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24 March 2014**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 24 March 2014

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT

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

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

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 578

SIXTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2013-2014

House of Commons

Monday 24 March 2014

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

The Secretary of State was asked—

Adoption

2. **Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): What progress he has made on speeding up the adoption process.
[903195]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr Edward Timpson): Major reforms in the Children and Families Act 2014 will help to speed up the legal adoption process for children, support quicker matching and ensure the earlier placement of children with foster families who may go on to adopt them. We have also implemented a new adopter approval process and, in 2012-13, the number of adopters was 34% up on the year before.

Martin Vickers: I thank the Minister for his reply and welcome improvements that have been made to the system, but may I draw his attention to a Canadian couple who have been trying to adopt a child from north-east Lincolnshire to whom one of them is related?

The process started in December 2012 but has still not been completed, and the child is now three. If the complications have arisen because the couple are from abroad, can anything be done to speed up the process?

Mr Timpson: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the fact that some adoption cases take far too long. The average time from care to placement is 22 months, which is why we have streamlined the approvals process and introduced regular scorecard data to show local authorities' timeliness with adoptions. It is also why we have put more than £200 million into the adoption system to try to rip out unnecessary red tape and ensure that everyone keeps their efforts firmly fixed on children who badly need stable homes.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Adults who become special guardians face the same difficulties as parents who adopt, yet receive less support. My experience is that overburdened social workers are more likely to pursue a special guardianship order because the process is less intensive, but sometimes that lack of rigour leads to breakdown. Will the Minister try to bring the processes for SGOs into line with those for adoption so that children are protected by arrangements that are appropriate for them?

Mr Timpson: Of course, any special guardianship order must be signed off and approved by the court in the same way as a placement or adoption order. There has been a significant increase in the number of SGOs throughout the country in recent years, which is why we have commissioned for the first time proper research into not only the prevalence of the orders, but who is taking them forward and what the breakdown rates are, as well as what is available to ensure that children who find themselves in such permanent situations get the support that they need. If the hon. Lady wishes, I will be happy to talk to her about that further.

Mr Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his astonishing record and success on expanding adoption, but may I echo the comments

of the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) by saying that there is still more to be done to speed up the process? One of the easiest ways of determining where the blockages in the system are is to compare neighbouring authorities that have similar socio-economic bases, but very different adoption rates. We must get out the message that speed matters when dealing with young children.

Mr Timpson: I completely agree with my hon. Friend that we must bring as much transparency as possible to the adoption process, which is why we have introduced the scorecard data and a national adoption register that is more open and available to prospective adopters. It is also why we have put such a strong emphasis on ensuring that local authorities' artificial barriers do not get in the way of children finding a loving, stable family home, if adoption is right for them. I welcome his support for what we are doing but, of course, we must continue to exert pressure so that all the 6,000 children who are in care and waiting to be adopted this very day get the opportunity that they deserve.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I also welcome the improvements, but may I remind the Minister that, in England alone, 16% of all children put up for adoption are black, Asian or from the ethnic minority communities, and that adoption still takes three times longer for a black child compared with a white child? What steps is he taking to ensure that more prospective parents come from the ethnic communities and that that difference is brought to an end?

Mr Timpson: The right hon. Gentleman is correct to raise that issue, of which I am conscious due to the statistics that he shared with the House. That is why we have made it clear—not only through the Children and Families Act 2014—that although ethnicity is an important consideration when matching for adoption, it should not be the single guiding principle that determines whether prospective adopters take on a child with a different ethnic mix from theirs. It is also why we are helping to fund local authorities, in partnership with independent fostering agencies, to examine how they can recruit more widely across our communities so that we ensure that we have a good cross-section of people coming forward to adopt.

We need to make people aware that some of the myths and barriers that they think prevent them from adopting do not exist. We want more people to come forward, so we should do everything that we can to encourage them to do so.

Register of Foster Carers

3. **John Glen (Salisbury) (Con):** What plans he has to create a national register of foster carers. [903196]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr Edward Timpson): We have no plans to introduce a national register of foster carers. Foster carers are approved locally by their fostering service, which helps ensure a good match between the foster carer and children. Introducing a national register would add an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy and make the approval process less responsive to foster carers' and children's needs.

John Glen: I thank the Minister for that response, but does he not agree that it seems somewhat counter-productive to restrict outstanding carers to one authority or agency, forcing them, in effect, to go through that additional bureaucracy and vetting procedure should they move? What plans does he have to make the system less bureaucratic so that, particularly in neighbouring authorities, they do not have to repeat that process, wasting a lot of time?

Mr Timpson: I agree that we need to make transferring from one agency to another, or from one local authority to another, as streamlined and as simple as possible. That is why we have changed the regulations to make it easier for new fostering services to access the foster carer's record, including the training that they have received, and why, more recently, fostering services have also been required to share relevant information about a person's suitability to foster.

We have seen a 6% rise in the number of approved foster carers, as well as a 9% rise in the number of approved foster placements, but we need to go further and do anything we can to ensure that those who want to foster and want to continue to foster really get the chance to do just that.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I recognise the Minister's concerns, and I suppose that the issue depends on what the register is intended to achieve, but the Department has had to address issues over the adoption register very similar to those to which he just referred. That register is managed by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering. How would a fostering register differ dramatically from the adoption register, on which the Minister has been rightly lavishing praise?

Mr Timpson: There are more than 71,000 approved foster carers, so there is already a scalability issue. We also have a much more deeply entrenched local system in relation to the recruitment of foster carers. That is why we have given the fostering network £250,000 to try to boost recruitment at a local level to try to meet local need, but we also need to do everything that we can to ensure that the latent capacity in fostering across the country is utilised. Hundreds of thousands of people would consider fostering and we need to find them. That is why we are also funding Fosterline—an independent, free advice line—so that people can get the guidance that they need to come forward and, hopefully, foster.

Holidays in Term Time

4. **Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con):** What guidance his Department has issued to head teachers on what constitutes the exceptional circumstances in which children may be granted leave of absence for holidays during school term time. [903197]

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove): My Department has not issued any specific guidance on this matter.

Mr Turner: There have been examples on the Isle of Wight, and I am sure elsewhere, of parents being told that the Government have banned all term-time holidays, which is particularly difficult for those who work during

the holidays. Will the Minister confirm that the definition of exceptional circumstances is made by the head teachers, and not the Government, the council or even the governing body, and that the normal use of language should be sufficiently clear for heads to make those decisions?

Michael Gove: As ever, my hon. Friend is absolutely right: the decision as to what constitutes exceptional circumstances is a matter for the head teacher. It is important, however, to stress that children wherever possible should be in school and learning, and a drive to reduce truancy and push up the number of days and hours that children spend in school is at the heart of our long-term plan to raise standards in our state schools.

Ann Coffey (Stockport) (Lab): In 2013, Ofsted estimated that more than 10,000 children were missing from education—children more likely to have special educational needs and to be more vulnerable to child sexual exploitation. Will the Secretary of State look at ways in which the extent of the problem and the risk to the children involved can be better monitored, such as asking local safeguarding children boards to include in their annual reports information on children missing from school?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. The work that she has done on emphasising how much better a job we can do to help vulnerable children and young people has been exemplary, and I very much take her point to heart. I stress that local safeguarding children boards have had a bad press recently but it is important that we use all the agencies at our disposal to try to ensure that the most vulnerable are in school, where they can benefit from great education and appropriate pastoral support.

Mathematics

5. **Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con):** What steps he is taking to improve mathematics education. [903198]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Elizabeth Truss): We are raising expectations in mathematics, in line with top-performing countries. We are strengthening the primary school curriculum to focus on core arithmetic and removing calculators from primary school tests this summer. We expect secondary schools to increase teaching time, with a more challenging maths GCSE that will, for the first time, be double-weighted in the performance tables. We are also providing £11 million to build a network of maths hubs across the country.

Sheryll Murray: Will my hon. Friend join me in praising my constituent Mr Kevin Bennett, who is helping local schoolchildren to learn maths through real-life applications, using astronomy at his Caradon observatory in South East Cornwall?

Elizabeth Truss: I congratulate my hon. Friend's constituent, Kevin Bennett. It is really important that young people understand not only how to do maths, but how it can be applied, from astronomy to business. We know that maths qualifications command the highest earnings in the workplace, and it is really important that all our young people understand how valuable they are.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): The Minister seems to agree that our primary problem in maths education is pre-GCSE, not post-GCSE. Does she therefore agree that it is unfair and unwise to press students to take mathematics beyond GCSE if their pre-GCSE performance is not sufficiently strong?

Elizabeth Truss: I agree that we have a lot to do to improve our performance in primary schools mathematics, but we have the lowest proportion of students studying maths from age 16 to 18 in the developed world. We need to do something about that, because it affects all kinds of things, such as the future supply of maths teachers and the number of people going into business and industry. What people in business tell me is that everything, from fashion to farming, now depends on having a good level of mathematics.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): It has been said that MPs can be divided into three groups: those who can count and those who cannot. Can my hon. Friend tell us whether the people now going into primary school teaching are people who have enjoyed mathematics and are good at it and can pass on their enthusiasm and skills to those they teach?

Elizabeth Truss: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am not proposing an entry requirement for Parliament, but perhaps that is something he might put forward. We have new maths and English skills tests for primary school teachers. We are also giving bursaries to maths teachers for primary school. One of the things we have been looking at in Shanghai is having specialist maths teachers in primary schools, which is an interesting model.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Are the Government meeting their targets for recruiting teachers into maths?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I think that we are at about 90% of our target for this year. It is vital that we get more people into maths teaching, so we have removed the cap on maths teacher recruitment and we are awarding the highest level of scholarships and bursaries into maths. Importantly, we also need more people doing maths at A-level, and we now have record numbers under this Government. We also have record numbers doing further maths at A-level and doing maths degrees. That will increase the supply of maths teachers in future.

Shakespeare Schools Festival

6. **Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con):** What progress has been made on the Shakespeare schools festival. [903199]

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove): I am delighted to be able to support and fund the Shakespeare schools festival. We have provided nearly £500,000 to give students the opportunity to prepare and perform an abridged version of a Shakespeare play. More than 1,000 schools—over 62,000 students—have already benefited, and 50,000 more students should benefit this year.

Nadhim Zahawi: In this special anniversary year, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's fantastic Shakespeare week has brought the works of the great bard to thousands of children across the country. Will the Secretary of State join me on 29 April to watch the talented students of Stratford-on-Avon mark the 450th anniversary of the bard's birth in a special performance in the Speaker's state apartments?

Michael Gove: Mr Speaker, to visit your apartments:

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments."

Yes is the short answer to my hon. Friend.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): There is evidence that Shakespeare poorly taught can put children off English literature for a very long time. Do our children not need a broad diet, which might even include our famous poet John Clare, this year, the 150th anniversary of his death?

Michael Gove: Any author poorly taught can put children off for life, but more and more lessons are being taught well in our schools. As the chief inspector has pointed out, we have more good and outstanding schools than ever before. I had the opportunity recently to see children from a special school, a primary school and a secondary school—Burlington Danes academy—all perform Shakespeare productions in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's flat. I was blown away by the quality of their verse speaking. I believe that Shakespeare has the power to move and touch every child, and I know that John Clare would have thought exactly the same. That peasant poet understood that he stood in a tradition of great literary figures, of whom Shakespeare was another grammar school boy made good.

Apprenticeships

7. **Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure more employers offer apprenticeships to 16 to 18-year-olds. [903200]

The Minister for Skills and Enterprise (Matthew Hancock): Apprenticeship reforms are putting employers in the driving seat of designing world-class standards for apprenticeships, and making it easier for them to offer apprenticeships in the future. I can announce to the House today that David Meller of the Meller Education Trust has agreed to become the new chair of the apprenticeship ambassadors network, with a brief of expanding and encouraging that network further and boosting apprenticeships once again.

Iain Stewart: I recently visited SMC Pneumatics in my constituency to meet its apprentices. It has an excellent apprenticeship programme, run in conjunction with Milton Keynes college. One suggestion made to me was that to get the most out of their apprenticeship, apprentices need a good mentor to support them. Will the Minister assure me that his Department will do all it can to facilitate a network of voluntary mentors?

Matthew Hancock: Yes, I absolutely will. I have visited Milton Keynes with my hon. Friend and seen some of the excellent work on apprenticeships there. Of course, from time immemorial an apprenticeship has been not

just a skills programme but a mentoring programme that shows people what it takes to work and succeed in a career. Modern apprenticeships do that too.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I have heard what the Minister has told the House, but in my area of south Yorkshire the number of apprenticeships available is down by 15% over the past year. Will the Minister consider taking special steps in areas where the number of apprenticeships is falling?

Matthew Hancock: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the number of apprenticeships has risen sharply over the past few years, but at the same time we have to drive up the quality of the programme. Of course, all steps that can be taken must be taken in all areas, and I will ensure that the issue of south Yorkshire is raised specifically at the next meeting of the apprenticeship ambassadors network.

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): A number of businesses in my constituency have been reluctant to take part in apprenticeship schemes, fearing that they are bureaucratic and do not address individual needs. Does my hon. Friend agree that the only way to bring true benefit to young people is to train them in the skills that business and industry actually need, which will also help to fill the skills gap?

Matthew Hancock: I could not have put it better myself, and I agree strongly with my hon. Friend. That is what we are trying to do, by having a three-click programme for an employer to take on an apprentice and through wider reforms.

Mr Speaker: I think the Minister was intending, at any rate, to offer extravagant praise.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The number of 16 to 18-year-olds undertaking apprenticeships dropped by nearly 14% in the first quarter of the 2013 academic year. With 900,000 young people out of work, is it not time the Minister admitted that his boastful rhetoric does not match his hopeless record of failure?

Matthew Hancock: Funnily enough, I do not agree with that one, Mr Speaker. The number of full apprenticeships—those longer than a year—has more than doubled for under-19s. In 2010, a 17-year-old could claim that they had an apprenticeship when they had a three or six-month programme. We do not think that is a proper apprenticeship. Funnily enough, nor does the Labour party policy review, so perhaps the hon. Lady should talk to some of her colleagues.

Child Care (Norwich)

8. **Chloe Smith** (Norwich North) (Con): What estimate he has made of the take-up of free child care for two-year-olds in Norwich. [903201]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Elizabeth Truss): It was a pleasure to visit the Magdalen Gates pre-school with my hon. Friend and see Norwich two-year-olds benefiting from our programme. I am

pleased to tell her that 1,537 children in Norfolk are now part of that programme. Across the country, by the end of February we had more than 100,000 two-year-olds in the programme, which represents 77% of available places.

Chloe Smith: I welcome those numbers and all the recent announcements on child care because they give parents choice and support. I welcome—as, I know, does my hon. Friend—good-quality early-years education, because it can help children develop social skills and vocabulary, as we heard at that pre-school. What is the Minister doing to raise quality for all the children we have just heard about?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend for her question, and I congratulate Paula Watts and her team in Norwich on their excellent work. We have seen a 25% increase this year in the number of people enrolling to be early-years teachers, which I think shows the level of confidence in our programme. Those trainee teachers have to pass the same skills tests in English and Maths as primary school teachers, and we know that children, particularly those from low-income families, benefit from high-quality teacher-led provision at that age, which can help them close the gap with their richer counterparts.

Mr Speaker: As the Minister herself widened the subject matter courtesy of her answer, I think we can safely make the journey to Reading.

Mr Rob Wilson (Reading East) (Con): A new Sutton Trust report states that 40% of children are missing out on the parenting they need to succeed in life. International evidence finds that under-threes who do not form strong bonds with a parent are more likely to suffer from aggression and hyperactivity when older, and they do less well in their education. In the light of that, is the Minister happy that parents are getting the full picture when making choices about the right balance of time spent in nursery and child care settings, as opposed to with their parents?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the importance of parenting and early attachment, and that is why we increased funding for early intervention and child care from £4.3 billion to £4.5 billion over this Parliament. One of the key roles of children's centres, which are being used by a record number of parents this year—more than 1 million parents are now using children's centres—is to communicate best practice. Our new early-years teacher qualifications have a focus on attachment.

School Funding (Solihull)

9. **Lorely Burt (Solihull) (LD):** What steps he has taken to implement fair school funding for Solihull. [903203]

The Minister for Schools (Mr David Laws): Past school funding levels have been very unfair to some parts of our country, and we have announced that we will significantly boost funding in 2015-16 by more than one third of a billion pounds for the 60 least fairly funded local authorities.

Lorely Burt: The formula funding protection for Solihull sixth-form college, as with all sixth-form colleges, runs out in 2015-16. What advice would my hon. Friend give to the principal and governors in developing their strategic plans?

Mr Laws: My hon. Friend will know that funding after 2015-16 will be determined in the next spending round, and we cannot make precise commitments now about funding in that period. We have been considering the options for funding large programmes such as those containing five or more A-levels, the international baccalaureate, and large vocational programmes, and we plan to announce how those will be treated after 2015-16 in the near future.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): I welcome enormously the real progress made on fairer funding, and I salute the Minister and the Secretary of State for delivering in this Parliament on an issue that went unaddressed for decades. May I encourage the Minister to keep on engaging with the F40 campaign, which includes Solihull, Staffordshire and the East Riding of Yorkshire, and to ensure that all areas that have suffered from unfair funding for too long can hope to benefit—as Worcestershire and Buckinghamshire already have—from fairer funding?

Mr Laws: We will certainly remain engaged in that debate, and I am delighted to congratulate my hon. Friend on the leadership that he has given to this campaign over a sustained period. That has led to our recent announcement, which has sought to resolve the issue in those parts of the country that have traditionally been very badly funded.

Primary School Places

10. **John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op):** What assessment he has made of the adequacy of provision of primary school places. [903204]

12. **Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op):** What assessment he has made of the adequacy of provision of primary school places. [903206]

The Minister for Schools (Mr David Laws): We have more than doubled the allocation of money for basic need to more than £5 billion in this Parliament, and 260,000 additional places were created between May 2010 and May 2013, including 212,000 primary places.

John Woodcock: May I declare my interest as a student working towards a level 3 teaching assistant qualification? I am currently undertaking placements in Victoria junior school in Barrow, and Oasis Academy Johanna in Lambeth. Barrow is one of the few areas of the country that has a surplus of places as a result of population decline in recent years, yet too many pupils are still being denied their first choice of school. If the Government were serious about making the education system work for pupils, and not at the convenience of producers, would they not give parents the right to send their child to the school of their choice, and place a duty on that institution to expand?

Mr Laws: We are so serious about this issue that we have doubled the amount of basic need funding going to the hon. Gentleman's local authority compared with the period under the Labour Government. We are seeking not only to improve the quality of existing schools but to make sure that parents can exercise their choices effectively.

Gavin Shuker: In Luton we are 630 primary places short of the number we require—a situation that would be much worse had a free school not been built by an arms-length council body that had to jump through all the hoops of the free school system. Is it not perverse that local authorities are not allowed to build schools?

Mr Laws: Local authorities are allowed to build schools. We have allocated £37 million to the hon. Gentleman's local authority to do precisely that.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is quite right to give local authorities the freedom to decide how to allocate this extra funding for places based on local need and local knowledge?

Mr Laws: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Local authorities do have that knowledge of local need, and they have the money from us to address this issue.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I recently attended a meeting with all the head teachers from the Otley family of schools, which covers Otley, Bramhope, Pool-in-Wharfedale and Adur, and they expressed concern about the chronic shortage of school places at primary level. After the debacle of Labour-run Leeds city council closing schools a number of years ago, now that we need some, what work is going on to have discussions with the Department for Communities and Local Government about how this problem can be avoided in future?

Mr Laws: My hon. Friend is exactly right. One of the reasons there are pressures in some parts of the country is that under the previous Government over 200,000 primary school places were eliminated after 2003. He will be aware that Leeds is one of the areas to which we have given significant amounts of basic need funding, and it is now using that money effectively. I will be happy to meet him if it would be helpful to discuss this in further detail.

Autism

20. [903217] **Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Acre Hall primary school in my constituency is growing, and it is well placed to expand its offer of small specialist classes for special educational needs pupils. However, the school is in a very poor state of repair and is in desperate need of rebuilding. Will the Minister urge the Education Funding Agency to reach a decision at the earliest possible opportunity on its application for capital grants?

Mr Laws: I will certainly look into that particular case as a consequence of the hon. Lady's question and write to her about it.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Local Government Association recently warned that there is a need to create 130,000 new places by 2017-18. It also warned that because of the Minister's ideological insistence that these places have to be in free schools and academies, they will not be created where they are actually needed. On what evidence does he believe that community schools and local decision making are always bad?

Mr Laws: We do not believe that. Indeed, local community schools are expanding right across the country; the difference between the situation under this Government and under the previous Government is that they have the money to do so.

Regional School Commissioners

11. **Mr Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): What plans he has for regional school commissioners. [903205]

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove): Regional schools commissioners will act on my behalf to support the national schools commissioner.

Mr Thomas: The Secretary of State will recognise that Al-Madinah and IES UK Breckland schools have not been the greatest advert for his policy agenda. How will these rather Soviet-sounding commissioners help to ensure that academy chains and free schools are properly overseen so that no more children have their education damaged in future?

Michael Gove: I have nothing against anything that is redolent of a better past in Russia. In fact, the Office of the Schools Commissioner was introduced by the previous Labour Government. We are merely building on it to ensure that we have great head teachers and others who can ensure that the superb innovation that is occurring in academies, free schools and community schools across the country is supported, and that wherever school failure occurs we can take swift and rapid action.

Vocational Education

13. **Steve Rotheram** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to improve vocational education. [903207]

15. **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to improve vocational education. [903210]

16. **Mr Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool South) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to improve vocational education. [903212]

The Minister for Skills and Enterprise (Matthew Hancock): Driving up the rigour and responsiveness of vocational education is a critical part of this Government's mission to give everyone the education they need to fulfil their potential.

Steve Rotheram: How does the Minister respond to the Government's own consultation, which proposes that an employer's contribution for a hairdressing apprentice should be about £1,700, whereas for STEM trades such

as engineering it should be more than £5,000, and construction specialisms would cost £7,000? Will he rethink these mad proposals?

Matthew Hancock: I do not recognise any of those figures, but I do recognise the need to make sure that apprenticeships are driven by the skills that employers need, so that they remain high quality and increasingly fill the skills gaps that have been left by an education system that was far too divorced from the world of work.

Paul Blomfield: What would the Minister say to Richard Wright, who speaks on behalf of Sheffield business as chief executive of the local chamber of commerce and who wrote to the Secretary of State saying that the funding cut for 18-year-olds in further education would remove money from where it can have the most effect in equipping young people with maths and English, and the technical and vocational skills that are modern and relevant, to ensure that they are work-ready?

Matthew Hancock: The first thing I would say is that we have ameliorated the change so that no institution will lose more than 2% in the coming financial year. The second thing I would say is that we had to make this change because of the mess left in the public finances by the Labour party. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members do not like it, but it is the truth, and until they get used to admitting their fault, nobody will trust them with the economy again.

Mr Marsden: Which does the Minister think causes most damage to vocational education in Blackpool—his 17.5% cut in college funding, which is capped for only one year at 2%, or his abject failure to promote or offer any properly financially supported traineeships for young people?

Matthew Hancock: Of course, there would not be traineeships, were it not for this Government. I would say that the most damaging thing to young people's futures is a Labour Government.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): In Northumberland we have doubled the number of apprenticeships and have outstanding vocational education at Northumberland college and at the Egger academy, which I opened last year. When I visited Release Potential in my constituency, people there stressed the success of traineeships and how they need to be promoted, not denigrated, as the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Mr Marsden) has just done. Does the Minister agree that traineeships are part of the future that we need?

Matthew Hancock: Absolutely. Traineeships are provided by good and outstanding institutions, because we want them to be a high-quality product to make sure that everybody gets the skills they need and the capability and character they need to hold down a job. They are filling a gap that was left before.

Independent Schools

14. **Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con):** When he last discussed education policy with leaders of independent schools. [903208]

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove): I regularly enjoy meeting the heads of our leading independent schools.

Mr Chope: Does my right hon. Friend appreciate the important role that independent schools play in raising education standards in this country, and does he applaud the enormous contribution that fee-paying parents make in investing in our education system?

Michael Gove: I take a close interest in the success of England's independent schools. In particular, I reinforce the point that my hon. Friend makes. Those parents who support independent schools are supporting not just a great education for their own children. In many cases—for example, with schools such as Wellington and Eton college—they are also supporting improved state education by sponsoring free schools, which would not exist if Labour came to power. I stress that the head teachers of independent schools appreciate the changes being made to the state sector. Only this weekend the headmaster of King's College school in Wimbledon pointed out that the state sector "has really improved" under this Government—so much so that it is totally different from the situation that prevailed 10 years ago under Labour.

Mr James Clappison (Hertsmere) (Con): I declare an interest as a governor of an independent school. Will my right hon. Friend in his various discussions promote the placing of looked-after and vulnerable children in boarding-school education, not least because this produces better results for them in examinations and better outcomes in life, and it is also considerably cheaper than the alternative?

Michael Gove: I absolutely agree. The role that independent schools play in making sure that children from vulnerable backgrounds have access to boarding education is to be applauded, but it is vital that we stress that there are superb state boarding schools as well, and that there are a growing number of state schools providing excellent facilities for children from the most fragile of circumstances to flourish. It is important that we should recognise that whatever the type of school helping a vulnerable child, the actions of those who lead it should be applauded.

Engineering Apprenticeships (16 to 18-year-old Girls)

17. **Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab):** What steps his Department is taking to encourage girls aged 16 to 18 to consider taking up engineering apprenticeships. [903214]

The Minister for Skills and Enterprise (Matthew Hancock): Since 2010, the number of women starting engineering and manufacturing apprenticeships has increased threefold.

Mr Wright: The Institution of Mechanical Engineers says that 92% of girls choose not to take triple science as a subject beyond the age of 14, which effectively disbars them from a career in engineering. EngineeringUK says that 83% of all young people do not have access to STEM-related work experience. How on earth do the

Government's policies of ending face-to-face careers advice and downgrading work experience help to encourage girls into engineering?

Matthew Hancock: I recognise the situation that the hon. Gentleman describes as the situation of a few years ago. Fortunately, a record number of girls are studying triple science at GCSE and a record number of girls are studying physics. That does not mean that there is not more to do for the Government in sorting out the problems that were left behind. We must ensure that people are given inspiration and mentoring through careers guidance, which was not available in the past. We must promote the highest-quality careers to boys and girls, and ensure that everybody knows how to fulfil their potential.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I congratulate the Government on their work in the STEM sector, and particularly in engineering. How many women have finished engineering apprenticeships and how many girls go on to gain a job in engineering? Will the Minister join me in recognising that women engineers are climbing to the top of the tree, since we have had a female president of the Institution of Civil Engineers?

Matthew Hancock: I will. A very high proportion of those who go into apprenticeships, and STEM apprenticeships in particular, stay on in a job or continue into a higher-quality apprenticeship. That progression is one reason why apprenticeships are such a valued institution.

19. [903216] **Julie Hilling** (Bolton West) (Lab): We know that girls and young women like to try before they buy. They therefore need practical experience of engineering before they will apply for it. Among other companies, MBDA in my constituency has a great programme through which it goes into schools and takes pupils on work experience placements. What is the Minister doing to ensure that every young person has a similar opportunity?

Matthew Hancock: I pay tribute to MBDA, which I visited to see its work on apprenticeships. The apprentice of the year was a young woman from MBDA. It does great work, but there is much more to be done so that all employers can engage in schools and colleges to show young people what they can do.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): When I visit engineering and manufacturing companies in my Bury North constituency, they often say that not just girls, but boys find the idea of taking up trades off-putting because they are noisy, dirty and sometimes smelly. Does the Minister agree that the teachers in our schools need to do more to encourage people of both sexes to take up such jobs?

Matthew Hancock: Absolutely. The very best people to do that are the people who are in those careers themselves and who can show what a modern engineering workplace looks like. They tend to be problem-solving institutions that are exciting and that pay well, which I find is a message that goes down particularly well with apprentices.

Child Care Costs

18. **Mr Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effects of the cost of child care on parents who want to work. [903215]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Elizabeth Truss): According to the recent Family and Childcare Trust survey, the cost of child care in England has started to fall in real times for the first time in 12 years, whereas in Scotland, the cost of nurseries has gone up by 8% and in Wales, which is run by Labour, the cost of nurseries has gone up by 13%. That is because the Government are reducing red tape and enabling good providers to expand.

Mr Slaughter: That was pure fantasy. One of the best and most effective child care solutions for working parents is Sure Start. Is the Minister ashamed that 600 Sure Start centres have closed under the Government and that some Tory councils, such as Hammersmith and Fulham, have cut their budget by half?

Elizabeth Truss: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has got his figures wrong. In fact, Sure Start provides fewer than 4% of places. In London, which he represents, 45% of early-years places are in school nurseries. I suggest that he joins the Mayor of London's programme, which he is running with me, to encourage school nurseries to open for longer hours. What the hon. Gentleman says about children's centres is absolute nonsense. We have increased the investment in those as well.

Nick de Bois (Enfield North) (Con): Unfortunately, the expansion of free places has resulted in the headmaster of Carterhatch children's centre in Enfield asking fee-paying parents to take their children out of the centre to make way for those who are on the new scheme. What advice does the Minister have for the headmaster, who has chosen to discriminate against working parents, and for the parents who are fighting to keep their children at the centre?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. We are working with London providers and local authorities to get them to expand the number of places. We have made it easier for private sector providers to expand without planning red tape, and we have made it easier for good and outstanding providers to expand without red tape. We also want to see school nurseries and children's centres open from 8 am to 6 pm to provide flexible child care.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): We welcome the fact that finally families will receive some much needed help in meeting their child care costs. However, does the Minister accept that by the time the tax-free scheme comes into effect in 2015, the support that families have already lost plus the increases in costs over this Parliament will mean that the vast majority of families will still be worse off? Can she also tell the House what assessment she has made of the impact on price inflation, given the chronic shortage of places?

Elizabeth Truss: I do not think that the hon. Lady heard my first point, which was that prices are falling in real terms in England for the first time since the Family and Childcare Trust study began. Under Labour, they

went up by 50%. On Thursday, I visited the excellent Medlock primary school in her constituency, which offers places to two, three and four-year-olds. Staff told me of their plans to open from 8 until 6 to provide parents with more care. That is happening across the country—[*Interruption.*] I hear what the hon. Lady says. At present, most nurseries in Manchester are open from 9 to 3. If they opened from 8 to 6, that would be more than 60% extra.

Topical Questions

T1. [903183] **Lorely Burt** (Solihull) (LD): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Education (Michael Gove): Thanks to the success of our long-term economic plan, my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister were able last week to announce not just an extension of tax-free child care, but the extension of the pupil premium to the early years, marking a step forward in making this country not only more economically efficient, but more socially just.

Lorely Burt: I warmly welcome the additional money announced in the Budget to support early education for children from low-income families. What will that mean for nursery providers in Solihull?

Michael Gove: We are consulting on exactly how we should distribute the additional cash in order to ensure that it goes to the very poorest families, but I am aware that in the west midlands generally—and in Solihull particularly—there are families in desperate need of support, and I hope we will be able to extend that to them as quickly as possible.

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): More and more research shows the importance of early-years development in a child's education. The Labour party's Sure Start programme was focused on supporting those vital infant years—a policy of prevention, rather than cure. We know that the Tories do not support Sure Start, but in 2010, the Secretary of State pledged to create 4,200 new health visitors. Can he tell the House how far he is from meeting that target?

Michael Gove: We extravagantly support Sure Start and I am a great advocate of the great work that Sure Start children's centres do, but the provision of additional health visitors is a matter for the Secretary of State for Health.

Tristram Hunt: That is exactly the problem with this Government—no cross-departmental thinking about having health visitors focus on early-years development. [*Laughter.*] The Tories might laugh at the impact that health visitors have on early-years education, but the Opposition think that the early years are vital. As the hon. Member for Reading East (Mr Wilson) suggested, research published by the Sutton Trust on Friday reiterated the impact that good parenting has on school readiness, educational attainment and progression into continued education and work. Will the Government's commitment to 4,200 new health visitors be matched this Parliament, or is it another broken promise, like Sure Start centres?

Michael Gove: The early years are indeed very important. That is when children often learn to spell. It is important that the Secretary of State can tell the difference between education, e-d-u-c-a-t-i-o-n, and health, h-e-a-l-t-h. Responsibility for health visitors, like responsibility for doctors and nurses, is for the Secretary of State for Health, and I suggest that the hon. Gentleman addresses those questions to my right hon. Friend.

T3. [903185] **Guy Opperman** (Hexham) (Con): Last summer the Minister visited Northumberland, where schoolchildren have, historically, been chronically underfunded, compared with those in other areas, by central Government. May I welcome the 6.4% increase in early 2015 and the ongoing consultation, and observe that the case for fairer funding is absolutely overwhelming? The Minister should prepare for a lot of representations from my head teachers.

The Minister for Schools (Mr David Laws): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome of our announcement. I congratulate him on his robust campaigning over a period of time to ensure this fairer funding settlement. As he knows, under our plans Northumberland's per pupil funding rate will increase by around £269 per pupil per year, which will mean over £10 million more for schools in his area.

T2. [903184] **Mr Tom Watson** (West Bromwich East) (Lab): Following a special educational needs tribunal ruling that children were unsafe in January 2013, at a ministerial meeting in March 2013 parents of abuse victims told a Minister that Stanbridge Earls independent school remained unsafe. I wrote to the Secretary of State in the same month to warn him that the situation was urgent. Despite this, a further child was sexually abused in July 2013. The school has now closed. Ofsted has apologised for its failures. Will Ministers now urgently consider adequate research into the funding of mandatory reporting in regulated settings?

Michael Gove: I take these issues incredibly seriously and I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising them. I have had the opportunity, in a different context, to talk to one victim of abuse who, I have to say, made a compelling case for mandatory reporting in a regulated setting. I had hitherto been concerned that mandatory reporting might create more work for children's services departments than it would generate safety for children, but the specific case for reporting in regulated settings is one that we are actively reviewing.

T4. [903186] **Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): Ministers are to be commended for their work to drive up educational standards for pupils in receipt of free school meals, and in particular for the appointment of John Dunford as pupil premium champion, who we saw on his recent visit to Peterborough. What further work are Ministers doing to focus on this area of work with children in receipt of free school meals?

Mr Laws: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. We are doing two things in particular. As my hon. Friend is aware, we announced in the Budget that we are extending the pupil premium into the early years, which I think has been widely welcomed. We are also ensuring, through

Ofsted, that while schools have the freedom to spend that money in the most sensible way they think appropriate, they will be held to account and fully supported by Ofsted and the Education Endowment Foundation.

T5. [903187] **Mr Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Minister is, I hope, concerned about the literacy levels of prisoners, 40% of whom have an average reading age of 11. Does he think that the policy of the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice to ban sending books to prisoners will make that better or worse?

Michael Gove: I take a close interest in ensuring that we deal with the problem of literacy. I am hoping to visit the prison education programme in Wormwood Scrubs in the hon. Gentleman's constituency next week. We should do everything possible to support literacy in prisons and in the justice system. If he looks closely at the work the Justice Secretary is undertaking to ensure that in secure settings for young people an appropriate emphasis is placed on education, he will appreciate that the Justice Secretary is more committed than anyone to ensuring that those who are incarcerated have the chance to educate themselves out of the path they have taken.

T8. [903190] **Mark Menzies** (Fylde) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that academies turn around some of the worst-performing schools in our country? Will the Government redouble their efforts to create the conditions to allow academies to thrive in Lancashire?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point. It is incumbent on the Labour leadership of Lancashire county council to do as other enlightened Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat local authorities have done and support academy providers in turning around underperforming schools.

T6. [903188] **Mr John Denham** (Southampton, Itchen) (Lab): In a reply slipped out on Budget day, Ministers confirmed the hitherto secret list of 14 academy chains that have been barred from taking on further schools, and other unnamed chains are causing concern. Does the Secretary of State agree that such secrecy not only wasted months of work by Woodlands school in Southampton in abortive discussions with Academies Enterprise Trust, but is damaging public confidence? Is it not time to allow Ofsted to inspect academy chains, as it does local authorities?

Michael Gove: Ofsted already inspects academy chains. It has inspected both E-ACT and AET.

T9. [903191] **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend aware that a very important event will take place in September 2014, namely the opening of Harlow's Sir Charles Kao university technical college following millions of pounds of Government investment? Is he aware that the UTC is proving to be incredibly popular among pupils and their parents, and that it will increase the choice that is available to many people in Harlow? Will he come to Harlow to visit it, and to see for himself how it will improve the quality of education?

Michael Gove: Any opportunity to visit Harlow is always welcome, any opportunity to visit a UTC is always a joy, and the chance to combine both with the opportunity to meet my hon. Friend again is an offer that is simply too good to be true.

T7. [903189] **Mrs Linda Riordan** (Halifax) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State agree that every classroom in every school should contain a qualified teacher who is able to provide the best possible education for children, and that to deliver anything else is to deliver education on the cheap?

Michael Gove: I agree that every classroom in every school should guarantee that children are receiving high-quality teaching, but I think it instructive to note that the hon. Lady's attempts to breathe new life into the policy of her party's Front Benchers has come a little too late. Nowadays, when the shadow Education Secretary is interviewed on the BBC, he is reduced to saying that our policies are a success, and when it comes to Question Time he cannot think of any education questions, and has to ask some health questions instead.

T10. [903192] **Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): This morning I attended the launch of "Get Tiptree Reading" at Tiptree Heath primary school in my constituency. This local reading initiative is led by some outstanding head teachers in the constituency, and is intended to inspire a love of reading among schoolchildren. Will the Secretary of State commend the leadership of that school and other local schools which are going the extra mile to support reading and literacy among the young?

Michael Gove: Absolutely. I had the opportunity to visit Essex twice last week; sadly, I did not manage to make it to my hon. Friend's constituency, but I hope to do so before too long.

The leadership being shown by primary head teachers, and teachers across the country, in helping us to eliminate illiteracy is inspiring. The introduction of the phonics check, which was the idea of my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr Gibb), has really raised the level of ambition, and the new primary curriculum which will be introduced in September will help to reinforce that.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State said a moment ago that Ofsted could inspect academy chains. If that is the case, why is the head of Ofsted asking for the power to inspect them?

Michael Gove: The chief inspector of Ofsted said some lovely things about me on the radio on Friday, and now I have an opportunity to say some great things about him. I think that the recent changes in Ofsted inspections that he had a chance to announce on Friday, in a wholly independent way, are wise and right, as he is himself in relation to every issue.

Simon Wright (Norwich South) (LD): I welcomed last week's announcement of an early-years pupil premium. Schools have benefited from access to the Education Endowment Foundation toolkit to use the pupil premium

to its best effect. Will the Department consider how best to make early-years pupil premium research available to providers?

Mr Laws: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. We will ensure that early-years settings have the necessary information about interventions that make a difference, so that the new money that is going into the system can have an effect, especially for some of the most disadvantaged pupils.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): The Under-Secretary of State rightly says that she is worried about the number of girls taking A-level maths, given that two thirds of A-level maths students are boys. Is she also worried about the fact that level 6 key stage 2 entrants are consistently more often boys than girls? She has announced changes in the maths curriculum, but what elements of that curriculum, or of teaching, will help to deal with this issue?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Elizabeth Truss): I agree that that is an issue. Information provided recently by the OECD's programme for international student assessment showed that girls have as much confidence as boys at the age of five but begin to lose that confidence as they proceed through the education system, and that that contributes to feelings of anxiety about mathematics. One of the things that we must all do is end the culture in which saying "I am rubbish at maths" is acceptable, whereas it is not OK to say "I am no good at reading." What is needed is a "can do" approach to mathematics. Our new maths hubs programme—there are 30 hubs across the country—will promote best practice in teaching, so that we can close the gap between girls and boys.

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): The Secretary of State recently saw basketball being taught in Mandarin at Bohunt school in my constituency. Will he join me in commending Bohunt on its immersion programme, and how can we get more people studying this strategically important language?

Michael Gove: I hugely enjoyed my visit to Bohunt school, an absolutely outstanding school. When the *Financial Times* visited it, it said that it was easily better—like so many state schools—than independent schools. One of the great things I saw today when I visited Chobham academy in Newham was a year 7 class being taught Mandarin through total immersion. The transformation of modern foreign language teaching over the last couple of years is a wonder to behold, and the commitment of so many of our modern foreign language teachers to extending Mandarin, Spanish and French teaching is vital to ensure that this country escapes the insularity that, sadly, afflicted us in the Labour years.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Secretary of State referred earlier to the reforms in Ofsted announced by the chief inspector last week. Does that mean he is now prepared to call the

dogs off and reaffirm his support for a genuinely independent national inspectorate completely free from political interference?

Michael Gove: As the Secretary of State who was delighted to appoint a Labour baroness to chair Ofsted, I think my commitment to the independence of the inspectorate is beyond question.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): In Bedford the transition from three-tier to two-tier education remains stalled, and there is still no coherent strategy to resolve it. In the circumstances, will my right hon. Friend take a particular interest in applications for funding from schools seeking to achieve coherent change for their pupils?

Michael Gove: I absolutely will.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): Earlier the children Minister talked about the increase in places at school nurseries. Is she aware of the challenge that faces many working parents who cannot secure more than the 15 hours a week they are guaranteed and cannot buy extra hours in a school nursery, which reduces the choices for working parents?

Elizabeth Truss: That is why we are making it very clear to school nurseries that they are able to charge for extra hours and they can open from 8 until 6 to provide parents with that service. As I said, 45% of all early-years places in London are in school nurseries. There is huge potential there to get better service from our existing assets.

Annette Brooke (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): I welcome the new advice on the summer-born starting school at age 5 in a reception class, but are Ministers aware of just how varied the response to parental requests is between different school admission authorities, and what action will they take?

Mr Laws: We are keeping the matter under close review. If my hon. Friend has any information on the way in which schools are implementing their responsibilities, I would be keen to hear from her, because we will take action if we find that schools are not paying attention to parental demand.

Mr Speaker: Last but not least, Andy Sawford.

Andy Sawford (Corby) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Many people in east Northamptonshire are worried by a council consultation on a move from the three-tier system to a two-tier system. May I ask the Secretary of State to impress on the county council that any changes, especially the disruptive closure of schools, must be driven by compelling evidence that they will lead to a better education for local children?

Michael Gove: I am grateful for the point the hon. Gentleman makes. Education standards in Northamptonshire have been low in the past. Reform is necessary, but reform always needs to be driven by evidence. That principle governs every single decision the coalition Government make.

Inherited Social Housing Tenancies

Mr Speaker: Before I call the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), to ask his urgent question I would emphasise to the House that its terms are narrow. It relates specifically to the question of inherited tenancies and the treatment thereof. I am sure the House had not been planning on a Second Reading-style debate on the merits or otherwise of the spare room subsidy/bedroom tax, but that is not the subject matter. It is a narrow matter and will be treated accordingly, and we are, of course, time-constrained.

3.33 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement regarding the exemption of those who have inherited social housing tenancies from paying the under-occupancy charge.

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Esther McVey): The issue raised by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is not a new matter, but is part of the 1996 provisions which impacted on the spare room subsidy legislation 2012, and which we have debated in the House before. Upon investigation early in the year, it would appear that some claimants have been unintentionally protected from the effects of the removal of the spare room subsidy, including those who have been in receipt of continuous housing benefit since 1 January 1996 and who have lived in the same property since that date unless the move was due to natural disaster such as fire and flood. There is a grace period of four weeks, or 52 weeks if the claimant or their partner is a welfare to work beneficiary. For example, housing benefit would be classed as continuous if the break is fewer than four weeks, or 52 weeks for a welfare to work beneficiary. Where a claimant dies, the partner or an adult child can inherit the protection, but it must be in respect of the same dwelling and they must qualify for housing benefit.

The issue of the inheritance of housing benefit has always formed part of the understanding of what the loophole meant, and this was part of the guidance issued to local authorities a few weeks ago. The loophole derives from a very narrow but complex set of regulations dating back to 1 January 1996, when the local reference rent rules were introduced. In January 1996, transitional protection was offered to existing claimants, which could, and still can, be inherited if the claimant dies: for example, by a partner or, where there is no partner, by an adult child. The protection applies only in respect of the same dwelling—therefore, partners or adult children must continue to live in that property—and only if they qualify for housing benefit. This protection ends if housing benefit ceased or they moved address.

With hindsight, the protection offered by the regulations could have been time limited. Because it was not, it has lain dormant for 17 years, the effect being that it has now unintentionally been applied to a group of people who were not financially affected by the local reference rent rules. During February's debate, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley), who was Secretary of State at the time the regulations were introduced, clearly stated that this exemption was never intended to come into force.

This matter was fully debated, and voted on, on 26 February 2014, to approve amended regulations to close the loophole. Clearly, the House has already spoken on this issue, and guidance was sent out a few weeks ago to inform local authorities. I am pleased to announce that most local authorities are following that guidance and delivering this policy.

Chris Bryant: That was all very interesting but not to the point, because this is actually about inherited social housing tenancies. The Minister just said that this only applied to the partner or the adult child of somebody who had been holding the tenancy, but in her advice to local authorities of January this year, she included the following highly ambiguous footnote:

“it may be the case”—

only may—

“that the transitional protection has been inherited by a claimant and if so they should be treated the same.”

Yet a separate e-mail from the Department for Work and Pensions includes

“any member of the claimant's family”

and says,

“if the claimant is a member of a polygamous marriage”—

I am not making this up; this is actually what the Minister has written—

“any partners of his and any child or young person for whom he or a partner is responsible”,

a much bigger number, would be included.

In what circumstances does a tenant inherit the right to be exempted? Does that apply to any member of the claimant's family or specifically just a partner, as the Minister referred to? How many people does that apply to now? What is the total cost of repayments of these illegal charges? How many people who have received refunds for being wrongly charged the bedroom tax have also received discretionary housing payments, and will they have to pay them back? The DWP advice suggests that in assessing whether someone is exempted, local authorities should

“err on the side of caution”.

What on earth does that mean: err on the side of caution to exempt, or not to exempt?

The bedroom tax always had the air of a policy dreamt up in an ivory tower. I know the Minister would love to put this sorry saga behind her, but she should know that before absolution there always has to be confession. So will she now confess that the bedroom tax has been a fiasco from the beginning, that the figures she has given the House were simply plucked out of the air, and that far more than 5,000 people will be affected? Should she not just repeal the bedroom tax? Because if she won't, we will.

Esther McVey: It is clear that the hon. Gentleman was not listening to the statement that I made and did not understand what the inheritance was or what he was voting for on 26 February. Obviously, we do not necessarily want to have to put this policy in place. It is something that we are having to deliver—

Chris Bryant: It is your mistake.

Esther McVey: No. It is something we are having to deliver because of what we inherited from the previous Government, including a benefit, the cost of which had

doubled in 10 years, and a policy that had left nearly 2 million people on housing waiting lists and 400,000 in overcrowded houses. It was a skewed policy under which people living in private rented accommodation could have their spare room subsidy removed but people who lived in the social rented sector could not. And as for people giving out wrong numbers, I would remind the hon. Gentleman that, when he plucked numbers from the air in the last debate, St Helens said that he had got his numbers wrong. Now, in response to his citing a figure of 2,100 cases, Birmingham has put up on its website this statement:

“We haven’t finished identifying them at Birmingham so can’t give you an exact number, but the number of possible cases has dropped substantially below the 2,100 that was reported in the papers”.

