who has perpetrated an attack and for what purpose, or even that an attack has taken place. Neither is it clear that everyone has grasped how important it is to avoid a silo approach to the cyberworld. It is essential to break down the dividing lines between civilian and military, among Government Departments, between Government and the private sector, and between our country and other countries, and therefore to approach the issue in an holistic way. Paul Dwyer of Mandiant came to brief the Defence Committee and told us that it takes a network to defeat a network.

Perhaps because the threat cannot be neatly categorised, it may be unrealistic to expect a neat categorisation of the responses. Everything we have been told in the UK emphasises that the armed forces have a very limited role, protecting their own systems and developing military cyber-capabilities. For other areas of activity, those in the lead are likely to be based elsewhere, particularly in the intelligence services. That is where the important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury comes in.

Mr Gray: My right hon. Friend makes a good point about the threat being so diverse as to be difficult to counter. None the less, the briefing we were given by Mandiant was very interesting: there are a large number

[Mr Gray]

of extremely serious attacks, not by a lot of people but by one or two groups. He even named Unit 61398 of the People's Liberation Army as one of the main culprits. In other words, it would be reasonably easy for the British Government and the MOD to counter a specific attack such as that.

Mr Arbuthnot: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right in saying that the Government are well aware of where some of these attacks are coming from. I do not agree that it would be relatively easy to counter them, because these threats are developing at a frightening speed, as the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness said. The diversity and development of these threats is changing on a second-by-second basis.

I am pleased to say that the Government are taking action to make the UK more resilient to cyber-attacks. It has established a new computer emergency response team in early 2014, CERT-UK, to improve the co-ordination of national cyber-incidents and to share technical information among countries. The Government set up a new cyber-incident response scheme in GCHQ to help organisations recover from a cyber-security attack. They have extended the remit of the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure—the CPNI—to work with all organisations that may have a role in protecting the UK's critical systems and intellectual property. They have agreed with regulators in essential services a set of actions to make sure that important data and systems in our critical national infrastructure continue to be safe and resilient. As I have said, responsibility for cyber-security rests principally with companies and organisations themselves. Government agencies' roles will be limited by available resources and national priorities.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a difficulty in making cyber-security just a defence issue and saying that the issue lies with companies? There is a network of things that need to combine, and we have not yet developed a system to create resilience across the spectrum; there are only chimneys of responsibility.

Mr Arbuthnot: The hon. Lady is quite right. We are groping towards it, but we are not quite there. One of the benefits of this debate, of our report and of the Government's response is to help us move to a better place.

Mr Ellwood: My right hon. Friend makes an important connection between the business community and state operations. I am concerned that state operations do not have the funds to attract the necessary expertise—geeks, my right hon. Friend called them—when they are in demand in the civilian sector. Banks and so forth pay huge sums of money to make sure they are able to fight off any cyber-security issue. Does he agree with a stance that my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr Brazier) might take—that there is a need to make sure that those in the reserve forces who actually have such skill sets through working in businesses can work in the MOD as well?

Mr Arbuthnot: I would have entirely agreed, but the problem may be whether there are enough reserves and enough people with those skills in the country at all. Let us move on towards that.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): To deal with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), that was one of the key factors in the strategic defence and security review of 2010. The then Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), said that we needed to see “up arrows” and “down arrows”. Heavy armour was a down arrow but cyber was an up arrow. Some £500 million pounds was set aside specifically for this purpose, so it has been identified as a serious and important area for investment.

Mr Arbuthnot: Interestingly, the Prime Minister, in giving evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, pointed out that some of the areas had cuts but that this area was one of growth. His regret was that it had not been one of greater growth, and that that change had not been more exaggerated than it was.

I ought to bring my remarks to a close, as others want to speak. Paul Dwyer told the Committee that the willingness of companies to share information about cyber attacks with one another and with the Government is critical to allowing an effective response to be developed and implemented but, while critical, it is far from easy to achieve.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I am a little concerned that my right hon. Friend is bringing his arguments to a close, because he touched on one point that I was rather hoping he would develop. He said that the Committee visited Estonia. For people who, like me, were not part of the Committee's study, it would be extremely helpful to know in concrete terms a little more about what it discovered on that visit about what a cyber-attack by a hostile neighbour can really mean.

Mr Arbuthnot: The Committee visited Estonia in 2009. It has still not been conclusively established who precisely was responsible for the attacks that took down much of that country's banking system, although we have our suspicions—they may have been marching around in unmarked uniforms. We discovered that the attack had been comparatively easy to achieve. It was a distributed denial-of-service attack that did real damage. We also discovered the international centre of excellence in Estonia, which at that stage the Government were not contributing towards in dealing with cyber-attacks. I am delighted that they have since decided, perhaps as a result of our incredibly effective report, to contribute to the centre.

Sir Bob Russell: I was biding my time, but the intervention from the hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) has prompted me to intervene. Has any evidence yet come forward to suggest that what is going on in Crimea has involved cyber-security breaches either way?

Mr Arbuthnot: If there is evidence of that, I do not yet know of it. All I can say is that before the invasion of Georgia there was an extensive cyber-attack on its computer network that was very similar to the one on Estonia. I suspect that it is now a new method of fighting wars that we must all get used to.

The need to share information is critical, as I have said, and important mechanisms for that exist, such as the cyber-security information sharing partnership, which is now open to companies beyond critical national infrastructure sectors, including small and medium-sized businesses. CISP analysts will be expected to feed into CERT once it is fully operational.

The Committee produced many recommendations, but our final conclusion was that the cyber-threat, like other emerging threats, has the capacity to evolve with almost unimaginable speed and with serious consequences for the nation's security. The Government need to put in place—they have not yet done so—mechanisms, people, education, skills, thinking and policies that take into account both the opportunities and the vulnerabilities that cyber presents. It is time the Government approached the subject with vigour. I am pleased to see the actions that they have taken since we issued our report. Clearly there is much more to be done—in the cyber world it is a matter of constantly playing catch-up—but I personally have the impression that the Government are, at the very least, joining in the game.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. It will be obvious to the House that a large number of Members wish to speak this afternoon and that the time available is limited. Rather than imposing a formal time limit, I thought that I might try an experiment. I wish to see whether Members have the ability to be courteous to one another by limiting their speeches to around 10 minutes.

2.54 pm

Mr Dai Havard (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): I would first like to say something about the debate. I agree that the Defence Committee is perhaps remiss in not applying for debates more regularly. This debate is taking place on an estimates day. It is a really serious debate that should be taking place in the Chamber in its own right. Our report is now more than 12 months old—it was published in January 2013—which says something about how quickly these things move. The Government published their response in March 2013 and then made a series of announcements last September, but here we are today with the first opportunity to talk about it. That is an issue we need to look at.

I will not repeat what my colleague who chairs the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot), said about structure, but I would like to say something about structure, about investment—we are talking about money, after all—and about accountability. The statement made in September was very interesting from two points of view. First, it set out a structure for how the Ministry of Defence, along with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Cabinet Office and others—this cannot be done in isolation—can start to look at its relationship with industry and at protecting itself through its relationships with the rest of the British community. I think that is hugely important.

There is a lot of work being done on achieving proper standards. We took evidence from industry representatives on that, and they were all over the shop, frankly. For example, they did not want standards, or they wanted

their own standards. The question of standards is absolutely at the guts of the whole issue of defining cyber, and not just for the Ministry of Defence. Industry must now have a compliance process with the Ministry of Defence, and I am sure that the Minister will say something about how that is to be done. That is hugely welcome, because it is vital. How we then do that in relation to our allies, NATO, the EU, the French—with our treaty—and others is a big issue that needs proper discussion. We need to have proper compliance and assurance mechanisms, as we do with our “Five Eyes” colleagues and many others, because we are all trying to understand the process.

Most people go to Wikipedia when they do not know much about something, as I did with cyber-warfare, because the announcement in September also mentioned having some sort of offensive capability. Wikipedia states:

“Not to be confused with Electronic warfare... Cyberwarfare refers to politically motivated hacking to conduct sabotage and espionage. It is a form of information warfare sometimes seen as analogous to conventional warfare.”

Well, that is terribly helpful. What we know is that there is no clear definition, either domestically or internationally. We are all fishing for something to help us understand this properly, and we should have some humility in that. However, we recognise its interconnectivity.

Let me turn to the statement on having offensive capability. It was very brave of the UK Government to make that statement. We are the first country to come out and say that. I have spoken with some of our international allies about that, and they say, “Well, that’s a very interesting statement for the Brits to make.” How we actually do that will be a matter for discussion. I am not necessarily against the investment or the capability, but I think that we need to be very clear about what we are saying and how we are going to do things. There will need to be a doctrine and rules of engagement. If we are saying that this is a new domain, I do not think that we can run away from some of these questions. If we do and we keep it too secret, we will lose legitimacy for the activities that we wish to undertake. That is a difficult balancing act, but it is absolutely crucial.

If we are to weaponise the process, how will we do that? There is a lot of talk about countries using the Stuxnet virus in Iran. That was actually delivered physically on a memory stick. The programme then searched out the thing it wanted to destroy or debilitate. It was a hugely expensive exercise. I do not know how much it cost, because I am not supposed to know who did it. Well, we do not know who did it, or we all suspect that we know. Whoever did it, it was not a bunch of amateurs; it was someone who could put substantial investment into it. It turned out to be a one-shot weapon.

If we are to weaponise this area, we must be clear that it will cost money. This sort of activity cannot be done by a boy working in his bedroom to come up with a fancy programme. We will have to invest in the process of weaponisation alongside all the other things we are talking about. How will we procure, what will we do with regard to research and technology, and how will we keep a sovereign capability in these areas? I suspect that those are big questions that Parliament will be discussing for many years to come.

Mr Brazier: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting speech. Does he agree that the issue is about not only the technical side but the personal side? More medieval fortresses fell through the inside touch than through outside assault. In the high-tech area, as in everywhere else, people can be bought or suborned.

Mr Havard: The short answer is yes. The other aspect is who can be engaged to help to do such things. As the hon. Gentleman, who is on the Defence Committee, will know, the structuring of things to ensure a reserve capability is hugely important. The way in which the process is being put together is correct; there will be no monopoly on understanding in the areas we are discussing. We need as good a collaboration as possible. The delivery of the processes will not always be remote. Intelligence and knowing what is happening, where and with whom will be crucial. I shall come to that later.

The other question that comes up is about the law—I mentioned legitimacy earlier. I am helping to lead a sub-study in the Defence Committee of the military and the law. That is coloured, obviously, by Supreme Court decisions, individual cases and all the rest of it. The issue raises questions about international law, humanitarian law, extra-territorial jurisdiction and other things. An argument is being put that says, “We don’t need anything to be separate. This is a different domain, but all the current legal constructs are good enough and we do not need anything different.” I come back to my earlier point. We need to be clear about doctrine. In large part, our doctrine is public. Some, however, may not be as public as we would like, but we need to be clear about how we do things.

Ms Gisela Stuart: We seem to accept that cyber can be not just defensive, but offensive—we can use it offensively. Does my hon. Friend think that our domestic legal structure is sufficient to deal with cyber as an offensive weapon and to contain the power of the Executive to apply that weapon?

Mr Havard: I do not know, but in the sense that I think I do know, I think that our legal structure is not sufficient and needs revision. I might be wrong, but that debate has to take place and people more qualified than I am need to comment.

It is interesting to note where our allies are. The United States has and has not made all sorts of declarations. If we believe *The New York Times*, there was a secret legal review that concluded that

“US military forces could legally launch an attack on digital infrastructure located in a foreign country if it found evidence of a threat against its own systems”.

A rules of engagement debate then starts. That is the other difficult bit—we will have to have rules of engagement for such activity. The more we discuss legitimacy in law for these things, the better. If we do not have such a discussion, the issue will be forced on us. That is what we are seeing now in a lot of other areas, so we should structure how we wish to have the debate rather than having a structure imposed on us.

Proportionality is at the guts of the whole business of international law, human rights and legitimacy. We have to show that proportionality is there and that we have mechanisms and systems to ensure that it is. Simply claiming that it is there will not be good enough.

We are not on our own. We need to be joined up not only internally within the United Kingdom, but internationally. We do not have time to go fully into this now, but it is interesting to see Russia’s current adventures in Ukraine. In September 2011, Russia and China said to a UN group that they wanted a code of conduct for cyberspace that would include requirements for co-operation in:

“curbing dissemination of information which incites terrorism, secessionism, extremism or undermines other countries’ political, economic and social stability, as well as their spiritual and cultural environment”.

Well, there we are—now we know. Translating that into current events will tell us a lot. That proposed code of conduct was about closing things down and giving legitimacy to the avoidance of dissent and to having systems that are less rather than more open. How we collaborate in this area will be important.

When he was Secretary of Defence in America, Bob Gates said that he could protect .mil, .gov, .org or .com, but that as the protection systems were put in, the public might not like what they saw on .com. That debate is not only to do with defence, but defence has a place in it. Whether there should be a code of conduct and the international arrangements are problematic issues, but there is a growing urgency around them.

At the end of the day, the issue can be about the collection of raw information and the sending of viruses to blow particular equipment up. That is the geeky stuff—the weaponisation and the sexy stuff that the press love. However, at the end of the day, those and other actions are only as good as the intelligence that exists to put them into effect. One area of investment that must not be lost in the question of cyber-issues is defence intelligence. In my opinion, we have the best intelligence analysts and they need to be developed.

We can collect the raw information, but if we do not understand it we will go nowhere with it and make the wrong decision. Investment discussions should please not just be about technical toys, GCHQ and all the stuff about weapons; they should also be about intelligence analysts. Let us protect the capability. The issue is about a whole force, but also about a whole community. Those people are vital in that community and investment also needs to go to them.

3.6 pm

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I welcome the chance to debate the UK’s cyber-security defence. Cyber-security is a particularly wide-ranging subject and cyber-attacks are a growing threat. Without stating the obvious, a cyber-attack could impact on everyone’s lives in so many ways. We are now all so reliant on technology and the internet; without our mobile phones or when our e-mail goes down, we almost cease to function.

A major cyber-attack on any of this country’s main utilities, such as transport, energy or the banking system, would cause chaos. It would be, at the very least, very bad for the economy; it could, in the worst-case scenario—if we did not have the means to transport food and fuel, for example—cause social breakdown in a short time. South Korea, for instance, has suffered huge jamming attacks, launched by North Korea, against its GPS systems. They affected major airports and shipping

lanes. The travel of more than 1,000 ships and 250 planes was disrupted by North Korean jamming attacks in 2012.

Cyber-security needs to protect us against so many threats: criminals attacking personal data, small-scale political activists—or “hacktivists”, as somebody said earlier—and state-sponsored hostilities. The Government’s cyber-security strategy is along the right lines and has led to the national cyber-security programme, which has clear objectives.

Cyberspace is often compared to the wild west and thought by some to be beyond the rule of law. However, our Government have made it clear that it is not and they have encouraged law enforcement teams to use the existing legal framework to prosecute. When cyber-crime emanates from overseas, the Government are working with the G8, the United Nations, NATO and the European Union to help shape the standards and norms of behaviour for cyberspace. Obviously, the solutions have not all yet been found but the discussions are ongoing and the work is slowly evolving. I am pleased that the work has started in earnest.

Part of the solution is normal, sensible protocol for cyber-security on the domestic agenda and it can be addressed through simple best practice. There is a knowledge gap and the Government are addressing it in the long term via the development of education in cyber-security; teaching materials on cyber-security are being produced for GCSE and A-level students. Academic centres for cyber-security have been set up in 11 universities. Investment in education is far-sighted and will position the UK with experts in the cyber-security arena.

The Government have also gone some way to engaging with industry by setting up the Cyber-Security Information Sharing Partnership. Furthermore, the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure, or CPNI, is working with businesses to encourage them to make cyber-security a board-level responsibility. The current work on the development of an official cyber-standard will help stimulate the adoption of good cyber-practices among businesses. Given the risks to our infrastructure as a whole, the Government have highlighted the role of regulators in overseeing the adoption of robust cyber-security measures. The companies that supply essential services such as power, telecommunications, water, transport and banking, need maximum protection.

I praise the many organisations that are tasked with upholding the Government’s cyber-defence plans. However, as has been said, the threat is so great that I worry that as a nation we are not doing enough, fast enough. An industry study produced by BT last month found that British companies are lagging way behind rivals in other major countries in addressing cyber-security risks. The survey found that only 17% of UK businesses see cyber-security as a priority compared with 41% in the US. Nearly 90% of directors and decision makers in the US are given IT security training, but in the UK it is only around 37%.

On defence, our armed forces are among the most technologically advanced in the world, and I am sure we are all proud of that. In theory, that allows us to put fewer of our people in harm’s way and their lives at risk. However, as the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) said recently, it makes every aspect of our military capability vulnerable

to cyber-attack. Obviously, there is no point spending millions in developing leading-edge technology without the cyber-security to stop it being felled by a single cyber-attack.

The Defence Committee noted that the Army has between 35% and 40% too few corporals and sergeants to man its cyber-capabilities. The Government have rightly set up a joint cyber-unit for the reserve forces, which was going well towards the end of the year, and others have said that the reserve forces will play a crucial role in our future capability. The Government have instigated broadly sensible long-term solutions such as apprenticeships to fill the staff-skills gap in industry and business, but how can we attract more trained staff immediately, especially in the defence reserve?

A further concern is that the threat is so wide and imminent that the command structure is not resilient. I understand that the global operations security control centre at Corsham has been empowered to take rapid action without direction from above to defend the MOD’s own networks from attack. That is great, but with the many groups set up to implement the UK cyber-strategy, how will one section know what the others are doing when an attack has happened?

Mr Gray: We are all pleased to see my hon. and gallant Friend back in full working order. The GOSCC is in my constituency, and does an outstanding job in providing cyber-security for the MOD. Is he not concerned, as I am, that with the plethora of Government and MOD organisations with responsibility for cyber-matters, the expertise of GOSCC is being undermined by a variety of quangos and committees whose exact function is clouded in mystery?

Jack Lopresti: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He is absolutely right. Within the chaos of a potential attack, I am not sure how the disparate groups would communicate with one another, how there would be a uniform chain of command and how it would work in practice. GCHQ seems to be in charge, but in other countries the matter would fall under the Ministry of Defence. It is fine that the MOD seems to be still developing its own basic cyber-security techniques with the armed forces setting up separate units, but it is the responsibility of the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure to take the lead in co-ordinating a UK response to a major cyber-security incident.

An extremely clear command structure will be needed to deal with a cyber-attack, which may come from a political group such as the group that claimed that the Sochi games were being held on the graves of millions of people who had been murdered and who were, according to the US Government’s computer emergency readiness team, threatening companies financing or supporting the Sochi winter games with cyber-attacks.

The response would be different if an attack was state-sponsored, but it would be extremely difficult, especially in the first day or so, to determine where the threat came from and whether it came from an individual or a country. The internet is worldwide and even if we knew where the attack came from geographically, it would be difficult to identify who was behind it.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I am pleased to be able to give my hon. and gallant Friend a pause to think what he is going to say next. When Mandiant briefed us last week, we were told by Paul Dwyer that 66% of our

[Bob Stewart]

companies take about 243 days to realise that they are subject to what he called an advanced persistent threat, and that some companies have no idea that they are being attacked and will never find out.

Jack Lopresti: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpfully timed intervention. He is absolutely right. Sometimes it is difficult or impossible to determine that an attack has taken place.

On offensive cyber-capability and action, a recent article published by the Royal United Services Institute said that Stuxnet, the malware supposedly used to attack Iran's nuclear weapons capability, was not successful in delaying Iran's technical progress. With hindsight, some have seen Stuxnet as a hindrance to diplomatic solutions. I am not sure I entirely agree with that analysis, but it is interesting. Cyber-space is being described as the fifth domain of warfare, so its defence and protection from attack is integral to the operation of our nation's defence infrastructure.

My last point is whether we are spending enough, which is not an easy subject in a time of fiscal austerity. Last week, Chuck Hagel, the US Secretary of Defence, outlined a vision for a leaner US defence posture with reductions in the US army to a pre-1942 position. However, at the same time, he rightly proposed increased spending on cyber-defence.

Ms Gisela Stuart: Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that the size of the reduction in the US army is exactly the same as the size of our entire Army?

Jack Lopresti: Yes, I agree, but obviously we are talking about different scales.

I am fully aware that the issues I have raised today are not easily solved, but I fully commend the Government for the progress they have made so far.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. It is usual for hon. Members to stand up to indicate that they wish to speak. It makes the life of the Chair rather difficult if no one does so. I was about to draw the debate to a close.

3.16 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker, for not standing up. I thought the hon. Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) had sat down to take an intervention, but slowly it came to my mind that he had finished his speech.

It is an honour to follow the hon. and gallant Gentleman. I share his concern about an attack on our national infrastructure, but we sometimes focus on things such as banking and transport when we should perhaps look at our food supplies or our hospitals. The impact of such an attack on the civilian population and the country's morale would be huge. We must address resilience to a cyber-attack and we must engage the civilian population in understanding and preparing for that.

The Chairman of the Defence Committee and I were given a book for holiday reading: "One Second After". That delightful read, which probably wrecked my summer,

was a description of the United States after an electromagnetic impulse attack had taken out all its computer-based systems. Everything went. No cars could go on the road and nothing would work. It was a scary prospect and I now understand why the Defence Committee's Chairman runs a car that does not have a computer in it. I am sure the book was a great influence in the decision to purchase that car.

The book also made me aware of the very narrow issue of who is the enemy. In traditional warfare, we tend to know who we are fighting, but in future we may be fighting criminals who are holding the country to ransom. We could be fighting terrorists, because a state is not needed to manufacture a cyber-attack, or activists or anarchists. It has been suggested that some of the attacks in Estonia were by third-party actors. At the bottom of the list is the potential for a state to attack, because states like rules and the rest do not follow rules. That is why they must be our focus, our worry and our concern.

A statement made in 2012 informed us:

"Our cyber defences blocked around 400,000 advanced, malicious cyber threats against the government's secure intranet alone".

On the whole, we do not know where those threats are coming from. We do know that the Government have given a commitment to having full-spectrum capability in dealing with cyber-attacks. In fact, in response to the growing number of cyber-attacks, the Secretary of State said that

"we are developing a full-spectrum military cyber capability, including a strike capability, to enhance the UK's range of military capability. Increasingly, our defence budget is being invested in high-end capabilities such as cyber and intelligence and surveillance assets to ensure we can keep the country safe."

I was very interested in that statement, so it sent me off on a little tangent, as such things often do. As the Minister, who has received many of my quirky little requests for information, will know, I sent off a parliamentary question to every Department asking them how many specialist IT staff they employed who had a PhD in computer science, who had a master's degree in computer science, and perhaps who even had just a basic bachelor's degree in computer science. It did not bode well, I have to say. The Ministry of Defence can rest on its laurels; it came second to the Department for Work and Pensions, with 1,625 such members of staff. None of the Departments could break the information down by qualification across Departments, which could explain why Government are not very good at commissioning cyber-capability and improved computer networking capability. Only 5,088 people, in total, held a degree-level capability in computing. It was depressing to note that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport had only three people with such a qualification, so we should watch out for its contracting.

Ms Gisela Stuart: Given the logic of Government, did my hon. Friend also ask whether the people with a computing degree actually worked in such areas beforehand or did something completely different?

Mrs Moon: I did, and most Departments responded that they worked in specialist teams, as we would expect.

Interestingly, the response from Her Majesty's Treasury told us that a total of 48 people are employed within its centralised IT department, or teams. Those staff provide

IT services to the Cabinet Office and to the Treasury. That compares with 57 people in 2008 who worked exclusively within the Treasury. So the numbers are going down, and that has to be a matter of concern. As people with these skills are increasingly highly valued in the marketplace, can Government stay ahead of the market in being able to recruit them?

I was worried about the budget and looked into that aspect. We have heard about the figure of £650 million over five years, which is a mere fraction of the figure for the annual economy, which is set to lose £27 billion every year to criminal activity in the cyber-realm. In contrast, the US Department of Defence has outlined a \$23 billion spend on cyber operations in the financial year of 2018 alone.

I thought that I would then have a look at how well we were doing in this area. I discovered, rather alarmingly, that the Government had withdrawn from a new cyber-warfare project called Project Cipher, which was intended to scrutinise fully complex programmes to ensure that they had the potential to meet our needs. After thorough assessment, it was decided that Cipher would not meet the full defence capability required to offer long-term value for the taxpayer, and so the programme was not taken forward. The costs of the stalled project, in the assessment phase alone, had been £66 million, so we have lost a large percentage of the money set aside for cyber, and they were £47 million above the original budget. Overall, this was a major disaster. IHS Janes has said that the project was

“intended to renew the MoD’s cryptographic inventory and automate its crypto-key management systems by replacing obsolete current systems to prevent encoded communication links being compromised.”

I understood half that sentence. The important bit is that it was intended to replace obsolete current systems, because Departments are not good at replacing obsolescent systems. They tend to work things for the length of a Parliament, which is now five years when we all know that these computers are dying on their feet after about the first two years.

IHS Janes continued:

“The delays in bringing Cipher online are creating capability risks, says the NAO, because the ministry’s existing crypto capability lacks the flexibility to deliver the flagship Network Enabled Capability project, which aims to link up a wide range of military communication networks. This means efficiency savings relating to the automation of crypto capability has been delayed, leading to increased demands on military manpower.”

It explained that the problems with Cipher’s design first emerged during an assessment phase and that they were the result of the lack of suitably qualified experienced civil servants—you will be surprised to hear that, Madam Deputy Speaker. One of the essential things that we must do if we are to be responsible in looking to the defence of this country is to find the way to employ and retain the capability that we need within government to provide the skills and oversee the systems that we operate to keep this country secure.

There has been considerable discussion about having a cyber reserve. I have had conversations with a number of companies that have told me that they are very worried about their employees joining the reserves because they fear for them when they have to travel abroad. Many international companies work around the globe, and they worry about someone who has been in our cyber reserve and transfers to work in another country,

or merely travels through a country perhaps on business or on holiday, being prone to personal attack because of the information they would hold not only on their company but on the UK’s cyber-defence capability. I hope the Minister is aware of that concern and will address it.

This is perhaps one of the most urgent and pressing issues affecting this country. We have to take it seriously across every Government Department, but we also have to alert our citizens of the fact that they are also now on the front line, because the attack may come from their personal computer, which could be hacked and used for an attack not only on this Government, but on other Governments.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Hon. Members are not doing terribly well on the supposedly self-imposed 10-minute time limit. Perhaps if they were to aim for nine or eight and a half minutes, we might be better on target.

3.29 pm

Mr Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I will do my best, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I agree with the conclusion of the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon): this is an extremely important issue and addressing cyber-security rightly sits at the top of our national security agenda. Cybercrime and cyber-attacks are not only tomorrow’s dangers; they are a very real and growing threat today. As others have already made clear, Governments, business and members of the public come under sustained attack from cyber-criminals and foreign powers. There were an estimated 44 million incidents in 2011 alone.

As we become ever more reliant on the internet, our vulnerability increases. Cyber-threats take two primary forms—cybercrime and cyber-attack, although sometimes the distinction is blurred. Cybercrime was estimated by the Association of Chief Police Officers to have cost £57 billion globally back in 2009, while Detica estimated that the 2011 figure for the United Kingdom alone was £27 billion. It is difficult to believe that that there has not been a geometric increase since then.

Large-scale cybercrime is an issue of national security. Cyber-attack and cyber-espionage also present a serious threat both to the state and to the community, and the state should be acting to protect both. As we know, cyber-attacks have had real-world effects, as exemplified by the denial-of-service attacks in Estonia in 2007 and the Stuxnet attack on Iranian nuclear development capability, although there appear to be disagreements about the degree of its effectiveness.

Cyber-espionage and theft of sensitive information is another major concern, so addressing the danger of cyber-threats today is real, not academic. The Security Service estimates that at least 20 foreign intelligence agencies currently operate to some degree against British interests. That threat merits our immediate and strong attention, which is why I welcome this debate and the attention the Defence Committee has given to the subject.

Mr Gray: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Blunt: Given the amount of time I have left, I hope my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not give way to him. If I have time at the end, I will come back to him.

What is being done and developed in the strategy? In 2009, the previous Government produced Britain's first cyber-security strategy, which, though laudable for initiating a centralised approach to cyber-security, I as the then shadow Minister critiqued as being a shallow copy of the then American strategy. I said:

"Minimal or no attention is given to key areas such as co-ordination of the new cyber-structures with existing agencies, response to a cyber incident and information sharing between government, industry"

and international action. I also said:

"There is no consideration within the strategy of how we would respond to a cyber-attack. No mention can be found of a framework for response or who would lead it. There is no discussion of issues such as back-up communications networks for security and emergency personnel."

All of those were given coverage in the United States review at the time.

Given the severity of the threat, the then Opposition felt that the strategy was an inadequate response, so before the general election we produced our own paper on cyber-security and keeping Britain safe in the digital age. I am pleased to say that much of it found itself in the Government's 2011 cyber-security strategy, which is currently being co-ordinated by the Office of Cyber Security and Information Assurance.

The strategy is far more detailed than its predecessor and offers a more thorough, co-ordinated and ambitious programme to enhance our cyber-security. The recent progress report from the Cabinet Office highlights the successes in implementing the strategy and the progress made towards achieving its objectives by 2015. I commend the strategy for its scope and ambition, incorporating everything from changes to law enforcement to greater co-operation and information-sharing with the private sector and enhancing our cyber-resilience. That the strategy also balances the attainment of security with civil liberties is reassuring.

Mr Gray: Everything my hon. Friend says is absolutely right. The Ministry of Defence, of course, has no responsibility whatsoever for this. Is my hon. Friend therefore proposing that the things he is describing perfectly adequately should now become part of a defence cyber-strategy, or is he talking about something other than the topic of this debate?

Mr Blunt: My hon. Friend, in his usual perspicacious way, has identified precisely what I am moving on to, but before I finish on the wider cyber-security issue, I want to recognise the contribution made by the noble Lady, Baroness Neville-Jones in pulling this strategy together and much improving our country's response.

No strategy, however, is incapable of improvement and the Government still appear to preside over a patchwork muddle of agencies and mandates responsible for cyber-security. In 2011, the Intelligence and Security Committee identified 18 different actors with responsibilities for cyber-security, which raises concerns about duplication, cost-effectiveness and confusion. I note the counterpoint expressed by the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, who said in evidence to the Defence

Committee that although the arrangement is untidy, it is effective, given the need for a cross-Government approach. I must say that, in the absence of a personality as strong as Baroness Neville-Jones, there remain issues about co-ordination and leadership, as was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti).

We must recognise that the updated cyber-security strategy is a major step forward, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) has made clear, defence is only one small component of the pan-Government effort and by no means the most important. I wonder whether the bracketing of cyber-security and defence is in fact wise, given the MOD's relatively limited role. The MOD has only two formal responsibilities: to ensure that armed forces operability is maintained both at home and abroad by securing its networks, and to enhance military operations by developing future cyber-capabilities.

Cyber-capability is immensely important for the armed forces: it is a battle-winning asset. In the same way that military operations become difficult if not impossible without air supremacy, cyber-superiority if not cyber-supremacy is required. What differentiates cyber-security is that it also applies to nearly every aspect of modern civil life. Not many businesses need to worry about the effectiveness of the F-35 and the Eurofighter in their daily operations, but the defensive cyber-capability is a daily national necessity for our financial system. Defence against most high-end cyber-threats, including those to critical national infrastructure, is the responsibility of other Departments, not least GCHQ and the Centre for Protection of National Infrastructure. Given that fact, the conflation of cyber-security with defence is possibly misleading, in that it obscures a complex and much bigger picture. However, we are debating cyber-security in the context of defence, so I shall focus on that.

Other hon. Members have outlined the threat, so I simply want to say that the armed forces are increasingly vulnerable to highly targeted forms of cyber-attack, given the networked nature of modern military systems and the increased use of unmanned aerial vehicles and robots on the battlefield. Adversaries may seek signals interception to distort intelligence, disrupt logistical supply chains or, most worryingly, render major platforms and systems, such as ships and aircraft, dysfunctional. If we now regard cyber as a fifth domain of warfare, we must expect other countries to do so too. Britain is a world leader in defence technology, but we must expect emerging powers to be keen to shrink the development gap by stealing what they cannot easily or quickly develop for themselves. The need to protect the operability of our armed forces and the integrity of our defence establishment is thus abundantly clear.

Of the £650 million set aside to transform Britain's national cyber-security capabilities over the next four years, the MOD will receive £90 million. That funding is not intended to secure MOD networks, because that is assumed to be business as usual, but I know that the Department is securing its supply chain against cyber-attack. The point has already been made about the importance of the need for a resilient industrial base, which must form part of the goal of the national cyber-security strategy. The MOD has responsibility to help to manage the security of its suppliers, and I note the work that has been done to that effect.

I also note the emphasis on reserve forces, which other hon. Members have mentioned, and I welcome the establishment of a joint cyber reserve unit. That is exactly the sort of imaginative use of civilian-qualified reservists in the armed forces that we will want in times of need, but we must bear it in mind that if the armed forces need them at a time of crisis, so will their host employers. On a separate point, I am encouraged by the assurance that spending on cyber will automatically be increased in the budgets of future programmes.

Cyber is part of how our armed forces will wage war in future, so the Department must be able to continue to enhance its military cyber-capabilities. I therefore want to touch briefly on cyber-attack. Inevitably, developments in technology will always be highly classified because the possessor of the latest technological advance is likely to have a battle-winning capability. I therefore understand why information in this area is restricted. However, I emphasise to the Minister that the military should understand that this House expects them to possess cyber-attack capability alongside the ability to defend their own networks from cyber-attack.

This area is highly sensitive because such technology can be applied against other states' non-military assets in a way that makes it difficult to be clear about whether the laws of war apply. I will finish by discussing this international aspect. This area sits in the grey area between espionage and conflict. That is why, in 2009, I called for us to co-operate internationally on cyber issues to regulate the relations between states in respect of cyber-conflict. I am delighted that that is recognised in the 2013 statement on aspects of state behaviour in cyberspace. We must try to identify the future international rules of the road that will govern relations between states in this area.

I will end by reiterating three questions. First, by bracketing cyber-security with defence, are we in danger of misleading ourselves about where the main effort needs to be? Secondly, can the lead responsibility for cyber-security be made clearer? Thirdly, are we affording enough resources to research and development in this vital area?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. Despite the presence of the new clocks to aid Members in calculating how long they have been speaking, and despite the fact that Members have been asked to keep their speeches to 10 minutes or less, we are left with six speakers and only 40 minutes to go. There is now an eight-minute time limit and the clock will count it down for Members. It might be necessary to revisit the limit to ensure that every Member who has been sitting in the Chamber patiently is able to participate.

3.42 pm

Mr Iain McKenzie (Inverclyde) (Lab): The growth of the internet has, without question, transformed our everyday lives. I say that as someone who spent many years working for a multinational corporation that introduced every home to the personal computer and introduced the business world to the speed of the e-mail. The importance of the internet is underlined by the part that it plays in our economy. The internet-related market in the UK is estimated to be worth £82 billion a year.

However, with greater openness, interconnection and dependence on technology comes greater vulnerability. To put that in perspective, cyber-attacks have been categorised as a tier 1 threat to the UK's national security, which puts them up there with international terrorism, military crises and natural disasters. The threats to our national security from cyber-attacks are therefore real and growing.

Terrorists, rogue states and cyber-criminals are among those who are targeting computer systems in the UK. That is highlighted by the fact that 93% of large corporations and 87% of small businesses have reported a cyber-breach in the past year. Performing an attack need not be expensive. With minimal equipment in the right hands, a lot of damage can be done. However, protection against such attacks does not come cheap. The cost of a cyber-security breach can be between £450,000 and £850,000 for a large business and between £35,000 and £65,000 for small and medium-sized businesses, which are not insignificant sums. The UK faces a staggering 1,000 cyber-attacks every hour, at an estimated annual cost of £27 billion.

In cyberspace, power can be exerted by states, non-state organisations or individuals, or by proxy. The boundaries are blurred between the military and the civilian, and between the physical and the virtual. The threats to security and information in the cyber-domain include state-sponsored attacks, ideological and political extremism, serious organised crime, low-level individual crime, cyber-protests, espionage and cyber-terrorism.

Some of the most sophisticated threats to the UK in cyberspace come from other states that seek to conduct espionage, and some states regard cyberspace as a way to commit hostile acts "deniably". That is why, alongside our existing defence and security capabilities, the UK must be capable of protecting our national interests in cyberspace.

"Advanced persistent threat" is the term used most often to describe threats that are unlikely to be deterred by simple cyber-hygiene measures. Acts of aggression or malice in cyberspace differ from those in other domains. Cyberspace is regarded as an asymmetric domain, which means that even adversaries of limited means can pose a significant threat to military capabilities. We will all agree that cyberspace is a complex and rapidly changing environment.

The British Security Service estimates that at least 20 foreign intelligence services are operating to some degree against UK interests in cyberspace, and their targets are in the Government as well as in industry. The Government have pledged £650 million for cyber-security over four years—0.6% of the cost of attacks. It is therefore essential that the MOD works alongside other Departments and the Security Service to ensure that there is no duplication or inefficiency, given budget constraints. We believe that the Government must ensure that every company working with the MOD, regardless of its size or the scale of its work, signs up to a cyber-security charter. That will ensure that hackers cannot use small suppliers to get into the systems of major defence companies.

With the armed forces now so dependent on information and communications technology, should such systems suffer sustained cyber-attack, their ability to operate could be fatally compromised. Because events in cyberspace happen at great speed, there will not be time in the midst of a major international incident to develop doctrine, rules of engagement, or internationally accepted norms

[Mr Iain McKenzie]

of behaviour. That is why the Defence Committee recommended that the MOD make the development of rules of engagement for cyber-operations an urgent priority, and ensure that the necessary intelligence, planning and co-ordination functions are properly resourced.

The rapidly changing nature of the cyber-threat demands that a premium be placed on research and development to enable the MOD to keep pace with, understand, and anticipate that threat. The Government should make it a priority to develop robust protocols for sharing information with industry to allow expertise to be pooled. A cyber-threat has the capacity to evolve with almost unimaginable speed, with serious consequences for the nation's security.

In conclusion, I repeat our call for the Government to ensure that every company working with the Ministry of Defence, regardless of its size or the scale of its work, sign up to a cyber-security charter.

3.47 pm

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): I should declare an obvious interest as the MP for Cheltenham, since GCHQ is based in my constituency. This is also a topical day to debate cyber-security, because this morning the Deputy Prime Minister made a speech in which he talked about the balance that needed to be struck between digital freedom and national security. He praised GCHQ for its continued expertise and its role in defending us all against cyber-attack.

Although there is currently no cold war in the old sense—I hope that is not the wrong thing to say; perhaps events in Ukraine are making us worry a little about that, but there is no active cold war in the way there used to be in the 1960s and 1970s—we are in effect at war in cyberspace. Ongoing attacks are taking place against this country and its institutions and businesses, and it is right that in 2010 the national security strategy identified cyber as a tier 1 threat alongside international terrorism, military crises and major accidents or natural hazards. Although the £650 million committed to the national cyber-security programme in 2011 sounded like a great deal of money, considering it against the billions being committed to Trident, for instance, which does not address any of those tier 1 threats, should give us some pause.

Trident addresses a theoretical and perhaps quite real future risk, and there are different views on that, but the cyber-security programme is defending us against current ongoing attacks. As hon. Members have pointed out, they are taking place at the rate of thousands an hour. It is almost like attacking an onion—Russian dolls would be the topical way of describing it. The core is the Government, the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces. We know that malicious e-mails are being blocked at the rate of 33,000 a month at the gateway to the Government secure internet. The next layer is defence contractors and the supply chain which, as other hon. Members have rightly pointed out, are just as critical to the successful operation of the armed forces and our defences as the Government core.

Critical infrastructure is the next layer. Hon. Members have rightly referred to banks and food supplies as part of that wider layer. The next layer is the wider economy

and society. The threat to business is a threat to our national security; 93% of large businesses and 87% of small businesses have reported cyber-attacks in the past year, potentially costing thousands, as the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Mr McKenzie) mentioned.

The Defence Committee rang the alarm bell in 2013. It said that the risk of military operations being fatally compromised continued despite all the effort, and that we perhaps needed more resource and focus on cyber-security. It is right that we commit spending, and look at structures and process, but spreading the culture and practice of cyber-security matters at all levels, and across Government, business and society.

We have talked about the various units. I am pleased to say that GCHQ is in the lead, but the Global Operations Security Control Centre plays a vital role, as do the cyber-security information sharing partnership and various cyber-units in various places across Government. The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr Blunt) offered criticism of that proliferation of different units, but I believe the network approach is the right one. We need attention and focus in different places across Government. The last thing we want is for cyber-security to be silo-ed. We need the culture and practice of cyber-security to spread across Government.

That was brought home to me recently when I visited Bletchley Park, and the brilliant National Museum of Computing, which was celebrating 70 years since the Colossus machine, arguably the world's first programmable computer, started breaking the Geheimschreiber codes at Bletchley Park. A lot was said about the technical expertise of the Government code and cipher school, which became GCHQ, and the genius of Alan Turing and Tommy Flowers, the great engineer who led the Colossus team—I proud to say that my father was one of his Post Office engineers. However, it was emphasised that human error allowed many of those codes to be broken. It was not just human error in the sense of mistakes that gave away code keys, but the fatal underestimation of Bletchley Park's capabilities on the part of Hitler and the German high command. Right up until D-day, Hitler held back Panzer divisions in the Pas de Calais because he simply did not believe that the Normandy landings were the real deal—he believed the misinformation and the false intelligence that was being fed to him. It never occurred to him that the Geheimschreiber codes were being broken and that our side had that capability.

I am pleased that GCHQ is in the lead on cyber-security and that it provides that technical expertise, but we need to spread the culture and understanding. By way of justifying the supplementary defence estimates to support that and other defence work, having that expertise has benefits for the UK economy. GCHQ has enormous links to academia, business and other parts of Government, but it supports cyber-skills at all levels, including encouraging maths, science and engineering in schools. I saw that at the Cheltenham science festival, although it encourages those subjects in many other ways. It also recognises academic departments that specialise in cyber-security. As has been said, they are now present in a large number of universities. That focus on high-tech skills, and research and development, could, and should already, make the UK a centre of global importance in cyber-security skills. In turn, that builds resilience, not just in Government but in businesses, making Britain a

safer place to do business in cyberspace. All those things have economic benefits and more than justify the spending we are considering.

There is a slight sting in the tail. GCHQ and its expertise are widely recognised now, which may be one of the benefits that it has inadvertently gained as a result of Mr Snowden's recent activities. Business recognises that expertise and skill, and is able to poach very expert people from GCHQ and, perhaps, from the Global Operations Security Control Centre as well. The Government need to value the people in GCHQ and GOSCC, and others across Government, who have those extraordinary skills, and—sometimes, I am afraid, in material terms—try to ensure that we hold on to the best people, and the real skills and expertise. We need to value those skills in all sorts of different ways, but I hope that Ministers will not take it wrongly if I say, on behalf of my constituents, that that way would also be appreciated.

We are facing a global threat. The United Kingdom is under current attack, and, while I think that the Government have got the strategy broadly right, I also think that they should not let up in defending us against this new and very 21st-century threat.

3.55 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Our society relies more and more on cyberspace in activities ranging from internet shopping to internet banking. More and more of our lives, and consequently our details, are online, and our constituents are affected by that every day. It is only right that the Ministry of Defence has a cyber-system that provides security, can be updated, and can be foolproof.

The national cyber-security programme puts in place £650 million over four years to transform the United Kingdom's cyber-security capability, of which the MOD's defence cyber-security programme is part. The cyber-threat has a capacity for almost unimaginable speed, which could have serious consequences for the nation's security. The nation therefore needs to do what it has not yet fully done, and provide the mechanisms, people, education, skills, thinking and policies that will make it possible to take into account both the opportunities and the vulnerabilities that cyber presents. If a reason for action were ever needed, that would be a very clear reason.

All of us, both inside and outside the House, will have watched films on television in which Governments are brought down by computer networks. I remember thinking that that was science fiction and that it could never actually happen, but all of a sudden, in our own lives as elected representatives dealing with constituents, we have found ourselves relating to some of the issues with which they have had to deal in connection with, for instance, banks. There is a real, definite possibility, for which we must be prepared.

We have heard more and more about hacking skills. Businesses and livelihoods now depend on cyber-security for protection, and we have a duty to protect ourselves, to protect Government Departments, and to protect our constituents. Currently, 91% of UK businesses and 73% of UK households have internet access, and £47.2 billion was spent online in the UK alone in 2009. The Minister has said that exact figures are hard to pin down, but a recent study by the Cabinet Office suggests

that cybercrime now costs the UK £27 billion a year, with a cost of £2.2 billion to the Government, £3.1 billion to individuals in the form of fraud and identity theft, and far the largest proportion—£21 billion—to industry.

Cyberspace is a continually evolving environment, and if we are to defend ourselves from the threats that emanate from it, we must keep pace with that change. However quickly a threat is identified, 10 more will have been dreamt up by those who have the capability to do so. We must ensure that our constituents are protected, and, if necessary and if possible, educated as well. One cyber-security chief has pointed out in one of the national papers that even a simple password is better than no password at all, and that many people are frightened of terminology.

I was pleased to learn that the new cyber-security programme essentially seeks to build on the centralised approach established by the last Government, and to tackle some of the emerging gaps. It seeks to establish new cyber-security institutions and education and skills initiatives, with the aim of locating and addressing the weaknesses in existing cyber-measures, anticipating future threats, and building good working relationships across UK sectors, both public and private, as well as within nations. That certainly requires, and is worthy of, the funding support proposed in the motion. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us some indication of how, while the investment is taking place, all the regions of the United Kingdom—including Northern Ireland—can benefit from it. I am keen to understand how we in Northern Ireland can gain some direct advantage.

I understand that protection and security are essential for individuals and also for the Government and the Ministry of Defence, and the money must be used to maximise protection and education. The information provided by the Commons briefing stated the following, which determined my support for what has been proposed here today, because these facts and figures are horrendous. Some Members have mentioned them already. The director of GCHQ has described how cyberspace is contested around the clock. In the United Kingdom there are over 20,000 malicious e-mails on Government networks each month, 1,000 of which deliberately target that very department. The Security Service estimates that at least 20 foreign intelligence services are operating to some degree against UK interests in cyberspace. Again, that illustrates the scale of the problem.

The US estimates that the Pentagon's computer systems are probed 250,000 times an hour, with more than 140 foreign spy organisations trying to infiltrate US networks. During the 2008 Olympic games, Beijing alone experienced 12 million cyber-attacks per day. That underlines the magnitude of this problem and the importance of our being prepared and ready to combat it. I again ask the Minister to comment on the collaboration aspect of that. The report mentions our collaboration with the United States, as other Members have. Can the Minister explain exactly what that entails, and can he assure us that we will not be exploited by the United States of America and its Government?

On the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, will Parliament be fully apprised of any decisions regarding participation in that and other international co-operative arrangements? It is important that everyone understands exactly what is proposed and what will happen.

[Jim Shannon]

These attacks are happening around the world and in the UK and we must protect ourselves. I am therefore very happy to support the proposals, and I ask the House to support them too, while also ensuring that every pound is spent effectively and enhances the skills of those in Government dealing with these threats. Other Members have stressed the importance of having skills in the MOD at corporal, sergeant and private level, so we can address the many pitfalls that may arise.

While cyber-terrorism may not be physical terrorism of the sort that some of us in this Chamber have faced personally, and whose effects can be seen in blood and tears, the effects of cyber-terrorism can bring a nation to its knees and we must ensure we are not the ones who are brought to our knees, but are instead able to withstand any such attack.

4.3 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): The greatest threat of electronic attack continues to be posed by state actors. Russia and China are suspected of carrying out the majority of assaults, but other countries—North Korea, Iran and even Syria—run very effective attacks too. The targets are in Government as well as in industry.

Let me give an example of a cyber-attack. On 23 April 2013 the American stock market dropped 1%; it lost \$136.5 billion in a matter of seconds because of a false tweet posted on the Associated Press Twitter account. That tweet apparently came from Syria.

Let me give another example of a possible danger to this country, and here I will use information from a paper written for the Defence Committee by the distinguished academic Chris Donnelly. Huawei, a Chinese company strongly suspected of having close links to the Chinese Communist party and Government, is now providing crucial equipment for our national telecommunications system. The company has been debarred from doing that in the United States because it could not prove that it did not have strong links to the Chinese leadership.

Chris Donnelly's paper highlighted three areas where Huawei could present a security risk. First, the company could insert undetected malware into its equipment, either to disable the system at will or at least to monitor it. Secondly, there is a possible security risk from the Chinese managers and technicians who man the system. Thirdly, allowing Huawei to dominate the field takes away our sovereign ability to deal with matters ourselves. Recently, there has been growing concern that our national cyber-security systems might not be able to detect whether malware has been inserted into the system.

Mr Gray: My hon. Friend is right to be concerned about the possibility that companies of all sorts might act against the interests of this country, but it is also right to record that Huawei is a major employer in the United Kingdom and is a multi-billion-pound multinational company. The suggestion that it is, in some way or another, an agent or a foreign force in the way he describes may of course be true, but it is worth saying that there is no evidence that that is the case.

Bob Stewart: I thank my hon. Friend for that, but I am not sure that he is right. Huawei has been involved in setting up our cyber-security evaluation centre. It offered its services at knock-down prices—no western firm could match them, and our economy was and is in a poor position to resist the temptation of accepting what looked like a very good deal. So we could be setting a thief to catch that same thief. Of course the suspicions I voice may be erroneous and our cyber-security services could be totally on top of this one, but without access to classified information I have no way of checking. Members may recall that Huawei offered to provide a mobile phone system for the London underground during the 2012 Olympics—was it not free or close to being free? If I recall it correctly, that offer was turned down on security grounds.

As Chris Donnelly highlighted, state security requirements and gaining commercial advantage are two sides of the same coin in China. We should be under no illusion about the Chinese's willingness to put huge efforts into understanding and, if necessary, harnessing all sorts of systems in the UK to advance the Chinese national interest. Already there is a mass English learning programme in existence, which Chris Donnelly suggests involves 300 million people in China, and a similar mass programme to teach computing. In 2012, China conducted what it called its first "digital technology exercise" in Inner Mongolia, when an entire division of hackers in the uniform of the Chinese liberation army was deployed. These cyber warriors went to war across the whole spectrum of western activity, not just against western military communications. We are wasting our time calling on China to stop hacking into our systems. Of course the Chinese will deny they are doing it until they are blue in the face—

Sir Bob Russell: Red in the face, surely.

Bob Stewart: Forgive me, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. He always stands up for the infantry, so he would use the word red, and I accept it; red is the colour of the infantry.

We had better wake up to the fact that systematic and state organised hacking is a massive Chinese industry. I am pretty sure that our security services are well aware of the threat, but the public must also be made aware of it. We need the funding to do what we can to counter the threat.

Let me be clear: hacking can be more deadly than a gun. Cyber-warfare, taken to its logical conclusion, could bring our society to its knees. Almost nothing works without electricity. I am talking about light, energy, traffic control—on the ground and in the air—hospitals, police and even sewerage. Undoubtedly, the national grid would be a No.1 priority target for someone wishing to reduce us to our knees. Von Clausewitz stated that war is an extension of politics by other means, but systematic hacking is also war, by new, subtle and probably very effective means.

4.10 pm

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): In a hands-free, wireless, bluetooth enabled world, how would any of us cope without access to our mobile phone or computer data for any duration of time? Our lives and livelihoods depend on those assets, and they would

change fundamentally if they did not work. The recent flooding in Dorset affected electricity and caused some households to reach for the candles. What a new experience that was for a generation of people who perhaps take our world a little bit for granted. They believe that all these things that we enjoy are there and will not be challenged.

I welcome this debate, and I commend the Defence Committee and its Chair for their report. My concern is that we are debating something that is changing almost daily and yet the report was printed on 26 March 2012. In answer to my interventions at the start of the debate, the Minister made it clear that changes have been introduced, but even they will be out of date given the pace of change in this area.

As we move into an ever more digital and virtual world, we are increasingly exposed to attacks not just on personal data and intellectual property, but on state operations from air traffic control systems to electricity grids. Cyber-attacks are simpler and cheaper than a dirty bomb. We no longer see robbers running in to rob a bank; it is all done electronically. This is the world that we now need to recognise.

Two years ago, I attended a course at Harvard university on national and international security. A cyber-security expert borrowed a laptop. He then purchased and downloaded \$16 of software, and managed to tap into Boston's traffic light systems. Had he taken it one step further, he would have been traced and got into trouble. None the less, he showed how easy and quick it would have been, with just \$16 of software, to cause huge disruption.

Let me place this issue in perspective. In the development of warfare, there are occasionally seismic leaps in capability as new systems are introduced, and they force all of us to adapt. Going back in history, the longbow changed the outcome of the battle of Agincourt. The introduction of the cannonball changed the way in which ships attacked one another, preventing the need to go on board. The introduction of the submarine, the tank, the plane and the aircraft carrier all changed the conduct of war. As has been said again and again in this Chamber, cyber-technology will provide a new dimension, which we all need to understand.

I am a little saddened that the Chamber is so empty. I hope that it is not because I am on my feet.

Bob Stewart: I think it is actually.

Mr Ellwood: Thank you! The fact is it is the usual suspects who are here today, by which I mean those who are interested in defence matters. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot) said, this issue does not affect just defence. It covers the business arena, the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence, yet we are not familiarising ourselves with the structures and processes so that we are at the front end of this capability. The speed of attack, if it happens, will be phenomenal. We have not yet seen anything on a scale that would fundamentally affect our lives, but there will be no build-up to such an attack. There will be no arms, tanks or ships mustering on the border; our lives will suddenly change when our computer systems no longer work.

The UK's military equipment is increasingly vulnerable because of the complexity of its IT. What would happen if we lost the global positioning system? How would anything operate and could we cope? When I was at Sandhurst, we were taught how to use a compass. I am not sure whether that happens any more, but if the systems go down, that is what will be required.

Today's statement on Ukraine reminds us of our involvement in the Crimean war and the charge of the Light Brigade. That infamous event took place because of a breakdown in communications, as by the time the orders reached Lord Cardigan, he had the wrong idea of what his mission was. Goodness knows what would happen today if we had insufficient resilience to communicate using our usual systems.

Knowing a little about Joint Forces Command, I understand the logic of placing cyber-security in that domain—it is wise that it is fed into the command—but cyber-security should have its own distinct command with its own expertise, as is advocated by some in the United States. Additionally, the relationship between the Global Operations Security Control Centre and the defence cyber operations group needs to be clarified for those of us who were unable to participate in the Committee's inquiry. Will the Minister update us on bringing together disparate groupings and organisations within various Ministries through the GOSCC?

I support the call for the use of reservists. Banks and other financial services businesses are at the high end of ensuring that they protect their capabilities, so we need to determine how we attract people with the skill sets to do that job to work in the Ministry of Defence as well. Will the Minister tell us what is being done to encourage our NATO allies to improve joint capabilities? That subject might be suitable for discussion at the 2014 NATO summit, which will take place in this country. Given the damage and disruption that a cyber-attack might inflict, would a full-scale attack on another country be subject to article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty? Have rules of engagement been determined for offensive and defence cyber-operations?

I welcome this debate and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) that we should have defence debates more regularly. The House needs to understand this emerging threat that faces us all, as it is only a matter of time before a major strike takes place. I welcome the huge progress that the Government are making, but there is clearly much more to do.

4.18 pm

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): Labour Members welcome the increased focus that cyber-defence is receiving. The report by the Defence Committee is evidence of that focus, so I congratulate its members on their excellent work. Cyber-attacks are at last properly acknowledged as a serious threat to our national security and are rightly prioritised as a tier 1 risk in the Government's 2010 national security document. As the Committee's report says, the threat is liable to grow and evolve at "almost unimaginable speed". Indeed, the pace of technological change is faster than traditional Government structures and time lines can cope with. As my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) said, five years is a long time in the cyber-world

[Yvonne Fovargue]

and the threat from cyber-attack is rising exponentially. The number of global web users in 1995 was 16 million; it is estimated that by 2015, there will be more interconnected devices on the planet than there are human beings.

As communications technologies spread and as the UK critical infrastructure networks become even more heavily based on IT networks, cyber-defence becomes an increasingly pressing security concern. There will be even more attacks. According to the Government's own national security strategy document, the UK faces up to 1,000 cyber-attacks every hour, which is estimated to cost the UK £27 billion a year. Cyber-attacks are now a constant reality, with the Government, the private sector and private citizens all under sustained cyber-attack from both hostile states and criminals, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) articulated so well.

I have no doubt that the Government take the threat of cyber-attack seriously, although perhaps not seriously enough. The report makes it clear that Ministers have not yet put in place the infrastructure to deal with that real threat properly, or approached the problem with vigour or sufficient robustness. As the right hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot) said, the problem is agile and many-layered—I think it has been likened to an onion, and the Opposition would agree with that.

Bob Stewart: It is not an onion, because that implies that one peels away a layer to get at it; actually, it is an attack on all institutions—every single part of our society—simultaneously. I therefore disagree with the onion analogy.

Yvonne Fovargue: I will not be tempted to go further into vegetable analogies. I think the multi-layered approach is the one we are dealing with here.

The Government have committed £650 million over four years to the cyber-security programme, which seems like a significant sum, but only 14% of that was allocated to the Ministry of Defence, while the total investment equates to only 0.6% of the £27 billion that the UK loses through cybercrime every year. In its report, the Defence Committee questioned whether enough was being done to secure the supply chain and the industrial base. We know that supplies of armed forces' equipment are increasingly being targeted, and are especially vulnerable to cyber-attack. In their response, the Government say they are working closely with industry on matters such as information sharing and incident reporting, but give precious little detail. The Government need to go further, and Labour is calling on them to ensure that every company working with the Ministry of Defence, regardless of its size or the scale of its work, signs up to a cyber-security charter. That will ensure that hackers cannot use the small suppliers to get into the systems of the major defence companies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Mr McKenzie) said, the risks from cyber-attacks are huge and growing; we need to do everything we can to protect against them, and the MOD and its contractors should lead by example.

The Government also refer to progress on the joint cyber reserve—an initiative to involve reservists in the delivery of cyber-security—but give little detail. Will

the Minister say what progress has been made in that important matter? I would particularly like to hear his thoughts on recruitment. The cyber reserves are not likely to be a traditional military outfit: the skills are entirely different. Is it essential that those reservists meet the usual fitness standards of the armed forces? A senior US officer said it was not essential that they were able to march 3 miles with a pack on their back, and I think most people would agree. It would be interesting to hear the Minister's thoughts on the requirements for the new force and how its personnel will fit into the military model.

What is the Minister doing to attract recruits? We have heard that a lot of the top universities are running cyber programmes with top computing graduates. Is the Minister attending those events or approaching careers fairs? Is there a career path that will be attractive to young graduates—we need not only to recruit but to retain those graduates. A recent study by the Army Families Federation shows that large numbers of married Army personnel want to leave the service. That will be all the more problematic with cyber personnel, as there are many lucrative private sector jobs tempting them away. But of course many of the skills and experiences required for this are prevalent in the defence industry. What steps is the Minister taking to encourage firms involved in Government contract work—not just in the defence but throughout Government—to encourage their staff to become reservists? What responses are there from such firms?

The new joint cyber-force is described by the Secretary of State in terms of its offensive rather than defensive capabilities, enhancing our ability to strike back in cyberspace against enemies who attack us. But as my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr Havard) said, what are the rules of engagement? Land, sea and air have been the traditional theatres of war. Cyberspace is new and untested. What constitutes a cyber act of war and, equally important, what would be a proportionate response to an act of aggression? For example, if all London's systems were knocked out by an electromagnetic pulse device, would that be an act of war? What would we do about it? As my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend said, how would we know who did it? In short, what are the rules of engagement?

It would also be interesting to hear whether the Minister believes that the concept of deterrence applies to cyber-defence as it does to conventional defence as perhaps those with the most ability to attack our cyber-capabilities have the least reliance on their own cyber-capabilities. What role does he envisage offensive cyber-capabilities playing in this? Do we work alone or in concert with others? The Secretary of State has made much of cyber-security being a sovereign capability but we have been working with other nations in supranational bodies for some time; for example we are a member of the "Five Eyes" group, which includes the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and we have also been working with NATO. The report cites the important work of the NATO cyber-defence centre of excellence. Of course this is based in Estonia and was created as a direct consequence of the cyber-attacks on that country in 2007. There is excellent work undertaken there and I am glad that the Government are committed to participation in the centre, although some may doubt whether the contribution of £20,000 per annum will

have much impact. But the lesson to be learned here is that we cannot afford to wait until an attack happens before we act. We have to be proactive.

Since the publication of the report, we have seen developments within the EU's common security and defence policy. The European Council meeting on 19 and 20 December last year led to a call for the development of an EU cyber-defence policy framework in 2014. I would be interested to hear what talks have been taking place about this. Working with, and within, bodies such as the "Five Eyes", NATO and the EU is vital, not only for intelligence sharing but for developing common rules of engagement. We must be aware of the threat and how best to counter it. That is why we need all the organisations to work together.

A further point is public trust. The public have to have trust in what we are doing to protect them and that is why accountability is so important. The USA has FISMA, the Federal Information Security Management Act, of course. What research has been done into how this might translate into our own system? We must also ask what role should Parliament and the Intelligence and Security Oversight Committee have in this new era of cyber-defence.

Currently we are accustomed to thinking of security in terms of three forces; army, navy and air force. But in many ways cyber does add a fourth strand. Just as the creation of the RAF in 1918 demanded a whole new way of thinking about defence and war, the increasing cyber threat means that we need to do some fresh thinking now. We have to think seriously about how we can combat this new threat because one thing is certain; it can only grow. Conventional borders will have less and less impact but the impact on civilians and the military will be greater and greater.

When the internet and electronic communications were first devised it was thought that they would impact only on academics in ivory towers. They have developed in ways that were never imagined then and have become an everyday part of our lives. Imagine a world without banking, power, communications systems, computers, control of our weapons. It absolutely does not bear thinking about, which is why we have to think about it and ensure that the MOD and the military are ready to take on this threat, and that they know their part, and play their part, in protecting our country and its citizens from this new and fast-evolving threat.

4.29 pm

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr Mark Francois):

I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in recognising and thanking those members of the armed forces, both regular and reserve, who have been engaged in preserving lives and protecting property in those communities across the United Kingdom that have been struck by the recent storms and floods. They have provided very good service and we are immensely proud of them.

May I also welcome the hon. Member for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue) to the Dispatch Box? Although she has been on the Opposition's defence team for a while, this is the first time we have debated together directly, so I would like to welcome her to her post formally. I will do my best to answer at least some of the questions she asked in her speech.

I would also like to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot), the Chair of the Defence Committee, for introducing the debate so ably and the 11 right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part so constructively. I have read the Committee's report, which was published early last year, and the Government's response. I will seek to address some of the Committee's concerns and report to the House on our recent progress in this important field.

It might interest Members to know that the term "cyberspace" is usually credited to the 1980's science fiction writings of William Gibson. He used it as a buzzword to describe an all-pervasive virtual realm. Although there are many interpretations, we generally use the term to mean the interdependent network of IT infrastructures and the data that move therein. Cyberspace has become an essential part of most of our lives, from communications to shopping, and from life saving to war fighting. In 2013 some 21 million households in Great Britain had an internet connection. That degree of connectivity clearly has security implications that we cannot ignore.