We have trebled the discretionary housing payments. We have also said that we will cover the differences involved for people who are exempt and that we will help local authorities with the administration charges. We have answered these points and we have voted on them. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman look again at the debate we had on 26 February.

Mr John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): How many people are affected by this problem?

Esther McVey: The number so far, on best records, is about 5,000. However, the cases are having to be manually checked at the moment, because of a change of computer system, and everybody is going through that. Also, a person has to be in continuous receipt of housing benefit and has to have lived in the same home since 1996.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I know that the Minister can see Wales from her constituency, but has she discussed the matter with the relevant Welsh Assembly Minister? Can she tell me today how many properties and individuals in Wales are affected, and what will happen if any of those individuals have been wrongly charged?

Esther McVey: We are looking through all that at the moment, and anyone who can prove that they are covered by this loophole is of course getting that funding back. That is what we have said people should do, as well as paying towards the administrative charges.

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): Is it not a fact that we inherited more than 1,000 pages of regulations on housing benefit and that there would inevitably be some lacunae while we sought to simplify the system? The real question, which still has not been answered, is why Labour wants to treat people on housing benefit in the social rented sector differently from those on housing benefit in the private rented sector. We still have not had an explanation for that.

Esther McVey: My right hon. Friend is quite right. At the moment, the Opposition say that they would like there to be a difference between the people in the private sector and those in the social rented sector. Actually, they had had discussions about introducing this policy too, so they were going to align the policies and do exactly the same as we have done. The only question that they have never asked, as they have sought to reverse what is happening in the social rented sector, is

this: should there be a legal challenge by those in the private rented sector against whom they were discriminating, would they reverse the rules for those people too, so as to have fairness and equality for everyone?

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Scottish ministers have written to Lord Freud five times since January regarding discretionary housing payments, including for those with transitional tenancies, but they have yet to receive a reply. The Deputy First Minister will be in London on Wednesday. Will Ministers from the Department for Work and Pensions commit to meeting her to discuss these issues and will she give me that commitment today?

Esther McVey: I know that the Secretary of State is in discussions with the Deputy First Minister, and obviously we will do the right thing and speak with her.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Given that we are talking about inherited social housing tenancies, may I urge the Minister to stick to her guns to ensure that the welfare state is about being a safety net for people in need and that it is rebalanced to make sure that it is just as fair for taxpayers as it is for people claiming benefits? May I also give some free advice to the Opposition? Given their lamentable response to the Budget last week, they need to do better than to keep flogging this particular dead horse.

Esther McVey: As my hon. Friend knows, we are ensuring that welfare works and we have a benefits system that works for the 21st century. We know that we are reaping rewards from that: the number of people living in workless households has fallen; the number of people in employment is at a record level; and youth unemployment has fallen for six consecutive months. What the Government are doing is correct, and in the future the Opposition will no doubt follow.

Pat Glass (North West Durham) (Lab): The Minister has said that we do not yet know the number of people affected by this. Given that she has said that each case has to be individually checked and that this mess is hers, will her Department be paying for these checks?

Esther McVey: I have already said that—of course we will.

Lorely Burt (Solihull) (LD): Is not the crux of the problem that far too many families are waiting for social homes, that there is too much overcrowding in our social housing and that more than 400,000 houses were lost under the previous Government? Is not the answer to build more social housing for everyone who needs it?

Esther McVey: My hon. Friend is correct; we have to look at those on housing waiting lists and those in overcrowded accommodation, not that the Opposition seem to care about those people. We have committed to £4.5 billion of spending to ensure that we have another 177,000 social homes by 2015.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): The Minister has accepted that because of the Government’s cock-up, local authorities are having to do a great deal of extra work, and she said that they will have more money. How much more extra money will they have?

Esther McVey: We will be covering the costs—that is what we will be doing. So when we receive that, we will have it, just as we trebled discretionary housing payments to support people and just as we did when we put in an extra £20 million to support local authorities, which, in fact, they did not need—they needed only £13 million. We have been supporting them all the way.

Dame Angela Watkinson (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): Given that nearly 400,000 families in the social housing sector are overcrowded, can the Minister think of a single reason why any individual should be allowed to under-occupy simply because their tenancy is inherited?

Esther McVey: My hon. Friend is right; no, I cannot. It is only when we meet people who are living in overcrowded accommodation, or who are on a waiting list with their children, and we look at the conditions they are living in, that we realise what a lamentable mess we had been left with and how we have to clear it up. How can we justify 1 million spare rooms when other people are sometimes crammed together in a room? So my hon. Friend is correct in what she says.

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): As the Minister has been able to expand on a possible policy area, I would point out that nobody in the private rented sector was ever expected to find £14 or £28 out of their pocket, each week, retrospectively. The Office for Budget Responsibility has said that housing benefit spend will continue to rise. Has the additional spending from this loophole been factored into that, or is that going to be another increase that is not in this Government's forecast?

Esther McVey: The money is obviously in the forecast; I mentioned that we put £20 million in place for local authorities but they did not need it—they needed only £13 million—and so that will come into play. As I also said, we all need to get the housing issues for people across the country right, and we are dealing with them in a way that is fair and proportionate.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): I was surprised to read today in my local paper, *The Oxford Times*, that Oxford city council has spent only two thirds of its discretionary housing funds for 2013-14, leaving £200,000 meant for the most vulnerable unspent. May I therefore ask for the Minister's guidance on how this fund can be better applied to inherited social housing tenancies and others?

Mr Speaker: An exceptionally interesting question, but its relationship with the urgent question tabled is, to put it kindly, tangential. However, let us hear the Minister as the product of her grey cells may prove me wrong.

Esther McVey: My hon. Friend is right that there are quite a few local authorities that have not spent the full amount, and it is that money that can be utilised here for those who have inherited a house or a property in that way. This is what the money is there for.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): A few moments ago, the Minister described this policy as “reaping rewards”. The people who are victims of the bedroom tax fiasco in my constituency would not consider that they are reaping rewards. Does she have any idea of

how out of touch those on the Government Benches sound when they stand up at the Dispatch Box and tell my constituents, who have been plunged into poverty by their actions, that they are reaping rewards?

Esther McVey: Unfortunately, the thing that Opposition Members never did was to look at this issue in the round, in the full 360°, including looking at those living in overcrowded accommodation and those on waiting lists. Yes, there are people who want to remain in their houses, and that is why discretionary housing payments have been made. Equally, there is support for people to move and to house swap. Many people have said to me, “Actually, downsizing is something that we should have done a lot earlier. We never did that, and by downsizing we have a house in which our bills are cheaper and the cost of keeping it tidy is cheaper. In fact, everything is cheaper. We can now live within our means, which is something that we never did before.” We can help people in many different ways.

Nick de Bois (Enfield North) (Con): Does the Minister agree that it is ironic that on the day that the Opposition claim that they want to cap welfare spending, they are yet again in this House demanding to spend more and borrow more?

Esther McVey: If there is one thing that is clear, it is the sheer deficiency of the Opposition. They really do not know what to do with any of the benefit changes. Each time I pick up a newspaper, I read about something that they are doing or not doing, were thinking of doing or of reversing. If they have spent that tax once, they have spent it 20 times.

Mr Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): Has the Minister made any assessment of how much time local authorities, such as my own in Blackpool, will have to spend clearing up this mess, which the right hon. Member for Banbury (Sir Tony Baldry) charitably referred to as “her lacuna”?

Esther McVey: Does the hon. Gentleman know how much time local authorities spend trying to find houses for people who are either on a housing waiting list or in overcrowded housing when houses have not been freed up? We have said that we will pay for any extra administrative charges. What we now need to do is move this debate on and think about the families and the individuals who need to live in accommodation that suits their purposes.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister write to me to tell me how many people in the metropolitan borough of Tameside are affected by the change? From the intimations given to the House so far, identifying these people sounds like quite a time-consuming process. What cost has she estimated to her Department of this announcement today?

Esther McVey: I fear that I have answered this question many times, but people keep coming back to it. We know that a very small proportion of people will be affected by this. When the administrative work has been done and costed, we will provide the funds. That is something we will work on.

High-speed Rail

3.53 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): The past few days have brought important proposals to make the most of High Speed 2. They will help us to build the line better, bring benefits to the north sooner and support job creation and economic growth. I wanted to update the House at the first opportunity and I am sorry that, for unavoidable reasons, I was unable to do so last week.

The proposals are welcome, because HS2 is a vital project. It can do for future generations what the Victorian railways did for previous generations and what the motorways did for ours. That is why it has the strong support of the Government and why cities in the midlands and the north are calling for its benefits to be spread as widely as possible. We must heed that call, but if that is to happen, we must also get the basics right, stick to the cost, plan well, listen, respect the environment, build what really works and what we need for the future, and ensure that people get the benefits as quickly as possible.

I know, too, that HS2 is just part, although a vital part, of our long-term economic plan—one that will see better infrastructure for all parts of our country. It is a clear and ambitious plan that is already paying dividends, as shown by last week's welcome decision by Hitachi, the company that invented the bullet train, to move its global rail headquarters to Britain. That is the sort of opportunity presented by HS2.

First, let me respond to the report by Sir David Higgins. He began work as chairman of HS2 in January and the first task I set him was to consider how to maximise the benefits of HS2 and manage the costs. Last year, Parliament backed the principle of a high-speed rail link to the north with 350 votes in favour and only 34 against. It is now up to us to make that happen and, given his great track record, there is no one better suited to the job than Sir David Higgins. Let me turn to his proposals.

First, on costs, Sir David has reviewed the cost estimates for constructing phase 1 and confirmed that they are realistic. The budget set by the Government in 2013 stands. As experience shows, in Britain we can build great projects on time and on budget, such as High Speed 1, Crossrail and the Olympics. At this early stage, however, before Parliament has considered the hybrid Bill, we must include a proper contingency. Of course, for popularity's sake, one option would have been to slash the contingency and claim that as a saving. Sir David said that that would be wrong and I agree, but, as he also says, with growing certainty comes growing confidence. That will be the stage at which we can bring down the contingency.

Let me turn to Sir David's second proposal. I have heard many hon. Members asking why we cannot build in the north sooner. I agree, and we can. Sir David's report suggests opening the new line to a new hub station in Crewe six years earlier than planned. Direct trains will of course be able to run off HS2 lines to serve places such as Stoke, Liverpool, Manchester, north Wales and Scotland, and faster too, and the line to Crewe sooner would mean journeys that are shorter than they would be under phase 1—journeys that are quicker to Manchester, quicker to Liverpool and quicker

to Scotland. That is a welcome proposal and I am commissioning HS2 Ltd to undertake the work to allow it to be considered in detail, but that must be an acceleration of phase 2 and not an alternative. Sir David says that we must make the most of this investment so that as many towns and cities as possible benefit. I agree, and we will make sure that that happens.

Let me turn to Sir David's third proposal, for the south-eastern end of the line. Our priority must be to get the benefits to the midlands and the north as soon as possible. In short, we must put the money and time where they can do the most good. Sir David is clear that he does not think that the existing proposals for a HS1-HS2 link meet the test. The HS1-HS2 link proposed in the hybrid Bill has not secured consensus. It requires too many compromises in terms of its impact on freight, passengers and the community in Camden. I therefore intend to remove the link from the hybrid Bill and withdraw safeguarding as soon as possible. I will also commission a study into options for ways to improve connections to the continent, which could be built once the initial stages of HS2 are complete.

I also agree with the report that much more can be made of Euston station, not just to build something of which we can be proud but to maximise the economic potential of the line, to use a site that has been neglected and to generate private sector investment that can reduce the overall burden on the taxpayer. I will therefore ask HS2 and Network Rail to develop comprehensive proposals for the redevelopment of Euston.

Our ambitions for Euston must not, however, conflict with our commitment to control costs. I want to see a substantial private sector investment to ensure that. Let me therefore turn to the report from the HS2 growth taskforce, published last week. It comes from an impressive panel including business leaders such as Sir John Rose, Alison Nimmo and Ray O'Rourke, city leaders such as Julie Dore from Sheffield and the general secretary of the TUC, Frances O'Grady. I thank everyone involved, and especially the commercial secretary for his committed leadership. Their message is clear: we need HS2, and we need to act on how to squeeze the most jobs, skills and growth from it. The taskforce's recommendations are plain common sense. They are things that business, the Government and cities can do together, and must start doing now: on skills, proper training to make sure that our young people get the best jobs on the project; on planning, ensuring that the line brings new strength to our cities; and, on transport, making sure that we link the existing road and rail network properly to HS2 and plan investment to bring them together.

Regeneration and economic growth are vital parts of HS2. City leaders have already started to put plans in place, but the Government have a role to play, too. That is why I am asking HS2 Ltd and London and Continental Railways, which developed the King's Cross-St Pancras site, to come forward with proposals for a regeneration company that will respond to the growth taskforce's recommendations on regeneration. This matters because, as I have said before, HS2 is a project that will be built over many Parliaments—and no doubt Governments, too—and will serve many people through the generations. It is not the only answer to our transport needs, but it is a central part of the answer, and that means designing it carefully and building it right. It is about something

[Mr Patrick McLoughlin]

that works, something of which we can be proud, and something that benefits as many people and places as possible at the lowest cost.

We are on schedule to open the line in 2026 which, by the way, is exactly the date that the previous Government set in 2010, or ahead of time in the case of the Crewe proposals. The Government are keen to rise to the challenge and I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will do the same.

4.2 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance notice and early sight of the statement. May I also congratulate Sir David Higgins and Lord Deighton on their substantial and thorough reports?

Transforming rail capacity south of Birmingham and improving connectivity north of Birmingham are vital and will transform our great cities. We support HS2 because of the capacity constraints that too many commuters on our railways face. We will continue to hold the Government to account for keeping costs down on the project. We will vote in support of the hybrid Bill when the Government finally bring it to Parliament.

David Higgins has made it clear that there are significant savings to be made if Ministers get a grip of this project and stop the delays. He says:

“a lower budget for Phase One could be set at some point...but only when the legislative timetable becomes clearer and more certain.”

What steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that the phase 1 hybrid Bill is put before the House as soon as possible? The Government must now act so that the scheme can be delivered under budget.

Sir David recommended, and the Secretary of State has acted, to scrap the link between HS1 and HS2. That is welcome because the link was set to cause huge disruption to large parts of Camden. At Euston, Sir David proposes central London's biggest regeneration site, with a mix of retail, office and residential units. Given the acute affordable housing crisis in Camden, a significant proportion of any new housing must be social housing. Does the Secretary of State agree that the community and council must be fully involved in those plans?

At Old Oak Common, where significant regeneration is planned, there is as yet no decision from the Government about the relocation of the First Great Western and Heathrow Express train depots. When can we expect a decision about linking HS2 and Crossrail into the west coast main line at Old Oak Common? That is key to maximising the development potential of the area and to improving the capacity for commuter services into Euston, which is crucial if there is to be a longer construction phase at Euston. When will those three important decisions be made? What contact has the Secretary of State had with the Mayor about setting up a development corporation to take regeneration plans for Old Oak Common forwards?

Sir David has listened to concerns from cities such as Milton Keynes, Northampton, Rugby, Stoke, Leigh and—yes—my city of Wakefield about how the line will

connect to the current railway network and how their services into London can be improved. When can we expect the Government's response to those significant issues in Sir David's report?

On phase 2, we are glad that HS2 will link to future Network Rail classic rail investment and that the connections between our great northern and midland cities that we have called for have replaced the Government's previous take-it-or-leave-it approach. We want a coherent transport plan for the north and the midlands, which have been historically underfunded, and for proper east-west links between Liverpool and Manchester and Leeds and Hull. A rebalancing of railway investment into the regions to close the economic divide: that is how we maximise the benefits for the whole country from this project.

We welcome the faster construction of phase 2 to bring benefits more quickly to the northern cities and north Wales. Will the Minister tell the House when the hybrid Bill for phase 2 would need to be completed in order to get to the north-west by 2026, as Sir David recommends? Sir David also recommends that discussions between council and business leaders and the Government should be conducted on a regional rather than a bilateral basis. When do the Government envisage such meetings starting, given the imperative to work fast to reduce costs? When will the Government announce their response to the phase 2 route consultation in order to get it started more quickly?

I turn to Lord Deighton's growth taskforce report. He is correct that HS2 must become the spine for jobs, growth and regeneration in our country. His report wants cities to set up locally led delivery bodies to maximise the regeneration that High Speed 2 will bring. He warns:

“Even the very best authorities will be stretched to manage a project as complex and large as HS2”.

What help will the Government give councils whose budgets have been cut by 40% over this Parliament in order to do that? He says that land for development should be bought early before land prices rise and to reduce blight around the station sites. When will the Secretary of State set out which costs will be included in the costs of the High Speed 2 railway and which are excluded, so that councils can budget accordingly?

On transport, Lord Deighton wants the Government to set out their plans for commuter rail in non-high speed areas by the end of the year. Will the Secretary of State undertake to publish such a plan?

On skills, Lord Deighton warns that the railway work force are ageing. Some 10,000 new people are needed to work on the railways in the next five years alone, and he also states:

“Railways have an image problem.”

How does the Secretary of State plan to transform that image to entice young people from both sexes to work on the railways?

When will the site of the High Speed 2 skills college be announced? Wherever it is located, it must not be a stand-alone institution; it must reach out to cities and towns across the UK that have young people who want to work on High Speed 2. Which Minister is overseeing that skills work and how can procurement processes drive up the number of apprentices on the project?

On small and medium-sized enterprises procurement, the Minister must learn lessons from Crossrail, where SME contract numbers are high on volume, but the total value of those contracts is uncertain. We must ensure that the High Speed pound reaches all parts of the UK. It is vital that we maximise the opportunities that the new north-south line brings to our country. We are behind the project. We wait for the Government to rise to the challenge.

Mr McLoughlin: I thank the hon. Lady for her support. I am not sure how many questions she asked me, but I will try to answer the vast majority of the points she raised. There will be other points on which I shall respond to her in due course.

The right hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson) has been a long-time critic of the HS1-HS2 link. It is right that we needed not only to listen to what local communities said, but to look at how we get a better link between the two stations of Euston and St Pancras. We are talking about a fundamental redevelopment of the whole of Euston station, which I think is the right thing to do. Anybody who has looked at those three stations over the past 20 years will have seen stations, particularly St Pancras and King's Cross, where one would not really have wanted to spend any time at all. Today, they are destinations in their own right and show what can be done with proper work and careful consideration. That is why I think that a complete regeneration of Euston is necessary. I hope that we can address those problems. With regard to Old Oak Common, the Mayor has already announced his intention to set up a development corporation. I have regular meetings with him. In fact, I have one coming up this week.

It is right that we look at the overall cost, which of course is an important consideration. There is a £14 billion contingency built into the current budget of £42 billion. It has been left in place because at this early stage that is thought to be the right thing to do. One of the reasons why costs have gone up—it is important to reflect on this—is that we have taken exceptional steps to try to meet some of the environmental concerns that have been raised by many hon. Members, their constituents and communities. I do not apologise for that, because it is right that something that will be there for the next 150 years is built correctly and properly, as it will be.

The hon. Lady made an important point about skills development and the opportunities that that can bring, for example through apprenticeships. I will be looking at Crossrail, which I think has done incredibly well in trying to spread the benefits across the country, even though it is a London project. It benefits London in particular, but it also brings great benefits to the United Kingdom and the regions. I will also be looking at how Crossrail has tried to improve apprenticeships and develop skills across the industry. By the time it ends, the shovels will be on the sites for HS2, so hopefully there will be some cross-over.

This should send out a message to young people that the railway industry has a great future. What has happened to the industry over the past 20 years, with the number of passenger journeys rising from 750 million to 1.5 billion and continual growth each year, shows people who want a long-term future that the industry certainly

offers good opportunities and work prospects. That is why it is important. I will write to hon. Lady in due course on the other points she raised.

Mr Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): The Higgins report is excellent and fully justifies Sir David's appointment. However, can my right hon. Friend give the House a categorical assurance that the money that is to be spent on High Speed 2 will in no way affect the record billions being spent in control period 5 on the conventional railway and what is likely to be spent in control periods 6, 7 and 8?

Mr McLoughlin: May I first put on the record my appreciation for the contribution my right hon. Friend made to this project? He was also the last Minister to meet Hitachi in Japan and so might have had a great influence on its decision to move its rail headquarters to the UK. I congratulate him on that. He is absolutely right; some £38.5 billion will be invested in the rail network over the next five years, excluding the money being spent on HS2. It is absolutely essential that we make that long-term investment in our railways.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): The reports from Sir David Higgins and the taskforce are very important documents. However, following the question from the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns), how can the Secretary of State demonstrate that investment in High Speed 2 will go together with investment in the existing classic line so that the whole network benefits?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Lady, as Chair of the Transport Committee, has spent a lot of time looking at that, and indeed has taken evidence from me, Network Rail and Sir David Higgins over recent months. She will know that there is huge investment. In her city, for example, in May this year we will see the first express train running from Liverpool to Manchester, which I welcome. It is part of the northern hub, with over £500 million of investment linking Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and, eventually, Hull.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): It is a reflection of the poor genesis of the project that, four years down the line, the Secretary of State is still making fundamental adjustments to the plans for HS2. It does not matter how many studies or justifications he puts forward, he needs to understand that for many of my constituents, it is like putting lipstick on a pig. However glossy the lipstick, HS2 is still a pig.

I am sad that the Secretary of State can stand at the Dispatch Box and say that he respects the environment when we are still not to have full tunnelling under the whole area of outstanding natural beauty in the Chilterns and when neither Front-Bench team have had the decency to talk about compensation. My constituents, and many people up and down the line, still do not know what the compensation package is, and it is about time that he came to the Dispatch Box and announced the generous and fair compensation that the Prime Minister promised.

Mr McLoughlin: I hope very soon to be able to make announcements about the Government's proposals for compensation. I would just say to my right hon. Friend that on one hand I am attacked for listening to people,

[Mr McLoughlin]

and then on the other hand I am attacked for not listening to people. I suppose that is just one of the problems of dealing with big infrastructure projects—wherever we take them, there will always be people who are directly affected, and they will not be convinced of the necessity of them. However, I am convinced of the necessity of high-speed rail for our cities in the north.

Frank Dobson (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's decision to abandon the ridiculous proposal for the High Speed 2-High Speed 1 link across Camden Town, and I also welcome Opposition Front Benchers' support on that matter. However, I cannot say the same about the proposal to go ahead with an even bigger redevelopment of Euston than was proposed before. It will mean that the homes of more than 500 people will be destroyed, and that the lives of about 5,000 people will be subjected for a decade to the noise, filth and disruption of the biggest engineering project in Europe. I hope that, even at this stage, at a time when looking back, looking forward and coming to different decisions is apparently still on the cards, the Government will at least consider having the initial London terminus at Old Oak Common.

Mr McLoughlin: The right hon. Gentleman has been consistent on the HS1-HS2 link. I do not need to tell him about the difference that has been made to the area around King's Cross and St Pancras in his constituency—it is plainly there for all to see. Those of us who use St Pancras station faced a lot of inconvenience at the time when that development was going on, but given what we see today, it was worth it.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that Lichfield will be badly affected by HS2, with phase 1 ending and phase 2 beginning in the constituency. As a consequence, a line running from east to west will join what was to be the end of phase 1 with the west coast main line. That work will transform the leafy lanes of Lichfield into the marshalling yards of Lichfield. What hope can he give my constituents that the temporary east-west line will no longer have to go ahead, and that there will be significant improvements in the environmental plans proposed for Lichfield?

Mr McLoughlin: I am always ready to listen to my hon. Friend's comments and points on these matters. I believe that, overall, HS2 will bring great benefit to the midlands, including Birmingham, which is an important city close to his own city of Lichfield. It is a matter of ensuring that areas such as his can also benefit from high-speed rail.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): The Higgins report specifically highlights poor east-west connectivity as a problem on the rail network, such as that between Manchester and Leeds, to which I would add that between Manchester and Sheffield, which is directly relevant to Stalybridge and Hyde. Will the Secretary of State go into more detail about how he plans to integrate Network Rail's existing investment plans with the relevant phase of HS2, specifically to address the east-west connectivity issue?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman mentions the rail line that goes through the top end of my constituency, so I am familiar with his points. Our plans for the northern hub will greatly enhance the services he receives, as will ensuring that we build them in to benefit from HS2, which is possible. On Thursday a number of parliamentary colleagues will come on the high-speed Javelin line. It goes to Ashford and continues to service other parts of Kent, and it has been very successful.

Sir John Randall (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for making the statement to the House. My constituents and residents in the London borough of Hillingdon look forward eagerly to the statements on compensation. As I am sure he is aware, the borough of Hillingdon still has some outstanding matters, and the most pressing—which I ask him to look at urgently—is the relocation of Hillingdon outdoor activities centre. That is a valuable asset, and we must resolve its future shortly.

Mr McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend has never lost an opportunity to make that case for Hillingdon, and I assure him that I will look into it. I reassure him that I hope to say something about compensation in the very near future.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): These are two excellent reports, and the Secretary of State is right to talk about ensuring that rail links help to provide the economic benefits from the high-speed links. When lines in the north of England are electrified, can he guarantee that, following the fiasco of the TransPennine Express, there will be electric trains to run on them?

Mr McLoughlin: Before we start talking about fiascos and the TransPennine Express, I chide the hon. Gentleman for not pushing a bit further and getting more electrification when he sat on the Government Benches, and getting more rolling stock—[*Interruption.*] He says he did, but he did not succeed. We are doing it, we are succeeding, and we will order the rolling stock.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I support linking our northern cities with high-speed rail, but does the Secretary of State understand the concerns on the east side of the Pennines about the announcement of the Crewe hub? All along we were given assurances that the link to Sheffield and Leeds would happen at the same time as Manchester. Will he commit to looking at the “High Speed UK” proposal that links more cities more quickly and for considerably less cost?

Mr McLoughlin: There is a recommendation on the Crewe hub and I have not made a full decision on it yet. A consultation is going on about the Y section from Birmingham to Manchester and Birmingham to Leeds. It is important I do that properly, which is exactly what I will do.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): The recommendation for the line to reach Crewe by 2026 is welcome, but does it allow for any possibility of the other sections of HS2 further north being completed earlier—and, if not, why not? How does the Higgins study impact on the study being

carried by the UK and Scottish Governments to ensure that the benefits of HS2 reach Scotland as soon as possible?

Mr McLoughlin: The extension to Crewe will have a positive impact on Scotland. As I have said, trains will be able to continue running on, and the fact that they will go further up will have a positive benefit. That should reassure the hon. Gentleman.

Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con): As the Secretary of State knows, my constituents are completely against these proposals and have been from the beginning. Furthermore, they are looking for proper compensation on principles that he knows I put forward in amendments to the project. Will he consider increasing compensation in line with the criteria that have already been provided to him in my amendments?

Mr McLoughlin: The full consultation process for the part of the line that goes through my hon. Friend's constituency is ongoing, and no final decision has been made. I hope to be able to say something about the compensation relating to phase 1 very shortly.

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): May I thank the Secretary of State for the report and congratulate Sir David Higgins on it? Does the Secretary of State accept that the data on page 8 of Sir David Higgins's report, which show that investment per head in London and the south-east has been running at least three times that of any other region, emphasise his point that this is not a zero-sum game between HS2 investment and investment in other services but rather the reverse—that this investment, properly co-ordinated with control period 6, should beget further investment in rail services across the north?

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman; I think he is right. I will not chastise him about when this huge extra expenditure in London was first committed to—we will leave that to one side. What is important is getting the long term investment in infrastructure right for all the northern cities. That is vital to all of us who care about those cities, and those connections, and about making sure that they have the right opportunities. As I said in my statement, this kind of project does not happen over one Parliament but runs over several Parliaments. That is why it is so important to have as much cross-party support as possible for such a big scheme. I believe that this will be an evolutionary change in transport. As I said, it will do for future generations what the motorways have done for today's generation.

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): My right hon. Friend will clearly come to the House in due course with a statement on compensation. Will he give an undertaking that during the proceedings on the hybrid Bill he and ministerial colleagues in the Treasury will be willing to listen to suggestions on how the compensation scheme can be further refined, improved and targeted?

Mr McLoughlin: Of course I am always prepared to listen; that is partly what we have been doing in consulting on the existing scheme. People often come forward with

proposals that increase the cost and then complain that the cost has been increased, so it is quite important that we get the balance right on these projects.

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): In view of the Secretary of State's commitment on Government funding to look at the prospects for opening up the line to Crewe that much earlier, what are the implications for the alternative proposal made by Stoke-on-Trent?

Mr McLoughlin: Sir David has made a recommendation to me and I am asking for work to be done on it. It is right that I then consider that alongside the representations that have been made by other cities in the north as part of the final consultation process. I am still engaged in that process, and I will do so.

Mark Reckless (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I am all in favour of better links with Europe, at least in this context. Does the Secretary of State accept, however, that most of the demand for an HS1-HS2 link will be domestic? Will he learn from the sub-optimal interchange at Stratford and consider installing a travelator to get people quickly and easily between St Pancras and Euston?

Mr McLoughlin: One of the problems at the moment is that people cannot get to the northern cities by high-speed trains, yet they can get to Europe in that way. I want the people of Birmingham and Manchester to have the same opportunities as those who wish to travel from London to Paris or London to Brussels. My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the need to have a good link between Euston and St Pancras. Sir David says in his report, and has said to me, that that can be done at a much more efficient rate than what is currently planned under the High Speed 1-High Speed 2 link, which will now be removed from the Bill.

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I welcome the Government's continued commitment to the Old Oak Common interchange, but I am alarmed that they are handing control of the whole area, including Wormwood Scrubs, to the Mayor of London, with instructions that any development must exclude separate funding schemes. Some 24,000 new homes are planned for Old Oak. How will the Government ensure that some of these are affordable homes for Londoners, and not the empty luxury flats for foreign investors that the Mayor prefers?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman is wrong about what the Mayor prefers. I think I am right in saying that he was one of the supporters of a Mayor for London. Perhaps he just does not like the democratic outcome and the Mayor he has today. I think the Mayor knows exactly what is needed at Old Oak Common and will act on it.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): As someone born in Crewe, I add my gratitude for any proposals to improve this transport renaissance. Will the Secretary of State clarify whether the connection to the west coast main line at Crewe will obviate the need for a connection at Wigan, as was proposed earlier? I do not wish to restrict the shadow Health Secretary's future freedom of manoeuvre in this regard.

Mr McLoughlin: I did not realise that my hon. Friend originally came from Crewe, which given its connections is a very important railway town, always has been and always will be. I will want to consider his point about the later connections on to the west coast main line in the light of Sir David Higgins's recommendations.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Given that Coventry will not benefit from high-speed rail, what will the Secretary of State do about the potential investment vacuum in Coventry and similar cities, and what will he do about negative equity?

Mr McLoughlin: I very much believe and hope that HS2 will be beneficial to Coventry. The entire west midlands benefits from HS2 and Coventry is certainly part of that wider west midlands conurbation. I want to see greater interconnection between the cities, and we have the time to plan and get that right. In this control period and the next one for Network Rail, we will be able to build on certain proposals that I know Coventry wants. Representatives of Coventry have been to see me and made recommendations about certain line improvements that they want to see.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): KPMG predicts benefits of more than £200 million for Worcestershire's economy from HS2, so I broadly welcome the statement, but can the Secretary of State reassure my constituents that nothing in it precludes investment in faster trains between London and Worcester to address the absurdity that a journey of 130 miles, which took under two hours in 1910, takes more than two and a half hours today?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend is right. One of the problems that HS2 addresses in a way that no other proposals put before us will address is capacity. I very much hope that it will free up other journeys so that we can have faster journey times from cities such as Worcester.

Cathy Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister will be aware that concerns have been expressed about the time for redevelopment at Euston and the potential impact on the west coast main line from Glasgow. Will he say more about that and about any impact on the Caledonian Sleeper service, which is important to the Scottish economy?

Mr McLoughlin: I fully accept that while huge works are going on at a station, there is disruption, so one of the questions that must be asked in the planning phase that HS2 is currently going through is how we minimise that. Inconvenience was caused at St Pancras for a number of years while redevelopment was going on, but, as I said earlier, nobody doubts that it was worth going through the pain as we have a far better station than we had previously, and I very much hope we can do the same for Euston.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): As the Transport Secretary knows, my constituency is a major hub for the rail freight industry. The growth taskforce suggested that the Government should invite the rail freight industry to set out how best it can take advantage of extra capacity on the existing network. Can my right hon. Friend outline what plans he has for this?

Mr McLoughlin: One thing that is curtailing growth in the freight market in the UK is the capacity problems. I hope that, by freeing up capacity, we will see a lot more freight travelling on our railway lines. I urge the freight industry to come forward with proposals on how we can improve the situation, which I think we can.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): In the light of the taskforce's recommendations, will the Secretary of State confirm when he will set out the Government's plan for how HS2 will affect the rail services of cities that are not on the route, such as Newcastle?

Mr McLoughlin: Newcastle will benefit from faster trains running up to Leeds and being able to continue on their current routes. The hon. Lady is right that more work needs to be done on that. It will be done and I will come to the House when it is complete.

Stephen Mosley (City of Chester) (Con): I welcome the report and the Secretary of State's statement. Opponents of HS2 in the north-west have claimed that although it might be beneficial for Manchester, it might suck investment out of other towns and cities in the north-west. Does my right hon. Friend agree that a new regional hub at Crewe will allow the benefits of HS2 to roll out to places such as Liverpool, north Wales and, of course, Chester, and support economic growth in those areas?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend represents a great city, which I have visited on many occasions. It will receive benefits from Crewe. The Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mr Timpson), who joins me on the Front Bench, has made it clear that the station will not only be very important for his constituency, but will serve the whole of the north-west, including the great city of Chester.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The Labour Welsh Government recently changed their view on the Barnett consequential from HS2, following questions from the *Financial Times* on why they were not backing Plaid Cymru's position on a fair share for Wales. What representations has the Secretary of State received from the Welsh Government or the official Opposition to demand a fair share for my country?

Mr McLoughlin: There is no doubt that Wales will benefit from HS2. North Wales, in particular, will benefit from the proposals in Sir David's latest report to build the line faster further north, because Crewe is a major interchange that serves north Wales.

Eric Ollerenshaw (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Con): If I understand the Secretary of State's announcement correctly, high-speed rail will get nearer to Lancashire earlier, which obviously is a good thing. What implications does that have for earlier planning for an HS3 that goes beyond Manchester and Leeds?

Mr McLoughlin: If my hon. Friend does not mind, I think that that is a debate for another occasion. He is right that HS2 will have a major impact on the cities it serves and that we will have to go further as a result.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): Despite the reports, it remains the case that the initial preferred route for the second part of HS2 will devastate parts of Warrington, with the loss of businesses and jobs, and will possibly give us a worse service in the long run. Does not the proposal of a regional hub at Crewe give more impetus to the suggestion by Warrington borough council and others of a preferred route that would be of huge benefit to the western part of the region?

Mr McLoughlin: As I have said, a period of consultation is going on and I am listening to the representations. No firm decision has yet been taken. The Higgins report states what Sir David believes would be the best way forward at the moment. I will certainly consider that, but I will also consider other recommendations and representations.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): I very much welcome the cross-party support for this transformative project. On the Higgins report and the proposed new Crewe interchange, will the Secretary of State do everything he can to give clarity and certainty to the Yorkshire leg of the Y, so that we can crack on with investing in and regenerating the areas around the proposed new stations at Leeds and Sheffield, and along the branch lines, such as the one from Huddersfield to Sheffield which goes through my constituency, that will bring better connectivity?

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is asking us to take on board the wider implications of HS2 across the area that it serves. I will certainly do that.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State echoes Sir David Higgins's call for the benefits to be brought to the north-west and north of England faster. Other than the Crewe interchange—which I welcome, but which should not be seen as the only solution—what other avenues is he looking at? Will he speak with leaders of local authorities in places such as Manchester to bring forward funding and proposals sooner rather than later?

Mr McLoughlin: I am in touch with Sir Richard Leese, the leader of Manchester city council about the issues. Manchester has made some imaginative proposals on how the station should be built alongside Piccadilly station, and they are being looked at. There are good communications between the northern leaders and the Government on this issue.

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): My right hon. Friend knows that the people of the far south-west do not speak much about high-speed rail: our focus is simply on rail and getting reconnected to London after the storms of the winter. Can he assure us that, at the same time as spending all this money on the north and midlands, he will have sufficient to invest in an alternative or additional route between Plymouth and Exeter as soon as it has been identified by Network Rail?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend has long been an advocate of better rail services in the south-west. Following the storms, I said that I had asked Network Rail to do some detailed work on possible alternatives for the

south-west, and that is happening. Network Rail is doing a huge amount of work to ensure the swift reopening of the Dawlish line, which is on course to happen on 4 April.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): In congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson) on his tenacity and hailing the relief of Camden as a consummation devoutly to be wished, may I tell the Secretary of State that the dispassionate observer would still feel that the lack of connectivity between HS1 and HS2 represents a problem for the future? Will he give thought to the possibility of an underground connection from Old Oak Common?

Mr McLoughlin: Many suggestions have been made for the connection between HS1 and HS2. First, all the high-speed trains are likely to stop at Old Oak Common, which will also be served by Crossrail, and secondly Euston and St Pancras stations are not that far apart.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): HS2 could have real benefits for Cornwall, especially if the First Great Western train depot at Old Oak Common were relocated to Penzance. My right hon. Friend has received proposals from me, First Great Western and the local enterprise partnership. When will he let us know his decision?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend raises one of the many issues that need to be considered and resolved, but Old Oak Common is likely to become a major new transport focus for future generations, and will have an important role to play. Getting the maximum development in that area will also be very important.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and declare my interest, in that HS2 phase 2 will go directly under my house. Will he confirm the future journey times from Euston to Manchester airport in my constituency, now that phase 1 has been extended to Crewe?

Mr McLoughlin: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House. I am delighted to see him in his place, but I wish that his predecessor was still there—as I am sure we all do. He was a big supporter of HS2 and believed that it would bring tremendous benefits to his city of Manchester—I agree.

If we build to Crewe, as suggested by Sir David Higgins, it will result in immediate time improvements for Manchester, but I know that what people want to see is the connection to Manchester airport as well as to the city itself.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Speeding up delivery for this major infrastructure project for the north is to be welcomed, but—as my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) and for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) suggested—deep concern is felt in west Yorkshire that economic advantage may come for the west side of the Pennines earlier than it will in Yorkshire if the extension goes beyond Birmingham before it goes to Manchester and then Leeds. I urge my right hon. Friend to engage more with the west Yorkshire councils to ensure that they have a strong, positive and

[Alec Shelbrooke]

simple message about the advantages of HS2, as their colleagues on the west side of the Pennines did, and which I am sure has influenced Sir David Higgins in his recommendation to extend on that side first, rather than ours.

Mr McLoughlin: I hear what my hon. Friend says. There has, rightly, been involvement: Julie Dore, the leader of Sheffield city council, was a member of the taskforce. The taskforce has stated that cities need to prepare, so that we can consider the long-term consequences of overall transport investment. They need to prepare for the benefits that HS2 will bring to their areas.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State used the two words “north Wales” in his statement. He will have my support for the speedy development at Crewe to link to north Wales. Does he accept that this is about not just speed, but capacity? What steps will he take to increase capacity to north Wales, and, by extension, to Ireland?

Mr McLoughlin: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Too many people talk about high-speed trains as though they are just about speed. They are not just about speed. When Lord Adonis launched the initial plans he talked a lot, as I have done since I have been Secretary of State for Transport, about the need for additional capacity. One of the biggest reasons for the new railway line is capacity on links between north and south, and the extra capacity we need at Euston. He is absolutely right: we need to ensure that that capacity serves north Wales well.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): The success and efficacy of HS2 in the north-east would be greatly improved if we reopened the Leamside line in future control periods. Will the Transport team look at this crucial improvement, and consider creating the HS2 skills academy in the north-east?

Mr McLoughlin: Surprisingly, my hon. Friend is the first Member today to mention locating the skills academy in his region. That is probably because other Members have been asking questions on the details and might

have felt that they would be testing your patience, Mr Speaker, if they also made a bid for the academy. The skills academy is essential to getting the message across to young people that engineering and the railways offer good opportunities for them in the long term.

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): My constituency of Darlington is the indisputable birthplace of the railways—I think there are no Members for Stockton present—and my constituents currently enjoy a very good service to London. They are delighted that people in Leeds will soon be able to enjoy a good service too, but are concerned that that must not be at the expense of investment in the east coast main line. Will the Secretary of State commit to that not being the case?

Mr McLoughlin: Indeed I will. We are committed to providing brand new rolling stock for the east coast main line: one of the biggest orders placed for the railways has been signed off by the Government. I am delighted we have done that.

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): Sir David Higgins stresses the importance of existing lines and HS2 working together. Will the Secretary of State reconsider the current plans for trains from Scotland to Birmingham and London to bypass Manchester and Leeds? Is this an opportunity to reconsider the possibility of linking them up?

Mr McLoughlin: It is essential that all these suggestions are considered. HS2 will fundamentally change capacity on our railway lines. It will give us many more opportunities not just for passenger numbers, but for more freight. In the past 10 years, there has been a 60% increase in freight. The issue of capacity is what is holding back a further increase. The west coast main line is the busiest railway line in Europe. An increase in capacity will free up a lot of other services and opportunities.

Mr Speaker: I am pleased to be able to advise the House that 37 Back Benchers were able to contribute in 37 minutes of exclusively Back-Bench time. I suggest that the Secretary of State issue his manual on pithy replies to all members of the Cabinet, who would profit greatly from reading that text. The journey time was very satisfactory.

Contaminated Blood (Support for Infected and Bereaved Persons)

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

4.49 pm

Mr Tom Clarke (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a committee to advise on haemophilia; to make provision in relation to blood donations; to establish a scheme for NHS Compensation Cards for people who have been treated with and infected by contaminated blood or blood products; to make provision for the financial compensation of people treated with and infected by contaminated blood and blood products and their widows, dependants and carers; to establish a review of the support available for people who have been treated with and infected by contaminated blood or blood products; and for connected purposes.

Let me first pay tribute to the late Lord Morris of Manchester, who not only campaigned on this highly disturbing issue, but persuaded another place to pass a Bill similar to mine, which I sought to promote in the House of Commons but which ran out of time. As well as paying tribute to Alf Morris for his huge commitment to those who suffered from problems arising from haemophilia and contaminated blood—he was indeed a tenacious fighter—I want to mention his successor in Wythenshawe and Sale East, our late and dedicated friend Paul Goggins, who held the most recent debate on this matter in Westminster Hall on 29 October last year. I also thank the Haemophilia Society, as well as Members in all parts of the House, for the support that they have given to an ongoing and thoroughly necessary campaign.

Let me say first that although the Bill applies to this Parliament, it is entirely appropriate for a Scottish Member to feel comfortable about advocating its provisions. I want to see an end to injustice throughout the United Kingdom, and I believe that the Bill runs in tandem with our expectations of the Penrose inquiry, which is currently taking place in Scotland, where similar injustices simply have to be put right.

I ask the House to consider a measure that was drafted to give recognition and support to one of the most needful minorities in Britain today. A group of nearly 5,000 people disabled by haemophilia—a rare lifelong blood disorder requiring continuous medical treatment—have been infected by contaminated blood and blood products used in their NHS treatment. Ninety-five per cent. of those people were infected with hepatitis C, and 25% were infected with both HIV and hepatitis C. Sadly, of those almost 5,000 people, at least 1,757 have since died from the effects of the viruses.

Apart from the obvious impact on health, such conditions have implications for people's ability to work full time, if at all. They face many burdens, and extra costs that are far too high for many of them to cope with. People who are suffering in these dreadful circumstances—and we should also bear in mind the impact on their families—have waited far too long for the remedies that I believe are in my Bill.

In January 2011, two years after the independent inquiry led by the late Lord Archer, the Government concluded their review of the support available. Although we welcomed the lump sum and annual payments that

were awarded to the 20% of sufferers who had reached stage 2 of hepatitis C—which is, essentially, cirrhosis of the liver—that clearly did not go far enough, given the 80% of patients who are not supported and who carry very physically painful burdens.

John Prior, a 39-year-old who lives in Moodiesburn in my constituency, contracted hepatitis C from contaminated blood in 1994, when he was just 20 years old. When I spoke to him at the weekend, he told me of the difficulties and stigma involved in having hepatitis C. He had been told for many years that he did not have hepatitis A or B, and was lucky not to have HIV. Information on his particular case was withheld for long periods. He and so many other people are clearly being penalised again and again. They had the misfortune to find themselves with haemophilia, and their condition was then made worse when they approached the NHS.

Philip Dolan is a former vice chair of the UK Haemophilia Society. He has haemophilia himself. He explained to me that he asked his consultant in 1991 whether he had hepatitis C and was told that in 1978 he had been tested without his permission for hepatitis. His doctors informed him that “We knew in 1978 that you had non-A and non-B hepatitis,” hence he sadly had been diagnosed with hepatitis C and was not informed.

Like many others, Philip recently received a letter from the NHS and was told that he may have received a blood donation from an individual who later died from variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. That raises profound questions for Philip and those others, given that there is no known cure for that condition.

It cannot be right that 80% of the sufferers involved receive no financial support. It cannot be right that many are left without counselling and that there is such an absence of transparency. It cannot be right that in Yorkhill children's hospital in Glasgow many of those who received contaminated blood were infected with HIV and that a large number of those patients' medical notes were simply lost. It cannot be right that 365 patients throughout the UK have had the same experience.

Too much has been hidden for too long. That is why I am proposing to establish a committee to advise on contaminated blood; I believe it should have comprehensive powers and the right to ask whatever questions it feels are appropriate. My Bill seeks to establish a scheme for NHS compensation cards that would allow those affected to receive freely, if needed, prescription drugs, counselling, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and other therapies allied to medicine and home nursing.

It is essential that we create a better and more comprehensive screening programme to establish what viruses the patients may or may not have contracted. It is essential to make provision for financial compensation for people treated with, and infected by, contaminated blood or blood products and their widows, dependants and carers. It is essential to establish a review of the support available to people treated with, and infected by, contaminated blood or blood products.

The truth is that Britain compares very unfavourably in these matters with other countries—the Irish Republic, for example. It, too, had an inquiry, as a result of which comprehensive and substantial support was given, including the underwriting of mortgages and travel insurance. It also gave upwards of €300,000 in one-off payments to each of the patients affected. The comparisons are bad

[Mr Tom Clarke]

enough, but those decisions were taken 13 years ago. The truth is that sufferers in Britain have been incredibly patient and are now rightly telling us that they have waited for far too long.

It is important that we address the unmet needs of infected patients and bereaved families. We have to be honest about highly disturbing administrative shortcomings, serious omissions and a failure to inform Parliament of the facts as to why provision made in other countries is so much better than here in Britain.

For us, justice postponed is justice denied. I very much welcome the fact that Lady Morris has been following our proceedings this afternoon, and I hope my Bill does justice to her husband's memory and the people whom he spent a lifetime serving.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered.

That Mr Tom Clarke, Mike Kane, Mr Nicholas Brown, Sandra Osborne, Mr Jim Cunningham, John Healey, Alistair Burt, Ann McKechnie, Jason McCartney, Mr Charles Kennedy and Joan Walley present the Bill.

Mr Tom Clarke accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 June and to be printed (Bill 187).

Ways and Means

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Debate resumed (Order, 20 March).

Question again proposed,

That,—

(1) It is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance.

(2) This Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting a supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding an amount of tax;

(c) for any relief, other than a relief that:

(i) so far as it is applicable to goods, applies to goods of every description, and

(ii) so far as it is applicable to services, applies to services of every description.

5.1 pm

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles): Before I start, may I say what a pleasure it is to see the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) replying to the debate? The House had an opportunity last week to express its great affection for his father. But no matter how distinguished or old a person is when they depart, to lose a parent, as those of us who have lost a parent understand, is a bitter blow. I just wanted the right hon. Gentleman to know that we express our deep condolences to him and his family at this very difficult time, and we wish him very well.

By sticking to our long-term economic plan, we have brought the deficit down by a third, we have helped a record number of people into work and we are continuing to boost Britain's resilient economic growth. This is a Budget that literally places new pounds in the pockets of taxpayers. It is creating opportunity and putting Britain on a path to a secure future, and it will reward pensioners, savers and hard-working families. It has drawn a clear distinction between a coalition Government doing everything in their power to bolster Britain's recovery, and a Labour party that just offers more borrowing, more debt, more taxes, and ducking the major challenge.

We want to see a fair and fast recovery across the country. This can only be achieved by galvanising all forms of growth—whether inside a local enterprise zone or on a building site—and by firing up businesses and home builders, getting them investing, exporting and creating jobs. Local economies are providing the solid foundation for a national recovery. The economy is stronger and more resilient, and is rewarding the hard-working British public.

The Budget has recognised those who were so badly affected by such poor winter weather. Some £300 million has already been announced to support the individuals, businesses and councils that were hardest hit by the flooding and storms. The Chancellor has made available an additional £140 million—money that will go towards immediate repairs to, and maintenance of, damaged

flood defences across Britain. The £200 million pothole challenge fund will fill holes in the road that have already been a blight to road users.

Getting these communities back on their feet after such a devastating period of weather remains a high priority across government.

Mr John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Those are very welcome announcements. Is my right hon. Friend also going to take action to stop rapacious councils making a misery of the lives of normally law-abiding motorists who slightly overstay their welcome at parking places and are then treated as if they were criminals? I am sure it would lift confidence if they were spared some of the excess.

Mr Pickles: My right hon. Friend and I are as one on that matter. He will recall that the Government have consulted on this and on other issues related to parking, and that the consultation period has recently ended. We hope to make an announcement in the very near future.

New measures in the Budget will also help to support the building of a further 200,000 new homes for hard-working people, on top of the work we have already done to kick-start house building. New house building and construction output in England is now at its highest level since 2008, and new housing construction orders are at their highest levels since 2007. More than 170,000 affordable homes have been delivered since 2010, and £20 billion has been invested in affordable housing over the spending review period.

More council housing has been built under this coalition Government than in all the 13 years of the previous Government. I honestly do not understand why Labour Governments do not build council houses. Since the last quarter of the last century, the two really big builders of houses have been the Thatcher Administration and this coalition Government.

The number of first-time buyers is at its highest since 2007, and mortgage arrears at their lowest since the Bank of England's figures began in 2007. The number of empty homes is at its lowest rate since records began and, in the last year, new housing registrations rose by 30% in England and by a massive 60% in London. In fact, the number of new homes registered in London last year was the highest since electronic records began more than 26 years ago.

By contrast, new home registrations fell in Labour-run Wales. House builders have shifted their business across the border to England because of the Welsh Government's anti-business policies. This is due to Labour's extra red tape, and to its botched implementation of home ownership schemes. By contrast, thanks to this Government, more than 17,000 people have already bought a home through Help to Buy. Overwhelmingly, these are first-time buyers, and they are mainly outside London and the south-east. This shows how we are supporting all parts of the country, north and south. Help to Buy is a key part of our long-term economic plan, giving thousands more people the security and independence that comes from owning their own home.

The Budget's pension reforms will offer freedom of choice for people who work hard. It would be helpful if the right hon. Member for Leeds Central could clarify whether the Opposition support these reforms, or whether

some ambiguity still exists. Our pension reforms, such as allowing the newly retired to pay off their mortgage and be liberated from the banks, will also lead to greater security in old age. I do not agree with the doom-mongers who say that this will somehow lead to a problem with buy to let. This Government are dramatically expanding the opportunities for institutional investment in the private rented sector, through guarantees and our build to rent schemes. These offer the opportunity for savers to invest in new built rented accommodation and to receive long-term, stable returns from the property market.

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): I have a genuine question for the Secretary of State. If someone used their ability to draw down their pension to pay off their mortgage, have the Government considered the impact that that might have if they were to require social care assistance in the subsequent years?

Mr Pickles: We have to understand that people who save up for their retirement have worked hard to put together a nest egg and are therefore unlikely to squander it. We should trust people to put together their own schemes. This move has been widely welcomed across the industry and by pensioners groups. Indeed, it has been widely welcomed by everyone but the hon. Lady.

Sheila Gilmore *rose*—

Mr Pickles: No, the hon. Lady has had her chance. That's it.

We are also ensuring that small and medium-sized house builders get a share of our housing revolution. A new £525 million finance fund will deliver 15,000 houses on smaller sites. We are cutting red tape, too. Today, we have published our proposals for scaling back section 106 charges on small home builders. We are introducing an exemption from section 106 tariffs for self-builders and extensions, building on our exemptions already delivered from the community infrastructure levy. Yet again, the Labour party has not been clear about whether it supports cutting these stealth taxes on self-builders. Self-builders will also benefit from further steps to free up land for self-build; a £150 million investment fund for custom-build plots; and a new right to a plot and to build from councils. Further planning reforms will help get empty and under-used buildings back into use. Those build on the success of our "office to residential" planning reforms, measures the Labour party opposed, despite the fact that they are providing new homes on brownfield sites in our towns and cities.

We are also supporting the first garden city for a generation at Ebbsfleet—decisive action and investment that Labour failed to deliver. The original announcement was made in John Prescott's 2003 sustainable communities plan, but the Labour party failed to build at Ebbsfleet.

Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the good thing about Ebbsfleet is that it commands the near unanimous support of the local community—of Members of Parliament, councillors and local citizens—which is very important for a project of this size? Does he also agree that speculative developments such as those in my constituency and in Arundel and South Downs produced by Mayfield are entirely unwelcome and command no local support at all?

Mr Pickles: My right hon. Friend has carefully, and with his customary style, signposted where developers should go, from his constituency to parts of Kent. The top-down eco-towns built nothing but resentment, but this Government are working with communities to support large-scale development. As he said, this works only if local councils are in favour, and we work with local developers and with the local community to build something together in a proper partnership.

Mr Redwood: My right hon. Friend might like to know that about a decade ago I wrote a pamphlet called “Thames Reach”, recommending a new town in the Ebbsfleet area. I recommended it to the Labour Government, as I am full of generous good ideas and thought they might want to take it up. I think they agreed with it, but they did absolutely nothing. Can he explain why?

Mr Pickles: No, I cannot explain why. I suspect that my right hon. Friend’s reputation as a scourge from the right may have put the Labour Government off. I suspect they never got further than the title page, but had they gone on they would have seen some very sensible suggestions. We are free from that prejudice and, of course, he is an inspiration to us all.

Further support will come in due course from the second round of the local infrastructure fund and a prospectus on support for locally led garden cities. Increased output, increased supply and increased jobs, with stable recovery, low interest rates, and support for firms and sites of all size—we have got Britain building again. Labour’s threats of land grabs and a new development tax on house builders would cut the level of house building and undermine investment in complex land assembly projects. Against a backdrop of anti-business sentiment, perhaps epitomised by the Labour Department for Communities and Local Government team’s campaign against free Waitrose coffee, it is no surprise that this week’s *Investors Chronicle* warns savers to sell their shares in house builders if Labour were to win the election. That is not going to build more homes; it is a recipe for stagnation and for unemployment. As Wales shows, Labour’s anti-business dogma will have a chilling effect on jobs and the economy.

By contrast, this Government welcome enterprise and the free market. Enterprise zones have led the way in creating jobs all over the country, as well as helping the UK to become world leaders in a range of technologies and for inward investment.

Mr Brooks Newmark (Braintree) (Con): On the subject of jobs, my right hon. Friend might be interested to know that not a single Labour Government have left power with more jobs than when they came in. Not only have this Government created 1.7 million jobs in the past four years, but the Red Book is predicting another 1.5 million jobs in the next five years.

Mr Pickles: I am not sure whether I was aware of that. I am surprised but not shocked by the revelation. It is a good job that we have had an opportunity to make that difference to the British economy.

Enterprise zones have led the way in creating jobs all over the country as well as in helping the UK to become a world leader in a range of technologies and for inward

investment. The existing 24 zones have created 7,500 jobs, and multinational companies have been tempted to the UK thanks to our business rate and simplified planning offers and other financial benefits.

To sustain that momentum, we have extended the business rate discount to 2018, offering up to £55,000 off business rates a year for five years, and extended the enhanced capital allowances incentive for those zones that have it. That includes Northern Ireland’s first enterprise zone, which is being established close to the university of Ulster campus near Coleraine. That measure comes on top of the business rates announcement in the Budget for small firms and local shops. By backing new and developing businesses and offering exclusive packages to entice new investment, we are confident that enterprise zones will carry on creating jobs and specialist local economies.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the work that his Department has put in on the Warton enterprise zone to ensure that there has been joined-up thinking in Government with regard to the Preston city deal. Will he assure me that Lancashire and Warton will remain at the forefront of his Department’s thoughts?

Mr Pickles: I can assure my hon. Friend that, as an ethnic Yorkshireman, Lancashire is rarely out of my thoughts. That is also true of the enterprise zone, and I look forward to visiting it very soon and seeing him there.

The Budget has ensured that areas all around the country will benefit from steady growth. The Mersey gateway bridge has been guaranteed to the tune of £270 million, the Cambridge city deal will accelerate 33,000 houses, and the second phase of city deals will bring improved transport links and employment opportunities to 15 places around the country.

The Budget will build a more resilient economy. Working through our long-term economic plan is the only way to deliver what the British people want, which is the economic security that comes with a good job and the prospect of a better future for all. That plan has delivered economic stability and low mortgage rates for hard-working families, and it has laid the foundations for a sustainable economic recovery. I commend the Budget to the House.

5.18 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Let me say how grateful I am to the Secretary of State for his very kind words of condolence, which mean a great deal to me personally and to the rest of our family.

We have a chance today to discuss the impact of the Budget on families and communities when it comes to their chances of getting a home, deciding where that home will be built and by whom and whether the policy the Government are pursuing meets the simple test of fairness. Those are the things that I want to address in my remarks.

We know that housing is at the heart of the cost of living crisis facing many of our constituents. Parents worry about whether their children will be able to afford a home. Young people who want to get a foot on the housing ladder see house prices disappearing into the

distance. People who are renting worry about the impact of rents that are going up faster than their wages. As I think the whole House will acknowledge, that is the result of a housing crisis that has come upon us over many years, as successive Governments have failed to build enough homes. Let me just say before anybody jumps up that it is a fact that, despite all the words we have heard from the Secretary of State and his colleagues today and on previous occasions, housing completions were higher in every single year of the previous Labour Government than they have been in any year under this Government. That puts into context what the Secretary of State had to say. Although I recognise that the previous Labour Government and our predecessors from both parties did not do enough to build homes, I would take our record over his any day.

Jonathan Evans (Cardiff North) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman suggests that the Government before the previous Labour Government had a similarly poor record, but in fact theirs was better.

Hilary Benn: I am very proud of the record of the previous Labour Government: 2 million new homes, including 500,000 affordable homes, and a huge number of social homes that were brought up to decency standard. One thing that the previous Conservative Government bequeathed the previous Labour Government was a lot of council houses that were in poor condition because they had not invested any money in improving them. When the Secretary of State is next having a conversation with the Prime Minister, he might point out that the next time he walks down that famous staircase in No. 10 past the photographs of his predecessors, he will have to get all the way to Stanley Baldwin to find a Prime Minister with a worse record of building houses than the current occupant of that office.

In his 2011 speech, the Chancellor told us that he would deliver an economy

“carried aloft by the march of the makers.”—[*Official Report*, 23 March 2011; Vol. 525, c. 966.]

Although, as the Secretary of State says, housing starts are now finally up, what has happened to construction output overall? It has fallen by 4.2%. I do not know how many marches the Chancellor has been on, but the general idea of a march is that one goes forwards rather than backwards.

Although the Government’s record of building houses has been poor, they have intervened in the mortgage market through Help to Buy and last Wednesday the Chancellor made an announcement about extending the equity loan scheme to 2020. As I have said before from this Dispatch Box, we support help for people, especially first-time buyers, to realise their dream of home ownership, but if the Government simply increase demand and do not do enough to increase supply all that will happen is that house prices will rise further out of reach of the very people we are seeking to help. That is why the Treasury Committee and the International Monetary Fund express concerns about Help to Buy. I presume that the Chancellor has now finally acknowledged that, as he told the House last week that he has asked the Bank of England

“to be particularly vigilant against the emergence of potential risks in the housing market.”—[*Official Report*, 19 March 2014; Vol. 577, c. 783-4.]

That is progress, but could the Minister tell us when he replies exactly what that means in practice and how we and the public will be kept informed of how that vigilance is operating?

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): First, I offer my condolences to the right hon. Gentleman, as a fellow Leeds MP, for the loss his family has suffered. As a fellow Leeds MP, he will know some of the pressures of development in Leeds, with some 70,000 units to be built in the city, despite talk in the Leeds core strategy. Does he agree that we must be careful about where these large-scale developments are built? If we are massively to change the shape of the village of Scholes in my constituency, say, that would have the unfortunate effect of lowering house prices and putting people into—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I think that the right hon. Gentleman, as he knows the area so well, has the message.

Hilary Benn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. If he will bear with me, I shall directly address his point about where the houses should go in a moment.

We need to build more homes. Everybody recognises that. That is why, for example, we called for a help to build fund supported by Treasury guarantees to assist small and medium-sized builders in accessing finance to build some of those homes. I welcome the fact that the Government have listened and set up a builders’ finance fund, but history teaches us that we need to do more if we are successfully to change the way in which the market works.

Let me reflect on that for a moment. In the 1930s, when we reached the highest level of private house building ever achieved in the UK, the top 10 house building companies had a market share of 6% or 7%. In 1988, firms completing fewer than 500 units a year produced about two thirds of UK housing but by 2012 that had fallen to less than a third. In other words, as the number of small and medium-sized builders has declined and the big firms have grown larger, it has become easier for the more dominant firms to buy up the land. That is why small and medium-sized builders and custom builders say that it is hard for them to get access to land, so I agree that it is about helping them with finance, but it is also about enabling them to get the soil they need to build on.

The Secretary of State spoke about self-build and the House will remember that the former Housing Minister, now the chair of the Conservative party, promised a self-build revolution and pledged to double—double—the self-build sector. But the facts show that, last year, far from doubling the size of the sector, the number of self-build homes fell to the lowest level for 30 years. That is some revolution.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman talks about the lack of house building. Will he therefore use this opportunity to support without reservation the development corporation that is being introduced to build houses in Ebbsfleet in my constituency?

Hilary Benn: I certainly support all measures that will help us to get housing supply up because that is an objective shared across the House. I shall have something more to say about Ebbsfleet in a moment.

[Hilary Benn]

We have also called for local authorities to have a higher proportion of small sites in their five-year land supply and to give guaranteed access to public land for small firms and custom builders, something to which the Secretary of State referred and that was also in the Budget. That is also why we have said that a proportion of homes in new towns and garden cities should be built by smaller firms and custom builders. The truth is that if we are going to make progress, we have to change the way in which the housing market and the building market work, which is something that Ministers have not yet acknowledged. Why? We know that the high cost of housing is driven by the cost of land. We know that not enough land is being released for housing development. We know that by the time that land is given planning permission, it is often prohibitively expensive and we know that this can create an incentive to bank, rather than build on, the land.

As the Planning Minister told me in a written answer earlier this year, as of January, there were 538,000 units with planning permission that had not yet been completed. About half had been started and the rest were working towards a start or were on hold. He says that land banking is not an issue. He says that in many an answer to a written question, but he forgets that a 2008 Office of Fair Trading survey found that strategic land bought with options, which accounted for about 83% of land banks, was worth 14.3 years of production. That is about enough land to build 1.4 million homes.

What is more, under the current system, there is very little that local authorities can do about it, because existing compulsory purchase order powers are legalistic, expensive, time-consuming and complex. Authorities are in a weak position to try to get the land brought forward. That is why we have argued for and will deliver much greater transparency in the system by ensuring that developers register the land that they own or have options on. We will give councils the power to charge developers escalating fees for sitting on land with planning permission to incentivise them to actually build the homes they said they wanted to build.

The idea is denounced by the Secretary of State but it is supported by the International Monetary Fund and by the hon. Members for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) and for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) and indeed it was supported by the Planning Minister before he got his job. As a last resort, we will give local authorities proper compulsory purchase powers so they can, in the right circumstances, buy, assemble and grant planning permission on land that is being held back from development.

What is the purpose of this? It is to address the current imbalance in power between communities and developers. This is the point the hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) raised. Where communities decide where new housing needs to go, which is what neighbourhood planning is all about and why I strongly support it, and when permission has been given, they should be able to do more to ensure that the houses actually get built. But there is a problem here, and it is the reason why the Planning Minister gets a lot of stick from many of his Back Benchers. When a five-year land supply has been identified, all the cards are stacked in the developers' favour. They can look at one site and

say, "That's brownfield, too expensive to develop, there is contamination. We are not going there." They can look at another site and say "That's not viable." They do not explain their measure of viability but just end the conversation by saying it is not viable. They look at a third site and say, "Okay we can do about 100 houses a year on that site", even though, physically, it could take 250, 500, or say, 1,000 houses. Then, at the end of the process, when the numbers are added up against the council's assessment of its annual housing need, what happens? Lo and behold, developers say, "Your five-year land supply is inadequate and therefore, we would like to build there and there and there." That is what is going on up and down the country.

I think the deal is that communities have to take responsibility for identifying sufficient land for housing supply, but they then have to be able to ensure that the houses that are needed are built on the land that they have identified. What we have at the moment is a system in which communities and their local authorities have very little power and that is why change is required.

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): What does the right hon. Gentleman mean by community? How does he identify the community in this context?

Hilary Benn: First, the community is represented by the local authority, and, secondly, I think the community has a really important part to play by joining in the process of neighbourhood planning. We have seen from some parts of the country—Thame is probably the best example—that the community took responsibility. It consulted and had a referendum and, from memory, 73% of people voted in favour of the plan. It identified sites for housing development. I think that is the right approach, because for too long, we have had a system where no one has taken responsibility and everyone has pointed the finger at somebody else when it comes to housing supply. That is why we need change.

Mary Macleod (Brentford and Isleworth) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman join me in urging the Labour Hounslow council in west London, which has development sites of 900 units, to include some affordable housing?

Hilary Benn: I am very strongly in favour of affordable housing—I was not aware that we had any county councils in west London, but I think that the hon. Lady was referring to something else. We need more private housing, more housing for rent and more social housing at a price that people can afford.

We also need new towns and garden cities, so what about what I would refer to as the great mystery of the highly reclusive new towns and garden cities prospectus? Just to remind the House, two years ago, the Prime Minister announced that he would be publishing a consultation by the end of the year on garden cities—does everyone remember that?—but 2012 came to an end and it did not appear, and 2013 happened and it still did not materialise. We then read reports in the newspapers that the Prime Minister was suppressing a document and had gone cold on the whole idea. Then, in January, the Housing Minister said that he was not aware of a report that was supposed to have been published, but the Deputy Prime Minister said that there was a prospectus and that the Government should be honest about their

intentions. Then the Secretary of State contradicted his Housing Minister and said that he had been told by his Department that there was a report, but not a report from the Department for Communities and Local Government—I do hope the House is keeping up.

Then, last week, the Chancellor announced that there would be a new garden city at Ebbsfleet with 15,000 homes. The only trouble is that that is 5,000 fewer homes than the 20,000-home development announced for Ebbsfleet in December 2012. Only this Chancellor could proclaim a smaller development as a triumph—backwards not forwards. We look forward to the publication of that prospectus, hopefully before Easter, and if the Secretary of State has not already seen a copy, I trust he will ask for it. After such a lengthy gestation, I hope that it does not disappoint him or the rest of us.

That episode shows that there has clearly been fighting within the Government—within the Cabinet—about what should be in it. We now know, thanks to the *Yorkshire Post* and the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Bristol West (Stephen Williams), that the same thing is happening inside the Department for Communities and Local Government.

I feel very sorry for the Under-Secretary, whom I notice is not in his place today, because he does not always look entirely happy and that may be why he decided to unburden himself at the Lib Dem conference recently. He said that being compared to the Secretary of State—I think it was a joke—was

“the most grievous possible insult”

that anyone could deliver. I think that is unfair and unkind to his boss. He was complimentary about the Planning Minister but said that he was

“hated by many Tory MPs”.

That is possibly true, but I think it is also unfair, and since then, the hon. Gentleman seems to have been given all the pretty unpleasant jobs in the Department, defending the indefensible. I hope the fact that he is not here today does not mean that he is being held hostage in the Department by the Secretary of State and I hope that he retains his independent streak.

The most damning comments from the Under-Secretary were about a flagship policy of his own Department:

“The new homes bonus... I'm not a fan of. I don't think it's an incentive, necessarily, for local authorities to give planning permission. I don't think it's actually driving decision-making on the ground.”

He is in good company, because the National Audit Office agrees. As we are already aware, the Housing Minister does not seem to know what it is meant for either, because he has told the House:

“I am afraid the new homes bonus is not about encouraging people to build homes.”—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2013; Vol. 571, c. 11.]

We have now had it from two Ministers—it is not effective.

The new homes bonus is also profoundly unfair. It is given to councils according to the number of homes that happen to be built in their area and it is top-sliced from formula grant, which is distributed according to need. Therefore—surprise, surprise—the areas that are getting most of the money are those where the homes will probably be built anyway, which tend to be better off, while the areas that are losing funding are those where there is less demand for housing, which tend to

be worse off. It is yet another example of this Government, in tough times, taking most from those who have least, and in so doing they fail that basic test of fairness.

The Government just do not get it. At a time when real wages are falling, as was confirmed by Office for Budget Responsibility document published last week, they think that the most important thing to do is give millionaires a tax cut. They think that councils in the most deprived areas with the greatest need should face the biggest reductions, while some of the wealthiest councils get an increase in the money they have to spend.

There are 10 Members of Parliament lucky enough to have councils in their constituencies that will be better off in terms of spending power per household—the Secretary of State's preferred measure—by 2015-16 than they were in 2010-11. Four of them are in the Cabinet. Two of them are Government Whips. Under this Secretary of State, the 25 most deprived local authorities in England will lose 10 times the amount in spending power per household compared with the 25 least deprived.

Not only are we seeing the biggest reductions in spending power in the areas with the highest need while there are increases in spending power in the wealthiest areas, but before long, the funding difference between those areas, having eroded, will in some cases be reversed. Within four years, under this Government, local spending power per household will be higher in Wokingham—I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr Redwood) is no longer in his place—than it will be in Leeds, Sheffield or Newcastle, even though those cities face far greater pressures.

Most people would say that that is extraordinary. Most people would regard it as unfair and impossible to justify. So why does the Secretary of State think that areas in greater need should actually receive less? We know what he thinks already, because in tough times for councils some services are becoming unviable, with entitlement to social care disappearing in some cases, and libraries, the arts, Sure Start centres and women's refuges going. What does he say to councils? He says, “What's your problem? These cuts are really quite modest. What are you complaining about?”

It is not just communities that are being hit; it is the people in the greatest need in those communities. What has the Secretary of State done? He has forced up council tax bills for people in work on the lowest incomes: carers, the disabled, injured veterans and war widows. Summonses have been issued and bailiffs are knocking on doors, because people are poor. That is why they are being affected.

The Government are forcing people to pay the hated and immoral bedroom tax, undermining community, neighbourliness and a sense of place. Once again, that hits people on the lowest incomes, most of whom are disabled. Let us consider for a moment a family receiving housing benefit, a mother and father with two children living in a three-bedroom council house. If one of the children leaves home to get a job, the Government are telling that family, “Move.” Two years later, the second child leaves home and gets a job elsewhere. What do the Government say to that family? They say, “Just move again”, leaving mum and dad in a one-bedroom property. Then, three years later, the father's mother becomes ill and needs to come and live with them so that they can care for her. What do the Government say? “Oh, just move again.” I cannot think of a policy more calculated

[Hilary Benn]

to undermine family life, and you know what? That family will not even have a spare bedroom so that their grandchildren can come and stay. That is why people are so angry about the bedroom tax and why, if we win in 2015, we will abolish it.

Alec Shelbrooke: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman has had a go. I am going to bring my remarks to an end, because many people want to speak.

Only last week, when the Chancellor had the nerve to get up in the House and say, “Oh, well, we are all in this together”, and the OBR confirmed that real wages were falling, what did we discover? That some Cabinet Ministers had been giving hefty pay rises—to whom? Their special advisers. The architect of and chief apologist for the bedroom tax, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, gave his special adviser a 36% pay increase in one year alone. If that is not proof that this Government stand up for the wrong people, I do not know what is.

This is a Budget that provides too little, too late to deal with either the chronic shortage of houses or the cost of living crisis, and a Chancellor and a Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government who have shown once again that they do not really understand, and are not prepared to take the action that we need to make life better for the British people.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. There will be a six-minute limit on speeches—I have increased it by one minute.

5.41 pm

Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): May I join in the expression of condolence to the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) and say how sad I was to hear his news?

I want to welcome the Budget and reflect for a moment on the Chancellor’s considerable achievement. Fortified by a coalition and stronger for it, with the most appalling legacy left by the last Government, he has managed to turn things around so that our country is now well on the path to better days, with a growing economy, a remarkable number of new jobs emerging and an exciting future about which we can all be optimistic—in particular, I hope, our young people, many of whom are having a tough time of it.

I want especially to mention the Chancellor’s wise decision to freeze fuel duty, which is now 20p lower than it would have been under a Labour Government. Together with a well judged freeze in the council tax, on which I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, that will make a real difference to hard-pressed families in Mid Sussex and elsewhere. I want particularly to congratulate the Chancellor on the welcome plans that have been set out for supporting exports, science and innovation, and of course on the game-changing package of support for savers and pensioners, which has undoubtedly commanded the broadest support possible, and rightly so.

I hope that people now realise—I truly think that they do—the profound difference between the wilful, almost grotesque irresponsibility of the last Labour Government and the steely, genuine determination of the current Administration to get on top of the serious difficulties with a long-term economic plan whose success is now quite clear for all to see. However, the new networked world in which we in this country have to make our way, and for which it must be said we are ill prepared, is manifesting every day a global flow of ideas, innovations, new collaborative possibilities and new market opportunities, not only here but all over the world. To be frank, if we get it right, the world should be our oyster.

There are plenty of businesses and people who understand that. They understand that by tapping into the global flow of new ideas and opportunities, they can become the key to something that we badly need in this country: far greater productivity. It is nowhere near good enough here, and it is the key to growth and increasing prosperity.

All of that will inevitably, and sadly, involve seismic change. I congratulate the Government on the announcement in the Budget of £42 million for the new Alan Turing institute and £74 million for the cell therapy manufacturing centre and the graphene innovation centre, all of which will greatly increase our chances of helping to export our way out of financial difficulties by accessing the fastest-growing markets around the world, particularly in the life sciences, agricultural products, science, medicine, energy and of course services.

My great anxiety is how our country will cope as we try to respond to changes in technology, globalisation and markets that have, in a very short time, made the decently waged, medium-skilled job increasingly unavailable. That is very serious for an economic model such as that in our country, and it is my firm belief that in not too short a time, most of the decently paid jobs will inevitably be those where high skills are at a premium.

I applaud the work of my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills as they try to answer those challenges, but we must now acquire a new level of political imagination, a combination of further, large education reforms, and an unprecedented collaboration among schools, businesses, universities and the Government, to change fundamentally how people are trained, and enable them to keep on training and learning throughout their working life. That will require major tax reforms and for us to consider in a more careful manner—I say this very deliberately—some of the immigration changes that are under way, in the interests of our economic growth.

Those ideas need to come from across the political spectrum. They will not be the prerogative of any one party, and there will need to be a willingness to meet people half way. We need to attract and enable the kind of talent to come to this country that can constantly spin off new ideas and start-ups, which are undoubtedly already the cause of most new, good jobs. It makes perfect sense: if we are to have more employees, we need more employers. Although that huge transformation, driven by the networked world and all that it involves, takes place—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order.

5.47 pm

Mr John Denham (Southampton, Itchen) (Lab): The right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) spoke of the importance of high skills, so let me consider the Government's record on higher education. The Government's approach to funding higher education is scandalously irresponsible. It is bad value for taxpayers, and wilfully makes graduates pay far too much for their degrees. By relying on unsustainable financial mechanisms, the Government threaten the long-term health of our universities.

Under their latest plans, each year the Government will borrow £14.6 billion to fund student loans, and each year they will write off, at taxpayers' expense, £6.6 billion—a liability of £300 for every household in England, every year, and year after year. On every major judgment the Government have got their figures wrong. They said that fees above £6,000 would be exceptional, but most are at or near the maximum of £9,000. Last year the Government got their projection of student numbers in private colleges so expensively wrong that they had to step in to block recruitment. They said that debt cancellation rates would be 28%; last week they admitted that they are 45%. The public financing of higher education has been out of control since high fees were introduced for purely ideological reasons.

The immediate damage to public finances may be hidden by accounting conventions, but no public accounting convention should be allowed to disguise what is going on. As loans are not repaid in years to come, the cost of today's higher education is put not just on to graduates but on all future taxpayers, and this is from the Chancellor who said:

"We have always understood that the greatest unfairness was loading debts on to our children that our generation did not have the courage to tackle".—[*Official Report*, 26 June 2013; Vol. 565, c. 303.]

A high-fee, high-debt cancellation policy forces up everyone's fees and institutionalises waste. Of today's public spending on higher education, £7.50 is spent on debt cancellation for every £1 spent on teaching students. If more were spent on teaching, fees would fall, as would the level of loans, the amount the Government had to borrow, the level and rate of debt cancellation, and the liability on the taxpayer. As a result of fees being lower, we would enjoy the virtuous outcome whereby all graduates would pay back less on their loans and more graduates would fully repay what they had borrowed.

There are many ways of modelling such a change. I set one out myself a few weeks ago at the Royal Society of Arts; it includes some wider changes to the delivery of higher education that are desirable. This is just an illustration of the scale of change that is possible. I am grateful to the House of Commons Library for modelling the figures that I am about to share with the House. With a different approach to higher education, whereby we spent money on teaching, not debt cancellation, Government borrowing would fall from £14.6 billion a year to £9.8 billion a year. Public sector net debt—that is, borrowing less the repayments made—would be about £10 billion lower after eight years and £30 billion lower after 20 years. The cost of debt cancellation each year would fall from £6.6 billion to £3.4 billion. The annual fees for a three-year degree could fall to £3,400 a year—pretty much the same as they were in 2010.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): I am very interested in the figures that my right hon. Friend is reading out. What does he think are the implications for the Government's policy to sell the student loan book?

Mr Denham: If I may, I will come to the student loan book in a moment, because that is a serious point.

One final point from the model that I have outlined is that the average amount paid back by each graduate would fall by £5,000 in total. On this model, usable university income would rise by at least £650 million a year.

The current approach is astonishingly wasteful in terms of public money and private graduate contributions—and that is not the end of it. As he said in the autumn statement, the Chancellor wants to encourage an additional 90,000 students, funded by the sale of the income-contingent student loan book. I do not object to the principle of selling the loan book. I tried to do it myself for two years when I was a Minister, but I became convinced that value for money was impossible to achieve. Buyers face such unknown risks on future inflation, earnings and the level of evasion that either the loan book has to be sold at a massive mark-down on face value or the buyer's income has to be guaranteed through taxpayer subsidies—the so-called synthetic hedge, which is not so much plastic privet as guaranteed private profit. Selling a capital asset to fund hypothecated revenue spending is a short-term fix that exposes higher education to unsustainable costs when the money runs out. The Public Accounts Committee has said that it has no confidence in the ability of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to work out what is value for money.

This cannot go on. Universities are pressing for higher fees, and Ministers have refused to rule out an increase, but the financial futility of that is now clear. Every time fees go up, the cost and rate of debt cancellation will increase. Graduate repayments will rise, yet fewer and fewer graduates will repay their debts. The Prime Minister's former head of policy, Paul Kirby, recently suggested closing 25% to 40% of all university courses—all those where graduate incomes are not enough to repay fees. Higher education is not simply a private benefit; it is a public benefit and a private benefit. It is now clear that we can reset the system so that there is a fair partnership between the state and the student. As my modelling has shown, we could have lower fees, lower borrowing and lower debt cancellation, with higher usable incomes for universities, within the current envelope of public spending. Only the ideological dogma and blinkered embarrassment of this Government stands in the way of doing just what is needed.

5.54 pm

Mr Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (LD): I wish to deliver a few remarks on the two broad themes that have been outlined for today's Budget debate—families and communities.

May I add my condolences to those expressed to the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn)? I first met his late father when I was at Glasgow university and on a train going to Bristol. He was with the late Eric Heffer. We were debating in the final of a debating tournament at Bristol, with Eric Heffer as the guest

[Mr Charles Kennedy]

speaker on our side which was against proportional representation—and we won. David Steel, who was on the other side of the argument with the Bristol team, was none too happy about that. The right hon. Gentleman's father was always very kind to me throughout the following 35 years of respect and, indeed, friendship that we enjoyed.

I have been critical of the welfare cap in the past, and I remain anxious about it. I have opposed the bedroom tax. I share the concerns expressed by the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham) about student finance issues, and voted against such provisions earlier in this Parliament. Nevertheless, it would be churlish not to welcome the progress indicated in this Budget as regards families. Looking at the figures from my own constituency, this Budget represents an £800 tax cut for some 27,390 people—a significant achievement. The pensions overhaul is leaving pensioners £650 better off. Alongside the tax-free child care initiatives, that means that both ends of the age spectrum are being addressed. That is the mark of a society heading in the right direction. I think we would all agree that the emblem of a decent society is that it gives a sense of opportunity to people in their youth and a sense of security, dignity and comfort to people at the other end of their lifespan. All those measures are welcome.

I also welcome the measures on fuel duty, which are particularly important in my area of the highlands and islands of Scotland, which, geographically, represents the largest constituency in the UK. The cost of fuel permeates everything in an area where the motor vehicle is not a luxury but an absolute necessity, and where, in days gone by, we have seen punitive increases. Fuel prices remain pitched at punitive levels in many parts of the highlands, particularly in the more remote—and therefore, by definition, more vulnerable—communities for whom access to fuel and transport is absolutely fundamental. The fuel duty freeze confirmed by the Chancellor is welcome, although, as he would expect, many of us would argue instead for a real-terms cut, which we would see as social fairness on a UK-wide basis.

When I first started out 31 years ago, the state of the Scotch whisky industry was dire. Distilleries were being mothballed and people were being made unemployed. The industry did not have a long-term, viable global future; it was losing out to the white spirits industry, in particular. An amazing turnaround has taken place, to the extent that there are now plans in progress, in my constituency alone, for the building of two new distilleries—one on the Isle of Skye and one on the Ardnamurchan peninsula. That is a remarkable development. The freezing of the duty on whisky is welcome for this industry, which is vitally important for the well-being of the whole UK economy.

My next point is about start-up support for regional airports. Transport links, and the communications arising from them, are vital to an area such as the highlands and islands. Dalcross, Inverness's airport, is located in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, but it serves as the hub for us all. He has worked hard on achieving the start-up support that has been announced, which removes red tape on new routes and develops the social and commercial

arteries that regional airports represent. That must be welcomed, although I would go one step further and give Treasury Ministers a nudge about the developments afoot to reopen the airstrip at Broadford on the Isle of Skye, as we have gone backwards in one respect. Thirty-plus years ago, I could leave central London on a Friday morning, take the British Airways shuttle, as it then was, to Glasgow, connect to a Loganair flight, and be in Portree on the Isle of Skye ready to hold a surgery by Friday lunchtime. Thirty years later, I can no longer do that. Things have gone back in that respect, so if the Government are thinking imaginatively about our airports, I hope they will not just look at existing airports, but consider revitalising some of the airstrips and airports that previously existed and served such a good purpose.

In general I welcome the Budget. Scotland should welcome the Budget. That is a message that those of us who want to keep the United Kingdom better together will convey not just in the House, but across the whole country.

6 pm

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Mr Kennedy) for his comments on fuel, to which I, too, shall refer.

What we have seen is a Budget from a failed Chancellor reaping a growing economic reward that he did not sow—an economy that is improving despite what the Chancellor has done over the past four years. The Chancellor said that the deficit would be gone by the next general election, but there has been a reduction of only a third so far, with a year left. There was talk about pulling rabbits out of a hat, but that is quite a rabbit to pull out, with one year to go and two thirds of the deficit still to reduce. Debt has risen, and the growth that there is in the economy is based on delicate consumer spending—consumers spending their savings or money that they might have saved. Growth was stronger back in May 2010.

In the time available to me, I turn to some of the things that should have been in the Budget. As the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber said, what was needed was a fuel cut. FairFuelUK is one of many organisations suggesting that a 3p cut in fuel duty would kick-start businesses. Hauliers and others throughout the country were relying on some sort of cut because for them that is the difference between making a profit or a loss.

Four years on, we have heard many times, and will no doubt continue to hear, Members on the Government Benches referring to what the position would have been if Labour were still in government. What nonsense! What about the fuel duty escalator introduced by the present Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke)? What would it have been if we had kept that going?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) referred to councils' ability to assemble land. That should indeed have been possible. In my constituency, in the rest of Stoke-on-Trent and in the rest of north Staffordshire I frequently see pieces of land that have been held by one developer sold to another developer, then sold to a third and to a fourth. I think of one piece of land in particular where basic infrastructure—drainage and cabling—was put in, but

that was it. Nothing moved after the economic tsunami hit, and the land has been changing hands ever since at higher and higher prices. Now the economy would have to be racing away for there to be any possibility of that land being developed. I can think of example after example where a small number of wealthy developers are sitting on land until they get their own way.

Other points should have been dealt with in the Budget. Businesses, especially in the haulage sector, have been calling for a stable view, six or seven years out, of the duty on biofuel, and ideally a reduction in that duty, so that they can make the investment and put the infrastructure in place for heavy goods vehicles that run far more efficiently on our roads.

Energy-intensive manufacturers such as the ceramic industry in Stoke-on-Trent are losing out as a result of energy speculators trading on the price of gas and speculating that what is happening in Crimea might have a negative impact on prices. Who pays? It is the manufacturers who have to buy their energy, not the speculators buying and selling.

Another of the things not in the Budget was the massive cuts to the finances of Stoke-on-Trent city council, which has been the third hardest hit for three years running. That is likely to continue for a fourth year because of the hit to our local authority, which means that services for real people are being taken away.

Of the things that were in the Budget, I shall concentrate on pensions and the removal of the annuity obligation. Giving people more choice in respect of the money they have worked hard to put aside for their pension is, on the face of it, a good thing, but around 80% of people who already do not shop around for the best annuity are losing out. People who need to buy annuities will find them far more expensive. As for the free and impartial guidance, it is advice that is needed, and who will pay for that advice or guidance? It is another mis-selling scandal being lined up to hit in a few years' time, and, mark my words, it will come back and hit whichever Government happen to be in office at the time.

Who wins? The financial advisers might win, the Treasury will certainly win in the first few years, and insurance companies will bring out complex new products. Or, as the Pensions Minister suggested, is it Lamborghini salesmen who will benefit from the changes?

Let me end by referring to the economic hit on places such as Stoke-on-Trent from HS2. KPMG accountants identified an £80 million potential loss for Stoke-on-Trent as a result of HS2 if it happens as predicted. No Budget could make up for such massive damage to our economy.

6.6 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Flello) in his comments about the Chancellor. Instead, I congratulate the Chancellor on a first-class Budget, for the reasons given and expounded on by my right hon. and hon. Friends in earlier debates. For reasons of time, I shall not repeat them.

I would like to comment on the new garden city planned for Ebbsfleet. That is not in my constituency, but it holds an attraction for all those who see a new garden city as a way of meeting expectations to provide the number of houses required by tomorrow's inhabitants.

It represents a good way of bridging the gap or squaring the circle between making planning and development local and providing for the future. As part of the Budget, as we have heard, the Chancellor set out an ambitious plan and up to £200 million of public investment for a major new development around the high-speed rail station in Ebbsfleet in Kent. That is only 19 minutes from central London, and the 15,000 new homes it will provide are to be welcomed.

The excellent transport links to London will make Ebbsfleet a very attractive commuter location, but development at Ebbsfleet will also provide tens of thousands of new jobs, many of which, it is expected, will be taken up by local residents. I make two points about this. The first is the involvement of local people. The Royal Town Planning Institute commented:

“The Government’s announcement of a ‘new Garden City’ in Ebbsfleet is a welcome, if limited initiative.”

The word “limited” is misguided. It fails to recognise the new localist age we are in. This is not a case of central Government imposing a solution. It must be driven by local councils.

In this context I was pleased to see the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) comment on neighbourhood plans, and particularly the neighbourhood plan in Thame in my constituency. The most important thing about that is that in the referendum that was held on the same day as the county council elections, one in 10 people went into the polling booth and voted for the neighbourhood plan, but did not vote for their county councillor. One in 10 people did that because the neighbourhood plan is a crucial way of determining the future of their town. The Government want local people to be involved in towns such as Ebbsfleet. That is crucial as part of the consultation, to make sure that it is going to be a good place for people to live, and for us to make the necessary investment to turn derelict sites that are currently local eyesores into green places to live.

The relevant local councils usually sit on the boards of development corporations. It is vital that urban development corporations are democratically accountable. It is therefore necessary to ensure that local councils are represented, including the county council, which will be crucial in providing much of the infrastructure.

Urban development corporations are designed to be time-limited local vehicles that drive major development forward, especially when the scale of change is significant. The experience since the 1980s suggests that UDCs work best when they channel their efforts into the development of specific major sites, where extensive capacity and resources are required. The Government are determined that this UDC will learn the lessons from previous ones. Therefore, it will have a clear focus on the accelerated delivery of large, strategic sites; there will be significant local buy-in, with members of the relevant local authorities playing an important role on its board; and there will be strong transparency about costs to ensure that taxpayers' money is used effectively.

A key element of Ebbsfleet must be an emphasis on design. It is essential that it is an attractive place where people want to live. Design must play a key role because of the importance that the project will have in the minds of other people who are thinking about having a garden city. We do not just want rabbit hutches and boxes to be built. All eyes will be on this city in determining whether communities are willing to participate.

[John Howell]

In my last few minutes, I will say a few words about the planning reforms. I encourage the Government to take a good look at the general permitted development order. The simplification of the planning system is essential, not just to support the case for development now, but for the future. It is not in anyone's interests to have a complex system, except for the socialist antecedents of the planning system. I am glad that the Government have set out their three-tier approach to general permitted development, with permitted development for small-scale changes, prior approval rights for larger changes and planning permission when the scale is even larger. The changes that we have made to residential planning are being followed through with the proposals on warehouses and light industry. Such things are already happening in some places, which is very much to be welcomed. This is a great extension of the changes.

6.12 pm

Mr Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley) (Lab): Sometimes I get a bit sick of hearing about the mess that the last Labour Government supposedly left. [Interruption.] Wait a minute. Perhaps it is America that should apologise to my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), because when Lehman Brothers crashed, it brought down the American economy. Northern Rock and all the other banks were investing in the sub-prime market to get a fast buck, and that brought down the banks here. I looked the other day at how much that cost the British taxpayer. It cost our economy £70 billion. When Members talk about the last Labour Government—

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): Spend, spend, spend.

Mr Campbell: No, we did not. When Members talk about the last Labour Government bringing down the economy, they are wrong. Let us have some truth and honesty about what happened to the economy at that time.

Robert Ffello: My hon. Friend will remember as well as I do that when we were on the Government Benches, Conservative Members used to stand up and say, "Can we have a new this? Can we have a new that? Spend, spend, spend."

Mr Campbell: According to the Conservatives, we should have wrapped the banks in red tape and nailed them to the floor. Would they have done that? Of course not. They would have done exactly what we did.

I want to get to the meat of the problem, so I will start with pensions. I am not a believer in a nanny state and never have been. If Members look at my record, they will see that I have voted against many such proposals. I looked at the pensions proposal carefully. I know a lot of pensioners who are not getting what they should be getting out of their pensions after they have bought an annuity.

The proposal reminds me of when I was a coal miner. When all the coal mines were closing, the Government decided that the miners could pull their pension out of the National Union of Mineworkers pension fund and put it into something else if they got a better deal. Of

course, all the Scrooges came around, knocking at the doors of the miners. They said, "Will you organise a meeting?" Would I hell! They were there to grab the miners' money. I am pleased that the Secretary of State for Transport is here, because he knows what I am talking about.

A lot of the men were bought. They pulled their money out of the miners' pension scheme and put it into all sorts of finance companies that offered them a better deal. That did not last two years. Before long, they were all trying to get back into the scheme. The other schemes were a disaster. There was mis-selling on a big scale. The miners' pension scheme had to be opened again so that the men could put their pensions back into it. They were given two years to do it. If they did not do it in that time, they were left with the company that they had gone with.

We have to be careful that that sort of mis-selling does not happen. I understand the problem. It is good that people can have control of their own money. I have no problem with that, but we might be stirring up a hornets' nest. I do not trust the institutions one little bit.

On wages, we all know—it is a fact that is on record—that people who are working have lost out by £1,600 a year. People in two or three industries—especially those who work in local government, which we are talking about tonight—have not had a rise for three or four years. According to the latest figures that I have, £39 billion has been taken out of the economy since the austerity programme started because people have not got wage rises. It is no wonder that the economy is sluggish. If money is taken out of the economy, it will be sluggish. All that some workers have to look forward to is zero-hours contracts and food banks.

People do not realise what the welfare cap means or what it includes. Child benefit is capped. Incapacity benefit is capped. Winter fuel allowance is capped. Income support is capped. People do not realise what the cap means. There is a big figure, but people do not realise what is under it and what it means for them.

Alec Shelbrooke: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Campbell: No, I do not have time.

I got hold of a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions. It says that before the austerity measures were brought in, an average of 12,530 people on jobseeker's allowance were sanctioned each month in north-east England. Under the new arrangements brought in by this Government, that has gone up to an average of 29,000 people a month. People are being sanctioned and do not have any money. That is why the food banks are increasing. People have no money and do not know where they will get their next meal, so they have to be sent to the food bank.

Some people are sanctioned fairly and some are rightly sanctioned. Like other Members, I have had many people come to my office who have never looked for a job. I tell them that they have to go out and look for a job—that even if it is a job as a brain surgeon, they should apply for it. A lot of people are not doing that, but a lot of people are and they are being sanctioned unfairly.

The borrowing requirements are a bit of a joke. In this year alone, the Government will borrow £50 billion. Perhaps that is where all the money is going. That will

leave us £111 billion in debt. That is the situation that this country is in. If that is the economy getting better and if that is the country reducing the deficit, I will eat my hat. Quite honestly, I think that we are heading for the rocks or for a car crash—one or the other.

6.19 pm

Paul Uppal (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr Campbell). I was not going to make some of these points, but I cannot resist.