Although the MOD runs its own cyber-defence programme—I will say more about that later—the defence of our national cyber infrastructure begins within central Government, with the Cabinet Office playing a key role, as it does with all potential crisis management situations. All public and private sector organisations have a stake in addressing the threat, across international and domestic boundaries. To co-ordinate that effort, the Government created the Office of Cyber Security and Information Assurance within the Cabinet Office, which runs our national cyber-security programme. Alongside the Cyber Security Operations Centre, OCSIA works with other lead Government Departments and agencies, such as the MOD, the Home Office and GCHQ—the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) rightly paid tribute to his constituents there and the skills they have.

The national cyber-security programme is backed up by £860 million of Government investment from 2011 to 2016. That comprises an initial £650 million allocated across Government at the time of the strategic defence and security review and an additional £210 million investment announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer following the 2013 spending review. Moreover, given the seriousness with which we treat the cyber threat, since the Committee's report the Minister for defence equipment, support and technology, my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), announced in July 2013 that, on top of the money allocated to the MOD from the national cyber-security programme, the MOD has allocated a further £70 million over the next four years from within our own budget for improving our cyber-defence capabilities.

The MOD's key priority is to keep our own networks and systems defended and operational, so that if a crisis occurs we can continue to operate with the same efficiency and professionalism required on the battlefield. That does not mean that we cannot help in other ways, but the situation prevailing at the time will dictate how, when and if military assistance would be called upon.

A number of hon. Members asked about MOD structures, as indeed did the Committee's report, so perhaps I can provide some clarification. Since the

[Mr Mark Francois]

Committee's report was published, the Chief of the Defence Staff has issued direction to the four-star commander of Joint Forces Command to empower him as the defence authority for cyber. On a day-to-day basis, that responsibility is delegated to the three-star Chief of Defence Intelligence in his unifying role to plan and develop cyber capability. Under CDI sits the joint forces cyber group, stood up formally in May 2013 to deliver that capability. The joint forces cyber group plans and directs the activity of the joint cyber units at Cheltenham and Corsham, including the reserves.

The senior responsible owner for the defence cyber programme is the two-star director for cyber, intelligence and information integration, currently Air Vice-Marshal Jonathan Rigby, who gave evidence to the Committee's inquiry in 2012, and remains accountable to the Chief of Defence Intelligence for those responsibilities. I hope that that helps provide absolute clarity about the chain of command.

Our armed forces use some of the most sophisticated equipment in the world. The downside of the capability we possess is the potential exposure to emerging threats from our adversaries. We have to see those as an intrinsic part of modern military operations and put measures in place to mitigate or deal with them. The Global Operations and Security Control Centre, or GOSCC, is a key part of that protection, with its mission to ensure that we can operate and defend our networks.

I was pleased to read in the report that the GOSCC's performance impressed the Defence Committee, which said that it should be held up as "a centre of excellence." I agree. I visited the centre recently and was struck both by the ability of the personnel and the interplay with the embedded industry professionals whom they work alongside.

The Committee also rightly identified the importance of promoting good cyber-security practice. I fully accept that technology is only one part of the equation; we need the right people to do the right things. As cyber professionals often say, the majority of the threat that we face could be overcome by good practice on the part of our people. That point was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti); we Front Benchers are also pleased to see him back here on good form.

At the time of the Government response to the Committee's report, we had already recognised the need for good practice and had included a specific cyber module in our mandatory training for defence personnel. Since then, we have gone further and developed a cyber primer—an easy-to-read, unclassified book that introduces personnel to the subject of cyber, particularly in a defence context, and is provided for all defence personnel to use.

In its report, the Committee noted the importance of exploring options to develop military capabilities. Since then, the Secretary of State for Defence has announced, on 29 September 2013, that Britain will build a dedicated capability to counter-attack in cyberspace as part of our full-spectrum military capability. As we set out in the strategic defence and security review, the UK views cyberspace as a domain in which we can carry out military operations to support national objectives, as we would on land, at sea or in the air. The hon. Member

for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr Havard) asked questions about the legality of that. I reassure him and the House that we are looking to develop a range of cyber capabilities that would be used in accordance with the well-understood laws of armed conflict and, more generally, would comply with domestic and international law. Any capability that we develop must be used legally. We are mindful of that.

Mr Gray: The Minister is making an extremely interesting and useful speech. In the context of the offensive use of cyber, does he believe that there can be such a thing as deterrence in the cyber world? Is there a way of finding out who the enemy is and deterring them by threatening the use of cyber-warfare ourselves?

Mr Francois: A complicating factor is that it is not always immediately apparent where an attack may have come from. Sometimes it is possible to establish that a little later, but it cannot always be done instantly. That needs to be taken into account. However, I believe that the possession of a cyber capability that allows us to strike back could act as a deterrent to potential adversaries—not only in cyberspace but potentially against more traditional threats.

A number of Members have asked about how industry fits in, including my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr Blunt) and the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Mr McKenzie). Private industry is and will remain a key partner in cyber-security. A secure supply chain is vital for the business of all public sector delivery, and that is no less the case in defence. Our armed forces depend on a wide range of equipment and services provided by industry. As part of the NCSP, the Government are working closely with industry to ensure that it is aware of the changing nature of the threat and has effective counters in place.

The hon. Member for Makerfield asked for something specific to the Ministry of Defence. I am pleased to say that in addition, in July 2013, the MOD launched the defence cyber-protection partnership. That bespoke initiative aims to meet the emerging threat to the UK defence supply chain by increasing awareness of cyber-risks among our contractors and suppliers, sharing threat intelligence, and defining risk-driven approaches to applying cyber-security standards. In short, we already have something that is designed specifically for military and defence contractors and they are entering that programme.

Technology is only one part of the equation. People are essential. We know that the number of deep specialists and experts in this field is limited, and that all organisations, both public and private, are looking to recruit from that supply. However, defence can offer an exciting opportunity for experts to put their skills to use for the nation through the formation of the joint cyber reserve. Some hon. Members asked about that, and I will provide an update.

Recruitment to the joint cyber reserve commenced in October 2013, and there has been healthy interest. I cannot tell the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) how many of the applicants come from the Department for Work and Pensions, but I respect her assiduous work, as ever, in collecting statistics, and I have often been on the receiving end. I assure her and the House that we have recruited the first cohort of cyber reservists, and their training will commence in the spring.

On the basis of the healthy interest so far, we believe that within the next two years the cyber reserve will be fully operational with reserve personnel recruited, trained and operating alongside their regular military and civilian colleagues in the joint cyber-units at Corsham and Cheltenham, and in the information assurance units.

Mr Brazier: I am sorry that I have had to be out of the Chamber for a long-standing engagement. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the cyber reserve includes two long-standing squadrons that have been around for six or seven years and were part of the specialist group, the Royal Signals, and that those squadrons will go intact into the new set-up?

Mr Francois: My hon. Friend has raised this issue with me before. He asks a specific question about two specific squadrons. I believe that what he asks is the case, but I will write to him to confirm it. The House knows that he is the world's greatest living expert on this matter, and I do not want to be the man to give him a wrong steer.

The cyber reserve offers individuals the opportunity to be part of the proud history and ethos of our reserves while working in a cutting-edge, technological field. The hon. Member for Bridgend asked about the effect on reservists if they travel to other countries. I will look into the good point she raised, and will return to her on that.

Cyber crosses national boundaries, a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) made clearly, and so too must our view of this new domain. It is, therefore, essential that we work with our allies to ensure that we are not only able to operate with one another, but are aware of common threats. We are already working closely on cyber with our long-standing international partners, particularly through a defence cyber-contact group that includes the US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and ourselves—the traditional “Five Eyes” partners.

Thomas Docherty: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Francois: I will give way briefly because I am conscious of time.

Thomas Docherty: Before the Minister moves away from personnel, what lessons are being learned about recruiting regulars and reservists from the IT world? He seemed to skip over that.

Mr Francois: This is a wonderful opportunity to recruit IT specialists from the civilian world to the reserves, but we have learned that this is a specialised area of work and we are looking at ways of extending the careers of people who work in cyber. For example, in the military, people might normally do a tour of two or three years and then move to a different position. We are looking at options for allowing people who work in this field to do longer tours of duty so that we can fully exploit the detailed expertise that they develop. We are looking at the matter carefully.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) asked about NATO co-operation. The UK is proud to be part of the NATO co-operative cyber defence centre of excellence in Tallinn, and the MOD has already seconded a member of our cyber team to work there. I should tell the Chairman of the Select Committee that the Committee cannot take all the credit for that, but it can certainly take part of it. Furthermore, we have increased our co-operation with the NATO computer incident response capability based in Brussels by joining the malware information-sharing platform and the multinational cyber-defence education and training project.

I assure the House that we are taking cyber very seriously in our defence planning. We are integrating cyber scenarios into our cross-defence exercise programme and combining it with the other domains of operations as part of full-spectrum planning, alongside land, air and sea. The cyber piece is becoming integral across the spectrum of military activity.

Mr Havard: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Francois: I think I should conclude because we have another debate to come.

Cyber remains a relatively young domain. Many advances will continue to come online and change the way we live our lives. While this brings new opportunities for better understanding, collaboration and innovation, we must be alert to the risks and threats as they emerge. We are striving to do both within the Ministry of Defence. It is not a task for the fainthearted, but one we must undertake none the less. The Select Committee urged us to take these threats seriously. I hope I have been able to demonstrate to the House that we do take them very seriously, in defence of the realm. *Question deferred (Standing Order No. 54).*

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND
LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Private Rented Sector

[*Relevant documents: First Report from the Communities and Local Government Committee, on the Private Rented Sector, HC 50, and the Government response, Cm 8730.*]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2014, for expenditure by the Department for Communities and Local Government:

(1) further resources, not exceeding £10,776,378,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 1006,

(2) the resources authorised for use for capital purposes be reduced by £697,027,000 as so set out, and

(3) the sum authorised for issue out of the Consolidated Fund be reduced by £179,382,000 as so set out.—(*Claire Perry.*)

4.46 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak about the report on the private rented sector by the Communities and Local Government Committee—its first report of the 2013-14 Session. The report was produced through the Committee taking formal evidence in a number of sittings. Some of those featured more informal discussions and some involved landlords and tenants together, which was interesting. There was a visit to Leeds to look at how the council was operating with regard to the private rented sector, and a visit to Germany to look at the sector in a very different sphere of housing circumstances. On behalf of the Committee, I particularly thank Christine Whitehead, who was the Committee's special adviser for the inquiry, and Kevin Maddison, the lead specialist from the Committee staff working on the inquiry.

We chose the subject of the private rented sector not because of any particular initiative that the Government were proposing at the time but because of the sector's increasing importance to our constituents. According to the latest figures for 2012-13, 18% of households now live in the private rented sector. That growth did not suddenly happen following the banking crisis of 2008; it had been taking place before that over a period of time. Indeed, it has been the only growing housing sector since 2002, when owner-occupation started to fall as a percentage of households. That is an interesting fact.

The Committee saw the growth of the private rented sector not as a short-term issue but as something that is likely to continue in the longer term. We also observed that it is changing in that it is home to a wider range of households, particularly families with children who might, in other times, have chosen to be in a different sector but are now looking for a different housing experience, and particularly for more security. When people with children change their home, that often means changing schools, and that creates substantial disruption to family life.

When we went to Germany, we saw a very different situation that we are probably not likely to get to any time soon. People literally have tenancies for life; many of us could not quite get our heads around that. Someone with a tenancy in Germany has it for life and can pass it on so that their family members can succeed to it. We learned that there were good standards in the private rented sector that we ought to seek to emulate in this

country. Tenants and landlords had an awareness and understanding of rights and responsibilities that is perhaps not always shared in this country. There was an equilibrium between demand and supply to which we aspire but recognise realistically that it will take some to achieve. Those factors create a very different market indeed.

We identified five main areas to concentrate on in our report: awareness of rights and responsibilities; the standards of properties and of how they are managed; effective regulation of letting agents, which we received an awful lot of evidence about; new tenancy models looking for longer-term agreements and greater security; and, in passing—because we had already done a report on this the previous year—increasing the housing supply.

When it came to taking evidence, the then housing Minister—the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk), who is in his place—was, as usual, very open to ideas and he welcomed, both in his initial statement in the House and in the Government's response, many of our recommendations, as indeed did the then shadow housing Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey). May I place on record the Committee's thanks to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford for the courteous, assiduous and highly knowledgeable way in which he always approached us and our deliberations?

There was a great deal of consensus right from the beginning. The Government have subsequently produced their "Review of property conditions in the private rented sector", which includes many of the Committee's ideas. Indeed, having initially dismissed our recommendations for mandatory carbon monoxide and smoke alarms in private rented homes and for five-yearly checks of the electrical installations, the Government are now consulting on them. Of course, consulting does not necessarily mean agreeing, but at least it is a step in the right direction, which we should recognise and welcome.

There are two areas on which we have not reached agreement and to which we need to pay more attention. The first is the flexibility of local authority powers to raise standards and to deal with rogue landlords in particular—I will say more about that in due course—and the second is the regulation of letting agents, on which the Government have not gone as far as the Committee wanted them to. I will explore that as well.

On raising awareness, in Germany it struck me and, I think, other Committee members that tenants and landlords seemed to understand the rules and their responsibilities. That is not always the case in this country. Our report notes that there is a bewildering array of legislation and regulation relating to the private rented sector. Different Acts of Parliament are cross-referenced in new Acts and it is very difficult for any professional, let alone any lay person, to get their head around the situation. A professional landlord might understand some of it, but small landlords and tenants probably do not.

We therefore called for a review on the potential consolidation of legislation, but the Government rejected that, which is disappointing because I think it would have helped to simplify things. We were not asking for more regulation; we were asking for simpler regulation. There is a difference. The Government could have scrapped some regulations if they had gone about it in a different way and that may have earned some brownie points for Ministers past and present.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Betts: I will, of course, give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is a member of the Select Committee.

John Stevenson: The hon. Gentleman's opening comments are very much in tune with the views of the Committee. Does he agree that we recognised that the rented market is a relatively immature market and that, while we encouraged positive changes, one of the reasons why we were a little cautious in our approach was that we also recognised that we had to allow the market to develop and mature in its own way?

Mr Betts: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right and I thank him for putting that clearly on the record. That is exactly what the Committee agreed. Some of the changes will be incremental and there will be opportunities for either this or a future Government to come back and look at the totality of regulation and legislation, which I think would be helpful for everyone involved.

On raising awareness, the Government have accepted some of the recommendations. The Committee called for easy-to-read fact sheets and model tenancy agreements. The Government have already produced a draft tenants charter and we look forward to their model tenancy agreement. That is entirely in line with what the Committee recommended, which was to try to make things easier, particularly for people who do not easily understand legislation and regulations, and to have something that is easy to operate. We felt that that would really help not only tenants, but many landlords, particularly non-professional, occasional landlords who have a few properties and would welcome such an approach.

We asked for a review of the housing health and safety rating system. Again, it is valued by many professionals, but it is very difficult to understand for many landlords, let alone for tenants. I do not think that the Government are prepared to go so far as a wholesale review, but we note that they are now trying to produce guidance for tenants and to update the methodology. There are problems in relation to local authorities wanting to act against a property if the tenant is elderly, but not if they are young, and landlords can get confused about an authority requiring them to do work simply because they have changed tenants. It is certainly worth looking at that complication in the new guidance and new methodology.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Years ago, we had what was called a rents officer, which would surely be one of the better ways of enforcement whether in relation to private landlords or higher rents in general. Rents are now escalating because the supply of housing is very low. Did my hon. Friend and his Committee consider that?

Mr Betts: We did, but I will come on to rents later, if I may, because that is a separate issue. We did refer to that matter, but the main point of our report concentrated on standards, which is what I am trying to address now.

As we all know, the reality is that some of the worst standards in housing are in the private rented sector. That does not mean that every such property is bad and we should not give all private landlords a bad name, but as well as some of the worst properties, the sector has

some of the most vulnerable occupiers, and that juxtaposition should really worry us. Some landlords simply want to sit and do nothing, while others blatantly break the law and think that they can get away with it, and we particularly want to bear down on them. There was general agreement about how to bear down on the really bad landlords without putting extra burdens on the good ones, and about how, at a time of financial constraint for local authorities, to enable them to take action against such private landlords and ensure that they can use their resources and recover their costs.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): I would add long-distance landlords to the list of problem landlords. I had a letter from a lady in west Sussex complaining about the condition of properties and various other things in the area of Church in Accrington. Many landlords in that area do not live there and have never visited it, and their properties are not in a particularly good condition. That is not necessarily for nasty or unpleasant reasons, but because landlords generally live too far away, and because they are amateur about making such an investment, rather than professional in housing management. Will my hon. Friend add long-distance landlords to his list?

Mr Betts: I do not want to say that every landlord who lives at a distance is a bad one—that would be wrong—but living further away can clearly make it more difficult for tenants to contact landlords and get instant responses about problems, particularly if they do not use a reputable agent to help them manage the property on the spot. We will come on to agents a little later. The issue is about local authorities having the powers to act against not merely individual properties, but areas with collections of properties in poor condition, which is probably the sort of area to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his very generous remarks earlier. Houses in multiple occupation are a subset of the private rented sector on which there needs to be a real concentration. I certainly attempted to do that as a Minister, and I am sure that my successor is also seeking to do so. Does the Chairman of the Select Committee agree that we should often focus on HMOs in relation to the worst behaviour?

Mr Betts: Absolutely. The Committee was very supportive of the legislation on HMOs, particularly local authorities' use of article 4 powers to try to restrict the growth in their numbers in areas where there were so many that they had begun to dominate, as well as of the Government's position. There is cross-party consensus on that issue.

Mr Prisk: My experience as a Minister was that there was a lot of reluctance among local authorities to use article 4. I am not suggesting that I encouraged them to do so unreasonably, but a bit of elbow pushing was required to get them to do the job. I think that the Select Committee's support will be very helpful. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Mr Betts: Yes, certainly. One of the messages right the way through the report is that there is good practice among local authorities. As with many things that we

[Mr Betts]

consider, it is a challenge to ensure that the good practice is spread to all authorities and that that knowledge is available. It should not be just the Select Committee, the Government and the Opposition telling councils what to do; they should be able to look at the good work that is being done by colleagues in other councils and replicate it.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): On property conditions, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that under the Housing Act 2004, local authorities have a statutory duty to deal with certain hazards in a property. Did the report look in any detail at expanding the number of hazards that are covered by that statutory duty? If so, does he have any thoughts about the cost implications for local authorities of doing so?

Mr Betts: No, we did not look at extending the properties that are covered by that responsibility of local authorities. We did look at the powers that are available to local authorities in respect of the approach to the licensing and registration of landlords in their area, and I will come on to discuss that.

Jake Berry: The licensing of landlords in areas of low demand is a separate issue. The powers that are available to local authorities in respect of houses that are not in a fit state of repair are already quite extensive. For example, they can put an order on a property that spans all residential use. That power is not widely used and I wonder whether the report says anything about why that is.

Mr Betts: No, we did not take evidence on that specific point or give consideration to it.

Graham Jones: I think that my neighbour, the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), was referring to the housing health and safety rating system and its implementation by local authorities in respect of category 1 and category 2 hazards. Does my hon. Friend agree that if significant cuts are made to local government, it does not help environmental and housing enforcement teams in local authorities to enforce the housing standards, even if they have a statutory ability to do so?

Mr Betts: The Committee received evidence of concerns in some local authorities that the squeeze on their resources was affecting their abilities in respect of the private rented sector. We tried to look at how authorities could deal with the challenges that they face most effectively with the resources that they have. One thing that we looked at was licensing.

On balance, the Committee did not come down in favour of a national licensing scheme. That is essentially because, over a number of reports, we have tended to be localist and to believe that local authorities should be allowed to make such choices for themselves. We went to Leeds, which has a very good accreditation scheme, under which there is good training and advice for landlords, which the landlords really appreciate. However, we were told by landlords and tenants that the problem is that it is the good landlords that join such schemes. They said, "It's those landlords down the road you want to get hold of and they're not going to volunteer."

The selective licensing approach tends to be cumbersome, time-consuming and bureaucratic, and the criteria are very restricted. The Committee therefore asked whether we could relax the criteria and make them more flexible so that local authorities could engage in selective licensing if they wanted to. We also asked whether, in a more general sense, a local authority could have an accreditation scheme that was mandatory, so that it would include all landlords, including those who do not want to join.

Unfortunately, on both issues, the Government's response was not as helpful as we would have liked. They said no to mandatory accreditation schemes and no to a review of the flexibility of selective licensing. The Government's recent consultation document does include changes to selective licensing, but they are talking about tightening the criteria, rather than making them more flexible. That seems to be a retrograde step. All our evidence suggested that that was too cumbersome and does not work, and authorities that want to make it work find it difficult to make it happen.

We are apparently consulting on a landlord-specific, rather than property-specific, licensing or accreditation scheme, which the consultation document refers to as a suggestion from the Communities and Local Government Committee, although it was not. It has clearly come from somewhere, however, and it may not be unwelcome if it gives local authorities another set of powers and another way to deal with rogue landlords who are causing problems. If those landlords who persistently cause problems with individual properties have to become part of a mandatory registration scheme, that could be perhaps not a complete response to the Committee's request, but at least a helpful step in the right direction, as we suggested.

Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): All the evidence from London suggests that the problem is not low demand as the criteria state, but high demand. Surely all that evidence leads us to believe that we need greater flexibility in licensing, otherwise we will not get to the heart of the problem.

Mr Betts: Precisely, and the Committee's view was very simple. These arrangements are—or at least should be—for local authorities to determine. Local authorities know their own areas and there is a big difference between one local authority and another. Even within London and within local authorities themselves there are big differences, so we hope the Government will recognise the value of giving a local authority a range of powers to tailor requirements to the needs of a particular area.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab) *rose—*

Graham Jones *rose—*

Mr Betts: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) because my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) has had two goes already.

Jeremy Corbyn: My hon. Friend must be aware that in areas of high housing demand such as London, the six-month shorthold tenancy means that any tenant who has the temerity to complain about conditions to

the environmental health service, or anybody else, rapidly finds their tenancy terminated. They then become homeless or have to move some distance away. There must be proper protection for people who legitimately exercise their right to complain.

Mr Betts: Yes, and the Government are consulting on retaliatory evictions as part of their consultation document, which is to be welcomed. One other issue that the Committee report dealt with that we must consider is how to encourage longer term tenancies. Families in particular want greater security. They may not want to be in the private rented sector, but if they are there and have a property they like, they probably want to be there for five years rather than six months. Considering how we can change the culture—that is what it is, as much as anything else—to get landlords and tenants to understand that there are possibilities within the framework of the existing assured shorthold tenancy for a tenancy longer than six months or a year, is a step forward. We must also consider how to get letting agents to recognise that they should be advising on that—letting agents often have a vested interest in regular reviews of tenants and tenancies because they make a profit and receive a fee every time they do it.

We must also deal with the fact that many lenders prevent landlords from having a tenancy of more than a year. Nationwide is now, I think, prepared to accept a three-year tenancy, which is a good step forward, and the Government are trying to bring lenders together to try to make that change happen. I entirely accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North about retaliatory evictions when tenants complain. However, if landlords are to accept a tenancy period of three or even five years, they must have a way of getting the tenant out, rather than waiting until the end of the tenancy period. Shelter has accepted this and the Government have established a working party on it. That is being looked at as a *quid pro quo*. Shelter accepts that; it is not only landlords associations that have been pressing for it.

Graham Jones: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Betts: I will let my hon. Friend intervene one more time, and then I must try to bring my remarks to a conclusion.

Graham Jones: My hon. Friend made the point that landlord licensing is seen as a panacea, and the sound point that licensing applies to landlords and not properties. It is thought that that panacea will deal with rogue landlords, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr Love) has suggested, there is the question of property and stock conditions in both high and low-demand areas. Is there not a case for extending landlord licensing to include stock condition and other criteria to deal with those problems?

Mr Betts: The Committee called for more flexibility in licensing—perhaps that covers my hon. Friend's point.

The Committee recognises the need for more powers and action in one or two other areas to improve standards. We call for the possibility of fixed-penalty notices, so that local authorities can deal with less serious offences at relatively low cost. The Government are consulting on the range of measures that should be available. We also say that, when a landlord lets a property in an unfit

condition and is prosecuted, it should be possible to claw back any housing benefit paid or any rent paid by an individual. We are pleased that the Government are consulting on that proposal.

One additional matter that the Committee did not get into—we might have a look at it in the autumn—is what happens when landlords are taken to court. That goes back to the fact that authorities are strapped for cash, as many are, and have limited resources. If a landlord is found guilty, the court should award the authority the full cost of the action. Sheffield, my local authority, advised me the other day that it has brought five successful prosecutions of landlords in recent months. On each occasion, it has not been given its costs back—it got back roughly 50% of its costs in total. That is not acceptable. We ought to put pressure on the courts—perhaps the Minister's colleagues in the Ministry of Justice could do this—to recognise that, when effective action costs money and the landlord is found to be responsible for and guilty of an offence, the costs should be returned to the authorities.

Finally, there are two other points. On letting agents—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. I am sorry to stop the hon. Gentleman mid-flow, but he has been speaking for quite a long time, and lots of other hon. Members want to speak. I hope his two points are brief ones.

Mr Betts: Yes. On letting agents, the Committee is pleased to see a lot of demand for regulation. We are pleased that the Government are introducing a redress scheme, but are disappointed that the code of practice backing it up will not be mandatory. There ought to be more Government action on the lack of transparency in relation to fees charged by letting agents. They should not leave it to the current legislation, which needs tightening.

Finally, on rents—this point has already been made—the Committee are not in favour of rent control. We believe that introducing rent controls is a blunt instrument that is more likely to curtail investment in the sector. Things should probably be done on local housing allowances, which could sometimes artificially inflate rents. There was evidence from Blackpool on that.

To summarise, the Committee is pleased with many of the Government's responses. We have concerns on the points I have made and are looking forward to Government action. The Committee will monitor that and look to the Government's proposals to stimulate extra building in the private rented sector and other sectors to deal with the real problem in housing: the shortage of supply.

5.13 pm

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), the Chairman of the Communities and Local Government Committee. I have much sympathy with many of his points, but I welcome his generous and well deserved tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk). I am delighted to see him in the Chamber. He did a great deal in the sector in his time as a Minister and his work is appreciated on both sides of the House.

[Robert Neill]

I declare an interest—it is in the register—as owner of a single property that I let out. That puts me in the same position as many private landlords, the vast majority of whom have a small property portfolio—it is generally fewer than 10 properties. I am also interested in the debate as a London MP. The private sector is particularly important in London, where housing costs are acute. I will then deal with the last point made by the Committee Chairman, which is on recommendation 30 of the report, on rents and affordability. I welcome the Select Committee's view that rent control is not the answer, and I also welcome its view that what is really important is increasing supply. That is certainly critical to us in London.

The Government have taken commendable steps. The establishment of the Build to Rent fund, along with the raising of that fund to £1 billion, is a tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford, and to the continuing work of his successor, the current Minister. The £10 billion in loan guarantees for the building of homes specifically for private rent is another important step. So the Government are doing a great deal, but we should be prepared to think outside the box and think about other, more imaginative ways of leveraging private as well as public money into the private rented sector.

We all know that it is important for us to produce not just good-quality homes—and the quality of private rental stock is variable—but homes that will give people a degree of stability. An interesting comment was made in the pre-Budget submission by the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which pointed out that a lack of affordable housing for rent in the private rented sector, and the difficulty experienced by many people—including many young professionals in London—in moving into market housing are increasingly presenting a potential bar to London's economic competitiveness. It quoted a designer in London—very sensibly, I think; after all, the creative industries are an important part of the economy—who said:

“When my employees see their rents shoot up, they come to me for a pay rise that I can't afford to give them. This means I am always at risk of losing my most talented and experienced staff.”

I think that many London business people will recognise his problem.

Jeremy Corbyn: I, too, represent a London constituency. Rent levels in the private sector are rising astronomically all the time, out of all proportion to the value of the properties involved. Does the hon. Gentleman not think that the solution must be a rent regulation scheme of some kind, possibly beginning in London? Would that not stabilise the situation, and enable us to retain the diversity and population of our city?

Robert Neill: Although I agree with the hon. Gentleman about rents rising in London, I do not agree with his conclusion. I do not believe that trying to manipulate the market in the way that he suggests can be a long-term solution to the problem.

Mr Prisk: My hon. Friend has rightly drawn attention to the role of individual landlords, but the key element of the Government's present strategy is encouraging institutional investors, not dissimilar to those in Germany.

Does he agree that that is the best way in which we could increase supply, choice, quality and indeed the longevity of terms in the manner he has described?

Robert Neill: My hon. Friend is entirely right. That is the main point that I wanted to make in my speech. It is precisely because there have not been funding models to attract institutional investment that money has not been invested for long enough periods to underwrite the longer-term, more stable tenancy arrangements that we would all like to see. I think that what has been done so far is an important step forward, but it is ironic that under Governments of both political persuasions we have lagged somewhat behind other countries when it comes to leveraging institutional money into the private rented sector. REITs—real estate investment trusts—have never taken off in this country as they have in many others, and I think that that is a shame. Some adjustments to the fiscal treatment of those vehicles would be helpful.

Mr Love: The biggest barrier to institutional investment in the private rented sector is the image of the private rented sector. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need to address that problem before the sector can attract any institutional investment?

Robert Neill: I think that this is a classic case of “It is not an either/or scenario”. We certainly need to take steps to improve the image of the sector, which I believe is often unfairly castigated. A good deal of action is suggested in the report, and I would probably agree with the hon. Gentleman on some helpful steps that we could take. However, I think that we must do that in parallel with creating mechanisms that will bring in the institutional money. The two go hand in glove: they are two sides of the same strategy that we should be adopting.

I want to say a little about what we could do to improve institutional investment in the private rented sector. There are obstacles, and this brings us back to the point made by the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). In some cases land for private sale may be worth more than land for long-term rental. There are issues with speculative costing and valuation methods. We also need to look at whether there is some scope for using the private rented sector to create an income stream that could generate a source of cross-subsidy for affordable housing units, particularly in regeneration schemes, as rents rise. The current models we have tend to put the subsidy at the beginning of the system, in effect through the planning gain being taken out with the consequence that the landowner takes a lesser price on the sale or the market housing will be inflated a little to pay for the subsidy that comes via section 106 or the planning gain.

That does not help in respect of the longer term funding streams we would like to see, however, and I hope the Minister will think about the following. I recently had the opportunity to talk with representatives of the New Economics Foundation. They have been doing some very interesting work in this field, and I commend the work in particular of Alicia Weston who has been doing some very interesting research. They have come up with a model that merits further consideration. It is a model for a defined income scheme that is designed to bring forward more rented housing. It allows private rental incomes to subsidise the rents of affordable units on a

rolling basis and therefore gives the ability to have a long-term income flow. Indeed, it almost gives a bond that can be available to back up the investment.

The housing that is created stays in the rented sector for the life of the scheme. One cannot guarantee beyond that, but that would none the less give valuable supply increases. A new form of contract would be required, which would be perfectly doable within current English law, between the local authority and the housing association, so that rather than setting a specified level of affordable housing on the site, the allowable income from the site is what is set. That income is made up of a combination of market and affordable rents and their levels are allowed to flex in order to make up the defined income. Provided there is the income, which is guaranteed and is therefore a quasi-bond, there is the stream to cross-subsidise. Under those circumstances, if market rents were to rise, as they have in London recently, the excess income would cross-subsidise more affordable housing. Conversely, if there is a revenue shortfall some affordable units can be switched to market rent, but the integrity of the income stream is preserved, and therefore the integrity of the investment model. That will give local authorities a semi-guaranteed stream that is not guaranteed by the public purse, but which creates something almost as good as a bond. I hope the Minister will look seriously at that. There are some practical issues that we will need to deal with, but pilot schemes are being considered around the country and I hope the Department will give schemes such as this one a fair wind.

There is an advantage for housing associations there, too, because that more stable income stream is worth more to them and the increase in value will allow them to subsidise more housing or to unlock further sites and land for rented housing, either using a mix of the private rented sector or just affordable. This also encourages housing associations into the private rented sector, co-operating with institutional money, which might be an interesting approach to pursue.

If applied sensibly, this scheme could lead to increased institutional investment in the private rented sector. I hope the Minister will look at that and encourage it. That can be done in respect of the whole scheme or simply the section 106 element. There is a degree of flexibility. I do not pretend it is a silver bullet, but we do need to think outside the box in leveraging in institutional money. There are a number of possible routes, and I think this particular one may be very timely.

Overall, a healthy private rented sector is an important part of the housing mix, especially in large cities such as London, where the nature of the population frequently means that for a period of their lives people may well want the flexibility of living in the private sector before moving on to house purchase. They are likely to be earning incomes that mean they would never qualify for social rented housing, but they cannot at the moment access the market readily. Finding models that produce adequate housing supply for people in that situation is crucial for the health of London, my city, and of all the major conurbations in this country. So I hope the Minister will think about that as a model that is worth pursuing and that this report will generally find favour with the House. I also commend the Government's response to it, which is a constructive one.

Jake Berry: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In my previous intervention I failed to draw the House's attention to my declaration of interest, so I just want to set the record straight.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Thank you, Mr Berry. That is clearly now on the record and is therefore in order.

We now come to Mr Mike Kane's maiden speech, to which the normal conventions of the House apply.

5.25 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It was one of my predecessors, Alf Morris, who recruited me to public life. He said in his maiden speech that

"it was Aristotle who held it to be the essence of probability that some improbable things will happen."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1964; Vol. 701, c. 1280.]

And here I find myself, as only the fourth elected Member for the Wythenshawe and, now, Wythenshawe and Sale East constituency.

I must from the outset acknowledge the role played by the Prime Minister in my success. In a rather heated exchange at Prime Minister's questions before the by-election, he and the Leader of the Opposition clashed over my candidature in the election. I want to place on record my thanks to the Prime Minister for the ensuing publicity in Manchester, helping Labour to secure one of the highest ever shares of the vote in the history of the constituency.

I want to thank the electors of Wythenshawe and Sale East for returning me here and many Members on both sides of this House for the welcome I have received since coming here. It will be a privilege to sit on these Benches as a Labour MP, following in the footsteps of Keir Hardie, who created the party 114 years ago and is a hero of mine. It filled me with immense pride to welcome the leader of the Labour party, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), to the constituency twice in recent weeks.

I wish to pay tribute to my predecessors. In November 1950, the first MP for Wythenshawe, Eveline Hill, a Conservative, won the ballot for a private Member's Bill and introduced the Deserted Wives Bill, which would have given security of tenure to women who had been deserted by their husbands after the war. Without enough votes, the Bill fell. In 1952, she, along with two female colleagues, wrote to *The Times* urging Conservative associations to adopt more women to help secure more progressive legislation—60 years later it would seem that the advice still applies.

I mentioned Aristotle at the top of my speech, and it is often an Aristotelian confluence of events that brings any of us to this place—in my case, they were events that no one from any part of this House would have wished for. Paul Goggins was an extraordinarily dedicated public servant, and was loved and respected by all in this Chamber. He was a friend to many in this place, including to me and my wife Sandra. Justice and peace were his driving passions, and his ministerial work in the Home Office and Northern Ireland reflected that. His work with the victims of contaminated blood products and asbestos-related diseases was an extension of Alf Morris's work in helping people who were chronically sick and disabled. As I walk these corridors, I am being

[Mike Kane]

constantly told that I have big shoes to fill, and it is true—I do. However, I know that in one area at least, our shared and abiding passion for Manchester City football club, I will not let him down.

Paul believed in the Augustinian notion of the world as it is and the world as it should be. He believed that we should strive on all sides, despite the tensions we face in this place and in this country, to create a better world. Such tensions currently include: the bedroom tax—or spare room subsidy; welfare reform; how to create a stronger economy; and the worrying situations we face in Syria and Ukraine. We cannot create that better world together without those tensions, and where better to do that from than the House of Commons, which has been the world's leading instrument of revolutionary but peaceful societal change.

I am proud to have been born in the constituency, to have lived in the constituency all my life and to have taught in the constituency. Now I am proud to represent the constituency. If we are to ensure that Wythenshawe and Sale East is to continue as a thriving place in which to live and work, supporting our transport infrastructure will be critical. The country's first municipal airport, Manchester, lies within the boundaries of the constituency. Granted a licence in 1929, it was established in 1933 by the Manchester city council by just one vote—56 to 55. Now it is one of the biggest drivers of the economy in northern England.

Light rail is critical to the constituency. There is a long-established line through Sale and a route in development through Wythenshawe to Manchester airport. Heavy rail is also critical, with the establishment and growth of the rail hub at Manchester airport. Unfortunately, we still have no railway station on the Stockport to Chester line that passes through the constituency. We look forward to welcoming High Speed 2 and its station in Wythenshawe at some stage in the future.

Speaking of HS2, Edward Watkin, who was a Member of this place in the 19th century and a resident in Northenden in my constituency, oversaw the construction of the great central main line, a purpose-built high-speed railway line of its day; and also oversaw a failed attempt to dig a channel tunnel under the English channel to connect his railway empire to the French rail network. That vision was realised only 100 years later, but as Disraeli said 200 years ago:

“What Manchester does today the rest of the world does tomorrow.”

More unusual routes through the constituency include the trans-Pennine trail, a cycling and walking route along the banks of the River Mersey, an off-road intercontinental route from Hull to Liverpool in the UK, and a route from Galway to Istanbul across the rest of the continent. The Bridgewater canal is also highly significant. Built by the Duke of Bridgewater in 1761, it brought coal to power the industrial revolution in Manchester, which changed the world.

To create that better world that we all want to see, we must continue to champion the people whom we represent, to listen to their stories and to help them build their own power through strong relationships and action. Eveline Hill believed in a better world in which deserted

wives would have greater rights and in which there would be more representation and diversity in this Chamber.

Alf Morris believed in a better world for people who were chronically sick and disabled. He successfully introduced a ground-breaking private Member's Bill in 1970, recognising their rights to lead a life of dignity and worth. Likewise, Paul Goggins believed in that better world for people with HIV and hepatitis C infection from contaminated blood products and for asbestos victims.

As the son of Irish immigrants, I am proud to serve in this legislature. My parents strived for a better world. I remember at the age of 10 being rehoused in an affordable three-bedroom council house. I saw how that lifted their spirits. I envision a world where all people can have a home, regardless of their status, that lifts their spirits and does not sap their energy; where people can access the job of their choosing and be treated with respect and dignity in the workplace; where more people are paid a living wage and are free from the tyranny of the loan sharks and where people have access to fair credit.

The primary purpose of our leadership in this place must be to create more leaders, not followers. St Paul in his letter to the Ephesians implores us all to lead a life worthy of our calling. I hope to do so.

5.34 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is an honour and a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane). I think that I speak on behalf of the whole House when I say that his speech, which was his first from the Opposition Benches, was both witty and excellent. I am sure that those on the Government Benches join me in wishing him many happy years—on the Opposition Benches.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the debate, which has been led so well by the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), who is an excellent Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee. He guided the production of last year's report and, indeed, our reply to the Government's response. I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

There are some 9 million people in the private rented sector. As we have heard, that sector is now larger than the social rented sector and, in many years, it will catch up with the so-called owner-occupier sector. Those who talk about owner-occupation should remember that most people who buy a house do not actually own it. They have borrowed the money to buy the house, but it will be 25 or 30 years until they can say that they own the property in which they live.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I do not want to distract my hon. Friend from his speech, but may I bring to the House's attention recommendation 37 of the report, which deals with data quality? It cannot be found in any of the English housing statistics the proportion of homes that are leasehold, which is something that gives rise to a whole set of problems. Martin Boyd of the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership estimates that the number is 5 million, but those homes do not get much attention, so perhaps the Select Committee will examine what more needs to be done in that area.

Bob Blackman: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and the Committee will have to examine that matter further.

In the borough that I have the privilege of representing, there are twice as many privately rented homes as there are properties owned by registered social landlords. That dwarfing of the social rented sector gives rise to a series of problems. In London, and especially the outer London suburbs, owners no longer sell properties, but vacate them and rent them out privately. The properties are often rented as houses in multiple occupation, but without them being registered as such, which creates the problem that many single individuals are renting properties collectively. Such people are often young men from eastern Europe who live together in one big house. There are many properties in which beds are rented out for eight hours a day, meaning that three individuals will occupy one bed in a room in sequence when they are not fulfilling their jobs and roles in society.

The HMOs in this country that are registered are few and far between, so I want the Government to put in place much more stringent registration requirements for HMOs. There are only 89 registered HMOs in my borough, but I could take Members to a single ward in Harrow in which there are more than 89, but they are unregistered, and therefore unlicensed and unregulated. As the report shows, we clearly need to deal with the problem of standards, and the Government need to take more action on the registration and regulation of HMOs.

That takes me on to the problem of beds in sheds, because the fact is that unscrupulous individuals are using relatively high rents and high demand for housing—throughout the country, but especially in London—to force people to live in substandard accommodation. I made a long speech about the private rented sector in the pre-Christmas recess debate. I will not repeat some of the points I made about the condition of properties and the problems in the sector, but I commend what Slough council did to draw up a heat map of its borough to ascertain the number of properties in which it was likely that there were bed in sheds. My own borough, Harrow, was not given Government money for the purpose but has just done a heat map of the area. We discovered 329 properties with buildings outlying or adjacent to the main house that are occupied. I am told that, as a result of the exercise, the police have also found a number of cannabis farms, which are another threat, not only because the domestic properties in question are no longer available to rent, but because cannabis farms lead to illegal trade. Clearly we need much stronger government intervention and much stronger Government support for local authorities to ascertain all the unscrupulous landlords who are not registered with anyone, but who are cramming people into substandard accommodation and ripping them off in the rent they charge.

During the debate, we have heard about the problems caused by the lack of stock, but we should be clear: it is a scandal that the last Labour Government presided over the lowest level of housing development since the 1920s. The reality is that planning permission was granted for relatively few properties and, sure enough, few properties have been completed in the past three years because of the lack of investment and the failure of the Labour Government to make it happen. I commend my the

Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Kris Hopkins), and his predecessors for taking action to encourage new housing development, which will lead directly to improvements not only in the private rented sector but in all sectors of the housing market.

During the stages of producing our report, the Committee looked at evidence from a wide variety of sources. One of the concerns expressed was about the regulation of managing agents, and I want to draw out the absolute scandal of the charges that unscrupulous managing agents levy not only on landlords but on applicants for rental properties. Frequently those charges are excessive, going beyond reasonable costs, and are levied multiple times, as the agents charge both the landlord and potential tenants. For example, we heard evidence of hundreds of pounds being charged for credit checks that, broadly speaking, would cost between £8 and £10 to conduct. That is a scandal. There is a need for clarification and more regulation in that regard.

In certain areas, the bureaucracy involved in registering is also a problem. The borough of Newham has introduced a policy of registering every single private rented property and requires landlords to fill out the same complicated form for every single property they rent out. The Select Committee has not yet had a proper answer from the Government about whether that is actually a requirement. I would welcome the Minister stating his view, not necessarily at the Dispatch Box tonight but in the future, that people do not need to do that. If the landlord in question is a large-scale, reputable landlord, the simple fact of registering their ownership of a property in the borough should be sufficient, but there is no reason why a small-scale landlord—one with, say, fewer than 10 properties—should not fill in the necessary forms and register properly, because it will need to be checked and verified that they are acting in a particular way.

I remind colleagues that for most landlords in the private rented sector, the yield on capital employed is in the order of 3% or 4%. Most people who rent out property privately are not necessarily doing it for the income—the review—they gain, but for capital growth. At present, interest rates are historically low.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman says. Where a former council property, which has often been bought with a very large discount historically, is let out at five or six times the rent charged by the appropriate local authority, that bears no relationship whatever to the capital employed and, frankly, is just plain greed.

Bob Blackman: Clearly there are issues around where there is greed and where there is not. I am coming to a particular issue that is of importance to the sector.

Given that the yield is relatively low—an average of 3% to 4% is true across London and may be true across the rest of the country as well—and given that that money can be borrowed at perhaps 3% or 3.5%, a single half of a percentage point increase in the Bank base rate would lead to an increase of almost 20% increase in the amount of money people are paying their lenders for their mortgages. Think of the effect of that on rents. Given that the yield is only 3%, imagine if there were a 20% or 25% increase in what landlords must pay in interest rates for their mortgages. The effect of that

[Bob Blackman]

would be enormous on the price of rents. It would have a knock-on effect on the housing benefit bill because, in many cases, housing benefit is paid to those in low-paid jobs, particularly in areas of London. That will be a clear concern in the coming weeks and months.

One of the things that I would stress—it is important that we send out this message—is that it is vital that we have a Government who continue to bear down on interest rates and maintain reducing the deficit as key. That is one of the reasons why we cannot let the Opposition have any say in Government or on housing policy.

The final issue that I want to raise briefly is the key issue of the length of tenancy that applies. One of the key issues from our report was that we should have longer tenancies and more settled arrangements for families with children in schools who are building up a community of interest, rather than potentially having families being evicted after a six-month shorthold tenancy. However, that must go hand in glove with the ability of landlords to be able to evict tenants who do not pay their rent or who badly misbehave. That has to be one of the things where we will need intervention. We need the Government to take action to promote longer tenancies, and we need more responsibility from landlords and from tenants. We then need applicable rates where rents will rise with inflation so the position is more flexible for everyone in the housing market. We need lenders to recognise that longer tenancies are to their benefit, and to the benefit of their borrowers and of the people who reside in the properties.

Landlords will always say that a good tenant is worth keeping and worth keeping happy. A good tenant will say that they are happy in a property, that they want to stay and that they want a long-term relationship with the landlord. Bad tenants who do not pay their rent or who misbehave or cause antisocial behaviour clearly need to be evicted, and quickly, at the lowest possible cost to the landlord. If we can get some answers from the Minister tonight on those issues, that will be of great help to the sector and the rest of the market.

Finally, we have to be clear that this is a market. If we intervene in a market, it can have untold consequences and possibly consequences that one was not anticipating. This is one of the areas where we have to proceed carefully because we do not want to distort a market and cause further problems. With certain targeted interventions comes the potential for improving the market and for improving the lot of tenants and landlords combined.

5.49 pm

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): I join the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) on his maiden speech, which I thoroughly enjoyed—it certainly made me laugh. I wish him well as he tries to follow in the steps of St Paul. I do not mean Paul Goggins, although for many of us he was a bit of a saint, but St Paul of the Bible, who took on many people in government before his premature demise.

I worry that I am treading on old ground when I say that we are currently in the midst of the biggest housing emergency in a generation, but it is worth repeating that

we continue to build less than half the number of homes we need to keep up with demand, if only to hammer home the severity and scale of the problem. All the while, private landlords, many of whom leave much to be desired in the caring and service department, continue to hike rents, often at the expense of the taxpayer, who has to foot the bill for many people forced by the failures of Government to claim housing benefit.

I am therefore pleased to welcome the Communities and Local Government Committee's report and its conclusions, which cover: simplifying the law; promoting rights and responsibilities; proper enforcement powers for local authorities; better regulation; a crackdown on unfair charges; longer and more secure tenancies; and a renewed effort to boost housing supply in order to increase choice, quality and affordability.

Sadly, I cannot say the same for the Secretary of State's response. He writes of burdensome red tape hampering private landlords, proportionate regulation that will let them off the hook and measures that will give tenants the know-how to demand longer-term tenancies, stable rents and better quality accommodation, to avoid hidden fees when renting a home and to demand better standards, but all without any real requirement on landlords to agree. He also writes of the "small number of rogue landlords"

who need to be dealt with, and optional model tenancy agreements that no one needs to adopt. It is not exactly a charter for the sector—certainly not for tenants. I welcome the funds to encourage more people to build new properties for rent and the compulsory redress scheme, although it is not clear how vulnerable tenants will take on the might of landlords.

However, none of that will deliver the house building revolution we need. A great concern is that the housing crisis is not a problem that exists in isolation—quite the opposite. A failure to build is but one link in a chain reaction that is having damaging effects for many people. With housing costs increasing, real wages falling and energy bills rocketing, not to mention the other bills that we must all factor into the cost of living, the chronic shortfall in building is driving that crisis.

Hard-working people across the country are being left unable to afford the homes they need. The average home now costs eight times the average wage. It took just three years for an average family to save for a deposit on a home in 1997, but today it will take the same family 22 years, if they are able to do so. But the number of affordable homes built over the past year dropped by more than a quarter.

As I sit on the bus each evening going to my Battersea flat, I am amazed by the number of apartments being built along Battersea Park road, each a tiny box costing several hundred thousand pounds. On behalf of the people of north-east England, I envy London the thousands of jobs and—in this apprenticeship week—the hundreds of apprenticeships that have been generated on those sites. It is just a shame that the vast majority of Londoners will never be able to buy and live in those apartments and will have to rely on the private rented sector instead. I could advise those people to move north, even to my constituency, where they will be able to secure a family home for a fraction of the cost of some of the box-sized apartments in London. The cost of living and quality of life is better, too. But why would I advise them to move

to a region starved of housing investment, despite the efforts of our local authorities, and where unemployment continues to rise in most parts?

I would offer a solution. The Government could work to restore the north-east by encouraging some of the multi-million pound investment in housing and industry we see in the south-east to move north. Do that and build on the region's successes, which include being a huge exporter of manufactured goods, including petrochemicals, steel, cars and a whole range of other goods. If houses could be delivered across the north-east at just a fraction of the rate in the south, we could have our own boom time.

What is most alarming about the shift away from home ownership is the simultaneous shortage of affordable and social housing. That extends far beyond the scarcity of one-bedroom properties that is blighting the socially rented sector as a result of this Government's malicious bedroom tax and reaches past the confines of London, where rents are increasing by as much as 10% a year. Across England, 5 million people are on local authority waiting lists for social housing. As a result, the private rented sector plays and will continue to play an important role in meeting our housing needs. However, all too often private renting is unaffordable, unstable and subject to poor conditions and bad management.

The recent English housing survey for 2012-13 has shown that, for the first time, the private rented sector has grown larger than the social housing sector, with 4 million households compared with 3.7 million. The trend towards growth in the private rented sector is self-reinforcing, driven by the combination of factors that confront aspiring buyers looking to get on the housing ladder. People want to buy, but cannot do so as little affordable housing is available. They cannot even save a deposit while renting because of the shortage of low-cost social housing. To make matters worse, that all comes at a time when real wages have fallen at a rate of 2.2% a year since 2010—the longest such period in half a century.

One of my primary concerns is that so many homes in the private rented sector continue to fail to meet the decent homes standard. Although the number of houses in all sectors failing to meet the required standard has fallen in recent years, one in five households—almost 5 million properties across the country—are still substandard. In the private rented sector, however, a third of all properties fail to live up to the expected benchmark, the highest proportion of non-decent homes in any sector.

Some in the private rented sector would have us believe that they have been cleaning up their act, as the proportion of private rented sector homes classed as non-decent has fallen from 47% in 2006 to 33% in 2012. That is all very well, but that statistic conceals the fact that the absolute number of non-decent dwellings did not decrease over the period. Private landlords could take a lesson from the social rented sector, just 15% of whose properties miss the decent homes standard—although that, of course, is 15% too many.

Proportionally, roughly three times as many homes in the private rented sector failed to meet the decent homes standard as a consequence of disrepair or poor thermal comfort—two key indicators of housing quality—compared with the social rented sector. Private landlords

could learn much from my own Stockton-on-Tees borough council's work on insulating hard-to-heat private properties; Tristar Homes is doing the same in the social sector.

There is a broad consensus that the reputation of responsible landlords in the private sector is being undermined by a minority of criminal landlords who deliberately prey on the vulnerable, but there are problems that we cannot overlook and sweep under the carpet. There are the "couldn't care less" landlords, the absent landlords and the anonymous landlords who are happy to take the rent but do nothing for their tenants. Some let properties to anyone prepared to pay, and in some areas create misery for neighbours and the wider community.

Just a week ago, a distressed woman was in tears in my surgery after years of trouble from one set of aggressive and noisy tenants after another, placed next door to her by a landlord who takes no responsibility whatever. The situation is all too common. We know that when standards reach unacceptable levels, regulatory and enforcement tools are available to local authorities. However, using those tools is often a last resort, partly because of regulatory red tape, meaning that poor standards can persist for too long.

Yet of the 4 million households in the private rented sector, 25% received housing benefit in 2012-13 to help with the rent, up from 19% in 2008-09, as wage values drop, low paid part-time jobs replace well paid full-time ones and people are forced to fall back on the state. That means that the Government are, in effect, increasing subsidies for low quality homes. That would rightly be considered a scandal at any time—even more so when the money could be used to boost house building in the social rented sector and benefit some of the millions of people in need of high quality affordable homes.

Over the past three decades, in excess of 1 million council properties have been sold through the right-to-buy policy and its variants. About a third of the ex-council homes sold in the 1980s are now owned by private landlords charging rents more often than not staggeringly higher than rents in the social sector. In the social rented sector, the average household rent in 2012-13 was £89 a week, while the equivalent figure for the private rented sector stood at £163, a difference of £74 a week. In some local authority areas in the north-east, as many as 72% of those in the private rented sector are entitled to rent support through housing benefit. With 80,000 households renting private accommodation entitled to housing benefit across the north-east region, private companies are benefiting massively from the welfare system. For example, Stockton Flats has taken more than £1.7 million from councils throughout the north-east, the north-west and north Yorkshire, including £775,000 from Stockton-on-Tees and £260,000 from Redcar and Cleveland. Similarly, Castledene Property Management has benefited hugely from Durham and Newcastle councils.

Mr Speaker: Order. There is no formal time limit on Back-Bench speeches, but I am cautiously optimistic that the hon. Gentleman is approaching his concluding comments, a point that I make in the light that other hon. Members—four to be precise—wish to speak. I know that the hon. Gentleman is considerate of his colleagues and is approaching his conclusion—not his end, but his conclusion.

Alex Cunningham: I am grateful, Mr Speaker. I have a few paragraphs to go.

[Alex Cunningham]

The companies that act as private landlords are reaping the rewards of the housing crisis that is afflicting so many people in Britain, and driving growth in the buy-to-let market while stifling the building of the affordable and social homes that so many hard-working people want and need.

I will cut short my comments, Mr Speaker. I will simply say that the report from the Communities and Local Government Committee offered the Government robust recommendations, and I am saddened that the Secretary of State is not giving them much credit.

Mr Speaker: Splendid. The hon. Gentleman may have had a few paragraphs left, but they were short, which is encouraging.

6.1 pm

Stephen Gilbert (St Austell and Newquay) (LD): I extend a warm welcome from the Liberal Democrat Benches to the new hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) and congratulate him on his maiden speech. When I made mine years ago, it was terrifying. The hon. Gentleman acquitted himself admirably, as I am sure he will continue to do over the next 12 months. He said a lot about Aristotle, who said:

“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.”

I think you will agree, Mr Speaker, that that is what we often do in this place when we listen to one another speaking across the divide.

It is clear that over the last 30 years, housing in this country has changed dramatically. The country has moved away from the high level of social tenancies that used to dominate the landscape. Now, more than 8.5 million people live in private rented accommodation. Many of the people I speak to most weekends at my advice surgeries dream of owning their own home. That dream has been handed down through generations, and it helps to create a stable family life and a meaningful existence. We cannot build a big society if we do not have roots in the society and the community in which we live. People who are subject to the transient churn of the private rented sector all too often fail to grip the community around them and engage positively with it.

People’s dreams of owning their own home are becoming harder to realise. The average age of a first-time buyer is rising, and is now 37, the size of deposit required to buy a home is ever higher, and bank lending has become more stringent in recent years. When ever-increasing house prices, due to shortage of supply and high demand, are factored in, a significant part of society may never be able to own the home to which they aspire, or will struggle for decades to do so. For them, the private rented sector is the only realistic option.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): I am sure my hon. Friend will explain how the issue affects his rural constituency. Will he acknowledge that it is a problem not only in the large urban stretches of London, but in smaller cities such as Norwich?

Stephen Gilbert: My hon. Friend is exactly right. The problem is not restricted to one part of our country, but is a national housing crisis. I consider myself to be a

fairly astute observer of politics from time to time—perhaps on high days and holidays—but I fail to understand why the issue is not higher up the political agenda. The House is reasonably well attended today, but election after election passes without housing achieving the penetration of public consciousness that it deserves. A generation is frozen out of the housing market, millions of people are on waiting lists for social housing, and, as the hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) said, millions more are living in inappropriate conditions in the private rented sector. There will be a moment at which housing bursts through, and when that happens I suspect that whichever party is best able to capitalise on the public anger will be rewarded at the ballot box.

The private rented sector sees a huge turnover and is inherently unstable. In my view—I share the analysis of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman)—that is partly because of the nature of the short-term tenancy arrangements within the sector. Often agreements will be for six months, or 12 months if you are lucky. Almost inevitably, there will be annual rent increases that are above inflation or above the retail prices index or the consumer prices index. As the hon. Member for Stockton North said, there is a failure by landlords to invest. This often creates a churn in the private rented sector that is undesirable for the people who are in it and for landlords, as well as for our wider communities.

We should not make the mistake of thinking that all the people who are renting are students or young people. In fact, half of all private renters are over 35 and a third are families. Moving is not always desirable for people who are trying to create deep links with local schools and other links with local communities, and it is our job as Members of this House to recognise that. The housing charity Shelter, which does excellent work across the piece but particularly on this issue, says that two thirds of renters in England want the option to stay in their properties for longer periods, and eight out of 10 want to know that they are not subject to the annual unpredictability of rent rises. This shows that the private rented sector is not fluid because of consumer choice; it is not what the individuals who are renting want to happen. They are victims of the market who are concerned about punitive rent increases and the motives of their landlords.

I fully endorse the suggestion by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East that the Government need to bring forward measures on longer-term tenancies that will benefit property owners and renters. The Government should make overcoming the inherent short-termism that is built into the system a priority.

6.7 pm

Frank Dobson (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I commend the speech by my new hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), who represents the great city of Manchester. He is one of the few people who could survive a headline saying “New MP for Sale” without being investigated by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. I congratulate him on the wit and intellect that he used in his maiden speech, and on the tributes that he paid to his predecessors. One characteristic of both Alf Morris and Paul Goggins was that they commanded rather a lot of respect and affection on both sides of the House. That is a trick that

most of us have not pulled off over the years, I have to say, and I hope he manages it. I pay tribute to some of the work that got him here, including his work on promoting a living wage and on trying to undermine and replace the loan sharks who batten on a lot of poorer people. I am sure that he is very welcome in the House.

I welcome the report by the Select Committee and commend the hard work that it has put in, but I am afraid that I do not think it goes anything like far enough in dealing with the problems of the private rented sector in London. Londoners are being priced out of London, and young Londoners are suffering most. Whether they are seeking to buy or to rent somewhere to live, all the options are being taken out of the reach of ordinary people. Over the years, housing policy in London has been a failure, and there is now a housing crisis the like of which I cannot remember in all the time that I have been involved in local politics.

When I first became an MP, I knew that a nurse at Great Ormond Street or University College hospital would not be able to afford to live in the area. Over the years I realised that, increasingly, junior doctors would not be able to afford to live in the area surrounding those two great hospitals. It has now reached the stage where a new specialist consultant can no longer afford to live in the area, which is a ludicrous and damaging situation.

Younger people who are starting careers and who want to start a family and to find a place to live are being pushed out by house prices and rents that have been rising out of hand. The badly off have been hammered and the situation in London is such that—these are official figures—the average weekly rent now exceeds 50% of the average weekly pay. It is not just the badly off who are being driven out; it is people on middling incomes and young professionals who are hoping to start a career. They certainly cannot afford to buy and increasingly they cannot afford to rent.

In the past few years, private rents have gone utterly mad. It is not just me who is saying that. A recent headline in the *Evening Standard* stated: “Half Londoners fear they’ll be forced to leave neighbourhood: Housing costs in London ‘driving us out’”. A few days later the paper had a similar headline: “Rents rise 8 times faster than wages”. These are unsustainable increases.

The fact is that the private rental market is failing. It receives a £9 billion subsidy from the taxpayer—£9 billion of housing benefit goes to the private sector. It does not reside in the pockets and handbags of the tenants; it goes to the landlords.

The situation now is such that rents are going up, but the supply is going down. Another headline from the *Evening Standard* read: “‘Generation Rent’”—that is how young professional people are being referred to—“suffers in overheated market as housing supply slumps.” The idea that high, unregulated rents are bringing resources into the private sector is simply not true. Some argue that some sort of regulation or control might harm the supply, but it could not harm it any more than the free market is managing to do at the moment.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank my right hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour for giving way and I agree with everything he has said. Does he accept that what is

happening in our constituencies is, in effect, a form of social cleansing of those on housing benefit, who cannot afford to pay the gap between the benefit level and their rent and are thus forced to leave, which is damaging to all our communities, families and schools and to everything about London life?

Frank Dobson: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. I think I invented the phrase “social cleansing” and sometimes I refer to it as the lowland clearances, which might be of interest to our colleagues in Scotland.

A headline in *The Sunday Times* stated: “Buy-to-let returns top 10% a year: Investors piling into the market as yields soar”. The supply is not soaring, but the yields are and it is time we shifted the balance in favour of the tenants, with greater security, and longer tenancies. I believe that we cannot afford to avoid introducing rent controls. In fact, I would go further and say that there should be a progressive reduction in the level of some of the rents and that, in future, rent increases should be tied to wage levels.

We of course have the problem of the massive increase in house prices, which is a major factor in the rise in rents. One of the biggest factors is foreign buyers. Some of them buy property in London to live in, but they are a small minority, because most of them now buy residential property simply as an investment that they leave empty. To read another *Evening Standard* headline, “Super-rich from overseas flock to buy homes in London”. They do not intend to use them as homes; they are simply an investment that is better than putting their money in gold. They cause a double damage or blow to people in London: they drive up prices; and they take a lot of housing out of supply, because the places that they buy and do not occupy could otherwise be occupied by other people.

We cannot stop EU citizens buying residential property in this country, but we can stop other people doing so. The Government have established a precedent, because they have said that a private landlord must not let to a tenant who is not lawfully in the United Kingdom. I believe that we should change the law so that people cannot sell residential property to somebody who is not entitled to be in the United Kingdom. That would have a dampening effect on these massive rises in house prices.

As the Government are now scrambling around in contemplating sanctions against Russia, may I suggest that, as a pilot scheme, we quickly pass a law to prevent Russian oligarchs from buying houses and flats in this country unless they are entitled to live here, because all that happens is that landlords, estate agents and property companies are making money? They have contributed little or nothing to making London a better place to live. In the southern tip of my constituency, which includes Covent Garden, people—with their children or their parents—battled for years in the 1970s to prevent the wholesale destruction of Covent Garden and to preserve it as the great success that it has become, but they can no longer find anywhere in Covent Garden to live, because properties are bought up by other people, whether British bankers or foreign owners.

We also have the problem of Crossrail, which has cost £16 billion, most of which has come from the taxpayer. With a fanfare of trumpets, the people now running Crossrail have announced that some firm of valuers is predicting, again to quote the *Evening Standard*,

[Frank Dobson]

that “Crossrail ‘will boost property prices by up to 25 per cent’”. It has cost billions of pounds of taxpayers’ money, but someone else will benefit from the increase in property values.