In 1997, some 17 years ago, many of us were not yet Members of Parliament. I remember the Labour party coming into office to the theme tune “Things Can Only Get Better”. The electorate will judge that claim in times to come. Labour likes to talk about the Conservatives’ 26 tax rises, but the inconvenient truth is that under all Labour Governments the burden of taxation increases dramatically. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west; Labour will always raise taxes and spend our money. Those are the truisms of life, and they always will be.

An increase from 10% to 11% in employees’ national insurance may not sound like much, but it amounts to an increase of 10%; in the case of the employer, the rise was a shocking 28%. No wonder Conservatives recognise national insurance contributions as a tax on jobs. Labour can talk all it wants about tax rises, but the people of Britain have long memories and will remember 13 years of a Labour Government during which the Treasury regularly raided people’s pay packets, and created a system in which businesses faced increased pressures and costs when creating jobs.

Alec Shelbrooke: Can my hon. Friend explain why some people think the banks caused all the borrowing, when Labour borrowed £80 billion in 2006?

Paul Uppal: My hon. Friend makes a reasonable point. Labour took its eye off the ball when it came to borrowing, and no one can deny that.

Thankfully, today things are different. Taxes on business were too high under Labour and corporation tax was 28% when this Government came to power. As the new tax year approaches, businesses will feel the impact of several important tax cuts. Corporation tax will fall to 21%, help on business rates will come in, and the landmark employment allowance will take up to £2,000 off employers’ national insurance bills.

Politics is always about being local, and in my constituency the Government’s changes are translating into new jobs and opportunities for my city. I have spoken regularly in the House about the positive impact that the arrival of Jaguar Land Rover will have on the city, but I have not so far spoken about the impact of the new Sainsbury’s store on Raglan street, which will create nearly 200 jobs. The sprawling Raglan street site stood empty for 10 years; it was a blight on the city and a sad symbol of our lack of progress. One of my first priorities was for that to change and, thankfully, ground was finally broken at the site last October.

This morning, it was a pleasure to welcome my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to Marston’s, a valued employer and brewery in my constituency. The company, which employs around

1,000 people at its brewery and headquarters, invests in opening dozens of new pub-restaurants every year, creating hundreds of jobs nationwide. I met the chief executives of three breweries, all of whom concurred with the view that the Budget was good news for jobs and growth.

The third and final piece of good news for the city came two weeks ago, when I visited the Woodthorne development by David Wilson Homes on Wergs road in Wolverhampton. Local jobs have been created to provide new homes in the city. The Woodthorne development will provide 58 new homes over the coming months, underpinning nearly 120 jobs for local people. It is great news that new homes are being built in the city and that a local work force is being used to build them. Support for small and medium-sized developers to access development finance through the builders finance fund will provide more than £500 million for two years from 2015-16 to deliver up to 15,000 homes.

The Help to Buy loan scheme has already helped 25,000 people to buy their own homes when they could not previously afford the deposit, and it has helped to build more houses. Owning one’s own home should always be one of life’s biggest aspirations, and the Government will help even more people to achieve that dream.

People who have worked hard and saved hard all their lives will now be trusted with their own finances. The Government will completely change the tax treatment of defined contribution pensions to bring it into line with the modern world. From March 2017, the Government will cut the income requirement for flexible draw-down from £20,000 to £12,000, raise the capped draw-down limit from 120% to 150%, and almost double the total pension savings people can take as a lump sum to £30,000. I am really heartened by that initiative because it constitutes a clear blue line and political divide: we trust people with their own money.

I have been poor in my life—to be honest, I have been dirt poor. What got me and my family out of poverty was taking responsibility for myself, making my own choices and taking my own risks—not a Government body or quango. The Government will empower people by trusting them with their own money, and the changes on annuities encapsulate that sentiment.

The Budget also shows that we are on the side of manufacturers, creating a Britain that makes things again. We are cutting the cost of manufacturing by cutting the cost of energy bills for manufacturers. We are doubling the annual investment allowance to £500,000 and delivering the most competitive export finance in Europe by doubling the Government lending available to exporters to £3 billion, and cutting the typical interest rate on it by more than a third.

Boosting savings, putting the public finances on a stable footing and making it easier for companies to invest were the key themes of this year’s Budget, and I support wholeheartedly the Government’s efforts to continue to rebuild our once broken economy. It is interesting to reflect on those key themes and what we remember from 1997 onwards—golden economic rules, prudence and, more recently, “cutting too far, too fast”. We do not hear those words any more. At least this Budget will build an economic inheritance that we can pass on to our children.

6.26 pm

Ann McKechin (Glasgow North) (Lab): I welcome the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr Campbell), who recommended a precautionary approach to the proposed changes to pensions. They are huge changes with many unanswered questions. At the weekend, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury was quoted in the papers as saying that intuitively he did not foresee undue harm to the public purse. Rather than his personal rose-tinted view, we need hard facts and well researched analysis to allow Parliament to make an informed decision about the proposals.

Many questions arise, in particular about the level and quality of the financial advice that will be available to people to enable them to make proper decisions. How will pensioners be protected from the scams that my hon. Friend mentioned? If people choose not to take the annuity route, they will require active management of their investment over a prolonged period, at a time when many of them will experience increasing incapacity. It is vital that we have full consultation on the changes, and that any legislation is considered in draft format by the Work and Pensions Committee before it is presented to the House.

Jonathan Evans: As the hon. Lady will know, on Thursday the Government published a consultation paper and said that the consultation would be open until June. No doubt she will make her proposal as part of the consultation.

Ann McKechin: I welcome the fact that we will have a proper consultation. The depth of it, and the analysis that will be required before people can provide their opinion, will also be vital. I also expect draft legislation to be put before the Work and Pensions Committee to be considered line by line in close detail.

While the Budget focused on pensions, many significant challenges were either ignored completely or—at best—addressed only superficially. To name just a few, they include stagnating incomes; the lack of business investment compared with our international competitors, a matter addressed by the Civitas report published today; high personal debt levels; and a distorted housing market.

The Resolution Foundation's annual report on living standards, "The State of Living Standards 2014", points out that

"it has become harder to live a comfortable life on a modest or even typical income in modern Britain".

The biggest increase in poverty is now among those already in work, trying to make ends meet with average wages consistently falling over the last five years. Before Conservative Members claim that the latest Office for Budget Responsibility figures show that we are coming to the end of that fall in income growth—albeit that the timeline keeps moving backwards—I should say that the situation is not as positive for a huge swathe of our population. The wage growth figures are based on the CPI index, which excludes housing costs. When the figures are recalibrated on an RPI-adjusted formula, as the Resolution Foundation report shows, the picture is much gloomier. For those on median earnings, there will have been barely any wage growth for more than a decade up to 2018.

Currently, the bounce we are witnessing is based primarily on increased consumer spending and greater levels of personal debt. Scottish Widows reported only last week that there are now 1 million more people than last year who have no savings at all—9 million people. Given the slow to negligible wage growth, that level of spending cannot continue forever. We risk returning to the problems that were at the root of the global collapse in 2008. Putting an extra 17p on the minimum wage rate and having approximately 1 million workers stuck on zero-hours contracts is not the way to increase incomes. That will simply push more people into a debt that will become increasingly unaffordable when interest rates start rising again.

The biggest omission in the Budget is the complete failure to tackle the causes of the housing crisis. Land prices are still far too high in comparison with average incomes and they take money away from our productive economy, yet the Government are perfectly happy to advertise in the Red Book, on page 107, that they forecast house prices to increase by 8.6% in the next year against an inflation rate of 1.8%. You would never guess, Madam Deputy Speaker, that an election was due.

Week after week, I hear from desperate young people, often with young children, about their fruitless search for stable and affordable housing. Last month, I met a young mother with two children who was looking for her fourth private tenancy in as many years. It was not that she wanted to move—either the landlords wanted their houses back to live in or to sell on, or, in the latest case, they had failed to pay their own mortgage. She is currently in overcrowded housing simply to ensure that her eldest child can remain in the same school. She faces a sector with perverse incentives, such as Help to Buy, which in its latest format is not even linked to house building. No attention has been given to reconstructing a rapidly growing but highly fragmented private rental market that could provide greater security of tenure and better service levels. The stubborn failure to boost house building, which is now at pre-war levels, is made worse by the slashing of investment in social housing, with the result that prices are kept high.

The right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) made some very good comments on the rapid changes occurring in the manufacturing sector. If we make the right choices now, we can benefit from the revolution in manufacturing; I agree entirely with his comments. We need to invest in skills, not just for young people but for the existing work force. In too many factories across the land, we will find Jimmy and Johnny aged 69 or 70-plus, because companies have no one younger with the right skill sets. The Government continue to be complacent about the rise in inequality and about wasting talent.

6.33 pm

Mary Macleod (Brentford and Isleworth) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Ann McKechin). Glasgow has been a European city of culture and I spent many happy years there as a student. She was much more negative than I plan to be. She forgot to mention the £63 million that Scotland will get out of the Budget although I think we agree that Scotland is better together with the United Kingdom given the forthcoming referendum in September.

The Secretary of State laid out very clearly how the Budget will help hard-working people and put Britain on a platform to a secure future. In my few remarks, I want to concentrate on how the Budget will impact on families and local communities in London and in my constituency of Brentford and Isleworth.

I thank the Chancellor for his support for London air ambulance. In his statement, he said:

“I will also relieve VAT on fuel for our air ambulances...and provide a new air ambulance for London, all in response to huge and heartfelt public demand and the campaigns of my hon. Friends the Members for Hexham (Guy Opperman), for Brentford and Isleworth (Mary Macleod) and for Argyll and Bute (Mr Reid).”
—[*Official Report*, 19 March 2014; Vol. 577, c. 786.]

London air ambulance is an incredibly important cause. Because of the hard work of Dr Julian Thompson, Graham Hodgkin and the team at London air ambulance, it is saving lives around London. A new helicopter was needed because there was only one helicopter in London for 10 million people. Across the rest of the country, there is one helicopter for every 1.5 million people. The service in London has treated more than 30,000 high trauma cases and it saves lives across London. The Budget will help it to save more lives.

The Budget will help brewers, such as Fuller, Smith & Turner. Its Griffin brewery is in Chiswick in my constituency. It is London's last remaining traditional family brewer—a great brewer it is, too. The 1p duty cut on beer and the scrapping of the escalator rise in alcohol duty will benefit 4,200 pubs and the more than 50,000 people the industry employs across the country, as well, of course, as its customers. That is another benefit of the Budget.

We have not heard much mention of the increase in the personal tax allowance. The right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) said that the Government were standing up for the wrong people. How wrong can he be? I believe that increasing the personal tax allowance is standing up for the right people. Increasing the personal tax allowance to £10,500 in April 2015 will lift 31,000 hard-working people across London out of income tax altogether, and 3.3 million people will see an average real-terms gain. That is what is meant by standing up for the right people and hard-working people.

Tax-free child care is helping families and hard-working people across London and elsewhere. The scheme will be extended to up to £2,000 per child and extended up to 12-year-old children more quickly. The scheme will benefit more than 500,000 London children in working families.

Housing is a big issue in London and we have already heard much about it today. I welcome the extension to 2020 of the Help to Buy scheme, which will create stability for families. It was good to see that 85% of those on the Help to Buy scheme are first-time buyers. That, too, helps hard-working people and is standing up for the right people across London and the United Kingdom.

There is a strong hub of creative industries in west London—television, film, IT and so on—and I am very proud of it. The changes to film tax relief from 1 April will make it easier for these industries to export further around the world, creating more jobs and growth for the future.

Locally, the Government are making a real difference, with record numbers of people in work, including record numbers of women in work. Some of the local achievements

I have seen in my constituency include being in the top 10 for business growth, lots of new companies moving into the area, current businesses expanding and growing, the creative industries hub becoming even stronger, and a record number of apprenticeship starts. That is what this Government have done as a result of the measures we have taken. Unemployment in my constituency is at a record low of 2.6%, down by 21.3% since May 2010. Youth unemployment is down by 29.5%, which is something to be proud of. For those who are unemployed, I invite them to *Aspire*, the jobs and apprenticeships world skills fair at West Thames college, which, with the support of Heathrow and others, is there to help people to get work.

This is a Government who are helping hard-working families—the people who need it most. This is a Government who believe in aspiration. This is a Government who are turning the country around to growth and prosperity for the future.

6.39 pm

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): I will first touch on the housing market and the role of housing benefit, and then move on to the Government's proposals for pension reform, because they are linked.

According to the Office for Budget Responsibility report, the largest driver in the growth of housing benefit has been a growing case load in the private rented sector. The share of housing benefit spend in the sector is projected to increase to 40% by 2018. The trend towards renting from private landlords and away from owner-occupation is accelerating. The increase in the proportion of the private renting population who claim housing benefit is a consequence of low wages and a rise in rent inflation. The recent rise in housing benefit in the private rented sector has been accounted for by people in work, and the fall in owner occupation since the recession has been particularly marked among young people. I ask Members to bear that in mind when they hear what I am about to say about the Government's pension proposals.

I agree with the Chancellor that we should trust the people, but I do not have a problem with trusting the people; I have a problem with trusting the financial services industry. I understand why the Chancellor made his announcement on Wednesday, but I feel that his proposals are treating the symptoms and not curing the disease. The Government say that they trust the people, as they rightly should, but what are they doing to ensure that the people can trust the financial services industry? What are they doing to ensure that 40% of the retirement or savings pot will not be lost in hidden fees in the future? Some savers can lose as much as £230,000 in the value of their pensions when a 1.5% fee is charged over their working lives. What are the Government going to do to ensure that those fees are transparent, and what are they going to do to ensure that the financial services industry does not come up with mis-sold financial products, as it has in the past? I say all this because we should not forget that the insurance companies that are selling annuities now will start to present what they will call “innovative and creative products” to fill the chasm left by the collapse of annuities.

There are three measurements by which these proposals should be gauged. First, when is “advice” advice, and not guidance? The Chancellor said that £20 million was

[Phil Wilson]

to be set aside over the next two years for the right to advice, but the Treasury consultation document calls it a right to financial guidance. There is a big difference between the two: advice means telling people what is in their best interests, whereas guidance means informing them of their options and then sending them on their way. Secondly, there should be a test to ensure that those with low and middle incomes are not disadvantaged but are offered the certainty that they need in retirement, especially at a time when the average pension pot is about £36,000. Thirdly, the Government should ensure that reforms do not result in extra costs to the state as a result of, for instance, higher social care bills, and force pensioners to fall back on benefits. We should not set up a system that socialises the risk and ensures that only the private sector reaps the benefits.

The Chancellor said in his speech:

“People who have worked hard and saved hard all their lives, and done the right thing, should be trusted with their own finances”.—[*Official Report*, 19 March 2014; Vol. 577, c. 793.]

I agree that we should trust the people, but we should also be able to trust the financial services industry. For many people, their pension investments are not just about trust, but about faith. They want to have faith in those who look after investments, and to know that they are doing right by them.

The mis-selling of future financial products must be a big worry. It has happened time and again in the industry, which is why I have demanded, in the House, that a fiduciary duty be placed on those in the financial services industry who look after the trillions of pounds in the existing pension funds. Every practitioner must be able to put his hand on his heart and say that he acted in the best interests of those whose funds he has invested. That should be at the core of the Government's proposals. I believe in “trust in the people”, but, in this instance, trust must be earned by the Chancellor and the financial services industry.

That brings me back to my original point. As a result of the Government's reforms, we will see an explosion in the number of buy-to-let properties, inflating house prices and further diminishing the opportunities for young people to own their homes. The challenge for all of us is not the abandonment of the pension system, but the building of a system that actually works, under which money is given to someone who can be trusted to use those savings wisely to generate a retirement income. Holland and Denmark have private pension systems that are collectivist and large, so that risk is shared and fees are low. If a typical Briton and a typical Dutch person save the same amount, have the same life expectancy and retire on the same day, the Dutch saver's pension will be 50% higher than that of the Briton. There is much to be said for the collectivist approach to pension provision, and it should not be deserted.

The question is not “Should we trust the people?” of course we should. The question is “Can the people trust the Government and the industry to get this right?” Given the long history of mis-selling by the industry, I believe that the jury is still out.

6.44 pm

Jonathan Evans (Cardiff North) (Con): Let me begin by saying to the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) that I wish to draw attention to my entry in the

Register of Members' Financial Interests, and my specific interests in the life insurance industry, because later I shall say a few words about the annuity market changes. Before that, I want to talk about the impact of the Budget on my constituency. The House will be delighted to know that I do not intend to trawl through all the provisions; I shall merely mention three specific headline issues that my constituents raised with me after the Budget, and were very pleased to raise with me.

The first of those issues, which has already been mentioned, is the increase in the personal tax allowance. That increase is significant, and I think it a mistake for any Opposition Member to talk it down. The allowance used to be £6,500, and next year it will be £10,500. That is a measure that will help the lowest paid: it will take 3 million people out of tax altogether. I am amazed that some Opposition Members are still shaking their heads over that proposition.

Secondly, my constituents were delighted by the announcement about child care costs that was made the day before the Budget. It will mean real help for people who want to get back to work. Thirdly, although this too will not be popular with Opposition Members, my constituents have told me how pleased they are that there is now petrol price stability—a stability that will be underpinned by the continual fuel duty freezes that we have seen.

Let me say something about the impact on the business community in my constituency. When I went to my constituency business club on Thursday evening, three items were mentioned specifically. The doubling of the investment allowance to £500,000 a year has been warmly welcomed, and there has been a widespread welcome in Wales for the announcement of a package for heavy users of energy. The right hon. Member for Neath (Mr Hain), who is present, will know how strongly Tata argued for that, and Celsa in Cardiff is delighted as well. There has been a universally positive response to the Government's determination to lower corporation tax to 20% from the Welsh chambers of commerce, the Institute of Directors and the Federation of Small Businesses and others.

Let me now say something about the pension changes. The pensions landscape has changed dramatically since the 1990s. The shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), told us that he was very proud of the last Labour Government—the Government who scrapped dividend tax credit, which cost pensioners £5 billion each and every year from 1997 onwards. Subsequently, we have seen Government policy pursue low interest rates and quantitative easing, which have driven down the value of our pensions. No one has mentioned that so far. Annuities are on the floor in comparison with their level in the 1990s: they are down to a third of that level. The fact is that those on both Front Benches are responsible for that. Between 2009 and 2012, the Bank of England and members of the Monetary Policy Committee claimed that £375 billion of quantitative easing would have a neutral effect on annuity-holders. However, in a report published two weeks, Ros Altmann made it clear that it was monetary policy that had driven down annuity rates.

One of the strengths of the Government's announcement is the positive response not just from those approaching retirement, but from savers more generally. Along with the announcements of an increase in the amount that can be held in individual savings account and the National

Savings & Investments pensioner bonds, it has lifted interest among savers. However, I think that we need to concentrate on two other issues. First, the Government's changes apply only in relation to direct contribution pension schemes. They have no relevance to, for instance, direct benefit schemes in the public sector, including those applying to Members of Parliament. Currently, however, it is possible to convert one to the other, and the Government have already signalled that they intend to block that conversion. If we want pensioners to be trusted with their own money, how can we easily restrict that principle to people who have direct contribution rather than direct benefit pensions?

Secondly, there is the potential negative impact on infrastructure investment. On Thursday, the Government signalled that they were aware of it. Insurers will undoubtedly be less interested in purchasing long-dated Government gilts if the long-term liabilities of those companies are cut to the extent that has been estimated by Barclays, which has said that in 18 months' time the annuities market in the United Kingdom will be down to a third of its present level, and by investment advisers Panmure Gordon and accountants Grant Thornton, which have predicted that it will fall to a fifth of that level. Whichever may be true, that is a significant reduction in the demand on the part of the industry for those long-term infrastructure projects that back so many of the demands that are made by Members on both sides of this House. We all want to see that public sector investment, but the reality is that the pensions landscape is being changed. It is crucial that the Government consider the impact of this in order to ensure that this reform does not produce unexpected or unanalysed impacts.

6.50 pm

Mr Peter Hain (Neath) (Lab): I agree with the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Jonathan Evans) over Tata, but the one thing that cannot be said about the economy under this Chancellor is that it has recovered quickly from the shock of the global financial crisis. Total output still has not reached pre-crisis 2008 levels, quite unlike in the USA and Germany both of which passed their 2008 peak back in 2011. What took them three years to achieve is taking the British economy under this Chancellor six years, and the reason is the savage cuts since 2010, a far tighter squeeze than in the USA or the eurozone. Under Labour, recovery was already well under way in the first half of 2010 when the Chancellor came into office. It was his policies that choked it off and the British people have been paying a heavy price ever since.

Today we have an unsustainable, out-of-balance recovery. The Chancellor acknowledged that neither investment nor exports are high enough. We already knew that higher consumer spending has come out of reduced savings, not out of higher incomes, because real incomes have been stagnating for years. It is a short-term recovery that cannot last. The ex-chair of the Financial Services Authority and ex-director general of the CBI Adair Turner said so in January at Davos when he warned:

"We have spent the last few years talking about the need to rebalance the economy away from a focus on property and financial services and towards investment and exports. We are now back to growth without any rebalancing at all... If you chuck enough monetary stimulus at an economy something happens. It is as if we have had a cracking great hangover, had a stiff drink and off we go again."

A second factor making the situation unsustainable is that UK productivity has been flat for years. This pushes up unit costs and keeps our export prices higher. Our export predicament is dire. On top of that, we are witnessing a housing bubble again, with property prices rocketing in London in particular. In short, nothing fundamental has changed to avoid a rerun of a financial crisis brought on by a debt-financed consumer boom and a Government-backed housing bubble that sooner or later will burst, because bubbles always do burst.

Yes, the economy is recovering faster than forecast last year, but growth is forecast to be slower next year than this. The Chancellor expects the economy to run out of steam almost as soon as it starts to grow again, yet there is plenty of scope for much faster growth, and faster growth would mean less need for spending cuts and a quicker reduction in the Budget deficit.

The austerity programme, which this Budget continues to drive forward is based upon what I call the big deceit of British politics: that Labour "overspending" left the country with the mountainous levels of debt and borrowing which the Tory-Lib Dem Government inherited after the 2010 election. *[Interruption.]* The idea that the global credit crunch was caused by Labour's public investment in Britain is risible. *[Interruption.]* The proposition that by building new hospitals and new schools, and by recruiting tens of thousands of extra nurses, doctors, teachers and police officers in Britain, Labour caused the sub-prime mortgage defaults in the US that ricocheted throughout the world's financial institutions is preposterous. *[Interruption.]*

Robert Flello: It is amazing to hear the laughter from the Government Benches. Does my right hon. Friend recall, as I do, Conservatives standing up time and again saying there was far too much regulation of the banks and that they needed to reduce it?

Mr Hain: Absolutely.

It was not Labour's public spending that triggered Britain's or the world's economic crisis; it was the global inter-dependency of reckless banking that the Conservatives wanted to be less regulated that in 2008 triggered an economic meltdown in Britain and right across the globe. *[Interruption.]* Labour responded by boosting public spending and borrowing to offset the catastrophic collapse in private sector spending, and the £90 billion spent on bank bail-outs plunged the public sector into record annual deficits, but these were deficits that stopped a shocking slide into a fatal slump and laid the basis for recovery from the biggest shock to hit the world economy in peacetime since the 1930s great depression. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] If I have time at the end, I will.

Contrary to right-wing free market mantras and Tory-Lib Dem history rewrites, it was the banking crisis that caused debt to rocket, the deficit to rise and borrowing to rise as well. The low yields on UK Government bonds before, during and after the credit crunch under Labour bore eloquent testimony to the fact that the international markets had full confidence in its policies, and that they were not clamouring for the right-wing dogma subsequently visited upon Britain. Indeed, so desperate was the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) to identify with Labour's success on spending, investment, jobs and growth that he pledged to match Labour's spending plans for three further years in September 2007

[Mr Hain]

up to 2010. [Interruption.] Members on the Government Benches shake their heads, but that is what he did. If we had spent too much—if all the charges made by the Conservatives were true—why on earth would the current Prime Minister have backed our spending plans for three years ahead? It would help the quality of this debate and the quality of assessment of the Chancellor's Budget if the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats had the decency to acknowledge that essential fact, including this Prime Minister's support for our spending programmes, instead of ploughing on regardless, with no end to austerity in sight.

Mr Redwood: Why did the new and very expensive and complicated regulators the Labour Government introduced fail to control the banks when people like me were telling them they did not have enough cash for capital?

Mr Hain: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman to this extent: we did not regulate the banks well enough or carefully enough, but his party—not necessarily him, but his leadership—was saying that there should be less regulation of the banks at that time, yet now they have the temerity to attack our spending plans when we brought borrowing down. [Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. All other speakers have been heard in silence. The right hon. Gentleman has livened up the debate, but he also ought to be heard.

Mr Hain: It is interesting how those on the Government Benches do not like to hear the truth, Madam Deputy Speaker. The level of debt under the Labour Government before the banking crisis was lower than we inherited from the Conservatives in 1997. We brought borrowing down and we brought the deficit down compared with what we inherited, and yes we invested in repairing the desperate state of our public services—people dying on trolleys in hospitals, schools crumbling, the railways decaying. We repaired all of that and then the banking crisis came along and blew it out of the water, and there was a failure by every Government right across the world to recognise the seeds of that banking crisis, but it was not caused by Labour overspending, and not caused by Labour high borrowing or high debt, because none of those things was going on prior to the banking crisis, and if we had not dealt with the banking crisis in the way that we did, the whole of the economic and banking system in Britain would have collapsed. We need the decency and honesty from the Government Benches to acknowledge that central fact.

6.58 pm

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I am very glad to contribute to the Budget debate and in particular to be following the right hon. Member for Neath (Mr Hain) because I want to pick up on a couple of the themes he introduced. Before I get on to that, however, I would just remind him that the Office for National Statistics revised downwards the depth of the recession that happened under the Government of which he was a member, which perhaps explains why it has taken us a little longer than we thought to get our economy back on track: the scale of the damage was that severe.

I want to start by welcoming a Budget measure that I hope will be applauded across the House: the Chancellor's announcement to set up an Alan Turing institute. Thankfully, Alan Turing finally had his name cleared just before Christmas and justice was finally done. I am very proud that Bletchley Park, where he did much of his outstanding work, is in my constituency. Now that we have been able to draw a line under that injustice, it is absolutely right that we concentrate on celebrating his enormous achievements. The establishment of an institute that will further research into cyber-security, algorithms and a whole load of things I will not even pretend to begin to understand will be a wonderfully fitting tribute and legacy. If I may, I will make a gentle bid for Milton Keynes to be the host of that institute. I am sure there will be competition from Manchester, Cambridge and elsewhere, but we would make a very fitting home.

I also welcome the announcement of a new garden city at Ebbsfleet, and I invite the good people of Ebbsfleet and Kent to look at how we in Milton Keynes planned our city. I am sure they could draw many lessons from the design of Milton Keynes and the understanding that went into its creation, inspiring designs of new cities as far afield as China. We would be delighted to advise the good people of Kent.

I welcome the measure in the Budget to extend Help to Buy, a very welcome initiative that has helped many people in my constituency to get on to the housing ladder who would not otherwise have been able to do so. Reference has been made to the housing supply, and I can assure Members that in my constituency, it is growing. The number of letterboxes and doorsteps I have to campaign on is growing at a far faster rate than I am able to cope with. There has rightly been a long-established cross-party agreement in Milton Keynes that such expansion—20,000 new houses over the next couple of decades—should be balanced development consisting not just of owner-occupied houses but of affordable housing in all its forms: some council housing, some housing association properties, some shared ownership properties, some key worker housing.

However, it is not just the numbers and the tenure of housing that is important, but the type. Under previous housing targets, the only thing that was important was the number of houses or flats built, and too many of the wrong type were constructed. There was a glut of apartments, which are fine, but the balance was out of kilter; we did not build enough family-sized dwellings. I am delighted to see some of the planning reforms introduced by this Government, backed up by the neighbourhood planning process. The Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), who is in his place, has been to Milton Keynes a number of times to see the strength of the neighbourhood planning process locally. That will underpin a more balanced and sustainable approach to housing development.

Housing has to be underpinned by good infrastructure, and this Government's investment in projects such as East West Rail will ensure that these new houses are. Most of all, housing expansion must have a solid business base. I am delighted to report that Milton Keynes is leading the country in its economic development. New business start-ups are up by 20% over the past few years. Survey after survey from independent bodies

such as Experian, Centre for Cities and the *Financial Times* place us at or near the top of the national growth league.

Our economic growth is also balanced: it is not just in the service sector, but in high-tech research and development. Last week, I had the great privilege of visiting Red Bull Racing, the Formula 1 team, where the level of engineering research and development is enormous. Budget measures such as the investment allowance, R&D tax credits and the seed enterprise investment scheme all underpin that growth, as do the extra grants for apprenticeships. Without a strong skills base, the economic recovery will not be permanent.

The economic recovery must be soundly based, but so must our long-term financial future. That is why the measures in the Budget on savings and investment were, for me, the most welcome. For too long we have had a culture of instant gratification: if we want something, just borrow and get it. That is not sustainable, and encouraging savings and pensions will help us get back to a secure future in the long term.

7.4 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The Chancellor told the House last week that his policies had been vindicated. His basic case is that austerity is working so well that we need it for two Parliaments rather than one, as was planned. Of course, it is welcome that we have economic growth after so many lean years, but the inescapable fact is that the targets in the growth and spending plans set out at the beginning of this Parliament have been missed by huge margins. The cumulative effect is that cuts will last years longer than planned, and an extra £190 billion is being borrowed, compared with the figure in the plans set out after the election. If Labour had borrowed £190 billion more than was planned, I am not sure how Government Members would describe it, but I doubt whether they would be reaching for the term “success”. The return of growth cannot hide the fact that the outcome of the strategy pursued in the past four years is that one of the Government’s fiscal targets has been missed, and the other—the five-year rolling target—continues to be pushed into the future.

The increases in investment allowances are welcome, but let us be in no doubt: this is a U-turn from the Conservative manifesto and from the 2010 post-election Budget. At that time, when the Chancellor was talking about the “march of the makers”, he cut support for investment in manufacturing by £3 billion a year, and called it getting rid of complex allowances and reliefs. Rhetoric and policy were pulling in entirely different directions. I therefore welcome the U-turn, and on this point at least, rhetoric and policy are now pulling in the same direction, although needless barriers were placed in the way of investment by the policy previously pursued.

Frank Dobson (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that when the investment allowance was reduced, corporation tax was reduced, which did not benefit manufacturing but benefited the banks?

Mr McFadden: That is absolutely right: a cut in support for manufacturing was used for business as a whole.

Although it makes sense to support investment decisions through the tax system, we should not kid ourselves that investment allowances alone will be enough. The UK’s export performance has been routinely described as disappointing in report after report by the Office for Budget Responsibility. Speak to any manufacturer and they will most likely say that their key challenge is skills. If companies cannot get the right people with the right skills, they cannot innovate, they cannot meet orders in time and they cannot operate as efficiently as they want.

If the Government are really serious about supporting UK manufacturing, they should heed the call coming from their own Back Benches today to stop chasing UKIP and putting in place policies that stop the brightest students and workers from around the world coming to the UK. The Government’s arbitrary net immigration target is a barrier to our accessing the best talent in the world, and the exclusion of such talent is not in the interests of UK businesses or the economy; nor is the threat of withdrawal from our biggest export market, the EU. It is no good supporting investment decisions through the tax system with one hand, and threatening to pull away from our biggest market with the other. The stance the Government have adopted on this is a complete failure of leadership: it is party management first, and the interests of the country second. No amount of support through investment allowances would undo the damage that pulling out of our biggest market would do. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition made the announcement he made of a couple of weeks ago, exercising leadership on this issue and rejecting the option of following the Government down this path.

Perhaps enough has been said about beer and bingo in recent days. As someone whose father was a labourer and whose mother worked in a local authority children’s home, the only thing I would add is that a more serious working-class aspiration is an education system that opens up opportunity to all; social mobility that is not based on but challenges closed elites; and a path to rising living standards that has been sadly absent in recent years. I suggest to the Government that a poster based on those things might have been truer to the heart of working-class aspiration than the one that was produced.

I echo some of the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson) on the pension changes. There has been an attempt to reduce this proposal to the question of whether people can be trusted with their own money. Of course people can be trusted in that way, and empowering them to make their own decisions is a good thing. It is something that we should support in politics. Choice in public services empowers people. It has worked well in the area of personal payments for social care, for example. As my hon. Friend said, however, what is in question is not trusting people but trusting the financial services sector that sells people these often complex financial products. I serve on the Treasury Select Committee, and we have seen many mis-selling scandals in recent years, ranging from endowment mortgages to payment protection insurance. We should have learned the lesson that there is often a serious information mismatch between those selling those financial products and those buying them, and that customers are not well served when things go wrong.

[Mr McFadden]

How do the Government propose to address that issue? Simply shouting that we should trust people with their own money is not enough, given that the PPI compensation alone has had to be set at £20 billion; and nor is it the philosophy that has been pursued on a cross-party basis for auto-enrolment into the pensions systems. If customers are to be well informed, they need good advice and alternative products in which they can trust. It is perfectly reasonable—indeed, a duty—for a responsible Opposition to ask questions about how that is to be achieved, and to point out the dangers if it is not.

The recent economic growth is welcome, but if it is being funded by consumer spending, people will rightly ask how can we ensure that it has solid foundations and is not simply the froth from another unsustainable housing boom, and how we can ensure that Britain remains engaged with the world and does not turn away from the trade and exports that we need.

7.12 pm

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): I agree with a certain amount of what the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) has said. I am delighted to hear from him and other Opposition Members a gentle—or, in some cases, not so gentle—movement towards accepting that the saving public, the pensioners, should be allowed to choose their own vehicles to finance their retirement income.

I introduced a private Member's Bill in 2003, entitled the Retirement Income Reform Bill. It was designed to lift the compulsion to purchase an annuity at the age of 75. The then Government opposed it, but it so happened that I got a majority of more than 100 on that Friday in the spring of 2003. These things happen on Fridays when Government Members are elsewhere. Eventually, however, the Government talked the Bill out. It was defeated on the basis that the public were unable to make their own decisions on the funding of their retirement. It was said that they would waste the money, or simply not do what the Government wanted them to do with their retirement funds. I happen to take the view that the Government are a poor parent, a poor business man and a poor manager of people's old age. I was disappointed, but not surprised, that the then Government talked out my Bill. The number of private Members' Bills that get talked out is too big to worry about.

I was interested to hear my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announce in the Budget statement last week that he intended to liberalise the way in which we deal with pension income. I was even more interested when the shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), announced that her party and her Front Bench were coming round to accepting that the public should be trusted with the management of their own financial affairs in retirement. She made that announcement rather half-heartedly, but she made it none the less. I think that that is practically and philosophically the right thing to do.

In the course of this afternoon, I have smelled the burning rubber of handbrake turns from Labour Back Benchers who are beginning to realise that they need to catch up with those on their Front Bench, who in

turn are deciding that they need to catch up with those on our Front Bench and with public opinion that is in favour of greater liberalisation of the pension and retirement income system. The fact that criticism has been made of the banking system and of the financial services sector does not undermine the practical and philosophical benefits of liberalising the system.

Frank Dobson: I agree that those criticisms do not undermine the philosophical side of things, but it is the practicalities that people are bothered about. Most of the concern arises from the fact that the various institutions have been giving people a bad deal on annuities and that, unless they actually go out of business, they are likely to be offering the products that are the alternative to annuities. Does the hon. and learned Gentleman really believe that those self-same institutions will be offering people a good bargain, if they have not done so in the past?

Sir Edward Garnier: Yes, I do. I find that view deeply depressing, although not in the least surprising. The right hon. Gentleman is a good old-fashioned socialist and I respect him for that. I wish that more of his colleagues were as clear in their views as he is. I happen to take the view, however, that Mr and Mrs Retirement Person should be allowed to do what they like with their pension funds and that if the financial services sector misconducts itself, we should prosecute it or take regulatory action against it. We should not act to prevent the vast majority of individuals from doing what they think best for their financial future, either pre-retirement or post-retirement, simply because we fear that there might be one or two bad hats in the financial services sector. If those of us who are about to retire wish to invest our pension funds in property or in stocks and shares—

Mr McFadden *rose*—

Sir Edward Garnier: I fear that I am limited to one free hit, and the right hon. Gentleman may not have one. Perhaps he should see his financial adviser instead.

If those of us who are about to retire wish to invest our pension funds in property or in stocks and shares—or in buying an annuity—let us do it. Let us be allowed to make informed, adult decisions. Yes of course we must build protections into the system to prevent people from being mistreated or misled, as the Chancellor made clear in his Budget statement, but we must allow them to make their decisions from a position of knowledge. For goodness' sake, let us not imagine that Mr Whitehall Man, or even Mr Labour Cabinet Minister, is better able than anyone else to decide how I should lead my life. I really object to that form of nanny state—

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): Quite right!

Sir Edward Garnier: I used that expression in order to encourage my hon. Friend. I do not like the kind of jargon that we are forced to use in these short, time-limited debates.

If there is one thing in the Budget that we ought to appreciate, it is the liberalisation of the pension and old-age retirement income. My private Member's Bill was defeated by the then Government. I think that Ruth Kelly was the Treasury Minister who organised its

destruction. I hope that, were she here in the House now, she would welcome the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor last week. I hope, too, that Opposition Members will come to realise that they need to catch up with public opinion and to acknowledge the desire of all people, whether they vote Labour or Conservative—I dare say one or two might even vote Liberal Democrat—to support their own independence and to make their own decisions. I congratulate the Chancellor and I wish him all good speed with this measure.

7.19 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I do not intend to reflect on the broader points about the Budget in relation to deficit reduction and borrowing figures, because my hon. Friends have articulately made those points this evening. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) did so particularly well in an excellent contribution. I wish to focus on the package of support that the Chancellor promised energy-intensive industries last week.

Before I discuss that, I wish to comment on how the Chancellor intends to balance the books in relation to his tax proposals. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has already raised that question, because the Budget is, of course, not quite as neutral as it looked at first glance. The measures on personal tax allowances and the doubling of relief for business investment, welcome as that is—I do support it—are apparently paid for by forecast savings within the budget from Whitehall itself, but they are not identified clearly in the Red Book. In addition, these things are apparently to be paid for by extra income from measures to reduce tax avoidance. Paul Johnson of the IFS has said:

“A set of definite and permanent tax cuts look to have been matched by more unspecified spending cuts, some changes in the timing of tax receipts, and our old friend tax avoidance measures.”

It is incumbent on the Government to explain to the House just how robust their plans are for reducing tax avoidance and, just as importantly, to give us clear details about exactly how these spending cuts will be made to balance the books and pay for those increases in the personal allowances. It is important that the House is made aware of exactly where the money is going to come from to pay for all this, and it is just showing respect for the House to set out those details.

I wish to discuss in detail the measures designed to help foundation industries, particularly those on the carbon floor price and the renewables obligation. The measures are welcome; my constituency is home to Tata Steel, ceramics companies, British Glass and the paper industry, in the form of SCA, so it is incredibly important to my local economy that these measures go through. However, we must put on the record the fact that the carbon floor price and its freezing from 2016 reflects changes to a policy that was introduced by the Chancellor and which became operational only a year ago. So we are, in effect, seeing a reduction in a tax that was introduced by this Government and which is already levying significant damage to manufacturing industry. It was a unilateral tax not felt anywhere else in Europe. Even when the freeze takes effect in 2016, UK manufacturing will still be paying more for carbon than is paid in any other country in the European Union. Even with the levy freeze in 2016, INEOS at Runcorn

will face annual costs of £4 million as a result of the carbon floor price. With UK manufacturers facing wholesale prices for electricity 45% higher than those faced in France and 70% higher than those faced in Germany, the Government have to commit—I would like this from Ministers tonight—to ongoing support for foundation industries in this country, because of course the game is not over. The work that needs to be done to make manufacturing industry cost competitive is not finished, and we need to see much more from the Government. These industries are crucial for jobs and wealth creation in the future.

I wish to make a couple of other brief points. First, we need to hear whether the backdating of the compensation already announced for the carbon floor price will actually be decided. The decision date has already been delayed to 9 April and manufacturing deserves clarity about it. Secondly, we need to know the extent to which compensation for both the carbon floor price and the renewables obligation levies will apply: how many sectors of manufacturing industry will be included in that package? We know that the European Union state aid guidelines are restricting the number of industries that can benefit from that compensation. I want Ministers to say whether they will commit to going to the Commission to argue rigorously for an extension to the number of sectors that will be included in that compensation package. The points made about the EU were relevant; we need to see the Government batting for UK manufacturing within the EU and trying to ensure that we get as comprehensive a compensation package as possible, agreed within the Commission as soon as possible.

7.25 pm

Stephen Mosley (City of Chester) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this year's Budget debate and a special pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), who spoke with such expertise, knowledge and passion about the future of energy-intensive industries. I am delighted to hear that she welcomes the thrust of what the Chancellor is proposing in his Budget. I just wish that all Labour Members had that same attitude, because some forget what it was like four years ago, when this country was on its knees: our families were being squeezed by high unemployment and falling wages; our high streets had been devastated by the biggest dip in consumer spending in a generation; and our young people found they had the will and passion to succeed, but not the opportunities.

What a difference four years can make: unemployment is down across the country—in Chester it has fallen from 3.5% at the time of the last general election to just 2.2% now; our small businesses are reviving—locally, we have seen new business start-ups increase by 300%; and our young people are starting to get their hope back. In Chester, youth unemployment has fallen from 610 in 2009 to just 295 today—it has more than halved. We have seen a record number of apprenticeships, with 870 created in Chester in the past year alone—that is three times as many as were being created under the last Government. People know what they get with a Conservative-led Government: more jobs; great opportunities; and a better future for our country and its people. It is not just in this place that we are helping hard-working people.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): If the hon. Gentleman is so confident that things are so much better under this Government, can he explain why in my constituency the claimant count for over-25s has increased from 185 in May 2010 to 450 as at the last month and why for young people it has increased from 100 in May 2010 to 145, peaking at 205 last March?

Stephen Mosley: I would hope that the hon. Lady stands up, champions her constituency and goes to employers and investors saying, “Look this is what we have to offer. Come and invest here. Come and create jobs here. Come and employ people here. We want you.” My constituency is great—Chester is great—and I want to sell it the whole time; we have jobs fairs and business fairs, and we get the investment and the jobs—I am proud of that.

But is not just in this place that Conservatives are doing a good job: up and down the country, in town halls and city halls, our councillors are freezing council tax, and in some cases cutting it, while protecting front-line services. My local Conservative-run Cheshire West and Chester council is doing all it can to help my constituents, and it is freezing council tax for the next two years. Over the five years of this Parliament, council tax payers in Chester will have seen just a 1.65% rise in their council tax bill, which of course compares massively favourably with what happened under the previous Government, when council tax bills more than doubled. This means that band D council tax payers in Chester are £131 a year better off. It is this Government who have given my local council the funds to freeze council tax. My council knows that it has to do more than always look to central Government for more money and that the way to improve local services is to make them more efficient. That is why it is now sharing its back-room services with other local authorities. A recent deal with Labour-run Wirral borough council will see council tax payers in West Cheshire and Wirral saving some £69 million. Management costs have been cut by 33%, saving tax payers £3.2 million. At the same time the council is improving local services, as can be seen in its fostering and adoption services. Working with two more Labour councils, Halton and Knowsley, it is sharing expertise, experience and costs to improve the services offered to children. Adoption figures are now the best in the north-west, with the time taken to place children half the national average.

By making local services more efficient, the council is making them more effective as well. It is using the savings to keep taxes low and to invest in our residents and in Chester’s future. Work is currently progressing on a new £37.5 million theatre, replacing the old Gateway theatre that was shamefully closed by Labour in 2007. I was therefore delighted to hear the additional support that the Chancellor announced for regional theatre in his Budget on Wednesday. Cheshire West and Chester will be knocking on his door.

I was also delighted to hear about the new £20 million to support our cathedrals in this anniversary year of the start of the first world war. Chester cathedral stands at the heart of our beautiful city. It was recently voted by American readers of *USA Today* the fifth prettiest city in Europe. The cathedral also hosts memorials, and has a memorial garden, to the soldiers of the Cheshire Regiment, 8,420 of whom died serving our country between 1914 and 1918.

On 5 April, the new tourist attraction Cathedral at Height will open, allowing people to climb to the top of the cathedral tower to see the panoramic views across the city and the inside of the cathedral. The cathedral has massive plans to boost the Chester visitor offering, and it will be keen to explore the opportunities that this new money provides.

As we reflect on the Chancellor’s Budget, let us look at the reality for my constituents. A four-year transformation of our country’s economy has delivered more jobs, better services and a council tax freeze. Every step of the way, Labour has opposed our long-term economic plan that is making all that possible. What a clear choice for the people of Britain. They can have more borrowing, more taxes and more debt from the Labour party, or more pounds in their pockets with the Conservatives. Bring on the election!

7.32 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): My constituents will be very disappointed about a number of things that were not in the Budget—the lack of real support for new house-building, for young people and long-term jobs, and for small businesses in my constituency. Furthermore, there is no break in the cloud as far as the continued savage attacks on local government services are concerned.

However, I want to talk about something that clearly is in the Budget, and has been in Budgets for the past two or three years. As my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) mentioned, it is a policy that has nothing to do with what happened under the previous Labour Government; I am talking about the Chancellor’s own policy—or policy mess—on carbon price support.

When the Chancellor announced that he was freezing the carbon price support at £18 to about 2020, I was not too upset; in fact, I was interested to see this latest development in his astonishing zigzag policy. After all, in the 2011 Budget, when the Chancellor invented that particular policy, he said that the carbon price support was designed to

“encourage further investment in low-carbon generation by providing greater support and certainty to the carbon price.”

The figure was revised wildly upwards in Budget 2013, and then radically downwards in Budget 2014. The Chancellor’s steering of the carbon price support, which started last April and supposedly goes on to 2020, has been rather more “Keystone Cops” than keystone policy.

Essentially, support for energy intensive industries, which my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge mentioned, is coming out of the money raised from the policy being steered wildly upwards in Budget 2011 and onwards. I have always thought that the right thing to do is to support the EU emissions trading system and get it into good order for the long term. However, when the level was revised wildly upwards in Budget 2013, as a result of the then perceived crash and the possible long-term inertness of the EU ETS, I thought that that level of unilateral levy was likely to be unsustainable.

What this policy mess demonstrates is that we cannot do things unilaterally and in isolation without there being consequences. After all, in the Energy Bill, the carbon price floor was prayed in aid as giving out a long-term signal that would render changes in the emissions

performance standard superfluous. Even at the end of the Energy Bill, when the Opposition moved an amendment to include existing coal-fired power stations in the EPS, the same argument was used—the floor price would have long-term continuity, which would mean that we could rely on it as an instrument to ensure that there would be little or no unabated coal in the system in the 2020s. We did not need any other instruments.

Now, with the freeze on carbon price support, it is likely that coal will trade allowances far further forward into 2020, and measures in the Budget to support carbon capture and storage are, ironically, less likely to be taken up as a result of that calculation. It is also likely that the reliance that gas has put on the consequences of carbon price support to make coal prices over the period less competitive will mean that advance gas investment will be dampened, which has consequences for the extent to which additional funding for the capacity payment market may also be necessary. It is an additional amount of money coming on the back of trying to make sure that there is less money available over the period of this particular policy.

Furthermore, it is not really true that, as the Red Book says, the buying power of the levy control framework, which sets out the amount of support available for low carbon and renewable investment until 2020, will be unaffected by other Budget decisions. It directly means that renewable obligation buying power, part of the levy control framework system, will be changed because the obligation was based originally on 2011 assumptions about the level of carbon price over the period. The relationship between the strike price and the reference price for contracts for difference will change, which means that we will be paying more out of a fixed fund to make up the difference between strike and reference price. The buying power of the levy control framework will certainly be reduced and there will be a smaller quantum support to go into new entrant projects for renewable energy over the period.

The Government should state to the House what they consider to be the consequences of their decision on carbon price support and set out measures that will need to go alongside it to maintain the position that they themselves had previously said was dependent on the trajectory of the carbon price. Above all, what all this shows is that non-joined-up government has consequences.

7.39 pm

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I want to discuss the proposed garden city at Ebbsfleet in my constituency. Provided that certain assurances and safeguards are put in place, it will be welcomed by the local people.

Ebbsfleet is as much a concept as a place where we can build houses and development can take place. The proposal is not new; there have been other attempts to build houses in the Ebbsfleet valley. The first proposal was made back in 1996, and seven years ago Dartford council granted planning permission for thousands of homes to be built. What is new this time is the creation of the development corporation and, crucially, up to £200 million of investment in infrastructure in the area to complement the house building. The scheme is bold and forward thinking and, if implemented correctly, will enhance the local area and help ease some of the pressure on housing in the south-east.

The former Housing Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), endeavoured to kick-start the housing project by getting all parties around the table, but to no avail. For some reason, landowners have always been reluctant to get on with building houses in the area and consequently the Ebbsfleet valley is now a muddy quarry. The Chancellor suggested in his Budget that fewer than 300 houses had been built in the area, but I would put the figure far lower. The experience has been frustrating, so I am pleased that we are witnessing the beginning of some action on the site.

The development is on a brownfield area some 20 miles from this Chamber and represents a great opportunity to bring jobs and investment to my constituency. It is next to the High Speed 1 line station at Ebbsfleet, 17 minutes from central London and less than two hours from both Paris and Brussels. It is also adjacent to some of the most beautiful countryside in Kent and to the villages of Betsam and Southfleet, which must be protected under the scheme. I am pleased that reassurance was given to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr Holloway) and me that the green belt area surrounding Ebbsfleet garden city will be protected from any building under the proposed development.

It is also crucial that local people form part of the decision-making process. There must be a role for Dartford council, which has proactively tried to make the development happen in recent years. There must be opportunities for local people to input their thoughts and suggestions, as the concept simply will not work if the development is imposed on local residents. The Red Book makes it clear that local residents will be involved in the consultation process for any decisions made by the development corporation, which is a welcome announcement.

The importance of infrastructure's complementing house building has not been lost on local residents or the Government. That is why the £200 million figure cited by the Chancellor is so important. Families will not move to a muddy quarry without transport infrastructure, school places or medical provision. The development needs to work with the residents and the local council to be successful, but it must also work with the private sector. The site is adjacent to the Bluewater retail complex, which views the announcement as a positive step, and it is also next to a proposed Paramount theme park, the developers of which have also welcomed the idea.

The announcement is pro-enterprise, bold and ambitious. It will create thousands of jobs in the area, help alleviate some of the housing pressures in the south-east and kick-start a faltering project. The possibilities are endless. I have always recognised the huge potential in the area, which, in my biased opinion, adds to what makes it the area with the most exciting prospects in the country.

7.44 pm

Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): I hope that the hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) gets a genuine garden city. The 15,000 houses are welcome, although the number has reduced since the original plans, but they need to be underpinned by garden city principles if Ebbsfleet is going to be a garden city.

[Roberta Blackman-Woods]

There are some things to be welcomed in the Budget, such as the increase in the personal tax allowance, the rise in the tax-free ISA allowance and the Government's decision to expand the tax on residential properties worth more than £2 million to those worth more than £500,000. Overall, however, the Budget delivers very little for people in my constituency.

The key question for people across Durham and the north-east is whether they are better off than they were when the coalition came to power back in 2010. For the overwhelming majority of my constituents, the answer would be a resounding no. Julia Unwin, chief executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, said:

“This is a Budget for the people who already have, not for the people who need to benefit most from the return to growth. It is a lost opportunity for the 13 million people...who need active intervention to tackle the structural barriers that keep them in poverty.

People on low incomes are unlikely to see the welcome benefits of growth unless there is targeted help with household and housing costs, with child care and with the nature of jobs and training. The expense and inefficiency of high levels of poverty continue to put a drag on growth.”

I agree with her and would emphasise that neither the Chancellor nor any Government Member today has shown any recognition of the need to rebalance growth in our economy. Significantly, there is a real need to reduce regional inequalities.

Many people in my constituency simply earn too little to benefit from the Chancellor's tax cuts and can only dream of earning the £1,250 a month that can now be saved tax-free in ISAs, let alone being able to save that amount.

People in the north-east and my constituency hoped that the Chancellor would offer help to do something about the fact that they experience the highest unemployment levels in England. Last month, unemployment in my constituency fell by just 17. Although I welcome that fall, the Government must do more to get people back into work. I have found the Government's rather triumphalist approach to unemployment quite disturbing. Worryingly, in my constituency youth unemployment has risen in the past two months and more than 900,000 young people are out of work across the country. That is not something to celebrate. It is clear that tens of thousands of young people are not experiencing any recovery at all.

The Government should have used last week Budget to introduce Labour's compulsory jobs guarantee to get young people and the long-term unemployed off benefits and back to work. The compulsory jobs guarantee would be funded by a repeat of Labour's successful tax on bank bonuses and by restricting pensions tax relief for people earning more than £150,000.

We know that working people are already £1,600 worse off under the coalition Government than they were before the general election, but the situation is exacerbated in the north-east by wages that are about £50 a week less than the UK average and almost £200 a week less than wages in London. Beth Farhat, regional secretary of the northern TUC, has criticised the Budget for failing to tackle the living standards crisis that is the fundamental concern of workers across our region and for the Chancellor's failure to show any real support for

the living wage or fair pay. According to the TUC, north-east workers are much worse off in real terms, and that is equivalent to about 23 average weekly shops, a year's worth of energy bills for the average household or 88 tanks of fuel.

The regional secretary of the northern TUC has also questioned the quality of jobs being created in the region. Many are precarious and based on zero-hours contracts. She has also drawn attention to the fact that eight out of 10 private sector jobs that have been created have been in the south of England. The few jobs that are being created in the north-east are predominantly in low-paid sectors and leave many families on low incomes struggling to cope with the rising cost of living and increasingly reliant on payday loan companies or food banks. That is unacceptable and it is particularly worrying that the Government have brought forward no strategies to invest in the north-east of England.

The regional growth fund is not strategic. It is not directed towards areas of greatest need or the parts of the north-east's economy that are most likely to grow. We need from the Government an approach that will direct funds to the areas of greatest need. To respond to the hon. Member for City of Chester (Stephen Mosley), it is not the case that we are not championing our region, because many people in my area are highly skilled and would welcome the opportunity to work, but what they need is support from the Government for them and for industrial growth in the area.

7.50 pm

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I am sorry to be following the hon. Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods) because there are good things in the Budget. She should encourage her constituents to enjoy—responsibly, of course—cider and beer.

Wednesday's Budget was the latest in a series of announcements from which my constituents will directly benefit. I strongly welcome the Chancellor's measures to assist the cider industry. I was delighted by the removal of the escalator and the freezing of duty on almost all ciders, which will provide much-needed relief for an industry that represents a real success story for British business. Cider production is powered by British raw materials and British workers making a product for British consumers. The average pint will now be 3p lower than under Labour's previous proposals.

I am glad that the Chancellor recognises that this has been a testing time for the 7,500 people employed by the cider industry. The impact of heavy flooding on this year's crop of cider apples is yet to be seen, but I know that many fear the worst because prosperous growing areas were some of the worst hit by the floods. I hope that we will see continued support for this industry, which is one of the biggest employers in my constituency and an essential contributor to the pub sector.

North Herefordshire boasts 132 pubs and 11 breweries. The pub sector is a great supporter of local communities. It invests approximately £1.1 million locally and provides various employment opportunities, including 254 direct jobs for 16 to 24-year-olds.

The fact that pubs and many other businesses in North Herefordshire are taking on new employees is a clear indication that our long-term economic plan is working. Beer is 8p a pint cheaper than it would have been under the previous Labour Government's plans. In

February, the number of unemployed claimants in North Herefordshire was 862, which is 282 fewer than in February 2013. That means that 282 people are now working thanks to the Government's measures.

A further testament to progress is the success that the apprenticeship scheme is achieving in rural businesses. The benefit brought to local businesses by new apprentices in North Herefordshire has been a boost of more than £1.7 million in the last year. The benefits from the scheme are twofold: each business that hires an apprentice experiences an average benefit of £2,207; and youth unemployment in North Herefordshire is down, with just 250 18 to 24-year-old jobseeker's allowance claimants.

I also welcomed the news from the Chancellor of the doubling of the annual investment allowance, which will be warmly welcomed by the farming community. Farming is a highly intensive industry that requires expensive specialist gear. I hope that the announcement will provide an incentive for investment in equipment so that British farms can remain as efficient as our competitors.

Despite those improvements, I appreciate the frustration of farmers in my constituency who still feel that they face an uphill struggle for similar funding to that enjoyed by urban businesses. Their unincorporated businesses are not able to benefit from the Chancellor's corporation tax reduction. I have previously voiced my concerns in the House about the raw deal that rural communities receive on Government funding. Sparsity of population makes it far more expensive to provide services in areas such as North Herefordshire, yet urban areas still receive 50% more funding per head. The Government need to recognise there that is still a disparity in the calculation of local government finance but, to give credit where it is due, I am delighted that the disparity in school funding has been addressed. The change to allocating funds on the basis of individual schools' needs and character is a common-sense measure that is greatly to be welcomed. The previous Labour Government based funding only on historical levels of spending, and the fact that that mechanism was allowed to continue for so long was detrimental to thousands of pupils in my constituency. However, our schools will now receive £2.6 million more per school year, so I thank my colleagues who have campaigned hard on this, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker). Unfortunately, in several other ways, rural communities still require far more Government funding to provide essential services.

Road maintenance is a key concern for all rural constituencies and I know that such areas will be delighted with the extra £200 million that has been allocated to that in the Budget. Potholes are a menace and a danger, especially to those who live in isolated areas. The extent of the damage to roads in North Herefordshire is reflected by the fact that it received the highest allocation of repair funds in the west midlands. The damage has been aggravated this winter, but the overall standard of rural roads is very poor. I hope that the Government will maintain the new funding to address widespread pothole problems. I also look forward to the publication in the near future of the Government's guidance on council applications for more highways funding.

I have set out just a snapshot of how the Government have made positive progress for my constituents, including the Exchequer Secretary's mother-in-law. The Budget

continues the already good progress that has been made to address the imbalance between rural and urban communities. I urge the Government to continue to bear in mind the specific needs of our hard-working rural communities when they allocate future funds. We cannot afford to allow our vital countryside communities to be ignored and underfunded purely because of their rural location.

7.56 pm

Frank Dobson (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I wish to speak about a huge sum that was not mentioned in the Budget statement, but will loom large over Chancellors of the Exchequer in years to come: the £50 billion that is committed to the building of High Speed 2. To put that amount in perspective, it is about what we spend on our entire school system each year.

Both the Higgins and Deighton reports on HS2, which were recently produced for the Government, demonstrate that, whatever was wrong with the Government's original plans, they were amateurish and ill thought out. Most importantly of all, they show that massive additional investment will be needed in the areas that HS2 is supposed to serve if its promised benefits are to come about. The Government have agreed to a huge saving by abandoning the preposterous proposal of a High Speed 2-High Speed 1 link. That link, which would have run through my constituency, was opposed by local people and businesses, as well as Transport for London, the rail freight industry and the Institution of Civil Engineers, but it is still included in the hybrid Bill and was supported by the House when it voted through the paving Bill. Fortunately, now that the Higgins report has said, "Dump it," the Secretary of State has, to his credit, agreed to dump the link, but I wonder whether any of the people and businesses that spent a lot of time, effort and money opposing the idea will get any compensation.

The other proposition that affects my area involves the redevelopment of Euston station and its use as the terminus for HS2. Long before HS2 was dreamed up, there was an outline proposal to redevelop Euston station, which is awful, on its existing footprint. That proposal would have involved building more than 1,000 new homes. HS2 originally said, "We could incorporate that in our scheme and it would be 1,500 new homes," but then the masterminds behind the proposition concluded that as the cost of the scheme had increased from £1.2 billion to £2 billion, it was unaffordable and they would drop all the planning gain and extra housing and industrial premises, and replace that with a lean-to shed approach. However, while speaking in Hong Kong, the Chancellor of the Exchequer suggested that there should be a reversion to something like the original scheme, which is what the Government now propose. The proposal is still awful, but it is better than what is included in the hybrid Bill.

Other investment will be needed beyond the budget for HS2 if its benefits are to flow. According to HS2 itself, Euston will not be able to cope with the extra passengers and it will therefore be necessary to build—God help us—Crossrail 2, at a cost of anything between £16 billion and £20 billion, but that is not included in anyone's budget at the moment. So much for the idea that HS2 will transfer transport spending from London to the north, because although that has already been identified as necessary expenditure, similar expenditure

[Frank Dobson]

will be necessary in Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and in the east midlands if the benefits from HS2 are to flow. There is no money in the Chancellor's Budget for that investment, nor is there money in anybody else's budget.

My constituents' great fear now is that, after the announcement that there will be a huge redevelopment at Euston, all sorts of property-speculating vultures will descend and want to build a huge office city there and not provide the housing that people desperately need. When we consider that the biggest problem in London for Londoners is the fact that average Londoners are being priced out of the city—and average Camden dwellers are being priced out of Camden—we want to make sure that if the redevelopment of Euston goes ahead, it includes housing that ordinary people can afford and does not include a lot of speculative blocks of penthouses to be bought, but not occupied, by Russian oligarchs. They are the people who are driving up the cost of housing in this country and, as a final offer to the Government, I suggest that if they want a sanction, they should stop the oligarchs buying residential property and take back what the oligarchs have bought up to now if they are not occupying it.

8.2 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson). Constituents in Romsey and Southampton North have welcomed what they regard as an excellent Budget, aimed at improving the lot of doers, makers, savers and hard-working lower earners. It was a Budget that raised the income tax threshold and further shifted the burden for Government spending away from those who can afford it least and on to those who can afford it most.

The Budget also provided help to manufacturers struggling with the costs of energy, including companies in my constituency such as Michelmersh bricks, which welcomed the £7 billion support package that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced. Those of my constituents who enjoy a pint also noted the 1p reduction in beer duty. I join members of the all-party save the pub group and hope that cut will be passed on to the consumer, not kept by the pub companies. Those in Romsey and Southampton North who drive a car are relieved that the hated fuel duty escalator was abolished last year and that we have seen a further freeze in fuel duty, meaning a saving of 20%, given the rises that would have taken place under the Labour party.

I was delighted to hear my right hon. Friend's announcement on changes to annuities. His proposal struck me as a policy that is as radical as the right-to-buy scheme was in the 1980s. That scheme saw the largest ever transfer of wealth from the state to the individual and enabled people to take control of their future and wealth through property ownership. This policy does exactly the same with taxed income that responsible people have chosen to save, yet are restricted from accessing because of the hand of the state. I have always believed that if someone has been responsible enough to save for their own retirement, they should have the absolute right to access their money as they wish and to reinvest or spend it as they see fit.

On the subject of pensioners, Hampshire sees 1,000 more people every year reach the age of 80 and the health and social care requirements of an ageing population is a challenge faced both by central and local Government. Local authorities such as Hampshire county council face significant challenges. The Care Bill, which I welcome, places an additional burden on local government and estimates indicate that just assessing the eligibility of Hampshire's residents for the new provisions of the Care Bill will run into many millions of pounds. That is not money delivered in front-line services to the elderly, but merely to assess whether they are eligible. Even for a prudent local council, that bill is large and unexpected. Counties such as Hampshire currently have a significant number of self-funders—in the region of 60%—and under the terms of the Care Bill, all of those might apply to the council to see whether they are eligible.

I am relieved that the Budget has not led to further reductions in central Government funding for local authorities, but there is no doubt that the next two years will be tough. Particularly in Romsey and Southampton North, there has been a significant problem with flooding over the past few months—perhaps not on the scale of Somerset or the Thames valley, but it is none the less devastating for the affected residents and businesses.

We know assistance is available, but what Romsey residents want to know, and quickly, is what measures will be put in place to prevent a recurrence in future. Flood defence measures do not come cheap, nor are they easily engineered and installed. We have to be as alert to inland flooding as to coastal flooding and remember that people's lives and homes do not fall easily into mathematical equations to assess the wider benefit. I suspect that the burden of the winter's floods will fall on local government, such as the careful, prudent Conservative authorities of Test Valley and Hampshire, and I seek reassurance from the Treasury that they will not be left to shoulder that burden alone.

That brings me to potholes. I welcome the additional funding for pothole repair, but the estimate for Hampshire's roads is that this winter's weather will have brought about a bill of £35 million extra, even before the water level has gone down completely and prior to any assessment of damage to bridges. I welcome the £11.5 million that the Chancellor has already committed to Hampshire and I am grateful to him for making £200 million more available in the pothole challenge fund, which local authorities are invited to bid for. I sincerely hope that he will look favourably on an application from Hampshire.

8.6 pm

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): What a pleasure to follow such a well delivered speech. I only wish that the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) had more time so that she could go into more detail about the reaction of pub dwellers in Romsey or Southampton North when she went in and said, "We have an amazing new offer: buy 300 pints and get one free!" I am sure they were absolutely overwhelmed.

We were told that this Budget would be for savers, and yet the Office for Budget Responsibility says that it will be followed by a sharp drop in the savings ratio. It was supposed to be a Budget for exporters, but the OBR predicts that export volume growth will be less

than half what is needed by the Chancellor to meet his targets. It was also supposed to be a Budget that learned lessons from the past, but estimates of household debt have now been revised up to near the levels they were at before the global crash. This is not a Budget for the long term. They are not a Government who are thinking of the country's long-term future. They are an Administration doing, I am afraid, what Tory Administrations always do: trying to manufacture a pre-election splurge, whatever the long-term consequences, and rarely, if ever, intervening in a market, regardless of whether that market happens to be working in the interests of the country and its citizens.

This Government came to power and delayed infrastructure decisions. They told skilled manufacturing workers in sectors such as defence that Ministers were only really interested in buying off the shelf from abroad. They may have changed their tune now, but the world is moving so fast and we will rue these years of stagnation. I am afraid that the ambition remains limited and the delivery too often feeble. Where there is investment, there is little sign that the Government are willing to act to lever in the maximum possible benefit to the community.

In my constituency and in those neighbouring it in south and west Cumbria, we are about to see a scale of industrial investment in the area that will exceed that of the 2012 Olympic games. That includes new civil nuclear capacity; GlaxoSmithKline's first factory in the UK for 40 years; and the work to enable Barrow shipyard to build the next generation of nuclear submarines. All those are extremely welcome and are a result of the consensus that we forged in government, which—thank goodness—at least one of the Government parties is now on board with taking forward.

When we saw big levels of investment in the area during the 1980s, that coincided with a time of growing divisions in our communities—wealth for a few, destitution for many others. The investment came via a Government who celebrated the concept of trickle-down economics. Yes, Barrow grew in the 1980s, but so did hardship and hopelessness. When recession and mass redundancies came to the shipyard on their watch the last time, it was truly devastating. We still bear the scars of those days.

Look at the parallel now, when rising employment sits alongside an explosion of food banks and desperation. With Olympic-scale investment coming our way, the Government should be doing so much more in Cumbria, helping us to ensure that those massive projects can be delivered simultaneously, which is a big challenge in itself, and, equally importantly, that they will lead to sustained jobs, skills and prosperity for as many people as possible. Unfortunately, there is little sign of that so far, and the expertise that would have been best placed to do much of the work—the Northwest regional development agency—is long gone.

Therefore, as the Government parties stand back, we will step in. My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Mr Reed) and I will work with Cumbria's local enterprise partnership to bring together the employers, investors, schools, colleges and councils to work out how best to make this succeed for all of us for the long term, and to do better than the last time they were in charge.

The Chancellor needed to up his game on long-term infrastructure planning in this Budget, but there was precious little sign of that. He needed to show that he understood how Governments of all colours had damaged

the country with stop-start infrastructure spending. Rather than being determined to micro-manage every mile of road in the Budget statement, a truly radical Chancellor would have taken infrastructure planning off the political merry-go-round. We need a binding, independent body that can lock in a long-term infrastructure plan, making it much harder for today's—I am sorry to have to break it to them—transient Ministers to unpick.

Instead, we have had the inevitable re-announcement of the ever-hardy perennial, the prospective garden city in Ebbsfleet, but nothing that will fundamentally solve our housing crisis. This Budget was as great a missed opportunity as much of the past four years has been. The Prime Minister can tweet the rhetoric, but he and his Chancellor are just not up to the job. It will be up to us to put that right.

8.12 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), although he seemed unable to find a single positive thing to say about the Budget, notwithstanding the remarks of his colleagues about the support for energy-intensive industries. That is in complete contrast to the country as a whole because, as the opinion polls published over the weekend indicate, the general public seem quite supportive of what we are doing.

Rugby is the fastest growing area in the west midlands, with a very positive attitude to growth and development. My constituents will benefit substantially from our long-term economic plan. They are keen to look at the measures in the Budget that will contribute to growth, which are very welcome. The British Chambers of Commerce stated:

“Budget 2014 passes the business test.”

The Federation of Small Businesses stated that its measures “will maintain increasing confidence in the construction sector”.

The Home Builders Federation called it a “Budget that builds for the future”.

The Federation of Master Builders stated:

“Government intervention to finance small house builders welcomed”.

The Building Societies Association referred to

“welcome proposals to boost house building, especially Help to Buy.”

That sounds to me like a pretty ringing endorsement for the measures the Chancellor announced last week.

Many of my constituents have already benefited from the Help to Buy equity loan scheme and will be pleased to see it being extended to 2020. It was announced today that already 17,000 people have been able to realise the dream of owning their own home. In my constituency 75 loans have already been completed and there are 77 “scheduled out” sales, meaning potential completed loans following the reservation of a property in the scheme. That is the 18th highest level in the country. It is enabling people to start on the housing ladder with a 5% deposit. Many of those buyers would otherwise still be renting.

In Rugby we are proudly building more homes, with 320 completions last year. Work is currently taking place on development sites across my constituency, the largest being Eden park, where 1,400 new homes are coming forward, with outline consent granted in the

[Mark Pawsey]

last couple of months for a sustainable urban extension on the old BT mast site. The continuation of Help to Buy will speed up the site's development. It will not be built overnight—it is anticipated that it will take over 15 years—but it will reduce the build-out time, as well as providing many of the houses our country needs.

However, the majority of new build is now done by major-volume house builders, as smaller builders were hit hardest by the downturn, so I am rather disappointed that the Chancellor did not accept recommendations to reduce the VAT rate on improvements and extensions, which attract VAT at the standard rate while new build attracts zero VAT. That work is often carried out by smaller, family-owned building companies, which have been hardest hit over the past few years. I was therefore very pleased to see the £500 million builders finance fund, which will enable small builders to deliver 15,000 housing units. The market share of 100-unit builders has halved since 1995, from 30% to 14% of the market. This is a very welcome incentive for that sector.

I was delighted by the proposal for Ebbsfleet, and there is such support within the community there. We heard my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson), who represents Ebbsfleet, speak about the virtues of the development site. The critical difference between that proposal and the previous Government's eco-towns is that they failed through a lack of local support. In Ebbsfleet the development is being welcomed by local people. It is entirely right for the Government to bring forward incentives for local authorities to consider how garden city proposals, such as those in Letchworth and Welwyn garden city, can be brought forward. At a time when the national planning policy framework sets out the principle that planning is no longer something that people see as being done to them, but something in which they have a real say, it is vital that any proposals for substantial new development have real public support and consensus.

I welcome the pensions reform, which means that pensioners will finally be treated as adults, but there are those who are concerned that use of the pension pot might encourage people to invest in buy-to-let properties or to support the next generation to buy their homes, which will add upward pressure on house prices. Opposition Members talk about a bubble, but we cannot have a bubble when, as today's BBC report reminds us, 8% of households in the UK are in negative equity, and the figure rises to 16% in the north of England. We would need a very substantial rise in house prices across the country for there to be any form of problem.

I welcome the support that the Government are bringing forward for energy-intensive industries, which of course will support manufacturing, including cement manufacturing, which is so important in my constituency. We have seen a Budget that is good for business, good for development and good for individuals across our country.

8.18 pm

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey). He mentioned negative equity. I fear that when interest rates rise, as they may well do over the next few months, there will be an awful lot more people across the country—

including many of his constituents and mine—in negative equity. That is a massive concern for this country's long-term sustainability.

I want to focus my remarks on productivity. Productivity remains the vital element of Britain's competitiveness. If British makers and doers are to compete in world markets, our productivity has to match or better that of our rivals, yet we are falling behind our competitors. Last month the Office for National Statistics released data showing that output per hour in the UK was 21% below the average of the other G7 countries—the widest productivity gap our country has seen since 1992. Output per worker in the UK fell year on year, while it rose for the rest of the major industrialised nations. That is probably one reason why our share of exports is falling and expected to fall further, as per the Red Book, which means that we will not meet the target that the Chancellor set of doubling our exports by 2020.

Without productivity growth, Britain cannot increase its competitiveness and there will be no long-term improvement in living standards. Wage inequality will increase and in-work poverty will worsen, which will mean that my constituents in Hartlepool, who saw a year-on-year actual—not relative—fall of 6.1% in average full-time wages in 2013 will see further real falls in their wages. That is on top of the fact that Hartlepool has lost £28.9 million since 2010 as a result of public sector cuts—a drop of 24.5% since 2010. That means that spending power in Hartlepool has diminished by £680 a household since the general election. The cost of living crisis in my community will get worse if the Government do not address the issue of productivity.

The Chancellor did not mention the word “productivity” once in the financial statement. Without business investment in new innovation and technology and better skills for workers, our living standards will fall over the long term. In his first Budget, the Chancellor forecast that business investment would rise by 8.1% in 2011, 10% in 2012, 10.9% in 2013, 9.5% in 2014 and 8.2% in 2015. The actual out-turn figures to date have been 3.1% in 2011 and, as this year's Red Book shows, 3.9% in 2012. The forecast is an actual fall in business investment of 1.2% in 2013. I hope that I am wrong and that pent-up demand for investment will be unleashed in the next few months, but given the record of the past four years, the figures in this year's Red Book suggesting business investment growth of 8% in 2014 and 9.2% in 2015 seem widely exaggerated and optimistic.

This Budget also marked the time when the Government gave up any ambition for this country's becoming a leading player in the future of global low-carbon technology. The CBI report “The Colour of Growth” found that investment in the low-carbon economy could have accounted for more than a third of all growth in 2010-11 and had the potential to halve the UK trade deficit by 2014-15. It seems a long time since the Chancellor stated in his first Red Book in June 2010:

“The Government is committed to playing its part in moving to a low-carbon economy. The transition will change the shape of industry, growth and jobs. As part of this, the UK needs £200 billion of investment to 2020 to provide secure low-carbon energy.”

This Budget provided nothing to help realise that ambition, and in certain ways, such as the ending of the renewable energy enterprise investment scheme, it actively worked to deter investment in the low-carbon economy. That target of £200 billion of investment in a decade, which

would have helped manufacturers such as those in wind turbine supply chains in my region, the north-east, and my constituency, will now be difficult to realise.

The fact that the Government will exempt from the carbon floor price fuel used in combined heat and power plants for electricity generated to supply manufacturing firms is welcome, and I have asked parliamentary questions about that. Mitigating actions for energy-intensive industries might also help manufacturing, but not immediately, because the announcement in the Budget does not kick in until 2016-17. As my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) said, it only reverses something that happened on the Chancellor's watch last year.

Business rate reform, which would help manufacturing, was not mentioned in the Budget. Expanding capital allowances might help incentivise business investment, but again, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) mentioned, that measure only reverses the cut that the Chancellor made to such allowances in his first Budget. The tax relief to boost North sea oil and gas investment will only remedy the damage that he did to the sector in his Budget of 2011.

Those matters all show a wider problem in the Government's economic and industrial policy. Businesses want long-term policy stability and a stable framework that gives them the confidence to plan and invest for the long term. Those oscillations in policy, with a measure in one year's Budget reversed in a subsequent Budget a year or two later, do not give companies the stability and certainty that they need. It is little wonder that business investment has flatlined and our productivity has fallen behind that of our rivals. That is a real weakness of the Budget that the Chancellor shows little appetite to resolve for the long-term good of the British economy and the good of my constituents.

8.24 pm

Annette Brooke (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): I shall aim to achieve a balance between despair and euphoria in my contribution.

There is a great deal to commend in this Budget, against a background of rising employment, falling inflation and rising economic growth, which is now expected to be 2.7% in 2014 according to the Office for Budget Responsibility. The OECD forecasts that the UK will grow faster than any other G7 economy in the first half of this year, and further forecasts show that real wages are set to rise over the years ahead. Of course, that has been accomplished with some tough decision making, which has had an impact on many people, and there is still much to do to ensure that we have both a sustained stronger economy and a fairer society.

I am particularly pleased about the increase in the income tax threshold, a key Liberal Democrat manifesto pledge. A £700 tax cut for more than 20 million people has been delivered by April 2014, with the 2.7 million lowest-paid people taken out of tax altogether. Now the threshold is set to rise to £10,500, benefiting working families, along with the increased support for child care.

I welcome greatly the measures to help pensioners—I am not sure whether I should declare an interest. I am proud to be part of a Government who will be remembered for having done so much to reform pensions—single-tier

pensions, the triple lock, auto-enrolment and now the change in the Budget. The help for savers is to be welcomed, as are more measures to clamp down on tax avoidance.

I also welcome the Government's adding to the measures that have previously been announced to support business, such as increasing tax incentives to invest in new equipment and carry out research and development, and increasing the level of financial support for exporters. As other Members have mentioned, ensuring that business has skilled labour is all-important. Some 1.5 million apprenticeships have already been created, and now there is new money to create even more.

Local government clearly has an important role to play in supporting businesses to grow and create jobs, which of course are also related to tackling our housing crisis. Many council leaders of all political colours fear that by 2015, the successive cuts to local government expenditure might result in a cliff edge, with serious further cuts to the local services that they can provide. There are also likely to be more increases in regressive charges, despite the innovative and transformative work that is taking place and the extra money that has been pledged for the integration of health and social care services.

The proposed changes to councillors' pensions are deeply unpopular. I simply do not understand why, for example, council leaders of working age should be seen as volunteers, when in today's world they are working full time and using many professional skills. I understand that local social fund money has been transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions to the Department for Communities and Local Government, and that it may be removed from council budgets in 2015. That would cause me great concern, as it is a vital safety net.

We are faced with a deep housing crisis, and there are heartbreaking situations, typified in my constituency mailbag, involving families in unsuitable accommodation. Although I welcome the measures to address the crisis announced in the Budget and previously, and although I acknowledge the Government's record on building houses, particularly social houses, I have two main questions. First, will the measures be sufficient? Secondly, although I appreciate that we must have both demand and supply measures to increase the number of homes delivered each year, what monitoring will there be of the Help to Buy scheme, given the fears that it might result in undue upward pressure on house prices, particularly in London and the south-east?

I welcome the moves to allow garden cities—or perhaps towns, if we are talking about 15,000 homes—to be developed with a local trigger, providing much-needed housing and offering an alternative to filling in every space in existing urban areas. I welcome any moves to bring forward publicly owned land for development, and I wonder what progress there has been on community land auctions. We have heard further calls for “brownfield first” today, and I am sure that there is much publicly owned land that would meet that criterion. I welcome the pilot study on development benefits. The new town option provides the opportunity to capture community benefit to provide long-term facilities and infrastructure for a settlement and its surroundings, and potentially to provide affected individuals with a share in any benefits.

With any development it makes sense to include self-build and building by smaller and medium-sized companies. That introduces competition and, I hope,

[Annette Brooke]

will stimulate good design—something much needed, as a previous speaker said. I note further measures to support social housing—again, so much is needed—and I believe that neighbourhood plans are really important, although they need more resources. Planning should be bottom up; we should be working with our communities to help tackle our housing crisis, allocating sites within our local community, and delivering when we truly understand our local community's housing needs. Finally, I welcome the announcement of the extra money on potholes, which I believe will deliver real change very quickly.

8.30 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Yet again, this Budget benefits those on the Treasury Bench and their millionaire donors far more than the millions of ordinary people who have borne the brunt of this Government's decisions so far. This Budget showed that although Ministers might try, they will never understand ordinary people.

The Chancellor said a lot about beer duty—it was as if he had given people a free pint. As we heard earlier, however, the trouble with saving a penny a pint is that someone has to drink around 300 pints before they get a free one—hardly a healthy message. He also said a lot about cutting tax on bingo. What he did not say is that that will benefit bingo operators, not bingo players. The Chancellor made big play of allowing people to save up to £15,000 a year tax free. He might be able to squirrel away that kind of money, but at the moment many of my constituents would consider themselves very lucky even to earn £15,000 a year, and even luckier to take home that amount, never mind being able to save £15,000 in their lifetime, let alone in a year. Should not a responsible Chancellor who wanted to build a broad-based recovery and improve living standards concentrate more on helping those people rather than wealthy savers? If he wanted to know what ordinary people wanted from the Budget, he should have read the excellent *Sunderland Echo*, as I do every day. A reporter went out and about in Sunderland last week to ask people exactly that question.

Thomas and Elizabeth Dunn wanted the Chancellor to do something to tackle the cost of living crisis, which is becoming difficult for them. They are not alone. Working people are on average £1,600 a year worse off in their pay packets under this Government; that is even more the case if we add in the 24 tax rises that the Government have snuck in, causing the cost of living crisis that is devastating people across the country. How many mentions of the cost of living were in the Red Book, and how many new policies were there to ease it? Absolutely none.

The *Sunderland Echo* reporter also spoke to new parents, Chris and Lisa Mann. Lisa wants to return to her job as a community nurse after having her son, Harry, who is now eight months old, but the cost of child care is prohibitive. Chris said:

“We both want to work but the cost of child care is a problem, it really is. We have to rely on Lisa's mum a lot.”

Parents across the country are similarly prevented from working because of the triple whammy that the Government have hit parents with. Costs are up 30% since the

election, there are thousands fewer child care providers, and tax credits have been cut. Did the Budget mean that Lisa will be able to return to work at the end of her maternity leave, thanks to increased support for child care? No, it did not. Yes, there will be some support, but in 18 months' time, not now. What about now? The fact remains that over this Parliament, the Government have cut, not increased, support for parents in accessing child care. Parents will remember that, and they will see Labour's offer of 25 hours a week of child care free at the point of use as the biggest help to their family budgets.

Of course, the No. 1 concern in my constituency is finding decent jobs. On the face of it, there was some good news for my constituency in last week's employment figures, but when we dig down we see that very long-term unemployment for adults is rocketing. In my constituency, there was a 76% increase in just one year, and 12 of the 20 constituencies with the biggest increases on that measure are in the north-east. Twelve out of 20 constituencies are in one small region, yet there is only one in the whole of the south—more evidence of the widening north-south divide under this Government. Those people are clearly being left behind by this Government, and by a Work programme that is worse than doing nothing. They need a way back into employment—something to give them their confidence back and to sharpen their soft skills. What did we see from the Chancellor to help those people? Absolutely nothing. Only a Labour Government would guarantee those people a job for six months, with training and intensive support to find employment afterwards.

In summary, the Chancellor should not believe his own hype or a few good headlines from his friends in the press—people who probably benefit from this Budget. Come the election, real people will be asking themselves, “Am I better off thanks to this lot?” We know who will be able to answer yes: the Chancellor, those on the Government Front Bench, the Prime Minister and all the millionaires the Government have prioritised support for. However, millions of people on low and middle incomes—those who have been hit hardest by the Government's cost of living crisis—will answer no, and it is they who will show this lousy Government the door in 15 months' time.

8.36 pm

Mr Brooks Newmark (Braintree) (Con): This was a Budget for savers, for pensioners, for businesses, and for hard-working people, and most importantly of all it ably demonstrates that our long-term economic plan is working. Only last year, we were talking about a triple-dip recession, but in fact there was no triple-dip recession, or even double-dip recession. The Office for Budget Responsibility is now forecasting growth for this year to be 2.7%—the biggest upward revision in 30 years—and the Bank of England is forecasting growth to exceed 3%.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Will my hon. Friend tell the House who exactly was predicting the triple-dip recession, and pleading with the Government to go to plan B?

Mr Newmark: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I think it was the shadow Chancellor who predicted 1 million people unemployed—I will get to that point in a moment.

More growth means more jobs, and over 1.5 million more jobs are forecast over the next five years, on top of the 1.7 million new jobs created in the past four years. Indeed, today we have more men and women in work than ever before. In Braintree, unemployment has dropped by a third since the general election, with general unemployment down from 3.4% to 2.3%, and youth unemployment from 6.3% to 4.1%. Last Friday we had a successful jobs fair in Braintree with more than 30 businesses and 450 local people attending. I thank Braintree Freeport and Amtek for sponsoring the event, and Braintree district council and Ignite—especially Liz Storey and her team—for their support.

Getting young people back into work is vital, as Councillor Stephen Canning, the youngest councillor in Braintree, keeps reminding me. As a founder of the Million Jobs campaign, I am delighted that the Chancellor has abolished national insurance contributions for employers hiring a young person under 21.

Apprenticeships, too, have been a great success, giving over 1 million people a first step on to the jobs ladder. In particular, I congratulate Braintree district council, especially Councillor Chris Siddall, cabinet member for prosperity and growth, on its apprenticeship programme, and Essex county council on supporting over 2,700 apprentices in the past five years.

The deficit is now down by one third and is due to fall to 5.5% next year. That is 50% of what we inherited in 2010. Yes, the Government's long-term economic plan is indeed working.

This is a Budget for savers, with the raising of the annual limit on ISAs to £15,000, the abolition of the dreaded 10p rate on savings income helping over 1.5 million lower-income savers, and the new pensioner bonds offering up to 4% return on a three-year bond. This is a Budget for pensions and pensioners, with no one being forced to buy an annuity and no punitive 55% tax rate if people try to take more of their tax-free lump sum. This Budget puts pensions back in the control of pensioners, taking them away from the diktat of Government.

This is a Budget for business. At this point, I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. The annual investment allowance, which increased tenfold from £25,000 to £250,000, is now doubled again to £500,000. With the business confidence index at an all-time high, I hope that this will encourage businesses, including farmers in my area, to invest more in plant and machinery and to hire more people.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): Today I visited a company in my constituency, Cube Precision Engineering, with the Chancellor. We could already see the immediate impact of the raising of the investment allowance to £500,000, which is allowing that company to place an order for a new machine that will enhance its competitiveness and allow it to take on new people.

Mr Newmark: That is a fine example of exactly why raising the allowance from £25,000 to £250,000 was an important decision that created jobs. As my hon. Friend has indicated, doubling it again will create even more jobs.

This is a Budget for hard-working people, with petrol duty frozen; a penny off a pint of beer, again; and, most importantly, the personal allowance raised to £10,500,

cutting taxation for over 25 million people and lifting 3.2 million people out of tax altogether.

Alec Shelbrooke *rose*—

Mr Newmark: I can give way only twice; I am sorry about that.

A typical taxpayer in my constituency of Braintree will pay £805 less in tax than they would have done before.

This Budget continues the drive to reform local public services and get value for money for local people. Braintree district council, under the leadership of Councillor Graham Butland, has reduced council taxes by 1% this year and 1% again next year, yet the council continues to invest in our town centres with initiatives such as the new jewellery village, supporting 12 new traders in Braintree town, and the pop-up shops generating four new retailers such as Chic Décor, started by Emma Jane Jarvis.

Essex county council, under the leadership of Councillor David Finch, is also to be congratulated. It has frozen its council tax for four years in a row, yet at the same time invested £3 million in flood prevention, £1 million in youth facilities, and £1.4 million to support vulnerable older people. Of course, the extra £2.7 million of funding in this Budget to address the blight of potholes on our roads throughout Essex, but especially in our rural areas, is also more than welcome.

This is indeed a Budget for hard-working people: for the makers, the doers, and the savers. Our long-term economic plan is slowly but surely beginning to pay dividends. I am delighted to support the 2014 Budget.

8.42 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I do not know whether you, Madam Deputy Speaker, or other Members of the House caught the recent BBC programme "Mind the Gap". It was not about the perils of travelling on the underground but the growing problem of our country's two economies—the way in which London and the south-east is sucking economic activity away from the rest of country. Judging by their policies over the past four years, this Government clearly do not mind the gap; indeed, they have widened it. It is not just a north-south problem; it is London versus the rest. The Chancellor's Budget fuels the gap.

Let us spend a moment looking at two-economies Britain under this Government. Public funding has been diverted from areas where it is needed most by their local government finance settlement, as highlighted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). Regional development agencies were scrapped as soon as this Government got through the door.

James Morris: Can the hon. Gentleman remind us of what happened to regional inequalities when the RDAs were in existence under the previous Government?

Paul Blomfield: I would cite the extremely successful advanced manufacturing research centre, which is a pioneering collaboration between the university of Sheffield, Boeing and Rolls-Royce. It has been highlighted by the Government as a model of industrial innovation. However, it simply would not be there if it had not been for RDA investment.

[Paul Blomfield]

London also thrives in arts and culture funding, with subsidies worth £68.99 per head, while the rest of England gets just £4.58 per head.

The Budget does not just ignore those issues; it is making them worse. Research by Sheffield political economy research institute has exposed the Chancellor's flagship increase in the income tax personal allowance as not benefiting the lowest paid and not addressing regional inequality. In many ways, it has made that inequality worse.

This situation is not inevitable. We simply need the political will and the policies to reverse the trend. Let us build on our regional assets, such as our universities, which are uniquely positioned around the country to drive growth through innovation. Let us ensure that there is effective investment in research and development across the higher education sector.

We need an active industrial strategy that does not simply pick winners but supports growth in key sectors across the country, such as the nuclear sector. Of course, one of the early actions of the Government was to undermine that sector in my city by scrapping the loan to Sheffield Forgemasters.

We need a fairer distribution of public funding that puts need at the heart of funding allocation and that recognises the role of public investment in stimulating local economies. The Government should use the levers of public sector employment to address the regional imbalance. They should move Departments, not just minor agencies, out of London. Why cannot the Department for Education move lock, stock and barrel to Sheffield? Let us move the Department of Health to Leeds. Let us take the Department for Work and Pensions to Hull.

Government Members have raised concerns about the impact of what they describe as "generous public sector pay" on private sector employers in the regions. However, we cannot accept the argument that there must be a race to the bottom on pay and conditions for there to be regional growth outside London. All regions benefit from decent, well-paid jobs. They fuel our local economies and put money in people's pockets that will be spent in local businesses. Moving Departments out of London would be good not only for the regions, but for London. For evidence of that, we need only ask those who are struggling to rent or buy in the overheated housing market in the capital.

Moving Departments of State to the regions would not just provide economic benefits, but would ensure that policies were no longer shaped by people who live and work in London, and who see everything through the prism of the metropolis. One of my constituents, Amy Hall, who is a biophysicist, wrote to me last week and said:

"We need to be less London-centric as this seems to be blinding some of the key policy makers to the situation elsewhere."

Amy was right. There are things that we can do to make that happen.

Moving Departments out of London is not a new idea. It was pioneered by the Labour Government in the '70s. I remember the Manpower Services Commission coming to Sheffield as a result of a Government decision in 1976. More progress was made under the last Labour

Government in moving civil service jobs out of London. According to the information I have been given by the House of Commons Library, that progress has halted under this Government.

We need to take action to achieve a one nation economy, not a one city economy.

8.48 pm

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I rise in support of a Budget that really gets down to doing the job.

Let me start with a constant bugbear of my constituents: the state of the roads. The additional funding to repair the potholes and road damage that came about over the winter is hugely welcome to my constituents. The funding for my city of Leeds is £949,426—almost £1 million of extra money. Altogether, the Government will have spent £4.5 billion on road repairs in this Parliament, which is £800 million more than the last Labour Government spent in their final term in office.

We need to keep a close eye on where the Labour party on Leeds city council spends that money. It has almost revelled in making cuts to front-line services in our city, purely for politically motivated reasons. That is the only explanation for why, when cutting front-line services, it has spent £1.8 million on a website, £600,000 on furniture and hundreds of thousands of pounds on union time and facilities. We must ensure that the £1 million that goes into Leeds is spent as extra money on the roads, and is not the only money that is spent on the roads. Unfortunately, we have a Labour council in Leeds which governs in its own political interests, not in the interests of those who rely on its services. Even outside the financial issues, the council is too slow to get anything sorted out, such as housing and land supply.

It is massively welcome to cities such as Leeds and constituencies such as mine that a £500 million pot is now available for SME developers. With the inclusion of windfall—and my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) and I lobbied very hard for Leeds to be included in the land supply—it means that we should be able to relieve the pressure that villages in my constituency feel to take some of the 12,500 houses that Leeds city council has designated for the area. The time taken to identify major areas of sustainable development, such as Headley Fields in the north of my constituency and Makins Farm in Garforth, is ridiculously slow, but the proactive stance that we are taking in the city is much better than the Labour policy of building 200,000 new homes and seizing the land to build them on—a frankly Stalinist policy. Labour leaflets talk proudly of that policy, but fail to tell local communities that they would effectively lose any say in the location of that development.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will be interested to hear a few other gems from Labour's latest newsletter on economic policy. Top of the list is a pension triple lock, so that any increase would never be lower than 2.5% and would also be in line with the higher of earnings or inflation. One can only guess how Labour thought that policy up—it sounds like a winner. I would suggest that we adopt it if we had not already done so three years ago. It certainly beats the 75p rise of a few years ago. Labour also voted against our triple lock when we introduced it.

Labour also says that it will cut taxes for 24 million people by introducing a 10p rate, but in office it doubled tax on the lowest earners. We did not double that tax: we abolished it. Effectively, that is a watering down of the policy of abolishing tax for the lowest paid. Labour says that it will back small businesses by—wait for this—cutting the rates in 2015 and then freezing them. We gave £1,000 back to businesses with under £50,000 of rateable value, which had a huge impact on the SMEs and small shop owners in my villages of Wetherby, Garforth and Rothwell—a real investment after years of non-investment.

Labour also says it will strengthen the minimum wage: we are doing that. What we are not doing is chasing easy headlines on the living wage, which has already risen by 40p since the argument started a few months ago. We cannot chase wages with an inflation-led policy: we have to make sure that we cut taxes on businesses so that the money goes into the pockets of hard-working people such as my constituents. That approach is sustainable in the long run and that is what we are doing. I want to see the minimum wage reach at least £7, when we are able to afford it by cutting taxes and making sure that what businesses are not giving to the Government goes directly into the pockets of the people who are doing the work.

Compare our approach to Labour's compulsory jobs guarantee scheme, which no firms have signed up to. It would subsidise public sector jobs and create non-jobs. There is nothing more demoralising than being sent to a workplace with nothing to do. Do not patronise my constituents: do what the Government are doing and ensure that we have strong economic growth, leading to real jobs for people. Apprenticeships in my constituency are up 63% since the election, and that is making a real difference. I have had enough Labour shadow Ministers coming to my constituency recently to hear that from people on the doorstep. Clearly they have their ears closed to them, as they seem to listen only to the Labour candidate with all her ideas from Tooting, where she lives. Perhaps those ideas work well around the dinner tables in London, but in my constituency they would not work at all. My hon. Friend the Minister should take heart from the fact that the Opposition's economic policies have either already been put in place by the Government or have no traction outside the north London kitchen tables in the multi-million pound houses of Labour Front Benchers.