In all I have said, I have been very careful to avoid mentioning any socialists, and I will now mention a very unsocialist person. He said:

“Do you think it would be very unfair if the owners of all this automatically created land value due to the...enterprise of the community...had been made to pay a proportion...of the unearned increment which they secured, back to...the community?”

That was Winston Churchill at the great Free Trade hall in the great city of Manchester in 1909. He was right then, and he is right now. My view is that if there is to be a massive increase in property values as a result of Crossrail—I have always supported Crossrail—the public should get some of it back.

I will quote somebody else:

“Both ground rents, and the ordinary rent...are a species of revenue, which the owner, in many cases, enjoys without any care or attention of his own. Though a part of this revenue should be taken from him in order to defray the expenses of the state, no discouragement will thereby be given to any sort of industry.”

He went on to suggest that rents are

“the species of revenue which can best bear to have a peculiar tax imposed upon them.”

That is what Adam Smith said in the “The Wealth of Nations”. If the Tories claim to be Churchillites or say that they support the Adam Smith Institute, it is about time that they adjusted some of their policies in line with what those distinguished people advocated.

It seems to me that there will be no prospect of ordinary folk continuing to afford somewhere decent to live in London until we introduce rent controls and reductions, introduce a tax on gratuitous increases in values accruing to landlords, and do something to stop the stinking rich foreigners buying up residential property in this country. When people talk about immigration, they say that there will be all sorts of burdens on the infrastructure. The suggestion seems to be that there will be such a burden only when poor people come here. The fact is that the people who are recruited by the City from abroad also want somewhere to live. They impose as great a burden on our housing stock as anyone else. I therefore think that we need a much more radical approach. That no doubt betrays me, yet again, as being not old Labour, but heritage Labour.

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Lab) *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I simply point out that the winding-up speeches from the Front Benches should begin at 6.40. I am sure that that leaves ample time for the observations of the hon. Members for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) and for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn).

6.22 pm

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Lab): I genuinely enjoyed the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane). I also enjoyed knocking on doors in his constituency a few weeks ago in the pouring rain. I am pleased to have helped him get into this place.

I am speaking in this debate because I am a member of the Communities and Local Government Committee, which conducted the inquiry, and because this issue is thoroughly important to my constituency as many of my constituents live in the private rented sector. This inquiry is one of the most interesting and important inquiries we have conducted because it relates to a large proportion of the British population. I enjoyed the inquiry and found it particularly informative. I will canter through three issues: simplifying the legislation, empowering local government and thinking about the long term.

The Chairman of the Committee mentioned the importance of regulating the private rented sector, as did others. He also mentioned that tenants, landlords, local authorities and everybody else who is involved in the sector find the legislation complicated. It adds to the costs, causes confusion and creates a lot of hassle for those who want to rent a house. I hope that the Government will review the legislation to make it clearer and simpler.

As the private rented sector is so large nowadays, there is an opportunity for the Government to conduct a public information campaign on how it relates to tenants and potential tenants. There are also issues with letting agents, as the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) and other Members pointed out. It is important that there is a breakdown of the fees that tenants are paying. There is a view that there should be a national licensing scheme, but although I agree that national guidelines could be useful, I think that is done better by local authorities. Local government needs the ability and flexibility to decide its own licensing schemes that are particular to the local housing area.

On localism, local authorities should be given more powers to tackle rogue landlords, but we should bear it in mind that there are also rogue tenants, as has been pointed out. There are 1.2 million landlords, many of whom could be described as accidental. The vast majority are good, but there are a few rogue landlords who treat people badly and prey on vulnerable people, particularly the old, students and immigrants. That needs addressing by giving local authorities greater powers to impose penalty charges and the chance to recoup costs.

Frank Dobson: Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to address the problem of people who cause a massive nuisance to their neighbours, because the present laws and practices are quite pathetic?

Simon Danczuk: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend, and there is an issue about rogue tenants, which is the point I am making. On unscrupulous landlords, my right hon. Friend mentioned the subsidy through housing benefit, and those rogue landlords are often receiving public money, using it badly, and treating their tenants badly. There is a need for greater powers for local authorities.

On the longer term prospects, I have two quick points. First, as the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) said, there is a real issue of people wanting longer term tenancies. The Government can do something to help and assist that, perhaps by looking more closely at Germany in creating longer term tenancies, particularly for families and those who want to stay in a location for a lot longer than they currently do. Finally, in the long term more broadly we need to start building more

homes. Whether this Government or the next get that under way—whichever party is in office—that is the key to this complex problem.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Jeremy Corbyn.

6.27 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was being distracted by my neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson), and expressing concern about his reading list.

Mr Speaker: Order. I thought he was talking about antisocial tenants a moment ago.

Frank Dobson: That is the problem you get with difficult neighbours.

Jeremy Corbyn: I was expressing concern about my Friend's reading list—Adam Smith and Winston Churchill—but he assured me, and he is quite right, that there was a radical tinge to Churchill who also introduced wages boards. There was also a radical tinge to Adam Smith, although he was grossly misrepresented by the far right of the Conservative party many decades later. We will not debate that.

I congratulate my Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) on his election and membership of this House, and on an absolutely superb opening speech. I have never heard anybody start with Aristotle. I hope he carries on in that philosophical mode. It was absolutely brilliant.

I will be brief, you will be pleased to hear, Mr Speaker, because those on the Front Benches wish to wind up the debate. Like my Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras, who has the neighbouring constituency, I represent inner London where the housing crisis is acute beyond belief. I hold regular advice bureaux, as all Members do, and my walk-in advice bureau on the third Friday of the month frequently lasts for anything from six to eight hours. The vast majority of the people who come have housing issues, and they are devastated by the situation they are in. They are often people who have been placed in the private rented sector by the local authority, which must house them because they are in desperate housing need and the family is in danger of homelessness, or has medical needs and so on. I do not blame the local authority for that. People's rent goes up, their housing benefit is capped, they cannot afford to meet the gap, and the only alternative for them is to be moved out of the area to a distant place. At the moment, my borough does not place people outside London, but I suspect it is only a matter of time before all London boroughs decant people outside London because they simply cannot find the private rented accommodation to house them. Schools are disrupted when families are moved out and the community is weakened. The flats are then rented to somebody at an even higher rent.

I am pleased that the Communities and Local Government Committee has decided to concentrate on the private rented sector. I agree with much in the report, including the regulation of letting agents, better conditions in the private rented sector, the guaranteed return of deposits, and the protection of tenants against unfair eviction because they have the temerity to complain to local environmental health services.

I would like those measures to be introduced, but we must address the elephant in the room—the rents levels in the private rented sector. In answer to a question from me yesterday, the Minister asserted that private rented sector rents in London are going up by 1.4% per year. I tested that out on a few people last night in my constituency. The answers ranged from, "Which planet is he living on?" to "Did he mean 1.4% per week?" There is a total disconnect between the figures the Department works on and the reality of life for people in the private rented sector.

Government Members say, "We cannot interfere with the market," but we are already doing so. As my Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras has pointed out, the public are putting £9 billion a year into the hands of private landlords. That is market interference. I support housing benefit, but it has an effect. No rent regulation is associated with housing benefit, and there is no control on rent levels. That must be addressed. I recognise that, in most of the UK, private rents are not excessively high. In many parts of the country, they are lower than council rents. When I talk to colleagues about supporting my ideas on the regulation of private rents, they say, "It's not an issue in my area." I fully understand that, but in London and on the fringes of London, and in one or two other cities, it is a massive issue. A third of my constituents live in the private rented sector. They ask me, "How much longer can I afford to stay in your constituency?" Some of those people are not poor—their salaries are quite good. They are young professionals who want to live in an inner-city area of London but can no longer afford to do so.

There is a knock-on effect on the London labour market. I have been to the Royal Mail sorting offices in my constituency, the local hospital—on many occasions—the fire station, the police station, social services, the council departments and other places, and have asked people where they live. If they are under 40, the chances are that they live at home with their parents. They do not want to—the parents often do not want them there either—but are stuck in that situation. If they have managed to buy a place, it is a very long way away from London, and they spend an awful lot of time and money on commuting, which has an environmental effect. A few years down the line, where will the nurses, the teachers and the firefighters come from if we do not address housing for people who need houses and places in London?

To my local authority's great credit, it is building council houses. It hopes to complete about 2,000 with the housing associations on affordable or social rent models. That is making a good difference to a lot of people's lives. It is a great pleasure meeting families who have lived in grossly overcrowded, poor-quality accommodation when they get a decent, permanent, reliable and secure council flat. That has changed their lives, and has changed the attitudes of the young people involved. However, we are not doing enough of it; instead, we are letting the market rip, and allowing all the problems that go with that to arise.

I have introduced a Bill under the ten-minute rule procedure, the Regulation of the Private Rented Sector Bill. I think that the majority of Members would find most of it unexceptionable. It deals with the need to regulate letting agents. We could start with Criminal Records Bureau checks—in some cases, that would be quite helpful—and then move on to full regulation of

[Jeremy Corbyn]

the way in which agents charge, the extent of their transparency, and so on. Not all letting agents are bad, just as not all private landlords are bad, but there are some pretty seriously rogue elements.

Agencies discriminate blatantly not only on grounds of ethnicity and race—as “Panorama” discovered—but against people on benefits. They say “We will not allow anyone who collects benefit to rent a flat through this agency.” Why do they do that? It is an interesting question, because someone who pays part or all of his or her rent by means of housing benefit will actually be a very reliable tenant. The answer can only be that the agencies do not want the attention of HMRC to be focused on the levels of income they are receiving.

We need regulation to deal with that, we need transparency in regard to how deposit schemes work and how tenants get their deposits back, and we need serious attention to be paid to the longevity of tenancies. Six months for assured shorthold tenancies is far too short; at least five years strikes me as a reasonable basis, although obviously there should be an appropriate form of get-out clause for people who, for instance, get a job in another part of the country. That can be worked out.

Other countries manage to regulate rents. Germany has a very regulated and a much bigger private rented sector, and, in general, private rented properties are owned by much larger landlords—co-operatives, insurance companies or others. When the Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), told me that regulation of the private rented sector would bring about the economic ruin of Britain, I asked him whether that was a parallel with the economic ruin that Germany was facing as a result of its regulation of the sector. I am still awaiting his answer; I do not know when he will be able to give it to me.

My Bill proposes that local authorities should play a key role, because they understand the communities they represent. Newham council, Oxford city council and a number of other authorities have introduced registration schemes, and have sought to introduce some degree of regulation of the private rented sector. Of course, as the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), the Chair of the Select Committee, pointed out, the problem is that it is the good landlords who tend to register voluntarily, and it is the rogues whom we want to be registered. Nevertheless, that is a good initiative and a good step forward. Moreover, if local authorities introduced their own private letting offices, they could use them for their own purposes when they have to house families in the private sector because they do not have enough council houses to deal with the demand.

The Bill also proposes that a combination of the Mayor and London boroughs should be given the opportunity to introduce a rent registration and rent regulation regime across London, which would have some bearing on the affordability of properties. That would give access to housing to a range of people who are currently excluded from it, and would thus create more stable, more harmonious communities.

I welcome the work that the Select Committee has done, and I welcome the fact that we are beginning to have a serious debate about the private rented sector. It should be remembered that more than a third of the communities in many parts of London are already

living in the sector, and that, according to all the predictions, it will grow a great deal. I very much hope that this will become a big issue at the next election. I hope that parties including my own will understand the need for regulation and the need to limit the excessive rents that have been charged, so that we can bring about some sense of harmony and decency in this sector of the housing market throughout the country.

6.39 pm

Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) on making an excellent maiden speech, and I can see he is going to be a real champion for his area. I, too, remember campaigning for him, and not only in the rain, but in the wind and rain, and it was very much worth it to have him here. I am sure his warm and moving comments about his predecessor are greatly appreciated on both sides of the House.

We have had a very well-informed debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) and his Select Committee on producing such an excellent report and on highlighting the key issues relating to the private rented sector. It is a pity that the Government’s response to the Committee’s report did not rise to meet the sensible challenges it set out. Indeed it is still a mystery to me why one of the first actions of this Government when coming to office was to put an end to the planned regulation of the sector of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey). As a result, four years on, all we have is a consultation and we have lost a valuable opportunity to identify and address key issues facing the sector.

Both the Government’s response to the Committee’s report and the subsequent consultation paper on property conditions in the private rented sector show huge complacency. Yes, the Government are consulting in some areas, but they are not addressing the main issues that the Select Committee report highlights, such as affordability, poor standards in some cases, lack of security of tenure, lack of regulation for letting agents, illegal evictions and lack of protection for the tenant. It is important that they do address these issues, however, because, as lots of Members have said today, increasing numbers of people now rely on the private rented sector for their housing. We think the figure is now about 4 million households, which is the highest ever.

It is now more important than ever to address some of the long-standing and growing issues that are affecting ever more people. In its report, the Select Committee identifies as the first major issue the need for a simpler regulatory framework. There is a case to be made for consolidation of the legislation relating to the private sector, which is currently dispersed and complicated, and such action would make it simpler for tenants and landlords to understand their respective rights and responsibilities. Clarity will also make things more accessible for both tenants and landlords and may help to reduce some of the problems that arise, and consolidation would also make things easier for local authorities. What is absolutely vital, however, is that councils are able to put existing, and any subsequent, legislation and guidance in place locally in an effective way, and I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale

(Simon Danczuk) pointed in his speech to the importance of enabling a localist approach and of getting good local policies in place.

The Committee is right to highlight the need to raise standards in the sector. Too often unscrupulous letting agents are ripping people off; people and families that are renting are subject to a lack of stability through short-term tenancies and unpredictable rent increases; and too many homes are of a poor standard. Some 33% of all privately rented homes are estimated to be non-decent with one in 10 homes in the sector suffering from damp and mould.

The Committee's report highlights the considerable concerns of many in the sector and identifies some real problems, but the report also offers potential solutions to these issues, recommending empowering local authorities to tackle problems and penalise landlords who fail to maintain the necessary standards. The report recommends that local authorities should be able to retain the money recouped to fund further work to raise standards.

However, despite the report's extensive recommendations, the Government have taken a step back and simply published what they describe as a "discussion paper" which they make clear

"does not recommend any policy or legal changes"

at all to address the issues that have been raised about the sector.

While the Government's consultation on standards in the sector is welcome, it comes almost four years into the Parliament and as a direct result of pressure from the Select Committee, campaigning organisations and the work of many of my colleagues on this side of the House. It does not make up for their failure to tackle this growing problem sooner.

The same applies to the Government's attitude towards the licensing of landlords. At the moment, local authorities do not even know how many landlords are in their area or how to contact them. We want to help local authorities identify those bad landlords whose housing is not up to scratch and who break the law. That is why we have proposed a national register of landlords, but we have been clear that our aim is to empower and enable local councils to have tools to achieve that locally. The Select Committee's report recommends giving local authorities the flexibility to license in their local area and to require landlords to be part of a regulatory scheme. The report proposes lots of different ways of doing that, but the important point is that local authorities need the powers. We want to ensure that if a local authority knows that poor standards are a significant problem in its area, it has the proper powers to deal with them.

Labour-run Newham council became the first council in the country to introduce a borough-wide mandatory licensing scheme for all landlords in June 2012, and it is seeking to prosecute 134 landlords for breaches under the initiative. Despite its success, many local authorities have told us there is too much bureaucracy and red tape in their way if they want to step in and introduce licensing schemes. Similarly, the Local Government Association believes:

"Councils should have greater local discretion on the qualifying criteria and the amount of evidence provided for local licensing schemes".

Yet the Government appear insistent in continuing their lack of action on this matter, stating in their response to

the Select Committee report that there are already tools available to local councils and ignoring the Select Committee's valuable recommendations. Indeed, they are ignoring a great deal of the evidence from local authorities and others on this issue that was presented in detail to the Committee.

The same is true when it comes to the issue of houses in multiple occupation. As was suggested by the former housing Minister, the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk), this is a particularly thorny issue. The report considers HMOs in some detail, with paragraph 63 on page 26 considering article 4 directions. I know that the Committee received some evidence that article 4 directions could be used to limit the number of HMOs in a particular area, but I am not sure that article 4s are the right approach or the right tool for this purpose. Many local authorities tell us that they are a clumsy way of trying to control HMOs and that there should be an easier way for councils to regulate HMOs in their area. So we want to make it easier for local authorities to address local problems more simply and directly.

Similarly, we also want to make it easier for local authorities to deal with letting agents. According to estimates, some 4,000 managing and letting agents are entirely unregulated, in that they do not even belong to voluntary bodies that encourage a responsible approach to letting and management practice. It is a peculiarity of current policy that while estate agents, who hold very little money on behalf of their clients, are regulated, letting agents, who hold significant sums on behalf of landlords and tenants, are not. Good letting agents have a worthwhile role in providing professional input and support, but too often tenants and landlords alike are ripped off by unscrupulous letting agents. We have said we will regulate letting and management agents, and bring an end to rip-off fees. The Government's moves to require letting agents to be part of an approved redress scheme are welcome, but their action comes only after prominent campaigning by Labour and, in particular, by my colleague in the other place Baroness Hayter. We think that without her efforts the Government would not move on this issue.

Another major issue identified in the Committee's report is that of tenancies and rents. The report clearly says of the sector:

"No longer can it be seen as a tenure mainly for those looking for short-term, flexible forms of housing".

We want to encourage the Government to take stronger action on introducing longer-term tenancies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) raised a number of points related to addressing affordability and supply issues right across the country. My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) drew our attention to the particular issues of affordability and supply in London. The Select Committee did not focus in this report on supply issues, but it did in an earlier report on the financing of housing supply.

In conclusion, the Government need to look seriously at raising the supply of housing in the private rented sector. In doing so, they must ensure that we get not only additional supply but supply that is of good quality and at a reasonable rent. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about how he will achieve that.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Kris Hopkins): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) and to the Communities and Local Government Committee for securing this debate. I welcome this opportunity for the Government to set out what they are doing in relation to private rented supply. I agree with the hon. Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods) that this has been an extremely interesting debate. The content was thoughtful and the tone, right across the House, was completely appropriate. I know that members of the Committee have spent a long time deliberating on the issue.

We are pleased that the Select Committee produced this thoughtful and well-balanced report following its inquiry, and we agree with a considerable number of the recommendations. I am aware that there was a slight hint from some Members that we did not appreciate the work of the Committee, but let me say that I did appreciate the content of the report. I know that the Committee spent a long time taking evidence, and thinking about the report before reaching its conclusion.

The Government recognise that the private rented sector is playing an increasingly important role in the housing market. There are now just short of 4 million households out there, accommodating some 8.5 million individuals. Moreover, there is, increasingly, a diverse range of people living in the sector.

Overall, the sector is performing well. As the hon. Member for Sheffield South East said, it is the one part of the market that grew even in the darkest times of the recession. Supply is now beginning to respond to the growth in demand. I recognise that many of the actions that I will talk about later on specifically relate to the Government's intervention in increasing that supply.

Rents are increasing more slowly than inflation. Let me say to the hon. Member for Islington North that I live on this planet, and that I cited a figure of 1.6%, not 1.4%. I recognise that the figures across London are higher, but overall, the Office for National Statistics is confident that the figure is 1.6%. Across the whole of England, the figure is 1%, which is significantly below inflation at this moment in time.

Overall, the quality of private rented sector accommodation is improving and satisfaction levels are high. In fact, 83% of the people who live in the PRS say that the accommodation is good. The vast majority of people—some 80%—move from their own choice; some 10% move by agreement with their landlord and some 9% by the landlord's activities or actions.

We recognise that there are challenges that we need to address. For example, a lack of supply has led to a problem of affordability and a limited choice as a consequence, especially in hot spots around parts of London. The lack of professional landlords and the need to improve management practices in some parts of the sector are important. Legislation is in place—there is the Housing Act 2004—and we are taking action in certain areas. There is a need to change the balance. At the moment, some 78% of landlords are individuals who own one place, which they rent. We need to change that balance in favour of larger-scale providers.

Tackling rogue landlords is an extremely important part of our work. I recognise the enormous amount that local councils do, and the Government have allocated £6.5 million to addressing beds in sheds and poor-quality provision by enabling individuals to carry out not only raids and inspections but, importantly, prosecutions. There is growing demand for longer tenancies, especially among people with families, and we want to support them.

The Government want a bigger and better PRS, which is why we want to make private renting more positive. Although we have heard negative comments in the debate, private renting is an extremely important part of the housing sector. As we heard, the PRS is now bigger than the social sector, so it is important that politicians, practitioners and professionals challenge the behaviour of the small minority of individuals who, owing to the poor-quality provision that their tenants receive, undermine not only the sector, but other people's businesses.

Through the schemes that we have introduced, we are trying to bring new entrants into the sector and to attract more institutional investment. We want to drive forward more larger-scale, professionally managed, high-quality and well-designed accommodation. We want to stimulate the construction of more housing. We want to empower and inform tenants by driving up standards and promoting choice. We want to increase the effectiveness of existing regulation, but when supplementary regulation is needed, we should act judiciously so that we neither deter investment nor add costs, thus putting pressure on rents. While we want to crack down on rogue landlords, we do not want to put extra burdens on ordinary landlords who are providing a decent service.

The Government have put forward the £1 billion Build to Rent fund. Round 1 was over-subscribed, and three contracts have been signed, while further ones are going through due diligence. Round 2, on which an announcement will be made soon, was significantly over-subscribed, with 126 applications worth £2.8 billion being received for a fund of only £721 million. Our guarantee scheme, which is worth £3.5 billion, will also secure new building in the sector. We want to introduce a redress scheme, a tenants charter and a model tenancy, as well as to crack down on the landlords I have mentioned.

I want to talk about Members' contributions, and I must start with that of the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane). It is a convention in the House that one is gracious and welcoming to a new Member, regardless of our politics, and despite the fact that he is from Lancashire, I intend to comply with that protocol. He made a great speech. When I made my maiden speech only a few years ago, I was absolutely terrified, but he made a thoughtful speech and it was completely appropriate that he paid tribute to one of our former colleagues, Paul Goggins, who is greatly missed by Members on both sides of the House. I wish the hon. Gentleman a successful time representing the people of Wythenshawe and Sale East.

We heard thoughtful contributions from Members on both sides of the House, and the hon. Member for Sheffield South East covered many points. I want to maintain a positive relationship with the Communities and Local Government Committee. I served on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, so I know the

immense work that a Committee does during its deliberations. The vast majority of the time, regardless of party, members of a Committee come together to discuss the issues thoughtfully, which is completely appropriate.

This Government are absolutely committed to making sure that the private rented sector grows bigger and better—

7 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. This is where Lancashire overrules Yorkshire.

Debate interrupted, and Question deferred (Standing Order No. 54(4)).

Mr Deputy Speaker: Under the Standing Order, I am now required to put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the estimates set down for consideration this day.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. On the Serious Fraud Office supplementary estimate, which comes later, with the Justice Committee report, the agreed redactions and the Tchenguiz interests featuring in the Office of Fair Trading report on abuses of leaseholders, overvaluations of freeholds and the sale of managers' flats, could the Question on motion No. 21 be put separately for approval?

Mr Deputy Speaker: But of course.

The Deputy Speaker put the deferred Questions (Standing Order No. 54).

ESTIMATES 2013-14

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2014, for expenditure by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs:

- (1) further resources, not exceeding £313,194,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 1006,
- (2) further resources, not exceeding £77,312,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and
- (3) a further sum, not exceeding £145,464,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2014, for expenditure by the Department of Energy and Climate Change:

- (1) further resources, not exceeding £5,040,483,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 1006,
- (2) the resources authorised for use for capital purposes be reduced by £379,370,000 as so set out, and
- (3) the sum authorised for issue out of the Consolidated Fund be reduced by £205,309,000 as so set out.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2014, for expenditure by the Ministry of Defence:

- (1) further resources, not exceeding £1,672,884,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 1006,
- (2) the resources authorised for use for capital purposes be reduced by £1,863,070,000 as so set out, and

- (3) a further sum, not exceeding £1,400,160,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2014, for expenditure by the Department for Communities and Local Government:

- (1) further resources, not exceeding £10,776,378,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 1006,
- (2) the resources authorised for use for capital purposes be reduced by £697,027,000 as so set out, and
- (3) the sum authorised for issue out of the Consolidated Fund be reduced by £179,382,000 as so set out.

The Deputy Speaker then put the Questions on the outstanding Estimates (Standing Order No. 55).

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 2013-14 (NAVY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That, during the year ending with 31 March 2014, a number not exceeding 36,530 be maintained for Naval Service and that modifications in the maximum numbers in the Reserve Naval and Marines Forces set out in Supplementary Votes A 2013-14, HC 1078, be authorised for the purposes of Parts 1, 3 and 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 2013-14 (ARMY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That, during the year ending with 31 March 2014, modifications in the maximum numbers in the Reserve Land Forces set out in Supplementary Votes A 2013-14, HC 1078, be authorised for the purposes of Parts 1 and 3 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

ESTIMATES 2014-15 (NAVY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That, during the year ending with 31 March 2015, a number not exceeding 35,110 all ranks be maintained for Naval Service and that numbers in the Reserve Naval and Marines Forces be authorised for the purposes of Parts 1, 3, 4 and 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the maximum numbers set out in Votes A 2014-15, HC 1077.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

ESTIMATES 2014-15 (ARMY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That, during the year ending with 31 March 2015, a number not exceeding 115,180 all ranks be maintained for Army Service and that numbers in the Reserve Land Forces be authorised for the purposes of Parts 1, 3, 4 and 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the maximum numbers set out in Votes A 2014-15, HC 1077.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

ESTIMATES 2014-15 (AIR) VOTE A

Resolved,

That, during the year ending with 31 March 2015, a number not exceeding 37,190 all ranks be maintained for Air Force Service and that numbers in the Reserve Air Forces be authorised for the purposes of Parts 1, 3, 4 and 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the maximum numbers set out in Votes A 2014-15, HC 1077.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

**ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 2007-08 (NAVY)
VOTE A**

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2008, excesses in the numbers in the Reserve Naval Forces be authorised for the purposes of Part 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the revised maximum numbers set out in Excess Votes A, 2007-08, HC 1075.—
(*Amber Rudd.*)

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 2007-08

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2008, resources, not exceeding £1,000, be authorised for use to make good excesses of certain resources for defence and civil services as set out in Late Statements of Excesses 2007-08, HC 1008.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

**ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 2008-09 (NAVY)
VOTE A**

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2009, excesses in the numbers in the Reserve Naval Forces be authorised for the purposes of Part 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the revised maximum numbers set out in Excess Votes A, 2008-09, HC 1075.—
(*Amber Rudd.*)

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 2008-09

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2009, resources, not exceeding £1,000, be authorised for use to make good excesses of certain resources for defence and civil services as set out in Late Statements of Excesses 2008-09, HC 1008.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

**ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 2009-10 (NAVY)
VOTE A**

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2010, excesses in the numbers in the Reserve Naval Forces be authorised for the purposes of Part 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the revised maximum numbers set out in Excess Votes A, 2009-10, HC 1075.—
(*Amber Rudd.*)

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 2009-10

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2010, resources, not exceeding £1,000, be authorised for use to make good excesses of certain resources for defence and civil services as set out in Late Statements of Excesses 2009-10, HC 1008.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

**ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 2010-11 (NAVY)
VOTE A**

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2011, excesses in the numbers in the Reserve Naval Forces be authorised for the purposes of Part 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the revised maximum numbers set out in Excess Votes A, 2010-11, HC 1075.—
(*Amber Rudd.*)

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 2010-11

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2011, resources, not exceeding £1,000, be authorised for use to make good excesses of certain resources for defence and civil services as set out in Late Statements of Excesses 2010-11, HC 1008.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

**ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 2011-12 (NAVY)
VOTE A**

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2012, excesses in the numbers in the Reserve Air Forces be authorised for the purposes of Part 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the revised maximum numbers set out in Excess Votes A, 2011-12, HC 1075.—
(*Amber Rudd.*)

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 2011-12

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2012, resources, not exceeding £1,000, be authorised for use to make good excesses for use for current purposes as set out in Late Statements of Excesses 2011-12, HC 1008.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 2012-13 (NAVY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2013, excesses in the numbers in the Reserve Air Forces be authorised for the purposes of Part 5 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 up to the revised maximum numbers set out in Excess Votes A, 2012-13, HC 1075.—
(*Amber Rudd.*)

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 2012-13

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2013:

- (1) resources, not exceeding £1,000, be authorised to make good excesses for use for current purposes as set out in Statement of Excesses 2012-13, HC 1008,
- (2) resources, not exceeding £1,189,000, be authorised to make good excesses for use for capital purposes as set out in Statement of Excesses 2012-13, HC 1008, and
- (3) a sum, not exceeding £55,456,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund to make good excesses on the use of resources authorised by Parliament as set out in Statement of Excesses 2012-13, HC 1008.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

**SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES AND NEW
ESTIMATES, 2013-14**

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2014:

- (1) further resources, not exceeding £24,625,104,000 be authorised for use for current purposes, in accordance with HC 1006, HC 1052, and HC 1053,
- (2) resources authorised for capital purposes be reduced by £4,379,764,000, in accordance with HC 1006 and HC 1053,
- (3) the sums authorised for issue out of the Consolidated Fund be reduced by £1,980,330,000, in accordance with HC 1006, HC 1052, and HC 1053.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

ESTIMATES VOTE ON ACCOUNT 2014-15

Resolved,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2015:

- (1) resources, not exceeding £211,673,099,000 be authorised, on account, for use for current purposes as set out in HC 982, HC 1007, HC 1009, HC 1036, HC 1051, and HC 1054,
- (2) resources, not exceeding £23,884,619,000 be authorised, on account, for use for capital purposes as so set out, and
- (3) a sum, not exceeding £209,940,950,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

Ordered, That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing Resolutions relating to Supplementary Estimates and New Estimates, 2013-14, late Excesses 2007-08 to 2011-12, Excesses 2012-13, and Estimates, 2014-15 (Vote on Account);

That the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Danny Alexander, Sajid Javid, Mr David Gauke and Nicky Morgan bring in the Bill.

SUPPLY AND APPROPRIATION (ANTICIPATIONS AND ADJUSTMENTS) BILL

Presentation and First reading

Sajid Javid accordingly presented a Bill to authorise the use of resources for the years ending with 31 March 2008, 31 March 2009, 31 March 2010, 31 March 2011, 31 March 2012, 31 March 2013, 31 March 2014 and 31 March 2015; to authorise the issue of sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the years ending with 31 March 2013, 31 March 2014 and 31 March 2015; and to appropriate the supply authorised by this Act for the years ending with 31 March 2008, 31 March 2009, 31 March 2010, 31 March 2011, 31 March 2012, 31 March 2013 and 31 March 2014.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 178).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 15),

That, at this day's sitting, the Second Reading of the Inheritance and Trustees' Powers Bill [*Lords*] may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

**INHERITANCE AND TRUSTEES' POWERS BILL
[LORDS]**

Motion made and question put forthwith (Standing Orders No. 90(5)).

The Second Reading Committee has recommended that the Bill ought to be read a second time.—(*Amber Rudd*)

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63)

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Deputy Speaker: With the leave of the House, we will take motions 24 to 31 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

That the draft National Minimum Wage (Amendment) Regulations 2014, which were laid before this House on 18 December 2013, be approved.

That the draft National Minimum Wage (Variation of Financial Penalty) Regulations 2014, which were laid before this House on 14 January, be approved.

TRIBUNALS AND INQUIRIES

That the draft Tribunal Security Order 2014, which was laid before this House on 16 January, be approved

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Funds Payments) Order 2014, which was laid before this House on 27 January, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) (Limits and Thresholds) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, which were laid before this House on 27 January, be approved.

CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES

That the draft Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies and Credit Unions (Investigations) Regulations 2014, which were laid before this House on 27 January, be approved.

RATING AND VALUATION

That the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Levy and Safety Net) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, which were laid before this House on 27 January, be approved.

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Income Support (Work-Related Activity) and Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 2014, which were laid before this House on 22 January, be approved.—(*Amber Rudd.*)

Question agreed to.

Pancreatic Cancer

Motion made, and question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—[*Amber Rudd.*]

7.4 pm

Eric Ollerenshaw (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. As one Lancastrian to another, let me say that I am pleased to introduce this debate on access to new treatments for pancreatic cancer. It will become apparent why we are so pleased to get this debate at this time.

I want to start by reiterating some points I made about this dreadful disease in a debate in Westminster Hall last May that might help to set the context for this further debate today. Before I do, may I put on record my thanks to Pancreatic Cancer UK, Pancreatic Action, the all-party group on pancreatic cancer and others who have highlighted the impact of this disease? These include that great Lancastrian actress Julie Hesmondhalgh, who recently gave the disease some publicity in “Coronation Street”. More sadly there is the example of Kerry Harvey, who died at the age of 24 on 22 February and did so much in her last months to highlight the impact of this disease with the assistance of Pancreatic Action.

Pancreatic cancer is the fifth-most common cause of cancer death in the UK. Approximately 8,500 people will be newly diagnosed with pancreatic cancer this year with around 7,900 people dying from the disease annually. Pancreatic cancer has the lowest survival rate of the 21 most common cancers. Five-year survival rates are less than 4%; a figure that has barely changed in nearly 40 years. Pancreatic cancer five-year survival rates lag behind many other EU countries and are almost half of what they are in the US, Canada and Australia. Only 1% of the National Cancer Research Institute Partners’ total research spend is directed towards pancreatic cancer. By way of comparison, £3,613 per death per year is spent on breast cancer research compared to £553 per death per year on pancreatic cancer.

Some 50% of pancreatic cancer patients are diagnosed as a result of emergency admission; nearly twice that of other all other cancers combined. Patients diagnosed as a result of emergency admission, compared to other routes to diagnosis such as routine GP referral, have significantly lower rates of survival. Pancreatic cancer patients have one of the least satisfactory NHS experiences of all cancer patients, evidenced by National Cancer Patient experience surveys.

If it is not too presumptuous, I would like to quote myself from the debate on 23 May 2012.

“Effective cures for pancreatic cancer remain stubbornly elusive, but we need to try to find ways to prolong patients’ lives and to ease their pain and sufferings while always remembering that, with cancer, it is not only the patient who is affected but the people around them, including their family.”—[*Official Report*, 23 May 2012; Vol. 545, c. 93WH.]

The all-party group then found out that a new drug, Abraxane, in combination with standard chemotherapy was licensed for use in patients in the UK and Ireland with metastatic pancreatic cancer. Abraxane has been described as the biggest advance in pancreatic cancer treatment in almost two decades; for a disease, as I have already said, where survival rates have barely changed in 40 years.

As the drug has not yet been approved by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence it is not yet available on the NHS as a standard treatment. Pancreatic Cancer UK is very keen to ensure that patients are able to access Abraxane through the cancer drugs fund. The House will now see the importance of the debate tonight; the decision will be taken on Thursday 6 March—that is this week. Along with others in the Chamber, I would like to see the drug approved by the CDF this week and then eventually by NICE so that access to it is more readily available. We know that Abraxane is due to be reviewed by NICE very soon but this process takes a great deal of time, and it is time that pancreatic cancer patients do not always have.

One of my fears is based on my understanding of the way these new drugs are measured. This is based partly on what is called quality-adjusted life years which, so far as I understand it, is a measurement of the state of health and how long life is prolonged running from optimum health to death.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for bringing this important matter to the House’s attention. It is surprising how many of us know people, both personally and from our constituencies, who have been affected by pancreatic cancer. I have some figures from Northern Ireland that might help his argument. Only 14.2% of males and 10.3% of females live longer than a year after diagnosis. When we get to five years, those figures drop to 2.8% and 2.9% respectively. Early diagnosis is key, along with new treatments. That would increase the survival rate by 30%. Does he agree that a strategy covering all the regions of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland would be better for addressing the issue?

Eric Ollerenshaw: The hon. Gentleman hits the nail on the head. It is of course a UK issue, and one of the concerns is the regional variation in performance on early diagnosis and the impact that is having. We want to get rid of that.

I want to talk today about the new drug, Abraxane. The vast majority of pancreatic cancer patients are diagnosed so late that the benefit of any new drug can be measured only in months, rather than years. Our worry is that, compared with other cancers, that benefit might be deemed insufficient simply because it is measured in months and might not register highly on the quality-adjusted life years measurement scale.

That is why Pancreatic Cancer UK launched its Two More Months campaign, which highlights what patients would have been able to do with two more months, which is the average additional survival time provided by Abraxane. I have a few quotes from relatives of those who have died from pancreatic cancer:

“Two more months would have been a significant amount of time for Nicola, only 25 years old herself, to spend with her four year old daughter”.

That was from Chris, Nicola’s brother.

“Two more months would have meant my daughter Gemma might have got to wear her wedding dress and walk down the aisle with Adam”.

That was from Debbie, Gemma’s mum.

“Two more months would have seen my wife Jill finish her Open University Modern Languages degree and attend an international social work conference in Buenos Aires, both of which she would have been very proud of”.

That was from Dave, Jill's husband.

"Two more months would have seen Andy and I celebrate our second wedding anniversary, and given us more time to prepare for what was to come".

That was from Lynne.

For me, two more months would have meant one last Christmas with my partner—

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): May I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has done tremendous work on this issue and been a great advocate for all those affected by pancreatic cancer? I know from my experience of working in the hospice movement that time is the thing that all patients want. If that drug can provide just a little more time, surely it is something that all those families should be given.

Eric Ollerenshaw *rose*—

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and endorse what he says entirely. Does he agree that perhaps we should also consider going *commando* this Friday to raise male cancer awareness and show our general support for all cancers that people are struggling with today?

Eric Ollerenshaw: I am grateful for those well-timed interventions from my colleagues across the frontier.

What I am trying to get on the record is the fact that those two more months are critical in this particular cancer. Our worry is that two more months might not look good enough when the judgment is made, but for pancreatic cancer it is a massive improvement.

I also want to put on the record two other emerging possibilities. A useful and emerging new technology is NanoKnife. It carries out a process called irreversible electroporation, which destroys parts of the tumour while avoiding damage to vital tissue nearby, such as blood vessels. The process shrinks the tumour to a more manageable size, which might then allow more permanent surgical solutions. NanoKnife is currently available only through the private sector at one hospital in London.

A company called Novartis, has a treatment for neuroendocrine pancreatic cancer that is currently funded via the CDF in England. Although it is welcome that patients can access treatment via that route, we continue to argue for a long-term solution. In that context, we are worried about Andrew Dillon's statement that, under the new system of value assessments that NICE is due to introduce in the autumn, only six out of 20 treatments assessed by NICE in the past year would be approved. A 30% approval rate is clearly not the long-term solution expected from the original concept of value-based pricing. In 2013, I understand, not one new cancer drug was approved by NICE. That issue, perhaps, is for a wider debate, but I hope the Minister understands that those arguing on behalf of pancreatic cancer patients are extremely worried about ever getting the new drugs on to the system and available for wider use across, hopefully, the whole United Kingdom.

Minister, this debate has been an unashamed appeal for support—from the charities concerned, the all-party group, the survivors and all those who have been affected by pancreatic cancer through the loved ones they have lost. We do not want others to go through our tragic experiences.

Tessa Munt (Wells) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. I should like to pick up on what he said about NanoKnife—there is also CyberKnife and Gamma Knife. Those are all modern, stereotactic treatments for cancer. I hope that he agrees that we need to concentrate not just on the drugs but on those particular types of radiosurgery, which can make sure that people live longer if they are given the trials that they need.

Eric Ollerenshaw: The hon. Lady makes an important point. Our point is that because of the poor pancreatic cancer survival rates and its late diagnosis, which is the key, it always seems that the pancreatic cancer patient is last in the queue. The quality of life assessments do not look long enough to justify a new drug or new radiotherapy, as has been pointed out.

Again, I pay tribute to Pancreatic Cancer Action, which got a great deal of press from an advert, not used at the time, saying, "I wish I had breast cancer". That was effective in raising publicity about the impact of pancreatic cancer.

I am trying to put whatever pressure the Chamber is capable of exerting on the cancer drugs fund when it makes its decision on Thursday and on NICE for what it does to follow. Providing Abraxane and an extra two months could help ease this year's 8,500 tragedies and start the process of making up for 40 years of lost hope.

7.18 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Eric Ollerenshaw) on securing this debate and setting the scene so well. Pancreatic cancer needs all our efforts if we are to make a difference. I pay tribute to pancreatic cancer patients up and down the land, including my good friend Sir John Mason, who is battling the disease, and all the families and friends of those with pancreatic cancer, as well as those working with and supporting them.

As the hon. Gentleman said, survival rates from the disease have not changed for 40 years. Abraxane gives the opportunity not only for two more months, but to bring about change and transform how the disease is dealt with in future. In the United States, there is already innovation in how the disease is being tackled. I hope that the people having to make these difficult decisions listen to this debate and take it into account when making the decisions in a proper and objective way. It is important that our voices echo those of people who are contacting us about the condition, including my constituent, Maggie Watts, who has assembled a petition of 45,117 names of people who are shouting for something to be done about this disease.

That is all I want to say; I wanted to add my support to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood with whom I have worked on the all-party parliamentary group on pancreatic cancer.

7.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Eric Ollerenshaw) on securing this debate and leading it in the knowledgeable and able way that he has led other debates on this

[Jane Ellison]

important subject. I will do my best to respond to his specific points, but there may be some that I will need to respond to after the debate.

It goes without saying that cancer is a terrible disease, and my hon. Friend spoke movingly of his experience, but all hon. Members know ways in which it has touched them and their families and friends. I pay tribute to the work that he and colleagues in the all-party parliamentary group on pancreatic cancer have done to raise awareness of the disease. Its excellent report, "Time to Change the Story", does much to counter common misconceptions about the disease.

My hon. Friend drew the House's attention again to the particularly poor outcome for people who get the disease and the challenges in diagnosis. If we could match the best survival rates in Europe we could save an additional 75 lives a year. Clearly, if we exceeded those survival rates, more people would be saved.

Before I tackle my hon. Friend's specific point about Abraxane, it is worth giving the context of other work that the Government are doing to support earlier diagnosis. We committed more than £450 million in funding over the four years to 2014-15. Sadly, there is currently no easy way of detecting pancreatic cancer and it can be particularly difficult for GPs to detect and diagnose it, especially in its early stages. However, to try to address the situation, the Department helped to fund a six-month pilot with Macmillan Cancer Support of a cancer decision support tool for GPs to help them to identify patients whom they might not otherwise refer urgently for this suspected cancer. Evaluation of the pilot is under way, and if it is found to be helpful, we will work with NHS England actively to promote its use. That tool was highlighted at a recent parliamentary event that some hon. Members might have attended.

We need to do more about earlier diagnosis and public awareness of the symptoms, which are often limited. As is often the way, I suspect that the recent "Coronation Street" story line has done more than many public health campaigns could have done to raise awareness. Yet again, well done to our broadcasters for covering some difficult issues and providing through Hayley's sad story some important health education. It has reached many people, and we thank them for that.

On Abraxane, I am obviously aware of Pancreatic Cancer UK's Two More Months campaign, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on this particularly well-timed debate. I am fully sympathetic to his points. As he says, two more months can mean so much to those who are affected by this cancer, and he gave some moving examples. We do not associate the disease with younger people. Sufferers are predominantly older but, as he illustrated, many people suffer at a younger age. I thank those who contributed to the report details of loved ones they have lost. My hon. Friend bears witness to his own loss, which we feel keenly with him.

I listened to my hon. Friend's request that the recently licensed drug, Abraxane, should be made available from the cancer drugs fund. As he says, in the light of new evidence from the manufacturer, NHS England's cancer drugs fund expert clinical panel is reviewing its earlier decision not to add it to its national list. One criterion in the scoring tool used by the panel is evidence of a drug's impact on quality of life, which is what my hon. Friend

spoke about. While I cannot in any way pre-empt the panel's decision, I can fully understand how important this will be to people with pancreatic cancer. I will ensure that NHS England is made aware of tonight's debate and the very good attendance. As the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) said, that reflects the impatience of parliamentarians, on behalf of their constituents, to see progress on this issue, which we seem to have been stuck on for so long. I undertake to do that immediately in the morning to ensure that the information is with the panel ahead of its deliberations.

My hon. Friend will be aware that Abraxane has not yet been assessed by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. Partly because of these situations, we established the cancer drugs fund to ensure that cancer patients in England have better access to life-extending or life-improving drugs that are not routinely funded by the NHS. He may also be aware that Novartis's drug Afinitor is included on the national list for the cancer drugs fund, alongside two other treatments for treating pancreatic and neuro-endocrine carcinomas. More than 44,000 patients have benefited from the cancer drugs fund since October 2010, and we have recently announced an extension to funding for the scheme.

Looking further ahead, NICE is appraising Abraxane for untreated metastatic pancreatic cancer and expects to publish its guidance to the NHS in January 2015. That may seem a long way away, but, as been mentioned, this reflects the robust, evidence-based technology appraisal programme that NICE provides to ensure that clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness is taken into account when we look at drugs and treatments. The Government believe that clinically appropriate drugs should be routinely available to NHS patients, and we remain committed to the rapid uptake of NICE-recommended drugs in the NHS.

My hon. Friend referred to recent decisions on cancer drugs made by NICE. I am sure he appreciates that there will naturally be fluctuations in the proportions of drugs recommended by NICE each year, and so a more accurate picture can be gained from looking at all NICE decisions on cancer drugs to date. That shows that almost two thirds of its decisions on cancer drugs have recommended their use for all or some of the eligible patient population. Far from making appraisals tougher, the most significant change to NICE technology appraisal methods in recent years has been to introduce greater flexibility in the appraisal of potentially life-extending treatments for patients at the end of their lives, and that has helped NICE to recommend a number of new cancer drugs for use on the NHS. That speaks directly to the extremely pertinent points that my hon. Friend made about how someone who has had such a diagnosis will see an extra two months in the context of the end of life, given that the progress of the disease can be very rapid from the point of certain diagnosis.

Jim Shannon: Will the Minister give way?

Jane Ellison: Yes, very briefly.

Jim Shannon: In an earlier intervention I asked about a UK-wide strategy. Has the Minister considered that for all the regions?

Jane Ellison: The hon. Gentleman has made that point in other contexts before, and it is a perfectly good one. Of course, health is a devolved matter, but as regards research and what we know about drugs, there are lots of aspects on which England has taken a lead and on which the devolved Administrations co-operate. I regularly have exchanges of letters with my opposite numbers. When there are important lessons to be learned on behalf of all our constituents, we would naturally share that information and expect it to be looked at in all parts of our United Kingdom.

Our priority is to make sure that we get the best possible results for all NHS patients with the resources we have. That is why we have asked NICE to look at how drugs are assessed to ensure that patients can get the treatments they need at the best value for the NHS, and that the price the NHS pays is more closely linked to the value a medicine brings. These can sometimes sound like quite cold decisions, but they are designed to help us to have a sense of objectivity in what are always very difficult decision-making processes. I assure my hon. Friend that NICE will carry out a full public consultation before implementing any changes in the way that it makes these assessments.

My hon. Friend referred to NanoKnife, which was also mentioned in an intervention. I am advised, I am afraid, that NICE has published guidance on that procedure which states that current evidence on the safety and efficacy of irreversible electroporation for treating pancreatic cancer is inadequate in quantity and quality, and it recommends that the procedure should currently be used only in the context of research.

My hon. Friend mentioned research funding. We are often asked about the amount of funding put into one area or another and I always like to make the point that, rather than specifying subject areas, the National Institute for Health Research welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health. These applications are subject to peer review and are judged in open competition, with awards made on the basis of the importance of the topic to patients and the NHS, value for money and scientific quality.

I have no idea whether parliamentary interest is part of that mix, but I cannot believe that it hurts at all. Such issues come up regularly, and whenever I meet people from different health institutions and the NHS I always make a point about the things in which Parliament has shown a particularly keen interest to debate and progress.

Tessa Munt: Will the Minister give way?

Jane Ellison: I do not think I have time, sadly, but I would be happy to speak to my hon. Friend after the debate.

I hope it will be of interest that the Government are investing a record £800 million over five years in a series of biomedical research centres and units, including £6.5 million of funding for the Liverpool biomedical research unit in gastrointestinal disease, which has a major focus on pancreatic cancer. Some really interesting things are coming out of the opportunities for biomedical centres.

Recruitment to studies associated with pancreatic cancer by the NIHR clinical research network has also increased more than fivefold, from 447 in 2008-09 to 2,744 in 2012-13, which is another measure of the increased emphasis and interest.

I again pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood for his campaigning on this issue and the work he has done to raise its profile in Parliament, and to all hon. Members for the interest they have shown. As I have said, it is great to see such good attendance at this debate. That is on the record and it is of great interest.

Tessa Munt: Do NICE and similar organisations accept reviews and evidence from other countries, be they in Europe or America, when they deliberate and make considerations, or is it only home-grown evidence that counts? Is there an acceptance of the views of clinicians from other parts of the world?

Jane Ellison: I will, if I may, take my hon. Friend's question away and respond to it formally. Obviously, it is a matter for NICE and I will make sure that I get an answer for her. My understanding, however, is that an awful lot of peer-reviewed research from all around the world is looked at and that it is the quality of that research that is taken account. I will respond formally to my hon. Friend and make sure that I have that absolutely right.

In conclusion, I thank those who have participated in this important debate and those who have stayed to show their support for it, which is valuable. This disease remains very difficult to treat, but the Government will continue to work with patients and charities—which have done so much good work—and with researchers, the pharmaceutical industry and, of course, the NHS to improve results for people with pancreatic cancer and to see whether we can make more rapid progress than we have made in the past four decades.

Question put and agreed to.

7.33 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 4 March 2014

[MR MIKE WEIR *in the Chair*]

Scotland and North-east England Post-2014

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(Harriett Baldwin.)

9.30 am

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. This issue is of rising importance for the north-east of England. In six months' time, the Scottish people will decide whether they want to remain part of Britain. Although it is right that that decision should be taken by them, it is not right to think that it will not affect the rest of Britain as well, especially the north-east of England.

Scotland and the north-east of England share an economic and industrial history, one based on shipbuilding, coal mining and steel works, for example. It is also fair to say that the Conservative party in both areas has been marginalised. That is a common identity that the north-east of England and Scotland share, and that economic history is important to the north-east of England even today. At Durham Tees Valley airport, some 35,000 passengers a year travel from my constituency to Aberdeen for the gas and oil industry, which shows how close Scotland is industrially and economically to the north-east of England.

Thousands of Scots and English cross the border between England and Scotland every day, without let or hindrance, to do a day's work, but I believe that the Scottish National party has a twin-track approach to the English. On one hand, Alex Salmond has described the north-east as

"our closest friends in economic and social terms",
and others have said that

"a stronger Scotland could act as a powerful advocate on issues of mutual concern to the north of England and Scotland"

and that there is

"a shared sense of values".

That is great, but if all that is true, why does Scotland need independence to prove it further?

To the SNP's internal Scottish audience, the English are those from whom the SNP wants independence, but to the north-east of England, according to Alex Salmond, we are Scotland's closest friends. Call me old-fashioned, but I would not close the door on my closest friends by asking for independence from the rest of the UK.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): To follow the reasoning of the hon. Gentleman's argument, is he saying that the Swiss are not friends with the Austrians or the people of Liechtenstein just because they do not share a Prime Minister? Surely, given that 250,000 people cross the Swiss border daily to work, that is an example of how people can be friendly without sharing a Prime Minister. It is not David Cameron who makes us friends.

Phil Wilson: The hon. Gentleman is not necessarily comparing like with like. Scotland and England, and the rest of the UK, have a shared history that goes back 300 years.

I read something recently on the blog "Open Democracy" by Gerry Hassan and James Mitchell, two pro-separatist academics based at the university of West Scotland and Edinburgh university. They state that the metropolitan establishment have pronounced on the currency union, and go on to say:

"London is where the problem lies. But our friends in the north of England have long understood this."

Speaking as an MP for the north-east who has lived in the north-east all his life, I say to those commentators and the SNP that they should not patronise the north-east of England by pretending that they speak for my region—they do not—or offer friendship with one hand while building a wall between us with the other.

I agree that there should be deeper economic cross-border relations between Scotland and the north-east of England; I have no problem with that. The IPPR North study "Borderlands", commissioned by the Association of North East Councils, points out that there should be closer cross-border relations, especially between local authorities on either side of the border. Who could argue against that, especially when it comes to issues such as transport? I understand that the SNP agrees, which I am pleased to hear, but surely that would be much easier to do across the existing border than across an international border between two independent states.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. I accept entirely the point that he is making: cross-border economic relations of every kind will be affected and harmed if Scotland becomes independent, whether by different tax rates, border controls or fundamental changes to the transport systems, two of which would not meet.

Phil Wilson: The hon. Gentleman has raised the point that I was going to make next with some statistics. At present, more than 23 million vehicles, 15 million tonnes of freight and 7 million rail passengers a year cross the border between England and Scotland in both directions. If Scotland becomes an independent state, the current border will become an international border. Scotland will have to take control of its border and introduce the relevant regulations to manage it. The present UK is a true domestic single market: businesses in Scotland have easy access to customers throughout all parts of the UK, as does the north-east of England. Anyone who has the people and their benefit in mind will surely see that as a key reason why Scotland should not be independent, and why we should work together for the benefit of all the people who live in the UK.

An international border would create a barrier to all that. For example, as I have said, 40,000 people travel each way across the border every day to work. An independent Scotland would not have the membership of the EU or the common travel area that it now enjoys. It would have to renegotiate travel arrangements with the rest of Britain.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. It is also about access to European markets.

[*Tom Blenkinsop*]

Currently, steelworks in Scotland such as Dalzell and Clydebridge roll Scunthorpe steel. Every single bit of slab steel that goes to Dalzell and Clydebridge in Scotland is from Scunthorpe. Independence would undermine a crucial, constituent part of the steel industry not just in England but in Scotland. It is a UK steel industry.

Phil Wilson: I think there will be a lot of consensus on this side of the argument. We have a lot of common ground among all parts of the UK. Why we would want to disrupt and dismantle that, I do not know. It can only cause additional burdens to the Scottish and English people who currently take for granted the journey across the border. If Scotland managed to renegotiate entry into the EU, it would have to join the Schengen agreement, meaning that passports would have to be shown at border crossings such as Berwick.

Ian Swales (Redcar) (LD): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful case. On that point, I am sure he shares my concern that because new entrants to the EU must join the euro, we will end up with two currencies.

Phil Wilson: The hon. Gentleman is correct. Little by little, hon. Members are dismantling the whole argument for independence.

Mr MacNeil: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Phil Wilson: Go on, then.

Mr MacNeil: Croatia joined the EU in July 2013. When did Croatia join the euro?

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): You'd be obliged to join the euro.

Phil Wilson: My right hon. Friend says that Scotland would be obliged to join. The position of the Scottish National party is that once it believed Scotland should join the euro. Then it wanted Scotland to have its own currency, and now it wants to stay with the pound. Can SNP members make up their mind? It is not possible. They want to have their cake and eat it.

Thousands of north-easterners would have to take their passports to go to work in Scotland, and Scots would have to take their passports to travel from Scotland to England. I have relatives in Scotland who visit my family in south Durham every week. My brother is English and his partner is Scottish. They make that journey every week without let or hindrance, and now the SNP wants to put border controls there. Scotland will not be a member of the EU or of the common travel area, and cannot have it both ways.

Guy Opperman: It is fair that we keep making the point by giving particular examples. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the North East Chamber of Commerce has expressed specific concerns about the currency issue, and the Northern Farmers and Landowners Group, which represents the cross-border farming community, including many farmers who farm both sides of the border, has also expressed significant concern that if independence went ahead the ability of the farming community to function would be gravely impeded.

Phil Wilson: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point yet again. Over time, employment regulations may not be an incentive for people to cross the border, a factor that in itself might disrupt economic development in both the north-east of England and Scotland.

I do not understand why the SNP wants to put up barriers between Scotland and the north-east of England. By putting up such barriers, Scotland will potentially lose out on—

Mr Iain McKenzie (Inverclyde) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Phil Wilson: I will just make this very important point, because I will now boast about the north-east of England, as it has a lot to offer.

The north-east is the only region in the country with a positive balance of trade in the export market, exporting £14 billion-worth of goods every year; its manufacturing industry is worth £7.5 billion; we have a strong and successful advanced engineering sector, leading the way in low-carbon technology and sustainable energy solutions; we have world-class research and engineering capabilities in wind, wave, tidal and solar power; we are home to successful knowledge-based economies, with 40,000 skilled individuals employed in the supply chain and more than 65,000 people working in the oil and gas sector; and more than 70% of the oil and gas platforms operating in the North sea are built in the north-east of England. On top of all that, a third of the north-east is designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty or is part of a national park. Why does the SNP want to put an international border between itself and an area as fantastic as the north-east?

Mr MacNeil: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Phil Wilson: No. I have given way twice to the hon. Gentleman, I want to make progress and I am sure that he will make some kind of speech later on.

I believe in co-operation between Scotland and the north-east of England, but building barriers will generate costs. Internal studies have proven that. When Czechoslovakia split into two states in 1993, the currency union between the two lasted 33 days and trade between the two fell significantly. I do not want to see that happen in our case.

International evidence also shows that flows of trade, labour and capital are much larger between two regions of the same country than between two similar regions in different countries. The best example is the trade between US and Canada. According to studies, Canadian provinces trade around 20 times more with each other than with nearby US states of a similar size, and the international border between the US and Canada reduces trade by 44%. If anyone believes in a strong Scotland and wants to see a prosperous north-east, why would they want to put barriers between the two, which would not be welcome and are not needed? Such a move cannot be good for Scots, English people or Britain.

I do not understand what is wrong with being part of the third largest economy in Europe and the sixth largest economy in the world. Why does the SNP want to be independent of that kind of success story?

Mr Straw: I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. First, the concerns and issues that he is raising for the north-east of England also apply to all colleagues of all parties in the north-west of England. Secondly, on his central point—that we are better together—does he think that a far better comparison than the one used by the SNP representative here in Westminster Hall, the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), which compared Scotland with Liechtenstein—

Mr MacNeil: Austria.

Mr Straw: Or Austria. The better comparison is to look at what happened in Germany. Three centuries ago, Bavaria and Prussia were at war—Catholic versus Protestant. They finally came together and I do not think that anybody, either in Bavaria or Prussia, would argue that those regions have not been able to maintain their distinctive identities and institutions while hugely benefiting from the fact that they are part of a single union.

Phil Wilson: My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point. We can have 300 years of history, as we have between Scotland and England, and still keep separate identities. We have an identity in the north-east of England, which in some ways is similar to the Scottish identity; we even call our children “bairns”. From my perspective, the identity is there and it is a great thing, so why do we have to create independence and an international border between the two countries? To say that we need to do that to secure our identity is not true.

Currently, 70% of Scotland’s trade is with the rest of the UK, including the north-east of England, and 70% of Scotland’s imports come from the rest of the UK. If the SNP wants independence, why does it want to keep the pound? If it wants to keep the pound, why not stay as part of Britain? It would save—

Mr MacNeil: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Phil Wilson: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will make a speech later. He has already intervened on me twice, and I am sure that he will let me intervene when he speaks.

Mr MacNeil: Absolutely.

Phil Wilson: However, I suppose that if it all goes wrong, the rest of the UK, including the population of the north-east of England, can pick up the tab.

Mr David Hamilton (Midlothian) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes some good points, and I congratulate him on securing this debate.

There is far more that combines us and brings us together than ever divides us. However, one of the things that is quite concerning is the question of what Britain will pick up from Scotland if we become independent. Standard Life has just announced that it would look to go to its marketplace and its marketplace is England, and that would also be the case with the Royal Bank of Scotland. That is not scaremongering. In fact, what we are doing is creating a division when we do not need to create one.

Phil Wilson: Again, that is an excellent point from my hon. Friend and fellow Whip.

If someone really believes in the future of Scotland, why would they want to create so much uncertainty for the economy in the future by having this rose-tinted view of independence, when in fact independence is not in the best interests of the Scottish people, although I believe they should have the right to decide whether or not they stay part of the UK?

The issue of Scottish independence is very important to the north-east of England. At one time—

Ian Swales: Has the hon. Gentleman been surprised, as I have, by the lack of logic in wanting to stay in the European Union but wanting to leave the United Kingdom Union?

Phil Wilson: The whole SNP philosophy on independence is just full of contradictions. It wants to create a barrier between England and Scotland, but it also wants to join the EU, where there is free movement of labour and free trade in goods. Obviously there is a contradiction in that.

I think that I have already said it but I just want to repeat that the SNP wanted, at one time, to be a member of the euro; then, the pound was a millstone around Scotland’s neck. Now the SNP wants to keep the pound. How can it keep the pound without fiscal, monetary and political union? We are better together because we already have that union, and it offers stability.

It is okay having some rose-tinted image of Scottish independence, which is all thistles, sporrans and Bannockburn, but the practicalities for the Scottish people should make them think twice, if not three times. Labour is a national party, not a nationalist party, and any further settlement on devolution should bear that in mind: devolution of air passenger duty would affect the airports in the north-east of England; any kind of variation in corporation tax would have an effect as well; and any change in income tax could have a detrimental impact on other parts of the UK, including the north-east of England. It seems that there is another contradiction, whereby the SNP wants to offer cuts in corporation tax and in APD to business, while at the same time saying to the rest of the population that it will maintain good, decent public services. How will it raise the tax to do that?

I belong to the Labour party, a left-of-centre people’s party; that is how we see ourselves. As such, our belief in people does not stop at the borders, but if someone is a nationalist I believe that it does. Those pushing for independence want to have their cake and eat it. They want to keep the pound and the Queen, stay in the EU and NATO, and keep the BBC. They have all those things now, and it is called the United Kingdom. My advice to those seeking independence is that if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it, because we are, after all, better off together.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order. Six people seek to speak, and I hope to call the wind-ups no later than 10.40. I will not impose a time limit at this stage, but I ask Members to bear in mind that I hope to get everybody in.

9.49 am

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) on securing this debate.

I speak as a mongrel Brit of immigrant ancestors, as the representative of a constituency that borders Scotland, and as someone who has repeatedly made the case that we are better together. I went to Scotland last year and did a series of events over about 10 days, debating this issue from Aberdeen all the way down to Argyll. I was struck by the fervour created by this point. The issue matters desperately to those of us who represent north-east constituencies, because it will have a significant impact on trade. Of course, trade and tourism will continue and, of course, Scotland will continue to exist as an independent country, but there is no doubt that the decision will have an impact on business and on job prospects in the border region.

When one analyses the case put forward by the Scottish National party, it is, on any interpretation, economically illiterate. When the hon. Member for Sedgefield made the point that the Scots wish to have their cake and eat it, the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) wisely and intelligently said from a sedentary position, “That’s what cake’s for.” It is a policy totally devoid of any grasp of reality.

Looking at the currency issue, the SNP argues that it wishes to have the pound, but it does not want Mark Carney or the Bank of England having any controls, because when one takes independence, one forfeits huge amounts of control over the ability to tax, set interest rates, and the like. We are now in a position of sterlingisation, a policy best espoused by those legendary countries, Panama, Montenegro and Greece.

Mr MacNeil: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Guy Opperman: Of course I will. I cannot wait.

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Gentleman will, of course, furnish us with information about which countries have shared sterling in the past, and particularly about how many countries were sharing sterling in the 1970s.