We froze council tax: that is why hard-working people have seen their taxes cut. But this year Labour has raised it by 1.99%—a disgraceful attempt to dodge the electorate.

8.54 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Many Government Members, both this afternoon and in the preceding days of this debate, have said that it has been a Budget for savers. That is an irony, coming from a Government who have pumped more than £375 billion into the economy to buy Government bonds. That has been singularly responsible for reducing the yield to savers. The Bank of England working paper 442, on the impact of quantitative easing on the economy, states that the 8% increase in money holdings is estimated to have depressed yields by an average of 150 basis points. That was in 2012. Quantitative easing now is not £122 billion, or 8%; it is more than £375 billion.

Mr Newmark: Unless the hon. Gentleman is suffering from selective amnesia, he will know that it was the Labour Government who separated responsibility for QE from the Treasury and the Government and gave it to the Bank of England.

Barry Gardiner: I am not suffering from amnesia, selective or otherwise. I do recall that the process started in 2009 under the Labour Government, so I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. Equally, we have to accept that the Bank of England's own figures show the impact that that has had on savers over the lifetime of this Government. Elderly savers have had to bear the brunt of that. The Chancellor is trying to win them back with changes to the rules on individual savings accounts, and, for those approaching a decision on their pension pot, the prospect that they need not purchase an annuity. It is, however, QE that has in large part kept savings rates so low.

Government Ministers need to reflect on the changes to ISAs. They are a boost to mid-caps and the alternative investment market. Alternative investments are riskier. In the 2013 Budget, the Chancellor abolished stamp duty on AIM shares. By uniting share and cash ISAs, the Chancellor has boosted what is inevitably a riskier element of the City and is encouraging people to undertake less secure investments with their savings. It is important that that sort of incentivisation should be considered most carefully by Treasury Front Benchers. My hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) spoke of it being beyond the capacity of ordinary people, who include most of Labour Members' constituents, to accumulate £15,000 in one year to put into an ISA. That suggests that the Government, in framing the Budget, have again been out of touch with the reality for many people.

I am deeply concerned that unfettered access to pension pots undermines the whole basis for tax relief on pension contributions in the first place. We give people tax relief on pension contributions precisely because we want to ensure that they do not become more of a burden on the state in old age. We may well be seeing the birth of the next great financial mis-selling crisis. Independent financial advice is all well and good, but in the past many advisers have shown themselves to be better at ensuring that their clients' money serves their own purposes and interests rather than the interests of the clients whom they are supposed to be advising.

I am even more worried that the ability to access one's pension pot should not become a way for the Government to tip people over the threshold of £23,500, where they will have to start contributing to their care costs. At today's rates, a £25,000 pension pot would generate an income from an annuity of approximately only £1,500 a year. On top of the state pension, and even a modest works pension, an elderly person in need of care would not normally be pushed over the contribution threshold in such circumstances. Previously, the pension pot could be used only to purchase an annuity. Now that it can be converted into cash, I fear that a local authority could insist, under the rules, that it is converted into cash, thereby forcing someone to contribute to their care costs. I ask the Minister to give us a clear reassurance about that. Greater freedom for savers should not be a back-door way of enabling Governments to get their hands on people's pension pots.

[Barry Gardiner]

Nearly one in five of our young people is now without a job. The pity—and, I hope, the shame—of this Government is that they preferred giving tax cuts of £42,500 to the very richest in our society to giving a job guarantee to the young and long-term unemployed. Do the coalition partners truly believe that the families of this country would rather see bankers keep their exorbitant bonuses than see their children assured of quality training and serious jobs?

Mr Newmark: I am listening carefully to what the hon. Gentleman is saying. He should at least give the Government credit for abolishing national insurance contributions for employers who hire people aged under 21, to give young people a chance on the jobs ladder. That has brought youth unemployment down.

Barry Gardiner: The hon. Gentleman has made a reasonable point. It would be a very strange Budget if all its measures were objectionable to the Opposition. My purpose is to flag up the areas of disagreement, and the areas that I believe will pose serious problems to the economy in the future.

The reality for my working constituents is that they are earning less, and earning less in jobs that are less secure. As their real wages have fallen, they have had to rely all the more on housing benefit. That is why the welfare bill under this Government is rising rather than falling. More people are having to claim housing benefit because their wages have simply failed to keep pace with inflation. No wonder the Government are spending £13 billion more on welfare than the Labour Government did in 2010, and no wonder they are spending £30 billion more than the Chancellor himself predicted in 2010. Is it not incredible that a coalition Government who came to power saying that borrowing was the problem have borrowed more in three years than the Labour Government did in the 13 years during which they were in office?

People do not forget that it was this Government and this Chancellor who said that they would balance the books by 2015. Now, in the Budget, the Chancellor has had to admit that in 2015 there will be a £75 billion deficit, and that, in addition, he will be borrowing £190 billion more than the amount promised in 2010.

The Government need to answer the single question that should be asked about all Budgets. *Cui bono?* Who benefits? We are asking about more than mere distribution. We are asking about fairness, about equality and about justice. On that question, the Government have failed.

9.3 pm

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): I am much obliged to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me at this late hour to speak about what I consider to be an extremely effective Budget. I think that it is a Budget about business, about aspiration, and about savings. I also think that it recognises what everyone else has recognised in the last six months: that the country is back on its feet after a very poor period of stagnating growth, and that we have stuck to the plan and put Britain back on track.

It is particularly paradoxical to hear Opposition Members say that the recovery is unbalanced. A year ago, they complained that there was no recovery. A year ago, they were talking about triple dip. A year ago, they were

talking about trying to go back to plan B and ditching the original plan. Today, when we have the strongest growth in the OECD and the strongest growth among our European partners, they complain about the nature of the growth. It is true that the growth could be more balanced, but I certainly prefer some growth to no growth whatsoever.

I want to talk about the general fiscal position of this country. We have heard a lot of arguments today, especially from the right hon. Member for Neath (Mr Hain), suggesting that Labour had nothing to do with the debt crisis and the deficit this Government inherited in 2010. Nothing could be more absurd. If we look at the fiscal position in 2001, we will see that the Budget was balanced. In fact I think the first Labour Administration were pretty good in terms of the fiscal position—I have said that publicly before, although I was not endorsed by the Whips for doing so. For those four years the Budget was either in balance or in surplus and it was a very good fiscal record.

Alec Shelbrooke: During the first four years of that Labour Government, which were fiscally very good, they were following the plans adopted by the previous Chancellor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke).

Kwasi Kwarteng: Absolutely, but I think we should, in this very partisan place, give credit where credit is due. That Labour Government ran a very good, tight ship for four years, but then of course the demons of their worst nature took over and they reverted to type, and from 2002 right through to the crisis we ran deficit after deficit after deficit. That was the inexcusable part of that Government. It was bad Gordon as opposed to good Gordon—prudent Gordon—that took over after 2001, and the previous Prime Minister himself, the then Member for Sedgefield, has suggested that they spent too much money. He has admitted that while he was Prime Minister the Government spent too much money, and that is clearly the case. In the Budgets from 2002 right up to 2007, before the banking crisis was even an issue and before Lehman Brothers went broke, the Government were continually running deficits.

Mr Newmark: Was not the flaw of the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) the fact that he had never run anything? The fact is one can never beat the economic cycle, but he never put any money aside just in case things did not work out.

Kwasi Kwarteng: That is absolutely right. The right hon. Gentleman's principal fault was that he thought he had abolished the business cycle—no more boom and bust. He essentially believed—and it is incredible to think he did believe this—that he had discovered perpetual motion and that the laws of economics and of economic gravity had been suspended or abolished. That was the problem we were in: we were borrowing money even when the economy was growing. In 2004 I recall the economy grew at 3%, yet we ran a deficit of 3%. There is no Keynesian in the world who would suggest it was a good policy to borrow 3% of GDP when the economy was growing, yet the previous Government persisted in doing that.

Phil Wilson *rose*—

Kwasi Kwarteng: It is quite true that the economic and financial crisis that hit in 2007-08 was a global phenomenon, but our country was in the worst position of any in the OECD to deal with that problem because of the poor management of our public finances in the six years before the crisis hit.

Germany is not a bastion of hard right-wing fiscal conservatism, yet it managed to reduce its spending right through the first decade of this century. It started to reduce public spending in 2004 and 2005. Today the Federal Government have a balanced Budget because of the prudent housekeeping and fiscal management of the previous German Government, first under Schröder and the Social Democratic party and then continued under Merkel. By contrast, in this country at that time we saw a total dereliction of duty by the Government.

Phil Wilson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Kwasi Kwarteng: We saw an expanding public sector, big public expenditure and tax revenues which frankly could never meet the expenditure that the Government were embarked upon. So talking about what happened in 2010 can never be repeated enough times and must never be forgotten: in 2010 this coalition Government inherited the biggest deficit in our peacetime history.

Phil Wilson *rose*—

Kwasi Kwarteng: I can see that Members opposite are eager to intervene and rightly so, because that was a shocking record of public financial management, and they are absolutely right to be indignant about what I am saying because it is the simple truth. They fell asleep at the wheel and left this country with an enormous deficit.

Phil Wilson: If what the hon. Gentleman is saying is true and he has the answer to everything we did wrong, why did the current Chancellor—the then shadow Chancellor—agree with our expenditure plans in 2008?

Kwasi Kwarteng: I have publicly said that I think that was a mistake. It was a mistake to stick to Labour's spending plans when we were running six or seven years of straight deficits. I do not understand how that makes any sense in financial management terms.

Phil Wilson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Kwasi Kwarteng: No. The hon. Gentleman has had his say and I want to finish my speech, given that I have little time left.

It is very important that we remember exactly what the last Government did. In 2010, as everyone remembers, we had a deficit of £160 billion, which was the largest peacetime deficit. It is a remarkable testament to this Government that they have managed to reduce it by a third and at the same time preside over economic growth. That is an extraordinary record, and I am very happy to meet my constituents and seek re-election on that basis.

I know that we should not be too obsessed with polls, but the one consistent thing emerging from the polling evidence over this whole period is that the British people consistently blame the last Government for the deficit and

for the economic crisis we are in. There is an intuitive understanding that the Labour Government spent too much money, and that this coalition Government have been elected with a mandate to sort out the mess that Labour made. Intuitively, people across our constituencies get this, and that is why the Labour party, even through all these difficult times, continues to perform very poorly in the opinion polls and has yet to win the confidence of our countrymen and women.

9.11 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the apolitical speech of the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng).

The Chancellor got it completely wrong. Ebbsfleet is not the first new garden city in 100 years: he is welcome to visit Wythenshawe, which was built in the 1930s and '40s, any time. He should cross his border and see it in all its glory. I also say to the hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) that there are possible twinning opportunities for us; he knows where my office is.

I give a cautious welcome to the reform in the Budget of air passenger duty. The current rules are crazy and unjust, as the Chancellor rightly said. He said that there would be support for new routes from regional airports, but we need more detail. His statement did not go far enough. The Government could go further and grant exemptions for new long-haul services from regional airports. That would make a huge difference at Manchester airport, in my constituency, attracting flights from cities such as Beijing. Eventually, that would link up with High Speed 2 and with the £800 million Chinese investment in the new airport city we are building in my constituency. It is an important measure, and I will challenge the Chancellor further on it in the weeks and months to come.

We are facing a cost of living crisis, and Labour Members will keep pointing that out. No one could have fought the by-election that I have just fought without speaking to the many people who had stories to tell in that regard. As was pointed out earlier, real wages are down by £1,600 a year compared with 2010, and the OBR has confirmed that all our constituents will be worse off in 2015 than they were in 2010. To compound the problem, people's energy bills have risen by almost £300, on average, since the election. It is no wonder that many of my constituents are increasingly reliant on food banks such as that run by the Dandelion Community, which I visited on Friday.

I want to focus on three key things that would benefit my constituents, the first of which is freezing energy bills. I am reminded of the story of a former Member of this place, Richard Cobden, a Liberal campaigner from Manchester who was part of the Anti-Corn Law League. He stood up against the Peel Government of the time and brought working people and intellectuals together because the landed aristocracy who were running this place controlled the price of wheat bushels by not allowing external competition and free trade. He eventually won that argument, because millions of poor working people across the country were going hungry. Our energy providers are doing exactly the same thing today. The big conglomerates are controlling the markets. It is not a free market; it is not fair. The prices go up, and the energy providers never lose. The hon. Member for Spelthorne goes on about business, and he is right to do

[Mike Kane]

so, but those businesses take no risks. Whenever their costs go up, the prices go up. We would freeze those bills—

Kwasi Kwarteng: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mike Kane: Of course I will. This will be the first intervention that I have taken in the House, so I ask the hon. Gentleman to be gentle.

Kwasi Kwarteng: I will bear that in mind. I was just wondering what the hon. Gentleman thinks Richard Cobden would have thought about the proposed energy price freeze.

Mike Kane: Poor working people were going hungry, and he campaigned for them, so I think he would understand that poor working people are now cold, and that he would campaign for them as well.

Barry Gardiner: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mike Kane: Do I get an extra minute? Yes? Then I will give way.

Barry Gardiner: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. May I assist him by saying that Richard Cobden might have thought the price freeze less important than the restructuring of the vertical integration in the market, which it was buying time in order to do?

Mike Kane: I agree with that, even if I do not quite understand all of it. It was very good. I am very proud that Richard Cobden ran his campaign from Manchester and changed the world. Once he had won, the campaign eventually brought down the Peel Government, so there is hope for us on these Benches.

My second point is that we should put young people back to work. Nearly 900,000 young people are out of work in this country, and many are in my constituency. Their parents are very worried about their children's future. Nearly 1,000 young people under the age of 24 in my constituency are in that position. We could pay for measures to address that with a tax on the bankers bonuses. In 1997, the new deal did an immense amount for the estates in Wythenshawe. In my opinion, it did even more than the introduction of the national minimum wage. It transformed the estates and got people back into work, which makes a great difference to the cohesion in our communities.

Finally, it would make a real difference to the standard of living in my constituency if we were to extend free child care for working parents to 25 hours a week for their three and four-year-olds. That would help more young women to get back into the workplace. The lack of affordable child care is a real obstacle for working poor families, but we could achieve that change in the next Parliament while balancing the nation's books in a fairer and more equitable way.

9.17 pm

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), a near neighbour of mine. I was

pleased to hear his upbeat assessment of Airport City in Manchester; I share that assessment and look forward to working with him, just as I did with his esteemed predecessor, whom many of us in this House admired and respected.

It is important that this Budget has further underlined the Government's commitment to putting our public finances back in order. It has also highlighted the action that is being taken to address cost of living challenges, including the increase in the personal allowance to £10,500. Government Members have pointed out repeatedly that the Chancellor has gone further in this Budget by taking bold, radical steps, the better to support the aspirations of savers and pensioners. Those steps have been welcomed by many of the constituents in Macclesfield I have spoken to over the weekend, and they are popular across the country because they give power to the people. That is not something that Citizen Smith said in the 1970s; it is the Conservative way, the right way, and we welcome this approach.

Another positive theme in the Budget is the continuing action that is being taken to deliver sustainable economic growth after the boom and bust of the Labour years. The evidence is clear to see in the 2.75% growth forecast for this year and the 2.4% growth forecast for 2015. In addition, we have the 1.7 million jobs that have been created. Perhaps Labour Members could remind us who said that just could not be done—where is the right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls) when you need him?

I welcome the positive progress that has been made, but clearly more needs to be done to take forward our long-term economic plan and our growth agenda, and that is what I want to say more about this evening. It is refreshing and good to see that the Federation of Small Businesses and the British Chambers of Commerce also warmly welcome this Budget. With so much new news in the Budget, it might be easy to overlook the fact that the Government have dramatically reduced corporation tax. It has fallen from 28% under the previous Government to 21% this April, and is set to fall further with a cut to 20% in 2015-16—that is the joint lowest rate in the G20.

On the employment allowance, it is crucial that we get to a lower tax environment, so that businesses have the confidence to invest, and the desire and appetite to take on more workers. I am pleased that the growth we are seeing is spread across all the regions—just about—as that is vital in our task of rebalancing the economy. In recent months, we have had positive reports about what is going on in our local economy in north-east Cheshire. In November, AstraZeneca invested £120 million in its packaging and manufacturing site in Macclesfield. The recent announcement of the sale of AstraZeneca's Alderley Park plant to Manchester Science Parks is crucial to ensuring that there is a sustainable future at the site, which has been a centre of innovation, research and discovery for decades. This new approach means that there will be further innovation and success in decades to come. So although AstraZeneca may have decided to take its research and development facilities to Cambridge, I am pleased to be working with the company and with the Alderley Park taskforce to make sure there is a lasting legacy. The Chancellor, as a local Member of Parliament, is also championing that important start we are making. With the new owners, our aim and ambition locally is to make sure that we create a

counterweight to Cambridge up in the north-west. Who knows, AstraZeneca may live to regret the day it decided to relocate—I hope it does, as that is certainly our plan.

That case study demonstrates again that the state cannot and should not seek to rebalance the economy on its own. Government Members know that making areas dependent on public sector jobs is not a panacea, despite the protestations of the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), who is no longer in his place. The Government are right to focus on getting the economic fundamentals in place so that businesses across the regions can thrive and flourish, without the excessive competition in the labour markets from public bodies.

The Government also recognise that they have a crucial role to play in investing in infrastructure. Connectivity will be the key to rebalancing the economy, and this is not just about HS2, which I am pleased to hear will now have a hub station in Crewe six years earlier than planned; in the north-west, there are ambitious plans for the Atlantic gateway, the northern hub and, let us not forget, further rail electrification, with 800 miles planned by 2019, compared with just the nine miles put in place during the Labour years in government.

The bidding process for the £2 billion growth deal fund, involving business-led local enterprise partnerships across the country, will be another catalyst for change. I am sure I am not the only Member seeking to draw attention to major projects in their area, but in Cheshire and Warrington we are supporting an innovative cross-border science corridor, which builds on initial progress we are making at Alderley Park. So let the competition begin—just let us not forget our science corridor in Cheshire to move things forward. I support this Budget and the contribution that this Government's long-term economic plan is making to the economy in this country.

9.24 pm

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): In his statement on Wednesday, the Chancellor evoked an image of Britain that thousands of my constituents will simply not recognise. This Budget ignored the 2,882 people in Nottingham, including 1,092 children, who needed to use a food bank in the past year. This Budget ignored the nearly 5,000 households in Nottingham affected by the bedroom tax, which has left thousands of my constituents with a debt they have no prospect of paying off. This Budget failed to offer any hope whatever to thousands of families in Nottingham whose living standards have plummeted. The Government are yet again making the poorest in our society bear the burden of their failures, and the Chancellor's silence on any measures that will help young people and lift the long-term unemployed back into work has been deafening.

Nottingham is a young city, with almost a third of its residents aged 18 to 29. Many of them are students, but too few stay and obtain jobs once they graduate, even though many would like to. Long-term youth unemployment in Nottingham South is 45% higher now than in May 2010, demonstrating that the recovery is leaving too many behind. It is not just an economic cost, but a human one too. This wasted potential matters not just to those young people who are affected but to their parents, grandparents and the wider community, yet it has been glossed over by Ministers. The Government continue to betray a generation of young people who,

decades after the Chancellor has left office, will be the ones who continue to pay the price for his misguided policies. The slowest recovery for 100 years is hitting those new to the jobs market more than most, and many of my younger constituents feel that they are not even being given a fair chance right at the start of their working lives.

Cities such as Nottingham simply cannot afford a lost generation of unskilled and under-developed employees. We cannot afford to see residents demoralised and humiliated by unemployment. Something must be done, but the Government continue to dismiss Labour's jobs guarantee that would use revenue from a tax on bankers' bonuses to ensure that there is a paid job for every young person who has been out of work for a year.

Instead of setting aside additional funding for our cities, which are struggling to deal with the fall-out from a global recession, the Government have made places such as Nottingham bear the brunt of their cuts. Our city is the 20th most deprived local authority area in England, yet it has been targeted for some of the deepest cuts. It has been estimated that by 2017-18 Nottingham city council will have lost £848 per person as a result of Government funding cuts and welfare reform, compared with a loss of £117 per person in wealthier Windsor and Maidenhead.

Alongside the cuts, people in Nottingham continue to deal with the greatest cost of living crisis in a generation. They face soaring gas and electricity bills, real wages that have fallen by 5.6% and, of course, the housing crisis. The Chancellor's unbalanced economic recovery means little to those struggling to make ends meet in places such as Clifton in my constituency, which has already seen its energy company obligation-funded solid wall insulation programme scrapped after this Government, panicked by Labour's plans to freeze energy prices, did a deal with the energy companies.

We have already heard during this debate that one of the major causes of the current cost of living crisis is the housing shortage. The Government are doing too little, too late to tackle the chronic shortage of homes being built and are presiding over the lowest levels of house building in peacetime since the 1920s.

In Nottingham, 70% fewer homes are being developed since the coalition came to power, despite new affordable homes being built by our local arm's length management organisation, Nottingham City Homes. Demand for housing is increasing, but the Government are doing nothing to address supply and the banks continue to withhold finance from smaller construction companies that know the local market and could make a huge difference. The Government seem to be passively reliant on developers to bring forward planning proposals, even in inappropriate locations, when too many brownfield sites lie empty. It is an abdication of responsibility.

The Government's failure on housing means that an entire generation in Nottingham could be locked out of home ownership entirely, left to cope with the insecurity offered by the private rented sector and facing rents that are expected to soar by an average of 39% by 2020. It is shameful that homelessness has risen every year under this Government. According to local homelessness charity, Framework, around 40% of its service users are between the ages of 16 and 25. Despite the increased demand for homelessness intervention services, councils hit by this Government's unfair cuts have been forced to cut tenancy

[Lilian Greenwood]

support services. Yet again it is younger, vulnerable members of society who bear the burden of this Government's ideologically driven cuts agenda.

We need real action to tackle the housing crisis. My constituents need a Government who are on their side, but, instead, people in Nottingham feel let down—let down by a Prime Minister who is happy to hand a tax cut to those at the top while doing nothing to ease the cost of living crisis that leaves everyone else worse off than they were in 2010.

9.30 pm

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): The shortage of housing, particularly affordable housing, about which many of my hon. Friends have spoken affects Scotland as much as it does the rest of the UK. We, too, have seen a reduction in house building. Indeed, the figures for last year show a 46% drop in house building in Scotland since its peak in 2004-05. There is a great shortage of affordable housing, as I know from experience, particularly in my constituency.

Much of the responsibility for housing in Scotland is, of course, devolved. It says something about the priorities of the Scottish Government that, since the Scottish National party took power, there has been a 29% drop in the capital housing budget, but the problem is not all the responsibility of the Scottish Government. The Help to Buy scheme operates in Scotland as it does in England and Wales and although the limit on the value of houses eligible for support under the scheme in Scotland is £400,000 rather than £600,000, it has the same fundamental deficiency in that it benefits those on higher incomes more than those on whom it should be targeted—that is, those on more average incomes, particularly first-time buyers. The other drawback of the Help to Buy scheme, as many people have pointed out, is that it is likely to stimulate another property price boom. We all know the damage that such booms have done in the past and there is every indication that the scheme is having such an effect in London at the moment.

I welcome the commitment from Labour to build 200,000 houses a year across the UK. Such a policy provides a real answer to the housing shortage, an answer that can certainly not be found in the bedroom tax, as the Government seemed to suggest today. Members who were in the Chamber earlier will have heard the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Wirral West (Esther McVey), saying that 1 million people were in social housing that was too big for their needs. Of course, many of those who are in social housing that the Government say is too big for them have no possibility of moving into smaller housing. In Edinburgh, for example, demand for one-bedroom social housing, depending on availability from week to week, can sometimes be 100 times larger than supply. That is typical of many cities across the country.

The Government know that the bedroom tax is not working. They desperately argue that the fact that there has not yet been a 100% take-up of the discretionary housing payment in some areas is evidence that the policy is working, but we all know that in many cases it has not been taken up because the addition of extra

funds during the year has made it difficult to get funding out to the people who need it. I am glad that the Scottish Government, after a lot of pressure from Labour, have agreed to provide cash from their own resources effectively to end the bedroom tax in Scotland. I wish they had done so earlier, but better late than never.

If the Government want to reduce the cost of housing benefit, they should be putting the effort into providing new housing so that people do not have to depend so much on the more expensive rented sector. It is also important that the housing benefit system and the provision of housing should be integrally linked as far as possible. That is why I welcome the Scottish Labour party's commitment, through our devolution commission, to devolve housing benefit as part of our proposals for further devolution to Scotland.

I want to spend a couple of minutes discussing the abolition of the requirement for 75% of the private pension pot to be spent on annuities or similar arrangements. As many of my colleagues have pointed out, Labour recognises the need for reform of the annuity system but although the principle that people should have more control over the allocation of their pensions is fair, a responsible Government should recognise difficulties and problems as well. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) highlighted some of them in his speech, so I shall simply observe the contrast between the Government's proposal to remove any requirement for people to spend a certain amount of their pension fund on long-term pension provision and their approach to contributions to private pensions. All parties, including those in government, have supported auto-enrolment into pension schemes—not compulsory enrolment, of course, but a pretty strong nudge towards it—but there appears to be no wish to encourage people, other than through that device, to take steps to assure their long-term security. As proposals for changes to private pension schemes are developed, it is vital to implement measures to encourage people to ensure that they provide for their long-term security in retirement because if they do not, as many Members have pointed out, we are merely building up problems that will be faced by future Governments and will seriously affect the living standards of many who retire in years to come.

9.35 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): Our passionate and wide-ranging debate was excellently opened for the Opposition by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who I commend on the deeply moving and insightful tribute that he paid to his father in the House last week. Tony Benn had close links with the north-east, not least through his regular appearances at the Durham miners gala. His loss is felt keenly by many people of all ages throughout the region and, of course, by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The many excellent speeches that we have heard today have served to illustrate once again which side of the House is in touch with the reality of the lives of people up and down the country. Labour Members know that, despite the Chancellor's continued complacency, for most people in Britain, living standards are not rising but falling year on year. Indeed, the Institute for Fiscal Studies makes it clear that working people will be

worse off in 2015 than they were in 2010—and little wonder with average real-terms earnings more than £600 a year lower than in May 2010, and with households having faced 24 Tory tax rises since then, including the increase in VAT. Labour Members believe that the Chancellor should have used his Budget to take urgent action to support families through the cost of living crisis now, not after the general election.

I pay tribute to the contributions made by Labour Members: my right hon. Friends the Members for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham), for Neath (Mr Hain), for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) and for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson); and my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Flello), for Blyth Valley (Mr Campbell), for Glasgow North (Ann McKechnie), for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson), for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead), for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods), for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) and for Edinburgh North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz). They all spoke about concerns on behalf of their constituents—yes, those people who live in the real world out there—and businesses throughout the country.

Despite the pressing nature of the cost of living crisis that my right hon. and hon. Friends carefully articulated in the debate, what mention was there of that critical issue in last week's statement by the Chancellor or any of the Budget documents? Absolutely none. What urgent measures were announced for parents facing child care costs that have increased by 30% on this Government's watch while the value of their wages has fallen? Absolutely none at all. What extra support will be available now to parents struggling with those costs and to pensioners struggling with the cost of heating their homes? Not a penny. What help will the Budget provide for the millions of small firms whose business rates will increase by an average of £430 next month? Zero. What about the tens of thousands of young people who have been out of work for 12 months or more? The number has doubled under this Government, but they did not even receive a mention.

Just as we thought that the Chancellor might have completely lost touch with the lives of people up and down the country, however, we learned this weekend that he actually is on the side of the working man and woman. It is now clear that he knows what the ordinary working people of this country—very occasionally, he even gets to speak to them—want out of life: a game of bingo; and, if they buy 300 pints, to get one free.

We were all under the impression that it was the Chancellor's right hon. Friend, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), the chair of the Conservative party, who was the one with the common touch, but we were wrong. Who needs lower energy bills, lower child care costs or lower business rates, higher wages or even a job when people can spend their time being patronised by the Chancellor and his hapless colleagues instead? Who cares that women are being hit four times harder than men as a result of the Chancellor's tax and benefit changes since 2010, when the move on bingo taxation, welcome as it is, has been spun in this Budget as a woman-friendly measure?

I am sure that Britain's women will be thrilled to know that the Chancellor failed to take up the Opposition's proposal of scrapping the discredited marriage tax allowance—84% of the benefit of which will go to men—in order to introduce the 10p rate of tax that would benefit 24 million low and middle-income households up and down the country. I am sure that they will be delighted that the Chancellor continues to defend his £3 billion tax cut for the top 1% of earners in this country—85% of whom just happen to be men—rather than adopting our proposal to reverse it in order to ensure that those with the broadest shoulders bear the greatest burden of deficit reduction.

So what did the Budget have to offer? Let us take a moment to remember the Chancellor's record. His 2012 Budget was going to raise billions of pounds through tackling tax avoidance, yet his flagship Swiss tax deal had more holes than Swiss cheese and has brought in just a fraction of the amount that was originally promised. His 2011 Budget was a Budget for growth, yet he has had to revise his growth figures down. Of course, there was his 2010 Budget—the one in which he first made the decision to slash Labour's annual investment allowance from £100,000 to just £25,000 from April 2012, on the grounds that 95% of firms would not be affected. He continued down that path, despite being warned widely of the hugely detrimental effect that it would have on businesses and job creation. We then had two autumn statements and two Budgets before, lo and behold, the Chancellor announced in the 2012 autumn statement that he was going to increase the allowance temporarily—the one he had cut to £25,000—to £250,000 from January 2013. On making that announcement, he described it as “a huge boost to all those who run a business and who aspire to grow, expand and create jobs.”—[*Official Report*, 5 December 2012; Vol. 554, c. 881.]

That would imply to anyone that his decision to slash it just two and half years earlier was entirely the opposite.

Mr Newmark: Notwithstanding the hon. Lady's criticisms, it was her shadow Chancellor who predicted that 1 million more people would be unemployed. There are now 1.7 million more people in jobs today than there were in 2010. We have taken 3.2 million people out of tax altogether by raising the personal allowance. Those are the achievements of the Government.

Catherine McKinnell: I caution the hon. Gentleman, given that long-term youth unemployment in his constituency has gone up 125% under the Government; he should check the figures.

However, back to the annual investment allowance, the slashing of which has cost jobs. Cutting the allowance from £100,000 to £25,000, then announcing a temporary increase to £250,000 with the expectation that it would then fall again to £25,000, before then increasing it to £500,000 in last week's Budget, although welcome, does not really inspire confidence in the Government's long-term strategy for supporting business growth and investment—businesses that desperately need stability and certainty, rather than continual chopping and changing over the years.

David Rutley: On that point, does economic growth of 2.7% inspire confidence in the hon. Lady?

Catherine McKinnell: The growth figures are a fraction of what the Chancellor promised back in 2010. I urge caution on the hon. Gentleman, who has seen long-term unemployment in his constituency go up 600% under this Government.

Indeed, that whole sorry saga just about sums up the Government's haphazard and cavalier approach to backing economic growth and job creation. Clearly, it is welcome news that the economy is growing again—undoubtedly, after three years of flatlining—but as we all know, in 2010 the Chancellor predicted that our economy would have grown by 8.4% by now. Instead, we have seen growth of just 3.8%, lower than the US and lower than Germany. Indeed, GDP growth this year is still expected to be lower than the OBR forecast in 2010. This is now the slowest UK recovery for 100 years, with our economy still 1.4% behind its pre-crisis peak.

How many more businesses could have grown, and how many more jobs could have been created, had the Chancellor not slashed the annual investment allowance at the first opportunity? How many jobs and how much new investment has been lost as a result of his carbon price floor, about which the Opposition have consistently raised concerns and on which he finally used last week's Budget to take some action?

Had the Chancellor acted before last week's Budget, how many firms could have been given the support and finance they need to export, thereby helping to ensure that any economic recovery is driven not just by consumer spending? It is little wonder that he is so unlikely to achieve his target of doubling UK exports to £1 trillion by 2020, given that the Government's export enterprise finance guarantee scheme helped just five firms before folding and their export refinancing facility is still not operational, despite being announced back in July 2012.

Of course, three years of a flatlining economy have meant that the Chancellor's much-hailed deficit reduction plan has been an abject failure, with the coalition now set to borrow £190 billion more than originally planned. Indeed, the Government have borrowed more in three years than Labour borrowed in 13 years. The Prime Minister and the Chancellor previously promised to eliminate the deficit and balance the books by 2015, but now they will not be able to do that until 2018. As a result of their failed policies, the Government, who like to talk tough on welfare spending, will actually spend £1 billion more on welfare this year and next than Ministers were planning only last December to spend. They will spend £13 billion more than they planned.

David Rutley: It is interesting to hear the hon. Lady's comments on the debt, the deficit and so on. Does she agree with the IFS that the Labour party would be spending £29 billion more under the plans it has in place?

Catherine McKinnell: I agree with the IFS that families are, on average, £891 worse off as a result of this Government's tax and benefit changes. Once again, Government Members want to ignore the cost of living crisis that households are facing up and down the country as a direct result of this Government's failure to deal with the deficit and help ordinary families.

Last week was the Chancellor's final opportunity to introduce policies to provide the real help that people need now and to cement the recovery after choking it off when the Government first came to office. The key

question that people across the UK will be asking is whether they are better off now and in the coming months than they were when the coalition came to power in 2010. With the exception of a very few of the Chancellor's friends at the top, for most the answer is a resounding no. Last week's Budget did absolutely nothing to reverse that.

9.48 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Nicky Morgan): Let me begin by thanking hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber for their contributions this evening. I will do my best to respond to as many of the points raised as I can.

I will start by saying this: of course the Government, and everyone in the Chamber, want to see our economy growing and our living standards rising. The best way to achieve that is by ensuring that more people are going to work every morning and that those people are keeping more of the money they earn. That is exactly what last week's Budget will help everyone to achieve.

Let me turn to the comments made in this wide-ranging debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames), in setting out his support for the Budget, mentioned the fact that we need more productivity. He also mentioned the need for investment in skills, as did other hon. Members. The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Mr Kennedy) talked about a sense of opportunity for the youth of this country and a sense of security for older people. He welcomed the freezing of whisky duty. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) set out his support for the development at Ebbsfleet and mentioned neighbourhood plans, which he said were key, explaining that it was Thame in his constituency that launched the neighbourhood plan.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Paul Uppal) talked about Labour always raising taxes—how very observant he is—and set out the help for businesses that the Chancellor announced last week and the successes in his constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mary Macleod) talked about the support that the Government are giving air ambulances, as well as the support for tax-free child care, for which 1.9 million families will be eligible. She also mentioned the record numbers of people in work, including women.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff North (Jonathan Evans) talked, as other Members did, about the support that the Government are giving energy-intensive industries, and my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) made a bid for the Alan Turing institute to be based in Milton Keynes. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science will have noted that plea. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier) said that he was in favour of freedom for those with pensions to make decisions that are right for them, which was a key cornerstone of last week's budget.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Stephen Mosley) made a terrific speech about falling unemployment in his constituency and the great work that he has done on jobs fairs. My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) welcomed the Chancellor's announcements about Ebbsfleet, of which I know he will be a great champion.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) talked about the cuts in cider and beer duty, which he rightly said were good news for pubs and brewers. He also mentioned that the mother-in-law of my hon. Friend the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury lives in his constituency. I am not sure whether there is any connection with cider and beer, but perhaps that is how those in Herefordshire like to spend their time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) mentioned funding for flood defences and the repairing of potholes. The Government have introduced a £6.5 million severe weather recovery scheme to support local authorities, including for highway infrastructure repairs. The scheme is now paying 100% of local authority costs above the threshold, rather than the usual 85%, and the threshold has been reduced for all county councils and unitary authorities to make it easier for them to claim support. Of course, we have also provided a further £140 million to help repair roads hit by weather damage and, in the Budget, £200 million for repairing potholes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) talked about the importance of new homes and, like other Members, rightly pointed out that the rise in house prices is not universal across the United Kingdom. There is a particular impact in London and the south-east. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Annette Brooke) mentioned the rise in the personal allowance, which the Government are proud to have delivered, and financial support for exporters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr Newmark), the founder of the Million Jobs campaign, talked about the work that he has done, including on the Braintree jobs fair, and said that more growth needs more jobs. My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) mentioned the Labour newsletter put out in his constituency about Labour's economic policy. I wonder whether he would like to share it with Opposition Members, particularly the shadow Treasury team, because we did not hear much about that today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) mentioned the recovery, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) just has. He reminded us that a year ago the Opposition said that there was no recovery. Now, of course, it is the wrong kind of recovery. To say that it is hard to please them would be an understatement. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) talked about the important reductions in corporation tax and employment allowances.

I turn to the speeches that Opposition Members made. I must congratulate them on one thing—at least most of them talked about the Budget. That is remarkable given last week's Budget response speech by the Leader of the Opposition, in which I think he failed to mention a single Budget measure. I have to say that listening to Opposition Members is like watching arsonists making a call after they have started a fire and saying, "Please, the fire's not being put out quick enough."

The right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) asked various questions. I probably do not have time to go through all of them, but it is interesting to note that Tower Hamlets, one of the poorest boroughs in London, has received £49 million from the new homes bonus, compared with £6 million for Wokingham,

so he is not entirely right to say that money has been taken from the poorest authorities in the country. He also asked about the Financial Policy Committee's remit on monitoring the housing market. The latest remit was published last week, on 19 March, and, as the FPC has said, it will monitor in particular developments in house prices,

"relative to indicators of affordability and sustainability."

The right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham) talked about student loans and debt. I do not think he is in his place now, but—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes, he is."] I am sorry, I missed him. I ask him just what Labour's policy is on student loans. I represent a large university in Loughborough, and the vice-chancellor would like to know.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) spoke about fuel price cuts. Average pump prices under this Government's policies will be 16p per litre lower than under the plans of the previous Government. The hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr Campbell), who sadly is not in his place, blamed the entire financial crash on Lehman Brothers, but I point out to him that Northern Rock collapsed before Lehman Brothers.

The hon. Members for Glasgow North (Ann McKeichin), for Edinburgh North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz), and for Sedgefield (Phil Wilson), talked about protecting pensioners from themselves, which I think is deeply patronising.

Mr McFadden: Will the Minister give way?

Nicky Morgan: No, I will make some progress. The right hon. Member for Neath (Mr Hain) talked about exports. Exports to countries outside the EU continue to grow, rising by 23% since 2010. The right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) talked about the referendum on the EU damaging investment. That is a common theme on the Labour Benches, but the Government believe it is time to trust the people and ask them about important issues. Labour Members clearly do not.

The hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) talked about support for energy-intensive industries, which she and I have discussed before. She encouraged us to make strong representations to the European Commission for the extension of compensation, and I take those points on board. The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) spoke about the carbon price floor, and the hon. Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods) talked about the north-east needing more support. The right hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson) talked about Euston station.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) talked about Olympic-scale investment under this Government, and the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) mentioned productivity. He is right; the job is not yet done. That is why we do not think that anyone should entrust the keys to those who crashed the car. The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) missed the fact that this Government are already spending £5 billion on child care, before we get to tax free child care.

I welcome the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) to the House. I know this was not his maiden speech, but if he can raise a laugh after

[Nicky Morgan]

five hours of a Budget debate he is a welcome addition to the House. He mentioned reform of air passenger duty. That is what I was discussing with his predecessor just before Christmas, and I look forward to continued discussions on that.

My hon. Friends the Members for Wolverhampton South West and for Brentford and Isleworth said that we need greater business investment, and they are right. Investment has been too low for too long, and it has held back growth. Had business investment increased by just 10% in 2012, the level of GDP would be £12 billion higher. We must create an environment that encourages business to invest.

Barry Gardiner: Will the Minister answer the question that I put to her in my speech about whether local authorities will be able to insist that pension pots are converted into cash to put people over the threshold for care costs?

Nicky Morgan: I am sure we do not want to see that, but we will look at it in more detail as we go through the scheme. The Government have set out a clear intention to help people with their care costs, and nothing in last week's announcement should diminish the fact that we want people to have affordable care costs, and not to be worried about getting older and being able to afford their care.

The most important point about business investment was the extension and expansion of the annual investment allowance, which means that from next month 99.8% of businesses will get a 100% investment allowance. Almost

every business in Britain will pay no upfront tax when it invests. We have already mentioned the policies on pensions and savings, and the Government believe that we will give people the opportunity to save now, and to control better their finances in the future. The Government believe that responsible people who have worked hard and saved sensibly all their lives should have the freedom to decide how to use their own savings. The changes we announced last week recognise that, and act on it.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary for Communities and Local Government spoke earlier about some of the other Budget measures that will boost our communities. He spoke about Ebbsfleet, the enterprise zone in Coleraine, and the Cambridge city deal. I wish to put on record how pleased I was to be at the launch of the Leicester and Leicestershire city deal this morning. Many hon. Members will already have seen the difference those schemes can make in their areas, and I pay tribute to all those in Leicester and Leicestershire who worked so hard to secure that deal. It will boost the economy of our city and county.

This Budget will ensure that more people have jobs to go to at the start of the day and can return to their own homes at the end of the day. It will give people a greater amount of their earnings at the end of the month, and greater access to their savings at the end of their careers. Of course there is more work to do, but this Budget represents another sensible step to get our country back on its feet, and I commend it wholeheartedly to the House.

Ordered, That the debate be now adjourned.—(Harriett Baldwin.)

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Safety of Electrical Appliances

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Harriett Baldwin.*)

10 pm

Mike Wood (Batley and Spen) (Lab): I hope, Mr Speaker, that you will consider that, on the first day of United Kingdom home safety week, it is appropriate that I raise the concerns of my constituent, Martin Squires, who on 6 January 2012 did what hundreds of thousands of families in this country will undoubtedly be doing this very evening—he went to bed having first programmed the dishwasher sited in his kitchen. The dishwasher caught fire, and Martin believes that it is only by chance that he and his young family were not burned to death as a result.

That is bad enough, but in his attempt to come to terms with what happened to him and his family and to get to the bottom of its causes, Mr Squires has since become much more concerned with the safety of all those of us using white goods. I think it is true to say that he feels extremely let down both by the manufacturers and by the recall system for faulty and dangerous goods. In his own words,

“I purchased a product in good faith with hard earned money from a reputable company, which with hindsight was a potential death trap that they planted in my family home. As each month goes by I feel angrier with Hotpoint and the UK recall system. Hotpoint knew they had a problem with this product before my fire and whilst they started to contact customers in October 2012 they did not make the problem public until April 2013.”

He has found the system for recalling faulty products to be piecemeal, inflexible and designed, in essence, more to secure the profits of the producers than to protect the public. In fact, we know that the system is entirely in the hands of the manufacturers who produce the faulty and potentially lethal goods in the first place.

The Electrical Safety Council, which, as one might imagine, has done an enormous amount of work in this area, suggests that Mr Squires' experience is far from unique, with such appliances causing over 17,000 domestic fires and 40 to 45 deaths in this country each year. Yet over 1 million appliances that are known to be faulty may remain in use in UK homes as we speak, every one of which has the potential to start life-threatening fires, as in my constituent's case, or to emit gas, poisoning people as they sleep, as happened to Richard Smith and Kevin Branton, two young men who, as reported to this House in a recent debate and as shown in the *Official Report* of 11 March 2014, died in their sleep when a Beko cooker gave off carbon monoxide. This is a serious situation which it might be felt that the Government of the day would want to play a part in mitigating. Perhaps I may come back to what I think the Government could and should do to improve matters.

First, I would like to look at the recall system that is supposed to operate when a safety risk to customers is discovered. It appears, at best, to be extremely flawed. The onus is on the manufacturer who produced the faulty product to initiate and organise the process, which, on average, leaves 80% of these defective and dangerous goods unreturned or unrepaired. Underfunded local trading standards services are responsible for enforcement and even have powers to order recall, but they rarely use them. Such other sanctions as there are

appear to be derisory. Why is that the case when 1 million recalled goods are still in use in customers' homes, and when 17,000 fires and up to 45 deaths a year result from that fact?

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this important matter to the Chamber for our consideration. I have sought his permission to intervene. In Northern Ireland, a new scheme has been brought in by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to retrain electricians periodically to make them aware of new regulations and the safety of electrical appliances so that they can use their expertise to advise their customers. If that scheme has not been introduced on the UK mainland, does the hon. Gentleman think that it should be?

Mike Wood: The situation is so bad that any scheme that could make a positive contribution and improve it would be welcome. I am grateful for that information, because I did not know about that scheme.

Things appear to be much better in product areas as varied as motor vehicles and food. I cannot speak for the Minister, but I understand that the Government say that the difference is due largely to the lack of traceability in electrical goods, as opposed to motor vehicles. Apparently, neither the manufacturer nor the retailer has sufficient information about the vast mass of people who purchase white goods. How, then, can we have a customer safety system that depends on exactly that knowledge? If traceability is the key to stopping fires and deaths, a quite different system must be introduced.

In my view, we need a third-party organisation with which people can register when they buy white goods. That would overcome the reticence of customers in giving their personal information to manufacturers or retailers, no doubt for fear that the data will be used or abused to bombard them with advertising and for other commercial purposes. Will the Government consider such a development? Will they consider a much more radical model that takes the process of recall out of the hands of the manufacturers altogether, so that it can be undertaken entirely in the interests of the consumer and their safety, rather than in the commercial interests of the producers?

I point the Minister to the American system, where the Consumer Product Safety Commission does just what I have suggested. As far as one can tell, it produces much better results for the consumer and their safety than we manage. I am not known for advocating the wonders of American practice generally, but our system is failing UK consumers and they have a right to expect better. In our system, commercial interest is allowed to determine how, at what pace, by what means and, indeed, if at all a manufacturer meets its responsibilities to recall defective products.

The trading standards service in my area reported to me at least one recent example of a manufacturer refusing to issue a recall notice at all, even though the trading standards service and the local fire service considered that it should. Neither of those agencies, whether individually or collectively, had the ability to force the company to act. The Chief Fire Officers Association says that it is

“very concerned about the number of faulty products in people's homes.”

[Mike Wood]

There is little wonder in that if the situation nationally is the same as the situation in my area of west Yorkshire, where the number of house fires is decreasing, in large part due to the professionalism, expertise and work of the fire service, but the number of fires caused by electrical goods remains stubbornly high. Chief fire officers have also said that they believe the recall system to be “unsuccessful and inadequate”.

The situation is that tens of thousands of dangerous and defective goods are left in people’s homes, causing 17,000 fires and up to 45 deaths a year. The responsibility for those goods obviously rests with the manufacturers, the importers and the retailers. The system to reduce the threat and protect the public safety is diffuse, unclear and too open to conflicts of interest.

I have some questions for the Minister about what the Government might do in the face of this threat to the public. First, will the Government ensure more traceability for electrical goods and consider a third-party agency to overcome the customer reluctance to provide details at point of sale? Secondly, will they investigate systems such as that in the US, where the onus for recall is essentially out of the hands of manufacturers? Thirdly, will they greatly increase the penalties, which are currently derisory—fines of £5,000 for multinational companies—given that the lives of my constituents and many others have been put at risk? Fourthly, will they start to collate data—it is ludicrous to me that they should need to start to do this—from, for instance, the 200 or so trading standards services and the fire services about the full extent of the dangers posed by these electrical products? Fifthly, will the Government listen more to people such as my constituent, Martin Squires? He has had enormous difficulty in getting anybody to listen to the dangers that his family were put in and the lessons that he thinks should be learned. He wants the interests of consumers to be considered, not just those of producers, so that people’s lives are put less at risk.