Guy Opperman: The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that no sensible economist would say that a policy of sterlingisation would support a country’s banking and fiscal system. The desire that we all have for greater North sea oil prosperity is based on a fundamental need to secure the markets, and to secure bank finance, for example. That would be grossly affected by a floating sterling position in Scotland.

As for borders, my constituents in Northumberland are deeply concerned about that matter. It is worth analysing briefly the position in relation to immigration controls. For my sins, I have read the Scottish Government’s paper, “Scotland’s Future”, and I assure hon. and right hon. Members that it is a long, hard read. Chapters 6 and 7 set out the Scottish Government’s preference for an independent Scotland joining the EU, but staying within the common travel area. Others commented, rightly, on the fact that originally Scotland wished to join the euro; then it decided that it wanted the pound, and now it is sterlingisation.

However, in respect of immigration policy—not that we are in Woolworths, having pick ‘n’ mix in any way—the Scottish Government prefer to have an EU policy and support that part of the EU. That is, of course, contingent on one thing. It is rare for a Conservative MP to praise a man called Barroso, but I am grateful to Mr Barroso for his amazing contribution to this debate, because the European leaders have made it acutely clear that, regarding the immigration control situation, were Scotland to go independent, it would have to apply to join the EU. That is not going to happen. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar laughs and chunters, as always, from a sedentary position, but can he name an individual European politician—I will happily give way to him on this point—who has said that the border control situation will be acceptable if Scotland does not join the EU, and that it will be no problem at all?

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Gentleman will, of course, be aware of the example of the Republic of Ireland, which is in the EU and the common travel area and not in Schengen.

Guy Opperman: Answer came there none, I am afraid.

Phil Wilson: People leaving southern Ireland and going to Belfast do not have to show their passports, but if they continue their journey to Liverpool by ferry, they do.

Guy Opperman: It is worth assessing the UK Government’s position, which is that if Scotland were to become an independent state, the boundary between Scotland and the rest of the UK would, by definition, become an international border between two separate states, with everything that that entails. The evidence locally in the north-east, whether from farming bodies or the North East chamber of commerce, is extensive: there is huge concern that this will have an impact on trade, businesses and jobs. I met a number of oil and gas producers, several of whom are building huge sites on the Tyne at the moment. Hon. Members know that the two biggest construction sites are for construction projects in the North sea. The producers are concerned that, if there were independence, those projects would be affected, and there would be greater difficulties.

It is, self-evidently, for the Scots to make this decision, but it is incumbent on all of us, not just—with great humility and respect—to analyse the weak arguments of the SNP, but to make the case to all the Scots whom we know, and to get up to Scotland and encourage all those in Scotland to analyse deeply whether they wish to do this, because, self-evidently, we are better together.

9.56 am

Mr Iain McKenzie (Inverclyde) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) on securing this important debate.

As a Scot, I believe that separation from the rest of the UK would present business on both sides of the border with an unnecessary barrier. In Scotland, there would be a barrier to trading with our biggest market—the UK—and to our long-established trading with the north-east of England, and that makes no sense at all. No one

wants a barrier to our trade and connections with north-east England, except those who promote independence for Scotland.

Mr MacNeil: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr McKenzie: I will not give way at the moment.

We are all aware that the open border between Scotland and the north-east brings significant economic, trade and employment opportunities. We are also aware that, should Scotland vote yes in September, the border will be closed, with the new Scottish state being outside EU membership. Scotland's languishing in a long line for EU membership would mean its being outside the EU and having a closed border—absolutely guaranteed—bringing about significant trade difficulties. We would lose our shared opportunities, despite the fact that we all agree that we need as many opportunities as we can get these days.

Cross-border private and public sector trading can do without this obstacle being put in the way of ease of doing business. Clearly, Scotland has an important economic relationship with north-east England and the UK as a whole. The facts speak for themselves: Scottish business buys and sells more products and services from the UK than any other country in the world. This enables the Scottish people to be part of a larger and more successful economy, and to trade and share easily with our neighbours in north-east England. Some 70% of Scotland's exported goods went to other parts of the UK, and 70% of imports came from the UK, clearly demonstrating that Scotland's economic performance is stronger because it is part of a larger integrated UK economy. Exit the UK and our border becomes a barrier that will impede and restrict ease of trade.

Even where free trade agreements exist alongside controlled borders, neighbouring countries with similar economies are affected by the presence of that border. As we have heard, we know this to be true. Hon. Members need only look at the US and Canada: their trade is thought to be some 44% lower than it could be—a result of that controlled border between them.

Mr MacNeil: I am listening to the hon. Gentleman carefully and wonder whether his argument is that Canada would be better giving up its independence and becoming part of the United States of America. That seems his logical position.

Mr McKenzie: The comparison I am making is between a closed border and an open border. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, it is not only business that will be disadvantaged. Labour migration between Scotland and the rest of the UK is estimated to be as much as 75% higher within an integrated UK. More than ever, we need to share skills and knowledge, so that both sides of the border can prosper. Without doubt, Scotland's leaving the UK would create an unnecessary barrier to trade with our close neighbours in north-east England. More unites us than divides us. Common goals and common bonds have been built over generations, which is why I believe in a vision of working across an open border and a continuation of the ease in our trading relationship that we have come to expect and enjoy.

We remember and value our close association with those with whom we share a border, but it is a border in name only. The border is not a symbol of division, but a

link spanned by friendship and a common understanding of the challenges that we face together. Scotland's relationship with north-east England should be a constructive collaboration, not a destructive competition, as would undoubtedly transpire after Scotland's separation from the UK. The SNP is always arguing both ways, telling its supporters that everything will change while telling people on both sides of the border that nothing will change.

If all that independence is about is getting away from a Government for whom Scotland did not vote, I would ask Members to join me in seeking independence for Inverclyde. We have never voted for an SNP Government. We have a Labour MP, a Labour MSP and a Labour-controlled council, yet twice we have had to suffer under an SNP Government. The difference is that we understand and accept democracy. I have visited north-east England many times, and I have always believed that the future of Scotland and of north-east England lie together in one country—the UK.

10.1 am

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I am sure you will know what to do if the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) gets overexcited during the course of our proceedings.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) on securing this timely debate. People cannot get nearer to Scotland than my constituency. Indeed, Scotland surrounds us on two sides. My northern boundary and much of my western boundary are the national boundary. The passage of people across the border for work, shopping and family relationships, including my own, is constant. My constituency is very much involved, and there is a great deal of apprehension on what the consequences of a vote for independence might be. I will address those consequences in a moment, but I will first say a few things on the north-east's relationship with Scotland that will apply whether the vote is yes or no.

The north-east is catching up, but it has significant economic problems. The north-east needs a much larger private sector and more jobs, but it has not had the resources that Scotland has had over the years. Successive Governments have failed to reform the Barnett formula, which gives between 10% and 15% more money per head for Scotland to spend on public services. The Barnett formula does so because it simply locks in the distribution from many years ago and applies it formulaically year after year when the needs of the north-east should have been recognised as they originally were. That is unfinished business for many of us who represent constituencies in the north-east of England.

We continue to fight for change on that front, but there are many signs of improvement in the north-east. We have seen the gross value added per head improve in the past couple of years, and we have seen growth in private sector jobs. We have seen marvellous investments by, for example, Nissan and the kinds of firms to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) referred. Firms are investing on Tyneside in renewable and offshore technology. That is all encouraging, but it has to be recognised that, if we do not continue to press the case for the north-east of England, Governments of

[*Sir Alan Beith*]

all parties appear ready to forget about the area. As north-east MPs, we must therefore continue to press our case very strongly.

There are two aspects of the relationship between the north-east and Scotland that I particularly need to emphasise today. Our economy significantly depends on the connectivity between the north-east and Scotland. One of the most obvious aspects is that it is absurd that we still do not have a dual carriageway connecting the north-east of England with Scotland. Parts of the road have been dualled over the years, but the job is still not completed. The previous Government dropped two very good schemes that would have dualled the road significantly. There is increasing trade between Scotland and England that requires good road communications, which is an important priority. I welcome that the Secretary of State for Transport and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury have both committed to completing the ongoing study and intend to proceed with the matter. We need progress.

Mr MacNeil: I hear what the right hon. Gentleman says about the roads being a serious matter. Can he think of a couple of independent EU countries in which the main arteries joining at the border—on the frontier—are so bad?

Sir Alan Beith: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I was in Croatia on holiday, and the A1 in Croatia is a magnificent dual carriageway, but it suddenly stops at the border with Montenegro. There is a small break in the otherwise magnificent A1. If Croatia can do it, why on earth have we still not completed the dualling of the major link between England and Scotland on the east coast?

Rail connectivity is also important, and I am beginning to be concerned that the High Speed 2 proposals have led Railtrack to propose ideas for the future of the east coast main line that would provide unsatisfactory services between the north-east of England and Scotland. Those services have greatly improved in recent years. We now have very fast train services from Edinburgh and Newcastle to London. We also have a much improved service from Alnmouth in my constituency, which is an important part of our connectivity. If Railtrack wants to ensure that MPs in the north-east of England, and indeed eastern Scotland, support HS2, it must not pursue daft ideas that would undermine the service. That also means that we have to improve the east coast main line's capacity, particularly to handle freight. There are possible investments, such as on the Leamside line, that could greatly improve the capacity of the east coast main line and cater for potentially growing freight traffic between the north-east ports and for links between the north-east ports and Scotland.

There are issues that would be of very serious concern to my constituents if there were to be a yes vote in the referendum. The debate so far has been about an idea, and only now are we beginning to consider the realities and facts. Of course Scotland could be independent, but there is a price to be paid by both countries if that were to happen. That price includes serious problems at the border. If the United Kingdom, minus Scotland, did not have control and did not know what Scotland's

immigration policy will be, it could not commit itself to an open border with Scotland. If the rest of the United Kingdom did not have any control of security in Scotland, it could not have a completely open border. Whether the rest of the United Kingdom has a continuous border control or just introduces a border control when it considers there to be a particular danger, there will from time to time be border controls to address the fact that the United Kingdom will have no control over who is admitted to Scotland. I am talking about, for example, a terrorist returning from Syria whom we would not want simply to move freely in Scotland.

Mr Russell Brown (Dumfries and Galloway) (Lab): The question of immigration and border controls is as much an economic issue as anything else, because the growth in Scotland's working population is projected to be significantly less than the rest of the UK. That is why we have had nothing from the SNP on immigration. An independent Scotland might have a greater dependency on migrant workers.

Sir Alan Beith: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. In my limited time, I will address another issue that affects border controls—fiscal policy in Scotland. An independent country might wish to have different VAT rates from those that apply in England. That raises the other issue of Scotland's relationship with the EU, which has already been covered so I will not say any more. If different taxation rates applied, there would be issues at the border and a need to control goods coming across the border. That would further impair trade and cause further difficulties for people whose everyday life means constantly crossing the border. Those things are not impossible to address—they are dealt with in many countries—but they add to the difficulties of areas that have enough economic problems as it is and certainly do not need such artificial pressures.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman has got to the crux of the matter. Those who support independence for Scotland tell us that they want to see open borders and no change whatsoever from the current arrangements. If Scotland was to become independent, I am sure that most of us, so far as we would have a role in the matter, would want to see as open a border as possible. The fact is, however, that we can only guarantee open borders and the present arrangements by being part of the same state, and that could change with independence. People can debate how real that is and how far they would change, but we can only guarantee the open border by maintaining the same state arrangements.

Sir Alan Beith: The hon. Gentleman puts the argument very well indeed. The Union is a guarantee of free passage across the border, unimpeded by either immigration or customs controls, and that is well worth having. We are much better together because of that.

There is another kind of problem—we get it even under the existing system, although it would be significantly worse if Scotland became independent—which is the administrative difficulties people face if they want to access public services across the border. If I ring up a plumber, he does not say, "I am sorry, but I cannot help you because I am on the wrong side of the border." When public services are involved, however, those difficulties

start to arise. We have managed to minimise them in health, for example, where many people on the Scottish side of the border go to GPs in England and vice versa. Many people from my constituency use the Borders general hospital. There are, however, always problems just around the corner, and I spend a lot of time fighting to ensure that new barriers are not erected. They would be much more likely to be erected in the event of independence, and that is a real danger.

Mr David Hamilton: Is it not also the case that we have specialised treatments in Scotland and the UK? It is not uncommon for someone from my area of Edinburgh and Midlothian to be sent down to London or the midlands for a specialised treatment. It is also not uncommon for someone in England to come to Scotland for specialised treatment. That would have to go by the wayside with independence.

Sir Alan Beith: Indeed. Cross-border activity is common; it is day to day in my area, but it also happens elsewhere with specialised treatment. That activity is not impossible with independence—we should not overstate the case—but it would become more difficult and the likelihood of administrative barriers being erected is that much greater. There are a whole series of reasons why anyone living near the border, unless they see their future entirely as a town of currency exchange kiosks and smugglers, would think that we are much better together. That leads many of my constituents to say, “Why can we not vote on Scottish independence?” I have a lot of sympathy with that, but I hold as a matter of principle that, having joined the Union, Scotland is entitled to leave if that is the will of the Scottish people. They would be ill-advised to do so, and I do not think they will vote to do that, but it is their entitlement.

Were the Scottish people to vote for independence, negotiations would begin on the terms of that independence, how much of Britain’s national debt they would take with them, what we do about the banks headquartered in Scotland and all the other issues. It is then that my constituents and those of other English, Welsh and Northern Irish MPs will want to be heard. No Government, however composed, will get a deal for Scottish independence through this Parliament that is unfair to the people of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Members of Parliament representing the rest of the United Kingdom will want and will have a say on behalf of their constituents, were Scotland to vote to seek independence.

10.13 am

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): It is a great pleasure indeed, Mr Weir, to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate the hon. Member for Sedgfield (Phil Wilson)—a fine MP—on securing the debate. Usually, the Scottish National party in the House of Commons finds itself the six against the 600. There are slightly better odds this morning, with one against 18, and that is much to the good.

It is absolutely fantastic that some of these arguments are being aired, because when the scares and fears are aired, they are quickly punctured. I am glad to see that the hon. Gentleman, together with the SNP Government and Standard Life, supports currency union with the rest of the United Kingdom. That is to be welcomed and is progress. If only some other Members—particularly

those in the Treasury—had his enlightened view, we would get on much better. I encourage him to ask the Prime Minister to continue with pre-negotiations. He ruled them out, but of course he has broken his word on that already.

Barriers were mentioned and the truth is that we will not be erecting any barriers. I hope that the Prime Minister will not be erecting any barriers, and in the absence of either side erecting any barriers, there will be no barriers and we can continue to flow and interact with each other freely. The thing that will change is that the Government will move from Westminster to Holyrood, with the most democratic forum representing the Scottish people. I do not know what people can have against that, but I am shocked that people cannot be international. It is great to be an internationalist and fantastic to respect the independence of other nations and to look to engage and co-operate in an international manner. With that, I encourage people who feel that they cannot interact with people outwith their borders to think bigger, to hope for better and to look for a greater future. I am sure that if they search the depths of their hearts, they will find a way to look and to co-operate with their neighbours.

If people are struggling, there are international examples of that co-operation. Switzerland has 250,000 people crossing its borders every day. It is not in the EU, but those people come from EU countries. The population of Liechtenstein doubles during the working day as people come in to work in its advantageous employment environment. That would not happen if Liechtenstein was not independent. The people living around Liechtenstein would not have the possibility of finding employment in that area and would have to travel further afield. I am sure that the benefits that accrue to many places on the borders around Europe will also accrue to the north of England. If the hon. Gentleman was to look deeply at the issue, I am sure he would find many advantages, but it is to his political advantage—it will be off a Whip’s script that he has probably written himself—to up the fears and the scares and make it sound difficult.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr MacNeil: I will give way in a minute. All that will happen is that we will stop sharing a Prime Minister. It is not the need to have David Cameron as a Prime Minister that keeps the pair of us co-operating. Without David Cameron, I will still like the hon. Member for Sedgfield as much as I do.

Phil Wilson: Can the hon. Gentleman just answer this simple question? When it loses the referendum, what will be the point of the SNP?

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Gentleman asks a fantastic question, which gives me the opportunity to outline the point of the SNP, which is to put the Scottish people first, rather than power struggles in London, which, unfortunately, is the point of the London parties. It is all about who is in government in London, and that is not for the good of the people of Sighthill, Springburn, Castlemilk, Fort William, Inverness, Sutherland, Lochaber, Skye or Lewis. That is an awful tragedy. It should also be in our interest in Scotland to ensure that the good

[*Mr MacNeil*]

people of the north-east of England are benefiting as much as those in the regions of Scotland. I look forward to the day I witness people from the north-east of England finding chances of employment in Scotland, rather than having to go far afield to the south-east of England.

Guy Opperman: May I return the hon. Gentleman to the key issue of currency? Will he state for the House's benefit what his proposal is on currency? Under the present position on a sterlingisation approach, he would surely be borrowing in a currency over which he had no control and in a monetary environment that is unsustainable in the long run for investors, who are so key to jobs and business prosperity.

Mr MacNeil: The reality, as he well knows, is that after the referendum victory on 19 September, George Osborne will take a different approach from his arrogant, dismissive bullying of the Scottish people. He will find some humble pie and dine on it very heartily. George Osborne understands the importance of his balance of payments and does not want to weaken sterling. Or is the hon. Gentleman saying that he would like to see sterling weaken? He knows that that is what will happen if Scotland is not in the sterling area. Does he disagree with that?

Sir Alan Beith: Has the hon. Gentleman not observed the situation with the euro, where Germany is pointing out that those countries whose fiscal policies cannot support use of the euro cannot have independent fiscal policy if they want to remain in the euro? How can Scotland remain independent in its fiscal policy if it uses a common currency with England?

Mr MacNeil: If I did not know the right hon. Gentleman better, I would imagine that he was threatening the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, because they are in that situation. Is he saying that the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man will have to give up their independence? I think not. I think that he is quite a reasonable individual, and I do not think that he will go down that route. The argument about the euro is fallacious, because there are vastly different levels of productivity within the eurozone. The strains within the euro are not really between all the countries that use the euro—they are not between Germany, the Netherlands and France—but between Germany and the far more divergent economies of southern Europe, such as Greece.

I want to address the point that has been made about Canada and the United States of America. The comparison is erroneous because the populations of Canada and the United States are more contiguous, particularly in Canada, running east-west rather than north-south, and that is where the problems are. I am pleased to see that the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Mr McKenzie) was not encouraging Canada, which became independent of the United Kingdom, to become part of the United States of America. We must realise that 100 years ago, the world had 50 independent states. It now has 200 independent states—Europe alone has 50 independent states—and it is better for it. Intergovernmental organisations and others come together to deal with things, and the approach is far more mature than the

one that existed in the days of empire. I encourage the hon. Gentleman to take further his support for the independence of Canada, of which I am a fervent supporter, and to realise that just as Canada is better off being independent of its 10-times-larger neighbour to the south, the same is true for Scotland. I do not see any animosity between Canada and the United States of America; I see friendship and people trying to get on with each other.

If there has been a discordant note in the debate, it was introduced by the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable), who described London as a “giant suction machine”. I am glad to say that that was repudiated by no less a figure than the SNP deputy leader Nicola Sturgeon, who said at University college London that the Secretary of State's comment was a bit harsh. That happened to be on the day that the Chancellor went to Scotland to bully, threaten and harry the people of Scotland, with predictable reactions. I remember the headline from the London *Evening Standard*: “Chancellor bullies the Scots while Nicola Sturgeon charms London”. The SNP's deputy leader spoke in a constructive tone not of fears and scares, but of optimism about the future.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): We did not see that last week.

Mr MacNeil: I hear Members, including no less a figure than the Minister, cackling and heckling. The same fears and nonsense about the idea that we would be diminished were no doubt present when Ireland and some of the Dominions were moving towards independence, but I argue that they were wrong. There is more trade between the UK and Ireland now than there ever was when Ireland was part of the UK. Things are better, and the aggregate GDP of the British Isles is higher because of an independent Ireland and an independent Isle of Man. It will be higher still when we have an independent Scotland, because of the giant suction machine that the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills alluded to. There is an issue, but the best way to solve it is to create a successful second centre of gravity in the island of Britain. The island of Ireland probably benefits from having two Governments, although it has not been helped by the psychopathic elements who have been involved over the past 100 years.

Guy Opperman: It is hard to follow the hon. Gentleman's speech, but we are all trying. Can he enlighten us when it comes to the Barnett formula? If Scotland were to go independent, presumably that formula would not continue to operate and the hon. Gentleman would not seek for it to do so, given that Scotland would be an independent state. What is the SNP's position if it loses the referendum? Will he decide that Scotland does not need the Barnett formula?

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Gentleman is quite correct to say that if Scotland were independent, it would not seek to operate a Barnett formula any more than Norway does. In Norway, of course, average wages are twice those in the UK, on a population of a similar size to that of Scotland with oil.

The hon. Gentleman asked what would happen if the referendum were lost. First, I do not think that the referendum will be lost, and secondly, the SNP will do what we always do, which is to put the interests of Scotland first. He should be aware that Scotland is 8.4% of the UK's population and raises 9.9% of the UK's taxes, and that over the past five years, taking tax and spend together, Scotland was £12.6 billion relatively better off.

If the hon. Gentleman is exercised by the Barnett formula, and he clearly is, the best thing that he can do is to join his brothers in Scotland and support independence, and then he can stop worrying about it. He will no longer be troubled by the green-eyed monster when it comes to someone getting a fraction more or a fraction less. Actually, that concern should not exist because, as I have pointed out, Scotland contributes 9.9% of the UK's taxation although it accounts for only 8.4% of its population. In each of the past 32 years, Scotland has contributed more tax per person than the UK average.

Mr Russell Brown: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the population of Scotland in comparison with the rest of the UK, and he mentioned taxation. One of the important taxes for the man and woman on the street in Scotland will be income tax, and that income tax level is only 7.2% of the UK collection rate. He has also mentioned Norway. Would he like to share with us the income tax levels for people in Norway, and whether those living in an independent Scotland could actually stomach such rates of tax?

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Gentleman tempts me down an inviting road. As I have mentioned, average wages in Norway are twice what they are in the UK after tax. After adjusting for purchasing power, the average Norwegian has 43% more money, or £158 extra, each week in their pocket than the average person in the UK. In addition, inequality in Norway is lower than it is in the UK. If the hon. Gentleman is interested in making his constituents wealthier, he should follow the model that the SNP proposes, under which we would set up an oil fund and ensure that the gains of productivity were distributed far more equally in our society than they are at the moment in the UK. Inequality in the UK is the fourth highest in the OECD, and that is not something that he should be defending. He should join me in making Scotland a more egalitarian and wealthier place. Norway proves that that can happen with independence and oil.

Mr Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr MacNeil: I would love to take the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but you are inviting me to wind up, Mr Weir. I thought that I had been doing so quite successfully, but I shall bring my remarks to a close. I would just like to mention the pleasure that I alluded to earlier of reading that Standard Life agreed with the Scottish Government on the currency. It should be borne in mind that Standard Life has at various points in the past 20 years threatened to walk out of Scotland if this, that or the other happened. Of course, it has not and it will not.

Mr David Hamilton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr MacNeil: I am afraid that I cannot. The child care offer given by the SNP Government would be fantastic, and I am absolutely clear that nobody in Standard Life would want to leave, particularly when its employees were getting such a fantastic offer.

Mr Hamilton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way? Put up or shut up.

Mr MacNeil: It is not just Standard Life. British Airways and Ryanair are seeing opportunities coming through, which may well benefit those in the north of England. They may prefer to take cheaper flights abroad from Scotland rather than making the long and arduous journey down to the south-east of England through snarled-up traffic. British Airways demonstrates the nub of the issue.

Mr Hamilton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order.

Mr MacNeil: It is not necessary to have David Cameron as Prime Minister to be British.

Mr Hamilton: Oh, for Christ's sake.

Mr MacNeil: Language, please. The hon. Gentleman lets himself down.

My final point is that when we put all the scares and fears aside, we see that independence offers opportunities not only for Scotland but for the north of England, and that it will increase the aggregate GDP of the British Isles. Nobody would roll back the independence of any other countries that have become independent, and I wager that when Scotland becomes independent, nobody will roll that back either. The voices that try to scare us about independence are the same ones that endlessly tried to scare us about devolution. They repeat the same fears as before when it comes to independence. None of them wants to reverse the independence of any European country, however, and when Scotland has become independent, they will support it wholeheartedly. Those in the north of England and the Borders will tell us of their great relations with Scotland, and they will tell us that an independent Scotland is the best thing since sliced bread.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order. The two speakers left are down to 11 minutes. I will not be timing them, but I ask them to bear that in mind.

10.29 am

James Wharton (Stockton South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir, and it is a privilege to follow the party political broadcast for the Scottish National party—we look forward to the idea of “Scotland, the new Liechtenstein” being rolled out in the referendum debate. I feared that I would not get to speak, so I will be brief, to allow other Members to contribute.

In principle, I support allowing Scotland a referendum, so that the people can decide. How could I not, with my track record of advocating referendums? I am concerned,

[James Wharton]

however, about the way in which the referendum has come about, and about its legitimacy, given who will be voting. I have never quite been resigned to the anomaly that allows 400,000 English people living in Scotland to vote, but 500,000 Scottish people living in England not to vote. It is strange that many of the Scottish people whom I represent will have no say, but my mother who lives in Hamilton will get a vote—she will, I am sure, vote to remain part of the United Kingdom.

We are primarily present, however, to discuss not the referendum, its format or how it came about, but what it might mean. There are two possible options. Scotland could, of course, vote to leave the United Kingdom. That is unlikely, because the Scottish people are sensible enough to want to remain part of the United Kingdom, but the possibility remains. They might be persuaded by the slogans and rhetoric of those who legitimately make the argument for independence. As we have discussed this morning, though, there would then be all sorts of problems and unanswered questions. How would they deal with taking a share of the national debt? How much would that share be, and what would the deal look like? What would the currency be, if it cannot be sterling? What would Scotland's relationship with the European Union look like?

Mr MacNeil: I am surprised at some of the hon. Gentleman's words. Would he be in favour of Scotland using sterling?

James Wharton: No, I would not, personally. It would be a suboptimal position, were Scotland to go independent, and I think that Scotland would not find it to be in its long-term interests.

Furthermore, how would Scotland deal with an exodus of companies that have made it clear that they would not be comfortable remaining based in Scotland were it to cast itself adrift from the United Kingdom? All those questions have been debated at some length, however, and I want to look at what is more likely to happen. It is more likely that Scotland will sensibly vote to remain part of the UK. That is why this debate is important, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) on it. What happens in that case could be important for the region that he and I represent; indeed, it could have an impact on the north-east and the north-west, and on the north of England as a whole. Without doubt, debate would quickly move on to further devolution, devo-max and what Scotland will look like as part of the United Kingdom, post the independence referendum. What would the new settlement be? I have no doubt that there would be a push for further powers to be devolved and further control to be transferred to the Scottish Parliament, and I fear what that would mean for the north-east.

We already have a competitive disadvantage in the north-east as a result of some of the powers that Scotland has devolved to it today. As regards competition with the north-east, Scottish Enterprise is able to give an extra push towards investing in Scotland, and to appeal to companies on where they bring their business, employment and investment. It is not necessarily the case that Teesside and Tyneside would prosper at the expense of places such as Aberdeen, but the reality is

that companies choose where they will be located. There should be a level playing field, with fair conditions on both sides of the border, when companies make that choice.

Mr MacNeil: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

James Wharton: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman again, because we are short of time.

After Scotland votes to remain part of the United Kingdom, as I am sure it will, my concern is that the north of England will face a challenge. While we do everything we can to support the country, the economy and its growth as a whole, we must ensure that we do not allow an unfair competitive advantage that would damage the economies of the people and constituencies that we represent.

Tom Blenkinsop: The hon. Gentleman and I know that the growth of Teesport in our region is massively dependent on exports to the Scottish market. For example, last January, Bunn Fertiliser announced that it would use Teesport to export not only to its English sites, but to the Scottish market. Can he give any other examples in our area of the Scottish market being so crucial to Teesside?

James Wharton: The examples are legion. The entire chemical processing industry and our engineering expertise on Teesside are in competition for jobs and investment with similar industry in many parts of Scotland. That goes not only for Teesside, but for Tyneside, Wearside, County Durham and the north of England as a whole. It is important for us to work together, and to improve the economies of all such areas where we can. We must not allow unfair competition that would unjustifiably and unfairly penalise the people we represent in the north of England.

Where would that take us? If Scotland voted to remain in the United Kingdom, the greater debate would be the one that took place in the north of England. The push would be for further regionalisation. We had a vote some years ago on whether we wanted a regional assembly, and the proposal was rejected in an outstandingly clear result. My concern is that that movement and impetus would arise again, out of a feeling of unfairness about Scotland being able to compete in a way that disadvantaged the north of England. The push towards regionalisation in England would start again—it would start in the north—and it is not something that I want to see.

Scotland voting no, if handled in the wrong way, could lead to further regionalisation, damage and break-up in the United Kingdom. I have no objection to powers being given to regions, but I do not want wholesale transfers away from our existing united model, which I support. We resoundingly rejected a regional assembly, but this could open the door to that debate starting again. The people of the north-east do not want a regional assembly, and the people of England do not want an English Parliament—that is not a route that the United Kingdom should go down—but I fear that a no vote, if handled in an improper way, might allow the creation of unfair competition and disadvantage for areas such as the north-east and the north-west, and for

constituencies similar to mine, leading us down a path that would do irreparable damage in the long term to the United Kingdom.

I welcome the debate, and we will hear much more on the subject in future. I congratulate the hon. Member for Sedgefield on raising such an important issue. I hope that, whoever is in government and whatever the situation at the time, people in London and in Westminster will appreciate the significance of further devolution to Scotland if it unfairly disadvantages the north-east.

10.36 am

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) on securing this important debate. The impact of Scottish separation on the north-east has received little attention. I am pleased that we are able to discuss the consequences of separation for the north-east, as well as for Scotland.

My view, for the record, is that we all benefit from Scotland remaining part of the United Kingdom. My constituency is a bit further from the border than that of other Members present, but in common with many people throughout England who have family ties with Scotland and feel a real sense of connection, I am proud of the longstanding relationship that we enjoy with our Scottish neighbours. It is right that any decision on whether Scotland should leave the United Kingdom is a matter for Scotland alone, but the United Kingdom has benefited from Scotland being part of it, just as Scotland has seen many benefits from being part of the United Kingdom.

The challenges that we face in the north-east are all too familiar to the Scots, and are similar to their concerns in daily life. Our shared trading links are a massive advantage on both sides of the border. Businesses and other organisations, such as the North East chamber of commerce, have rightly expressed concerns about the undoubted negative impact on jobs, growth and trade of a vote for separation.

There are many unanswered questions about the practical implications of separation. Unfortunately, this morning we have had no answers from the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), speaking on behalf of the Scottish National party, whether about border controls, currency or membership of the European Union. It is incumbent on those who propose independence as an ideal to offer answers to genuine questions on such important issues.

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Lady talked about sharing an affinity with Scotland. I have an affinity with Ireland, but I do not want us to share a Prime Minister, necessarily. Are there voices in north-east England expressing concern about jobs flooding into Scotland, as they might put it?

Bridget Phillipson: My concern is predominantly with the shared trading links between England and Scotland. We benefit from having an open border, without any hindrances. In the event of separation, that would simply not be the case.

Tom Blenkinsop: In answer to the question of the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), yes. Steelworkers in the north-east were concerned when the SNP Government awarded the contract for the fifth

of Forth crossing to China. If it were not for steelworkers in England—in Scunthorpe and Darlington—bringing that up with the Scottish Government, the SNP would not have U-turned and offered the contract to the Dalzell site, so that there was fabrication in Darlington as well.

Bridget Phillipson: My hon. Friend makes an important point. He takes a keen interest in such issues. Teesside is an important part of the UK steel industry, and he has steadily made that point about the impact if Scotland were to become independent.

I believe that more unites us than divides us. Our shared links and shared history matter. We simply cannot afford the uncertainty and the risk to jobs and trade that Scottish independence would bring. I do not want to see Scotland break away, but that decision is for the Scottish people—I respect that. I hope, though, that when voters go to the polls in Scotland, they will see the benefits of remaining part of this successful and enduring Union. I hope that it will endure for many centuries to come.

10.39 am

Gordon Banks (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) on securing this important debate and on his passionate contribution, in which he argued for the strengths of the Union of the United Kingdom. We have heard a lot this morning—about the impacts of independence on the steel industry in Scotland and the north-east; border controls and barriers; connectivity between the north-east and Scotland; EU membership; euro membership and currency in general; farming; North sea oil exploration and engineering; and a history lesson about Bavaria and Prussia from my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw).

I have seen things from both sides of the border. My father was a Scots miner, who married my mother, an Englishwoman, in Dunfermline abbey. They lived in Dunfermline, and then moved back to the north of England—that is where my mother was from. I was born in Acomb, in Northumberland, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman). I lived in Northumberland and then Cumberland, as it was then, until I was 14, before moving to Clackmannanshire in Scotland, where I have lived since, and I now have the privilege of representing it as part of my constituency. In the 1970s and 1980s, I worked for 10 years for the UK's biggest house builder, Barratt, a north-east company that has in the past seen excellent growth and rewards from its Scottish business ventures. That kind of relationship is under pressure from independence.

Mr MacNeil: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Gordon Banks: I will say this once and only once to the hon. Gentleman: I will give way once, and I hope his intervention is much better than his contribution.

Mr MacNeil: That is a disappointing tone to take. All I can say is that I am severely surprised. The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the different countries of his ancestry. Had his parents or grandparents been from countries outside the UK, would he have had a difficulty about that? Had he an ancestor from Denmark or

[*Mr MacNeil*]

Ireland, would he be internationalist on this issue, or does the fact that his ancestors are from the UK give him a particular difficulty?

Gordon Banks: It was not any better than the speech, at all. The hon. Gentleman really needs to be saved from himself in this place. My experience is of understanding the relationship between north-east England and Scotland, first hand. Those bonds demonstrate, I feel, the underlying strength of the Union, a sentiment that I know is shared by most Members present, with one obvious exception. Such links highlight that the debate surrounding independence does not affect Scotland in isolation but has significant implications for the rest of the UK. Nowhere is that felt more keenly than in north-east England.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield spoke with conviction about the common identity shared by Scotland and the north-east, and I am in full agreement with those sentiments. There can be no doubt about the bond in our industrial centres, such as Glasgow and Newcastle, or Sunderland and Dundee, based on our shared history, family and political perspective.

I, too, remember the 1980s, when Scotland and the north-east stood together against the poll tax and pit closures. People recognised then, as we do now, that any political change that we hope for can be reached only through the unity of shared identity and interests. That common bond would simply not be achievable if Scotland and the north-east were in separate countries.

The bonds of the 1980s can be felt just as strongly today, as can be seen by the fact that close to 150,000 people who were born in Scotland live in north-east or north-west England, and we have heard today about the many who travel across the border to work every day. Most of those people have made it abundantly clear that they do not want the break-up of the UK, as can be seen in a recent independent poll, which showed that 62% of Britons want Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom. People want that not only because of the bonds that we share, but because of an underlying recognition that independence for Scotland could leave them worse off.

That brings me to an important point, echoed throughout today's debate: independence has the potential to create uncertainty for our nearest neighbours, as well as for Scotland. John Tomaney, formerly of Newcastle university, has indicated that independence could have significant economic consequences for the north-east; in particular, he has highlighted the undesirable situation of Scotland competing directly with the north-east for investment. North-east England would be in the unfortunate position of being caught between a prosperous south and an independent Scotland fixated on implementing Irish levels of corporation tax. The end result would be a dangerous race to the bottom when it comes to wages and conditions, a scenario that would have serious implications for not only job security but the growth and development of the economies of both Scotland and the north-east.

That concern is not restricted to today's debate; it has been voiced over a number of years. In evidence to the Calman commission on Scottish devolution in 2009, the North East chamber of commerce expressed its concerns about what it called

“the creation of a Scottish rate of Corporation Tax”, identifying

“the potential for wasteful competition”.

That view was recently echoed by the chamber's head of policy, Ross Smith, who has stated that the north-east “will feel the impact of any competition from north of the border more keenly than others”

and that

“the future of Scotland is a big issue for many businesses” in the region.

Those concerns are only reinforced by the fact that the nationalists still have no credible plans on what currency would be used in an independent Scotland—that issue has been explored today, and we are still waiting for an answer. The situation leads only to uncertainty for the thousands of companies in the north-east and north-west that trade directly with Scottish businesses. The separatists are putting economic output and jobs in north-east England in jeopardy.

With just over six months to go until the referendum, the SNP has simply not provided any substantial answers to those important questions and many others raised today. As a result, it is damaging Scotland's prospects with its crossed fingers, and its strapline from Alex Salmond of “Trust me: it'll be all right on the night.” It also runs the risk of damaging the north of England, part of the country that would be an independent Scotland's biggest supplier and marketplace. That is why it is insincere of the SNP to assert that backing an independent Scotland would be in the best interests of the economy of north-east England, while not being straight about the impact on the north-east of its proposed cut to corporation tax.

We have a bigger idea than independence. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield, Labour is a national party, not a nationalist one. By their very nature, nationalists are separatists, whereas my party has its roots firmly in the whole of the UK, as has been shown today. I would encourage people to pay attention to the Institute for Public Policy Research's “Borderland” report, which argues that the key to success for north-east England lies in more joint working with Scotland—a point we heard in contributions from hon. Members today. Working within the shared institutions of the UK is the obvious means of delivering and achieving that, rather than trying to forge a relationship with a newly formed foreign country.

This debate will go on, so perhaps we should have another debate on the same topic. The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) bemoaned the 1:18 ratio among Members here today. Perhaps he can put in for a debate; then he could make a longer contribution, although that might be a bit of a challenge. However, today's debate has made it clear that although the outcome of the referendum is rightly a matter only for people living in Scotland, the debate must be open to all. Open debate will be vital in the coming months if we are to provide any clarity in the uncertainty that the independence referendum poses for Scotland and the north-east. Independence for Scotland will do nothing to build jobs, improve social justice or raise the aspirations of people in north-east England.

As I said, I was born in north-east England, in the UK. I have lived in north-east England and in central Scotland, in the UK. I have worked in central Scotland

and in this place, in the UK. I intend to make sure that, after 18 September, living in central Scotland and working in this place, I am still living and working in the UK. That is why I welcome today's debate, and I hope there will be further opportunities to discuss these issues in the weeks and months ahead.

10.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir; I commend the fair way in which you have performed your duties. I congratulate the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) on securing the debate, and I welcome the contributions from Members from both sides of the border and of all political persuasions. Some Members are new to the debate on Scotland that we are regularly subjected to—or take part in, depending on one's perspective.

Today is an important day in the referendum debate, because I hear from the BBC that Mr Alex Salmond is coming to England to reach out over the heads of the "Westminster elite"—I do not know whether that is us—to the people of England. I understand that he will tell them that they have no right to have a say in whether England enters into a currency union with Scotland, and that if Scotland becomes an independent country in the EU, English students will still have to pay tuition fees, contrary to EU law. That sounds like a very friendly message, which will be much welcomed.

Phil Wilson: I have seen the coverage of Alex Salmond's speech, too. It is being described as an emotional appeal. It always seems to be emotional, but it never gets down to the nuts and bolts of the economics and the impact on people's lives.

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman makes an astute point. We all listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil), but it did not contain many facts about what independence will mean for an independent Scotland, or what currency it will have. Mr Salmond needs to be clear that the message on the currency union is not a bluff. He needs to tell us what his alternative plan is. Sterlingisation would leave Scotland with no central bank, no lender of last resort and no control over its interest rates. The Scottish Government's fiscal commission said that sterlingisation "is not likely to be a long-term solution".

Mr Salmond looks like a man without a plan. Perhaps the people of England will find out what the people of Scotland have not found out: his plan B for currency.

As a number of Members have pointed out, being part of a strong United Kingdom benefits us all, on whichever side of the border we live. We all benefit from the stability and certainly that comes from being part of the large and diverse UK single market of 63 million people, rather than the market of the 5 million people of Scotland. The UK really is greater than the sum of its parts; we all put something in and we all get something out.

As part of the UK, Scotland has a broad tax base that allows us to share risks across the UK, and enables us to deal with economic shocks such as the 2008 financial crisis, and to support our ageing population. We have influence on the world stage as a member of

the UN Security Council, the EU, NATO, the G8, the G20 and the Commonwealth. At home, institutions such as the NHS and the BBC benefit us all. Scotland benefits from having a strong Scottish Parliament that can make decisions about the things that affect our everyday lives, such as our schools and hospitals. We can pool our resources in the good times and share risks in the bad times with our families and friends in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr MacNeil: The Minister says that we have a strong Scottish Parliament, but will he tell us why he left it to come to this place?

David Mundell: I left the Scottish Parliament because I was elected to Westminster. I am a supporter of the Scottish Parliament. I want to remind our friends who are not usually part of this debate that the Scottish National party did not support the devolution proposal in 1997, or the Calman commission's proposal to give the Scottish Parliament additional powers in 2012.

Mr Russell Brown: The Minister is painting a picture of where there have been significant improvements. There has been a devolution of power, yet under the SNP Government, we in Scotland are experiencing centralisation on a scale that has never been seen before.

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman is right. Although he and I did not vote for the SNP Government in Edinburgh—nor did most people in Dumfries and Galloway—we are not saying that we should tear up the devolution settlement simply because we do not like the Government in Edinburgh. Rather, we are campaigning against the Government and saying that they should be changed. We are not tearing up our country simply because we do not believe in individual policies.

The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar said that the only change that would come from independence is a change of Prime Minister—I think I heard him correctly, but I will check his words carefully, because I intend to have them printed out and distributed as widely as possible. He gave us the best case against independence that I have heard for some considerable time.

As a number of Members have said, like Scotland, the north-east benefits from the UK's size and scale, and the ability to share risks and resources. Within the UK's single market, we all benefit from close trading links, which continue to grow. The hon. Members for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop), for Inverclyde (Mr McKenzie), and for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson) made those points strongly. Scotland sold goods and services worth more than £45.5 billion to other parts of the UK in 2011; that is double what we sell to the rest of the world, and four times as much as we sell to the EU. About 30,000 people travel between Scotland and the rest of the UK to work each day.

The strong ties between Scotland and the north-east are clearly illustrated by the work of the "Borderlands" initiative. As a Member of Parliament for Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish borders, I am keen to encourage that close cross-border work. We must bring more closely together the strategic interests on both sides of the border.

Sir Alan Beith: Can I count on the Minister's backing in ensuring that the policy put forward by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Transport Secretary to prepare for the dualling of the A1 goes ahead?

David Mundell: The right hon. Gentleman is a powerful advocate of the dualling of the A1 to the border. It was not clear from his contribution that the A1 in Scotland is not dualled to the border; he might have wished to give that impression. However, he makes a strong argument for his proposition. He also made a strong point about cross-border services. Many of my constituents gratefully receive hospital treatment in Newcastle, and they do not want additional bureaucracy to block that. Although the NHS works on a devolved arrangement in Scotland, it is a shared institution and people do not want it to be separated.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield powerfully made the point about the border effect, which can be seen in the case of not only Canada and the US, but Austria and Germany. Creating a border will have an impact on trade. Hon. Members might be aware that our SNP friends have a pick 'n' mix approach to comparisons with Scotland. Sometimes it is Norway, sometimes Finland, and sometimes Lithuania; today it was Lichtenstein—tomorrow, who knows? What we do know is that Scotland is better off within the United Kingdom. The only way to keep the benefits for trade and the labour market, the UK pound and cultural links is for Scotland to vote no in the referendum. That is why the UK Government will do everything we can to make a positive case for a strong United Kingdom with Scotland as an integral part.

Patient Medical Records

10.59 am

Mr Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab): It is always a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir, and I welcome the opportunity to make a contribution to today's debate on how our health service can use patient data to improve health care.

Using data collected by the NHS to improve patient care sounds like a wonderful idea and it should be something that we can all support. However, almost nobody in the country, apart from NHS England, the Department of Health and companies with a commercial interest in the area, support what has been proposed. The scheme, which had the chance to bring about huge benefits for patients, has suffered from a complete failure to listen to either patients or doctors. The bottom line is that people simply do not want their medical data to be sold to the private sector or used for profit-making activities, and no amount of awareness raising or leafleting will change that.

I want to ensure that we have a consent-based model for using patient data that patients are happy with and have confidence in. Patients' opinions should be used to inform the way in which care.data works and not trampled over in the hurry to extract data. Patients matter, but we have heard no apology to all those who were not properly informed about care.data and whose confidential data would have been extracted without their knowledge if there had not been this hastily arranged delay. Why, I ask, have we had no apology to the in-patients who did not receive the leaflet, those with learning difficulties or visual impairments who could not read or understand it, those whose first language is not English, or to the elderly, sick and infirm, who could not get to their GPs to discuss the scheme?

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I fully support the principles behind care.data, but I think we need balance here. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that no patients were informed at all about the fact that their hospital episode statistics data were being released under the previous Administration, and they had no opportunity either to opt in or opt out?

Mr Godsiff: I certainly accept that, and I know that the hon. Lady has already raised that with the Government. I think the Government gave an answer, then had to apologise for the answer they gave and had to correct it.

Dr Wollaston: I was referring to the Labour Government.

Mr Godsiff: Well, there is not a Labour Minister responding at this time; there is a Minister from the Department of Health, which is peopled by members of the coalition Government.

Let me make it clear: this is not an argument between people who are in favour of research and those who are against it. Of course, we all want to facilitate life-saving medical research, but I want to do so without damaging patient confidentiality or public confidence in the NHS. We now have another chance to get this right, and we have six months in which to do that.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing a timely debate on a very important subject. Does he agree with me that a scheme that is already lacking in public confidence is not helped when Atos has been awarded the contract to extract the data from GP records? Does he agree that that should never have happened?

Mr Godsiff: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend and indeed, I will come to that point later. As I said, we have an opportunity in the next six months to try to get the scheme right. If the Government now address the many concerns raised about privacy, consent and the creeping commercialisation of our health service, they have the opportunity to create a scheme that offers enormous benefit to health care and research. However, if they fail to do that and continue to steamroll ahead, ignoring public concern, in six months' time they will find themselves in precisely the same place as they are now, faced by massive public opposition to a scheme that has the potential to do so much good and to save lives.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I wonder whether my hon. Friend has noticed an issue that has emerged. NHS England uploaded a vast amount of hospital patient data—188 million records—to Google servers. That was done—we have already heard mention of the firm, Atos—by PA Consulting Group, which lost a Home Office contract a few years ago because of data loss. Does he agree that it appears that NHS England has now lost control of the IT side of the project, and that before we go forward, we need full disclosure of all the uses to date of patient data?

Mr Godsiff: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I hope that the Under-Secretary for Health, the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) has taken note of what she said and that the Department will be forthcoming in identifying exactly how much confidential NHS data have been released to private profit-making companies. He might also point out how much income the Government have received from that.

There are a huge number of problems with the existing scheme. I could mention the information leaflets that look more like junk mail and have no opt-out return slip on them, or the fact that data extraction was planned to start before the code of practice on who will be allowed to access the data was completed, or the lack of a clear figure on cost. However, perhaps the most damaging flaw in the whole plan has been the refusal to listen to or to address those concerns when they were raised by doctors and patients. We simply cannot and should not bring in a scheme that lacks the consent and approval of the vast majority of people whose confidential health data will be used.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing the matter to the Chamber for consideration; it is the second time in three weeks that we have had the chance to debate the issue. Data collection is important, because of the benefits that could come from it, but confidentiality and people's confidence in the system have been undermined. Does he agree that the fact that the NHS data collection is specific to England, and that the Northern Ireland Assembly Minister responsible has indicated that he

would have some concerns over a similar proposal, indicates that there is not unanimous support for it across the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

Mr Godsiff: As usual, the hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point, which just goes to show that the Northern Ireland Assembly view the matter with more concern than the Department of Health seem to at the moment.

I say again that simply spending the next six months dropping more leaflets through letterboxes or building a website will not be anywhere near good enough. The Government must now come up with a coherent plan of how they will change care.data to address the many concerns that have been raised, and NHS England must work out how it will let people know about that.

Basically, the Government have two choices, but first they should stop fighting with GPs and patients who are unhappy with the scheme. I can assure the Minister that the GPs and patients who have contacted me have plenty of ideas about how the scheme could operate with proper safeguards built in. Will the Minister commit, during the six-month period, to engaging with GPs and patient groups about their concerns? As I have said, the Government have two options. They can either ensure that all the patient data extracted are only shared with non profit-making bodies working in the NHS or with recognised medical charities, or, and this is the second option, allow identifiable data to be extracted and used by companies for profit, but only, surely, when patients have specifically opted in to permit that.

The one thing any new scheme must have is clarity. Which datasets and variables will be released? Who decides what information or combination counts as identifiable information? Who will be held accountable if data are wrongly released and confidentiality breaches occur? What will happen if a patient withdraws their consent after data have been extracted, because they change their mind?

The Government must engage with GPs and patients. They could do far worse than look at the survey carried out by Pulse, which showed that three quarters of GPs believe that NHS England should abandon the opt-out system and ensure that data are extracted only after patients have given consent.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Is there any reason to believe that the opt-in would end up covering more than about 13% of patients, as is the case in other countries? What use is that to future generations that want their conditions cured and their diseases ended by good medicine?

Mr Godsiff: If the hon. Gentleman believes that only 13% would choose to opt in, does that not prove that 87% have considerable concerns about the entire basis of the scheme? People do not want their data to be taken outside of the confidentiality agreement that exists with their GP.

Sir Peter Bottomley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Godsiff: I have given way on many occasions.

Sir Peter Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman asked whether I agreed.

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order.

Sir Peter Bottomley: On a point of order, Mr Weir. I do not want to intervene again, but the hon. Gentleman asked a question, the answer to which is no, it does not. Inertia is the big problem.

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): As you well know, Sir Peter, that is not a point of order. It is up to the hon. Gentleman to decide whether to take interventions.

Mr Godsiff: Thank you very much, Mr Weir.

The Pulse survey found that as many as one in 12 GPs are considering opting out all of their patients from the scheme, and 33% said that they were undecided. Unless public awareness and GP confidence improves massively in the next six months, we will see huge opt-outs. What would the consequences of that be for the health service? I asked the Minister what would happen if a GP refused to upload patient data. His rather disconcerting reply was that

“NHS England would need to consider whether to take remedial action for breach of contract.”—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2014; Vol. 576, c. 275W.]

Will the Minister tell us whether such remedial action would make it impossible for GPs to continue to practise? Can he guarantee that doctors will not lose their jobs for doing what they believe to be best for their patients by protecting the confidentiality of personal data?

NHS England has said that it is delaying the scheme for six months because it wants to ensure that the public better understands the proposals. That is a hugely arrogant argument. NHS England is basically saying, “Look, we know best. We tried to get this through by stealth but we got found out. We will therefore delay it by six months while we try to explain it better to you, the public. We know best—we understand and you do not.” As I just said in response to the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), 87% of the population have considerable concerns about the scheme and do not want their data to be taken outside of the confidentiality agreement that exists between a patient and their doctor.

Grahame M. Morris: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Godsiff: No, I have given way on many occasions.

NHS England must start listening. GPs in Birmingham, where my constituency is, have said that they simply do not have time to have a proper conversation with patients about data sharing. GP surgeries are already stretched, and patients struggle to get an appointment within a reasonable time frame. Are we really suggesting that GPs should be talking to patients about the minutiae of a data-sharing scheme when ill people already cannot get an appointment? Would that really be the best use of doctors' time?

My hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) raised the issue of who is going to extract the information, and pointed out that Atos appears to have won the contract. At first, I thought that that was a joke, and I looked at the calendar to check that it was not 1 April. If it is seriously being suggested that Atos, probably the most loathed and inept company operating in the UK, is to be left to extract the data, all I can say is God help the patients of this country. The Department

for Work and Pensions has found that 60% of Atos disability assessments have been overturned on appeal. The company is absolutely hopeless. How on earth can the Government award it a contract to extract patient data? I ask the Minister: will it be done in this country, or on the other side of the world? I have no confidence whatever that Atos will be able to retain the confidentiality that patients want.

In conclusion, some people say that the choice is between protecting patient confidentiality and saving lives, but that is a false choice. As I said right at the start of my speech, people such as me who are concerned about the scheme are not against medical research or the provision of information to allow research to go ahead. I am opposed, along with the vast majority of people in this country, to private information about patients being sold off to private companies for private gain. That cannot be right. I urge the Government to look at the issue again and listen to what doctors and patients are saying.

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): I call Dr Daniel Poulter.

Sir Peter Bottomley *rose*—

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order. Sir Peter is seeking to make a speech, but given the time, I can let him do so only if both the Minister and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green agree to it. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has received any notice that Sir Peter wishes to speak.

Mr Godsiff: A number of Members had asked me whether I would mind their interventions, Mr Weir, and I took many of them, including two from the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley).

Sir Peter Bottomley: One.

Mr Godsiff: Well, one intervention and a point of order that was ruled not to be a point of order. Both were during the course of my 15 minutes. It is a matter for the Minister as to whether he wishes to give up some of his time for the hon. Member for Worthing West.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr Daniel Poulter) *indicated assent*.

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): I shall call Sir Peter, but it must be a very short speech.

11.17 am

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): As I said in the previous debate on this issue, I am grateful that this debate has been held. Nevertheless, I hope that we will take the advice of Ben Goldacre, who said that patients should wait before they opt out and that NHS England should listen before it makes a final decision. I hope that we will find a way to satisfy people, and I strongly urge people to make their data available for the benefit of us all. That is what community is about.

11.18 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr Daniel Poulter): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir, I believe for the first time. It is also a pleasure to respond to the debate and the points

raised by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr Godsiff). I congratulate him on securing the debate, as well as on the keen interest he has shown in the correspondence we have conducted via written questions. We have talked through some of the issues and he has expressed concerns about the importance of patient confidentiality.

I hope today to be able to reassure Members that strong safeguards were put in place by the Health and Social Care Act 2012, and that the creation of the Health & Social Care Information Centre was not a sudden event. The process is evolutionary and was debated fully and thoroughly during scrutiny of the Health and Social Care Bill a few years ago. I was a member of the Health and Social Care Bill Committee, as was the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris), and it sat for longer than almost any other Committee in the House for more than a decade. It is therefore not correct to say that the issues have not been debated and properly scrutinised in the past, because they absolutely have.

Grahame M. Morris: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Poulter: I am not going to give way because of the time. I have not said anything controversial; I am just reiterating the fact that a lot of the issues that have arisen today were discussed at great length during scrutiny of that Bill. The hon. Gentleman will recall that as he made many interventions and speeches in Committee.

We need to highlight the importance of this issue. We must ensure that we have the right data and the right processes in the NHS to inform good care. It is about ensuring that we have the data to improve research, to drive better integration and, in the wake of the Mid Staffs scandal and the Francis inquiry, to ensure transparency in protecting patient confidentiality and in the quality of care provided by health care providers so that we can ensure that high quality care is provided throughout the NHS and that its quality is properly scrutinised. We must learn from examples of good care, and where, by comparison and other standards, care is not good it should be transparently exposed.

There are important research benefits, too. We know that if we want to combat disease, address some of the challenges that we face in the health system and improve our knowledge of diseases from cancer to heart disease, we need to have the right information. We have to ensure that we collect data and information to improve patient care, which is the heart of everything we are talking about today. As long as we do that—I believe that we have the right safeguards in place through the 2012 Act and through the further clarifications and reassurances provided by the amendments to the Care Bill that have been tabled for next week—we are in the right place to deliver improved transparency and care quality while ensuring that we protect patient confidentiality, in which we all believe.

Dr Wollaston: I am passionate about the principles of care data, and I will not be opting out because of the benefits that the Minister and many others have outlined. He mentions the Francis report, and one of its fundamental principles was that people should be open and transparent about past errors and take account of genuine concerns. I am concerned that what we are hearing from the

Health & Social Care Information Centre is very defensive. There is a complete refusal to be transparent about errors; it is blaming everything on a previous body. Many members of those two bodies are the same, so for us to proceed with confidence those legitimate concerns must be addressed.

Dr Poulter: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is also important to highlight that sections 263 to 265 of the 2012 Act put much stronger safeguards in place. Those sections state that processes must be in place in the Health & Social Care Information Centre to ensure confidentiality and to ensure that data are always handled in the right way. The body is responsible for ensuring that those processes are kept up to date and that there are accountability frameworks for those processes. That important step forward was not in place for the previous body.

Barbara Keeley: Will the Minister give way?

Dr Poulter: I hope the hon. Lady will forgive me, but I want to make progress on some of the points raised in this debate. I will have to be brief any way, and she had a good chance to question me when I appeared before the Select Committee on Health last week. If she feels that she did not have an opportunity to discuss all of the issues, I am sure she will have an opportunity next week when we discuss these matters in our consideration of the Care Bill. Amendments were tabled last night to support some of the issues that we are talking about today. Those amendments will be considered next week, and I am sure those Members who cannot contribute in greater detail today because of the time will be able to contribute much more fully to next week's debate.

Finally, it is important to talk about driving and supporting integrated, joined-up health and social care across the system, in which we all believe. I know that those Members who are members of the Health Committee believe in that because I remember being a member of that Committee with the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Easington. If we are to deliver better integrated care, we need to have the right data. One of the key challenges in the past is that we did not collect the data effectively to measure what good integrated care looks like. We know we need to improve the collection of those data, and we want people with long-term conditions such as diabetes, dementia and asthma to be better supported in their own homes and communities. Of course we need to have the data to do that. A lot of those data will come from primary care, and it is important that we put together those data and analyse them to understand what good care looks like. We have not been in the right place to deal with that in the past, but I am confident that we will be in the right place to do it while protecting patient confidentiality with the measures that we are seeking to implement.

Barbara Keeley: The point that I wanted to make is in line with what the Minister is saying. Following the revelations about IT issues that I mentioned, and the apology that his colleague the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison) made yesterday to the Commons, will he now agree that it would be sensible for Ministers and NHS England to consider keeping one copy of the care.data database and run staff queries against it, so that it is held in one

[Barbara Keeley]

place and not scattered about on various servers, causing consternation and the need for websites to be taken down, as they were yesterday, because NHS England does not know where the hospital data have gone? The only solution is the one that we discussed last week: keeping one copy and running staff queries against it.

Dr Poulter: It is absolutely right that the discussions that we have had in this debate and the issues raised about care.data have been helpful in building on the safeguards in the 2012 Act to improve the processes of the Health & Social Care Information Centre, as a new body, to ensure that it has particular regard to putting strong confidentiality criteria in place. It is also right to keep those criteria under regular review. Obviously, there is regular communication between that body and the Information Commissioner about issues such as protecting confidentiality.

I am sure that we have a robust set of criteria in place under the 2012 Act. It may be helpful to hon. Members if I outline what they are. I reassure the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green that the data are not released for profit. It is about cost recovery when they are. It is also important to say that data are not released in identifiable form without a strong public policy reason: for example, in a civil emergency or some such situation. Data must be used for the benefit of the health and care system. That is a strong set of criteria for use of the data, and strong safeguards are in place. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already put in place an opt-out for patients who do not want to be involved in the process, which has not been the case in the past.

It is important in this context to highlight that we are not taking a sudden, big-bang approach or change to data; this is an evolutionary process. In 1989, in-patient data were collected for the first time; in 2003, out-patient data; in 2007 and 2008, accident and emergency data. That was about improving and driving transparency,

developing better care pathways for patients with, for example, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and ensuring that we better used data to benefit the health service and patients. Now, when it is so important to drive better integration, primary care data will also be collected. That is not a revolutionary change; it is an evolutionary change. What is important is that now, under the 2012 Act, we have much stronger safeguards in place better to protect patient confidentiality and much more rigorous processes under which the Health & Social Care Information Centre, as a new body, will operate, in order to ensure that it regularly reviews its processes and uses data in the right way.

It is also important to say that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State fully supports and is committed to the principles of the programme, which will alert the NHS where standards drop, enable prompt action to be taken, help staff understand what happens to people, especially those with long-term conditions, and help us develop and improve care. However, in order to reassure hon. Members further and bring greater clarity to some of the issues and discussions, we have tabled some amendments to the Care Bill. We will have an opportunity to discuss them fully next week when we debate the Bill. I am sure that when hon. Members see them, in conjunction with the safeguards already in place under the 2012 Act that were not there before, they will be reassured.

The programme is a good one. It is doing the right thing, improving research, driving up care standards in our NHS and supporting the integration of the health and care system, which we all believe in. It is also protecting patient confidentiality. With those reassurances, I close my remarks. I hope that hon. Members will take the opportunity next week to debate fully any further issues or concerns that they may have. I will bring them the reassurances that they need.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

A303

[DR WILLIAM MCCREA *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr McCrea, and I am delighted finally to have secured this afternoon's debate. The A303 is a 92-mile road of historic importance that runs from Basingstoke to Devon and is one of only two major routes across the south-west. It is often affectionately referred to as the highway to the sun, because of its popularity with holidaymakers. I am sure that many hon. Members in the Chamber have fond memories of their long trips down it.

Unfortunately, such trips have become far from stress-free, and they now take far too long, because of the formidable traffic jams that are regarded as an everyday occurrence even outside the high season. A document published by the Department for Transport in July last year revealed that an estimated 20,000 vehicles drive within 200 metres of Stonehenge on an average day. The problems have become particularly acute since the closure of the A344 at Stonehenge. Sadly, to my constituents, the old Roman name for the road, which was the devil's highway, seems appropriate. For many people, travelling on the A303 has become a deep source of frustration. Parents battling to the west country in half-term dread it, but it is a hassle that they face only once or twice a year. It is far worse for my constituents, who have to wrestle every day with what feels like one of the most notorious traffic blackspots in the country.

I have called the debate because I want to ensure that the 15 miles of the A303 that run through my constituency are not overlooked in the Government's evaluation of the road as one of their national strategic priorities. More than 20 years have passed since the first dualling proposal was put on the table, and a staggering £43 million has been spent on numerous feasibility studies that have ultimately, and very sadly, come to nothing. That is all despite the fact that when the M4/M5 route to Devon and Cornwall was constructed in 1961, it was always envisaged that the A303 would be entirely dualled, given the road traffic and economic forecasts at the time. That was 53 years ago. My predecessor, the excellent Robert Key, campaigned on the matter throughout his 27-year career in the House. He tells me that he had meetings with 70 different Ministers from different Departments during that time, which even involved the late Baroness Thatcher examining maps on the floor of her office.

Sadly, debate over the dualling of the A303 has become increasingly polarised. For those who are primarily concerned with traffic flows and the prosperity of the south-west, dualling is a no-brainer that will ease congestion and boost the regional economy.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this vital debate. He is making an excellent case, which I would like to back up by saying that people in Cornwall would benefit enormously from the dualling of the A303 throughout his constituency, because it is a vital arterial road into Cornwall.

John Glen: My hon. Friend makes a wise and sensible point, and I will expand later on the economic benefits for the south-west as a whole.

On the other side of the argument, we cannot ignore the fact that the A303 runs very close to the UNESCO world heritage site at Stonehenge. We have a responsibility to protect that sacred site and reduce the blight that traffic continues to cause. If we do not, the National Trust, English Heritage, the Stonehenge Alliance and the Council for British Archaeology inform me that Stonehenge will be formally placed on the at-risk register. That would be extremely damaging to our reputation as a world leader in safeguarding our heritage.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend accept that the argument is about not only the megalithic monument at Stonehenge but the landscape in which it sits?

John Glen: Absolutely. My hon. Friend makes a sensible point, which I will expand on in a moment.

The risk of Stonehenge losing world heritage status is not an empty threat. That happened to Dresden in 2009 when a new four-lane bridge was constructed. As my hon. Friend just said, we must recognise the unique nature of the environment that surrounds the A303. Understanding how the greater Stonehenge and the vast interlacing of pathways, waterways, tombs, stones and enclosures fit together is not the idle pursuit of a few; it is a national heritage responsibility for us all.

As those two perspectives collide, doing nothing is not the only option. Although people tell me, "Just get on and dual the road," a poorly designed and badly executed overground dual carriageway that undermines a 5,000-year-old world heritage site is not an improvement worth fighting for. In the past, however, all parties have repeatedly united around one solution: a deep-bore tunnel that is at least 2.8 km long, which would pass unseen beneath the hidden barrows and earthworks of the wider Stonehenge site. It seems to me that no other realistic solution has been offered—other proposed solutions have been a cut-and-cover tunnel or open dualling—that provides the same protection for the historic asset of Stonehenge and delivers the improvements to traffic that so many of my constituents desperately seek, and which I so enthusiastically support. Successive programmes have been cancelled on the grounds of costs that made them politically impossible to deliver or justify. As a result, we are left with a highly congested road, dissatisfied local people, wasted investment in feasibility studies, long delays for businesses and an imperfect solution for those who seek fully to address the heritage concerns.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that sometimes it is difficult to look at the benefit of a project? I look back to the debates over the Channel tunnel and think of what that has delivered. Tourism is mission-critical for the south-west, and if we do not get the A303 sorted, we will have a real problem. Our small businesses depend on it, and if the situation is not improved, the potential of the south-west will never be realised.

John Glen: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. Later in my speech, I will describe the analysis that has been done on the impact on the south-west economy, the support of the CBI and others, and the reasons why it is imperative to get on with improving the road.

[John Glen]

The difference now, compared with previous attempts to deal with the problem, is that Britain's engineering expertise has developed and we now have an international reputation for excellence in large-scale infrastructure projects that involve tunnelling. I understand that as a result of the expertise accumulated through Crossrail, the Hindhead tunnel and the Thames Tideway tunnel, the cost of such a project today should, in real terms, be around half the cost that was quoted in 1996.

I recognise that the dualling of the A303 by Stonehenge has aroused significant debate over many years, but the current impasse requires clear ministerial engagement and decisions. I therefore urge the Minister to be the one who unlocks decades of inertia—to be the Minister who finally delivers a solution for the road, rather than being added to the 70 I mentioned earlier who sadly failed.

Ten years ago, the then Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Edinburgh South West (Mr Darling), said:

“Let's have no further re-examinations and re-examinations and reviews—let's get on with it”.

Mr Jeremy Browne (Taunton Deane) (LD): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and for securing this debate. I completely agree with him on the need to be sensitive to Stonehenge and its surrounding environment. Nevertheless, does he share my observation that the road must be dualled at some future point, at least as far as Ilminster, because the volume of traffic will inevitably make it necessary? Indeed, it already has. The question is not really whether we dual it, but whether the Government have enough sense of urgency about the economic benefits for the south-west and the time that is being lost daily. Are we going to keep pushing the problem on to future generations of politicians and future Governments when we should be looking to resolve it ourselves?

John Glen: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. He makes a passionate case on behalf of the Somerset people he represents, and everyone in the region, on the legitimate economic arguments for the whole country, and the south-west in particular. I fully back him up on what he said.

Will the Minister tell us how the feasibility study will be framed to deliver an unambiguous solution for the A303 in Wiltshire? I do not mean a solution on paper, and subject to further decisions near or after a general election; I mean a solution that will secure physical changes on the ground. As other Members have said, the A303 is vital to the south-west, but it is also a route used day in, day out, by local people in my constituency, and they are very concerned.

Winterbourne Stoke is a typical Wiltshire village, except that more than 30,000 vehicles thunder through it every day. In just five years, there have been two fatalities and nine serious injuries in a number of collisions. The case for the Winterbourne Stoke bypass was accepted in previous studies and public inquiries. I recently visited the proposed sites with local councillor Ian West, who said that there is no controversy over the best route

or its inclusion in any upgrade to the A303. Will the Minister reassure my constituents in the village that this notorious accident blackspot will finally be addressed?

Other local areas have been similarly affected by the pollution, and particularly the noise, caused by the sheer volume of traffic. I am delighted that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Sir George Young), is present. He has drawn my attention to the increased noise and pollution caused by the sheer volume of traffic around Andover. Will the Minister outline today how he intends to tackle that and replace the particularly noisy sections in that constituency? Will he agree, at the very least, to explore resurfacing the road so that those living next to it can have relative peace and quiet restored?

The village of Shrewton in my constituency has also paid a heavy price for the recent traffic changes associated with the construction of the new visitors' centre at Stonehenge and the closure of the A344, which I mentioned earlier. The work of the Stonehenge Traffic Action Group—STAG—under the leadership of Janice Hassett and Dr Andrew Shuttleworth has motivated me to pursue those issues.

I turn to the wider economic benefits of improvements to the route. A study carried out in 2013 for Devon, Somerset and Wiltshire councils estimates that dualling the A303 would ultimately generate more than £41 billion for the economy, create 21,400 jobs and increase visitor expenditure by £8.6 billion every year. John Cridland, the director general of the Confederation of British Industry, has said that the A303 should be fast-tracked because it is

“pivotal in underpinning the government's broader growth priorities: boosting our export capability and maximising the economic potential of all regions.”

Of 650 south-west businesses surveyed, 89% said that the reliability of the journey time was an issue for them, and 77% said that improving the route would increase investment in the area. More than two thirds of Wiltshire businesses alone said that dualling would increase their turnover, saving time, fuel and lives. The issue therefore is not simply one of a bit of traffic on the edge of Salisbury plain. The A303 is one of just two transport arteries to the south-west. The British Chambers of Commerce has shown that upgrading it offers the highest benefit-to-cost ratio of any UK transport project, including—dare I say it—a third runway at Heathrow.

Why would businesses invest in sites if accessing them involves travelling regularly on the A303? Staff would be plagued by delays and rarely be on time, while clients would never know whether staff would turn up. The benefits, therefore, are clear, as is the choice. We can continue with the clogged-up artery that is the existing A303, or we can provide the region with a much needed lifeline to catalyse economic growth in the south-west. It is somewhat sad that seven years ago my predecessor held a debate in this Chamber on this exact topic, but since that point nothing tangible has emerged from Governments of either side.

In recent days, I have spoken to English Heritage, the National Trust and Stonehenge Alliance, and I have received representations from the Council for British Archaeology, which will not accept anything that threatens the heritage interests of the area. Decades of consultations mean that we know the position of the Ministry of

Defence and of the numerous stakeholders I have referred to, which have all contributed many times to the lengthy, expensive and repetitious public inquiries over the years. Let us be honest and say that tackling Stonehenge might well be the most difficult part of the A303 programme, but let us then get on with the job.

Let us have no more hand-wringing and procrastination, flying of kites that will not get off the ground or picking off of smaller, cheaper schemes elsewhere along the route—perhaps the Countess roundabout flyover, or an underpass at Longbarrow roundabout. They may be politically more palatable and fiscally less threatening to the Treasury, but they are not really what is required. We need an imaginative and holistic solution, and a realistic, fully costed explanation of how it will be paid for.

Have we explored every funding avenue available? Will the Minister agree to examine European funding avenues related to the economic interests of the far west of the region, which would undoubtedly benefit from the A303 being upgraded? Will he work with other Government Departments, including the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, to ensure that all funding associated with this UNESCO world heritage site is pursued aggressively and exhaustively? More importantly, will the Minister pledge categorically that Stonehenge will not be simply siphoned off into the “too difficult” category in the study, in order to deliver improvements elsewhere on the route?

The harsh reality is that if the Stonehenge solution is ignored and the rest of the A303 is dualled, my constituency will remain host to the bottleneck that prohibits swift and easy access to the wider south-west region.

Sarah Newton: The Government have commissioned a resilience review for the whole transport infrastructure to the far south-west in Devon and Cornwall, which is very welcome. Does my hon. Friend agree that we might also ask the Minister to consider giving the importance of the A303 greater emphasis in that infrastructure resilience report?

John Glen: That is a useful intervention. The difficult past few weeks, in which the infrastructure of the south-west has been under enormous pressure, have underscored the fact that we must open up new options for the A303. Sorting out the A303 in Wiltshire will provide a clear gateway to the south-west.

My constituents have been promised so much on this issue by many Ministers over many years; sadly, they have been let down every time. I am determined that they will not be let down again. I ask the Minister to commit today to ensuring that our hopes for the A303 can become a reality. I know that he is a plain-speaking Yorkshireman. I look for plain speaking in his response to us Wiltshire folk, who are fed up with constant words and little action.

2.50 pm

Alison Seabeck (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab): It is a pleasure to have you in the Chair, Dr McCrea. The hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen) is to be congratulated on securing this debate, not least because the A303 is one of the few strategic road links down to the far

south-west, and particularly to Plymouth. Its importance therefore cannot be overstated. The recent extreme weather in the far south-west shows how vulnerable we are; we lack rail and road resilience when major road routes are cut.

Anne Marie Morris: Is the hon. Lady aware that only last week, the A303 was closed at the same time that our wonderful railway was out of action?

Alison Seabeck: The hon. Lady knows the region very well. I will come to those issues a little later, but she is absolutely right that there are major problems when either the M5 or the A303 closes for one reason or another. We have had relatively little investment in the south-west, as recent weeks have shown. Across the south-west, we have less investment in transport per person than any other region in the country, with the possible exception of the north-east in some modes. We are now reaping the consequences.

I say to the Minister that I fully accept that there is no open chequebook—the shadow Chancellor would jump on me if I suggested that there was—but when we look at the Hindhead tunnel, which goes under the gorgeous landscape of the Devil’s Punch Bowl in Surrey, we can see what could be done if the finance were to become available. As the hon. Member for Salisbury made clear, the A303 has long been a subject of Department for Transport attention, and his predecessor was much admired by all parties for his persistence and the intelligent way in which he tried to find a solution to the problem around Stonehenge.

The South West Regional Committee, of which I was the Chair and which reported in 2010, made it clear that we felt it important that the Department for Transport should value the route in terms of the resilience that it provided to the region. We had instances during the recent storms—I will come back to this—when the A303 was partly closed due to falling trees and the rail line was closed for engineering works, as was the M5. Nobody had actually talked to each other. Business in Plymouth and further south ground to a halt. Fortunately, co-ordination between the Highways Agency and Network Rail is now a lot better, but as the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) pointed out, we have seen exactly what can happen if those roads close.

Tourism and manufacturing are hugely important issues in the south-west and Plymouth. Although rail usage is growing—when there is a line—we also need road links to bring visitors, freight and goods. Companies such as Wrigley, Princess Yachts and Babcock all need to ship products and supplies via road links rather than rail, due to the nature of the products that they are moving. The Heart of South West local enterprise partnership’s top priority is a faster, more resilient transport system, and it is pressing for improvements to the A303 as part of its key area of activity. It understands the need to move people around by road. Certainly, now that Hinkley Point C will be going forward, there will be a greater need for good road links, and improvements will be required.

The region’s transport planners have been grappling with the A303 for decades. What should be done with it? What should its status be? How can we better connect it with roads further west? The dualling argument to increase resilience is made by motoring organisations

[*Alison Seabeck*]

such as the RAC as well as local authorities. Dualling the road under the Blackdown hills, for example, would be a huge cost commitment, but it is undoubtedly what local people want, in the same way that tunnelling under Stonehenge is important.

Like many hon. Members here, I have driven along the A303. It is a lovely route winding through a number of counties. Judging by the Members here, it does not go through many Labour constituencies, but I say to Government Members that they have a strong, powerful voice. It is their coalition that is in government. I have seen Members from my party in areas such as the north-east make use of the strength of such a body of people. Government Members have a good opportunity, and they should ensure that they use it.

I will wind up, because I am sure that other hon. Members want to make similar points. I point out that the road does not have national status. Unfortunately, it has not been seen as important by this or previous Governments, but I hope that the Minister will now take a close personal interest in it, because it is important. We have seen the impact of weather on the south-west. If we fail to get a grip on the situation, not only will UNESCO look at Stonehenge—the hon. Member for Salisbury made that point clearly—but we will lose the important opportunity to grow the economy in the south-west. We have a lot to offer, including a lot of manufacturing companies that could do a lot more, but we cannot do it without the transport infrastructure. The A303 is a vital part of that.

2.56 pm

Mr David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): In my 17 years in Parliament—other than the period when I was a Minister, when I had to secrete references to the A303 in answers on other things—there has not been a single year in which I have not raised the issue of the A303, so I am particularly grateful to the hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen) for securing this debate, and for introducing it so well. The A303 is a special road. It is a road of myth and legend, about which books have been written and films made. It is Britain's mother road. Sadly, it is a neglected mother, because successive Governments have failed to put in the investment needed, and it is frankly unfit for purpose. That is the simple point that many of us have made year after year to Government.

The hon. Member for Salisbury concentrated, quite reasonably, on Stonehenge, which is the major difficulty along the whole road. I hope that he will forgive me for concentrating, despite the fact that we do not have megaliths to hand, on the portion of the road that runs through my constituency, the Sparkford to Ilchester stretch. We have a couple of listed world war 2 hangars turned into houses that are of interest, but they do not quite merit the same attention as Stonehenge. Nevertheless, they are very interesting.

Sparkford to Ilchester is a stretch of road that should have been dualled a long time ago. There are reasons why it has not been, and in my view, those reasons are unsustainable. Casting my mind back a little, I remember appearing at a public planning inquiry in 1996 on the dualling of that stretch of the A303. Those of us who

were in favour of dualling won the inquiry—the inspector found in our favour—and construction was about to start, when suddenly, in 1997, with the change of Government came a moratorium on all major road construction, and the Sparkford to Ilchester stretch was left out. That meant that work did not start when we hoped it would.

Then the regional bodies for local government in the south-west brought together the so-called south-west regional spatial strategy; very few people shed many tears when it went. Those bodies decided that the A303 should not be considered the second strategic route to the south-west. That was an utterly perverse decision, but of course the Government at that time, with many other demands for investment—

John Glen: In the north-east.

Mr Heath: In the north-east, as the hon. Gentleman says, or elsewhere. The Government were very happy to grasp that and say, “Well, the local people don't think this is an important road, so why on earth should we invest in it?” So the road was still not dealt with at that time.

There were other knock-on effects. The hon. Gentleman mentioned Winterbourne Stoke, where I have spent many happy hours queuing in traffic over the years, and the effect of the surface noise from the road there. That problem also afflicts my constituency; around the Wincanton area, there are houses that are close to a busy road. We had a commitment 15 years ago to replace that road surface with a low-noise road surface, but guess what? The plans to do that were cancelled and the money was specifically moved to the A1(M), which was considered a higher priority.

The A303 has been constantly neglected. Also, the best has sometimes been the enemy of the good: sometimes the difficulties to do with Stonehenge and the Blackdowns—difficulties that undoubtedly exist—have been allowed to prevent anything being done along any part of the road. I entirely accept what the hon. Gentleman said about Stonehenge; it is essential that we find a solution.

Alison Seabeck: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way—or should that be the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr Heath: No.

Alison Seabeck: Sorry, I am not doing very well with titles today. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that if a solution is not found on Stonehenge and the Blackdown hills, dualling other bits of the road and encouraging more traffic on to them will simply cause further problems at bottlenecks? There is almost a case for sorting Stonehenge and then working backwards.

Mr Heath: Well, the same volume of traffic will be on the road, so I am not entirely sure of that. However, I agree that Stonehenge is a priority; we have to find a solution to the problem there.

The problem with the Blackdowns is that it is extremely difficult to conceive of a road scheme across the area that will meet the environmental requirements. In the case of the Blackdowns, there is an alternative, in the use of an enhanced A358 connection. I know that those

in south Devon, including the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Alison Seabeck), will not see that as the ideal solution. Nevertheless it is a viable alternative, at least in the meantime, until we can find a better solution.

Let me return to the reason for dualling the parts of the A303 that can be dualled relatively simply. I would like the schemes for Winterbourne Stoke, Chicklade and Sparkford to Ilchester to be taken off the shelf; it is utterly absurd that we have not made progress on those. I am hugely relieved that this Government have finally decided that they want to do something about the A303 and have commissioned the feasibility study. I hope that it will be in the hands of the Minister relatively soon, so that decisions can be made, hopefully in time for big announcements in the autumn spending review this year.

There is every argument for doing something about the A303, but they are in three main areas. First, there are the economic arguments. We have already heard from various hon. Members that the economy of the south-west needs this connection, and ample evidence has been produced by the CBI, the Federation of Small Businesses, the local enterprise partnership and the local authorities in the area to say that this work needs to be done to unlock the economy of the south-west peninsula.

Secondly, there are perfectly sound safety arguments, certainly in relation to the area that I represent. One of the problems is that there is a relatively fast—I say “relatively”, because too often it is clogged up—dual carriageway that suddenly becomes a single carriageway, then a dual carriageway again and then a single carriageway again, just at the point when people travelling from London are at their lowest ebb and most tired. They have probably not taken a break before that point, and therefore the accident record is of some concern to me. That problem could be avoided by simple online improvements.

Thirdly, there is the point about resilience, which was eloquently made by my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton). It is simply ridiculous that we often have only one viable route to the whole of the south-west peninsula; it is ridiculous that one of the longest peninsulas in any country has such limited access to it. People in London and elsewhere sometimes do not understand just how big the south-west is. I remember that when we were talking about regional police forces, I said that the northernmost point of the so-called south-west regional police force, which was at Tewkesbury, was nearer to Scotland than to the tip of Cornwall. That is a fact. People have no conception of the distances in the south-west, yet we are served by one motorway. When that motorway is closed for any reason, as it was, sadly, by the accident near Taunton in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Mr Browne) a little while ago, the result is chaos for the inadequate A303. Similarly, the A303 was flooded at Christmas. Perhaps that was because of freak conditions, but nevertheless we had, yet again, an example of the area's lack of resilience.

We have to couple that with our inability to travel by rail in such circumstances, which all of us will remember from just a few weeks ago, when Paddington station was like a ghost station, because there were no trains running from it, or no trains running to anywhere that people wanted to get to. I beg the pardon of my hon.

Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell), because he could probably get to his constituency from Paddington, but we could not get to the south-west from Paddington. Resilience is a big issue.

My last point relates to something said by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View, namely that the south-west seems to be forgotten by every Government. A few months ago, I accused the Secretary of State for Transport of not knowing where the south-west is. He has proved me wrong; he knows where it is and has been there, as has my hon. Friend the Minister who is here today. However, in terms of Government investment in infrastructure, the south-west is still very much the poor relation of every other part of the country, and that is not good enough for me. I just do not see why we have to be the last in the queue for every single thing when it comes to Government investment. My plea to the Minister is this: for once, listen to the west country, listen to all the points that we are making, and do something about our wholly inadequate A303.

3.8 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Let me apologise, Dr McCrea, because I may not be able to stay to the end of this debate, depending on when it finishes, as I have another meeting to attend.

I will make a short contribution picking up on the historical implications of this issue, which my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) mentioned. I declare two interests: first, I am a member of the all-party group on archaeology; and, secondly, I am a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. The economic implications of this issue have already been highlighted by Members; I will not go over them again. I just point out that Stonehenge is an important element of the economic case that they have made, and we need to take it into account.

Inevitably, the issue of the A303 bottleneck in the area of Stonehenge has been raised. We need the Government to look for a long-term sustainable solution to this problem, which reflects their full cultural, environmental and international obligations. With respect to the Minister, this is not solely a traffic issue; at stake is the integrity of one of the world's finest prehistoric landscapes.

I intervened earlier to say that this was not just about the monument. I am credited with being one of those who helped to invent landscape archaeology. I stress that the landscape in which Stonehenge sits is an important archaeological site in its own context. This Government should explore what impact on this world heritage landscape would be acceptable. Particularly for the reasons set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury, the Government should explore a long-bore tunnel option. That would add to the considerable achievement of the recent closure of the A344 next to the stones, which reduced noise and traffic pollution from the road, and that in turn moved us further in the desirable direction of allowing visitors to explore the entire world heritage landscape in its completeness.

John Glen: Although my hon. Friend makes a reasonable point about the wider heritage arguments, he must acknowledge that the closure of that road before a

[John Glen]

solution for the A303 was fully established caused enormous frustration to many local residents, some of whom are in the Public Gallery.

John Howell: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. I fully accept his point, but we cannot undo what has been done historically, and we have to take the major benefits that came out of it, in terms of reducing noise and traffic pollution. We would like to get back to the amount of noise and traffic pollution being reduced, so that people can explore the world heritage landscape in its entirety.

The aim of all the key heritage bodies involved—my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury listed them in their entirety—is to regain the tranquillity and dignity of this unique cultural landscape, as well as allowing the throughflow of traffic between here and the south-west, so that present and future generations can fully enjoy and appreciate the world heritage site as a whole. Anything that can be done to achieve those two objectives is to be welcomed as something that we should do now.

3.12 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this worthwhile debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) for securing it and congratulate him on doing so. The number of hon. Members in the Chamber, especially from along the route of the A30/A303, shows how important a debate it is.

I want to quote *Hansard* first of all:

“The trunk roads from London to the West are quite inadequate for the traffic they have to carry. Queues up to 10 to 15 miles long are commonplace in summer on roads like A.30 and A.303. At many points there are bottlenecks, and the carriageways are quite inadequate.”—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1959; Vol. 605, c. 1558.]

This is from a speech made by Mr Edward du Cann, MP for Taunton, in an Adjournment debate held in May 1959. It shows that there has been quite a long debate about this road.

My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr Heath) mentioned the part of the road in Ilminster that was to be trunked in 1997, before the moratorium on road building by the previous Government. A project involving the A30, moving into the A303, east of Honiton, was also shelved. We nearly got there, but it was stopped.

I am delighted that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill), has agreed to drive on the road and see the A303 for himself, including where improvements can be made. That is welcome. I thank him for that. As he is a Yorkshire farmer, I am certain that we will get a truthful answer from him today, and that he will commit the Government to doing something about this quickly, rather than taking too long.

I want to take issue slightly with my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell). Rome is one of the most historic cities in the world, with the forum and all the Roman remains, but dual carriageways go all around it, right close to the buildings. Yet that can be maintained. We have to be able to deal with the life that we live today and the need for dualling of the A303/A30, and not live in a prehistoric world. I am keen on history, but at the

end of the day we have to find a way, acceptable from both an historical and financial point of view, to ensure that we dual the A30 right the way down to Cornwall.

In this Chamber, we are probably 300 miles from Penzance. I have not done the arithmetic, but I suspect that it is only a little further from London to Scotland. People have to remember that.

Alison Seabeck: The hon. Gentleman is right. The distances are not wildly out. It is distressing, when one visits Secretaries of State in some Departments, to find that they think that Plymouth is a bit like Hastings, in terms of its distance from London. Some education is needed in Departments.

Neil Parish: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. Of course, when the Minister drives the route—he has probably already done so, but he will do it officially—he will see the length of the A30/A303 and will only probably get halfway along it. By some magic, he appears to be stopping at Honiton; I have no idea why. But seriously, we have to improve the road.

Hon. Members have said that we have few arterial routes into the west country. Bristol is not the west country; it may be part of the west country, but there is much after Bristol. To get to Devon and Cornwall, people need to cross Wiltshire and Somerset. We need to get that road done. A previous solution talked about in the spatial strategy—building on the A358 and dualling it out to the A303—is not a solution, because all that does is drive motorway and A303 traffic on to and off an already congested road. The west country—Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, and Wiltshire—relies a lot on tourism. We also rely on our businesses being able to be able to move their goods and services around. Come the summer, there are times when those roads are completely blocked. That has a huge economic effect on our businesses. Money for dualling the A303/A30 would be well spent.

I have made the point before in Parliament that, although I am 110% behind the Government taking action on our deficit—the huge sum that we have to borrow day in, day out, to pay the running costs of this country—there is an argument that says that, when interest rates are so historically low, we should borrow money to build infrastructure, because that builds up our economy and gives us a great future.

We expect our fair share of proceeds in the west country. Vast sums may or may not be spent on High Speed 2, yet we have railways that are falling into the sea. We are doing our best to make sure that that does not happen, and that railways are rebuilt. A second railway line needs to come down to the west country. All this is part of the infrastructure. Roads are also important.

On a slightly more controversial note, people say, “If you dual those roads, the traffic will go faster and it could cause more pollution.” However, in my view, it causes much less pollution. There is nothing worse than car engines ticking over for hours on end; cars do not run well when the engines are not running smoothly, and the amount of fuel and carbon monoxide that comes out of cars that are queuing for hours adds to pollution.

In my constituency, especially coming out of Honiton, several villages along the A30, which leads into the A303, have poor access to and egress from that road.

There have been many accidents along it, so there are many good reasons, from a traffic safety point of view, for improving it.

People might think that I, as the Member for Tiverton and Honiton, would be telling the Government, “You must start by dualling the A30/A303 from Honiton eastwards,” but I am not saying that. I say that eventually we must dual the whole road. We must not be stopped by either Stonehenge or the Blackdowns in my constituency, because those are the expensive parts of dualling the road. In a former life, I drove around the whole south-west region. I often drove down the A30 into Cornwall. Short stretches of single-track road do not hold up traffic anywhere near as much as longer lengths of single-track road. My point is that we have to start the job. There is a saying that a job started is a job half done. There is no doubt that, once we break the logjam by starting to dual the road, it will be dualled the whole way.

John Glen: I accept my hon. Friend’s positive approach, but does he acknowledge that, for the large volume of people going all the way through to the furthest extremity of the south-west region, the economic advantages of spending money on the route will not be realised unless they can get through the significant bottlenecks near Stonehenge? We have to do something; otherwise people will not get down to the south-west quickly enough.

Neil Parish: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. He is fighting the corner for Stonehenge, but if we improve the roads either side of Stonehenge, we will solve the Stonehenge issue. We do not want to say, as the previous Government did in many respects, that we will not spend any money on the A30/A303 unless the Stonehenge situation is sorted. I will support him all the way in whatever he wants to do to get his piece of the road done, but we should not let that be the piece that holds up the whole road. I will not necessarily throw all my rattles out of the pram—I will throw only a few of them—when the A30/A303 at the Honiton end, going east, is not the first part to be dualled. I believe that the dualling will happen, and it is right that it does. We are considering the long-term strategy for the south-west. The A30/A303 has to be part of that strategy. Businesses, the local enterprise partnerships and councils are all pulling together, which is amazing in itself, so let us not say that it has to be Somerset, Devon or Wiltshire. It has to be all of us pulling together.

Mr Heath: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we need the Government to commit to a strategic plan for the whole A303 corridor. What part is done first depends on how quickly things can be worked up, how long the regulatory and planning processes take and all the rest of it. We know that some bits will be difficult and some bits will be easy, but we want the Government to commit to a comprehensive plan.

Neil Parish: The hon. Gentleman is right. The improvements are set up in five pieces for five different areas. Some of those pieces will be easier to start than others. I urge the Minister to get on with it. We have talked for an awfully long time, and people want to see something happening on the ground. We could do with a bulldozer or a JCB sometime before 7 May 2015. I do not know what is happening on that day, and the Minister cannot possibly comment.

Sarah Newton: My hon. Friend is generous in giving way. He makes a powerful case, because we have a long-term economic plan. From the Isles of Scilly up to Bristol, we are all united. A key part of the Government’s long-term economic plan is to rebalance the economy so that every region contributes to the success of our nation. Every LEP has identified that this infrastructure is mission-critical.

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend is right. The Government’s long-term economic plan is essential for ensuring that the west country gets its fair slice of the cake. We will contribute hugely to the economy, and we will help to build growth. People always want to come on holiday to the west country. Until we had all this rain, the sun did nothing but shine in the west country. I am surprised that we have managed to have such an amount of rain. In all seriousness, people come to the English riviera in south Devon, and they come to Somerset and Cornwall. They visit Stonehenge in Wiltshire, but they would like to be able to move on at a reasonable speed without being jammed for ever; if they cannot, it probably does not show Stonehenge to advantage. It probably sticks in people’s memory as that horrendous place where they were jammed in traffic. Improving the A303 will hugely help the national economy and the west country. The scale of the flooding has caused setbacks for people, businesses and property; now is the time for us to move forward positively.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. We have twice had statements in Parliament from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and others on money to be spent on the A303. That is why the situation is different now from in previous years: the Government have committed real cash to getting the road done. My one plea is for the Minister to get on with it. He should get the money out of the Treasury, which is a naturally generous body, as soon as he can; otherwise, it might take the money away. Let us get on with building the road, so that not only can there be a good future for our constituents and businesses, but all the people who come to the west country have a good experience and come back again.

3.27 pm

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen) on securing this debate, which has attracted interventions and speeches from no fewer than eight speakers from both sides of the House. All of today’s speakers have made important points on this piece of road. It is difficult to talk about it as a “piece of road”, because it is so long. He described it as “the highway to the sun.” Coming from Birmingham, I know such highways well. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr Heath) describes it as “Britain’s mother road”. Both of those descriptions are accurate.

Many hon. Members have talked about the economic importance of the A303. Most notably, it was a major part of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Alison Seabek). There has been unanimity today on the need to invest in creaking parts of the road network to cope with demand, improve safety, relieve congestion and secure jobs and growth. There is also an understanding that, however we do

[Richard Burden]

that, it has to be done in a way that improves our communities and quality of life. Protecting the environment is an add-on to that and has to be part of the process.

The A303 is a road that has tested the ability of successive Governments to deliver those objectives. We have to be honest about that. There is a clear need to improve the route, which is vital for the entire south-west's connectivity to the rest of the UK. Incomplete dualling over the years has resulted in a number of bottlenecks, about which we have heard today. Those bottlenecks cause road safety problems and cost trade and tourism. There has been a range of continuing reviews, public inquiries and policy changes from the 1990s to the current day. They have demonstrated just how contentious delivering some crucial road upgrades can be in practice. Any solution to this matter will be difficult, but I am concerned—some of the issues put to the Minister are real ones—whether the Government's approach fully learns the lessons of the past. I have a number of questions for him to tease that out. The recent floods have underlined just how important it is to improve strategic transport connections to the south-west more generally. It is no good just looking at roads, although they are important; we need to take into account all the transport networks of the south-west—that point has been made by a number of Members today—and improve transport resilience across the piece in the region.

I will not attempt to hide the fact that, like this Government, we faced challenges in delivering a second arterial road to this part of the country when we were in government. As Secretary of State for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Mr Darling) committed to improving the A303 in 2003. Our process was subject to lengthy public inquiries and the cost of the proposed schemes rose significantly during that period. When we left office, however, the Highways Agency had a costed and timetabled plan to improve the A303. That included—it has been contentious for some in the Chamber—dualling the A358 from Ilminster to Taunton, which avoided some of the problems with the area of outstanding natural beauty at Blackdown hills. What is the status of that plan now?

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) spoke about money, and we need to press the Minister on that. When the Government entered office, nearly £4 billion of planned investment for our roads network was cut. Those are not my figures, but those of the National Audit Office. The Highways Agency budget for capital investment in roads has been cut from £1.6 billion in 2010-11 to just £877 million in 2013-14. That has had a big impact on specific road slippages.

A lot has been said about delivering major progress. Things were said about that in the autumn statement, but the truth is that most of the road schemes that are being talked about were started under the previous Government. I do not say that just to make a political point, although I am making something of a political point. My right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) wanted to be here today, but was unable to come. He has said that the Government's failure to invest in infrastructure has made the reality of improving the A303 further away than it could be.

On this side of the House, we are pleased that Ministers are finally talking about the need to invest in our country's long-term transport infrastructure, but the important thing is to start delivering it. In the spending review of June 2013, the Government committed to producing a feasibility study on solutions for an alternative road route to the south-west, and I have a number of questions for the Minister on that. Will he clarify the study's intended publication date? There has been some talk about that being spring 2015. I am sure that all of us are looking to spring 2015 for all sorts of things, but I suspect that the constituents of Members who have spoken today, seized though we will be by events in spring 2015, want to know what the significance of that study will be for the road scheme.

John Glen: The real lesson of the past is that publishing reports near general elections ensures that nothing happens for another five years. It is absolutely imperative that we have a clear proposal from the feasibility study much sooner than spring 2015. Does the shadow Minister not agree?

Richard Burden: The hon. Gentleman is ahead of me in many ways. It is important that the Minister is clear about the issue. If we are talking about publication in spring 2015, is the bottom line that it might not even be published before the next general election? If it is published before the general election, when does he, whichever Government are elected, see the study being put into operation in practical terms?

Neil Parish: I want to ask the shadow Minister a direct question. The A303 was about to be dualled in 1997. If the British people do not make the right decision and elect a Labour Government in 2015, can he assure us that, if it is in place to go, that road will be built and not shelved as the previous Labour Government did in 1997?

Richard Burden: I will make a number of points to the hon. Gentleman, and the first is that I would love to have a tardis, for this issue and for many other things. I would love the result of the last general election to have been different. I am sure that the Conservatives would have liked to have won the last general election, but they did not quite manage that. There are lessons to be learned by all parties on this issue. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View said, we have committed to a review, but the fact is that the finances of this country are opaque and what is going on is not clear. We will and are going to have to go through everything before the general election to work out what can be done.

The points raised by the hon. Member for Salisbury were well made. This issue has been subject to delay. Whoever is elected next year, we need to know the timetable for discussion and for those decisions to be made and put into effect, one way or another.

I fully admit that the decades of delay have been under different and successive Governments, but perhaps the Minister can explain why it was only in January of this year that he wrote to the relevant Members—I quote his response to a question from the hon. Member for North Devon (Sir Nick Harvey)—to

“set out a brief synopsis of our proposals for the study.”—[*Official Report*, 24 January 2014; Vol. 574, c. 356W.]

Is that the only practical progress that has been made by the Government since the summer of last year? If not, will the Minister set out what else has been done? If the study is to take nearly two years, when does he expect a costed and timetabled plan to be in place? That is what is needed for delivery. The hon. Member for Salisbury has rightly said that a new feasibility study needs to take into account things that have happened so far. A number of Members have talked about the previous south-west and south Wales multi-modal study, which was published in 2002 and took an integrated approach to tackling transport problems in the region. Does that have any status in the Government's thinking, and if so what?

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View has talked about the work done by the former South West Regional Committee. Regional Committees did some excellent work in their short life, including on this issue. Will that work form part of what the Government do and say on the feasibility study? Given that the congestion problems on the road have remained broadly similar, is there not a case for updating what has already been done, rather than simply commissioning a new study? There seems to be some confusion on that point. If I have misunderstood what is happening, perhaps the Minister will tell me. What action are Ministers taking to ensure that the feasibility study will not just result in an A303 proposal again being subject to further public inquires and further legal challenge?

Recent events have underlined just how important it is to improve transport connections to the south-west. At a debate last week on weather events in the south-west, Members from across the House spoke about the devastating impact the floods have had on their communities. Our thoughts are with all those communities that have been affected. Labour party candidates from that area have been on to us, saying that investment needs to be prioritised. Those points are made to us by our people in the south-west, as well as by those in this House. It is not only about restoring rail services, important though that is, but ensuring that the transport network as a whole to the south-west can cope with future pressures and be resilient. I therefore want to press the Minister for more clarity on the Government's plans for future investment.

The transport network in the south-west is increasingly under threat. There has been significant concern among local authorities trying to improve resilience on the peninsula. Can the Minister confirm whether the funding that he is talking about on the rail network, apart from anything else, is the same money that was pledged in 2013, or is it new money? If it is not, where will it come from and what cuts will be made elsewhere?

Equally, I welcome Network Rail's proposals for an alternative to the Dawlish line, which is expected to be published in July. After two attempts by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) to raise this question last week, I ask the Minister again to clarify how a Dawlish avoiding route will be funded. Will new money now be available from central Government? It is important that we have clarity from the Government on both the rail and the road situation. It is important for the Government to consider the needs of the transport system, as well as land management and flood defence, holistically. That is partly what today's debate is about.

First, the report on options for the Dawlish avoiding line should clearly be developed in conjunction with the A303 feasibility study to ensure that they come together

to ensure needs are met. If that is going to be the case, can the Minister confirm whether they will be parallel processes that do not link up? Secondly, will the Minister think again about the new national networks policy statement proposed for the future of our road and rail? This planning document, which is open to consultation at the moment, does nothing to ensure that our existing transport networks are flood-resilient. I understand that, privately, his Department is aware of this and aware that the policy statement requires major work to ensure that it reflects future planning policy properly and that it is climate-resilient. If that is the case, it needs to be revised. So I think we need to hear a little more from the Minister about that one.

If the NPS is meant to be the Government's vision for future transport, and the omission of flood resilience remains, that is highly concerning. In the light of all this, will the Minister clarify what consideration is being given to climate change and future weather shocks in the A303 feasibility study?

The Opposition take investment in our long-term infrastructure seriously. It is not about rushing to announce long lists of schemes or studies without considering future risks and shocks. It is about properly considering the options and future pressures, and establishing clear and costed plans for delivery. It is about looking at our transport network in an integrated way so that we can meet the needs of the future. I hope the Minister will be able to clarify some of the issues raised, because the A303—Members have alluded to many problems along the line of the route—is not and cannot be a stand-alone issue. It is indicative of a need to deliver an effective strategic transport network for the south-west in future. I hope that when we leave the Chamber today, the Minister will have provided us with greater clarity, rather than greater confusion.

3.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) on securing this debate on the future of the A303. I know this subject is of great importance to him and to other hon. Friends and Opposition Members. I am aware that he has raised issues about the performance of the A303 at Stonehenge and details of the Department's feasibility study during business questions.

The A303 is an important trunk road that passes in close proximity to the Stonehenge world heritage site, and the issue of improving this road has been considered by successive Governments, as we heard. I very much recognise the strategic importance of this corridor and therefore of finding solutions to its problems. Before I respond to the points raised by my hon. Friend, it is perhaps worth taking the opportunity both to set out this Government's position on investment in the strategic road network, but also the history of proposals for major improvements to the A303, as well as setting out how my Department will consider options for future investments. Indeed, I hope that I can make progress where even Mrs Thatcher failed.

Before I go on, I will respond to a couple of the points made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden). He recognised that the previous Government had been engaged in a degree of

[*Mr Robert Goodwill*]

stop-go—mainly stop in terms of the A303. Although he recognised that fact, there was no straightforward apology, and I was rather perturbed to hear him say that when they left office, they had a costed plan. Nothing was costed when the previous Government left office. The public finances were in a catastrophic state. Indeed, when they had some money in 1997, when they took office, they announced a moratorium, so I will take no lessons from the Opposition on how to organise a road investment programme.

We have controlled spending so that we can increase genuine investment, and we will build on the previous work done in planning the feasibility of this route. On timing, we have set ourselves an ambitious programme, and we hope to have some news in the autumn statement. Indeed, when the announcements are made in the autumn, it will be interesting to hear what the shadow Chancellor says about following through on the promises when the Labour party writes its manifesto.

Alison Seabeck: The Minister is talking about financing and the envelope in which we are all working. Has consideration ever been given—this will not be popular in some parts—to tolling a tunnel and paying for it that way?

Mr Goodwill: I made it clear in front of the Select Committee last week that we are certainly not going down that route. The decision on the A14 Huntingdon bypass makes that very clear indeed. In fact, I was reported as saying we have drawn a line in the sand on that one.

As part of the progress we are making, Department officials met local stakeholders in Taunton on 24 January to discuss the scope of the study, and officials are working to incorporate the views of stakeholders when finalising the scope.

I said that it may be useful to set out the historical background in terms of the previous proposals for major strategic improvements to the road. Proposals to complete the dualling of the A303 were made in the 2002 London to south-west and south Wales multi-modal study, and, together with improvements to the A358 between Ilminster and Taunton, they could have created a second strategic route to the south-west. However, by 2007, with the cancellation of the Amesbury to Berwick Down scheme owing to increased costs and the south-west region's conclusion that some schemes could not be funded from the regional funding allocation, the Highways Agency was no longer able to progress the proposals.

My hon. Friend may also be aware that Somerset county council held a summit with other relevant stakeholders in 2012, the outcome of which was a commitment for further work on the relative prioritisation of potential interventions and consideration of possible funding avenues. A grouping of local authorities and local enterprise partnerships produced an initial analysis and business case for future improvements to the A303 corridor, to reiterate the importance of investment in the corridor. This work provides a useful starting point for more detailed work into the consideration of possible solutions to the problems along the A303.

On this Government's commitment to infrastructure investment, we have already announced increased levels of Government funding to deliver improvements all

around the strategic road network, targeted at supporting economic growth. Our commitment to deliver a step change in future investment in transport infrastructure was made clear by the Chancellor in his statement of 26 June last year, which announced the conclusions of the Government's 2013 spending review.

The Treasury's Command Paper, "Investing in Britain's Future", set out that the Government will invest more than £28 billion in enhancements and maintenance of both national and local roads, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) mentioned. This includes £10.7 billion for major national road projects and £4.9 billion for local major projects. More than £12 billion has been allocated for maintenance, with nearly £6 billion for repairs to local roads and £6 billion for maintenance of strategic roads, including resurfacing 80% of that network.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury is aware, for future investment planning, the Highways Agency is conducting its route-based strategy process, which involves local stakeholders in the consideration of future priorities. It might be helpful to say a little more about the agency's approach, because that is the mechanism by which we will consider the investment needs of the entire strategic road network.

In our May 2012 response to the recommendations of Alan Cook's report, "A fresh start to the strategic road network", we agreed to develop a programme of route-based strategies to inform the identification of future transport investment for the entire strategic network. Route-based strategies will provide a smarter approach to investment planning throughout the network and see greater collaboration with local stakeholders to determine the nature, need and timing of future investment that might be required on the network. We will produce a uniform set of strategies for the entire network, including the A303, as part of the south west peninsula route-based strategy.

The Highways Agency completed a series of local engagement events last autumn to help identify performance issues and future challenges. I welcome the enthusiasm with which stakeholders in the south-west, including those in my hon. Friend's constituency, have participated so far. The agency and the Department will use the evidence to prioritise and take forward a programme of work to identify indicative solutions that will cover operations, maintenance and, if appropriate, potential road improvement schemes. Route-based strategies therefore provide an opportunity for stakeholders to provide evidence about problems on the A303, so that the need for improvements can be considered and a plan for future investment developed.

My hon. Friend highlighted the issue of congestion on the A303 and the problems experienced as the road passes the Stonehenge world heritage site. The Government very much recognise such issues and the importance of transport infrastructure to support the economy. We are committed to identifying and funding early solutions to the longstanding problems on the A303-A30-A358 corridor, initially by undertaking a feasibility study.

Richard Burden: The Minister was rushing through different things—the route-based strategy and the feasibility study—and I may have missed something, but will he clarify when he expects the route-based strategy to be completed and how it will feed into the feasibility

study? Given the estimates that I have heard, the report of the feasibility is due in the spring of 2015. Is that what is intended?

Mr Goodwill: No, we hope to make better progress than that and to be in a position to make an announcement based on that study in the autumn statement this year. The good news is that that study is one of six on the strategic road network. The A303 is already in the final of that competition.

Mr Heath: The Minister should be aware that making such an announcement in the autumn statement, and it including the Sparkford to Ilchester stretch of the A303, will enable me to retire a happy man.

Mr Goodwill: I wish for no less for the hon. Gentleman, I am sure.

It might be useful to say a little more about the approach we are taking, as the feasibility study is the mechanism by which we will identify early solutions to the problems on the A303-A30-A358 corridor. The aim of the study will be to identify the opportunities and understand the case for future investment solutions on the corridor that are deliverable, affordable and offer value for money, including noise mitigation where appropriate, as my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury suggested. Much work has been carried out, but agreement has not been reached on a set of solutions. It is therefore important for us to carry out this study to ensure that we understand the priorities for the corridor and that proposals for investment demonstrate a strong and robust economic case for investment, as well as value for money, and are deliverable.

John Glen: Does the Minister accept that the Stonehenge case will require not only a value-for-money approach, but a perspective on the wider heritage interests? What work is he doing to engage with other colleagues in Government to take account of the particular concerns at Stonehenge?

Mr Goodwill: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. A number of issues associated with the route-based studies up and down the country include environmental or heritage considerations. It is important not to take the view that, because they are sometimes too difficult, they should not be considered properly.

The study work will be conducted in stages, with the Department initially looking to identify the current and future challenges along the corridor. We are keen to ensure that we have the most up-to-date and relevant information available to inform the study. The Department has asked stakeholders to furnish us with any additional study work or analysis that they might have commissioned. The next stage will be to identify the range of solutions or measures that could address the problems identified along the corridor. Again, we will look to build on previous work, rather than starting from scratch, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield suggested, but we will not rule out other potential investment proposals that may emerge from the first phase of the route-based strategy process, as well as potential investment proposals on the A358.

We will look to engage with a range of stakeholders throughout the life of the study, including local highway authorities, local enterprise partnerships and local environmental groups. A stakeholder reference group

will be established to ensure a mechanism through which the views of stakeholders may be incorporated in the study work. The views of hon. Members will also be important in the deliberations. The outputs of the route-based strategy and of the six feasibility studies will inform the Department's roads investment strategy, which is being developed and which we have committed to publish by the end of the year.

I fully understand the Stonehenge concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury. As is well known, the single carriageway section of the A303 can cause congestion during traffic peaks on bank holidays and through the summer. I am aware that local lobby groups have been established, such as the Stonehenge traffic action group, of which I understand that my hon. Friend is aware.

The new Stonehenge visitor centre opened in mid-December 2013 and is situated at Airman's Corner on the A360. In terms of traffic to the centre, the car park fails to meet demand at busy times, and this leads to traffic that is queuing to enter the visitor centre backing up along the A360 and blocking it to other users. In extreme cases, the traffic has reached as far as the A303 at Longbarrow roundabout, causing congestion on the A303. In support of the new visitor centre and closure of the local road, the Highways Agency has carried out extensive improvements to the Longbarrow roundabout at the junction of the A303, with significant investment of more than £3 million to support the Stonehenge attraction.

In addition, drivers have been using the nearby byway and lay-bys to get a good view of the stones, which has further exacerbated congestion on the A303. The Highways Agency has worked with Wiltshire county council and the police to prohibit certain movements and to prevent drivers parking illegally, guiding them by the designated route to the visitor centre. I assure hon. Members that while we await the outcome of the feasibility study, the Highways Agency will continue to monitor and respond to congestion at this location. Wiltshire police have invited some local representatives to a meeting with key agencies, including the Highways Agency, the county council, English Heritage and the National Trust, to look at the short-term issues likely to arise this summer.

Given the flooding that we have seen over recent weeks and months, I emphasise to my hon. Friend that the strategic road network in the south-west has performed well, although there was a closure one weekend. By and large, the network has been kept running, keeping the south-west open for business during this difficult period and allowing the replacement buses to run. The importance of the A303 has been emphasised in light of the issues experienced on the rail network.

Flooding occurred at two locations on the A303, at Ilchester and at Deptford, which was due to adjacent water courses and groundwater run-off from fields. Flooding at Ilchester meant that the A303 was closed in both directions for 20 hours. The diversion route was utilised to keep the route into the south-west open. The flooding at Deptford saw the eastbound carriageway affected for 12 days, although within two days a contraflow was put in place, enabling traffic to get through.

In conclusion, I again congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury on securing the debate. I have been clear that the Government are committed to and have set out plans for large-scale investment to improve

[Mr Goodwill]

our strategic road network in the relatively short term. We are also committed to developing a longer-term programme of investment through the route-based strategy process. Through the A303-A30-A358 corridor feasibility study, we will work closely with local stakeholders to ensure we consider current and future transport problems and the range of possible solutions that could deal with them. As I said, it is important that proposals for future investment are clearly supported by the local stakeholders and that there is a clear consensus on what is required. Ultimately, any proposals for future investment need to be able to demonstrate a strong business case and the delivery of both transport and wider economic benefits.

Every cloud is said to have a silver lining, and the weather in the south-west this year has emphasised the importance of a resilient road network when we have problems on our rail network. The fact that big investment is going into north-south rail connections makes an even stronger case for investment in roads in the south-west. I look forward to my road trip to Tiverton and Honiton—a road that I have travelled before. Having heard the points made today, I think that I need to set off in good time.

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): I thank hon. Members for their participation in that important debate. I wish the Minister well on his road journey.

Domestic Violence (West Essex and Harlow)

4 pm

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under you today, Dr McCrea. I thank Mr Speaker for granting me this debate on an important matter that affects thousands of men and women up and down the country. I want to give special recognition to Safer Places in Harlow, Essex county council, Nick Alston, who is police and crime commissioner for Essex, ManKind and Women's Aid for the assistance they have given me in preparing for this debate. I also welcome the work done by the TUC on domestic violence training and education.

For six months, I have put in for this debate because of the particular problem of domestic violence in Harlow and because of two tragedies that have afflicted our town. That is why I must pay tribute to Mr and Mrs Blunnie, who are in Westminster today. They have been incredibly strong throughout their ordeal since their daughter's death, and continue to astound me with their campaign to prevent any other families from going through similar tragedies. I am hugely grateful to the Minister, who has agreed to meet the family after the debate.

This debate is much needed. Nationally, crime survey statistics suggest that 31% of women and 18% of men have experienced domestic abuse, with two women being killed per week by a partner or former partner.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): My hon. Friend makes an important point about male victims of domestic violence. Female victims are more numerous and sometimes more vulnerable, but we should not overlook male victims, who can fall victim to domestic violence in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Often they are unable to talk about the issue or to find resources available for victims of their gender.

Robert Halfon: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. Domestic violence is evil, whichever sex is afflicted by it.

As I said, crime survey statistics suggest that 31% of women and 18% of men have experienced domestic abuse. Today I want to focus specifically on west Essex and Harlow, where there is an above average amount of domestic abuse incidents. I am incredibly proud of my town. I love living there and am very proud to be its MP, but we cannot sweep the problems we have under the carpet and so it is important to set out some of the problems that we face. In Harlow alone domestic abuse makes up 10% of all crime, a statistic that has increased by 2% in the past year; 32% of all offences are assault with injury. Across Essex, police deal with 80 domestic incidents per day. As I mentioned, we have sadly lost two Harlow residents to domestic violence recently, Eystna Blunnie in June 2012 and Claire Parrish in July 2012.

I therefore want to raise three issues this afternoon. First, what the situation is in west Essex in relation to domestic abuse; secondly, what steps are already being taken to improve how domestic abuse is dealt with; and thirdly, what needs to be improved and how that could be achieved.

As I have already mentioned, there are two tragic cases I would like to discuss that really typify some of the problems that we face. The first is the distressing case of Eystna Blunnie. Before she met her ex-fiancé, Eystna was a happy young woman who had a close relationship with her family. During her relationship with her ex-fiancé she became withdrawn, and had little contact with her mother and father. In April 2012, she was taken to hospital after being strangled and falling unconscious. She was pregnant at the time, with a daughter called Rose. She made the decision to leave her ex-fiancé, and returned to live with her family. But two months later, and just days before her baby was due, she received a text from him saying he had a surprise for her. She was found by the roadside with over 50 injuries, and died shortly afterwards from severe head injuries. Her ex-fiancé was found guilty of her murder and of causing the death of their unborn baby, Rose. He was jailed for a minimum of 27 years. I was due to see her in my surgery just a few days after she died. During the court case, it transpired that her ex-fiancé had previously been arrested for assaulting ex-girlfriends.

The second tragic death is that of Claire Parrish, a mum of four living in Harlow. Her partner murdered her just hours after she told him that she wanted to end their relationship because of his domestic abuse. Like three in four victims, Claire was sadly one of the many who felt unable to contact the police.

Of course, those cases are horrific examples of the terrible tragedies that can occur. But they unfortunately also reflect the wider problem of domestic abuse in west Essex, which has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in the country. Between 2003-04 and 2011-12, recorded incidents of domestic abuse increased by nearly 88% across Essex; they increased by 25% between 2010-11 and 2011-12. The cost of domestic abuse in Essex alone is £86 million per year. It represents a substantial amount of police work.

Those statistics can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, we know from studies that the incidence of domestic abuse is higher in areas of deprivation, and that is sadly reflected in Harlow wards. Toddbrook, Little Parndon, Hare Street and Netteswell are in the top 30% of the most deprived areas in England; unfortunately, they also have the highest rates of domestic abuse in my constituency. On the other hand, it is good that Essex police are recording incidents of domestic abuse thoroughly, and it has been acknowledged that changes in how records are kept and county priorities are one of the reasons why domestic abuse figures in Essex are so high.

Yet that must not stop us acknowledging that there is a clear problem with domestic abuse. In the aftermath of tragedies such as the deaths of Eystna Blunnie and Claire Parrish, it is worth remembering that Essex police and Essex county council have taken important steps forwards in how they treat domestic abuse. They have created a new domestic abuse strategic board, and I praise them for that. I am glad for the enormous amount of work done by the Minister, who is taking a zero tolerance approach and is extending Clare's law across the United Kingdom. I am hopeful that that will prevent victims from being sucked into a cycle of abuse that is difficult to break. I also recognise that the east of England has the best conviction rate in the country for

cases of domestic violence, with Essex having the second highest conviction rate of all the criminal justice areas in 2011-12.

That does not minimise in any way, however, the significant failings that led to a lack of help for Eystna and Claire. There are three main problems that I wish to discuss. First, current training regarding domestic abuse for people working in key public services is inadequate. There were a number of occasions where better training for front-line staff might have provided Eystna with the help she so badly needed. For example, she was under the care of midwives and housing officers. She was also seen at A and E, and had reported to the police that she was being abused. Despite coming into contact with all those services, she received little support.

Eystna's case is echoed in the review by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary of Essex police's handling of domestic abuse cases in 2013, which reported that

"most staff were not able to demonstrate a broad understanding of the wider approach to domestic abuse, and of how dealing with it effectively can enhance the confidence of victims and ultimately prevent homicides."

Nationally, training has also been identified as a priority, and a recent report said that there is a need for improved training and awareness about domestic violence and abuse for GPs and healthcare professionals. The training also needs to extend to the Crown Prosecution Service, which acknowledged that it made a mistake by not initially charging Eystna Blunnie's ex-fiancé when he tried to kill her in April 2012. Healthy relationship education should be extended in classrooms. Victims of domestic abuse tend to be women in their early 20s, and education will hopefully give them the skills to deal with a bad relationship and encourage them to speak up if they are in an abusive one.

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I also represent a constituency in Essex, and we have many issues with domestic violence. My hon. Friend touched on the issue of training in the CPS and the health and social services. I, too, have experienced horrifying cases. Does he agree that in addition to improving training we must integrate the services better to co-ordinate the services and support for the victims of this awful abuse and to create stronger support structures and signposting for those vulnerable individuals?

Robert Halfon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I am proud to have her as a near neighbour in Essex. Sharing information and safeguarding are crucial issues, which I will come on to. She makes an important point, and I hope the Minister is listening to her.

Gareth Johnson: I want to build on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel). I used to practise in the criminal justice system in Essex, in which I saw both good and bad practices. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) agree that it is incumbent on HM Court Service to play a role, so defendants and victims are not left alone together, for example? In my experience, the witness service does a fantastic job in preventing that kind of thing. Nevertheless, it is important that courts ensure that the interests of both parties are protected while they are going through the criminal justice system.

Robert Halfon: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I am sure the Minister is listening carefully to what he has to say.

Perpetrators tend to come from families in which there is a history of abuse. Studies show that nearly a quarter of young people in the UK think that abuse or violence is sometimes okay. It must be stressed to young people that abuse in any form and for whatever reason is never acceptable. I am pleased that Essex county council is working with schools to develop a programme to help students recognise abusive relationships. However, abuse should be tackled nationally, and the curriculum should focus on altering the creation of violence through targeted education. That could include training on self-esteem and values; learning about the help that is out there, such as Clare's law, and how to access it; and special training for tutors in schools.

Victims have identified that how they are supported needs to be reformed. Following the terrible death of Eystna, Mr and Mrs Blunnie told me that despite good help being available from individual police officers, they felt let down by Victim Support. They received little follow-up, always had to be the first to make contact and had to speak to different people each time. Ultimately, they came to rely upon a charity called Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse for support, to which I give huge thanks for all it has done. The situation is disappointing, and I encourage Victim Support to review what it can do for victims and their families.

Finally, one of the major problems that was identified in the handling of domestic abuse in Essex is the lack of cohesive information sharing across services, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Witham referred. It is shocking that despite the fact that Eystna was pregnant and was known to many key services to have a fiancé with serious mental health problems and a history of abusing women, a sufficient safeguarding plan was not put in place. The HMIC review strongly criticised Essex police for failings across the force in that area. It said:

"We found poor communication between those providing victim care, investigators and voluntary sector support workers...The force needs to intensify its work with other agencies across Essex to develop a more co-ordinated approach to domestic abuse."

That view has been expressed to me privately, with the suggestion that there needs to be a stronger emphasis on mental health and substance misuse issues. It is essential that services work together and share information when people's lives are at risk.

If we are to avoid tragedies such as those that happened in Harlow and prevent such things from happening again anywhere, we must not only learn lessons but act on them. As I have said, that means providing education in schools, investing in and focusing on areas of high deprivation and significant domestic abuse, fully implementing Clare's law, ensuring proper information sharing among services and safeguarding vulnerable people. The Government are making significant efforts on a national level, but we must ensure that they also work on a micro-level. Local areas—in particular, those with high levels of domestic abuse—should have everything at their disposal to deal with this ever-increasing tragedy. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

4.16 pm

The Minister for Crime Prevention (Norman Baker): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow

(Robert Halfon) for the opportunity to debate this serious issue. I thank him for the measured way in which he presented his remarks. These are difficult issues to discuss without emotion.

Domestic violence is unquestionably a terrible crime, and I give my absolute assurance that the Government is committed to tackling it robustly. Getting a clear picture of the prevalence of domestic abuse is always a challenge because it is so under-reported; we must deal with that problem. The crime survey for England and Wales, which measures what people tell us, rather than crime recorded by the police, estimates that 1.2 million women were victims of domestic abuse last year. That is a huge number. The police and crime plan for Essex estimates that there were 44,000 victims of domestic abuse in the county, which has a population of 1.7 million.

I am aware that in my hon. Friend's constituency and across Essex there have been some tragic cases, and domestic abuse is often fatal. As I am sure my hon. Friend is aware, six people were killed by their partners or ex-partners in Essex in the three years between 2009 and 2012. That was against a national backdrop of 76 women being killed by their partners or ex-partners last year. Although we can take some comfort in the fact that that is the lowest figure since 1998, I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that anything more than zero is too many.

My hon. Friend mentioned the two particularly tragic deaths in Essex of Eystna Blunnie and Claire Parrish. Eystna was brutally murdered only days before she was due to give birth to her baby, Rose, in 2012. She was looking forward to being a mother. When she died, her profile picture on Facebook featured a recent ultrasound scan. She told friends that she "could not wait" to be a mother, and added:

"Only 17 days and counting",

but her life was cut short when she and her unborn child were brutally murdered, as my hon. Friend described.

I want to take the opportunity to offer my sincere condolences to Eystna's family for the loss of their daughter and granddaughter, and to the family of Claire Parrish for their sad loss. The Blunnie case was all the more tragic because there was a chance to prosecute Mr McLernon when he attempted to strangle Eystna two months before her death. Regrettably, the Crown Prosecution Service missed the opportunity to pursue the case. It has now rightly apologised for that unacceptable failing.

My hon. Friend also referred to the death of Claire Parrish, a mother of six brutally stabbed to death following a history of suffering abuse. She was a scared and vulnerable victim, again tragically let down by the agencies that should have been there to protect and support her. I want to reassure my hon. Friend and Members generally that I take such cases extremely seriously and I am determined that we all learn lessons from them, both inside Government and in the agencies involved that are on the front line to protect people.

I was pleased to see that the Essex police and crime commissioner, Nick Alston, has prioritised tackling domestic abuse in his police and crime plan. I was particularly encouraged to see his focus on learning lessons from Independent Police Complaints Commission investigations of the police handling of domestic abuse

cases, and his plan to tackle domestic abuse through a multi-agency approach and the joint commissioning of victim services.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on some excellent examples of local services for victims of domestic abuse in west Essex, including the charity Safer Places, which offers accommodation and support to victims of abuse. I am also aware of the innovative Essex Change programme, which is an accredited programme that works with perpetrators of domestic violence to help them break the cycle of abuse. That is a very important aspect of our work.

The Government has supported a series of reforms to the handling of domestic violence by the police. The introduction of police and crime commissioners, the increased independence of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, and the establishment of the College of Policing are reforms that are working and, I think, are helping.

Police and crime commissioners provide an impetus for reform, innovate, and deliver policing more efficiently. They bring real local scrutiny of how chief constables and their forces perform. I am encouraged by the fact that the vast majority of police and crime commissioners across England and Wales have made tackling violence against women and girls a priority in their policing plans, and we are committed to ensuring that they have all the information that they need to make good decisions on how to deliver those priorities.

Specific training on domestic violence and abuse is included in the national police training curriculum. That training was updated this year to take account of the Government's introduction of a new definition of domestic abuse. The new definition helps to prevent the escalation of abuse, which can end in tragedy, by dispelling the belief that domestic abuse begins and ends with violence. It places coercive control at the centre of determining whether abuse is taking place, and that is absolutely right. The College of Policing has committed to updating training on domestic abuse this year for its officers.

On top of that, the Home Secretary has commissioned Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary to look at the performance of police forces across England and Wales in domestic abuse cases and identify where improvements need to be made. In just a few weeks' time, it will publish its findings. The review will shine a light on police practice in each of the 43 forces. I am sure that my hon. Friend will read the report on Essex constabulary with particular interest. We will review the national recommendations with care and ensure that they are acted on as we strive for further improvements in this area.

Also of importance is the Government's decision in April 2011 to place domestic homicide reviews on a statutory footing. Now community safety partnerships produce a report for each domestic homicide review that they conduct, and each report is quality assured by a panel of independent and Home Office experts. Each review results in a tailored action plan that must be delivered by the area in question to make sure that we learn from each individual tragedy that occurs.

The Home Office has also published a document collating the national lessons learned from those reviews and making recommendations to local areas to drive

improvements in practice. That, in particular, flagged up the critical importance of effective information sharing. I understand that a domestic homicide review has been conducted in the case of Eystna Blunnie and will be published by the local community safety partnership in the coming months, following close liaison with the family, as is right.

However, in order for a victim to access justice, it is important that a professional police force is complemented by well-trained prosecutors who progress as many domestic abuse cases as possible, so that unnecessary deaths are prevented. The Crown Prosecution Service is currently refreshing its domestic violence policy. I understand that a revised version will be published for consultation in the next few weeks. I also look forward to the outcome of work between the CPS and the police to join up training to ensure that victims of domestic abuse are provided with a consistent and collaborative response.

My hon. Friend also raised the importance of the training of front-line professionals. I welcome the recent publication by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, better known as NICE. That guidance has been published and is directed at commissioners and front-line professionals, including the NHS, the police and social services. The guidance provides information for multi-agency professionals dealing with domestic violence and abuse. It includes evidence-based interventions to be used as best practice by professionals to identify and support victims and their children, as well as enforce the law and respond to perpetrators.