Finally, to be helpful to the Minister, perhaps I might suggest that she introduce some of those suggestions as amendments to the Consumer Rights Bill which is making progress through the House.

10.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Jenny Willott): I apologise for my voice being about an octave lower than normal: it is part of the tribulations of having small children who breed germs.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mike Wood) on choosing this subject for debate: it is a very important issue. As he said, it is an important consumer issue, and I am replying to the debate as the consumer affairs Minister. The specific case that he raises clearly illustrates how serious it can be when things go wrong, and shows how important it is to get this area right. We all want to ensure that the electrical appliances that people buy in the UK are safe, and that people know they can trust what they are buying. The evidence shows that modern appliances from reputable sources are inherently safe, and they are much safer than older appliances.

As the hon. Gentleman said, for the more than 26 million households in the UK the fire statistics for the latest year available show that there were 21 fatalities related to electrical appliances and cables. It is a small number, but clearly each case is a tragedy and we cannot be complacent. We need to make sure that we reduce the fatality rate further.

The hon. Gentleman highlighted the Consumer Rights Bill, and we had a lengthy debate on this issue in Committee. It was a very interesting debate, and the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan), who is in his place, tabled a new clause on the subject. So it is an issue that has been considered quite recently. I know it is of interest to a number of Members across the House, including the two Members from Northern Ireland who are in their place, the hon. Members for Foyle and for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

The way people buy electrical products is changing, and this was debated during the passage of the Consumer Rights Bill. Traditionally, people bought electrical goods by going into physical shops on the high street. Consumers were able to look at the products, see clearly what was being offered and ask questions to the retailer to assure themselves that the product was what they needed. They were more likely to know the sort of shop it was, the price and whether they could trust the retailer. That is a very different market from the one that is emerging.

The wider use of the internet has meant that distant selling has become more common, and that brings a number of issues with it. Many reputable manufacturers and retailers supply products online—I am sure many of us have purchased items in this way—but consumers can end up buying products from less reputable suppliers who deal in products that are sometimes of poor quality and unsafe and which perform badly. Such suppliers can use the internet to avoid their liabilities and responsibilities to customers. Customers are often not as well informed about the products they are purchasing, or about the person from whom they are buying, as they are when they go into a physical shop. As a result, the relationship between consumers and retailers has changed over the years.

In a very small number of cases, manufacturers will identify problems with the appliance after it has been sold and there will be a product recall—or, more correctly, a “corrective action”. Manufacturers, including importers, and distributors, such as retailers, have a duty in consumer protection legislation to ensure that the products they place on the market are safe, but corrective action is sometimes needed to remove a risk that has been identified. This includes a range of options depending on the issue, such as providing customer information and, as a last resort, recalling a product. This is complex and often very expensive.

The majority of industry recalls are undertaken voluntarily by manufacturers, as the hon. Gentleman said, because they are keen to avoid or minimise the damage to their brand and to make sure that they put something right—they rely on the trust of consumers for their brand to be successful. There is a comprehensive legislative framework in place for product recalls, which is underpinned by guidance. There is also comprehensive best practice at both UK and EU level. Consumer protection legislation requires manufacturers to have a process in place to identify problems that consumers experience, so they have a feedback system. If a

manufacturer of a consumer product becomes aware that it has placed an unsafe product on the market, they are obliged to tell the market surveillance authority, including trading standards, so they do have that responsibility.

Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman suggested, trading standards can insist on a recall. They have the power to ensure that a recall takes place under the general product safety regulations. This power is rarely needed as manufacturers usually do the right thing and set up a recall voluntarily, but trading standards can enforce one if they believe it is necessary. Recalls are often complex. As the hon. Gentleman highlighted, the biggest problem facing manufacturers and retailers is that it can be very difficult to trace customers. Customers often do not provide contact details when they buy a product. The difference between cars and electrical goods is that the owners of cars are in a big database and it is very easy to trace them. People are generally more loth to hand over all their contact details to the manufacturer when they are buying a toaster, so it can be much more difficult to trace them.

Consumers have the option of providing their details via warranty cards, generally for large appliances. There are, however, all sorts of reasons why they do not do so and the hon. Gentleman highlighted many of them. For many smaller items, the option is not generally available. Even if the consumer did complete the warranty card, he or she may have moved house, or changed his or her contact details for some other reason. Products are often a number of years old when the recall takes place, and contact details will have often have changed because of that. The consumer may even have disposed of the appliance by giving it away, scrapping it or selling it, and that makes recalls extremely tricky, because it is difficult to establish where products are.

I think that, in general, the legislative framework is effective and appropriate. Strict consumer protection legislation requires electrical products that are supplied to be safe, and there is legislation that places a civil liability on suppliers of appliances and producers in the event of any injury, death or damage to property. There is also legislation prohibiting misleading or untrue statements by those selling products, which covers consumers who are buying products through distance selling—over the internet, for example. So the legislation is there, but, as the hon. Gentleman emphasised, the implementation is all-important.

The Government are trying to improve market surveillance. We have funded projects to improve surveillance at United Kingdom ports with the aim of detecting non-compliant and counterfeit products, and reducing the number of such products that come into the UK. We are also trying to improve the sharing of information between authorities, and have launched a product safety focus group. We are encouraging the use of intelligence from the fire services, which are often an extremely important source of information that others do not have. Until fairly recently, we were not making very good use of that information. Through the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the UK is working in Europe to improve the sharing of information between the authorities in different countries. As more and more people buy and sell products across borders, particularly in Europe, we want to ensure that that information is shared as well.

Jim Shannon: Will the Minister say something about the role of the electrical contractors who supply the appliances and have to conform to the law?

Jenny Willott: In the case of appliances that are manufactured in the UK, the responsibility lies with either the manufacturer or the trader. In the case of appliances that are imported, the importer is liable for ensuring that they are in compliance with British law. All products that are sold in the UK must conform to British safety regulations. Traders are then responsible for ensuring that the goods that they sell to consumers are appropriate and safe, and comply with those regulations. It is clear that consumers will be protected by a number of different pieces of legislation so that they cannot fall into any gaps.

We are working with the Association of Manufacturers of Domestic Electrical Appliances on an industry initiative to encourage consumers to register their appliances, because the number of people who respond to recalls is extremely low. If more people register their appliances and ensure that the details are up to date, the recalls will be more effective. The leading appliance manufacturers—there is a great deal of money behind many of the big manufacturers—are trying to encourage product registration, and have committed themselves to using the power of their marketing programmes to show consumers why it is worth registering their domestic appliances.

I hope that that will debunk some of the myths identified by the hon. Gentleman. Many people think that they will end up on some junk mail list and be sent a load of stuff that they do not want after handing over their contact details, and do not complete the warranty forms because they do not understand why the information needs to be held. It was quite illuminating during the Committee stage of the Consumer Rights Bill to hear a number of Members say “I had no idea that that was why we were asked to fill in those cards.” If we can make people understand why it is important to provide the information, more of them will do so, and recalls will become much more effective. We are working with the manufacturers and also with trading standards and the fire service, and with consumer groups, too, because they have a very important role to play in helping consumers understand why this is important and worth doing.

This is a very important area. Although 21 deaths is quite a low number, every one of them is a tragedy and it is still far too high a number. As the hon. Member for Batley and Spenningsdale highlighted, as well as those tragic deaths there are also injuries and significant damage to property. We want to try to reduce that as much as possible.

I believe that the legislative framework is right, and we are working very closely with enforcers, consumer groups, the fire service, manufacturers and retailers to try to ensure we share best practice, tighten up enforcement to make sure that is effective, and in the long run make corrective action, including recalls, more effective, so that we can reduce the number of tragedies and consumers are properly protected under the law.

Question put and agreed to.

10.26 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 24 March 2014

CABINET OFFICE

City Deal

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Greg Clark):

Following the successful completion of the first wave of city deals in July 2012 with the “core cities”, the Government committed to work with a further 20 cities and their wider areas to negotiate a second wave of city deals in October 2012.

I can today inform the House that the Government, local businesses and civic leaders from Leicester and Leicestershire have reached agreement on a city deal.

The Leicester and Leicestershire city deal aims to halve youth unemployment by 2018 through a “Young Persons Pledge”. This pledge commits the area to provide all 16 to 24-year-olds with the chance to secure sustained employment or education and training and will be underpinned by the Leicester and Leicestershire “to work” programme.

The city deal will also provide funding to support the expansion of Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Parks and unlock the development of a new Advanced Technology Innovation Centre.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will also be supported to grow through the provision of tailored business support programmes. This scheme will enhance signposting of business support services and will establish grant schemes targeted at small/micro businesses and at medium-sized businesses that have the potential for further growth.

Business and civic leaders in Leicester and Leicestershire anticipate that the deal will create 4,000 new apprenticeships and traineeships, create 1,400 new jobs and safeguard a further 400, and support £130 million of public and private sector investment.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture and Fisheries Council

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr Owen Paterson): The next Agriculture and Fisheries Council will be on 24 March in Brussels. The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), who is responsible for farming, food and marine environment, will represent the UK. Richard Lochhead MSP will also attend.

There are both fisheries and agriculture items on this month’s agenda.

On agriculture the Commission will present proposals for regulations on the provision and promotion measures for agricultural markets, which are currently under

negotiation. There will possibly be a proposal regarding organic production and labelling of organic products. There will be a report from the Commission on mandatory country of origin labelling for meat used as an ingredient, which will be followed by an exchange of views. The report highlights the high costs of legislation on this issue and the European Commission has not proposed any action at this stage: the UK will resist new measures that would add to business costs. There may also be a presentation of a report from the Commission on the reform of the fruit and vegetable sector and a presidency report on the situation in the dairy sector.

On fisheries there will be an exchange of views on the recently concluded mackerel and the EU/Norway bilateral negotiations. This will highlight the agreement that has been reached between the EU, Norway and Faroe islands on the management of north-east Atlantic mackerel. The sand eel total allowable catch (TAC) for 2014 may be adopted at this Council. There is one “any other business” item that has been requested by Spain regarding illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

The presidency has also invited Ministers to a lunch to discuss international agricultural trade issues.

Veterinary Products Committee

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): I have received the annual report of the Veterinary Products Committee and its Sub-Committee 2013, which has been published today.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

I am pleased to acknowledge the valuable work done by the distinguished members of the Veterinary Products Committee and its Sub-Committee and thank them for the time and effort dedicated in the public interest to this important work.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs Council/General Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 17 March, and I attended the General Affairs Council on 18 March. The Foreign Affairs Council was chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Ashton of Upholland, and the General Affairs Council was chaired by the Greek presidency. The meetings were held in Brussels/Luxembourg.

Commissioners Füle (Enlargement) and Oettinger (Energy) were in attendance for some of the discussions at the FAC. Commissioners Reding (Justice) and Füle (Enlargement) were in attendance for some of the discussions at the GAC.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL (FAC)

A provisional report of the meeting and conclusions adopted can be found at:

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/141614.pdf.

Middle East Peace Process

Baroness Ashton briefed Ministers on work to prepare the “unprecedented package” of incentives promised in December’s Council conclusions. Following the FAC, Baroness Ashton stated publicly that the EU would offer “huge opportunities” for market integration and co-operation on security, research and innovation, and that the EU could support the parties in the fields of transport, energy, water, the environment and people-to-people links.

Iran

Baroness Ashton briefed Ministers on her 8-10 March visit to Iran. She had met human rights activists and the Iranian Government had signalled their disapproval. She noted that the EU’s special representative for human rights would visit shortly. Baroness Ashton also noted that E3+3 talks with Iran would resume on 18 March to continue discussions towards a comprehensive agreement on the nuclear file.

Middle East and North Africa

On Syria, Baroness Ashton noted that UN Special Envoy Brahimi was pushing for further talks between the regime and opposition. On Iraq, Baroness Ashton explained that the security situation made a full election observation mission of the 30 April elections impossible. Instead, the EU would send election experts to work with domestic observers. On Libya, Baroness Ashton thanked Italy for organising the 6 March Rome Ministerial meeting.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Baroness Ashton briefed on her 12 March visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). She had passed a strong message that BiH needed leadership and that progress could not wait until after elections. The EU should consider stepping up engagement with BiH, which should encourage leaders to respond to the socio-economic demands of recent protests. Baroness Ashton stated that she expected conclusions to be prepared for the April FAC.

EU-Africa Summit

Baroness Ashton briefed the Council on preparations for the fourth EU/Africa summit, which is to take place in Brussels on 2-3 April under the theme “Investing in people, prosperity and peace”. In addition, there will be an EU/Africa Ministerial meeting on 1 April, in advance of the summit. Conclusions were adopted on a number of African files, including on responding to the security challenges of the Gulf of Guinea, the situation in South Sudan, the Sahel and the Central African Republic (CAR).

Ukraine

The Foreign Secretary updated the House on 18 March on the situation in Ukraine, including on the actions agreed by the Foreign Affairs Council, 18 March 2014, *Official Report*, column 650. At the FAC, Ministers strongly condemned the holding on 16 March of an illegal “referendum” in Crimea on joining the Russian Federation, in clear breach of the Ukrainian constitution. The EU does not recognise the illegal “referendum” and its outcome.

In line with the statement of the EU leaders of 6 March, the FAC adopted the package of sanctions against 21 individuals in Crimea and Russia who were threatening Ukraine’s territorial integrity. The targets

include Crimean political leaders, Russian parliamentarians, and Russian military commanders. Baroness Ashton outlined EU support to Ukraine and Ministers endorsed the signing of the political chapters of EU/Ukraine association agreement at the 20-21 March European Council. Conclusions were agreed setting out EU concerns, noting the sanctions, and repeating existing language about possible further measures.

Ministers also emphasised the importance of signing the association agreements with Georgia and Moldova.

Energy diplomacy

Ministers discussed EU energy diplomacy over a lunch which Commissioner Oettinger attended. As well as focusing on the immediate situation in Ukraine, Ministers considered the issue from a strategic viewpoint. The Foreign Secretary stressed how energy security would play an increasingly prominent part in the future of foreign policy, and encouraged consideration of options for decreasing dependency on any single particular source.

Other business

Ministers agreed without discussion a number of other measures:

The Council adopted a decision on the amendment of a specific protocol to each of the euro/Mediterranean association agreements as concerns the concept of “originating products”.

The Council updated the EU’s common military list, which defines the scope of EU rules on arms exports as set out in Common Position 2008/944/CFSP defining common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment.

The Council approved revised guidelines on the appointment, mandate and financing of EU special representatives.

The Council amended the restrictive measures against the Democratic Republic of the Congo so as to implement changes decided in UN Security Council resolution 2136 (2014) of 30 January 2014.

The Council adopted a crisis management concept for a civilian mission under the common security and defence policy to assist the internal security forces in Mali so as to enable the Malian state to ensure law and order and fight against terrorists, organised crime and cross-border trafficking.

The Council authorised the opening of negotiations for an agreement on the participation of the Swiss confederation in the EU integrated border management assistance mission in Libya (EUBAM LIBYA).

The Council approved conclusions on West Africa’s Economic Partnership Agreement Development programme.

The Council adopted the conclusions on the EU common position for the first high-level meeting of the global partnership for effective development co-operation, which will take place in Mexico City on 15-16 April 2014.

The Council adopted conclusions on the European Court of Auditors’ special report No. 9/2013 on EU support for governance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL (GAC)

The 18 March GAC focused on: preparation for the March European Council; the European semester; and the Commission’s communication on the rule of law.

A provisional report of the meeting can be found at:

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/genaff/141629.pdf.

The Preparation of the March European Council

The GAC discussed the March European Council (20 and 21 March), both in the plenary session of the General Affairs Council and over lunch with the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy.

The main focus of this European Council is the situation in Ukraine. In addition, the Council has a full agenda covering: the energy and climate 2030 package; the European semester; industrial policy; and EU/Africa relations including the preparations for the EU/Africa summit to be held on 2 and 3 April.

Following the Foreign Affairs Council's extensive discussion on Ukraine on 17 March, the GAC concentrated more on the other European Council agenda items, though there was a substantial discussion at the Ministerial lunch. On the climate and energy 2030 package, I again stressed the importance of aiming for an ambitious outcome at the March Council, but made clear that member states needed flexibility to de-carbonise in the most effective way. The issue is not only about climate, but also ensuring Europe's long-term energy security needs are met. On industrial policy, I said that it was important to create the right conditions to encourage re-shoring and investment in Europe by reducing unnecessary burdens in key industrial sectors and creating a regulatory environment that drives innovation, industrial growth and competitiveness. The GAC also discussed widening the scope of the EU/Africa discussion to include trade, development and economic partnership.

The European Semester

The GAC endorsed the presidency synthesis report on the 2014 European semester for further discussion at the March European Council.

Commission Communication on the Rule of Law

The GAC received a presentation by the Commission of its communication on the rule of law mechanism and had a preliminary exchange of views. I made it clear that the focus on political dialogue and systemic threats was a step forward from earlier ideas but noted the need for further discussion after member states had considered the communication in detail.

Subsidiarity

Over lunch, ministers had a discussion on the principle of subsidiarity, following interventions by different member states, including the UK, at previous Council meetings. Germany and the Netherlands said that the EU needed to focus in the areas of its competence where it could add most value. I agreed and said this was a crucial debate at the right time given the upcoming institutional refresh.

Illegal Wildlife Trade

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague): On 12 and 13 February I chaired the London conference on the illegal wildlife trade, which was organised by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in conjunction with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Home Office. I would like to inform the House of the outcomes of the conference and to explain how the UK Government will take forward further action to combat the illegal wildlife trade.

The London conference brought together over 50 countries and international organisations to agree new and bold measures to tackle the illegal wildlife trade, signalling a new level of political commitment to

tackle the issue. As well as the devastating consequences for biodiversity and the environment, the illegal wildlife trade is a serious criminal industry worth billions of pounds, which damages local communities and sustainable development, particularly in Africa.

Participating Governments at the conference agreed a political declaration that should mark the turning point in the fight to save endangered species and to end the illegal wildlife trade. Governments committed to action designed to strengthen law enforcement, reduce demand and support alternative livelihoods of communities affected by poaching and the trafficking. Notably, Governments committed themselves for the first time to renounce the use of products from species threatened with extinction, which sends the strong signal that Governments will not procure the things that drive demand for illegal wildlife products. Governments also went further than earlier commitments and promised to support the current position within the convention on the international trade in endangered species of flora and fauna (CITES) to prohibit commercial, international trade in elephant ivory until the survival of elephants in the wild was no longer threatened by poaching. Governments also committed to treating poaching and trafficking in wildlife as a serious, organised crime; the same category as trafficking in drugs, arms and people.

Implementation of all the commitments made in the political declaration will be reviewed at a follow-up conference, to be held in Botswana in early 2015.

The London conference also provided a platform for Governments to make new commitments, including the elephant protection initiative, launched by the Governments of Botswana, Chad, Ethiopia, Gabon and Tanzania. These Governments committed to an extended moratorium on the sale of ivory and also to put all ivory stocks beyond economic use, showing their determination that it is the elephants that hold value for them and their communities, not their tusks. In response, the partners would access a fund to support measures contained in the African elephant action plan. Her Majesty's Government (HMG) committed to match the first tranche of private sector funding for the elephant protection initiative, amounting to £1 million.

The UK Government's approach to tackling the illegal wildlife trade following the London conference is set out in the UK Government "Commitment to Action", published on 5 February 2014. This includes the provision of a £10 million fund to help Governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and charities tackle illegal wildlife crime across the world and help deliver the outcomes of the London conference; continued funding and active engagement and leadership in CITES; and a guarantee of funding for the UK National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) until 2016. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will continue to use its network of diplomatic posts to influence international efforts to combat the illegal wildlife trade, including through supporting anti-poaching and trafficking initiatives, promoting demand reduction measures and providing support to the Government of Botswana in preparing for the follow-up conference on the illegal wildlife trade in early 2015.

I have laid a copy of the "London Declaration on the Illegal Wildlife Trade", and of the "Elephant Protection Initiative", in the Library of the House.

TRANSPORT**InterCity East Coast Franchise**

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): On Friday, 21 March 2014, I published the invitation to tender (ITT) for the InterCity East Coast franchise. This marks the next step in the formal competition to find a new private sector partner to run passenger rail services on the east coast main line.

I have also published the InterCity East Coast stakeholder briefing document, which provides an update to the InterCity East Coast consultation summary report published in October 2013.

The ITT asks bidders to set out detailed proposals on what improvements for passengers they will deliver and how they will build on the multi-billion pound investment planned for the east coast main line and should they win the franchise. The invitation to tender includes:

- the requirement to introduce the new world-class fleet of trains from the inter-city express programme;
- continuation of services to all current destinations;

faster, more frequent services to/from King's Cross by May 2020;

faster average journey times to Leeds and Edinburgh from May 2020;

the potential for improved services to destinations such as Lincoln;

an opportunity for bidders to serve five new routes including Huddersfield, Scarborough, Harrogate (via York), Middlesbrough and Sunderland (via Newcastle); and

a fund that will drive innovation for passengers and deliver long-term benefits for the franchise and wider rail industry.

It is anticipated that the successful bidder will be announced in November and that the new franchise will start in March 2015 and run for eight years and four weeks, with a possible one year extension callable at my sole discretion.

Services along the east coast main line are set to be transformed over the coming years through £240 million worth of investment which will improve reliability and boost capacity for passengers and freight. The route will also benefit from the Government's £5.8 billion inter-city express programme, which is set to deliver a new fleet of state-of-the-art trains which will improve journey times and deliver a boost to the customer experience.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 24 March 2014

TRANSPORT

Bus Services: Disability

Justin Tomlinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of new buses in the UK outside London are fitted with audio visual announcements. [192752]

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.

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, 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.

Driving: Licensing

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of (a) the cost of establishing the system to enable driving records to be accessed online by drivers and the insurance industry and (b) the annual cost of running that system. [192808]

Stephen Hammond: The development cost of establishing the system to enable driving records to be accessed online by drivers and the insurance industry is expected to be around £8.8 million. The estimated annual cost for support and maintenance is £2 million, excluding VAT.

East Coast Railway Line

Julie Elliott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to reduce the number of trains per hour on the East Coast Main Line from London to Newcastle following the opening of High Speed 2. [192389]

Stephen Hammond: It is too early to set the service pattern for the GB rail network in the 2020s and beyond. However, one of the key principles that will guide future service patterns is that all towns or cities which currently have a direct service to London will retain broadly comparable or better services once HS2 is complete. The future design, calling pattern and frequency of network services once HS2 opens will be developed openly, and in partnership.

Julie Elliott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the potential effects of High Speed 2 on the frequency of trains on the East Coast Main Line from London to Newcastle. [192390]

Stephen Hammond: This assessment will be made as different service options for the post-HS2 railway are developed. A wide range of potential service options are open, ranging from relatively evolutionary change to widespread service redesign. These issues were outlined in the Network Rail report 'Better Connections', published in July 2013, and available on their website:

<http://www.networkrail.co.uk/improvements/high-speed-rail/>

The Department is working with Network Rail to design the next stage of the service planning work for rail services once HS2 phase 1 opens, and looking ahead to phase 2. The Department will make further announcements shortly.

First Great Western

Mary Creagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much of the joint investment between his Department and First Great Western to fund additional standard class capacity and a refresh of first class is provided by his Department. [192533]

Stephen Hammond: At this stage, the amounts involved are commercially confidential, as private sector contractors are involved in undertaking the work on behalf of First Great Western. However, the basis on which the allocations have been made is equitable and reflects among other things the need for the public sector contribution to achieve value for money and to secure the Rail Investment Strategy imperative of improved standard class capacity on the Great Western route. The information about the amount borne by the Department to fund the standard class reseating in this joint investment will be provided once the works are completed.

First TransPennine Express

Diana Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that the new Transpennine Express franchise due to begin in 2015 maintains hourly direct services between Hull and Manchester. [192520]

Stephen Hammond: The new directly awarded franchise for TransPennine that begins in April 2015 will aim to provide train services at the same level as is currently available to passengers today until the start of the new completed franchise, expected in February 2016.

Goring and Streatley Station

John Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when lifts will be installed at Goring and Streatley station; and whether this will coincide with the replacement of the footbridge. [192909]

Stephen Hammond: Network Rail has submitted Goring and Streatley as a candidate station for Access for All Funding. The Government plans to make an announcement on funding in April. In the meantime, Network Rail has

advised me that the new footbridge which will be installed in the summer will be suitable for the installation of lifts.

High Speed 2 Railway Line

Mr Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evaluation his Department has made of the costs and benefits of linking the proposed phase two of High Speed 2 to the West Coast Main Line at Crewe instead of at Golborne junction. [192911]

Mr Goodwill: The Strategic Case for HS2 published on 29 October 2013 sets out the business case for proceeding with HS2. It shows that the Y-shaped network including the connections to the west coast main line at both Crewe and Golborne is expected to deliver around £2.30 of benefits (including Wider Economic Impacts) for every £1 spent. The Department has not estimated the case for the Y-shaped route for High Speed 2 without these connections. However, HS2 Ltd examined the possibility of only linking High Speed 2 to the west coast main line at Crewe, and eliminating the junction at Golborne. They identified significant constraints in the west coast main line north of Crewe and additional works would be required here as the line is intensively used by fast long-distance services, slower stopping trains and freight, causing significant timetabling constraints. Taking into account the levels of growth being experienced to date, both in terms of passenger and freight traffic, the west coast main line would not be able to cope with the overall volume of services required. Therefore the section of line between Winterbottom and Bamfurlong culminating in the Golborne connection is likely to offer very high value for money when compared against the alternative connection at Crewe and associated WCML modification work.

Liverpool Street - Harlow Railway Line

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the punctuality levels of train services between Harlow Town train station and London Liverpool Street station have been over the last 10 years. [192246]

Stephen Hammond: The Department does not hold such information to the level required. We do not routinely measure punctuality (or any other performance measure) by individual line or route; it is the franchise as a whole we measure.

Motorways: Repairs and Maintenance

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 27 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 456W, on motorways: repairs and maintenance, what the reasons are for the discrepancy between the figures of eight deaths in the preceding three years and 1,747 injuries in the preceding 12 months of people repairing motorways stated by the Highways Agency in a press release dated 21 October 2013. [192569]

Mr Goodwill: The figures quoted are based upon different data selection criteria and from different time periods. The answer of 27 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 456W, (motorways: repairs and maintenance) is

the number of people repairing motorways killed or injured by vehicles in 2012 and 2013. The Highways Agency press release of 21 October 2013, referred to the number of road workers killed and injured while improving and maintaining the strategic road network in England, irrespective of the causation or duties being undertaken. The eight road workers killed occurred between 2009 and 2013 and the figure of 1,747 quoted in the same press release included a large volume of near misses, hazards and damage to plant and equipment where no injuries had been sustained.

Nurseries

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the number of workplace nurseries available to staff in (a) his Department and (b) his Department's executive agencies or non-departmental public bodies in (i) 2010, (ii) 2013-14 and (iii) 2014-15. [192452]

Stephen Hammond: Across the Department (which includes its executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies) there are two workplace nurseries which are available to staff. These are operated by a third party. One of the nurseries available to staff is based in Swansea. The other workplace nursery is available to staff based in Hastings and is open to several Government Departments. Both nurseries were operating in 2010 and 2013-14. There are no plans for the nurseries to cease operating in 2014-15.

Railway Stations: Access

John Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much funding will be made available to the Access for All scheme in Control Period 5; and what terms and conditions will apply to such funding. [192821]

Stephen Hammond: £100 million has been allocated to extend the Access for All programme for control period 5. Stations will be selected based on their annual footfall, weighted by the incidence of disability in the area. The preferences of the train operators and the availability of third party funding or other capital contributions will also be considered.

Railways: Chester

Stephen Mosley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport with reference to the report of the Commission on Devolution in Wales published on 3 March 2014, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Wales on the potential implications for (a) rail services in Chester and (b) Chester railway station of the recommendation in that report to devolve the Wales and Borders rail franchise to the National Assembly for Wales. [192435]

Stephen Hammond: No discussions have taken place with the Secretary of State for Wales, my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) on further devolution of responsibilities for the Wales and Border franchise and its implications for the division of responsibilities between the two Governments for rail services calling at, and the management of, Chester station.

Railways: Fares

Mr Simon Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average change in rail fares was between Chelmsford and London in each of the last five years. [192303]

Stephen Hammond: The Office of Rail Regulation publishes information on average changes in rail fares by sector and ticket category on their website:

<http://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/displayreport/report/html/7cff3127-a5cc-4173-ac78-016db2339811>

However, I am able to provide information on the change in costs of an annual season ticket from Chelmsford to London terminals over the last five years, as follows:

<i>Annual season ticket from Chelmsford to London terminals</i>		
	£	Percentage change from previous year
2010	3,120	—
2011	3,260	4.5
2012	3,420	4.9
2013	3,540	3.5
2014	3,640	2.8

Railways: North West

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for how many days the (a) Colne to Blackpool South and (b) Skipton to Leeds lines were closed in each of the last five years. [192427]

Stephen Hammond: This is not information that is held by the Department for Transport. This is a matter for Network Rail, who own and operate Britain's rail network.

Railways: Tickets

Mary Creagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much the Government has spent on the South East Flexible Ticketing Scheme in each year since 2010. [192856]

Stephen Hammond: The following sums have been spent on the South East Flexible Ticketing Programme to date:

	£
2010	0
2011	0
2012	590,310
2013	5,667,057
2014 ¹	2,328,528

¹ To date.

Mr Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether there are currently any regulatory restrictions preventing train operators from operating part-time rail season tickets. [192957]

Stephen Hammond: Rail fares are set according to relevant procedures set out in the ticketing and settlement agreement ('TSA'), an inter-operator agreement to which the Secretary of State for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Mr McLoughlin),

is not a party but over which he has change control in certain areas. The TSA is available at the following weblink:

<http://www.atoc.org/about-atoc/rail-settlement-plan/governance/>

Mr Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when the pilot project for part-time rail season tickets will start; [192958]

(2) on what date the competition inviting train operators to submit a pilot project for flexible ticketing will start; and whether that competition will include services on the Waterloo to Weymouth line. [192959]

Stephen Hammond: The competition for the trial on flexible and part-time ticketing is currently scheduled to commence later in 2014. All train operators that are signatories to the South East Flexible Ticketing scheme, including South West Trains, who operate the Waterloo to Weymouth line, will be invited to take part in the competition. We expect to announce a winning bidder in sufficient time to commence the trial in January 2015. The trial is expected to last for a year.

Roads: Repairs and Maintenance

Mary Creagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) which local authorities receive what proportion of the £140 million to fix roads damaged by flooding and adverse weather announced on 9 March 2014; [192776]

(2) pursuant to the financial statement of 19 March 2014, what the breakdown is of the £200 million funding for potholes schemes; and whether that £200 million includes the £140 million to fix roads damaged by flooding and adverse weather announced by the Secretary of State for Transport on 9 March 2014. [192920]

Mr Goodwill: The funding allocations from the £140 million announced on 9 March to help repair roads damaged by the severe wet weather were announced on 20 March 2013. This includes a further £33.5 million announced earlier this year as part of the transport element of the Severe Weather Recovery Fund. A table which provides information on the funding we will be paying to local highway authorities by end March 2014 is available at the following weblink:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/294497/extra-funding-to-repair-roads.csv/preview

The £200 million for a Pothole Fund was announced in the Budget on 19 March 2014 is new money and in addition to the £140 million funding. From the £200 million, £168 million be made available to councils in England through a bidding exercise. Further details on the fund will be made available in the coming weeks.

Rolling Stock: First TransPennine Express

Diana Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to ensure provision of adequate rolling stock to serve the Hull-Manchester train route from April 2015. [192519]

Stephen Hammond: The Department is working with train operators and the rolling stock companies to ensure that adequate rolling stock is available to provide continued levels of service to passengers on the route.

PRIME MINISTER

Iraq Committee of Inquiry

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to the answer of 2 December 2013, *Official Report*, column 503W, on Iraq Committee of Inquiry, what the reasons are for the time taken to conclude the Government's response to the disclosure requests; when consideration of the final sets of papers will be concluded; and if he will make a statement. [193088]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 2 December 2013, *Official Report*, column 503W.

WALES

Free School Meals: Gwent

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of pupils at each (a) primary and (b) secondary school in Islwyn constituency is eligible for free school meals. [192747]

Mr David Jones: This information relates to a devolved matter and is not held by the UK Government. I have therefore written to the Minister for Education and Skills in the Welsh Government seeking the information requested.

I will write to the hon. Member when further information is received, and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Nurseries

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of workplace nurseries available to staff in his Department in (a) 2010, (b) 2013-14 and (c) 2014-15. [192454]

Stephen Crabb: I refer the hon. Lady to my answer to the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), of 3 March 2014, *Official Report*, column 697W.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Armed Forces: Cadets

Dr McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many young people from Northern Ireland have joined the (a) Army cadets, (b) RAF cadets and (c) Royal Navy cadets in each of the last five years. [191866]

Anna Soubry: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Ministry of Defence.

The information requested is shown in the following table.

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Navy</i>	<i>Army</i>	<i>Air</i>
2009-10	223	951	219
2010-11	243	1,098	276
2011-12	232	1,259	225
2012-13	189	1,155	246
2013-14	175	917	191

These figures include number of cadets in both the community cadet forces (i.e. Sea Cadet Corps, Army Cadet Force and Air Training Corps) and in Combined Cadet Force (CCF) units in Northern Ireland schools.

Immunity from Prosecution

Ms Ritchie: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether her Department is aware of any undertakings of (a) amnesty, (b) immunity and (c) implied immunity from prosecution given to any (i) former or serving members of the security forces, (ii) person who has acted as an agent of the security forces or Government intelligence services and (iii) member of a paramilitary organisation. [191098]

Mrs Villiers: I am not aware of any such undertakings. Responsibility for the prosecution of individuals rests with the police and the prosecuting authorities.

Post Office Card Account

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills on increasing the use of Post Office card accounts for the payment of welfare benefits in Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [192839]

Mrs Villiers: I have had no discussions on this matter nor have I been asked by any Northern Ireland Executive Ministers to raise this with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable) who has responsibility for the Post Office. I am due to meet the Minister for Social Development and will take that opportunity to discuss this with him.

TREASURY

Air Passenger Duty

Andrew Percy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of multi-ticketing on the revenue accruing to the Exchequer from air passenger duty in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [192302]

Nicky Morgan: Budget 2014 announced the reform of air passenger duty with the abolition of bands C and D from 1 April 2015. This will eliminate the two highest rates of APD charged on flights to countries over 4,000 miles from Britain, cutting tax for millions for passengers to travelling to China, India, Brazil and many other

emerging markets. This will mean that flights to South Asia and the Caribbean will pay tax at the lower band B rate.

Air passenger duty is calculated on a passenger's final destination. The liability of a journey from the UK will be the same whether the journey is made by using a single, direct flight from the UK, or by using two or more connected flights through foreign hub airports.

A journey using separate unconnected tickets has practical and financial implications including no protection on the cost of missed connections. Data is not held on the number of UK passenger journeys to foreign hub airports that may be part of a longer journey using unconnected tickets.

Alcoholic Drinks

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings his Department has had with (a) pub companies, (b) the British Beer and Pub Association, (c) members of the British Beer and Pub Association, (d) Independent Family Brewers of Britain and (e) members of Independent Family Brewers of Britain. [192124]

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>

Buildings

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the office space owned or leased by his Department is not in regular use; what the total (a) rental and (b) retail value is of all such unused office space; and if he will place in the Library a copy of his most recent departmental real estate valuation. [186874]

Nicky Morgan: Holdings of real estate are assessed as either being required to deliver departmental functions (forming the Core estate) or surplus to this requirement (non-Core). There is no system for classifying frequency of use. The Government's top priority for surplus holdings is to reduce property costs by exiting leasehold agreements, selling freeholds or by sub-letting to external tenants. The Government has now created a portal—Find Me Some Government Space at:

<https://www.gov.uk/find-government-property>

for more efficient marketing of surplus land and buildings. This is searchable by developers, community groups and the general public.

It is considered not to be in the public interest to disclose real estate valuation reports, as this information can be commercially sensitive and any disclosure could adversely affect the Government's future ability to negotiate efficiencies and achieve value for money to the taxpayer. However, the value of HM Treasury's land and buildings is available in its annual report and accounts, which is accessible on:

www.gov.uk

Children: Day Care

Tristram Hunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of future child care costs after 2015-16. [192701]

Nicky Morgan: Information on how future child care costs have been estimated can be found in the Budget 2014 policy costings document:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/293740/PU1638_policy_costings_budget_2014.pdf

Lucy Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the qualifying criteria for the tax free childcare scheme are. [192976]

Nicky Morgan: Information on the eligibility criteria for tax-free child care can be found in the consultation response document:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/293084/PU1607_Tax_free_Childcare_response.pdf

Excise Duties: Fuels

Mr David Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the economic effect of (a) a rise in fuel duty, (b) freezing fuel duty, (c) cutting fuel duty by 3 pence or more in 2014-15; [192285]

(2) what research his Department has (a) commissioned and (b) evaluated on the (i) economic effects and (ii) effects on the average motorist of (A) a freeze in fuel duty and (B) a reduction in fuel duty by 3 pence or more; [192286]

(3) if he will make it his policy to commit to a real terms cut in fuel duty in 2014-15; [192287]

(4) what estimate he has made of the change in employment levels of (a) a freeze in fuel duty and (b) a reduction in fuel duty by 3 pence or more in the final year of this Parliament; [192288]

(5) when he next plans to meet members of FairFuelUK to discuss (a) a freeze in fuel duty and (b) a reduction in fuel duty by 3 pence or more. [192289]

Nicky Morgan: Since 2011, the Government has taken action on fuel duty to support both households and businesses. At autumn statement 2013 the Government cancelled the increase that was planned for September 2014, freezing fuel duty for remainder of Parliament. As a result of this Government's action, the real terms rate of fuel duty is forecast to fall by 8p per litre over the Parliament. A typical motorist will save £680 in total by 2015-16, compared to the previous Government's plans.

All fuel duty cuts and freezes since Budget 2011 have had to be fully funded, through tax rises or spending cuts elsewhere. The impact of any reductions will need to be considered in the context of the wider public finances.

The actions this Government has taken on tax, spending and welfare reform have reduced the deficit, protected the economy, restored and maintained stability. The Government regularly meets a range of stakeholders on fuel duty.

Mrs Ellman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason it is his policy to apply varying taxation rates to different road fuel gases. [192718]

Nicky Morgan: The Government has maintained the fuel duty differential between the main rate of fuel duty and alternative road fuels until 2024. The Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) differential reduces by 1 penny per litre (ppl) per year, which is a continuation of the approach set out by the previous Administration. This follows their recommendation in the 2003 Alternative Fuels Framework, reflecting the greater natural environmental damage caused by LPG compared to other road fuel gases.

However, as this Government has frozen fuel duty until the end of Parliament, the LPG differential also remains frozen, and is not currently closing by 1 ppl per year. The Government will review the taxation of all road fuel gases in 2018, along with vehicle take up and the impact of the differential on the public finances.

Fixed Interest Securities: Pensioners

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the current (a) one and (b) three-year yield is on a gilt; and what the (i) one and (ii) three-year yield will be on the proposed fixed rate savings bonds for pensioners [192858]

Sajid Javid: At close of business on Thursday 20 March 2014, the one-year gilt yield was 0.40%, and the three-year gilt yield was 1.05%, as reported by Bloomberg. Yields on the National Savings and Investments (NS&I) bonds will be equal to their interest rates, which will be finalised at autumn statement to take account of prevailing market conditions. However, as set out in the Budget red book our central assumption is that the one-year bond would pay 2.8% gross/annual equivalent rate (AER) and the three-year bond 4% gross/AER, subject to tax.

Flood Control

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the Green Book in regard to flood defence investment; and if he will make a statement. [190935]

Danny Alexander: The Treasury Green Book provides a technical guide to the appraisal of all public spending proposals. The Government does not intend to review it as a result of the recent floods because it makes no provision specific to flood defence investment. However, the Government does keep the Green Book methodology under regular review to ensure it continues to set out best practice for all project appraisal.

Income Tax

Mr Ruffley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effects on revenues of (a) changes in the top rate of tax and (b) a reduction in the top rate from 45p to (i) 44p, (ii) 43p, (iii) 42p, (iv) 41p and (v) 40p. [192296]

Mr Gauke: The forecast Exchequer revenue effect of a change in the top rate of income tax from 45 pence to (a) 44 pence (b) 43 pence (c) 42 pence (d) 41 pence and (e) 40 pence is detailed as follows:

<i>2014-15 Exchequer effect</i>	
	<i>£ million</i>
44 pence	-150
43 pence	-300
42 pence	-500
41 pence	-700
40 pence	-950

These estimates are based on the latest available SPI (Survey of Personal Incomes, 2011-12) and have been forecast in line with Budget 2014 economic assumptions.

Substantial behavioural responses are associated with changes in top marginal tax rates. The HMRC report, "The Exchequer effect of the 50% additional rate of income tax", outlines these behavioural responses in greater detail. The report is published and available at:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/budget2012/excheq-income-tax-2042.pdf>

Individual Savings Accounts

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the removal of the distinction between a cash ISA and a stocks and shares ISA on (a) the behaviour of investors and (b) investment in capital markets. [192950]

Mr Gauke: From 1 July 2014, the overall annual new ISA subscription limit will be increased to £15,000 and can be used for either cash or stocks and shares investments, or any combination of the two, up to this limit. However, there are no plans to remove the distinct definitions of cash ISAs and stocks and shares ISAs, though the list of qualifying investments for the latter will be amended as set out in Budget 2014.

These measures will reduce income tax on savings for people constrained by the current ISA limits, improving incentives to save and increasing real household disposable incomes. Over 5 million adults currently fully subscribe to the cash ISA limit, and so are expected to benefit from the equalisation of the cash and overall ISA subscription limits. Three-quarters of these people are basic rate taxpayers and a third are pensioners. A further 1.3 million people subscribe to the overall ISA limit, which is currently £11,520.

As HMRC's published tax information and impact note explains, the increase to real household disposable incomes resulting from the new ISA changes might feed through to higher consumption or savings in the household sector. There may also be a shift in the savings portfolio composition towards cash deposits.

New Businesses: Government Assistance

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has made an assessment of the benefits and disbenefits of extending the Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme to the charity and social enterprise sector. [192183]

Mr Gauke: The Government is introducing the social investment tax relief from April 2014. It extends the venture capital tax breaks to investment in social enterprises.

The new scheme is based on the Enterprise Investment Scheme and will apply to significantly larger organisations than qualify for the Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), announced at Budget that the rate of income tax relief will be 30%. The relief is the first of its kind in the world.

Non-domestic Rates

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the ministerial statement of 13 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 66WS, on Business Rates Administration Review, if he will undertake a programme of research into the merits of replacing business rates in England with a land value tax; and if he will make a statement. [192870]

Mr Gauke: The Government's review of business rates administration after 2017 aims to identify improvements to the business rate system

"consistent with the principle that business rates are based on rental property values".

As the Government has previously set out, it believes that the complexity and cost of administering a land value tax means that such a proposal is not tenable. The Government therefore has no intention of considering a land value tax as part of its review of business rates administration post-2017.

Nurseries

Lucy Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of workplace nurseries available to staff in (a) his Department and (b) his Department's Executive agencies or non-departmental public bodies in (i) 2010, (ii) 2013-14 and (iii) 2014-15. [192453]

Nicky Morgan: No estimate has been made by the Treasury or its Executive agencies of the number of workplace nurseries available to staff in 2010, 2013-14 or 2014-15.

Personal Savings: Females

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to promote greater (a) knowledge of and (b) investment in ISAs and pensions among women. [192363]

Mr Gauke: The Money Advice Service (MAS) was set up by Government to promote understanding of the financial system and raise levels of financial capability across the UK. It offers free and impartial information and advice on money matters to all and provides advice on a range of savings products, including ISAs.

The latest available statistics show that as of 5 April 2011, of the 24,356 adults with ISAs, 11,861 (48.7%) were female.

On pensions, 2 million to 3 million are women will be automatically enrolled into a workplace pension where they will benefit from an employer contribution and tax relief.

The state pension reforms will benefit women who have historically done poorly under the current two-tier system. The Government expects that in the first 10 years after implementation, over 650,000 women will benefit from the single-tier valuation of their pension at 2016, receiving on average £8 a week more in state pension.

Provident Societies

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Industrial and Provident Societies have been registered with the Financial Services Authority or Financial Conduct Authority in each year since 2008. [192198]

Sajid Javid: The Government does not hold information on the numbers of Industrial and Provident Societies registered. The data is held by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Revenue and Customs

Mike Crockett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff had been employed on fixed-term contracts by HM Revenue and Customs for two years or more (a) in Edinburgh and (b) the rest of the UK at the most recent date for which figures are available; and how many such staff will be made redundant in each case by 31 March 2014. [192381]

Mr Gauke: There are currently 50 people (40.27 full-time equivalent) employed on fixed term contracts in Edinburgh. All of these staff have been employed for more than two years.

There are currently 2,222 people (1,850.9 FTE) with two or more years of service employed on fixed term contracts in the rest of the UK.

HMRC has been in meaningful consultation with departmental trade unions and is still working to minimise any potential redundancies. The Department has offered a number of staff the opportunity to extend their contract. Discussions between HMRC staff and their managers about fixed term contracts coming to an end are continuing, so final numbers of redundancies are not yet available.

Sand: Waste Disposal

Caroline Nokes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will put a mechanism in place to waive landfill tax for the disposal of sandbags by local authorities; [192187]

(2) what assessment he has made of the financial effect on local authorities of landfill tax payable for the disposal of sandbags since the recent floods. [192188]

Nicky Morgan: The Treasury has not undertaken a specific assessment of the landfill tax liability to local authorities from the disposal of sandbags following the recent floods.

Landfill tax is an environmental tax to discourage waste being sent to landfill and to instead encourage alternative forms of waste treatment such as reuse and recycling. Providing an exemption for the disposal of sandbags by local authorities would require new legislation which would take time to introduce, and add new administrative burdens for both local authorities and landfill site operators.

However, in response to the recent flooding, the Government has taken action to support local authorities with exceptional costs by expanding the Bellwin scheme which provides financial assistance to local authorities in England incurring expenditure above a qualifying threshold in response to an emergency or disaster to safeguard lives and properties. The Government has also established a Severe Weather Recovery scheme to contribute to costs incurred by local authorities to support their communities and repair highways and infrastructure. This scheme can help with some of the costs associated with disposal. In addition to these schemes, the Government has provided funding for local authorities to provide council tax and business rates relief as well as hardship grants for households and businesses affected by the flooding.

Social Security Benefits

Mike Crockart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to address financial inequalities faced by parents with shared custody of their child where state benefits are paid to only one parent. [192379]

Nicky Morgan: Child benefit and tax credits provide financial support for families bringing up children. In the instance where parents are separated claimants may also qualify for the 'lone parent' element of tax credits.

Payments are made to the person primarily responsible for the child. Where parents are separated child benefit and tax credit rules allow for parents to decide between themselves which of them, shall be entitled to receive the payments. Where parents are unable to make a decision HMRC commissioners can make a discretionary decision.