It is vital that our criminal justice approach is reinforced by support services for victims. This Government has ring-fenced nearly £40 million for specialist local domestic and sexual violence support services. Facilities funded with that money include 144 independent domestic violence advisers, who help victims of domestic violence get their voices heard, and 54 multi-agency risk assessment co-ordinators, who protect the interests of those who are most at risk by promoting information sharing. Up to 60% of abuse victims report no further violence following intervention by independent advisers.

However, we can and should do all we can nationally as well to reach out to those caught in cycles of abuse. The start of the national roll-out of Clare's law, which my hon. Friend referred to, and of domestic violence protection orders is now just days away. Clare's law, the domestic violence disclosure scheme, is a system in which anyone can seek disclosure of a partner's violent past. Those with the legal right to know are provided with information that could well save lives, empowering them to make an informed choice about their futures.

Domestic violence protection orders offer respite to victims in the immediate aftermath of domestic abuse. Those orders have the power to prevent a perpetrator of domestic violence from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days. That offers both the victim and the perpetrator the chance to reflect on the incident. It provides an important opportunity for the victim to determine the best course of action to end the cycle of abuse. Together, those two moves significantly improve the reality for victims.

I am also keen to do more to challenge cultural mindsets, which need to be changed to eradicate domestic abuse from our society. That is why the Home Office relaunched the "This is Abuse" campaign in December.

[Norman Baker]

It is particularly aimed at young people who think that violence can be okay, which is a point that my hon. Friend rightly referred to. It is aimed at stopping teenagers from becoming victims and perpetrators of abusive relationships by encouraging them to rethink their views on controlling behaviour and violence in their relationships.

We have also developed a “This is Abuse” discussion guide in partnership with voluntary sector experts, designed to help teachers, parents and youth workers lead discussions about abuse in teenage relationships. The guide has been quality assured by the Personal, Social, Health And Economic Education Association and is available to download on the gov.uk website. I welcome the work that the Department for Education is doing to establish a personal, social and health education subject expert group to ensure that teachers have the support and resources to deliver high-quality teaching and give the issues the same prominence as national curriculum subjects. The group will look at school-based programmes on domestic abuse and other key areas. I am committed to helping work with the DFE on those matters.

West Essex and Harlow have seen some extreme examples of appalling abusive behaviour in intimate relationships. The local area is to be commended for its efforts to learn lessons from individual tragedies and strive for improvements in the services offered to victims of domestic abuse. Through our violence against women and girls action plan, which will be updated and relaunched in a few days’ time, this Government has made significant strides towards a better reality for victims of domestic abuse.

We know that there is still much to do, and our refreshed action plan will capture that and outline the steps we will take to deliver further improvements. I look forward to working with local areas to ensure that actions identified by HMIC are driven forward. I will update Parliament, of course, on our continued progress in tackling domestic violence in the coming months, and I assure my hon. Friend and Parliament that this remains very much a priority for the Home Office, and for the Government as a whole.

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): I would like to thank the hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) and the Minister for the sensitive manner in which they debated this important issue of domestic violence. We now move to the debate on Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs inquiry centre closures. It is a pleasure to call Ian Lavery.

HMRC Inquiry Centre Closures

4.28 pm

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): As ever, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr McCrea. This debate focuses on the Government’s proposals to close all HMRC inquiry centres in the UK. Inquiry centres provide a vital public service, allowing taxpayers to access free expert advice from highly skilled HMRC staff. In 2012, some 2.5 million people visited those offices, where they could take advantage of free phone and internet access, and 340,885 of those customers made a face-to-face appointment to get help complying with their tax duties and receive advice on their benefit entitlement.

Last month, Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs announced that a “needs enhanced support” service model would be rolled out, resulting in the closure of all 281 HMRC offices by the end of June 2014. The taxpayers most likely to be prevented from accessing the proposed new service as a result of the cost are the unemployed, those on low incomes such as migrant workers and pensioners, and child benefit and child tax credit claimants. Such taxpayers rely heavily on the free service currently provided by HMRC staff at inquiry centres.

The closures will also put the 1,300 jobs of those who work in the centres at risk as a result of compulsory redundancies. Staff in the offices are faced with an impossible decision about their future as the Department rushes to implement the closure of the offices in four short months.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): I apologise for coming in to the Chamber a few minutes late. My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. One of the offices affected is in Leicester, where a number of staff jobs are now at risk. Does he agree that the Government must put in the time to negotiate properly with the workplace unions, particularly Public and Commercial Services Union, and do all they can to ensure that if they insist on closing the offices—although I hope they do not—the staff will be redeployed?

Ian Lavery: I fully agree, and I am sure my hon. Friend will agree that closing 280-odd offices—the service is provided up and down the country—will cause huge problems, mainly for people who are least well off but also, of course, for the staff themselves.

Graeme Morrice (Livingston) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. He will be aware that my constituency has an inquiry centre due for closure. I have been approached by constituents and members of PCS expressing concerns related to job losses and the impact that they could have on members of the public, particularly the most vulnerable. Does he agree that if the Government are serious about addressing the problem of underpaid and undercollected tax, the proposed closure programme is the wrong way to go about it?

Ian Lavery: I agree that the Government are going about it in entirely the wrong way. PCS, the union representing the HMRC workers, has agreed with HMRC that all members should have the opportunity for a formal one-to-one to help them consider their options.

However, HMRC has withdrawn from that agreement in an attempt to pressure people into making decisions without information about applying for jobs and voluntary exits. That shows contempt for staff and puts huge pressure on people to leave by demoralising the work force.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): I have four constituents who work at the Aberystwyth office and who will be affected in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests. Before he moves on from customer service, does he agree that there are particular concerns about how the new service, in so far as it is a new service, will be delivered in rural areas? Access will be denied to many of our constituents by virtue of the fact that huge tracts, in my case of rural west Wales, will be covered by a diminished service, and arguably a more costly one.

Ian Lavery: I will certainly come to that later in my speech. The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point.

I am fairly positive that the Minister—perhaps he can indicate that this is the case—met PCS representatives this morning.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke) *indicated assent.*

Ian Lavery: The Minister nods positively. I am pleased: perhaps he can assure me that support will be given to staff who are uncertain about their future and that compulsory redundancies will not be made.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): We are all grateful that the Minister met the union, but let us be clear: he met the union only after this debate was announced. There has not been full transparency in the sharing of information with the union by management about the various options going forward. The Government introduce changes, but it is best to do so in a negotiated way rather than by imposing them, as this management seems to have done.

Ian Lavery: Again, I thank my hon. Friend for a positive intervention.

The pilot scheme has been rolled out not just in my constituency, but in my region—the north-east area. In June last year, 13 offices in the north-east of England were closed, including Royal Sovereign house in my constituency, in Morpeth. They were closed as part of a pilot of the new needs-enhanced support service model. If the closures of all 281 offices throughout the UK go as planned in June, I hope that HMRC does a better job of letting the public know than it did in our region last year.

I have heard examples of people travelling miles, only to find their local office no longer open to the public. In one prime example, an 85-year-old man used two buses to get to Scarborough, only to find the inquiry centre closed. Staff were actively prevented from assisting him: I repeat that they were actively prevented from assisting an 85-year-old gentleman. Another member of the public was trapped inside Gilbridge house in Sunderland, while trying to look for the inquiry centre, which had been closed. Many taxpayers decided to travel outside the region to inquiry centres that were still open, just so they could get face-to-face advice.

A recently widowed elderly woman turned up at Gilbridge house office for assistance with a tax form she needed to complete on behalf of her late husband. She told a member of HMRC staff that she simply did not feel that she could discuss her affairs over the phone, that she was afraid of completing it herself, just in case she did anything wrong, and that she could not grieve properly while she had this worry on her mind. I use this specific example, because staff are particularly concerned about the prospect of mainly older customers getting the support they need to complete the R27 form over the telephone, as these appointments need time. They not only need time; they need empathy, understanding and a common touch. It is common for staff, so they tell me, to keep a box of tissues handy on their desk for such occasions. It is hard to see how this kind of personal service can be replaced over the phone or on the internet. What assurances can the Minister give that such people, who will be in a particularly vulnerable state, will not be disadvantaged by the new service?

There are also problems involving equality issues. It is clear that the pilot scheme could not possibly identify the equality impacts on customers and staff, due to the demographics of our north-east region. For example, migrant workers make up 25% of all inquiry centre customers. However, the percentage of these customers is much lower in the north-east of England than it would be in other regions, such as London, which is a prime example. The consultation carried out by HMRC last year did not present equality data about customers. The document was not produced in different languages, which is of particular concern considering the high number of migrant workers who use the service. Only 11% of staff work part time in the north-east, compared with a national average of 36%. For example, 45% of workers in Wales and Scotland work part time. Only 7% of staff declared a disability in the north-east, compared with 27% based in Wales. Some 30% of inquiry centre staff in London and south-east are black, Asian and minority ethnic, compared with just 2% in the pilot area. How can the pilot area possibly identify the equality impact these closures will have on the country as a whole?

It is also worth mentioning, while considering the equality implications of this decision, that in October 2013 three appellants supported by the low incomes tax reform group won their appeal against the HMRC's requirement that they must file their VAT returns online. A tax tribunal found that HMRC's regulations that required online filing of VAT returns without providing exemptions for older people or disabled people, many of whom live in parts of the country that are too remote for broadband access, breached the appellants' human rights and were unlawful in EU law.

If we consider the intervention of the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams), it is important that ordinary people can access those services. It does not matter whether those people live in London or in rural areas where access is extremely difficult. It was identified early in the pilot that a significant number of customers will not be able to call contact centres or interact with the website owing to the cost and low mobile or internet access in many parts of the UK. The taxpayers who are most likely to be prevented from accessing the proposed new service owing to the cost are the most vulnerable members of society. They are not able to afford a

[*Ian Lavery*]

landline or a mobile telephone, and even if they own a mobile telephone it is often on a pay-as-you-go facility with a minimum amount of credit reserved for emergency calls only. Those taxpayers include the unemployed, people on low incomes, migrant workers, pensioners, people on child benefit and child tax credit claimants. Those taxpayers rely heavily on the free service that is currently provided by our inquiry centre network because their tax queries are often complex.

Low earners, for example, often work in multiple jobs to provide for their family, which means that the tax code is often incorrect. They visit the HMRC inquiry centres to use the free phones and free internet facilities or to receive face-to-face support and advice. HMRC agreed that an alternative access solution needed to be found if the new model was to be rolled out nationally. It is therefore concerning that the decision to move to the new service model and to close the inquiry centres has been made despite HMRC not having found those solutions.

Can the Minister reassure me that solutions have been found? If not, why has a decision been made without the Department having been able to resolve those important issues? Even in areas that have decent mobile phone coverage, taxpayers need to be reassured that contact centres will be sufficiently staffed to handle their calls. If the closures go ahead, people will no longer be able to walk into their local inquiry centre and receive face-to-face assistance on tax issues that are often complex. Instead, they will have to call a contact centre. A member of staff will then vet them and determine whether to refer them to another adviser. Only if that two-tier adviser deems it appropriate will a taxpayer classed as needing enhanced support be given access to face-to-face advice. Call handling levels have consistently been criticised by the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office. There are figures that prove conclusively that people will find it extremely difficult to contact the centres.

The fact that we are removing HMRC offices from local communities is one of the most important issues. HMRC is effectively moving its presence away from people who are supposed to pay, which will make closing the tax gap even harder. It will make tax compliance more difficult, both for those who want to comply but cannot get access to the information they need and for those who intentionally want to slip under the radar because they are disengaged with the tax authority at a local level. Those concerns have been raised by a large number of stakeholders in the public consultation exercise, including by the Association of Taxation Technicians, Citizens Advice, Gingerbread, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, Lancaster city council, Milton Keynes council, TaxAid and a number of individual taxpayers. What work has HMRC done to estimate the amount of money that could be lost in uncollected tax owing to large numbers of taxpayers being prevented from engaging with the Department?

I conclude simply by asking the Minister to reconsider the decision to close the offices. There is a real danger that if the plans go ahead, some of the most vulnerable people in society will lose their access to HMRC's services. Hundreds of quality jobs will be lost, and the Government's attempts to tackle the tax gap will be

seriously set back. It would surely benefit society and the economy if the Government would concentrate on closing the tax gap, not tax offices.

4.45 pm

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Dr McCrea. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) on securing this debate and putting across his points with characteristic clarity and force. Although I can understand his and other Members' concerns about the new HMRC service, particularly the plans to close its network of inquiry centres, I hope to provide reassurance that the changes will in fact provide better support to customers who require extra help to get their taxes and payments right. I want to focus on three areas: the impact on HMRC staff, whether there will be continued provision of face-to-face service and what the changes will really mean for those who currently use the inquiry centres.

First, let me begin, as the hon. Member for Wansbeck did, with the impact of the proposals on existing HMRC staff. Members will be aware that HMRC has recently written to all MPs about the introduction of the new service. That letter includes confirmation, which I would like to stress again today, that the plans are no reflection on the dedication and commitment of the 1,300 staff working in the inquiry centres. It is simply the case that HMRC can better support customers if it uses its money and staff in other ways.

Since the original consultation on the proposed new service began last year, HMRC has been discussing the impact of the changes with staff in inquiry centres and trade unions. As the hon. Member for Wansbeck pointed out, I met PCS representatives this morning to discuss the changes. Staff have been advised of the options and support available to them, dependent on their personal circumstances. The options include opportunities to apply for one of 450 roles in the new service.

A voluntary exit scheme has been opened for inquiry centre staff who wish to leave the Department on favourable terms, and HMRC has good reason to expect that a significant number will take the option to leave and pursue their futures elsewhere. HMRC will also, of course, do everything possible to redeploy as many staff as possible within HMRC or to help them to find other roles within the civil service. For those who go into the redeployment pool, the offer of a one-to-one meeting is still in place—it has certainly not been withdrawn.

It is worth bearing in mind HMRC's history as an employer. It has reduced in size significantly over the past nine years, but there have been only 35 compulsory redundancies. Although I cannot provide any guarantees that there will be no such redundancies, HMRC's record in avoiding such eventualities is strong.

Secondly, I would like to address the concerns of those who have suggested that the closure of the inquiry centres marks the end of HMRC's dedicated face-to-face advisory service. Let me reassure them that that is definitely not the case. A face-to-face service is about people; it is not about bricks and mortar. What is important is that HMRC provides an accessible and flexible face-to-face service that meets the needs of customers. Such a service is at the heart of the new system, which will provide face-to-face meetings where

that is most convenient to customers. Today's customers increasingly want to access services online, by phone and face to face when they need. That is what the new service will focus on providing.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Gauke: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has just arrived.

Grahame M. Morris: I apologise for being late; I have been tied up in a Committee. The Minister mentions the responsibility to maintain customer services. Does he feel that it is sufficient merely to put posters in the windows of the offices that have closed? Is that sufficient notice to give the public, particularly when the feedback from the pilots was that that was not an effective method of communicating with the public?

Mr Gauke: It is important that HMRC communicates the closure of inquiry centres. It has written to all Members of Parliament on the matter and will take other steps to ensure that our constituents are aware of the changes.

Inquiry centres are not universally distributed across the country, and large parts of the UK are not even served by them. My hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams), who is no longer in his place, raised the position of rural areas. Rural areas do not tend to be well served by inquiry centres at present. There has been a sharp decline in the use of inquiry centres. Visitor numbers have halved from more than 5 million in 2005-06 to just over 2 million in 2012-13, and the number of face-to-face appointments also dropped by four fifths to 140,000 last year.

Ian Lavery: Is it not the case that individuals who wish to have a face-to-face meeting will be vetted on the telephone, and then someone will adjudicate whether they need one?

Mr Gauke: I will turn to how the new service will work in a moment, if the hon. Gentleman will bear with me. HMRC's in-depth research further revealed that nine out of 10 of those who visited an inquiry centre last year did not require a face-to-face appointment and would have been able to resolve their queries through a phone call or by visiting the HMRC website.

Ian Lavery: On that point, will the Minister give way again?

Mr Gauke: I am keen to answer the hon. Gentleman's question, but I will give way.

Ian Lavery: Where on earth did that information come from? Surely, people who wanted a face-to-face meeting had one and thought it beneficial. Where do the statistics that the Minister has just mentioned come from?

Mr Gauke: They are the result of research undertaken by HMRC. Matters can often be resolved over the telephone rather than in a face-to-face meeting. The hon. Gentleman rightly highlighted a case in which an 85-year-old gentleman caught two buses to attend an

inquiry centre. If it is possible to drive that service more easily over the telephone, so be it, but there are circumstances in which a face-to-face meeting will be appropriate, so that will be provided.

HMRC's research has highlighted that up to 1.5 million customers need extra help with their tax and benefits affairs. Many of them need help only for a specific event in their lives, such as when they approach retirement. Others may have low literacy skills, or a mental health condition may make it difficult for them to cope with their affairs. The new, more accessible service will be tailored to the needs of customers who require extra help. Specialist help will be provided over the telephone by extra support advisers who have the time, skills, knowledge and empathy to handle customers' inquiries at a pace that suits them, and who can identify when a customer needs extra help. If a customer's query cannot be dealt with over the phone, they can arrange a face-to-face meeting with a team of mobile advisers based across the United Kingdom. Such meetings can be arranged at a time and place convenient to the customer, and extra help will be delivered through HMRC's voluntary and community sector partners who have been provided with extra funding so that they can support more customers and refer them directly to the new service.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): The Minister says that the service will be more accessible, but can he guarantee that? More than 280 offices will be closed. It is very difficult for the ordinary man and woman in the street to see how the service will be more accessible than it is now. I am sure that he will use the phrase, "Taking the service to the people, rather than people coming to bricks and mortar." The advantage of bricks and mortar is that it cannot be closed down or moved. Services that go into the community can disappear: lorries, vans or whatever vehicles are used for mobile services can disappear.

Mr Gauke: The point I was making is that, yes, 281 inquiry centres are being closed, but there will be something like 350 venues that will be used for face-to-face meetings under the new regime. HMRC fully acknowledges that there is a need to deal with those people who require enhanced support and face-to-face meetings. It has been clear about that.

John McDonnell: The problem with call centres is that in order to secure a face-to-face meeting, someone has to get through on the phone. At the moment, the Public Accounts Committee has set HMRC a performance target of 90% of calls for 2013-14, but performance, as at December 2013, was 76.2%. So HMRC is significantly failing its existing call centre targets already.

Mr Gauke: It is worth making the point that HMRC has recently gone through one of the biggest peaks for telephone calls during the year, which is the self-assessment deadline at the end of January, and it met the 90% target even on the last day of January, so there is some progress in terms of HMRC's contact centre performance.

In the time that I have available, I will turn to the consultation and pilots. As many hon. Members will be aware, in developing and refining the new service, HMRC undertook a wide-ranging consultation on its proposals last year. It also piloted the new service in the north-east of England from June to December 2013, closing 13 inquiry

[Mr Gauke]

centres including, as we have heard, the Morpeth inquiry centre in the constituency of the hon. Member for Wansbeck, so as to run the live trial. Feedback from customers and staff has helped to shape the service that will now be rolled out nationally, which includes introducing alternative routes for deaf, hard-of-hearing and speech-impaired customers to contact HMRC online, and making it easier for a friend or family member to contact HMRC on behalf of a customer to arrange a face-to-face appointment.

Customers who have used the new service have liked it. Independent research has shown that the new service has delivered an improved service for customers who need extra help, compared with their previous experiences with HMRC. Some calls, particularly those about tax credits, can also be handled effectively by HMRC's contact centre advisers. I know that concerns have been raised about the ability of contact centres to cope with the increased demand, as the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) said. However, as I

have said, even in the self-assessment tax return peak in January, HMRC handled almost nine out of 10 calls first time.

I conclude by reassuring hon. Members that HMRC is making these changes for two main reasons: first, to better meet the needs of those 1.5 million customers who need more help with their tax and benefits; and, secondly, to ensure that the services it provides represent the best value for money for taxpayers. Many inquiry centre staff will have the opportunity to apply for roles in the new service; many others will choose to leave HMRC through a voluntary exit scheme, or will seek redeployment to other roles within HMRC or in other Government Departments. In short, HMRC is doing the right thing for its customers and for the country, and as a responsible employer it is treating its staff with consideration and respect as it implements this important new service.

Question put and agreed to.

4.59 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 4 March 2014

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Competitiveness Council

The Minister for Universities and Science (Mr David Willetts): My noble Friend the Minister of State for Trade and Investment has made the following statement:

The EU Competitiveness Council took place in Brussels on 20 and 21 February 2014. The UK was represented by Lord Livingston on day one (industry and internal market) and David Willetts on day two (research and space). A summary of those discussions follows.

The main internal market and industry issues discussed were industrial competitiveness and the annual growth survey.

The Council began with a discussion about industrial competitiveness. Member states were asked to outline their priorities for improving industrial competitiveness, achieving a balance between climate, energy and competitiveness policies and how to mainstream industrial competitiveness into all policy areas. In its presentation, the Commission outlined its overall approach, noting that: all policy proposals should be competitiveness proofed; support should be given to innovative SMEs; and Competitiveness Council should play a greater role on industrial policy. The Commission also reiterated its proposed target to boost industry's share of EU GDP to 20%. The UK called for: the EU to focus on creating the right single market conditions; reduced burdens; a strong state aid regime; free trade agreements; a cost-effective and flexible energy and climate framework; a reformed emissions trading system; robust action to prevent carbon leakage; and a single energy market. The UK also emphasised that the EU should not be distracted by artificial targets on industrialisation.

This was followed by a discussion regarding the annual growth survey. The Commission noted the progress many member states had made on their country specific recommendations, but argued that too many service sector barriers remained. Key sectors where action should be taken included business and professional services, construction and retail. The UK emphasised the need to fully implement the services directive, called on the Commission to urgently provide guidance on proportionality, and suggested following a sectoral approach for further services liberalisation—for example, professional business services.

Eight AOB points were discussed: the ninth ministerial meeting of the Union for the Mediterranean on Euro-Mediterranean industrial co-operation; the European tourism quality principles; the European strategy for coastal and maritime tourism; state aid modernisation; hybrid nutrition labelling; non-financial and diversity information and the statute for a European foundation.

Research and space issues were covered on 21 February. During research discussions, the Commission noted that many member states were cutting their research budgets due to the overriding driver of fiscal consolidation—a careful balance had to be found or this would risk damaging their research and development capacity and the knowledge economy.

References were made to the importance of linking research agendas—both national and Horizon 2020—to structural fund spending. Germany and the UK warned of the risks of unhelpful regulation at European level, with the UK highlighting that the precautionary principle needed to be revisited and that “gold” open access to publications should be the norm in Europe.

On the European research area Council conclusions, the Commission clarified that the European research area was complete at a European level, but this now needed to be complemented by member states' action to implement the policies identified.

On the AOB items on public-public research partnerships and public-private research partnerships the presidency updated on the recent negotiations with the European Parliament. On the AOB item on international co-operation, the Commission welcomed the renewal of the science and technology agreement.

On the space policy debate on relations between the European Union and the European Space Agency, the presidency highlighted that both organisations were analysing similar policy options: to do nothing, have closer collaboration on policies and space missions, to have a dedicated directorate in the European Space Agency operating in accordance with EU rules on procurement, or to disband the European Space Agency and establish a new agency within the EU with similar functions. The majority of member states including the UK expressed a preference to undertake further consideration of the middle two options although the UK noted that the concepts still needed further definition and that the case for new EU legislation to implement them had not been made.

There was widespread consensus that both organisations needed to respect each other's expertise more and become more pragmatic in their relationship. The UK proposed that there should be a joint ESA/EU “Space Council” at the end of the year to discuss which approach to take.

JUSTICE

Prison Service Pay Review Body

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Jeremy Wright): My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Justice, Lord Faulks, has made the following written ministerial statement:

I am today announcing the start of the triennial review of the Prison Service Pay Review Body. Triennial reviews of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are part of the Government's commitment to ensuring, and improving, the accountability and effectiveness of public bodies.

Section 127 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 prohibits the inducement of operational staff within the prison service to take industrial action. As a “compensatory mechanism” for their inability lawfully to take such action, the Prison Service Pay Review Body provides advice to the Secretary of State about the pay of those staff.

The review will be conducted in accordance with Government guidance for reviewing non-departmental public bodies, and will focus on the core questions of effectiveness and good governance. It will be carried out in an open and transparent way, and interested stakeholders will be given the opportunity to feed in their views. I shall announce the findings of the review in due course.

Petitions

Tuesday 4 March 2014

PRESENTED PETITION

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

The Right of Anton Kainga to Remain in the UK

The Petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the Petitioners believe that Anton Kainga, a tennis coach in Nottingham and an internationally qualified tennis professional from Malawi, who has exceptional talent and love for the sport of tennis, is unfairly being removed from the UK; further that the Petitioners believe that some members of the tennis club will suffer and will not be able to pursue their chosen career of becoming professional tennis players as a result of this decision; further that the Petitioners believe that during the 11 years he has lived in Great Britain Anton Kainga has inspired children and adults to love and play tennis; further that the Petitioners believe that Anton Kainga has inspired children, with one member of the tennis club being home-schooled so that he can commit to the game and play the qualification round of \$10,000 tournaments and Anton Kainga needs to be at this child's side for him to reach his full potential; further that the Petitioners believe that Anton Kainga is a mentor, best friend, second dad and invaluable coach to this child who understands not only this child's tennis but his medical condition and further that the Petitioners believe that only Anton Kainga can guide this child towards his dream of a career as a professional tennis player.

The Petitioners therefore request that the Houses of Commons urges the Home Office to reconsider their decision to deport Anton Kainga and grant him the right to remain in the UK.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

[P001327]

OBSERVATIONS

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Residence of the Bishop of Bath and Wells

The Petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the Petitioners believe that the Church Commissioners' decision to move the Bishop of Bath and Wells from the Bishop's Palace and Gardens is a mistake and further that a local Petition on this subject has received over 2,000 signatures.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Church Commissioners to wait until the new Bishop of Bath and Wells takes up office and then reconsiders and consults on whether he should reside at Bishop's Palace and Gardens.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Tessa Munt, *Official Report*, 12 February 2014; Vol. 575, c. 980.]

[P001319]

Observations from the Church Commissioners:

The Church Commissioners note the various representations that have been made to them regarding the future living arrangements of the Bishop of Bath and Wells and the use of the Bishop's Palace in Wells. The Board of Governors of the Church Commissioners held a discussion on the matter at their meeting on 25 February 2014. This was the first time the Board had met since the original decision of November 2013.

The members of the Board of Governors were given an opportunity to review the petition and various other representations, both in support and against their initial decision, which had been made to the Secretary of the Church Commissioners and to the Second Church Estates Commissioner, right hon. Sir Tony Baldry MP.

After detailed discussion, the Board of Governors took the decision to reaffirm its original findings. The Church Commissioners have written to the bishop's council and standing committee of the Diocese of Bath and Wells.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 March 2014

TRANSPORT

Bus Services: Disability

Mr Leech: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to assess the effectiveness of voluntary bus driver training; and how he will take into account the experiences of disabled bus passengers. [189401]

Stephen Hammond: On 24 February 2014, my noble colleague Baroness Kramer wrote to the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT), the principal trade association for the bus and coach industry, requesting information by 17 March 2014 on the structure and effectiveness of disability awareness training courses currently offered by operators to their drivers.

A copy of this letter will also be sent to all bus operators who are members of CPT and disability stakeholders and charities with an interest in disability awareness training, seeking their input on this issue. All responses will inform the Government's review, in March 2014, of the use of an exemption applied under EU Regulation 181/2011, which exempts drivers from a requirement to undertake mandatory disability awareness training.

Mr Leech: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the accessibility of buses to blind and partially sighted passengers. [189402]

Stephen Hammond: The Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations 2000 (PSVAR) outline specific requirements for the bus industry to ensure that buses are as accessible as possible for disabled passengers. These include facilities such as low-floor boarding systems, visual contrast on step edges, handholds and handrails and priority seats that can be of particular benefit to blind and partially sighted passengers.

All new buses used on local or scheduled services to carry 22 passengers or more are required to be fully PSVAR compliant, and all buses will have to be compliant by 2015, 2016 and 2017, depending on the bus type.

According to the Department's annual bus statistics (published in September 2013) 78% of the total bus fleet in England is now PSVAR compliant. We will continue to monitor compliance with the industry.

In addition, my noble colleague, Baroness Kramer, wrote to bus industry representatives on 4 February 2014 to encourage operators to work with manufacturers of the relevant technology to look into the possibility of developing simpler and more affordable audio/visual announcement systems for buses that can provide benefits to as many passengers as possible.

Mr Leech: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of (a) the number of new buses which entered into service in

2013, (b) the number of such buses which are fitted with audio visual next stop and final destination announcements and (c) the number of such buses so fitted which operate outside London. [189404]

Stephen Hammond: According to figures published by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) on 7 January 2014, 2,842 new buses were registered in the UK in 2013, along with 843 coaches.

All buses in London currently operate with audio/visual announcement systems. Although we do not hold specific data from each bus operator on the number or percentage of new buses using audio/visual systems outside London in 2013, we are currently examining whether this information can be gathered as part of the Department's next annual bus operator survey, due to be published in the autumn.

Research commissioned by the Department for Transport estimates that in 2012 there were 8,877 buses operating in England that offered audio announcements on the destination of the bus and the next stop, compared to 8,812 buses in 2011. This amounts to approximately 25% of all buses in England.

Gatwick Airport

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what effect expansion at Gatwick would have on runoff water levels in West Sussex and surrounding areas in cases of severe weather; and if he will make a statement. [189891]

Mr Goodwill: This Government established the independent Airports Commission to identify and recommend to Government options for maintaining this country's status as an international hub for aviation. Although a Gatwick airport option has been shortlisted by the Commission for further examination, its final recommendations are not due to be published until the summer of 2015.

The environmental impacts of any proposed infrastructure development that might result from this process would be considered as part of the preparations for the detailed planning process to which the project would inevitably be subject, were it to go ahead.

Heathrow Airport

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether there are proposals to increase night flights at Heathrow Airport from 2015. [189505]

Mr Goodwill: The stage 2 consultation on night flying restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted ended on 31 January 2014. Officials at the Department for Transport are analysing the responses, and the Government will make an announcement on a new regime to commence in October 2014 this spring.

Motor Vehicles: Exhaust Emissions

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 13 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 716W, on Office for Low Emission Vehicles, whether the £170 million projected to be unspent over the period 2010 to 2015 will roll over into the next Parliament in addition to or as part

of the £500 million commitment for the uptake of ultra low emission vehicles from 2015 to 2020 referred to in the answer of 25 November 2013 to the hon. Member for Strangford, *Official Report*, column 102W, on fuels. [190034]

Mr Goodwill: No, as with all Government Departments, the Department for Transport underspends on particular policy areas are generally either used to cover other pressures within departmental budgets or are surrendered back to HM Treasury. The £400 million provision was for the period 2010-15.

Oxford-Hereford Railway Line

Sir Peter Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 26 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 389W, on the Oxford to Hereford railway line, how many through passenger services operated between Evesham and London Paddington in the year immediately before the partial redoubling of the North Cotswold line; and how many such services operate under the present timetable. [190002]

Stephen Hammond: The information requested is in the following table:

	Timetable					
	Monday-Friday		Saturday		Sunday	
	May 2011	December 2013	May 2011	December 2013	May 2011	December 2013
<i>London-Evesham</i>						
Direct services	13	15	14	14	12	12
Indirect Services	¹ 2/2 ¹	² 1	0	0	0	0
<i>Evesham-London</i>						
Direct services	12	15	14	14	11	11
Indirect services	¹ 1/2	² 2	0	0	0	0

¹ Bus service between Evesham and Oxford, train service between Oxford and London Paddington.

² Change at Oxford or Didcot.

Note:

All figures relate to services per day

Railways: Franchises

Stephen McPartland: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what enforcement measures he plans to make available to passengers under the Thameslink Great Northern Franchise if the franchise falls below the passenger satisfaction obligation. [189484]

Stephen Hammond: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to him on 24 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 239W.

Sir Peter Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 26 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 389W, on the Oxford to Hereford railway line, for what reasons he does not plan to ask train operators to break down the performance of individual routes within a large franchise area when publishing Passenger Charter figures. [190001]

Stephen Hammond: In the older form of Passenger's Charter used by First Great Western, specially calculated performance figures are used to show passenger eligibility for season ticket holder discounts. These figures are calculated differently from the Public Performance Measure and the 'right-time' arrivals figures, which are otherwise the main source of published performance data.

Under the Delay/Repay form of Passenger's Charter, used by most other train operators, such information is no longer required for this purpose as it is individual journeys for which recompense is paid.

Railways: Shrewsbury

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is taking steps to allocate intercity express programmes hybrid trains to be set aside to provide direct train links from London to Shrewsbury. [189406]

Stephen Hammond: The Class 800/801 fleet procured as part of the Intercity Express programme by the DfT will be used on the East Coast and Great Western main lines only. It will be for future operators of such a route to determine which stock would be best. They will be able to approach Hitachi to negotiate the purchase of Class 800 bi-mode trains under normal commercial arrangements if they so wish.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Jammu and Kashmir

16. **Mr Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to support self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. [902799]

Mr Swire: We recognise the importance of finding a lasting solution to the situation in Kashmir, but it is neither for the UK to prescribe a solution nor to mediate in finding one. It must be for India and Pakistan to resolve, taking into account the wishes of the Kashmiri people.

Bangladesh

17. **Simon Danczuk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role the UK is playing in resolving the political situation in Bangladesh. [902800]

Mark Simmonds: On 6 January my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Warsi urged Bangladeshi political parties to work together to strengthen democratic accountability and build capacity to hold future elections free from intimidation and reprisals. She reiterated this message recently with the Bangladeshi Justice, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister.

23. **Paul Blomfield:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the political situation in Bangladesh. [902807]

Mark Simmonds: We continue to encourage political parties to work together to strengthen democratic accountability and build the willingness and capacity to hold future participatory elections free from intimidation and reprisals. Parties are currently focused on local elections, and we continue to urge a refrain from political violence and intimidation.

Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the legitimacy of the recent Bangladesh general election results. [189311]

Hugh Robertson: The British high commissioner in Dhaka and officials in my Department have discussed the outcome of parliamentary elections with representatives from Bangladesh's political parties, other governments and international institutions. The Senior Minister of State, my noble Friend the right hon. Baroness Warsi, received the Government of Bangladesh's appraisal of the election results from Bangladesh's Justice, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister on 11 February 2014 and high commissioner Quayes on 23 January 2014. The election was also debated in Parliament on 16 January and 29 January.

Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the level of participation in the recent Bangladesh general election. [189312]

Hugh Robertson: Officials have discussed the level of participation in the recent Bangladesh general election with representatives of Bangladesh's political parties, other governments and international institutions, and civil society. The election was also debated in Parliament on 16 January and 29 January.

The election took place on 5 January without the participation of the Opposition 18-Party Alliance, resulting in 153 out of 300 seats being uncontested. The Awami League gained a 2/3rds majority of 232 seats. Precise election day turnout is unclear due to the lack of independent elections observers. Estimates vary from as low as 20-22% to as high as 35-40%.

Andrew Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received on alleged human rights abuses in Bangladesh. [189313]

Hugh Robertson: We engage extensively with human rights organisations and raise concerns with the Government of Bangladesh. We welcome assurances that they are committed to protecting human rights. The Senior Minister of State, my noble Friend the right hon. Baroness Warsi, discussed human rights concerns with the Government of Bangladesh during meetings with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister Dipu Moni when she visited Bangladesh on 12 December 2013.

Human Rights: Colombia

18. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had on human rights in Colombia. [902801]

Mr Swire: The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), discussed human rights with President Santos and Defence Minister Pinzon during his recent visit to Colombia. The Secretary of State welcomed President Santos's commitment to zero tolerance of human rights abuses and underlined the importance of taking action on threats to human rights defenders and trade unionists.

He also met human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and hosted a high-profile event on sexual violence in conflict, supported by the Colombian Government, the UN and local campaign groups.

Ukraine

21. **Stephen Pound:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on recent developments in Ukraine. [902805]

Mr Hague: I have made a statement today and I visited Ukraine yesterday. The UK is gravely concerned by the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Exports

22. **Andrea Leadsom:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress his Department has made on raising exports to established and emerging markets. [902806]

Mr Swire: Total UK exports have increased by 12% from 2010-13.

Established markets remain important for the UK, but it is exports to emerging markets which have driven our export growth. In this period, exports to South Korea have risen by 123%, to Thailand by 73.5%, to China by 63%, to Indonesia by 54%, to Russia by 45%, to India by 29% and to Brazil by 24%.

We are undertaking a major programme to increase our diplomatic footprint in many of the major emerging economies.

Gibraltar: Spain

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many incursions into British Gibraltar Territorial Waters by Spanish state vessels occurred in (a) December 2013 and (b) 2014 to date; and on which dates and by which Spanish Agency each of these incursions into British Gibraltar Territorial Waters took place. [189457]

Mr Lidington: There were nine unlawful incursions into British Gibraltar territorial waters by Spanish state vessels in December 2013 out of a total 496 for the whole year, averaging 41 incursions per month. The breakdown by category is as follows:

	<i>Number</i>
Guardia Civil	6
Customs	1
Maritime Salvage	1
SP Navy	1

There have been 77 unlawful incursions in 2014, as of 28 February. The breakdown by category is as follows:

	<i>Number</i>
Guardia Civil	53
Customs	11
Maritime Salvage	6
Pilot Vessels	5
SP Navy	2

We continue to make formal diplomatic protests to the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs about all such incursions. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks), raised his concerns with the Spanish Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr Gonzalo de Benito, on 20 February. Unlawful incursions do not weaken or undermine the legal basis for British sovereignty over Gibraltar territorial waters.

Iran

Michael Ellis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress he is making on the receipt of compensation for damage done during the attack on HM Embassy in Tehran in 2011. [189480]

Hugh Robertson: We have made clear to Iran the need to resolve the question of compensation for the damage caused to our embassy compounds in November 2011. The UK's non-resident Chargé d'Affaires is in discussion with his Iranian counterpart on the matter, as part of our emerging bilateral engagement with Iran.

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to his Iranian counterpart for the release of Saeed Abedini. [189879]

Hugh Robertson: The UK Government is deeply concerned about the detention and treatment of Pastor Saeed Abedini; and has called publicly for his release and the end of all persecution of individuals on the basis of their faith. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), raised our concerns about human rights in Iran when he met Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif on 23 September 2013 in the margins of the UN General Assembly. We will continue to do so.

Spain

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times the Spanish Ambassador was summoned to his Department in 2013; on which dates the Ambassador was summoned; and what the subject of discussion was on each such occasion. [189458]

Mr Lidington: The Spanish ambassador, His Excellency Federico Trillo, was publicly summoned twice in 2013. On 2 August 2013, he was summoned in order to underline the British Government's serious concerns regarding delays at the Gibraltar-Spain border.

On 19 November 2013, he was summoned following a 22-hour unlawful incursion by Spanish oceanographic research vessel Ramon Margalef into British Gibraltar territorial waters. We also raised the British Government's concern about continuing delays at the border.

British Nationality

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for how long his Department holds information on people who have been deprived of their citizenship following orders made under section 40 of the British Nationality Act 1981. [R] [187940]

James Brokenshire: I have been asked to reply of behalf of the Home Department.

Deprivation orders are made under section 40 of the British Nationality Act 1981 under which the Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), is empowered to deprive, by order, any person of any form of British nationality, subject to the appropriate test in section 40 being satisfied.

The figures for each year are:

(a) 2012: five orders issued on conducive grounds; fewer than five issued on fraudulent grounds.

(b) 2013: eight orders issued on conducive grounds; 12 issued on fraudulent grounds.

(c) 2014: 0 (zero) orders issued on conducive grounds; fewer than five issued on fraudulent grounds.

The grounds for the deprivation orders that were made during this period were either that:

the Secretary of State was satisfied that such deprivation was conducive to the public good and the person would not be made stateless as a result; or

the individual obtained British citizenship by means of fraud, false representation or concealment of material fact.

The nationality of the individuals who have been deprived of British citizenship since 2012 are as follows:

Afghanistan, Albania, Bangladesh, Egyptian, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Yemen.

The deprivation decision is permanent unless and until it is revoked. In accordance with the Home Office's policy on information management, once a deprivation of citizenship order has been issued under section 40 of the British Nationality Act 1981, records on the individual will be retained until he/she reaches the age of 75 or until his/her death.

HOME DEPARTMENT

British Nationality

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for how long after an order under section 40 of the British Nationality Act 1981 has been made her Department holds information on those deprived of citizenship; [R] [187869]

(2) how many people were deprived of citizenship during (a) 2012, (b) 2013 and (c) 2014 to date; what the nationality was of each such person; and what the ground or combined grounds were on which each deprivation order was made. [R] [187945]

James Brokenshire: Deprivation orders are made under section 40 of the British Nationality Act 1981 under which the Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), is empowered to deprive, by order, any person of any form of British nationality, subject to the appropriate test in section 40 being satisfied.

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the individual obtained British citizenship by means of fraud, false representation or concealment of material fact.

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Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals requesting citizenship to the UK were refused on the grounds of failure to pass the Life in the UK test in 2013. [189036]

James Brokenshire: The refusal of citizenship is made on the basis that an applicant failed to demonstrate the required knowledge of language and life in the UK, rather than on failure to pass the Life in the UK test. There were 103 refusals of British citizenship in 2012 on grounds of insufficient knowledge of English and/or of knowledge of life in the UK. These figures were published as part of the latest quarterly Immigration Statistics update covering July to September 2013 in table cz 09. These statistics are available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/259959/citizenship-q3-2013-tabs.ods

Corresponding data on refusals of citizenship in 2013 are due to be published in the Department's quarterly Immigration Statistics update on 22 May 2014, and will be available from the Library of the House and at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release>

Childbirth

Andrea Leadsom: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate she has made of the number of live births that were not registered in each of the last five years despite a registrar writing to the parents; and what measures are available to registrars to ensure parents register live births; [189752]

(2) what estimate she has made of the number of live births that were not registered in each of the last five years; [189753]

(3) what measures are in place to ensure that live births are registered. [189754]

James Brokenshire [holding answer 3 March 2014]: The number of unregistered births reported to the General Register Office (GRO) for England and Wales by registrars in each of the last five years are:

	Cases
2009	22
2010	22
2011	25
2012	28
2013	16

A birth is required by the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 to be registered within 42 days of its occurrence. If a birth has not been registered within the 42 day period, and the registrar is unaware of the reason why, they will contact the parents to register the birth.

"Failure to register a birth is an offence under the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953, with the potential sanction being a level one financial penalty, although practise would be for GRO to issue a further directive to register".

Although failure to register a birth is an offence under the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953, current practice is not to seek convictions as the sanction is a level one financial penalty, rather than a further order to register.

Children: Abuse

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent advice she has received from the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre on written material used in child sexual abuse. [189926]

Damian Green: The Home Secretary has received briefing from officials on the matter of written material and child sexual abuse, which included information on the NCA CEOP Command's position on this issue. In addition, NCA CEOP Command has recently provided a short briefing paper on Child Sex Offenders and Written Material.

Counter-terrorism

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps she is taking to counter the threat of letter-bomb attacks on Army recruiting offices on the UK mainland. [189264]

James Brokenshire: It is a long-standing convention of successive governments to refrain from commenting on ongoing police investigations. Any change in the security posture of Armed Forces Careers Offices will be a matter for the Ministry of Defence.

EU Accession

Stephen Phillips: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment she has made of progress by (a) Bulgaria and (b) Romania against EU post-accession benchmarks. [189769]

Table 1: List of suspects¹ convicted for the homicide of one or more of their children² and sentences received 2007-08 to 2011-12

<i>Year recorded</i>	<i>Number of victims that were the child of the suspect</i>	<i>Suspect gender</i>	<i>Conviction</i>	<i>Suspect sentence (duration in months where applicable)</i>	<i>Further information on sentence</i>
2008-09	2	Female	Manslaughter—Section 2 (Diminished responsibility)	Hospital Order with Restriction Order	—
2008-09	1	Female	Manslaughter—Section 2 (Diminished responsibility)	Hospital Order with Restriction Order	—
2008-09	1	Female	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2008-09	1	Female	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2008-09	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	90	—
2008-09	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	30	Detained under Children and Young Persons Act 1933 Section 53(2)
2008-09	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	9	Fully suspended sentence
2008-09	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	42	—
2008-09	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	60	—
2008-09	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	132	—
2008-09	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	60	—
2008-09	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2008-09	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2008-09	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2008-09	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2008-09	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2009-10	1	Female	Manslaughter—Common law	Hospital Order with Restriction Order	—
2009-10	1	Female	Manslaughter—Common law	48	—
2009-10	1	Female	Manslaughter—Section 2 (Diminished responsibility)	Hospital Order with Restriction Order	—
2009-10	1	Female	Manslaughter—Section 2 (Diminished responsibility)	Hospital Order with Restriction Order	—
2009-10	1	Female	Manslaughter—Section 2 (Diminished responsibility)	Hospital Order with Restriction Order	—
2009-10	2	Female	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2009-10	1	Female	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2009-10	1	Female	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2009-10	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	84	—
2009-10	3	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	144	—
2009-10	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	48	—
2009-10	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	60	—
2009-10	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	54	—
2009-10	1	Male	Manslaughter—Section 2 (Diminished responsibility)	42	—
2009-10	1	Male	Manslaughter—Section 2 (Diminished responsibility)	48	—
2009-10	2	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2009-10	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2009-10	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2009-10	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2009-10	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2009-10	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2009-10	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2009-10	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2009-10	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2009-10	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2010-11	1	Female	Infanticide	Hospital Order	—
2010-11	1	Female	Infanticide	12	Supervision Order— with other or no requirements CYPA 1969 Section 7
2010-11	1	Female	Manslaughter—Section 2 (Diminished responsibility)	Hospital Order	—
2010-11	1	Female	Manslaughter—Section 2 (Diminished responsibility)	36	Community Service order
2010-11	1	Female	Manslaughter—Section 2 (Diminished responsibility)	144	—
2010-11	1	Female	Manslaughter—Section 2 (Diminished responsibility)	Hospital Order with Restriction Order	—
2010-11	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	60	—

Table 1: List of suspects¹ convicted for the homicide of one or more of their children² and sentences received 2007-08 to 2011-12

Year recorded	Number of victims that were the child of the suspect	Suspect gender	Conviction	Suspect sentence (duration in months where applicable)	Further information on sentence
2010-11	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2010-11	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2011-12	1	Female	Infanticide	Hospital Order with Restriction Order	—
2011-12	1	Female	Manslaughter—Common law	45	—
2011-12	1	Female	Manslaughter—Common law	14	—
2011-12	1	Female	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2011-12	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	108	—
2011-12	1	Male	Manslaughter—Common law	96	—
2011-12	1	Male	Manslaughter—Section 2 (Diminished responsibility)	30	—
2011-12	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2011-12	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
2011-12	1	Male	Murder	Life imprisonment	—
Total homicides	99	—	—	—	—

¹ There are 91 suspects convicted of 99 homicides.

² As at 1 November 2012; figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and the courts, or as further information becomes available.

Source:

Homicide Index, Home Office

Human Trafficking: Victim Support Schemes

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to her answer of 20 January 2014, *Official Report*, column 26W, on human trafficking: victim support schemes, what support services are provided by local authorities to victims of human trafficking after 45 days in shelters; what other mainstream support provisions are available; what support is provided to a person who wishes to return to their home country; and if she will make a statement. [187656]

Karen Bradley [*holding answer 13 February 2014*]: If a victim of human trafficking has recourse to public funds in the UK, they will have access to the full range of local authority and mainstream support services. Throughout the 45-day recovery and reflection period, a service that the Salvation Army and its subcontractors provide to adult victims of human trafficking, as part of the Government's victim care contract, specialist support providers work with victims to help them gain access to relevant services and to develop a move-on strategy.

The Government's Assisted Voluntary Returns for Irregular Migrants (AVRIM) programme is available to non EEA victims of trafficking who wish to return to their home country. This programme is run in partnership with the Choices service of Refugee Action. The AVRIM scheme can provide support in acquiring travel documentation, a flight to their country of origin and onward domestic transport, and airport assistance at departure and arrival airports.

Last December, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), announced her plans to introduce a Modern Slavery Bill and wider Action Plan. The draft Bill is currently being considered by the Pre-Legislative Scrutiny Select Committee. As part of that process, and prior to introducing the final Bill and publishing the Action Plan, we are considering what more can be done to support victims of slavery and trafficking.

Immigrants: Detainees

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have been detained in immigration removal centres for the purpose of age assessment in the last 12 months; and how many were found to be (a) adults and (b) children; [183481]

(2) what the (a) average and (b) maximum length of time is that a person has been held in an immigration removal centre pending an age assessment in the last 12 months; [183482]

(3) what the (a) average and (b) maximum length of time is that a person who has been defined as an age dispute case has been held in an immigration removal centre pending release to local authority care in the last 12 months. [183483]

James Brokenshire [*holding answer 20 January 2014*]: Our policy is that we do not detain people for the purpose of undertaking an age assessment. Where there is doubt about whether an individual is an adult, they would be released into the care of a local authority for an age assessment.

The Detention Service Order (14/2012) 'Care and management of age dispute cases in the detention estate' was implemented on 28 September 2012. This introduced the requirement to release individuals from immigration detention pending age assessment.

The specific data requested in the hon. Member's second and third questions is not routinely recorded.

Police: Complaints

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance her Department issues to police forces on circumstances under which it should refer a complaint to the Independent Police Complaints Commission. [189881]

Damian Green: The Home Office does not issue such guidance to police forces. Statutory guidance on such matters is issued to police forces by the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Annuities

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners who switched annuities when they retired in (a) 2010, (b) 2011, (c) 2012 and (d) 2013; [189703]

(2) what steps he is taking to encourage pensioners to switch annuities when they retire. [189705]

Mr Gauke: I have been asked to reply on behalf the Treasury.

The Government set up the 'Open Market Option (OMO) Review Group' in 2011 to consider how to make shopping around for an annuity a 'default'. Their baselining exercise showed that, in 2010, 32% bought their annuities externally. Research by the Association of British Insurers (ABI) in 2011 shows that this figure had risen to 44%. Separate work by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) found that, in 2012, 60% of annuities were purchased through the customer's existing pension provider or a third party with which their provider has an arrangement.

Following the work of the OMO Review Group, the ABI's Code of Conduct on Retirement Choices, which came into effect in March 2013, requires all members to provide better information to consumers to help them shop around for the best annuity to meet their needs. The OMO Review Group will be evaluating the effectiveness of these measures. The FCA has also just launched a Retirement Income Market Study, which will assess whether competition in this market is working well for consumers. Further information, including a link to the terms of reference, can be found here:

www.fca.org.uk/news/market-studies/retirement-income-market-study

Employment Schemes: Disability

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the level of the cap on Work Choice referrals for each of the 28 contract package areas was in (a) 2010-11, (b) 2011-12 and (c) 2012-13. [189374]

Esther McVey: The Department has not placed a cap on referrals to Work Choice in any of the Contract Package Areas since the inception of the programme.

Work Choice programme referrals are managed across Contract Package Areas in accordance with anticipated start volumes for each contract.

The numbers of referrals required to achieve the starts profiles may fluctuate across Contract Package Areas, to take into account: Failed to Starts, drop outs from the programme etc.

We do not impose caps on referrals, however, if referral levels are not managed appropriately and in accordance with this strategy we do have the option of suspending referrals until such a point that referral levels are brought into line with profiled starts expectations, but this would be seen as a last resort.

Pensions

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will take steps to help those with pensions which are worth significantly less than they anticipated when purchasing those pensions. [189277]

Steve Webb: It is important that promises made to pension scheme members are met. For defined benefit pensions—where the scheme sponsor promises a specified, usually salary-related, pension—we have a protection regime in place. This includes requirements on how schemes are funded and provision for member compensation.

For defined contribution pensions, there is not a promise to the member on the amount of pension benefit they will receive as this will depend on factors such as the contribution level and investment performance.

However, even when there is no promise, it is crucially important that members are given meaningful, clear and transparent information about their pension schemes by scheme managers and trustees. In recognition of this we have revised the disclosure regulations with effect from 6 April 2014 to simplify Statutory Money Purchase Illustrations' (SMPI) requirements. On 24 February we also announced new measures requiring transparency for transaction charges in pension schemes. We tabled an amendment to the Pensions Bill 2013 to introduce this latest step in the Government's wider plans to ensure consumers receive value for money from their pension savings. Accordingly, our response to the consultation on charges, and further proposals on quality and transparency in workplace pension schemes, will be published soon.

Work Capability Assessment

Mr Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason his Department has not published statistics on the number of people who have been declared fit to work and subsequently died; and whether his Department plans to publish such statistics in future. [189762]

Mike Penning: The Department does monitor requests we receive for new statistics and consider whether we can produce and release analysis that will helpfully inform public debate. The Department is therefore looking at this issue with a view to seeing what statistics could be produced on a regular basis.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Maternity Leave

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what proportion of civil servants in his Department who had been on maternity leave were still employed in the Civil Service (a) six and (b) 12 months after their return to work in each of the last five years. [189117]

Brandon Lewis: This information is not centrally held in the form requested. While we do hold figures for those still employed by the Department, this excludes

staff who transferred within the civil service following their maternity leave, or who may have been on loan from another Department and moved back to their sponsoring Department.

Maternity Pay

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the standard level and duration is of contractual maternity pay paid to civil servants in his Department. [189077]

Brandon Lewis: Regardless of length of service, or agreed working pattern, civil servants in the Department are contractually entitled to take up to 52 weeks statutory maternity leave.

The contractual maternity pay entitlement for civil servants in the Department with at least one year's continuous service is as follows:

26 weeks ordinary maternity leave at their full pay rate, and;

26 weeks additional maternity leave made up of 13 weeks paid statutory maternity pay and a further 13 weeks unpaid leave.

The contractual maternity pay entitlement for civil servants in the Department with less than one year's continuous service, but at least 26 weeks service at the 15th week before the week the baby is due, is as follows:

26 weeks ordinary maternity leave consisting of six weeks maternity leave at statutory maternity pay rate, made up of 90% of the individual's average weekly earnings, and 20 weeks maternity leave paid at the lower statutory level or 90% of the individual's average weekly earnings, if this is less than the lower statutory level.

26 weeks additional maternity leave; the first 13 weeks are paid at the statutory maternity rate described above plus a further 13 weeks unpaid maternity leave.

Civil servants in the Department with less than 26 weeks continuous service at the 15th week before the week the baby is due, are contractually entitled to 52 weeks unpaid maternity leave.

Nurseries

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many workplace nurseries (a) directly operated by his Department and (b) operated by a third party on his Department's property there were at (a) 5 May 2010 and (b) 5 February 2014; and how many such nurseries are expected to cease operating in (i) 2014-15 and (ii) 2015-16. [189097]

Brandon Lewis: There have been no workplace nurseries directly operated by the Department or operated by a third party on the Department's property since the Department was established in 2006.

Pagers

Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many pagers have been provided to staff by his Department since May 2010; and what the cost to the Department was of providing those pagers. [190045]

Brandon Lewis: There have been none provided for departmental staff since May 2010.

Planning Permission

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how often and for what reasons he has revoked planning permission he has allowed on appeal since May 2010; and if he will make a statement. [189304]

Nick Boles: The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr Pickles), has not revoked any planning permission he has allowed on appeal since May 2010.

Rescue Services

Lyn Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what changes were made to the funding formula for fire and rescue services between 2011-12 and 2012-13. [188671]

Brandon Lewis: The formulae used in the 2012-13 Local Government Finance settlement are set out in the Local Government Finance Report for that year. The settlement was consulted on in the usual way in late 2011 and details of that consultation are at:

www.local.communities.gov.uk/finance/1213/grant.htm#con

No changes were made to the fire formulae through the statutory consultation that year.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Paul Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to the Government's commitment to give due consideration to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) when making new policy and legislation, if he will place in the Library all assessments of how new policy and legislation from his Department since January 2013 has given due consideration to the UNCRC. [186579]

Brandon Lewis: DCLG is committed to considering the impact of all new policies and legislation, including where they impact specifically on children.

An overall impact assessment and a memorandum confirming that the Bill was compatible with individuals' European convention human rights were produced for the recently passed Local Audit and Accountability Act but as there was no specific impacts on children no separate assessment was needed.

More widely, the coalition Government is due to report to the UN Committee responsible for the UN convention on the rights of the child shortly. The Department for Education is co-ordinating the response with contributions from other Government Departments. Once the Government has submitted its response to the UN Committee, a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Written Questions: Government Responses

Emma Reynolds: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he plans to respond to Parliamentary Questions 185480, 185481 and 185482, tabled on 28 January 2014. [190000]

Kris Hopkins: PQs 185480, 185481 and 185482 were answered on 27 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 445-46W.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Developing Countries: Water

Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to address disproportionate use of water resources for industry and energy production. [189713]

Lynne Featherstone: The sustainable management of water resources in developing countries is critical to ensuring that there is enough water of sufficient quality for human consumption as well as for agriculture, industry, energy production and ecosystem protection. In most developing countries the United Nations notes that agriculture uses more than 80% of available freshwater resources and that its usage is not always efficient.

DFID works to promote sustainable and equitable water allocation for human consumption and use across all sectors including agriculture, industry and energy in order to promote poverty reduction and economic development. DFID funds the Global Water Partnership to improve water governance in developing countries and improve poor people's access to water for consumption and for their livelihoods. Our support for the World Bank's Water Partnership programme promotes analytical work and innovative approaches to water resources management to ensure that water use by the agriculture, industry and energy sectors does not adversely impact on poor peoples' livelihoods. Through the International Water Stewardship programme we are promoting partnerships between the public and private sector to finance improvements in water management. DFID is also working with the international community to promote the inclusion of water resources management, including efficient water usage, in the Post-2015 Development Framework.

Overseas Aid

Sir Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much UK Official Development Assistance was provided by (a) each government department and (b) other sources in 2013. [189640]

Justine Greening: The final estimate for UK Official Development Assistance by DFID and other Government Departments for 2013 will be published in DFID's National Statistics publication *Statistics on International Development* in autumn 2014.

Procurement

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which current contracts awarded by her Department did not go through ordinary tender processes. [189977]

Justine Greening: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 13 January 2014, *Official Report*, column 366-67W.

NORTHERN IRELAND

John Downey

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will take steps to revoke the effects of the letter sent to John Downey on his alleged role in the Hyde Park bombing. [189828]

Mrs Villiers: The case of John Downey was dealt with in the ruling by Judge Sweeney.

On 27 February, the Prime Minister announced that a judge would be appointed to undertake an independent review to provide a full public account of the operation and extent of the administrative scheme relating to so-called "on-the-runs", which will include a factual check of all letters issued. I expect the report to be provided to me by the end of May 2014 for the purpose of its full publication.

Pagers

Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pagers have been provided to staff by her Department since May 2010; and what the cost to the Department was of providing those pagers. [190057]

Mrs Villiers: My Department has not provided pagers to staff since May 2010.

Terrorism

Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who (a) signed and (b) issued the 38 letters of comfort to on-the-runs issued since 2010 and since devolution of Policing and Justice to the Northern Ireland Assembly; on behalf of which Government department they were acting; and which Minister or Ministers had oversight of this process. [189724]

Mrs Villiers: No new cases have been raised with this Government since the 2010 general election. 38 individuals were already under consideration before the election and the checking process was allowed to continue under the current Government. Of these 38 cases, 12 received a letter saying that they were not currently wanted in relation to terrorist offences. These were signed by a senior official in the Northern Ireland Office.

On 27 February, the Prime Minister announced that a judge would be appointed to undertake an independent review to provide a full public account of the operation and extent of the administrative scheme for so called "on-the-runs". I expect the report to be provided to me by the end of May 2014 for the purpose of its full publication.

Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who was responsible for fact-checking statements submitted by the Police Service of Northern Ireland to permit letters of comfort to be issued by officials to on-the-runs; and under whose ministerial authority were they acting. [189725]

Mrs Villiers: The administrative scheme dealing with so called "on-the-runs" was authorised by Ministers under the last Government. The Attorney-General referred inquiries about individuals to the prosecuting authorities and the PSNI who carried out the factual checks. The

PSNI advised whether individuals were wanted by the police. The Government communicated the response back to Sinn Fein via a letter from the Northern Ireland Office. Letters were issued based on the information provided by the PSNI.

On 27 February, the Prime Minister announced that a judge would be appointed to undertake an independent review to provide a full public account of the operation and extent of the administrative scheme, which will include a factual check of all letters issued. I expect the report to be provided to me by the end of May 2014 for the purpose of its full publication.

Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who was responsible for obtaining and fact-checking information from UK mainland police forces to facilitate the issuing of letters of comfort to so-called On-the-Runs. [189726]

Mrs Villiers: The Attorney-General referred inquiries regarding individuals to the prosecuting authorities and the PSNI, who carried out factual checks. The PSNI advised whether individuals were wanted by the police. Letters were issued based on the information provided by the PSNI.

On 27 February, the Prime Minister announced that a judge would be appointed to undertake an independent review to provide a full public account of the operation and extent of the administrative scheme for dealing with so called "on-the-runs", which will include a factual check of all letters issued. I expect the report to be provided to me by the end of May 2014 for the purpose of its full publication.

Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by which means letters of comfort issued to so-called On-the-Runs were requested, issued and transmitted to the individuals concerned. [189727]

Mrs Villiers: Under the administrative scheme for dealing with so called "on-the-runs", inquiries from individuals wishing to establish if they were wanted by police in relation to suspected terrorist activities were communicated by Sinn Fein via the Northern Ireland Office to the Attorney-General. The Attorney-General referred the inquiries to the prosecuting authorities and the police who carried out the factual checks. The Government communicated the response back to Sinn Fein via a letter from the Northern Ireland Office signed by a senior official.

On 27 February, the Prime Minister announced that a judge would be appointed to undertake an independent review to provide a full public account of the operation and extent of the administrative scheme which will include a factual check of all letters issued. I expect the report to be provided to me by the end of May 2014 for the purpose of its full publication.

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether a letter in similar terms to that sent to John Downey was sent to (a) men alleged to be involved in the murder of Kenneth Smyth and Daniel McCormick, (b) men alleged to be involved in the murder of Lexie Cummins in Strabane and (c) the eight people questioned following the murder of four Ulster Defence Regiment members in Ballydougan, Downpatrick. [189829]

Mrs Villiers: On 27 February, the Prime Minister announced that a judge would be appointed to undertake an independent review to provide a full public account of the operation and extent of the administrative scheme relating to so called "on-the-runs", which will include a factual check of all letters issued. I expect the report to be provided to me by the end of May 2014 for the purpose of its full publication.

Mr Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many letters were sent to on-the-runs (a) between the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and December 2005 and (b) after December 2005. [189899]

Mrs Villiers: On 27 February, the Prime Minister announced that a judge would be appointed to undertake an independent review to provide a full public account of the operation and extent of the administrative scheme for dealing with so called "on-the-runs" established by the previous Government. This will include a factual check of all letters issued. I expect the report to be provided to me by the end of May 2014 for the purpose of its full publication.

Mr Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what evidence she has identified on whether John Downey's letter was issued in error; and what assessment she has made of whether other such letters have not similarly been issued in error; [189995]

(2) for what reason letters of comfort were issued to on-the-runs despite the absence of a police force intending to arrest or question them; [189996]

(3) which Minister is currently responsible for oversight of the letters of comfort issued to on-the-runs; [189997]

(4) who first authorised the issue of letters of comfort to on-the-runs. [189998]

Mrs Villiers: On 27 February, the Prime Minister announced that a judge would be appointed to undertake an independent review to provide a full public account of the operation and extent of the administrative scheme for dealing with so called "on-the-runs" that was established by the previous Government. This will include a factual check of all letters issued. I expect the report to be provided to me by the end of May 2014 for the purpose of its full publication.

Mr Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under what statutory provision letters of comfort have continued to be issued to on-the-runs following the withdrawal of the Northern Ireland (Offences) Bill in 2006. [189999]

Mrs Villiers: This was an administrative scheme dealing with so called "on-the-runs" which was established by Ministers under the last Government. No individual was granted immunity from prosecution under this scheme. Letters issued provided factual clarification on whether individuals were sought by police at the point at which the letters were issued.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Furniture

Dr Thérèse Coffey: To ask the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross representing the House of Commons Commission what steps the Commission has taken to ensure that office chairs for staff of hon. Members that regularly use ICT equipment are compliant with health and safety rules. [189642]

John Thurso: All chairs issued by the House comply with the Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Regulations 1992. Members or their staff on the parliamentary estate can request a DSE assessment. In some instances (for example, if there is an underlying medical condition) they may be referred to the House's Safety, Health and Wellbeing Service, which would carry out a second assessment and might recommend an appropriate chair.

SCOTLAND

Career Development

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of civil servants in his Department who were promoted in each of the last five years were (a) male and (b) female. [189149]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office does not employ staff directly. All staff that join the Office do so on assignment, secondment or loan from other Government bodies. Information relating to the promotion of male and female staff would be held by those bodies.

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of civil servants in his Department who were promoted in each of the last five years were identified as (a) white British and (b) from any other ethnic minority group. [189169]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office does not employ staff directly. All staff that join the Office do so on assignment, secondment or loan from other Government bodies. Any information relating to the ethnicity of staff is a matter for the parent bodies.

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of civil servants in his Department who were promoted in each of the last five years were identified as (a) disabled and (b) non-disabled. [189189]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office does not employ staff directly. All staff that join the Office do so on assignment, secondment or loan from other Government bodies. Information relating to promotion of disabled and non-disabled staff would be retained by those bodies.

Maternity Leave

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of civil servants in his Department who had been on maternity leave were still employed in the Civil Service (a) six and (b) 12 months after their return to work in each of the last five years. [189129]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office does not employ staff directly. All staff that join the Office do so on assignment, secondment or loan from other Government bodies. Information relating to employment after maternity leave would be retained by those bodies.

Maternity Pay

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the standard level and duration is of contractual maternity pay paid to civil servants in his Department. [189089]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office does not recruit or employ staff directly. All staff that join the Office do so on assignment, secondment or loan from other Government bodies. Information relating to the duration of contractual maternity pay would be a matter for them.

Pagers

Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pagers have been provided to staff by his Department since May 2010; and what the cost to the Department was of providing those pagers. [190058]

David Mundell: No pagers have been provided to Scotland Office staff since May 2010.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Environment Protection: Seas and Oceans

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government plans to take in the Council of Ministers to ensure protection for fragile deep-sea ecosystems and species from damaging forms of fishing. [189272]

George Eustice: The UK Government is pursuing agreement of a Council position on deep sea access for negotiation with the European Parliament that focuses on establishing spatial measures for the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems and species.

Horse Racing

Chris Williamson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will make an estimate of the number of racehorses killed outright or destroyed at (a) Cheltenham and (b) Aintree racecourse in 2013. [189927]

George Eustice: DEFRA does not keep records of horse fatalities at individual race tracks.

Livestock: Transport

Tracey Crouch: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 26 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 355W, on cattle: transport, how many applications from farmers seeking to move individual animals or an entire herd subject to disease specific movement controls during the recent flooding period his Department has (a) received and (b) granted. [189944]

George Eustice: The Department has received and approved four applications from animal keepers in the south-west seeking to move individual cattle or an entire herd subject to disease specific movement controls during the recent flooding period.

Reptiles: Imports

Jim Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many reptiles were imported into the UK from (a) within and (b) outside the EU each year between 2001 and 2013. [189641]

George Eustice: The data are for commercial imports of reptiles to the UK. They were extracted from TRACES through the data warehouse facility on 27 February 2014 by searching for commodity codes 010620 (reptiles including snakes and turtles). It should be noted that full data are only available from 2005 onwards as not all EU member states were using TRACES prior to this date.

	<i>Intra Community</i>	<i>Third Countries</i>
2005	2,007	157,410
2006	1,470	175,571
2007	520	206,005
2008	1,822	245,941
2009	2,042	202,439
2010	1,269	171,531
2011	17,923	151,715
2012	8,430	154,768
2013	2,463	129,592

TREASURY

Banks: Regulation

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the Financial Conduct Authority on applications for challenger banks which are currently under consideration. [189382]

Sajid Javid: The Prudential Regulation Authority will annually report details of new bank authorisations.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the timescales in which the Financial Conduct Authority considers applications for potential new entrants to the UK banking sector. [189386]

Sajid Javid: The Financial Services Authority published a report in March 2013 detailing changes to reduce barriers to entry and expansion in the banking sector, including an improved authorisation process. These changes have been implemented in full by the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) and Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). The Government has asked the PRA and FCA to conduct a follow-up review to evaluate the success of these changes, and the report on this work is due to be published in the coming months.

Building Societies

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to creating opportunities for the establishment of new building societies. [189384]

Sajid Javid: There is no legal barrier to the establishment of new building societies, who are free to make an application to the regulatory authorities.

The nature of building societies as member-owned financial institutions means that they require a substantial amount of capital to be formed, but those who provide that capital cannot be given ownership or voting rights. This may have contributed to the fact that there have not been any new building societies established since 1981.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to publish proposals for consultation on bail-in orders in relation to building societies. [189389]

Sajid Javid: The Financial Services (Banking Reform) Act 2013 added the bail-in stabilisation option to the Banking Act 2009. Section 17 of the 2013 Act grants the Treasury the power to make an order, making provision to facilitate the exercise of the bail-in powers in relation to a failing building society.

The Government said it would consult on this order, and a consultation will be published in due course.

Employee Benefit Trusts

Shabana Mahmood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what resources HM Revenue and Customs has allocated to the Employee Shareholder Scheme since it was announced. [189347]

Mr Gauke: It is not possible to disaggregate the resource applied to this work from other tax policy or administration work.

Financial Services

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the effect of (a) peer-to-peer lending and (b) crowdfunding platforms on the availability of finance for small to medium-sized enterprises; [189378]

(2) what estimate he has made of the amount of investment in small and medium-sized enterprises which has come from (a) peer-to-peer lending and (b) crowdfunding platforms in each of the last three years. [189381]

Sajid Javid: Crowdfunding and peer to peer lending are innovative new forms of finance that support competition in the business lending sector. The Government has taken a number of steps to support their growth.

The Government has not made any assessment of the amount of investment in SMEs from peer to peer lending and crowdfunding platforms.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his Department has had with (a) peer-to-peer lenders and (b) crowdfunding platforms on the development of simpler products for potential investors. [189380]

Sajid Javid: Treasury Ministers and officials meet with a wide range of organisations as part of the usual policy making process.

The Treasury publishes a list of ministerial meetings with external organisations. This is available online at:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/minister_hospitality.htm

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with representatives of EU institutions on the cross-border implications of peer-to-peer lending and crowdfunding platforms. [189383]

Sajid Javid: Treasury Ministers and officials meet with a wide range of organisations as part of the usual policy making process.

The Treasury publishes a list of ministerial meetings with external organisations. This is available online at:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/minister_hospitality.htm

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will ensure that legislation is in place to enable small and medium-sized enterprises to attract funding from peer-to-peer lending and crowdfunding platforms. [189385]

Sajid Javid: The Financial Conduct Authority consulted on draft rules for the peer to peer lending and crowdfunding sectors in autumn 2013 and will issue a policy statement shortly.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will propose changes to the taxation regime for individuals who wish to invest in peer-to-peer and crowdfunding schemes; and if he will make a statement. [189390]

Sajid Javid: The Chancellor keeps all decisions relating to taxation under review.

Financial Services: Taxation

John Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with campaigners for a financial transaction tax; how many times he has met such campaigners since May 2010; and how many times he has met with representatives from the financial sector to discuss this issue in that time. [190016]

Mr Gauke: Treasury Ministers regularly meet with various stakeholders as part of normal Government business. As was the case with previous Administrations, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings and discussions.

Details of ministerial and Permanent Secretary meetings with external organisations on departmental business are published on a quarterly basis and are available at:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/minister_hospitality.htm

John Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in other European countries on the introduction of a financial transaction tax. [190017]

Mr Gauke: The Chancellor and other Treasury Ministers have had various conversations about the financial transaction tax with their counterparts in other European countries since the proposal was published.

Fuels: Tax Evasion

Sammy Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people were (a) arrested, (b) convicted and (c) received custodial sentences in the UK for offences relating to fuel fraud in each of the last 10 years; [183458]

(2) how many people have received custodial sentences for fuel laundering in (a) Great Britain and (b) Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years. [183459]

Nicky Morgan: Figures are available only for years from 2010-11 (arrests) and 2011-12 (convictions and sentencing). The number of people arrested, convicted and sentenced to custodial sentences is as follows:

	Arrests in the UK	Convictions in the UK	Custodial sentences in Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland)	Number Custodial sentence in Northern Ireland
2010-11	18	n/a	n/a	—
2011-12	15	5	1	¹ 1
2012-13	12	11	¹ 1	¹ 4
2013-14 to December 2013	23	8	1	¹ 6

¹ Suspended.

This data relates to the total number of oils related offences recorded by Criminal Investigation, they are not subdivided into specific regimes.

HMRC fights fraud on a wide range of fronts, from special units performing thousands of roadside checks to raiding laundering plants. HMRC has also recently announced the selection of a new marker for rebated fuel, which will make it harder to launder marked fuel and sell it at a profit.

HMRC uses several avenues to tackle fraud: criminal prosecution, civil action (such as seizing fuel or pumps) civil penalties and strong regulatory controls.

Sammy Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total value of assets seized in Northern Ireland by HM Revenue and Customs as a result of fuel fraud offences in each of the last 10 years is. [183461]

Nicky Morgan: HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) does not hold or collate this information. They seize a variety of different assets in their disruption of the supply of illicit fuel including plant, equipment and chemicals used to launder marked fuel. It is not possible to put a monetary value on such equipment and, therefore, a figure for the total value of assets seized cannot be provided.

HMRC fights fraud on a wide range of fronts, from special units performing thousands of roadside checks to the raiding of laundering plants. They have also

recently announced the selection of a new marker for rebated fuel, which will make it harder to launder marked fuel and sell it at a profit.

HMRC use several avenues to tackle fraud: criminal prosecution, civil action (such as seizing fuel or pumps), civil penalties and strong regulatory controls.

Housing: Sales

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what capital receipts have accrued to the Exchequer from the sale of UK housing in each year since 1984. [189551]

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 Caron Walker, dated March 2014:

In the absence of the Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking what capital receipts have accrued to the Exchequer from the sale of UK housing in each year since 1984. (189551)

The table provides the local government receipts from the sales of gross fixed capital related to housing for England, Wales and Scotland. These data are only available from 1997 onwards. Data for housing sales are not available for Northern Ireland.

Local government receipts from sales of housing (gross fixed capital formation) 1997 to 2013—England, Scotland and Wales¹

	<i>Local government housing sales receipts (£ billions)</i>
1997	1.3
1998	1.3
1999	1.8
2000	2.1
2001	2.2
2002	3.0
2003	4.0
2004	3.7
2005	2.6
2006	2.2
2007	2.1
2008	1.0
2009	0.5
2010	0.6
2011	0.6
2012	0.9
2013	0.7

¹ Sales of housing (gross fixed capital) for Northern Ireland are not available.

Source:
ONS

Income Tax

Stephen Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether his Department has any sources other than PAYE RTI data for its estimates of employers' liability to income tax and national insurance. [189432]

Mr Gauke: HMRC uses PAYE payments information from the Enterprise Tax Management Platform (ETMP) to estimate employers' overall liabilities for PAYE income tax and class 1 national insurance contributions. The

ETMP system was introduced as part of the Department's Real Time Information (RTI) Programme. Apart from ETMP and RTI, the Department has no other ongoing sources of information on PAYE payments or liabilities.

JD Wetherspoon

Luciana Berger: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many meetings there have been between (a) officials and (b) Ministers in his Department and representatives of JD Wetherspoon plc in the last two years. [189777]

Nicky Morgan: Treasury ministers and officials routinely meet with a wide range of stakeholders as part of the policy development process. Details of ministerial and Permanent Secretary meetings with external organisations are published on a quarterly basis and are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmt-ministers-meetings-hospitality-gifts-and-overseas-travel>

Legal Costs

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the (a) cost and (b) purpose was of legal (i) representation and (ii) advice sought by his Department and its agencies in each year since May 2010. [187801]

Nicky Morgan: The table details the Department's spend on internal and external legal costs incurred for legal representation and advice provided to HM Treasury for the financial years 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013 to 31 January 2014. The Department's financial year runs from 1 April to 31 March.

It is not possible, without separately analysing each invoice, to confirm whether all the Department's legal spend is captured in these figures. To do this would take the cost of responding to the question over the disproportionate cost threshold.

These figures include but are not limited to the case management services provided by the Treasury Solicitor's Department and external legal advice and representation provided by solicitors and barristers. It is not possible to provide a more detailed breakdown of the fees without exceeding the disproportionate cost threshold. The figures represent actual cost to the Department and therefore only include VAT to the extent such VAT is irrecoverable.

The Department's records of legal spend do not separate legal representation and legal advice. Disaggregating the data would take the cost of responding to the question over the disproportionate cost threshold.

Our records of legal spend do not contain details of the purpose of each item of legal spend. Each invoice would have to be separately analysed to establish the matter concerned and then further analysed to establish the purpose. This would take the cost of responding to the question over the disproportionate cost threshold.

The Executive Agencies accounted for within the figures are the Asset Protection Agency for the financial years 2010-11 and 2011-12 and the Debt Management Office. The Asset Protection Agency ceased to be an Executive Agency in October 2012.

The Divisions of the Department accounted for within these figures are:

UK Financial Investments (UKFI);

Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR);
Office of Tax Simplification (OTS);
Infrastructure UK (IUK);
Government Actuaries Department (GAD); and
National Savings and Investments (NS&I).

	<i>HMT legal costs (£ million)</i>
2008-09	10,943,871.11
2009-10	18,518,800.48
2010-11	4,154,551.49
2011-12	5,673,682.71
2012-13	5,041,254.62

The following points should be noted:

It is not possible to disaggregate costs further without incurring considerable costs in retrieval and analysis of individual invoices which make up these figures, and which are held in remote storage.

These figures include fees paid to external law firms for the purpose of debt collection. Disaggregating these fees will incur considerable costs.

Legal representation and advice incurred by GAD and NS&I only include costs paid to the Treasury Solicitor's Department. The Department has not been able to obtain any additional information on costs for legal representation and advice incurred by GAD and NS&I at the time of answering this question.

Maternity Pay

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the standard level and duration is of contractual maternity pay paid to civil servants in his Department. [189091]

Nicky Morgan: There are two maternity pay schemes at Treasury, which employees may have an entitlement to depending upon their length of service and whether they intend to return to work. These are:

Treasury maternity pay scheme (known as contractual maternity pay) where the first 26 weeks of maternity leave (OML) is paid at the normal full salary rate (calculated as the average of earnings in the eight weeks leading up to the end of the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth). This is followed by 13 weeks of statutory maternity pay (SMP) and 13 weeks of nil pay.

Statutory maternity pay scheme (SMP) where the first six weeks of maternity leave is paid at 90% of the normal full salary rate (known as higher rate SMP) followed by 33 weeks of a lower rate of statutory maternity pay. The remaining 13 weeks is not paid.

National Insurance

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the costs that would be incurred by renaming national insurance as earnings tax. [189863]

Mr Gauke: The Government does not speculate on tax policy ahead of Budgets, although all taxes are kept under review.

PAYE

Stephen Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the total PAYE (income tax and national insurance) receipts were in each of the tax periods (a) November 2012 to January 2013 and (b) November 2013 to January 2014; [189565]

(2) what total employer liability for PAYE (income tax and national insurance) was reported by HM Revenue and Customs' PAYE RTI system for the three full tax months between November 2013 and January 2014. [189566]

Mr Gauke: Total receipts of PAYE income tax and class 1 national insurance contributions for the periods requested are shown in the following table:

<i>PAYE income tax and class 1 national insurance contribution receipts</i>	
	<i>£ million</i>
November 2012 to January 2013	55,104
November 2013 to January 2014	56,846

Overall liability estimates for PAYE income tax and class 1 national insurance contributions for the period requested are as follows:

<i>PAYE income tax and class 1 national insurance contribution liabilities</i>	
	<i>£ million</i>
November 2013 to January 2014	59,002

Note that these figures (for liabilities in particular) are provisional and subject to revision.

Procurement

Catherine McKinnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his Department's 10 largest contracts let since the financial year 2010-11 are; what savings have been made in such contracts; what the level of overspend or underspend was in each such contract; and what steps his Department has taken to monitor the performance of each such contract following the contract award. [183962]

Nicky Morgan: The Government is committed to openness and transparency to enable the public to hold the Government and other public bodies to account. This Government has made more data available than ever before. Since January 2011, central Government Departments have been required to publish on Contracts Finder information on the tenders issued and contracts they award with a value over £10,000 (excluding VAT):

www.gov.uk/contracts-finder

In addition, Departments including HM Treasury routinely publish details of transactions over £25,000.

There is a senior responsible officer for each major contract. They are responsible for monitoring the delivery against the contractual agreement. They are supported by a contract manager, who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the contract. Financial support for the contract manager is provided by a representative of the Finance team and expert commercial support is provided by the Crown Commercial Service, and full guidance is available.

Public Finance

Mr Jeremy Browne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Government deficit was, expressed in monetary terms including forecast projections into future years, in each year since 1990. [184800]

Nicky Morgan: According to the latest public sector finances statistical bulletin:

Public sector net borrowing excluding the impact of large one-off transfers for Royal Mail pension assets and the Asset Purchase Facility (PSNBex (ex RM and APF)), was £5.8 billion in 1990-91 but rose to £157.3 billion in 2009-10. As a result of action by this Government net borrowing has fallen in each year since May 2010 and stood at £114.9 billion in 2012-13, the last full year for which information is available.

The independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) is responsible for producing the official economic and fiscal forecasts in the UK on which fiscal policy is based. According to OBR's December 2013 Economic and fiscal outlook, PSNBex (ex RM and APF) is forecast to fall in each year of the forecast period reaching a £2.2 billion surplus by 2018-19. The OBR forecasts are available here:

<http://budgetresponsibility.org.uk/pubs/December-2013-EFO-Charts-and-Tables2.xls>

Steve McCabe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in which months the Exchequer (a) was and (b) was not in surplus in each of the last 36 months. [189502]

Nicky Morgan: This answer assumes the hon. Member is asking about Public Finances.

The Public Sector Finances Statistical Bulletin, published monthly by the Office for National Statistics and HM Treasury, provides a detailed statistical view of public sector finances, for example for January 2014 at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/psa/public-sector-finances/january-2014/stb--january-2014.html>

Railways: Floods

Mary Creagh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to the economy of (a) the UK and (b) the South West of the track disruption caused by flooding in 2014. [188547]

Stephen Hammond: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department for Transport.

It is too early to assess the impact on either the UK or SW economies. This will be done as part of the post emergency review which government has already announced. Studies being undertaken by Network Rail to consider long term options to ensure rail services to SW England can be sustained will also include an economic assessment.

Rent a Room Scheme

Jonathan Reynolds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the likely cost to the public purse of raising the Rent a Room Scheme tax-free threshold from £4,250 a year to £7,500. [189462]

Mr Gauke: The Government has made no such assessment but keeps all tax policies under review.

Self-employed

Julie Elliott: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average income of self-employed (a) men and (b) women is in each region. [188556]

Mr Gauke: The information requested is in the following table.

2011-12 Average income from self-employment		
Region	£	
	Male	Female
North East	12,700	8,230
North West and Mersey side	13,900	8,950
Yorkshire and the Humber	13,700	8,940
East Midlands	13,800	8,670
West Midlands	13,100	8,850
East of England	18,200	9,740
London	25,700	12,400
South East	19,100	10,000
South West	13,900	8,370
Wales	12,400	8,060
Scotland	16,500	11,100
Northern Ireland	12,000	9,300
United Kingdom	17,000	9,800

These estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes 2011-12 which is the latest year for which outturn data are available.

Tax Allowances: Video Games

Justin Tomlinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the potential benefits of providing tax relief to the video games sector. [189890]

Mr Gauke: The Government announced a new tax relief for video games at Budget 2012, subject to state aid approval.

This relief will allow eligible companies to claim a payable tax credit worth 25% of qualifying production costs. As set out in the impact assessment, this relief is expected to cost around £25 million per year and there are approximately 300 video games companies in the UK that may benefit. The impact assessment can be found at:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/tiin/2012/tiin2060.pdf>

There are significant games clusters all around the UK including in Brighton, Guildford, London, Oxford, Cambridge, Leamington Spa, Manchester, Newcastle and Dundee. In addition, many games development studios in the UK are new, micro or SME businesses.

Taxation: Bermuda

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to ensure that Bermuda receives public recognition and credit for its open and honest compliance with his Department's request for taxation transparency and reform. [189951]

Mr Gauke: All of the UK's Crown dependencies and overseas territories with financial centres have taken significant steps forward on tax transparency putting them at the forefront of this agenda globally. This has been publicly recognised by the Government. In addition to signing agreements with the UK for the automatic exchange of tax information, they have also agreed to be early adopters of the new global standard for automatic exchange, recently endorsed by the G20 at its meeting of 22 February in Sydney.

Meeting a commitment made during the UK's G8 presidency all of the Crown dependencies and overseas territories have also had extended, or are in the process of obtaining extension of the UK's signature of the multilateral convention on mutual assistance in tax matters. They have also published action plans on beneficial ownership, setting out the concrete steps they will take to ensure greater clarity about who really owns, controls, and benefits from companies and legal arrangements in their jurisdictions. We will continue to work closely with the Crown dependencies and overseas territories and will continue to press other financial centres to match the steps they have taken.

Taxation: Bingo

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 15 January 2014, *Official Report*, column 599W, on taxation: bingo, if he will undertake a specific review of the bingo duty rate. [189973]

Mr Gauke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer he mentions, on 15 January 2014, *Official Report*, column 599W.

The Government keeps all taxes, including bingo duty, under review.

VAT: Sixth Form Colleges

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans his Department has to review the position of sixth form colleges in relation to VAT paid on purchases. [189573]

Mr Gauke: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), on 17 December 2013, *Official Report*, column 208WH.

Working Tax Credit

Catherine McKinnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 10 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 441W, on working tax credit, what estimate he has made of the number of children who were living with couples who worked 16 to 24 hours per week who were eligible for child tax credit but were not eligible for working tax credit on 2 December 2013. [189353]

Nicky Morgan: The number of children in families where a couple are working 16 to 24 hours who are eligible for child tax credit (CTC) but are not eligible for working tax credit (WTC) as at 2 December 2013 is around 80,000. This figure relates to the snapshot position of families at this time.

In addition there are around 20,000 children in families where a couple are working 16 to 24 hours and are eligible for CTC who have lost WTC eligibility but whose income was high enough that the WTC element of their award was fully tapered away, so they were only in receipt of the child tax credit (CTC) element.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Electoral Register

Chris Ruane: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what organisations have applied to his Department for funding to improve voter registration. [189460]

Greg Clark: A range of voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations have applied for funding to deliver activities to improve voter registration.

On 5 February 2014, the Government announced that five national organisations and all 363 local authorities and Valuation Joint Boards in Great Britain will be sharing £4.2 million funding aimed at ensuring everyone in the country is signed up to the electoral register and has their chance to vote.

Further details of the successful organisations can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-for-new-ways-to-encourage-voter-registration>

Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

Chris Ruane: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to the answer of 5 March 2013, *Official Report*, column 971W, on Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, when he intends to lay an Order before Parliament under paragraph 28 of schedule 5 to the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013. [189418]

Greg Clark: It is for the next Government to decide whether to complete the transition to individual electoral registration in December 2015 or December 2016. To conclude the transition in December 2015, the Order must be laid before Parliament between 1 June and 31 August 2015.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Eggborough Power Station

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change if he will hold a consultation with (a) individuals and (b) groups on the biomass conversion project at Eggborough power station. [189519]

Michael Fallon: Any decisions to convert to biomass are a matter for Eggborough Power Ltd. Government do not conduct consultations regarding private companies.

Energy: Conservation

Mr Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what sanctions his Department applies to energy companies which fail to comply with their targets for spending on energy conservation schemes. [189822]

Gregory Barker: Energy efficiency targets for companies under the current energy company obligation (ECO), and previous related schemes, are set in terms of carbon reduction outcomes rather than financial expenditure.

Enforcement of these targets, and any penalties levied in the event of non-compliance, are a matter for the regulator, Ofgem.

Energy: Consumption

Jim Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate his Department has made of the average consumption of energy for hot water and heating of a (a) two bedroom terrace house, (b) three bedroom semi-detached house and (c) four bedroom detached house. [189653]

Gregory Barker: The average consumption of energy for hot water and space heating in 2012 was 15,377 kWh per household within the UK.

Average consumption figures have been derived from dividing total consumption for hot water and heating figures (from Table 3.05 of Energy Consumption in the UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/energy-consumption-in-the-uk>

by the number of estimated households (Table 401:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-household-projections>

(Department for Communities and Local Government)).

These figures are not available by type of household.

Energy: Prices

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2014, *Official Report*, column 575W, on energy: prices, what estimate his Department has made of the average yearly difference in prices between fixed price and standard variable tariffs for domestic consumers. [188843]

Michael Fallon: There are a range of fixed price tariffs on offer to domestic customers. Short term deals tend to be cheaper than current standard variable tariffs, whilst longer term fixed deals tend to be more expensive. This is because supply companies take a view on how much prices will go up by in the future; It is up to individual consumers to decide if a fixed deal is better value for them.

Green Deal Scheme

Robert Ffello: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many Green Deal assessments were carried out through (a) the Carbon Emission Reductions Obligation, (b) the Carbon Savings Community Obligation, (c) the Home Heating Cost Reduction Obligation and (d) the Green Deal cash back in 2013. [189924]

Gregory Barker: Provisional figures reported by energy suppliers to Ofgem show that, up to the end of September 2013, there were 13,500 Green Deal Assessments that resulted in the installation of Carbon Emission Reductions Obligation measures and 13,700 Green Deal Assessments that resulted in the installation of Carbon Savings Community Obligation measures. These figures are rounded to the nearest hundred and exclude a small number of properties where it is unknown whether an Assessment

was used. Green Deal Assessments do not feature in the regulations relating to the Home Heating Cost Reduction Obligation.

The number of Cashback vouchers issued and paid is published in Table 4 of the monthly Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation (ECO) Official Statistics release:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-deal-and-energy-company-obligation-eco-monthly-statistics-february-2014>

Virtually all households applying for Cashback vouchers will have had a Green Deal Assessment.

Robert Ffello: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many Green Deal assessments were carried out by local authorities in 2013. [189925]

Gregory Barker: The provisional number of Green Deal Assessments delivered through the Pioneer Places project, a DECC-funded Local Authority scheme, in 2013 was published in Table 1.7 of the latest quarterly Official Statistics release:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-deal-energy-company-obligation-eco-and-insulation-levels-in-great-britain-quarterly-report-to-september-2013>

These estimates will be revised in the next quarterly release, which is planned for publication on 20 March 2014.

The Department does not hold any further information on the number of Green Deal Assessments carried out through other local authority schemes. However, my Department published information on all assessments that have taken place in each local authority up to the end of September 2013 in Table 1.6a of the latest quarterly Official Statistics release.

Robert Ffello: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many Green Deal assessments were paid for by private individuals in 2013. [189928]

Gregory Barker: DECC collects information on whether households pay for an assessment through research. Findings from the research suggest that 10% of assessments up to the end of September 2013 (the period the research covered) have been paid for in full by households and a further two per cent paying partially.

Members: Correspondence

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change when he will reply to the letter sent to him in February 2014 by the hon. Member for Broxbourne on behalf of the Procedure Committee on a parliamentary question from the right hon. Member for Don Valley on the introduction of a ring-fence between the generation and retail arms of vertically integrated energy companies. [189887]

Gregory Barker: I would like to apologise on behalf of the Department of Energy and Climate Change for the delay in replying to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne. The Secretary of State for Energy and

Climate Change, the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr Davey), has since responded to this letter on 27 February 2014.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change when he will reply to the letter sent to him on 29 January 2014 by the right hon. Member for Don Valley on the introduction of a ring-fence between generation and retail within vertically integrated energy companies. [189895]

Gregory Barker: I would like to apologise on behalf of the Department of Energy and Climate Change for the delay in replying to the right hon. Member. The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr Davey), has since responded to this letter on 27 February 2014.

Renewable Energy

Mr O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change when he will announce his plans for the introduction of competitive auctions for renewable subsidies. [189689]

Gregory Barker: The Department recently launched a consultation on our approach to competitive allocation under Contracts for Difference. The consultation included a proposal to introduce competition for at least those technologies considered by Government to be more established from the commencement of allocation in October 2014. The consultation closed on 12 February 2014 and we are currently carefully considering the responses before confirming our policy position in early April 2014.

Renewables Obligation

Mr O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (1) when his Department will next review Renewables Obligation scheme banding levels under the Energy Act 2008; and when the outcome of this review will be published; [189624]

(2) whether there will be a reduction for further subsidies for onshore wind. [189814]

Michael Fallon: There is no further comprehensive banding review planned for the Renewables Obligation (RO) scheme before it closes to new generation on 31 March 2017. Support for large-scale onshore wind generating stations was reduced by 10% from 1 April 2013 following the last comprehensive review of RO banded support. This review, which reported in July 2012, set support rates for 2013-17. UK onshore wind costs were further examined during the call for evidence on onshore wind. The results were published on 6 June 2013¹ and confirmed that RO support for onshore wind would be maintained at the levels set through the banding review.

Later this year, we will be introducing a new support mechanism—Contracts for Difference (CFD)—designed to support new investment in low carbon energy. Under the CFD, it is our intention that established technologies (such as onshore wind) will have to compete on price in an auction in order to secure a contract for support. This means that only the most cost-effective projects will be built and will represent better value for money

for bill-payers, while continuing to deliver the investment we need in secure, low-carbon electricity generation.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/onshore-wind-call-for-evidence>

Wind Power

Mr O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much carbon dioxide was emitted from backup technologies for wind turbines in the last year for which data is available. [189688]

Michael Fallon: When unexpected events occur such as generator faults or excessive demand, the electricity system operator requires either additional generation to run as back up, or a reduction in electricity demand to ensure the system remains balanced. Such generation is commonly referred to as “reserve”. Electricity generated from wind at a given time is one variable currently managed as part of the demand supply balance among others. The system operator procures reserve services commercially, as part of balancing services. DECC does not hold data on energy produced from reserve services which is part of commercial arrangements the system operator has with providers.

Mr O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what the net emissions reductions resulting from (a) onshore and (b) offshore wind has been in the last three years; and what such figures are including in the carbon footprint of (i) construction, (ii) backup technologies and (iii) connection to the grid of such turbines. [189691]

Michael Fallon: The following table gives emissions reductions (million tonnes of carbon dioxide avoided) from onshore and offshore wind in 2010 to 2012. Data for 2013 are not yet available—provisional figures for 2013 will be available on 31 July 2014.

	<i>Onshore wind</i>	<i>Offshore wind</i>
2010	4.2	1.8
2011	6.4	3.1
2012	8.5	5.2

This is calculated as generation from onshore and offshore wind, multiplied by carbon dioxide emissions per GWh of electricity supplied from all fossil fuels. As with the data gathered for all power generation technology, it does not include emissions from construction or grid connection.

Onshore wind power has a very small carbon footprint range relative to other energy generation technologies: between 8 and 20g CO₂eq/kWh, taking into account emissions incurred during the manufacture, construction and decommissioning phases. The average emissions from fossil-fuelled power generation in the UK is around 700gCO₂/kWh.

Back-up generation—including generation from gas, coal or biomass—is sometimes required to balance intermittent renewable generators as well as to cover demand spikes and other station outage. DECC has not estimated the gas turbine energy contribution (and therefore related CO₂ emissions) to manage wind variability specifically, due to complex inter-dependencies of the power system operational parameters.¹

¹ Estimates of wind generation and CCGT emissions are taken from scenarios modelled for the Electricity Market Reform Delivery Plan. Please see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/electricity-market-reform-delivery-plan>

A range is given based on the range of generation estimates for onshore and offshore wind in the modelled scenarios. Estimates for onshore wind include both large and small scale.

Sources:

1. Onshore and offshore wind generation, from table DUKES 6.4, available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/renewable-sources-of-energy-chapter-6-digest-of-united-kingdom-energy-statistics-dukes>

2. Carbon dioxide emissions (tonnes per GWh) for fossil fuel mix, from table DUKES 5C, at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/electricity-chapter-5-digest-of-united-kingdom-energy-statistics-dukes>

Mr O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether his Department's calculation that 6.3 million tonnes of carbon dioxide were avoided in the UK in 2011 by onshore wind alone includes emissions from construction of turbines and backup technologies. [189817]

Michael Fallon: The figures referred to are calculated as generation from onshore wind, multiplied by carbon dioxide emissions per GWh of electricity supplied from all fossil fuels. The quoted 6.3 million tonnes figure in 2011 has been revised to 6.4 million tonnes. As with the data gathered for all power generation technology, it does not include emissions from construction or grid connection.

Onshore wind power has a very small carbon footprint range relative to other energy generation technologies: between 8 and 20g CO₂eq/kWh, taking into account

emissions incurred during the manufacture, construction and decommissioning phases. The average emissions from fossil-fuelled power generation in the UK is around 700gCO₂/kWh.

Back-up generation—including generation from gas, coal or biomass—is sometimes required to balance intermittent renewable generators as well as to cover demand spikes and other station outage. DECC has not estimated the gas turbine energy contribution (and therefore related CO₂ emissions) to manage wind variability specifically, due to complex inter-dependencies of the power system operational parameters.¹

¹ Estimates of wind generation and CCGT emissions are taken from scenarios modelled for the Electricity Market Reform Delivery Plan. Please see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/electricity-market-reform-delivery-plan>

A range is given based on the range of generation estimates for onshore and offshore wind in the modelled scenarios. Estimates for onshore wind include both large and small scale.

HEALTH

Abortion

John Glen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ground E abortions were diagnosed by (a) amniocentesis, (b) ultrasound, (c) chronic villus sampling and (d) other diagnostic tests in each of the last 10 years; what other methods of diagnosis were listed under other; and how many such diagnoses which did not result in abortion were recorded in the same period. [188483]

Jane Ellison: The information held by the Department is in the table.

Ground E covers a range of conditions, and one or more of the diagnostic methods specified in the question are likely to have been used in all pregnancies involving these conditions over the time period regardless of the outcome of the pregnancy.

Abortions performed under ground E, by method of diagnosis of the foetus, England and Wales, 2003-12

<i>Ground E by method of diagnosis</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2003</i>
Amniocentesis alone	266	252	180	195	211	214	206	240	208	208
Amniocentesis and Chorionic Villus Sampling	16	5	12	11	21	13	19	11	8	12
Amniocentesis and Ultrasound	183	174	145	136	177	155	176	160	151	139
Amniocentesis, Ultrasound and Chorionic Villus Sampling	10	9	14	18	18	9	10	10	11	10
Chorionic Villus Sampling alone	491	421	335	362	318	326	296	287	327	313
Ultrasound alone	1,367	1,192	974	978	920	885	1,007	927	923	965
Ultrasound and Chorionic Villus Sampling	246	162	139	135	141	175	154	132	134	157
Other ¹	22	10	3	2	0	1	2	5	11	5
No information given ²	91	82	488	248	182	161	166	144	121	132
Total	2,692	2,307	2,290	2,085	1,988	1,939	2,036	1,916	1,894	1,941

¹ Notifications recorded as 'other' are not coded further.

² Notifications where no information was given were returned to practitioners for completion from 2010 onwards.

Accident and Emergency Departments: West Sussex

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the spending on locum doctors was in accident and emergency at the (a) Princess Royal

Hospital in Haywards Heath and (b) Royal Sussex County Hospital in Brighton in each year since 2005; and if he will make a statement. [189894]

Dr Poulter: I hope my right hon. Friend will appreciate that this information is not collected centrally. Both

hospitals are run by the Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust and my right hon. Friend may wish to approach the Trust directly for this information.

Autism

Jonathan Reynolds: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure that specialist autism training for community care assessors is addressed in the guidance and regulations arising from the Care Bill. [189327]

Norman Lamb: The Government is committed to ensuring that care and support assessments are carried out by assessors with suitable knowledge and training. The Care Bill will require local authorities to ensure assessments are carried out in an appropriate manner, which will require local authorities to ensure staff are appropriately trained. Regulations will place a duty on local authorities to ensure that any person carrying out an assessment has the skills, knowledge and competence to carry out the assessment in question and that this is maintained. In addition, local authorities will be required to consult an expert in the individual's condition in cases where the assessor lacks experience. These requirements will apply to assessors who carry out assessments for people with autism, and this will be set out in the statutory guidance that will support the implementation of the Bill.

These legal requirements build on the existing guidance around autism, 'Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives' which states that assessments should be carried out by trained practitioners.

Cancer

Bill Esterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specialist services are currently available in hospitals to support patients diagnosed with cancers of unknown origin; and what plans he has to change the mandated minimum provision of such services. [189302]

Jane Ellison: In July 2010, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) published the clinical guideline, "Metastatic malignant disease of unknown primary origin: Diagnosis and management of metastatic malignant disease of unknown primary origin". This guidance set out best practice on care treatment and support of patients with cancer of unknown primary (CUP).

On the matter of support provided to patients, the guidance sets out that every hospital with a cancer centre or unit should establish a CUP team, in which a designated CUP specialist nurse or key worker should ensure that the patient and their carers can receive information, advice and support about diagnosis, treatment, palliative care, spiritual and psychosocial concerns

CUP services are subject to assessment and assurance through the National Peer Review programme (NPRP) which provides quality assurance for cancer services. Assessment of compliance is made against clearly defined measures. More information on the NPRP and CUP measures can be found at the following link:

www.cquins.nhs.uk/?menu=resources

Finally, NHS England would expect that the treatment and care for patients with CUP reflects patients' needs and preferences and that services take into account the relevant NICE guidelines.

Cancer: Drugs

Mr Simon Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department has discussed with NHS England the operation of the Cancer Drugs Fund in the last six months; what the content of those discussions was; and if he will make a statement. [189571]

Norman Lamb: Departmental officials have frequent discussions with NHS England on a range of issues relating to the management of the Cancer Drugs Fund, including NHS England's financial projections for expenditure against the Cancer Drugs Fund in 2013-14 and operation of the fund in future years.

Mr Simon Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the forecast outturn expenditure on the Cancer Drugs Fund is in 2013-14 across the year as a whole; and if he will make a statement. [189572]

Norman Lamb: NHS England has published on its website a summary financial report for the Cancer Drugs Fund as at the end of December 2013. The report forecasts national end of year spend for 2013-14 of £240 million.

Mr Simon Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have gained access to the Cancer Drugs Fund in (a) 2012-13 and (b) 2013-14 to date. [189665]

Norman Lamb: The information requested is included in the following table:

	<i>Number</i>
Number of patients funded in 2012-13 ¹	15,456
Number of patients funded 2013-14 to end December ²	14,137

¹ Source-Information provided to the Department by Strategic Health Authorities. Some individual patients may be double-counted where a patient has received more than one drug treatment through the Cancer Drugs Fund.

² Source-NHS England.

Mr Simon Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total expenditure of the Cancer Drugs Fund was in (a) 2010-11, (b) 2011-12 and (c) 2012-13. [189994]

Norman Lamb: Information on spend by strategic health authorities under the interim cancer drugs funding arrangements in 2010-11 (from October 2010 to the end of March 2011) and under the Cancer Drugs Fund (from April 2011 to the end of March 2013) is shown in the following table:

	<i>Amount spent (£000)</i>
October 2010 to end March 2011	138,254
April 2011 to end March 2012	1108,327
April 2012 to end March 2013	175,334

¹ Includes end of year spending commitments.

Source:

Information supplied to the Department by strategic health authorities.

Clostridium

Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the clostridium-difficile targets for all hospital trusts and clinical commissioning groups will be published by the NHS Commissioning Board; and how his Department will enforce such targets. [189306]

Dr Poulter: We understand that NHS England plans to publish Clostridium difficile objectives for national health service acute trusts and clinical commissioning groups, together with guidance for commissioners and providers on the implementation of sanctions, very shortly.

Depressive Illnesses

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent estimate he has made of the proportion of GPs who regularly prescribe mindfulness-based therapy for the treatment of repeat depression. [189356]

Norman Lamb: Mindfulness Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence approved treatment of recurrent depression and is available through a number of Improving Access to Psychological Therapy services in England.

No estimate has been made of the proportion of general practitioners in England who regularly prescribe mindfulness-based therapy for the treatment of repeat depression.

Food: Chemicals

George Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department holds on the health risks posed by synthetic chemicals used in the processing, packaging and storing of food. [189361]

Jane Ellison: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) leads on the safety of food additives and food contact materials (FCMs).

The use of food additives is subject to harmonised European Union (EU) legislation and a pre-marketing authorisation regime which includes the assessment of possible health risks.

Harmonised EU legislation requires food business operators to ensure FCMs do not endanger human health. Based on toxicological assessments undertaken by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the legislation sets limits for chemical migration into food to ensure consumers are protected. The FSA commissions research and surveillance projects which investigate exposure to chemicals from FCMs, and publishes the results on their website. Details of the FSA's research projects can be found at:

<http://food.gov.uk/science/research/chemical-safety-research/fcm-research/>

George Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will institute a population-based assessment and bio-monitoring to establish any potential links between food-contact chemicals and chronic conditions such as cancer, diabetes and neurological disorders. [189362]

Jane Ellison: The Food Standards Agency leads on the safety of food contact materials (FCMs) including migration of chemicals from them. We are advised it has no plans for a population-based assessment and bio-monitoring.

Harmonised European Union legislation requires food business operators to ensure FCMs do not endanger human health. Based on toxicological assessments undertaken by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the legislation sets limits for chemical migration into food to ensure consumers are protected.

Health Services

Mr Jamie Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many commissioning access policies are being developed by NHS England; when they will be completed; and what rules apply to patient treatment pending their completion; [189948]

(2) how many NHS staff were assigned to specialised commissioning in (a) 2011-12, (b) 2012-13 and (c) 2013-14; and what level of expenditure they were responsible for in each such year; [189949]

(3) by what process and timetable commissioning access policies are developed and agreed when a treatment breaches the current maximum threshold of five individual funding requests in any one NHS England region. [190004]

Jane Ellison: As part of its role as direct commissioner, NHS England moved to a single operating model to support the commissioning of specialised services, which provided an opportunity to develop single national commissioning policies with the involvement of lead clinicians, patient representatives and other key stakeholders.

NHS England has 112 commissioning access policies in the pipeline for development, but this number is constantly changing. Established treatments that were routinely commissioned prior to 1 April 2013 will continue to be routinely commissioned. New treatments, or treatments not routinely commissioned prior to 1 April 2013, will not be routinely commissioned. National health service patients will not be able to receive these treatments, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If the numbers of patients for whom the treatment is requested per year reaches five or more, the NHS England Area Team will treat this change as a service development requiring a commissioning policy. Guidance is available on the NHS England website at:

www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/cp-03.pdf

In April 2013, NHS England became the direct commissioner for specialised services and for 2013-14 expenditure for specialised commissioning is circa £13 billion.

In 2012-13 the level of expenditure identified as specialised commissioning was circa £7 billion, which was the responsibility of primary care trusts as the statutory responsible organisations.

NHS England advises that it is not possible to provide figures for staff assigned to specialised commissioning because they are not separately identified for payroll purposes.

Health Services: Immigrants

Nadine Dorries: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the health needs (a) in relation to infectious diseases and (b) in general of people who have (i) migrated to the UK within the last two years and (ii) resided in the UK on visa for six months or more. [189448]

Jane Ellison: The national health service does not routinely collect information about a person's immigration status or the time a person has been living in the United Kingdom. It is therefore not possible to make an assessment of the health needs in relation either to infectious diseases, or in general, of this group of people.

Public Health England carries out a broad spectrum of work relating to prevention of infectious disease. This work includes infectious disease surveillance, providing specialist and reference microbiology and microbial epidemiology, co-ordinating the investigation and cause of national and uncommon outbreaks, advising Government on the risks of various infections and responding to international health alerts.

Health: Equality

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the British Academy for the Humanities and Social Sciences' recent report on local actions to reduce health inequalities, published in January 2014; and if he will make a statement. [189408]

Jane Ellison: The Government welcomes the publication from the British Academy 'If you could do one thing—Nine local actions to reduce health inequalities' as an interesting contribution to the debate on reducing health inequalities at a local level.

The contributors to the report are highly regarded academic social scientists who are demonstrating some practical applications of their research for local authorities.

Local action is critical to reducing health inequalities. We have transferred responsibility for public health to local government to provide a local focus for action, backed it with £5.46 billion over two years, and promoted action on health inequalities through the Public Health Outcomes Framework and the new health inequalities duties on the health system.

Hospitals: Infectious Diseases

Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how Quality Premium funding agreements and the Outcomes Framework ensure a continued zero tolerance approach to hospital acquired infections. [189303]

Dr Poulter: The current Quality Premium arrangements in relation to health care associated infections cover the incidence of both Meticillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) bacteremia and Clostridium difficile (C. difficile) infection. 12.5% of the Quality Premium payment value is available to clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) for whom there are no reported cases of MRSA bacteraemia assigned to the CCG and for whom their reported C. difficile cases are at or below the defined thresholds for that CCG. In this way CCGs are:

currently incentivised to work with their provider organisations to prevent any cases of MRSA bacteraemia and to deliver continued reductions in C difficile cases.

The NHS Outcomes Framework exists to provide a national level overview of how well the national health service is performing, to provide an accountability mechanism between the Secretary of State and NHS England for the effective spend of NHS funds and to act as a catalyst for driving up quality throughout the NHS by encouraging a change in culture and behaviour. Domain 5 of the NHS Outcomes Framework relates to patient safety and includes two indicators in relation to health care associated infections, covering the incidence of MRSA and the incidence of C difficile. This ensures that improvements in relation to health care associated infections are considered a priority for the work of NHS England and the wider NHS.

Mr Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts have failed to reach their targets for reducing hospital acquired infections; and how many such trusts have been fined for such a failure in each of the last three years. [189310]

Dr Poulter: The following tables provide the number of trusts that have breached their Meticillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) and Clostridium difficile objectives over the last three years.

MRSA	Number of trusts breaching their objective
2010-11	36
2011-12	36
2012-13	55
2013-14 ¹	123
¹ Forecast	

Clostridium difficile	Number of trusts breaching their objective
2010-11	9
2011-12	50
2012-13	59
2013-14 ¹	91
¹ Forecast	

Source:

The information in the previous tables is supplied by NHS England.

In relation to the number of sanctions applied to those trusts that have breached their objectives, NHS England is unable to provide this information as it is not collected centrally.

Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to bring the new vaccine for Crohn's disease developed by Professor Hermon-Taylor forward to the human trial stage; and how much funding his Department has allocated to such work. [189893]

Dr Poulter: The Department's National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including Crohn's disease and vaccines. These applications are subject to peer review and judged in open competition, with awards being made on the basis of the importance of the topic to patients and the national health service,

value for money and scientific quality. In all disease areas, the amount of NIHR funding depends on the volume and quality of scientific activity.

The NIHR is not currently funding any Crohn's vaccine development work by Professor Hermon-Taylor at St George's, University of London or by researchers at other institutions.

Medical Records: Data Protection

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that NHS patients' details and medical records are safeguarded by insurance companies; and if he will make a statement. [189409]

Dr Poulter: The Health and Social Care Information Centre will only share identifiable patient data where there is a legal basis to do so and only for purposes that promote health and adult social care services, and will not release this kind of data for commercial insurance purposes.

Meningitis

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 13 February 2014, *Official Report*, columns 840-1W, on meningitis, if he will publish the report to him by the Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisation of their two meetings in February. [R] [189892]

Jane Ellison: The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation will publish the minute of the meeting held on 11 and 12 February 2014 no later than 26 March 2014, in accordance with its commitment to publish a minute of any meeting of the main committee within six weeks. The minute will be accompanied by a statement from the committee outlining their findings regarding the use of meningococcal B vaccine in the United Kingdom.

NHS: Crimes of Violence

Mark Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS staff were assaulted in health centres and hospitals in Lancashire in 2013; in which locations each assault occurred; and what the role was of the member of staff assaulted in each case. [189485]

Dr Poulter: The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Information on the number of reported physical assaults against NHS staff in 2012-13 is contained in the document; 'Tables showing the number of reported physical assaults on NHS staff in 2012-13' has been placed in the Library. The tables cover 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 which is the latest period for which information is available. They show the employing NHS bodies of victims of assault but not the location of assaults or the roles of staff assaulted.

Nurses

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trained nurses were not registered to practice in England in each of the last five years. [190035]

Dr Poulter: The Department does not hold this information.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) holds a register of nearly 467,000 nurses and midwives registered to practise in England. Nurses must be registered with the NMC to work as a nurse. To keep their registration up to date, nurses also need to renew their registration every three years.

More information is available at the NMC website at: www.nmc-uk.org/

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses there were per 100,000 population in (a) the latest month for which figures are available and (b) the equivalent month in each of the last five years. [190036]

Dr Poulter: The numbers of qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff per 100,000 population working in the national health service in England for November 2013, the latest month available, and each November from 2009 are shown in the following table:

NHS hospital and community health services provisional monthly statistics: Full-time equivalent qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff in England per 100,000 population as at 30 November each specified year—England

<i>As at November each year</i>	<i>Number</i>
2009	596
2010	592
2011	581
2012	577
2013 ¹	585

¹ Figures are calculated using full time equivalent nursing figures from the provisional monthly work force statistics as at 30 November 2009-13, against the Office for National Statistics (ONS) mid-year population estimates, from 2009-12. The 2013 figure has used the 2012 ONS population estimate as these are the most recent data available from the ONS.

Note:

These statistics relate to the contracted positions within English NHS organisations and may include those where the person assigned to the position is temporarily absent, for example on maternity leave.

Sources:

Health and Social Care Information Centre Provisional Monthly Workforce Statistics.
ONS mid-year population estimates.

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department holds on how many nurses will retire in the next five years. [190040]

Dr Poulter: The Department does not hold information on the number of nurses who will retire in the next five years.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council holds a register of over 670,000 nurses and midwives in the United Kingdom, it also holds a range of statistics drawn from the register. These include the numbers of people on the different parts of the register and the age and gender of people on the register.

In relation to nurses working in the national health service, the NHS annual work force census published by the Health and Social Care Information Centre shows the age profile of nurses working for the NHS in England as at 30 September each year. The age profile of nurses working in the NHS in 2012 is shown in the following table. The next annual work force census will be published on 25 March with data at 30 September 2013.

For those nurses working in the NHS, the NHS Pension Scheme for England and Wales has a normal pension age of 60 for 1995 section members or 65 for 2008 section members. Some nurses have a reserved right to a normal pension age of 55 upon meeting qualifying criteria. However nurses do not have to retire upon reaching that age and can continue working.

Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff by age, England as at 30 September 2012

	Headcount
All ages	346,410
Under 25	13,281
25 to 34	70,484
35 to 44	105,144
45 to 54	114,473
55 to 64	40,918
65 and over	2,110

Source:

Health and Social Care Information Centre 2012 Non-Medical Workforce Census

Obesity: Children

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to tackle rising rates of obesity among children in England. [189417]

Jane Ellison: Obesity rates in children are not rising. They fell between 2011 and 2012 to 13.7%, the lowest level since 1998.

However, rates remain too high and we are committed to further progress on child obesity and have a well-developed and wide-ranging programme of actions. These include working with a wide range of partners including Public Health England, NHS England, other Government Departments including the Department for Education and Department for Transport, and industry through the Public Health Responsibility Deal. Key initiatives include Change4Life, the National Child Measurement Programme, Change4Life Sports Clubs and School Sports Funding.

Our national ambition for a downward trend in excess weight in children by 2020 requires collective action by Government, businesses, health and care professionals, and individuals.

Source:

Health Survey for England, 2012. All children aged 2 to 15.

Smoking

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent steps he has taken to publicise the effects of smoking on health. [189276]

Jane Ellison: Government has run a number of campaigns in recent years to publicise the effects of smoking on health and encourage people to quit smoking, through the Department of Health and from April 2013, Public Health England (PHE).

From April to June 2012, the Department ran a 'Smokefree homes and cars' campaign, which brought to life the fact that over 80% of smoke is invisible and showed children breathing in the smoke, with the message 'If you could see the damage you would stop'. PHE re-ran this campaign in June and July 2013.

From December 2012 to March 2013, the Department ran the 'Mutation' campaign, which dramatised the invisible damage caused by cigarettes by showing a tumour growing on a cigarette, with the message that every 15 cigarettes you smoke causes a mutation that can become cancer.

In December 2013, PHE launched a new health harms campaign called 'Toxic cycle', showing how smoking makes the blood thick and dirty with toxins, which circulate through the body in seconds increasing the chances of a heart attack or stroke.

Further information on the harms of smoking can be found on the Smokefree website at:

www.nhs.uk/smokefree

and also in the range of Smokefree support products.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Maternity Leave

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Attorney-General what proportion of civil servants in the Law Officers' Departments who had been on maternity leave were still employed in the civil service (a) six and (b) 12 months after their return to work in each of the last five years. [189115]

The Solicitor-General: The following table contains details on the proportion of civil servants still employed within six and 12 months of returning to work after maternity leave.

	Percentage					
	Treasury Solicitor's Department (TSol) ¹		Serious Fraud Office (SFO)		Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) ²	
	Still employed after Six months	Still employed after 12 months	Still employed after Six months	Still employed after 12 months	Still employed after Six months	Still employed after 12 months
2009	90.0	90.0	25	25	97.92	95.83
2010	96.7	96.7	100	100	96.69	95.04
2011	97.1	94.1	100	100	89.80	86.94
2012	88.2	85.3	100	100	95.67	90.91
2013	97.7	97.7	3—	3—	90.78	89.81

¹ TSol data also covers the Attorney-General's Office and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate.

² These data are drawn from the CPS I-Trent HR database and may be subject to change due to retrospective changes made in the future.

³ All SFO staff who took maternity leave in 2013 are still on leave but have indicated that they plan to return to work.

Pagers

Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Attorney-General how many pagers have been provided to staff by the Law Officers' Departments since May 2010; and what the cost to the Law Officers' Departments was of providing those pagers. [190043]

The Attorney-General: The Attorney-General's Office has three pagers which are used by press office staff. Since December 2010 has spent £1,861.34 (ex VAT) on them. No financial data relating to pager usage is held before this date.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) currently has two pagers remaining on a monthly rolling contract and the total cost of providing pagers from May 2010 (when there were three in use) to January 2014 equates to £497.40 (including VAT).

No pagers have been provided to staff of the other Law Officers since May 2010.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Gambling

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to provide support to the families of problem and addicted gamblers. [189709]

Mrs Grant: The Government takes the issue of problem gambling and its effects on families and communities very seriously. Support to those suffering from gambling addiction and their families is provided through a system of voluntary contributions by the gambling industry to the Responsible Gambling Trust; these contributions then fund or part-fund organisations such as GamCare, the Gordon Moody Association and the NHS National Problem Gambling Clinic. The Responsible Gambling Trust will spend around £5 million on its education and treatment programmes in 2013-14.

Music: Finance

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the Arts Council gave to (a) opera and (b) brass bands in each of the last three years. [189014]

Mr Vaizey: The Arts Council makes its funding decisions independently of Government, and DCMS does not therefore hold the information requested. However, the Arts Council has provided the following figures:

	<i>Opera</i>	<i>Brass bands</i>
2010-11	69,748,715	75,521
2011-12	65,850,274	289,739
2012-13	80,919,910	362,829
2013-14	65,862,659	550,495
2014-15	65,009,914	531,626
Grand total	347,391,472	1,810,210

Pagers

Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many pagers have been provided to staff by her Department since May 2010; and what the cost to the Department was of providing those pagers. [190046]

Mrs Grant: The information is as follows:

<i>Pagers supplied by Vodaphone Paging</i>		£
<i>May 2010 to March 2011</i>		
Cost of pages		760.74
Cost of replacements		470
<i>April 2011 to March 2012</i>		
Cost of pages		713.64
Cost of replacements		320
<i>April 2012 to March 2013</i>		
Cost of pages		713.64
Cost of replacements		0
<i>April 2013 to February 2014</i>		
Cost of pages		654.17
Cost of replacements		0

As at 28 February 2014 there are 11 pagers all held by the Press Office.

Screen Yorkshire

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of Screen Yorkshire since the regional screen agencies were disbanded. [189319]

Mr Vaizey: I congratulate Screen Yorkshire for its track record in raising alternative sources of funding. In 2012 it established the Yorkshire content fund, a £15 million co-investment fund with £7.5 million of European regional development fund (ERDF) investment, which has already been widely recognised by industry for its impact locally and nationally. The fund has invested in over 20 highly successful productions to date, with reports from production to date indicating that the first £4 million of ERDF money invested has so far produced direct spend in the region of over £15 million. In February this year Screen Yorkshire announced it is to receive an additional £7.5 million from the ERDF, raising the total value of the fund to £30 million, which will greatly benefit the film, television and digital content sector across the Yorkshire region in terms of projects and job creation.

Video Games: Tax Allowances

Justin Tomlinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on providing tax relief to the video games sector. [189889]

Mr Vaizey: In 2012 the Government announced plans for a video games tax relief to support the production of culturally British games and remains fully committed to introducing this measure, subject to EU state aid clearance. DCMS has been working closely with HM Treasury to support them on implementation of the tax relief, including on providing the European Commission with the evidence it needs to conclude its state aid investigation as soon as possible.

CABINET OFFICE

Death: Bacterial Diseases

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people have been recorded in the UK from antibiotic-resistant bacterial meningitis infection by age group in each year since 1990; [189930]

(2) how many deaths of infants up to the age of one year have been caused by multi-drug resistant bacterial infection; and from which infections such infants have died in each year since 1990; [189912]

(3) how many deaths of people aged 70 or over were caused by multi-drug resistant bacterial infection; and from which infections such people have died in each year since 1990; [189913]

(4) how many deaths of children aged (a) between one and 10 years and (b) 10 and 16 years were caused by multi-drug resistant bacterial infection; and from which infections each such person died in each year since 1990; [189914]

(5) how many treatment failures due to multi-drug resistant bacterial infection leading to death have occurred in each year since 1990; and from which infections each such person has died; [189915]

(6) how many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from MRSA ST398 there were in the UK in each year since 2000; [189916]

(7) how many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from monophasic salmonella typhimurium there were in the UK in each year since 2000; [189917]

(8) how many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from new type MRSA which has a mecC rather than a mecA gene there were in the UK in each year since 2000; [189918]

(9) how many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from antibiotic-resistant foodborne campylobacter infection there were in the UK in each year since 1990; [189919]

(10) how many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from antibiotic-resistant foodborne salmonella infection there were in the UK in each year since 1990; [189920]

(11) how many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from antibiotic-resistant osteomyelitis infection there were in the UK in each year since 1990; [189921]

(12) how many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from antibiotic-resistant pneumonia infection where bacteria were confirmed as cause there were in the UK in each year since 1990. [189922]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Joe Grice, dated March 2014:

In the absence of the Director General for the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent questions to the Secretary of State for Health asking:

1. How many deaths of infants up to the age of one year have been caused by multi-drug resistant bacterial infection; and from which infections in the UK, in each year, from 1990 [189912].

2. How many deaths in people aged 70 or over were caused by multi-drug resistant bacterial infection; and from which infections, in the UK in each year, from 1990 [189913].

3. How many deaths in children aged (a) between one and 10 years and (b) 10 and 16 years were caused by multi-drug resistant bacterial infection; and from which infections, in the UK in each year, from 1990 [189914].

4. How many treatment failures due to multi-drug resistant bacterial infection leading to death; and from which infections, in the UK in each year, from 1990 [189915].

5. How many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from MRSA ST398 there were in the UK in each year since 2000 [189916].

6. How many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from monophasic salmonella typhimurium there were in the UK in each year since 2000 [189917].

7. How many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from new type MRSA which has a mecC rather than a mecA gene there were in the UK in each year since 2000 [189918].

8. How many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from antibiotic-resistant foodborne *Campylobacter* infection there were in the UK in each year since 1990 [189919].

9. How many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from antibiotic-resistant foodborne salmonella infection there were in the UK in each year since 1990 [189920].

10. How many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from antibiotic-resistant osteomyelitis infection there were in the UK in each year since 1990 [189921].

11. How many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people from antibiotic-resistant pneumonia infection where bacteria were confirmed as cause there were in the UK in each year since 1990 [189922].

12. How many deaths of (a) infants, (b) children, (c) adults and (d) elderly people have been recorded in the UK from antibiotic-resistant bacterial meningitis infection by age group in each year since 1990. [189930].

The underlying cause of death is coded by ONS using the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD). The current version of the ICD does not provide specific codes for gene/strain specific pathogens or drug resistant strains of infections. To find out the gene/strain of an infection an individual died from or whether or not they died from a drug resistant strain, a comprehensive text search of all the information recorded by the medical practitioner or coroner on the death certificate would need to be carried out. This information cannot be provided due to disproportionate cost.

Annual statistical bulletins on deaths involving MRSA and *Clostridium difficile* are available on the ONS website at the links below. These reports are produced by carrying out text searching of all of the information provided by the medical practitioner or coroner on the death certificate.

MSRA:

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/subnational-health2/deaths-involving-mrsa/2008-to-2012/index.html

***Clostridium difficile*:**

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/subnational-health2/deaths-involving-clostridium-difficile/2012/index.html

Employment: East Midlands

Andy Sawford: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what estimate he has made of the number of people in (a) Corby and East Northamptonshire, (b) Northamptonshire and (c) the East Midlands who have jobs which primarily require working (i) during the day and (ii) at night. [189427]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Joe Grice, dated March 2014:

In the absence of the Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking for the estimate of the number of people in (a) Corby and East Northamptonshire constituency, (b) Northamptonshire and (c) the East Midlands who have jobs which primarily require working (i) during the day and (ii) at night. 189427

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of people working particular shifts. For the period April-June 2013 it is estimated that 32,000 people in the East Midlands worked permanent night shifts. This does not include people who occasionally work night shifts. It is not possible to estimate the number who primarily work during the day as this is not asked on the survey.

Employment estimates for Corby and East Northamptonshire constituency and Northamptonshire are available from the Annual Population Survey (APS). However, estimates relating to shift working are not available from this source.

As with any sample survey, estimates from the LFS are subject to a margin of uncertainty. It is estimated that the true value is likely to lie between 21,000 and 43,000.

Former Prime Ministers

Pete Wishart: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much in public duty costs allowance has been paid to each former Prime Minister in each year since 2010; what the limit is of the public duty costs allowance for former Prime Ministers; when that limit was last reviewed; whether the public duty costs allowance is payable in addition to their parliamentary allowances to former Prime Ministers who remain Members of Parliament; what audit is undertaken of claims made under the public duty costs allowance by former Prime Ministers; what checks are made to ensure that claims against the allowance meet the criteria for funding from the allowance; what guidance is provided to former Prime Ministers on claiming from the public duty costs allowance; and if he will place in the Library a copy of that guidance. [189655]

Mr Maude: The amounts paid in 2011-12 and 2012-13 are as follows:

	£
<i>2011-12</i>	
Gordon Brown	114,998.17
Baroness Thatcher	109,191.00
John Major	115,000.00
Tony Blair	115,000.00
<i>2012-13</i>	
John Major	114,996.00
Gordon Brown	100,315.68
Baroness Thatcher	74,087.76
Tony Blair	115,000.00

The current limit for the PDCA is £115,000. The limit is reviewed on an annual basis.

Former Prime Ministers will continue to receive the PDCA if they are a sitting MP, provided they are not serving as Leader of the Opposition.

Claims are processed by the Cabinet Office and form part of the annual audit of Cabinet Office expenditure.

All former Prime Ministers are provided with guidance on the PDCA. A copy of this has been placed in the Library of the House.

Government Departments: Procurement

Andy Sawford: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many Government contracts of what value have been awarded to companies or projects based in (a) Corby and East Northamptonshire and (b) Northamptonshire since May 2010. [189425]

Mr Hurd: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Livingston (Graeme Morrice) on 16 December 2013, *Official Report*, column 453W.

Information on government suppliers within a specific constituency or local authority area is not held centrally.

Manufacturing Industries: Females

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent estimate the Office for National Statistics has made of the proportion of manufacturing jobs held by women in (a) each English region, (b) Scotland, (c) Wales and (d) Northern Ireland. [189625]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Joe Grice, dated March 2014:

In the absence of the Director General for the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent estimate the Office for National Statistics has made of the proportion of manufacturing jobs held by women in (a) each English region, (b) Scotland, (c) Wales and (d) Northern Ireland. [189625]

Figures for the proportion of manufacturing jobs held by women in (a) each English region, (b) Scotland, (c) Wales and (d) Northern Ireland, for the most recent period, Q3 2013, can be found in the table below:

<i>Percentage of UK manufacturing workforce jobs which are female</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
North East	17
North West	22
Yorkshire and Humberside	24
East Midlands	26
West Midlands	21
East	25
London	32
South East	23
South West	25
Wales	20
Scotland	26
Northern Ireland	23
United Kingdom	24

Source:

Figures obtained from 2013 Q3 Workforce Jobs Estimates

Pagers

Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many pagers have been provided to staff by his Department since May 2010; and what the cost to the Department was of providing those pagers. [190044]

Mr Hurd: As was the case prior to the last general election various officials are provided with pagers when there is a business case to do so. We do not hold details centrally of when pagers were purchased but currently spend £360 a month on the services.

EDUCATION

Child Minding

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what level of inspection fees for (a) individual childminders and (b) childminder agencies Ofsted are considering; and how much it costs Ofsted to carry out inspections of each type of childcare provision. [188901]

Elizabeth Truss: The costs of carrying out inspections are a matter for Ofsted and Her Majesty's chief inspector will be writing to the hon. Member about this. A copy of that letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

In relation to fees for Ofsted registered childminders, the registration fee is currently set at £35, and the annual fee for these childminders is also £35. We will announce the fees for childminder agencies in due course.

Faith Schools

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will review his Department's guidance on school uniform in religion-specific schools to exclude items of clothing of religious significance so that they remain the right of the child to wear or not to wear. [189590]

Mr Laws: There are no plans to review the school uniform guidance at this time.

In September 2013 we published clear guidance to all schools, including academies and free schools, on developing a school uniform policy. This advises schools of the need to have regard to their obligations under equalities legislation, and to act sensibly and fairly in the interests of their students.

We expect schools to take a flexible approach and be willing to consider reasonable requests to vary their uniform policy to accommodate individual pupils' beliefs. We would encourage any parents who have concerns about the uniform policy at their child's school to raise them first with the school, including through the school's published complaints procedure where appropriate.

The guidance can be found here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-uniform

Free School Meals

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when the decision to let a contract for a package of help and advice on universal free school meals was made; for how much this contract is estimated to amount; and when he expects to announce the provider. [189888]

Mr Laws: We issued an invitation to tender for the universal infant free school meals implementation support contract on 6 December 2013. On 25 February 2014 we confirmed that the successful bidder was the consortium jointly led by the Children's Food Trust and the Lead Association for Catering in Education. We are currently

finalising the details of the contract, which will have a value of £9.6 million. We plan to launch the service shortly.

Free Schools

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what estimate his Department has made of the cost to it of the 18 free schools cancelled or withdrawn during the pre-opening process; [189323]

(2) what proportion of the 18 cancelled free school applications were in (a) Yorkshire and (b) London; [189396]

(3) what representations he has received from each of the providers of the 18 free schools which had a scheme cancelled or withdrawn; and if he will make a statement; [189395]

(4) how many of the 18 cancelled free school applications had a site purchased and assigned to the school. [189397]

Mr Timpson: As of 27 February 2014, 19 free school applications had been cancelled or withdrawn during the pre-opening process. Details on expenditure on cancelled or withdrawn free schools projects are published online and regularly updated:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/revenue-expenditure-for-free-schools

The 19 schools include one school that went on to open as a university technical college and another which opened as a sponsored academy instead. Of the remaining 17 schools, five were to be based in Yorkshire and Humber and four in London.

Whenever a free school project is to be cancelled or withdrawn, the Department for Education discusses this with the relevant free school trust. The Department also seeks to reclaim any project development grants that remain unspent.

There are no instances where a site has been purchased or assigned specifically to a single free school project that was then cancelled or withdrawn. However, there is one instance where a site was purchased which was to be shared by two free school projects. One of those has now been cancelled or withdrawn. The Education Funding Agency is working with the remaining free school trust and the local authority in order to determine the usage of this site.

Mr Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the answer of 24 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 217W, on free schools, how many of the free schools that have a rental or leasehold agreement for the site of their school are owned by a (a) local authority and (b) company. [189901]

Mr Timpson: We do not hold the information requested centrally for all open free school sites and collating it would incur disproportionate cost.

Internet: Bullying

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what guidance his Department gives to schools in assisting parents and pupils to tackle social media bullying which occurs outside of school time. [189501]

Elizabeth Truss: The Government recognises that educating pupils about e-safety is key to tackling cyberbullying and protecting children online.

From September 2014, e-safety will be taught at all four key stages. It covers responsible, respectful and secure use of technology, as well as ensuring that pupils are taught age-appropriate ways of reporting any concerns they may have about what they see or encounter online.

In addition the Department is providing over £4 million funding over two years from spring 2013 to four anti-bullying organisations. These include BeatBullying, the Diana Award, Kidscape and the National Children's Bureau. While this funding has been awarded to specific projects to reduce bullying in general this can, and does, include work to tackle cyberbullying.

More widely, the Government is working to protect children online through the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) which brings together representatives from government, industry, law enforcement, academia, charities and parenting groups.

The Government has also ensured that all internet customers will be given the opportunity to install free and easy to use filters which can be used by parents to prevent their children from accessing harmful content.

Kings Science Academy

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education on what basis he concluded that all the critical information regarding Kings Science Academy Bradford had been passed on to Action Fraud. [189348]

Mr Timpson: As I have stated previously, officials at the Department for Education reported the case by telephone to Action Fraud's national call centre on 25 April 2013. An additional telephone call was made to West Yorkshire Police's Economic Crime Unit, who confirmed that this was the correct way to report fraud and that no further action was required.

On 1 November 2013, a call was received from Action Fraud in which they apologised for their handling of the Department's report, stating that they had wrongly categorised the call as an information report when it should have been a crime report. There has never been any suggestion from the police or Action Fraud that the report lacked any critical information or was not reported correctly.

Languages: Education

Mr Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the differences in the teaching of modern languages in state-funded comprehensive schools and in mainstream independent secondary schools. [R] [189324]

Elizabeth Truss: No formal research has been conducted into this issue. However, informal analysis suggests that the key features of good practice in languages teaching in independent schools and in state schools with outstanding languages teaching are the same. Common features include high levels of teacher subject knowledge, teaching being supported by strong extra-curricular activities including school trips, and strong support from school leaders.

The new curriculum for foreign languages at key stage 2 (ages 7-11) and the more demanding curriculum for modern foreign languages at key stage 3 (ages 11-14), which come into force from September 2014, will raise the quality of language teaching in state schools. The inclusion of a modern or ancient language in the English Baccalaureate is already encouraging more young people to take a language at GCSE level. The numbers sitting a language GCSE are now at a five-year-high.

Mandarin: Curriculum

Mark Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to expand the UK languages curriculum to encompass Mandarin. [189489]

Elizabeth Truss: The Prime Minister has pledged to increase the number of people learning Mandarin Chinese in the UK from 200,000 to 400,000 by 2020. Offering more young people the chance to learn Mandarin will help in our efforts to encourage mobility between the UK and China and help ensure the long-term success of our economy and society.

A number of organisations are carrying out activity to further these aims. The British Council is working with Hanban, the Office of Chinese Language Council International, to increase demand for Mandarin teaching in UK schools and to address accessibility, for example by increasing the provision of Chinese Language Assistants. The Institute of Education's Confucius Institute is working with HSBC to promote more teaching of Mandarin in primary schools; and the Confucius Institute is also running the 'Accelerating Mandarin Chinese for London' programme. The grant for this comes from the £24 million London Schools Excellence Fund, set up by the Mayor of London, with funding from the Department for Education. The Department is taking a close interest in this work and providing encouragement and support at a high level.

We have also introduced a foreign language at key stage 2 (ages seven to 11) as part of the new national curriculum which comes into force from September 2014; and the inclusion of a modern or ancient language in the English Baccalaureate is already encouraging more young people to take a language at GCSE level. The numbers sitting a language GCSE are now at a five-year-high, with entries for Chinese rising by around 20% in 2012-13.

Maternity Pay

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the standard level and duration is of contractual maternity pay paid to civil servants in his Department. [189080]

Elizabeth Truss: In 2007 the provision for employers to pay statutory maternity pay increased from 26 weeks to 39 weeks. As a result the Department for Education increased their maternity leave package, from 28 weeks at full pay to 28 weeks at full pay plus 11 weeks at statutory maternity pay, to ensure the policy remained compliant with the legislation change. This arrangement remains in place.

Pagers

Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pagers have been provided to staff by his Department since May 2010; and what the cost to the Department was of providing those pagers. [190048]

Elizabeth Truss: The Department for Education does not hold the information requested centrally.

Pre-school Education: Greater London

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the number of additional early years education places in London resulting from the £8 million funding announced by his Department on 18 December 2013. [189343]

Elizabeth Truss: It is for individual London authorities to determine how best to use their allocation to expand the provision for two, three and four-year olds. We are encouraging local authorities to support school nurseries to open from eight till six and offer more flexible hours for parents. This will enable more parents to take their free 15-hours of early education for two, three and four-year olds at convenient times.

Individual local authority allocations to fund the extended early learning programme for two year-olds for the 2014 to 2015 financial year were published on 18 December 2013 and they are available from gov.uk via this link:

<http://bit.ly/1dm83fs>

Pupil Exclusions: Autism

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many informal exclusions of students with autism there were in (a) primary and (b) secondary schools in England in each of the last four years; [189852]

(2) what guidance his Department offers to schools about the exclusion of students with autism. [189853]

Elizabeth Truss: The Department for Education does not collect data on the use of informal exclusions. The Department's statutory exclusion guidance makes clear that all exclusions from school must be lawful, reasonable and fair. There is no excuse for a school not to adhere to the correct process, and Ofsted takes seriously any evidence that a school has acted unlawfully in excluding a pupil.

The exclusion guidance emphasises to schools the importance of early intervention to address underlying causes of disruptive behaviour, including, where appropriate, an assessment of whether suitable provision is in place to support any special educational needs (SEN) a pupil may have. It also states that head teachers should, as far as possible, avoid excluding permanently any pupil with a statement of SEN.

In addition, the Department is currently providing, over a two-year period, £440,000 in funding to the National Autistic Society. Part of this funding is being used to employ an exclusions adviser who can give

advice to parents and professionals to help prevent unlawful exclusion and reduce the need for formal exclusion from school.

The Department will continue to work with National Autistic Society, Ambitious about Autism and other groups to help improve provision for children and young people with autism.

Schools

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what analysis his Department has carried out of the comparable value for money of (a) community schools other than academies and (b) free schools. [189394]

Mr Laws: The Department for Education carried out a review of efficiency in the school system in 2013 and the final report was published in June 2013. The report can be found at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/financialmanagement/b0069984/vfm>

One of the proposals from the review was to develop a new indicator to provide a simple way for schools to compare their overall efficiency against other schools. The Department is currently in the process of developing such an indicator, which will be published as part of a benchmarking report card for each school or academy trust. The report card will show a school's key financial and performance data as compared with similar schools and we plan to send this out annually to all schools and academies.

Currently, spend data for both maintained schools and academy trusts is published annually alongside the performance tables at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance/>

The finance data are taken from the consistent financial reporting returns, submitted by all maintained schools, and the account returns data for academy trusts. The schools and academies whose data are published in the financial tables are grouped into three broad categories by free school meals bands (high, medium and low), so comparisons can be made between the spending patterns of similar institutions.

The National Audit Office reported in 'Establishing Free Schools' (December 2013) that new free schools have been established quickly and at relatively low cost. For example, free schools' average construction costs have been approximately 45% lower than costs in other school building programmes. The report can be found at:

<http://www.nao.org.uk/report/establishing-free-schools>

Schools: Admissions

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many school places in non-free schools have been provided in the UK between 2010 and 2014. [189377]

Mr Laws: The Department for Education collects information from each local authority on the number of available school places (school capacity) in state-funded primary and secondary schools (except special schools) through an annual survey. Local authorities are also required to provide estimates of future pupil numbers,

which indicates the number of places that will be needed. The most recent data available relate to the position at May 2013:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-capacity-academic-year-2012-to-2013>

The following table shows the number of non-free school places in state-funded primary and secondary schools that were available in England between 2010 and 2013:

	Number of school places			
	2010	2011	2012	2013
State-funded primary non-free school places	4,227,530	4,253,300	4,309,022	4,405,230
State-funded secondary non-free school places	3,330,670	3,608,970	3,595,680	3,614,348

Source:

Published School Capacity Collection

Schools: Finance

Mr Robin Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when the Government expects to publish its detailed consultation on the National Funding Formula for schools. [190025]

Mr Laws: The Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), announced in June that we would consult on how best to introduce a national fair funding formula, which will mean that all areas receive a fair allocation of school funding. We will announce the next steps shortly.

Schools: Standards

Mr Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the performance of schools sponsored by (a) AET and (b) Oasis; and if he will make a statement. [189444]

Mr Timpson: The Department for Education monitors the performance of all academies, including those that are part of Multi Academy Trusts such as AET and Oasis. Performance data for all AET and Oasis academies are published in the Department's performance tables, which can be found at

www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance

Where academies are seriously underperforming of not making sufficient progress, the Department will intervene by issuing a Pre-Warning Notice (PWN) and require that the Academy Trust provides an improvement action plan. All PWNs are published on the gov.uk website. Where improvements are not being made quickly enough, Academy Trusts are prevented from taking on additional academies or alternative sponsors will be found.

Special Educational Needs

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what support and training exists in England for teachers to improve their ability to teach students with autism; [189854]

(2) what requirements there are for maintained schools to have access to a specialist autism teacher. [189855]

Mr Timpson: The Department for Education is funding the Autism Education Trust £1.5 million over 2013-15 to provide autism training at three levels. This work builds on similar grant-funded support in 2011-13 by widening the training from schools to include early years providers and further education colleges and to cover the whole of England.

It is for schools and local authorities to decide how best to organise their support for autistic children. All schools are expected to ensure that teachers have a good understanding of special educational needs (SEN) and are able to adapt teaching accordingly. The draft SEN Code of Practice requires this to be reflected in a school's performance management and professional development for teachers and support staff. All new school SEN co-ordinators must have received training to take on the role and that training covers different types of SEN, including autism.

The Department is also supporting Nasen to develop a SEN gateway which will provide access to a range of free, quality-assured resources and training materials. This includes introductory and advanced materials on autism spectrum disorder.

Teachers: Surveys

Mr Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff West, *Official Report*, column 360W, on teachers: surveys; on what date he plans to publish the findings of the Teacher Workload Diary Survey 2013. [190003]

Mr Laws: The Department for Education published the 2013 Teacher Workload Survey on 28 February. The report setting out the survey's findings can be seen at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-workload-diary-survey-2013>

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Adult Education: Northamptonshire

Andy Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) how many people in Corby and East Northamptonshire constituency are enrolled in adult skills sessions; [189419]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of adults in (a) Corby and East Northamptonshire constituency, (b) Northamptonshire and (c) the East Midlands who are unable to (i) read and (ii) write; [189421]

(3) how many apprenticeships were started in the Corby and East Northamptonshire constituency in each industrial sector in each of the last five years; [189422]

(4) how many new apprenticeships were started in Corby and East Northamptonshire constituency in each of the last five years; and what the (a) age group and (b) gender of each such apprentice was. [189423]

Matthew Hancock: Final data for the 2012-13 academic year show that there were 6,000 adult (19+) learners participating in further education and skills in Corby parliamentary constituency.

The 2011 Skills for Life survey Small Area modelled estimates¹ provide information on the proportion of adults aged 16-65 with above and below the 'functional literacy' threshold². The data do not separate reading and writing.

The following table shows estimates for the proportion of people with below Level 1 literacy for Corby parliamentary constituency, Northamptonshire Local Enterprise Partnership³ (based on an aggregation of Northamptonshire local authority estimates) and the East Midlands region⁴.

Mean estimates of the proportion of people in the East Midlands region, Northamptonshire LEP and Corby constituency with below Level 1 literacy, 2011

Area	Proportion of people with below Level 1 literacy (%)
Corby constituency	16.6
Northamptonshire Local Enterprise Partnership	14.8
East Midlands region	13.8

Source:

2011 Skills for Life survey small area estimates and survey.

Apprenticeship data are not available by industrial sector. Learners may undertake a wide range of apprenticeship frameworks within one industry. Apprenticeship starts by geography (including parliamentary constituency) and sector subject area are published in a supplementary table to the SFR:

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140107201041/http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/580C5BA0-9661-4224-A3D5-EE508DA6F5B4/0/Oct2013_Apprenticeships_SSA_Geography_Starts.xls

Apprenticeship starts by geography (including parliamentary constituency) and age are published in a supplementary table to the SFR:

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140107201041/http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/3D49B725-2FD2-451E-9A5E-116D788E43F4/0/Nov2013_ApprenticeshipStartsbyGeographyLevelAge.xls

The following table shows apprenticeship starts in Corby parliamentary constituency by gender.

Apprenticeship starts by Gender in Corby parliamentary constituency, 2008-09 to 2012-13

Gender	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Female	310	330	590	660	860
Male	230	240	360	530	620
Total	540	570	950	1,190	1,490

Notes

1. Geography information is based on the learners' home postcode
2. Figures for 2011-12 onwards are not directly comparable to earlier years due to the introduction of the Single ILR:

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140107201041/http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/C05DCDD5-67EE-4AD0-88B9-BEBC8F7F3300/0/SILR_Effects_SFR_Learners_June12.pdf

Source:

Individualised Learner Record

¹ Available online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/2011-skills-for-life-survey-small-area-estimation-data>

accessed on 26 February 2014.

² This is defined in the Leitch review as "the level needed to get by in life and work" (HM Treasury [December 2006] 'Leitch Review of Skills. Prosperity for all in the global economy—world class skills. Final Report', p. 43.) Level 1 is equivalent to GCSE grades D-G. Adults with skills below Level 1 can read or write, but their skills may be limited; for example, they may not be able to read bus or train timetables.

³ Gibson, A. and P. Hewson (2012) 2011 Skills for Life Survey: Small Area Estimation Technical Report, BIS research report 81C: available online at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/36077/12-1318-2011-skills-for-life-small-area-estimation-technical.pdf

page 73.

⁴ The regional estimate is derived from the sample-based 2011 Skills for Life survey, rather than modelled estimates.

Andy Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he is taking to increase the participation of older people in further education in Corby and East Northamptonshire constituency. [189420]

Matthew Hancock: Our approach in Corby and East Northamptonshire is the same as across the country—apprenticeships are an all age programme. Outside of apprenticeships, we want to maintain access to learning for older people and to support this we have introduced advanced learning loans for those aged 24 and above studying at level 3 and 4, to help meet up-front course fees and remove one of the main barriers to learning for older people. Community Learning is also an important part of the wider learning and skills offer, engaging people who are most disadvantaged and furthest from learning such as older people. It is funded through an annual budget of £210 million managed by the Skills Funding Agency and most provision is delivered or commissioned by local authority providers, further education colleges, large voluntary organisations and other providers. As part of our plans for local growth, local enterprise partnerships consider how to drive growth in their local areas and Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership has been working on a number of initiatives designed to support skills development, including working with business, education providers and public services to develop a comprehensive skills plan for the county to meet the needs of employers and learners.

Business: Loans

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what discussions he has had with banks and payday loan companies on measures to ensure that small and medium-sized businesses are not penalised for repaying loans early. [189266]

Sajid Javid: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Treasury.

Government Ministers and officials meet with a wide range of organisations as part of the usual policy making process.

Decisions about whether to lend to specific individuals or businesses including repayment terms and conditions remain commercial decisions for providers of credit.

Ceramics

Robert Flello: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what advice and guidance his Department issues to UK Trade and Investment locations abroad on sourcing ceramic-based promotional material (a) generally and (b) on the Britain is Great promotional campaign. [189992]

Michael Fallon: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills does not issue any specific guidance to UK Trade & Investment on sourcing ceramic-based promotional items. All procurement, including that for the GREAT Britain campaign, is guided by the Public Contracts Regulations and Cabinet Office guidance.

Disclosure of Information

Catherine McKinnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when the Government's response to the Whistleblowing framework: Call for Evidence will be published. [189651]

Jenny Willott: The Government aims to publish its response to the call for evidence before Easter recess.

EU External Trade: USA

Mr Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the effectiveness and desirability of the investor-state dispute settlement clause in the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. [189255]

Michael Fallon: The UK has consistently pushed for an ambitious and broad agreement with all issues on the negotiating table. Negotiations are at an early stage and there is at yet no proposed text on Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS).

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills commissioned academic research into the impact of investor-state dispute settlement within the context of wider investment protection treaties to inform the UK position with regard to the upcoming investment treaties being negotiated by the EU.

The research developed a framework for analysing the costs and benefits of investment protection treaties as a whole and applied the framework to assess the inclusion of investor-state dispute settlement provisions within proposed EU agreements with China and with the US (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership). A copy of this research has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Clearly the exact conditions of any investment provisions included in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership will be essential in assessing their effectiveness and desirability. The desirability of including an ISDS clause in this agreement would also depend on an assessment of the precedent it would create for agreements with other countries.

Mr Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of whether the investor-state dispute settlement clause in the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership would allow corporations to take legal action against EU governments which enact or abide by legislation aimed at protecting human or consumer rights or the environment. [189257]

Michael Fallon: To date the UK has concluded 94 bilateral investment treaties. Negotiations are at an early stage for including similar provisions to those in the treaties in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment

Partnership. If an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) clause is included in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, the Government will seek to strike an appropriate balance between protection for UK investors in the US, while at the same time ensuring that the Government's ability to regulate in the public interest is safeguarded.

Exports: Government Assistance

Ann McKechnin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how his Department is helping small and medium-sized enterprises increase the number of countries to which they export. [189314]

Michael Fallon: Through UK Trade and Investment (UKTI), the Government provides a wide range of services to help companies export. Those services include bespoke reports on specific markets, introductions to potential customers or agents, help with language and cultural issues, events at British embassies and consulates and a business opportunities service. This support is available to companies throughout the UK.

UKTI also organises a wide range of events focused on market opportunities across the globe. For example, my noble Friend the Minister of State for Trade and Investment (Lord Livingston of Parkhead), is leading a delegation of over 60 businesses from across the UK on a trade mission to Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia from 3 to 7 March 2014. In each country, he will support small and medium-sized enterprises to engage in a wide range of business opportunities in this fast-developing region.

JD Wetherspoon

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many meetings there have been between (a) officials and (b) Ministers in his Department and representatives of JD Wetherspoon plc in the last two years. [189778]

Jenny Willott: Details of meetings held by Ministers and permanent secretaries with external organisations are published quarterly and can be found at: gov.uk

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications?departments%5B%5D=department-for-business-innovation-skills&publication_type=transparency-data

Information requested in respect of other officials' meetings is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

Land Registry

George Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will contact Google management to ask them to remove from Google all unofficial websites asking for money for services provided by the Land Registry. [189560]

Michael Fallon: The unofficial websites referred to are not illegal while they are not infringing Land Registry trademarks and displaying that they are independent of Land Registry.

Land Registry closely monitors all websites which use their data to charge for services and that can result in the customer paying additional and unnecessary fees.

Two websites have been closed down as a result of Land Registry's actions and many others forced to make changes. The only official website is:

www.landregistry.gov.uk

Overseas Trade: India

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what progress his Department has made on trade deals agreed between India and the UK since the visit by the Prime Minister in 2013. [189020]

Michael Fallon: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister visited India twice in 2013, in February and November, and was accompanied by a total of nearly 120 UK business people over the two trips. UK Trade and Investment has followed up with every company that accompanied the Prime Minister in order to help them expand their business links with India. In the period January—December 2013 the value of UK goods exports to India amounted to £5.05 billion, an increase of 11% over the same period in 2012.

Package Holidays: EU Law

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills pursuant to the answer of 24 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 168W, on telephone services, when his Department expects to implement the new Package Travel Directive Extending basic rate telephone provision. [189562]

Jenny Willott: The European Commission's proposal for a new package travel directive is currently being negotiated. Member states are usually required to implement directives within two years of adoption. Assuming agreement is reached and the new directive is adopted in early 2015, we would expect to implement it in the UK in 2017.

Pagers

Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many pagers have been provided to staff by his Department since May 2010; and what the cost to the Department was of providing those pagers. [190042]

Jenny Willott: The Department has not provided any pagers to staff since May 2010.

Post Offices

Graeme Morrice: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what research his Department has conducted into the social benefit of Post Office branches to local communities. [189529]

Jenny Willott: The Government fully understands and recognises the important role that post offices play in providing a wide range of vital services to the communities that they serve. The Government's policy statement, "Securing the Post Office network in the digital age", published in November 2010, was clear on this point and made clear commitments that there would be no repeat of the closure programmes of the previous administration that saw nearly 5,000 communities lose

their post offices. Since 2010 this Government has committed nearly £2 billion to maintain, modernise and protect the Post Office network.

Additionally, the Department funds Consumer Futures via a levy on the postal services sector, allowing it to undertake independent research into the services provided by the Post Office and their effectiveness in meeting customer need.

Graeme Morrice: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what support his Department has given to Post Office branches to diversify their services since May 2010. [189530]

Jenny Willott: As shareholder, the Government does not play a role in operational matters, such as providing advice or support to individual subpostmasters. However, the Government has committed nearly £2 billion since 2010 to maintain, modernise, and protect the Post Office network. This includes funding the Network Transformation programme that is seeing investment into thousands of branches, helping subpostmasters to modernise, introduce new operational practices (such as offering longer opening hours and making better use of their premises), and to become more sustainable. For branches where Network Transformation is not a viable option, the Government is providing a £20 million improvement fund to enable those subpostmasters to develop and secure their businesses.

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how the £1.3 billion Government investment into the Post Office network will be spent over what time period. [190067]

Jenny Willott: In November 2010, the Government set out its commitments to the Post Office in its policy statement "Securing the Post Office network in the digital age", which include maintaining a network of at least 11,500 branches; complying with strict access criteria; and providing for the modernisation of thousands of post offices. This is being supported by £1.34 billion funding, provided over the following years:

	<i>£ million</i>
2011-12	180
2012-13	410
2013-14	415
2014-15	330

Additionally, in November 2013, Jo Swinson MP announced to Parliament that the Government was committing a further £640 million covering the period April 2015 to March 2018 to ensure the Post Office network continues to be maintained, modernised and protected.

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment his Department has made of the effect on the Post Office network of withdrawing car tax discs administration and similar services. [190068]

Jenny Willott: In December 2013, the DVLA took a decision that car tax discs are to be phased out from October 2014, subject to legislation going through Parliament. DVLA's contract with Post Office Ltd for

services relating to vehicles and motoring and the impact of any changes to arrangements is a commercial matter for the Post Office and DVLA. However I understand that DVLA customers who choose to pay for their car tax in post offices will continue to be able to do so.

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the effects of the Government's investment into the Post Office network. [190069]

Jenny Willott: The Government set out clear and ambitious objectives in its 2010 policy statement, "Securing the Post Office network in the digital age", which are being met and made possible by the funding provided by this Government. This includes maintaining a network that is at its most stable for two decades; a modernisation programme that has seen nearly 2,000 branches improved, with thousands more subpostmasters signed up to modernise over the coming years; a strong Post Office that has negotiated a long term commercial agreement with the Royal Mail, and has won every Government contract that it has bid for over the last two and a half years; and is successfully operating as an independent business for the first time in its history.

Post Offices: West Lothian

Graeme Morrice: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) how many post offices have been located in (a) Livingston constituency and (b) West Lothian in each of the last five years; [189524]

(2) how many Post Office branches have closed in (a) Livingston constituency and (b) West Lothian in each of the last five years; [189525]

(3) how many Post Office branches in (a) Livingston constituency and (b) West Lothian have reduced their opening hours in each of the last five years; [189526]

(4) how many Post Office branches in (a) Livingston constituency and (b) West Lothian have reduced the number of services on offer in each of the last five years; [189527]

(5) how many people were employed by the Post Office in (a) Livingston constituency and (b) West Lothian in each of the last five years. [189528]

Jenny Willott: The information requested is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. I have therefore asked Paula Vennells, chief executive officer of Post Office Ltd, to reply to the hon. Member directly, and a copy will be placed in the Libraries of the House. However, I would note that the Government has committed nearly £2 billion since 2010, enabling the Post Office to maintain, modernise and protect a network of at least 11,500 branches that is compliant with the strict Government-set access criteria, and also that the network as a whole is at its most stable for two decades.

Skilled Workers

Robert Flello: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will publish the most recent UK skills shortage by occupation list. [189989]

Matthew Hancock: The UK Commission for Employment and Skills published their most recent Employer Skills Survey on 30 January 2013. The survey sets out skills shortages by occupation across the UK and can be accessed via the UK Commissions website www.ukces.org.uk

JUSTICE

Begging and Vagrancy

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many persons found guilty of begging appealed their conviction in each of the last three years; and how many attempted prosecutions resulted in acquittals in each of the last three years. [189557]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) does not maintain a central record of the number of appeals against conviction or the number of acquittals where appellants or defendants were charged with an offence or offences contrary to Section 3 of the Vagrancy Act 1824 and Section 70 of the Criminal Justice Act 1982 (begging). Such data could not be reasonably obtained locally or nationally other than by a manual exercise at disproportionate cost.

Complaints

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many complaints his Department has received from (a) members of the public and (b) staff in each year since 2010. [189990]

Mr Vara: The information requested in regard to complaints made against the Department by (a) members of the public and (b) staff, is not held centrally and would require every team within MOJ, its Agencies and arm's length bodies to conduct a search of their files. This would result in disproportionate costs.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Paul Blomfield: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the average length of time between application to initial award has been for awards issued by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority in each of the last five years. [188590]

Damian Green: The average (mean) time between application receipt and the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) initially deciding the case is as follows for each of the last five full financial years:

	<i>Time (months)</i>
2008-09	9.7
2009-10	8.5
2010-11	7.2
2011-12	7.8
2012-13	8.8

These figures are set out in CICA's annual reports. In recent years CICA has been focussing on the cases waiting the longest, which is why the current trend for the time to an initial decision is upwards. CICA expect that trend to continue this year before coming back down again.

Domestic Violence

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the written answer of 5 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 287W, on Domestic Violence, what the cost to his Department is of the Building Better Relationships programme. [189335]

Jeremy Wright: The fully apportioned cost to the National Offender Management Service of delivering the Building Better Relationships programme in the community in 2012-13 was £223,000. The programme was introduced during 2012-13.

An equivalent breakdown of the cost of delivering individual accredited programmes in custody is not available from the prison costing system. For this reason it is not possible to derive the total cost to the Department.

Driving Offences

Mary Creagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many notifications of endorsement from a court or fixed penalty office of a driver who meets the criteria of the Road Traffic (New Drivers) Act 1995 were sent to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in each of the last five years. [189542]

Mr Vara: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have given to questions 187575 and 187576 on 13 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 740W.

Driving Offences: Fines

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much he received from victim surcharges on motoring offences and motoring fixed penalty notices in each year between 2010 and 2013; and what estimate he has made of such receipts in 2014. [185092]

Damian Green: As set out in the Government's response to the consultation 'Getting it Right for Victims and Witnesses', we intend to raise an additional £30 million for victims services through increased motoring fixed penalty notices in 2014. The increases were implemented in August 2013 and there is no data yet available on how much has been raised in the financial year 2013-14. It is not possible to determine Victim Surcharge receipts attributable to motoring offences, as such data is not differentiated by offence type.

It is right that offenders, not taxpayers, foot the bill for the damage offenders cause so in October 2012 the Government increased and extended the Victim Surcharge to ensure criminals pay for victims' services, and that they pay more than they used to. These changes, along with increases to financial penalties including motoring fixed penalty notices, will help generate up to £50 million extra a year from offenders for victims' services. This is in addition of the £66 million already spent by Government.

Electronic Tagging

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what progress his Department has made with the Information Commissioner on development of a code of practice for the electronic monitoring of offenders; and when such a code of practice will be published. [189204]

Jeremy Wright: The Crime and Courts Act 2013 provides a power for the courts to impose location monitoring (GPS tracking) as a requirement of a community order or a suspended sentence order. We are currently completing the new electronic monitoring contracts. The Ministry of Justice will consult the Information Commissioner about the Code of Practice before commencing the electronic monitoring provisions in the Crime and Courts Act 2013, in accordance with the commitment given to Parliament during the passage of the Bill.

Government Procurement Card

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much has been spent by his Department using a Government Procurement Card on (a) temporary recruitment of staff, (b) catering and catering supplies, (c) clubs, associations and organisations, (d) office stationery equipment and supplies, (e) car rental, (f) hotels and accommodation, (g) restaurants and bars and (h) leisure activities in each of the last five years. [189744]

Mr Vara: To provide the data on MOJ departmental GPC spend in the format that the right hon. Member has requested would incur disproportionate costs.

Homicide: Victim Support Schemes

Mr Buckland: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps his Department is taking to help families bereaved through homicide after the Homicide Service has finished its work in their case. [188615]

Damian Green: The Ministry of Justice currently provides funding for a Homicide Service delivered by Victim Support, and is commissioning future service provision to families bereaved by homicide beyond the end of the current funding arrangements in October 2014. Our aim in funding a national Homicide Service is to provide support to families based on need and entitlement to, and provision of this support, is not therefore timebound.

Mr Buckland: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what homicide services are being funded by his Department to help families bereaved through homicide committed before April 2010. [188616]

Damian Green: During 2013-14 the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) has provided a total of £100,000 in funding to three specialist therapy organisations, ASSIST Trauma Care, Winston's Wish and Cruse Bereavement Care, to provide counselling and trauma care for those bereaved through homicide pre-2010. The MOJ has also provided funding of £250,000 in total to 13 peer support groups, which provide help and advice to those bereaved through homicide at any time.

Hunting: Convictions

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many convictions for illegal taking of game there have been in the UK in each of the last three years. [189271]

Damian Green: The Government is committed to tackling wildlife crime, including through the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime. It works hard to support the police and other law enforcement agencies that have primary responsibility for enforcing wildlife controls.

The number of offenders found guilty of offences relating to the illegal taking of game in England and Wales, from 2008 to 2012 (latest available) can be viewed in the table.

England and Wales related court proceedings statistics for these offences for calendar year 2013 are planned for publication in May 2014 as part of the annual Criminal Justice Statistics publication.

Justice Statistics for Scotland and Northern Ireland are a matter for the relevant devolved administration.

Offenders found guilty at all courts of offences relating to the illegal taking of game¹, England and Wales, 2008-2012^{2, 3}

	Number
2008 ⁴	1
2009	5
2010	2
2011	1
2012	⁵

¹ Offences under Sections 3 and 24 of the Game Act 1831.

² The figures given in the table 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 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.

⁴ Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates court for April, July and August 2008.

⁵ Nil

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice.

Legal Aid Scheme

Sarah Teather: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the average payment was; and how many payments were made to legal aid providers for judicial review cases that were refused at permission stage in each of the last five years. [188237]

Mr Vara: At a cost of around £2 billion a year we have one of the most expensive legal aid systems in the world. We have made changes and proposed further reforms to reduce the cost of legal aid and to ensure that the legal aid system commands the confidence of the public. The Government is committed to providing value for money for the taxpayer and making legal aid sustainable for the future.

Judicial review is an important way of challenging decisions by public authorities and will remain so. The following table shows the volume and mean legal aid costs claimed for all work on judicial review cases which ended after permission was refused by the court for each of the last five years.

Our recently announced changes to legal aid funding for judicial review cases aim to ensure that meritless cases no longer receive taxpayer funding by only paying legal aid providers for work carried out if permission is granted or where the LAA exercises its discretion to pay

the provider in a case where proceedings are issued but the case concludes prior to a permission decision being made.

These figures include the legal aid costs on those cases where costs were met in full or in part by the other party in the case.

The LAA has used outcome data reported by providers to establish whether or not a case ended after permission was refused. Due to errors when outcomes are reported to the LAA, there may be additional cases where permission was refused that cannot be identified from LAA data. Furthermore, as the data are live they may be subject to further changes and will differ slightly from the data provided previously in our impact assessment on the recent legal aid changes.

The following data are correct as at 17 February 2014.

Financial year	Volume of judicial review cases ending post permission refusal	Average civil representation costs on these cases (£)
2008-09	581	3,398.07
2009-10	585	3,551.81
2010-11	816	2,984.58
2011-12	842	3,164.00
2012-13	749	3,884.99

Members: Correspondence

Mr Iain Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will direct the governor of HM Young Offender Institution Deerbolt to respond to the letter dated 24 January 2014 from the hon. Member for Hartlepool. [189704]

Jeremy Wright: The governor of HM Young Offender Institution Deerbolt has responded to the letter dated 24 January 2014 on 21 February 2014.

Ministers

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many complaints have been received against named Ministers of his Department from (a) his Department's staff and staff of its agencies and (b) members of the public since May 2010. [189945]

Mr Vara: The information requested is not held centrally and would require every team within MO, its agencies and arm's length bodies to conduct a search of their files. This would result in disproportionate costs.

Prison Sentences

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many people were convicted of (a) burglary, (b) sexual assault, (c) grievous bodily harm, (d) rape, (e) manslaughter, (f) attempted murder, (g) forgery, (h) fraud, (i) theft of a motor vehicle, (j) theft from a person, (k) robbery, (l) sexual activity with a child under 16, (m) sexual activity with a child under 13, (n) sexual assault of a female, (o) rape of a male, (p) rape of a female, (q) sexual assault of a male, (r) child abduction, (s) abandoning children aged under two years, (t) cruelty or neglect of children, (u) wounding or other acts endangering life, (v) causing death by aggravated vehicle-taking, (w) causing death by driving while unlicensed or uninsured, (x) causing death of a child or a vulnerable person, (y) causing

death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs, (z) manslaughter due to diminished responsibility, (aa) causing death by reckless driving, (bb) threat or conspiracy to murder, (cc) perverting the course of justice, (dd) violent disorder, (ee) kidnapping, (ff) blackmail, (gg) intent to supply a controlled drug, (hh) possession of a controlled drug, (ii) criminal damage, (jj) arson, (kk) common assault, (ll) dangerous driving and (mm) firearms offences and received a custodial sentence of (i) less than six months, (ii) less than 12 months, (iii) less than two years and (iv) less than four years in each of the last 12 months; [182211]

(2) what the average length of custodial sentence was for all people convicted of a crime in each year from 2002 to 2013; [182562]

(3) what the average length was of custodial sentence given to those convicted of (a) burglary, (b) sexual assault, (c) grievous bodily harm, (d) rape, (e) manslaughter, (f) attempted murder, (g) forgery, (h) fraud, (i) theft of a motor vehicle, (j) theft from a person, (k) robbery, (l) sexual activity with a child under 16 years, (m) sexual activity with a child under 13 years, (n) sexual assault of a female, (o) rape of a male, (p) rape of a female, (q) sexual assault of a male, (r) child abduction, (s) abandoning children aged under two years, (t) cruelty or neglect of children, (u) wounding or other acts endangering life, (v) causing death by aggravated vehicle-taking, (w) causing death by driving while unlicensed or uninsured, (x) causing death of a child or a vulnerable person, (y) causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs, (z) manslaughter due to diminished responsibility, (aa) causing death by reckless driving, (bb) threat or conspiracy to murder, (cc) perverting the course of justice, (dd) violent disorder, (ee) kidnapping, (ff) blackmail, (gg) intent to supply a controlled drug, (hh) possession of a controlled drug, (ii) criminal damage, (jj) arson, (kk) common assault, (ll) dangerous driving and (mm) firearms offences in each year since 2002; [182717]

(4) what proportion of those convicted of (a) burglary, (b) sexual assault, (c) grievous bodily harm, (d) rape, (e) manslaughter, (f) attempted murder, (g) forgery, (h) fraud, (i) theft of a motor vehicle, (j) theft from a person, (k) robbery, (l) sexual activity with a child under 16 years, (m) sexual activity with a child under 13 years, (n) sexual assault of a female, (o) rape of a male, (p) rape of a female, (q) sexual assault of a male, (r) child abduction, (s) abandoning children aged under two years, (t) cruelty or neglect of children, (u) wounding or other acts endangering life, (v) causing death by aggravated vehicle-taking, (w) causing death by driving while unlicensed or uninsured, (x) causing death of a child or a vulnerable person, (y) causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs, (z) manslaughter due to diminished responsibility, (aa) causing death by reckless driving, (bb) threat or conspiracy to murder, (cc) perverting the course of justice, (dd) violent disorder, (ee) kidnapping, (ff) blackmail, (gg) intent to supply a controlled drug, (hh) possession of a controlled drug, (ii) criminal damage, (jj) arson, (kk) common assault, (ll) dangerous driving and (mm) firearms offences received a custodial sentence in each year since 2002; [182718]

(5) in how many and what proportion of cases of (a) burglary, (b) sexual assault, (c) grievous bodily harm, (d) rape, (e) manslaughter, (f) attempted murder, (g) forgery, (h) fraud, (i) theft of a motor vehicle, (j) theft from a person, (k) robbery, (l) sexual activity with a child under 16 years, (m) sexual activity with a child under 13 years, (n) sexual assault of a female, (o) rape of a male, (p) rape of a female, (q) sexual assault of a male, (r) child abduction, (s) abandoning children aged under two years, (t) cruelty or neglect of children, (u) wounding or other acts endangering life, (v) causing death by aggravated vehicle-taking, (w) causing death by driving while unlicensed or uninsured, (x) causing death of a child or a vulnerable person, (y) causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs, (z) manslaughter due to diminished responsibility, (aa) causing death by reckless driving, (bb) threat or conspiracy to murder, (cc) perverting to course of justice, (dd) violent disorder, (ee) kidnapping, (ff) blackmail, (gg) intent to supply a controlled drug, (hh) possession of a controlled drug, (ii) criminal damage, (jj) arson, (kk) common assault, (ll) dangerous driving and (mm) firearms offences in 2012 which resulted in a non-custodial sentence a victim impact statement was read out in court; [182719]

(6) in how many and what proportion of cases of (a) burglary, (b) sexual assault, (c) grievous bodily harm, (d) rape, (e) manslaughter, (f) attempted murder, (g) forgery, (h) fraud, (i) theft of a motor vehicle, (j) theft from a person, (k) robbery, (l) sexual activity with a child under 16 years, (m) sexual activity with a child under 13 years, (n) sexual assault of a female, (o) rape of a male, (p) rape of a female, (q) sexual assault of a male, (r) child abduction, (s) abandoning children aged under two years, (t) cruelty or neglect of children, (u) wounding or other acts endangering life, (v) causing death by aggravated vehicle-taking, (w) causing death by driving while unlicensed or uninsured, (x) causing death of a child or a vulnerable person, (y) causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs, (z) manslaughter due to diminished responsibility, (aa) causing death by reckless driving, (bb) threat or conspiracy to murder, (cc) perverting the course of justice, (dd) violent disorder, (ee) kidnapping, (ff) blackmail, (gg) intent to supply a controlled drug, (hh) possession of a controlled drug, (ii) criminal damage, (jj) arson, (kk) common assault, (ll) dangerous driving and (mm) firearms offences in 2012 which resulted in a custodial sentence a victim impact statement was read out in court; [182720]

(7) what proportion of persons convicted were given custodial sentences in each year from 2002 to 2013. [182763]

Jeremy Wright: Sentencing in individual cases is a matter for the courts, within the maximum penalty set by Parliament for the offence. Since 2010, those who break the law are now more likely to go to prison, and they go to prison for longer. In 2012, 26% of offenders convicted of an indictable offence were sentenced to immediate custody with an average sentence length of 17.0 months compared with 24% of offenders convicted of an indictable offence in 2010 with an average custodial sentence length of 16.2 months. This Government is creating a tough justice system with severe penalties

available for serious offenders. We have already introduced automatic life sentences for a second serious sexual or violent offence, and we have announced plans to end automatic early release for child rapists, terrorists and all dangerous offenders. Our radical reforms to rehabilitation will mean for the first time every offender leaving prison spends at least 12 months under supervision, where currently around 50,000 are released each year with no statutory support. This will start to address the scandalous gap that allows our most chaotic offenders to leave prison with no support or supervision to turn their lives around.

The table shows for offences referred to in the questions above, and for total offences, the number of offenders convicted, sentenced and sentenced to immediate custody in England and Wales, 2002 to 2012 (latest available). The table includes the custody rate, a breakdown of sentence length and the average custodial sentence length. Data for 2013 will be published in May 2014.

The data requested is a sub-set of those sentenced for indictable offences in this period and excludes data on a range of other serious offences (particularly some sexual and drug offences). It is inadvisable to draw conclusions on sentencing practice based on figures for individual offences which may be misleading when small numbers are sentenced. The overall immediate custody rate and average custodial sentence length for indictable offences have both increased since 2002.

Custody rates are highest for the most serious offences.

Data is not centrally held that would allow us to separately identify whether, in all the cases for the offences listed which resulted in a custodial and non-custodial sentence, a victim impact statement was read out in court. As such, this information can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The table will be placed in the Library of the House.

Prison Service

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the prison officer to prison ratio was in each prison in each month since May 2010. [181117]

Jeremy Wright: Staffing levels are being reviewed prison by prison as part of a 'benchmarking approach'.

Benchmarking has been agreed with the unions and the NAO has commented that the wider strategy for the prison estate is the most coherent and comprehensive for many years. It delivers efficiencies while ensuring that public sector prisons operate safely, decently and securely.

Benchmarking optimises the skills of staff by introducing new ways of working and puts all prison officers in prisoner facing roles.

The information requested has been placed in the Library. Information is available for both public and private sector establishments up until 30 September 2013. Information on officer numbers in private sector prisons up until 31 December 2013, the latest available period, is not held by NOMS and needs to be requested from each provider. I will write to you again when the information covering both public and private sector establishments is available.

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice on how many occasions wing closures occurred due to shortfalls in staffing in each prison, in each month since May 2010. [189716]

Jeremy Wright: The information regarding the number of occasions on which wing closures have occurred due to shortfalls in staffing in each prison is not collated centrally and is collected in different formats in each prison. The processes required to collect this data would incur disproportionate costs.

Prison Service: North East

Mrs Lewell-Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) what the cost to the public purse was of (a) transportation, (b) accommodation and (c) total expenditure for staff seconded on detached duty from each (i) prison and (ii) young offenders institute in the North East in the last year for which figures are available; [184295]

(2) how many staff of each (a) prison and (b) young offenders institution in the North East have taken detached duty in each year since 2010; and how many of those staff took detached duty on a (i) voluntary and (ii) compulsory basis. [184296]

Jeremy Wright: Information on the number of staff taking detached duty from prisons in the North East, and the associated cost, is not available centrally and could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost.

It is possible to identify expenses paid in connection with long-term detached duty since the introduction of new systems in April 2012. The records indicate that no staff from the North East area were posted on long-term detached duty during 2012-13.

Prisoners

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether there is a difference in treatment of prisoners who maintain their innocence and those who admit their guilt; and if he will make a statement. [189336]

Jeremy Wright: The National Offender Management Service must accept the verdicts of the courts and it follows that convicted prisoners have to be treated as being guilty of their offence(s). However, some allowance is made in the Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) policy for those whose conviction is the subject of a review by a higher court (appellants). Contrary to the position for other convicted prisoners, a recognised appellant who does not take part in offending behaviour programmes will not have that held against them when considering their IEP level.

Prisoners' Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many prisoners on an Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork programme have been placed on a basic level of the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme in each prison in (a) 2012 and (b) 2013. [189820]

Jeremy Wright: Information on the numbers of prisoners on the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork programme who were placed on the basic level of the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Re-employment

Lilian Greenwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer of 4 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 226W, on re-employment, how much was paid to the staff referred to as part of their retirement package. [188060]

Jeremy Wright: The information for the combined amount of pension and lump sum awarded to the 14 members of staff concerned in their retirement package is set out in the following table.

<i>Retirements re-employed May 2010 to December 2013</i>	
	£
Total combined pension awarded	132,847.81
Total combined lump sum awarded	444,052.41

Sexual Offences: Preston

Mark Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people were convicted in Preston for breaching their sex offenders order in each of the last five years. [189486]

Norman Baker: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Home Department.

A Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO) can be imposed where an offender has been convicted of a relevant sexual or violent offence and prohibitions are necessary to protect the public from serious sexual harm.

Data on the total number of registered sex offenders who were sent to custody for breach of their SOPO is published in the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) annual report. Data for Lancashire is set out in the table below.

A further breakdown of this data below MAPPA area is not collected centrally. The MAPPA reports for 2009-13 may be found on the GOV.uk website. Reports published prior to 2009 may be found on the national archives website.

	<i>Number of registered sex offenders sent to custody for breach of a SOPO in Lancashire</i>
2012-13	0
2011-12	0
2010-11	0
2009-10	1
2008-09	0

Temporary Employment

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many temporary staff have been recruited by his Department and its agencies in each month since May 2010. [189838]

Mr Vara: The use of temporary staff enables the Department to respond flexibly to any changes in demand for our services. They can also provide a cost-effective

and flexible way of filling posts for a short time, when the necessary skills are not already available in-house. The numbers of both temporary and permanent staff have fallen since September 2010.

Temporary/casual employees are those that have a fixed term contract with a specific end date or are employed on a casual basis.

The following table provides the information on the number of temporary staff recruited by the Ministry of Justice for the period May 2010 to December 2013. The figures relate to anyone recruited to any temporary contract of any length.

Headcount of temporary staff within MOJ HQ, HMCTS (known as HMCS and the Tribunals Service prior to April 2011), NOMS, OPG, Scotland Office (up to March 2011 only), Wales Office (up to March 2011 only) and LAA (from April 2013 only)

	<i>Month</i>	<i>MOJ</i>	<i>NOMS</i>	<i>Total</i>	
May 2010 to March 2011	May	35	33	68	
	June	79	17	96	
	July	56	27	83	
	August	82	41	123	
	September	65	37	102	
	October	73	37	110	
	November	76	20	96	
	December	28	11	39	
	April 2011 to March 2012	January	38	34	72
		February	27	32	59
		March	18	22	40
		April	9	21	30
May		19	17	36	
June		20	28	48	
July		2	47	49	
August		28	34	62	
September		11	28	39	
October		24	45	69	
November		24	29	53	
December		12	23	35	
April 2012 to March 2013	January	15	54	69	
	February	16	67	83	
	March	10	1	11	
	April	8	42	50	
	May	3	44	47	
	June	5	39	44	
	July	12	32	44	
	August	11	23	34	
	September	6	16	22	
	October	6	22	28	
	November	11	12	23	
	December	2	5	7	
April to December 2013	January	5	12	17	
	February	0	4	4	
	March	5	8	13	

Headcount of temporary staff within MOJ HQ, HMCTS (known as HMCS and the Tribunals Service prior to April 2011), NOMS, OPG, Scotland Office (up to March 2011 only), Wales Office (up to March 2011 only) and LAA (from April 2013 only)

Month	MOJ	NOMS	Total
April	7	22	29
May	15	9	24
June	7	12	19
July	32	16	48
August	6	32	38
September	1	30	31
October	5	13	18
November	1	23	24
December	3	11	14
Grand total	918	1,132	2,050

Violent and Sex Offender Register: Preston

Mark Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people in Preston are on the sex offenders register. [189494]

Norman Baker: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Home Department.

Data on the total number of registered sexual offenders managed under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) is published in the MAPPA annual report. The most recent report was published on 31 October 2013 and shows that 1,542 registered sex offenders were managed under MAPPA in Lancashire in 2012-13. A more detailed breakdown below MAPPA area is not collected centrally.

The MAPPA report for 2012-13 may be found on the GOV.uk website.

Witnesses: Protection

Sir Andrew Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to provide courts with additional powers to prevent the media harassment of witnesses nominally granted anonymity; and if he will make a statement. [188134]

Damian Green: The Government currently has no plans to do so. While witnesses who are subject to reporting restrictions which prohibit the publication of their identity can be approached by representatives of the media, the Editors Code of Practice prohibits intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit.

Furthermore the courts have the power to find anyone molesting, assaulting or threatening a witness who is going to or returning from court in contempt, and under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 harassing a person is a criminal offence.

Young Offenders: Suicide

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether the independent review into the self-inflicted deaths of 18 to 24 year olds in custody will take into account the specific risks for young women in custody. [189776]

Jeremy Wright: We are committed to the safety of prisoners and to preventing deaths in custody, including young adult women. The independent review into the

self-inflicted deaths of 18 to 24-year-olds in custody will examine the learning from all deaths since 2007 in this age group, including of young women. The terms of reference of this review can be found at

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/deaths-in-custody-independent-review>

Youth Custody

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what budgetary savings have been delivered by each planned reduction in the size of the youth secure estate over the last 10 years. [189761]

Jeremy Wright: The youth custodial population has fallen significantly in recent years and this has allowed considerable excess capacity to be decommissioned.

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) is responsible for purchasing places in the youth custodial estate. Between 2004-05 and 2006-07 there was a small increase in the size of the youth estate. Capacity of the estate then remained constant until 2009-10 when the YJB began a programme of decommissioning in response to falls in demand for youth custody. The budgetary savings to the YJB delivered by each planned reduction in the youth secure estate since 2009-10 total £76 million.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK armed forces personnel are currently stationed at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy as mentors. [189296]

Mr Francois: Currently there are 105 UK armed forces personnel filling the role of mentors at the Afghan National Army Officer Academy.

Africa

Mark Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what material support the UK army is offering under the Defence and Security Cooperation Treaty to French troops deployed in Mali and the Central African Republic. [189487]

Mr Francois: The UK is not offering any British Army equipment or personnel support to French troops deployed in Mali and the Central African Republic under the Lancaster House Treaties of 2010.

However, other UK support has been provided to support both French and international military operations in Mali and the Central African Republic. I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 18 November 2013, *Official Report*, columns 699-700W, to the hon. Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley), on 16 December 2013, *Official Report*, column 476W, to the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) and on 6 January 2014, *Official Report*, column 14W, to the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh).

The UK is also providing one staff officer in Greece to assist with operational planning for an EU Mission in the Central African Republic.

Aircraft Carriers

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what air assets can carry an entire F135 jet engine and deliver it to the Queen Elizabeth class carrier. [189468]

Mr Dunne: The F-35 jet engine, which is also known as the F135, as a whole unit cannot be transported by any of the Ministry of Defence's rotary wing assets. The F-35 engine is typically broken down into smaller modules for transportation. The heaviest module is the engine power module which a Chinook aircraft is capable of carrying as an underslung load to deliver it to the Queen Elizabeth class carrier.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) with reference to the National Audit Office's Major Project Report 2013 Appendices and project summary sheets, what steps he is taking to mitigate the risk posed by insufficient maritime intra-theatre lift assets to support the Joint Combat Aircraft operations aboard Queen Elizabeth class carriers identified in that report; [189471]

(2) what assessment he has made of the ability of the V-22 Osprey to conduct maritime intra-theatre lift to support (a) routine operations aboard Queen Elizabeth class carriers and (b) Joint Combat Aircraft operations aboard Queen Elizabeth class carriers; [189472]

(3) what assets are available for Maritime Intra-Theatre lift to support the Joint Combat Aircraft aboard Queen Elizabeth class carriers when those aircraft enter service. [189507]

Mr Dunne: Maritime Intra Theatre Lift (MITL) is the movement of passengers, mail and cargo between land and sea and within maritime platform groups; movements in support of the Joint Combat Aircraft will form an element of the total MITL requirement. The Response Force Task Group, of which the Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers will form a part, includes a range of assets to achieve MITL, including: afloat support, ship's boats, embarked aircraft and other tactical and strategic lift capabilities.

We expect that the Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers will remain in service for up to 50 years. Over this time, a number of complimentary programmes will deliver supporting capabilities, some of which will be related to, and able to deliver, MITL, and are in the Concept Phase of development.

Armed Forces Covenant

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which local authorities have not yet signed up to the Armed Forces Community Covenant; [189288]

(2) how many email addresses were on the Community Covenant e-Newsletter distribution lists in each year since 2012. [189293]

Anna Soubry: The distribution list for our Community Covenant e-Newsletter is a live document and as such is updated regularly when new additions or amendments are requested. We do not therefore hold this data by

year. As at 27 February 2014 there were 598 email addresses on the Community Covenant e-Newsletter distribution list.

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many bids were submitted to the Community Covenant Grant Scheme in each region in each year since 2011; and how many such bids were successful in each region and in each year. [189289]

Anna Soubry: The following table provides a regional breakdown of bids to the Community Covenant Grant scheme since its launch in June 2011. It has not been possible to readily disaggregate data for financial year (FY) 2011-12 from that held for FY 2012-13.

	Applications submitted	Applications successful	Applications submitted	Applications successful
	FY 2011-12 and FY 2012-13	FY 2011-12 and FY 2012-13		FY 2013-14
South Central	99	51	53	37
West Midlands	23	10	36	21
North East	79	43	61	29
Wales	11	4	40	24
South East	23	10	39	25
North West	17	4	47	18
South West	71	43	58	35
East of England	42	22	73	47
Scotland	59	22	65	27
London	15	8	19	12
Total	439	217	491	275

Armed Forces: Redundancy

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel who successfully transferred to other branches of the armed forces were made redundant since 2010. [189285]

Anna Soubry: Between 1 April 2007 and 31 December 2013, 650 UK regular service personnel transferred to another service within the armed forces. 20 of these have left on redundancy since 2010 (numbers are rounded). Information on redundees who had an inter-service transfer before April 2007 is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Armed Forces: Scotland

Mr Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what accommodation is available for the military in (a) Stirling Castle and (b) Edinburgh Castle; and how many personnel can be accommodated at each such location. [189882]

Dr Murrison: No military accommodation is available at Stirling Castle. The accommodation availability for military personnel at Edinburgh Castle is shown in the following table:

Type of accommodation	Number of bedspaces
Service family accommodation	0
Officers	8
Junior ranks	26
Transit	54
Total	88

The General Officer Commanding for Scotland, who is also the Governor of Edinburgh Castle, has a three bedroom apartment in the castle as part of his Governor of the Castle entitlement.

Army: Training

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many soldiers dropped out of Phase 2 training at the Infantry Training Centre (Catterick) in 2012-13; and how many of these had undertaken Phase 1 training at (a) the Army Foundation College (Harrogate) and (b) the Army Training Regiment (Winchester); [189317]

(2) how many soldiers who dropped out of Phase 2 training at the Infantry Training Centre (Catterick) in 2012-13 had undertaken Phase 1 training at that Infantry Training Centre. [189318]

Anna Soubry: The Combat Infantryman's Course (CIC) is run at the Infantry Training Centre (Catterick) and is a consolidated Phase 1 and Phase 2 training course for infantry (Standard Entry) recruits. Around 1,000 recruits withdrew or were discharged from the Infantry Training Centre at Catterick in 2012-13 before completion of their Phase 2 training, of which around 100 had originally commenced their training at the Army Foundation College, Harrogate. None had previously attended the Army Training Regiment, Winchester.

Individuals may withdraw or be discharged for a number of reasons, including medical and fitness factors, disciplinary reasons, or voluntary withdrawal. Personnel under 18 have a statutory right to discharge from the armed forces if they wish to leave.

European Defence Agency

Sir Peter Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 10 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 698W, on European Defence Agency, whether staff of the European Defence Agency paid out of the functional element of its budget perform any roles in the delivery or project management of (a) pooling and sharing and (b) other projects delivered by the agency; and what estimate he has made of the proportion of the functional budget spent on any such activity. [189964]

Dr Murrison: Approximately 70% of the European Defence Agency personnel could be called upon to support the delivery of activities for the common benefit of all participating member states; the remaining 30% are in managerial or support roles. It would not be feasible for the UK to estimate the cost of the agency's facilitation time, which will be depend upon a variety of factors such as the type of activity and the level of participation from member states.

Gurkhas: Redundancy

Mr Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the statement of 23 January 2014, *Official Report*, column 461, on armed forces' restructuring, how many eligible Gurkhas have applied for compulsory redundancy under the fourth tranche of redundancies to date; what estimate he has made of the proportion of compulsory redundancies among Gurkhas which will be filled by voluntary applications; and if he will make a statement. [189357]

Anna Soubry: Applications for armed forces redundancy do not close until 6 March 2014. A selection process will follow and those selected for redundancy will be notified on 12 June 2014.

As the Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), said in the House on 23 January 2014, *Official Report*, column 461, Gurkhas traditionally do not volunteer for redundancy, and we expect the overall percentage of volunteers to be lower in this final round of redundancies than it has been previously.

Reserve Forces

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost to his Department was of promotional material for recruitment to each of the reserve forces in each year since 2010. [189330]

Anna Soubry: The information requested will take time to collate. I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Type 45 Destroyers

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates a Type 45 destroyer has lost power resulting in the ship having to return to port for repairs; and where the repairs took place. [189654]

Mr Dunne: A Type 45 has never been forced to return to port because of a lack of power or propulsion.

Veterans

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to retain the knowledge possessed by retiring military personnel and officials. [189398]

Anna Soubry: Military staff in particular, but also civil service staff, change posts regularly in their career. The need to hand over to their successors, or other staff in their unit, is built into the ways of working for each unit, according to the nature of the job, and is handled at unit level. Retirement is a particular instance of that, differing only because it is not readily possible to ask further information after people have left their service.

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