VAT

Hywel Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the possibility of reducing VAT on local procurement; and whether he has any plans to propose such a reduction. [192657]

Mr Gauke: The application of VAT in the EU, including rates and flexibilities afforded to member states in this regard, is governed by EU law. The UK is only able to introduce reduced rates of VAT where there is the flexibility to do so under EU law.

VAT: Repairs and Maintenance

Caroline Dinéage: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will reduce VAT on repairs for those affected by flooding. [192189]

Mr Gauke: The Government is taking action to help families and businesses affected by the flooding. On the 20 February the Prime Minister announced a package

of new funding schemes to support homeowners and businesses, including a grant of up to £5,000 to provide financial support to pay for repairs which improve a property's ability to withstand future flooding. More information is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-floods-2014-government-response>

HOME DEPARTMENT

Alcoholic Drinks: Prices

Dr McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps she is taking to introduce a ban on the sale of alcohol below the cost of duty plus VAT; [191869]

(2) what steps she is taking to introduce a minimum unit price for alcohol in England and Wales; [191870]

(3) what recent discussions she has had with the devolved Administration in Northern Ireland on a minimum unit price for alcohol. [191871]

Norman Baker: Minimum unit pricing remains a policy under active consideration but is on hold while we assess the response of industry to our alcohol strategy, which we have indicated we expect to be a positive one. In the meantime we are introducing a ban on alcohol sales below the cost of duty plus VAT from April 2014. This fulfils the coalition Government's commitment and will stop the worst cases of very cheap and harmful alcohol sales.

Home Office Ministers have regular meetings with ministerial colleagues and others as part of the process of policy development and delivery. As was the case with previous administrations, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings.

Asylum: Deportation

Sarah Teather: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who were previously classified as unaccompanied asylum seeking children have been forcibly returned to another country as adults in each of the last five years for which records are available. [191300]

James Brokenshire: The number of enforced removals of adults previously classified as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children for the period January 2009 to December 2013 is set out in the following table.

	<i>Number</i>
2009	38
2010	91
2011	183
2012	87
2013	110
Total	509

Daniel Morgan

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 11 March 2014, *Official Report*, column 182W, on Daniel Morgan,

from which (a) individuals and (b) organisations documents have been received; what protocols with relevant organisations are required; and if she will place in the Library a copy of all (i) minutes and (ii) documents from the meetings of the Independent Panel held to date. [192069]

Damian Green [*holding answer 20 March 2014*]: The panel is seeking documents from those organisations mentioned in its Terms of Reference and other organisations and individuals which the panel considers may have relevant information to offer.

However, the proceedings of the Daniel Morgan Independent Panel will remain confidential until it presents its final report to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who will then make arrangements for the report's publication to Parliament. The Terms of Reference provide that the panel will brief members of the family through the final report. This will be made available first to the family and then to the public at large. It is not envisaged that the panel will make material public until that point, but it will keep under review what policies and protocols it can make publicly available during the course of its work.

Detention Centres

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are allocated to each room in immigration detention centres. [192293]

James Brokenshire [*holding answer 20 March 2014*]: Rooms in Immigration Removal Centres are generally shared by two or three occupants, although there are also single occupancy and some larger rooms, which can accommodate up to eight detainees. The largest room capacity is a 12-bed first-night unit in Dungavel, Scotland.

In order to be used as sleeping accommodation, rooms must be certified in accordance with Detention Services Order 4/2003 by the Secretary of State, that the lighting, heating and ventilation are adequate for health. This is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accommodation-lighting-heating-and-ventilation>

Entry Clearances: Africa

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visa centres have been contracted to be delivered by teleperformance in Africa; how many such centres are operational; and if she will make a statement. [192415]

James Brokenshire: Teleperformance Ltd have been awarded the contract covering the Africa region. This comprises 27 outsourced visa application centres. Of these, four are currently operational, with further visa application centres to become operational over the coming weeks.

Entry Clearances: India

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people applied for fast-track visas to the UK in India in 2013. [189241]

James Brokenshire: There were 81,755 applications in India in 2013 where applicants opted to use a priority service. A "same day" service was launched in India on 15 May 2013, and from that date to 31 December 2013, of the 81,755 applicants that used a priority service, 454 chose to use the "same day" service.

Entry Clearances: Overseas Students

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate she has made of the change in the number of non-EU students issued visas to study at UK universities in the last five years. [191829]

James Brokenshire [*holding answer 17 March 2014*]: Since 2010 we have made common sense reforms to our student visa system, cutting out abuse whilst ensuring that we continue to attract talented international students to our world class universities.

Available figures of applications for visas for study using sponsor acceptances at UK universities during the last four years (2010 to 2013) show that there has been an increase in each year, rising by 7% from 156,629 in 2012 to 167,995 in 2013 and for students sponsored by the Russell Group of universities this rose by 11%. These figures are published as part of the latest quarterly Immigration Statistics October to December 2013 in table cs 09 available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/283682/before-entry1-q4-2013-tabs.ods

Data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) indicates that first year non-EU students enrolling at UK higher education institutions (HEIs) increased by 36% between 2007-08 and 2012-13. These figures are available from the HESA website at:

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/>

Immigrants

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with reference to the Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Returnees project, what the countries of origin of the 1,470 irregular migrants were; what assistance will be provided to the 30 victims of human trafficking from EU countries; how it will provide reintegration assistance to the 75 returning vulnerable migrants; and if she will make a statement. [190276]

James Brokenshire [*holding answer 6 March 2014*]: For many illegal migrants, the UK remains a primary destination country and some of those this programme will assist might otherwise arrive in the UK.

This project will make a positive and significant contribution to Greece's comprehensive management of migration by facilitating the safe returns and reintegration of migrants in their countries of origin. The project will also raise awareness of the real dangers associated with illegal migration and of the advantages of returning home voluntarily, with support.

We will keep the effectiveness of this project under review.

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the nature and purpose is of the Government-funded Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Returnees project being implemented by the International Organisation for Migration in co-operation with the Greek Government; how that project will assist irregular migrants to return to their countries of origin; and how the project will help identified victims of human trafficking from EU countries. [190398]

James Brokenshire [*holding answer 6 March 2014*]: For many illegal migrants the UK remains a primary destination country and some of those this programme will assist might otherwise arrive in the UK.

This project will make a positive and significant contribution to Greece's comprehensive management of migration by facilitating the safe returns and reintegration of migrants in their countries of origin. The project will also raise awareness of the real dangers associated with illegal migration and of the advantages of returning home voluntarily, with support.

We will keep the effectiveness of this project under review.

Immigration

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the backlog was for cases supervised by the (a) permanent migration office, Liverpool, (b) temporary migration office, Sheffield and (c) older live cases unit, Liverpool in each year since 2010. [189531]

James Brokenshire: In response to parts (a) and (b), we cannot provide an answer as our reporting system does not allow historic reporting on this basis and our archived reports are not presented in such a way.

In response to (c), older live cases unit (OLCU) was formed in November 2012. OLCU does not have a backlog but is responsible for a defined cohort of older asylum and migration cases. The majority of these cases will have already received a negative decision against their initial application, but remain in the UK. For OLCU, the figures are:

31 December 2012—40,538 people (asylum and migration)

31 December 2013—34,841 people (asylum and migration).

Immigration Officers

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what rules govern the conduct of former immigration officials in respect of dealings with those still employed by the Immigration Service. [192294]

James Brokenshire [*holding answer 20 March 2014*]: In common with all civil servants, the conduct of former immigration officials are bound by the Business Appointment Rules for Civil Servants. These are in the public domain and are published at:

<http://acoba.independent.gov.uk/media/25653/business%20appointment%20rules%20for%20civil%20servants%20feb%202011.pdf>

These rules apply to all serving civil servants and to former civil servants for two years after their last day of paid service.

National Security

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make it her policy to regularly review directions given under section 94 of the Telecommunications Act 1984. [192753]

James Brokenshire: The Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) keeps national security policies and decisions under review.

Organised Crime

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the National Crime Agency has taken to liaise with its counterparts in the Irish Republic over steps to prevent further gangland-type killings and shootings. [192504]

Karen Bradley: The Common Travel Area (CTA) between the UK, Ireland and the Crown Dependencies and the free movement of goods within the EU mean that close liaison and co-operation between UK and Irish law enforcement partners against serious and organised crime is both vital and valued by both sides. The NCA has dedicated resources currently working with Irish law enforcement agencies to tackle the threat from organised crime that affects both our countries.

Poaching: North West

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of illegal taking of game have been recorded in (a) the North West and (b) Lancashire in each of the last three years. [192391]

Norman Baker: The Home Office does not hold this information centrally.

Police recorded crime statistics, consisting of indictable and triable-either-way offences do not include summary offences, such as taking of game.

UN Commission On the Status of Women

Martin Horwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress she has made in implementing the commitments in the outcome document of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2013; and if she will make a statement. [192490]

Norman Baker: Eliminating and preventing violence against women and girls was the priority theme for the Commission on the Status of Women in 2013. The coalition Government is committed to fulfilling our obligations to tackle such violence both in the UK and overseas. An update version of the cross-Government Action Plan, "A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls" was published on 8 March and incorporates key recommendations from the "Agreed Conclusions".

WORK AND PENSIONS

Access to Work Programme

Richard Fuller: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the advantages to deaf people of funding a team of interpreters through the Access to Work scheme rather than being assigned a single interpreter by their employer. [192543]

Mike Penning: We have not made any assessment of the advantages to deaf people of funding a team of interpreters through the Access to Work scheme. We appreciate that each situation is unique and may require a bespoke solution.

Richard Fuller: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how the maximum grants for funding support workers under the Access to Work scheme were determined. [192589]

Mike Penning: There is no maximum grant level set for the funding of support workers under the Access to Work programme. Our aim is to use the programme budget to assist the maximum possible number of disabled workers across all industry sectors.

Richard Fuller: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which organisations for deaf people his Department consulted before the Access to Work guidance on support workers was amended. [192591]

Mike Penning: There have been no recent amendments to Access to Work guidance on support workers.

Children: Day Care

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the distributional effect of raising the proportion of childcare costs covered by universal credit to 85 per cent within the existing budget. [192777]

Steve Webb: Work remains the best route out of poverty, and child care costs represent a significant barrier to families trying to take the first steps into work or workup to full-time hours.

Government and many of our stakeholders have concluded that funding an increase in child care support up to 85% provides a sufficient improvement in the financial reward and work incentive for families under universal credit. It will see around 500,000 working families get more out of the money they earn, helping more families move into employment and thus supporting our goal to end poverty in a sustainable way.

We will shortly be publishing a response to the consultation on the rate of child care paid under universal credit, which will include more detailed information on the effects of increasing the rate to 85% for all families.

The distributional effects of universal credit to be published at the next autumn statement, will include any changes to the child care element universal credit.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of disability living allowance claims took longer than 40 days to process in each of the last three years for which data is available. [192527]

Mike Penning: The following table shows the percentage of disability living allowance (DLA) new claims, for normal rules (NR), that took longer than 40 days to process. Claims not yet processed within 40 days, include cases where we are awaiting additional information from the claimant and/or medical evidence.

2012-13	
	Number/percentage
Volume of claims cleared (Number)	402,861
Volume of claims cleared after 40 working days (Number)	89,678
Percentage of DLA new claims (NR) cleared after 40 working days	22.3

Prior to 2012-13, the measure reported against was an actual average clearance time (AACT). This is the cumulative clearance days divided by the number of cleared events within the reporting period.

The following table shows information for 2010-11 and 2011-12.

	2010-11	2011-12
Volume of claims cleared	431,572	412,556
AACT (level 37.7 days)	30.3	27.2

Notes:

1. The reported figure only relates to DLA (NR) new claims. NR claims are those where the claimant is not terminally ill and the normal rules of entitlement therefore apply.
2. The figures above cover the period from 1 April to 31 March and shows the national position including working age and child claimants.
3. The AACT level (37.7 days) shown in the table is a measure based on a prior year's performance.
4. We have not provided data for 2013-14 due to not having a full financial year available at this time.

Source:

Department for Work and Pensions—RDA 80123 report—DLA Management Information Statistics.

Employment and Support Allowance

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will take steps to ensure that the support available on Saturdays for people appealing against the refusal of employment and support allowance is equivalent to that available on other days. [190133]

Mr Vara: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Ministry of Justice.

The First-tier Tribunal (Social Security and Child Support), administered by HM Courts and Tribunals Service, hears appeals against Department for Work and Pensions' decisions on a range of benefits, including employment and support allowance. The tribunal is designed to hear appeals from individuals without the need, for support from advocates.

The panel that hears the appeal, which will comprise experts such as judges, doctors, translators, and mental health experts, will guide the appellant through the

appeal process. An appeal is inquisitorial rather than adversarial in nature. Appellants may engage advocates to help in preparing for or attending an appeal, but this is a matter entirely for the individual.

Appellants are asked before their case is listed if there are any days of the week, from Monday to Saturday, when they would be unable to attend a hearing. If Saturday is not convenient they can say so. Hearings which are held on a Saturday proceed exactly as they would on a weekday.

If an appellant has engaged an advocate but the advocate is not available to attend the scheduled hearing the matter will be put to a judge as to whether the hearing should be re-listed.

Alison McGovern: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average time taken from an application for reconsideration of an employment and support allowance decision to a decision being made on the case was in each month since October 2013. [192738]

Simon Hart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the average length of time taken to complete the employment and support allowance mandatory reconsideration process was in (a) 2012 and (b) 2013; [192886]

(2) what the longest time taken was for an employment and support allowance mandatory reconsideration process in (a) 2012 and (b) 2013. [192887]

Mike Penning: Mandatory reconsideration was introduced for employment and support allowance for decisions notified from 28 October 2013. The Department is collecting information to understand how it is operating from the point of its introduction, including the time taken from an application for reconsideration of an ESA decision to a decision being made on the case.

At present, this data is not sufficiently robust and reliable to make available.

Employment Schemes: Young People

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many businesses in (a) the UK and (b) Brigg and Goole constituency have taken part in wage incentive schemes since the introduction of the Youth Contract. [192278]

Esther McVey: Data on the number of employers receiving wage incentives are not available. The latest statistics on Youth Contract wage incentives, released on 25 February 2014 are available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-contract-official-statistics-february-2014>

Flexible Support Fund

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants working less than 16 hours per week have received help in each year from the flexible support fund to cover child care expenses, (child care subsidy), in each year since its inception; and how much the Government has spent on such support in each such year. [192918]

Esther McVey: The information requested cannot be supplied without incurring disproportionate costs.

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants have received help from the flexible support fund to cover child care expenses for up to five days in the seven days immediately before starting working in each year since the fund's inception; and how much the Government has spent on such support in each such year. [192919]

Esther McVey: The information requested cannot be supplied without incurring disproportionate costs.

Housing Benefit

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of housing benefit claimants in the UK in each of the last 30 years. [192907]

Steve Webb: The information requested for Great Britain is published and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/benefit-expenditure-and-caseload-tables-2013>

Information for Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Department for Social Development. Northern Ireland statistics can be found at:

http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/stats_and_research/benefit_publications.htm

Housing Benefit: Staffordshire

Gavin Williamson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in South Staffordshire constituency under the age of 25 years old were in receipt of housing benefit in the most recent period for which figures are available. [192267]

Steve Webb: The number of people in South Staffordshire constituency under the age of 25 in receipt of housing benefit, as at November 2013 is 258.

This information is published and can be found at:

<https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk>

Guidance on how to extract the information required can be found at:

https://sw.stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/online-help/Stat-Xplore_User_Guide.htm

Housing Benefit: Yorkshire And The Humber

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much his Department spent on housing benefit for tenants in (a) council property, (b) housing association and registered social landlord property and (c) private sector housing in (i) Yorkshire and Humber and (ii) Brigg and Goole constituency in each year since 2009. [192397]

Steve Webb: The information is in the following tables. Housing benefit expenditure by parliamentary constituency is not available prior to 2011-12.

Table 1: Housing benefit spending in Yorkshire and Humber by accommodation type

	£ million, nominal			
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Local Authority Accommodation	439.4	453.5	485.7	522.8
Temporary Accommodation	10.0	7.9	7.5	8.7
Registered Social Landlord	447.5	464.1	504.3	546.2
Private Rented Sector	487.2	571.6	611.1	623.0
Total Housing Benefit Spend	1,384.1	1,497.0	1,608.6	1,700.7

Source:

Local authority subsidy returns

Table 2: Housing Benefit spending in Brigg and Goole by accommodation type

	£ million, nominal	
	2011-12	2012-13
Local Authority Accommodation	3.3	3.7
Temporary Accommodation	0.0	0.0
Registered Social Landlord	7.0	7.5
Private Rented Sector	8.0	8.3
Total Housing Benefit Spend	18.4	19.5

Notes

Figures may not sum exactly due to rounding.

Source:

Mid-year statistical data and Local authority subsidy returns.

A breakdown of benefit expenditure for housing benefit can be found in the housing benefit and council tax benefit expenditure by local authority tables as per the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277439/hb-ctb-la-tables-04022014.xls

Jobseeker's Allowance

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what guidance his Department issues on (a) the amount of class 1 national insurance contributions an individual must have made and (b) for how long such contributions must be paid in order to be eligible for contribution-based jobseekers' allowance; and how his Department makes such guidance available to the public; [192696]

(2) what the criteria are for self-employed people to be eligible for contributions-based jobseekers' allowance. [192697]

Esther McVey: Guidance is provided in the Decision Makers Guide. Please see link to Chapter 20 for the basic conditions of entitlement (20003) and Chapter 21 for the contribution-based conditions (21051 onwards).

With limited exceptions, only class 1 (employed) contributions count towards jobseeker's allowance (JSA). This means that self-employed people who make class 2 (self-employed) contributions do not normally qualify for JSA. The exceptions are share fishermen, and volunteer development workers employed abroad. People in these categories pay a special class 2 national insurance contribution at a higher rate, which enables them to qualify for contribution-based jobseeker's allowance.

Nurseries

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of workplace nurseries available to staff in (a) his Department and (b) his Department's Executive agencies or non-departmental public bodies in (i) 2010, (ii) 2013-14 and (iii) 2014-15. [192455]

Mike Penning: There were seven workplace nurseries operated by third parties, including some provision for subsidised places, on DWP premises on 5 May 2010; all of which were still in operation on 5 February 2014.

DWP does not directly operate any workplace nurseries. The Department is reviewing the position of all on site nursery provision, and until the review is complete, it cannot confirm whether any nursery will close.

No information is held on Executive agencies and non-departmental bodies. There would be a disproportionate cost to source that information

Occupational Pensions

Mr Leech: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether he plans to take steps to ensure that employers with employees who earn less than £10,000 per year will be legally obliged to provide those employees with an auto-enrolment pension scheme. [192722]

Steve Webb: Jobholders who earn less than the automatic enrolment earnings trigger of £10,000 and who are not eligible for automatic enrolment may opt in to pension saving. Employers are legally obliged to enrol anyone who opts into an automatic enrolment qualifying scheme and to pay the required employer contribution.

Personal Independence Payment

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the processing time target is for personal independence payment (PIP) claims; and what proportion of such claims took longer than this target time to process since the introduction of PIPs. [192751]

Mike Penning: As the hon. Member will appreciate, personal independence payment (PIP) is a new benefit and processes are currently bedding in. There are no time limits or targets on processing times to claims for PIP but we are taking the necessary action to improve the processing times.

Social Security Benefits: Brigg

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit sanctions were issued in Brigg and Goole constituency in each of the last five years. [192963]

Esther McVey: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Number of benefit sanctions applied in Brigg and Goole constituency in each of the last five years	
October to September each year	All benefit sanctions
2008-09	430
2009-10	800

Number of benefit sanctions applied in Brigg and Goole constituency in each of the last five years

<i>October to September each year</i>	<i>All benefit sanctions</i>
2010-11	870
2011-12	1,080
2012-13	1,100

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.
2. New sanctions rules came into force for JSA and ESA from 22 October 2012 and 3 December 2012. The number of JSA sanctions applied for the new regime is the number of low, intermediate, and high level referrals where the decision was found against the claimant. Further information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobseekers-allowance-overview-of-sanctions-rules>
3. The number of JSA sanctions applied for the old regime is the number of fixed length, varied length and entitlement decisions where the decision was found against the claimant.
4. Information on JSA and ESA sanctions is published and available at: <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>

Sources:

1. (JSA and ESA): DWP Information, Governance and Security Directorate: Sanctions and Disallowance Decisions Statistics Database.
2. (IS): Income Support Computer System

Social Security Benefits: Disqualification

Gavin Williamson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit sanctions were issued in South Staffordshire constituency in each of the last five years. [192333]

Esther McVey: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Number of benefit sanctions applied in South Staffordshire constituency in each of the last five years

<i>October to September each year</i>	<i>All benefit sanctions</i>
2008-09	390
2009-10	480
2010-11	610
2011-12	650
2012-13	610

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.
 2. The number of benefit sanctions applied is the number of sanction or disallowance referrals where the decision was found against the claimant.
 3. Income support lone parents receive a fixed sanction of 20% of the personal allowance rate of a single claimant (not aged less than 25) for each failure to attend/participate in a work focused interview until 10p is left in payment. This sanction lasts until the individual attends and participates in a work focused interview. In the case where there is more than one sanction in place, the claimant need only attend/participate in one work focused interview in order for all related sanctions to be removed from their benefit.
 4. New sanctions rules came into force for JSA and ESA from 22 October 2012 and 3 December 2012. The number of JSA sanctions applied for the new regime is the number of low, intermediate and high level referrals where the decision was found against the claimant. Further information can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobseekers-allowance-overview-of-sanctions-rules>
 5. The number of JSA sanctions applied for the old regime is the number of fixed length, varied length and entitlement decisions where the decision was found against the claimant
 6. Information on JSA and ESA sanctions is published and available at: <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>
- Source:*
1. (JSA and ESA): DWP Information, Governance and Security Directorate: Sanctions and Disallowance Decisions Statistics Database.
 2. (IS): Income Support Computer System.

Universal Credit

Mike Crockart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what consultation his Department has had with groups representing separated parents on steps to ensure universal credit makes shared parenting a financially viable option for parents who do not have family-based financial arrangements in place; [192380]

(2) how disputed child tax credits claims will be managed under the universal credit system. [192385]

Esther McVey: Currently the child element will be awarded to the parent with whom the child or qualifying young person normally lives. Where separated parents both share the care of a child or qualifying young person they are expected to jointly nominate which of them has the main responsibility.

Where parents are unable to come to an agreement themselves, a determination will be made. This will take account of where the child normally lives and who has the main day to day responsibility.

The proposed approach to universal credit was set out in a White Paper "Universal Credit: Welfare that Works" and in draft regulations upon which a wide range of organisations responded to in the consultation exercise carried out by the Social Security Advisory Committee.

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many full-time equivalent staff in his Department are working on developing the enhanced Universal Credit IT system. [192757]

Esther McVey: There are approximately 50 DWP staff working on the enhanced universal credit service.

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects the first alternative Universal Credit digital service to be in use in a job centre. [192759]

Esther McVey: As part of the wider transformation of its services, the Department is developing an enhanced digital service for universal credit. As part of our commitment to testing universal credit as it develops, we expect to trial an early version of the enhanced digital service to a limited number of claimants later this year.

Vacancies: Internet

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many entries there are on the Universal Jobmatch database; and what his estimate is of the number of vacancies such entries represent; [192401]

(2) how many Universal Jobmatch employer accounts have been found to be in breach of its rules since the service started; [192404]

(3) what assessment he has made of the extent of (a) fraud, (b) duplication of job entries and (c) entries for non-existent jobs in the Universal Jobmatch website; [192405]

(4) what his most recent assessment is of the (a) effectiveness and (b) value for money of Universal Jobmatch. [192406]

Esther McVey: Today, many jobs are only advertised on the internet. That's why we are doing everything we can to give those looking for work the skills and the opportunities to access them. Universal Jobmatch is a powerful tool for successfully connecting people to jobs, and it is delivering.

The website launches a public service into the digital age, allowing people to search for work from their home, handheld devices, local libraries, as well as the traditional jobcentre. It allows employers to match jobseekers to their vacancies and gives our customers access to a greater number of opportunities. It puts them on an equal footing with everyone else seeking a new job in the UK. With over 6 million job searches per day, the service is clearly popular, successful, and value for money.

At 18 March 2014, there were 507,474 vacancies on the service.

All internet job sites face the issue of duplicate vacancies. We take this issue very seriously, and whenever we have a doubt about the validity of a job offer we will intervene, suspend the vacancy and investigate. If an employer breaches our terms and conditions we remove their right to advertise. Our continuing removal of such employers or jobs demonstrates that our system of checks works.

Since Universal Jobmatch was launched in November 2012, we have removed 1,216 employer accounts that did not comply with our terms and conditions. That figure is equivalent to 0.2% of the total number of registered employer accounts.

Universal Jobmatch has revolutionised the way we deliver the public employment service. With over 6,000,000 job searches per day at a cost of far less than 1p each, it represents excellent value for money.

Work Capability Assessment

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2014, *Official Report*, column 638W, on the work capability assessment, if he will make it his policy to collect such information in future. [192085]

Mike Penning: To provide the requested information would incur disproportionate cost.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 9 January 2014, *Official Report*, column 280W, on the work capability assessment, how many and what proportion of those who have undertaken a work capability test in each nation and region of the UK have been declared fit for work. [192323]

Mike Penning: Employment and support allowance (ESA) initial claims and incapacity benefit (IB) reassessment claims, by outcomes of work capability assessments by regions in Great Britain are published. The numbers and the proportion of fit for work decisions can be found in table 1a and table 11 at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/274091/esa_wca_140122.xls

Notes:

1. There is a reporting lag of approximately 8-months at the issuing date of this statistical output owing to the time needed to process data and time allowed to enable each cohort's assessment phase to elapse.
2. Case load figures rounded to nearest hundred. Totals may not sum due to the rounding method use. Proportions are rounded to the nearest whole number.
3. Figures include those cases where the functional assessment has not been completed.

Information for Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Department for Social Development Northern Ireland statistics can be found at:

http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/stats_and_research/benefit_publications.htm

Work Programme

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on what information his Department draws in evaluating the performance of Work programme prime providers in addition to published outcome data. [192917]

Esther McVey: In addition to the published outcome data, the Department has put in place a programme of surveys and qualitative research to evaluate the performance and delivery of Work programme providers.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Air Pollution

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when he intends to publish a summary of the submissions to the consultation on the Clean Air Act 1993; and what his response is to that consultation. [192704]

Dan Rogerson: The responses to the Call for Evidence conducted to inform the review of the Clean Air Act are currently being compiled and analysed. A summary of the responses and Government reply will be published shortly.

Animal Welfare: Sentencing

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of sentencing for crimes involving the abuse of animals. [169728]

Dan Rogerson: The Animal Welfare Act 2006 was reviewed in 2010 and there was no recommendation to increase the maximum penalties for animal cruelty or that sentencing by the courts needed to be reviewed separately.

Energy: Conservation

Ms Ritchie: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment he has made of the proportion of retail products in the UK which are compliant with EU energy efficiency standards. [188791]

Dan Rogerson: In 2009, DEFRA appointed the National Measurement Office (NMO) to assess compliance with product-specific regulations made under the ecodesign for energy-related products directive (2009/125/EC). The NMO operates a risk-based and intelligence-led approach to compliance. Each year it checks compliance of several product types, focusing on those most likely to fail to meet requirements. Since the NMO started its work, the detected levels of compliance have increased in all areas of its work. Where the work has revealed non-compliance, the NMO has worked with manufacturers to make the necessary changes.

Environment Agency

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases being investigated for enforcement action or issued and proceeding in the courts have (a) been discontinued completely, (b) been enforced using a lower level of action and (c) ceased to be investigated in each geographic area of the Environment Agency since 26 February 2014. [191774]

Dan Rogerson: The Environment Agency tracks the number of cases at different stages in the enforcement process but cannot readily extract the changes to those case numbers over such a recent period.

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps each area of the Environment Agency is taking to reduce its enforcement and legal caseload by 31 March 2014; and by how many and what proportion of existing cases each area plans to reduce its caseload. [191850]

Dan Rogerson: Each area of the Environment Agency is currently reviewing existing work loads against enforcement priorities and available budgets. No decisions will be made until the review is complete.

Fisheries

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will bring forward proposals to improve information available to consumers of fish on the method of fishing used. [193076]

George Eustice: New labelling requirements are due to be introduced from December 2014, which will provide consumers with information on the type of fishing gear used. In addition, EU Fish Labelling Regulations already require that the method of production of fish (farmed, caught at sea or caught in inland water) is shown for fresh, chilled, or frozen fish fillets and other fish meat and smoked, dried, salted or brined fish.

Flood Control

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2014, *Official Report*, column 552W, on forests, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness in reducing flood risk of (a) the Slowing

the flow project in North Yorkshire and the (b) Forestry Commission projects in the catchments of the (i) River Parrett in Somerset and (ii) River Irthing in Northumberland. [192087]

Dan Rogerson: The Forestry Commission, through its research agency, Forest Research, is continuing to monitor the effects of forests on flood flows in the cited projects.

Observations in the Slowing the Flow project show the forest measures to be working as expected, but the data records are too short to confirm any reduction in flood risk at Pickering.

The small scale of forest planting and short length of flow record at the study sites in the River Parrett catchment make it difficult to detect an impact on flood flows, but the data are being used to improve flood models.

The River Irthing project is a long-term study of the impact of conifer afforestation on water flows within the Coalburn headwater catchment. Monitoring began in 1967 and assessments have been made of the effects of tree planting and growth on flood flows at various intervals since. The last was in 2003. A further evaluation is underway and is due to report in the summer.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2014, *Official Report*, column 552W, on forests, if he will make it his policy to record these projects centrally. [192088]

Dan Rogerson: DEFRA has no plans to centralise the recording of the performance of specific flood management measures, such as forestry, water storage or hard defences, which could only be meaningfully evaluated on a case by case basis.

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of the additional £140 million for flood defences over 2014-15 and 2015-16 announced in the Budget 2014 will be added to his Department's baseline for future years. [192951]

Dan Rogerson: The additional £140 million for flood defences announced in the Budget 2014 is to support the repair and maintenance of flood and coastal defences following the exceptional recent flood events of the last few months. Decisions about funding beyond 2015-16 will be made at future spending reviews.

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of the £140 million for flood defences over 2014-15 and 2015-16 announced in the Budget 2014 to repair and maintain flood defences is in addition to the previously announced £100 million additional flood defence funding for 2014-15. [192952]

Dan Rogerson: The £140 million announced in the Budget 2014 for flood defences over 2014-15 and 2015-16 is all additional to the £100 million previously announced in February 2014.

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of the additional £140 million for flood defences over 2014-15 and 2015-16 announced in the Budget 2014 is (a) capital and (b) revenue funding. [192953]

Dan Rogerson: £85 million is capital and £55 million is revenue.

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of the additional £140 million for flood defences over 2014-15 and 2015-16 announced in the Budget 2014 is (a) partnership and (b) public funding. [192954]

Dan Rogerson: All of the £140 million additional funding for flood defences announced in the Budget 2014 is central Government funding.

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of the additional £140 million for flood defences over 2014-15 and 2015-16 announced in the Budget 2014 will be available to spend in (a) 2014-15 and (b) 2015-16. [192955]

Dan Rogerson: Of the £140 million announced in the Budget 2014 for flood defences, £80 million is available to spend in 2014-15 and £60 million in 2015-16.

Floods: Housing

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information his Department holds on the number of households forced to seek alternative accommodation after their homes were flooded who were referred by their insurers to the Insurance Claim Accommodation Bureau (ICAB); how many such households were found homes by ICAB; and if he will make a statement. [189246]

Dan Rogerson: DEFRA does not hold details on the number of households that have been forced to seek alternative accommodation as a result of flooding, nor those referred to the Insurance Claim Accommodation Bureau. At the first meeting of the insurance industry on flooding on 18 February, Ministers were assured that there was sufficient alternative accommodation available.

Floods: Insurance

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will monitor home insurance premiums to ensure that increases relating to risks of flooding are justified; and if he will make a statement. [189245]

Dan Rogerson: The Government is addressing the issue of excessive flood premiums through the introduction of a flood reinsurance scheme, known as Flood Re. Flood Re will effectively limit the amount that most UK households should have to pay for flood insurance to ensure that people can continue to access affordable home insurance.

At the first monthly meeting with the insurance industry on 18 February, Ministers were assured that there was no evidence of insurers raising premiums for flood risk properties in advance of Flood Re starting in 2015.

In addition, DEFRA will undertake and publish market monitoring research.

Fly Tipping

David Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps he is taking to tackle the illegal dumping of commercial waste. [191327]

Dan Rogerson: The Government is taking the following action to tackle the illegal dumping of all types of waste, including commercial waste:

(a) Prevention: We are helping to prevent fly-tipping by making it easier for businesses to dispose of their waste legally. For instance, the Waste and Resources Action Programme has produced a best practice guide to help local authorities and waste management companies set up 'bring sites' in business parks.

(b) Cracking down on offenders: DEFRA has worked with the Sentencing Council on its new guideline for sentencing environmental offences. The guideline, published last month, should result in larger fines for serious offenders, thereby helping deter illegal dumping. The Government fully supports the Environment Agency taking appropriate and timely enforcement action against illegal waste sites.

(c) Tackling fly-tipping through partnership: We are working with the National Fly-tipping Prevention Group to provide guidance to those affected by illegal dumping. The group includes representatives from the Local Government Association, the Environment Agency and land owner and management organisations. The group is working on a Fly-Tipping Partnership Framework, which gives best practice options for the prevention, reporting, investigation and clearance of fly-tipping. This is designed to be used and adapted by local partnerships to suit the particular circumstances in their areas.

Forests

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2014, *Official Report*, column 552W, on forests, what records (a) his Department and (b) the Environment Agency keeps of the projects it has funded and the performance of each against its objectives. [192327]

Dan Rogerson: The Environment Agency maintains national level records of the flood and coastal erosion risk management schemes funded through DEFRA flood defence capital grant in aid, which show the benefits that schemes will deliver against outcome measures agreed with DEFRA.

Progress against these outcome measures is reported to DEFRA quarterly and a summary is published on the Environment Agency website. This does not include a breakdown of the performance of specific flood management measures, such as forestry, water storage or hard defences, which could only be meaningfully evaluated on a case by case basis.

Mercury

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when he will bring forward proposals to incorporate the Minamata Convention on mercury into domestic law. [192726]

Dan Rogerson: The Minamata Convention on mercury will be open for ratification from 10 October 2014. A proposal for EU legislation to facilitate ratification by member states is expected in early 2015. The Government is working in parallel with the EU process so as to be able to ratify the Convention at the earliest opportunity.

Mondelez International

Mr Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the objectives were of his visit to the Mondelez factory on 13 March 2014; and if he will make a statement. [192312]

George Eustice: Increasing the competitiveness and growth in the food and drink sector is a priority. A skilled work force can make this happen. One way is through apprenticeships.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), went to the Mondelez factory to hear first-hand from apprentices and their employers about how apprenticeships can secure the best results for the apprentices, the employers and the wider economy. He also went to 'The Big Bang UK Young Scientists & Engineers Fair in Birmingham' to understand how other companies are promoting the opportunities the sector has to offer.

Nurseries

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of workplace nurseries available to staff in (a) his Department and (b) his Department's executive agencies or non-departmental public bodies in (i) 2010, (ii) 2013-14 and (iii) 2014-15. [192444]

Dan Rogerson: There are three workplace nurseries available to staff in (a) core DEFRA and (b) the Department's executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies at the following locations:

Core DEFRA—York;

Food and Environment Research Agency—Sand Hutton; and

Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency/Veterinary Medicines Directorate—Weybridge.

All three nurseries were in operation in (i) 2010, (ii) 2013-14 and are all expected to be in operation in (iii) 2014-15.

Public Footpaths

Nadine Dorries: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the needs of small landowners who have had public footpaths wrongfully placed on their property; and what steps his Department has taken to mitigate the effects of such footpaths. [192477]

Dan Rogerson: I am very much aware that small landowners can experience problems with public rights of way that pass over their land.

All public rights of way are required to be recorded on a definitive map and statement, which is the local authority's legal record on public rights of way. If a landowner believes that a public right of way has been

wrongly recorded, then that landowner may make an application to their local authority to have the definitive map and statement modified.

Where a landowner is unable to establish that the definitive map and statement should be modified, then it may be possible to have the right of way diverted or extinguished.

Through clauses in the current Deregulation Bill, we are making effective legislation that provides for a statutory 'right to apply' for landowners. This would enable landowners to make a formal application for diversion or extinguishment of a right of way on their land and appeal to the Secretary of State should the local authority refuse the application or fail to consider it. Clause 16 of the Bill would enable the 'right to apply' to be extended to land use types other than agriculture, forestry and the keeping of horses, to which current legislation restricts it.

In addition, a Stakeholder Working Group on rights of way reforms has developed draft guidance for local authorities setting out how a presumption in favour of a landowner's request for a diversion should operate, where a public right of way passes through a family home, working farmyard or commercial premises where privacy, safety and security are a concern.

Rivers

Mark Reckless: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who is responsible for managing overhanging vegetation which may impede the flow of a river and increase flooding risk. [192929]

Dan Rogerson: Under common law, the person who owns the land or property next to a river or other watercourse is responsible for maintaining the bed and banks of the watercourse.

Mark Reckless: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what enforcement powers exist in relation to overhanging vegetation impeding a river's flow; and how many times such enforcement action has taken place in the last five years. [192931]

Dan Rogerson: Overhanging vegetation is not a specific offence. The impedance of flow in a Main River is covered by Section 107 (3) of the Water Resources Act 1991. Impedance in itself is not an offence under the Act, but Section 107 allows the Environment Agency to serve notice on the landowner to remove the impedance. Failure to comply with a notice is an offence, although there is a right of appeal.

For ordinary watercourses, powers similar to those under Section 107 of the Water Resources Act for use by both local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards, are contained in Section 25 of the Land Drainage Act 1991.

There are also local byelaws enacted under Section 210 and 211 of the Water Resources Act 1991, which give the Environment Agency powers to serve notice on landowners to "remove growth" on Main River banks for the purpose of preventing obstruction to flow.

The Environment Agency does not currently keep central records of notices served.

The Environment Agency is in the process of introducing a case management system which will include the ability to capture electronically data relating to enforcement actions.

Rural Areas: Broadband

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 10 March 2014, *Official Report*, columns 77-78W, on rural areas: broadband, how much of the £15.5 million funding is for projects (a) granted, (b) under pre-contract approval and (c) still under consideration for funding. [192611]

George Eustice: The breakdown for funding to date under the Rural Community Broadband Fund is as follows:

- (a) Projects granted (contracted) total £0.459 million;
- (b) Projects with pre-contract approval total £0.646 million; and
- (c) Projects under consideration total £14.2 million.

Until contracted, all costs are estimated and subject to revision.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 10 March 2014, *Official Report*, columns 77-8W, on rural areas: broadband, whether there will be a requirement to return unspent funds from the Rural Community Broadband Fund. [192612]

George Eustice: There is no requirement to return unspent European funding under the Rural Community Broadband Fund if it can be spent elsewhere under the Rural Development Programme for England. Where possible, any remaining EU funds will be utilised elsewhere across the programme.

Sharks

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information his Department holds on how many sightings of white sharks there have been in the seas around the UK in each of the last five years. [192467]

George Eustice: Some information on shark sightings is kept by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and

Aquaculture Science, an Executive agency of DEFRA. We also work very closely with non-governmental organisations, such as the Shark Trust, which also keep records of possible sightings.

There have been no confirmed sightings of white sharks in the seas around the UK.

Water Abstraction

Dr Thérèse Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the monetary value is of the fund accumulated from water abstraction charges through the environmental improvement unit charge by each water region; and how much has been (a) paid from, (b) committed from this fund since its inception and (c) how much remains. [192566]

Dan Rogerson: The total value of the environmental improvement unit charge funds accumulated up to the end of the financial year 2012-13 is £56.04 million. The value of these funds for each Environment Agency region is shown in the following table.

The Environment Agency cannot say how much it has paid in compensation because it may prejudice future negotiations.

<i>EA region</i>	<i>Environmental improvement unit charge money collected¹ (£ million)</i>
Anglian	12.01
Midlands	8.24
North East	0.48
North West	6.28
South West	3.57
South East—Southern	7.10
South East—Thames	18.36
Total	56.04

¹ End of financial year 2012-13.

Dr Thérèse Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been raised by the licence fee and environmental improvement unit charge in each region by (a) volume and (b) amount in the last three years. [192567]

Dan Rogerson: The annual subsistence charge, which comprises the Standard Unit Charge (SUC) and the Environmental Improvement Unit Charge (EIUC), is usually payable by everyone who holds a full licence to abstract water. The total amounts for the SUC and EIUC for each Environment Agency region collected over the last three years is shown in the following table:

<i>Region</i>	<i>2010/11</i>		<i>2011/12</i>		<i>2012/13</i>		<i>£000</i>
	<i>SUC</i>	<i>EIUC</i>	<i>SUC</i>	<i>EIUC</i>	<i>SUC</i>	<i>EIUC</i>	
Anglian	23,299	3,053	24,153	4,679	23,747	2,130	
Midlands	19,702	2,419	19,732	4,096	19,378	0	
North West	9,625	1,811	9,218	3,132	8,972	4,354	
Northumbria	20,703	0	20,628	0	21,485	0	
South West	9,416	879	9,271	896	9,685	357	
Southern	11,013	1,831	10,642	3,010	10,564	534	
Thames	16,411	3,133	17,176	5,311	17,060	7,357	
Yorkshire	6,710	67	6,758	96	6,774	82	
Wales	18,417	182	18,215	276	19,014	327	
Total	135,296	13,375	135,793	21,496	136,679	15,141	

Annual licensed volume is one of a number of variables used in calculating charges. Consequently it is not been possible to calculate charge income based on volume alone.

SCOTLAND

Conditions of Employment

Mr McKenzie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the extent of the use of zero-hours contracts in Scotland; and in which areas of employment such use is most prevalent. [192674]

David Mundell: The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable) recently concluded a consultation on zero-hours contracts with proposals on exclusivity clauses, transparency and guidance. A summary of consultation responses will be published in due course.

Nurseries

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of workplace nurseries available to staff in his Department in (a) 2010, (b) 2013-14 and (c) 2014-15. [192451]

David Mundell: The Scotland Office did not operate a workplace nursery in (a) 2010 or in (b) 2013-14, and has no plans to do so in (c) 2014-15.

Submarines

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what his policy is on the cost of the decommissioning and safe dismantling of the remains of the nuclear powered submarines anchored at Rosyth if Scotland votes for independence. [192546]

David Mundell: The Ministry of Defence's Submarine Dismantling Project aims to deliver a safe, secure, environmentally responsible and cost-effective solution for dismantling the UK's nuclear powered submarines, including those in afloat storage at Rosyth and Devonport dockyards.

The UK Government's position is clear: Scotland benefits from being part of the UK and the UK benefits from having Scotland within it. We are not planning for Scottish independence and have not conducted work to consider the implications that independence would have for submarine dismantling. It is in everyone's interest for dismantling to take place as soon as possible.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Confiscation Orders

Emily Thornberry: To ask the Attorney-General pursuant to the answer of 10 March 2014, *Official Report*, columns 125-6W, on taxation: fraud, how much of the total value of confiscation orders imposed by the Crown Prosecution Service in (a) 2010-11, (b) 2011-12 and (c) 2012-13 has been recovered. [192859]

The Solicitor-General: The answer of 10 March 2014, *Official Report*, columns 125-26W, provided the number of and value of confiscation orders obtained for cases categorised as tax and benefit fraud or VAT fraud for the past three financial years. The following table provides the amounts paid to date against those orders:

	<i>Number of orders granted</i>	<i>Amount paid (£)</i>
2010-11	253	9,205,329.27
2011-12	557	23,425,312.29
2012-13	352	14,949,528.87

This data has been taken from the JARD database which reflects the status of the orders reported at the time the data is extracted. As a result, the amounts reported represent the total amounts paid up to the date at which the data was extracted.

Counterfeit Manufacturing: Money

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Attorney-General how many people have been prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service for the counterfeiting of (a) coins and (b) banknotes in each year since 2006. [192758]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) maintains a central record of the number of offences charged under section 14(1) and 22 of the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981 that reach a first hearing in the magistrates court, however offence based data are not held by defendant or outcome.

Crown Prosecution Service

Emily Thornberry: To ask the Attorney-General pursuant to the answer of 17 December 2013, *Official Report* columns 545-6W, on Crown Prosecution Service, on which date the lease of each of the closed offices expired; and how much was paid by the Crown Prosecution Service in rent for each such office between closure and expiry of the lease. [184062]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) estate rationalisation programme began in 2009 and is set to be completed in 2016. The CPS is forecasting annual running cost savings of £20 million by 2016 compared to estate running costs when the programme began. The CPS has reduced annual estate running costs from £52.47 million in 2008-09 to £45.13 million in 2012-13.

It is not unusual for an office to be vacated before lease expiry. Often a period of time is needed to decommission a building, removing IT systems, infrastructure and furniture and allowing time for any works to be carried out in accordance with dilapidations obligations.

The following table includes details of the lease expiry, office closure dates and rent paid between lease expiry and closure or to 24 January 2014 where the lease is still live, for all properties listed in my answer of 17 December.

<i>Site</i>	<i>Office closure</i>	<i>Lease expiry</i>	<i>Rent paid between lease expiry and closure (£)</i>
Stratford, London	15 May 2010	5 May 2010	0
Harrow	1 June 2010	3 August 2010	79,964

<i>Site</i>	<i>Office closure</i>	<i>Lease expiry</i>	<i>Rent paid between lease expiry and closure (£)</i>
Workington	13 June 2010	12 June 2014	95,114
London, Ludgate Hill EC4	14 June 2010	30 June 2010	0
Lancaster	29 October 2010	28 September 2015	184,953
Leamington Spa	10 December 2010	28 September 2012	60,953
Eastbourne	15 March 2011	31 March 2011	1,091
Truro	27 March 2011	31 March 2011	0
Birkenhead	10 April 2011	30 April 2011	0
Blackpool	14 May 2011	31 May 2011	0
Harrogate	1 June 2011	19 June 2011	0
Wolverhampton	14 August 2011	22 August 2011	0
Rochdale	14 September 2011	30 September 2011	0
Northampton (Beaumont House)	14 September 2011	30 September 2011	0
New Kings Beam House, London, SE1	31 October 2011	24 December 2011	1,000,754
Salford	20 November 2011	31 December 2011	28,214
Mansfield	3 February 2012	3 February 2012	0
Grimsby	14 March 2012	31 March 2012	0
Aylesbury	6 July 2012	13 March 2013	47,169
Swansea	5 September 2012	22 November 2012	11,468
Chester	20 November 2012	23 June 2014	88,687
Coventry	3 December 2012	24 December 2014	954,375
Stafford	19 February 2013	16 November 2016	130,910
Chichester	1 March 2013	8 March 2013	0
Bradford	2 March 2013	30 September 2018	71,550
Athena House, York	10 March 2013	4 February 2015	171,212
Durham	27 March 2013	31 March 2015	74,428
Bristol	31 March 2013	31 March 2013	0
Newtown	1 April 2013	1 April 2014	24,480
Warrington	5 April 2013	24 December 2016	0
Northampton (Riverside House)	29 June 2013	31 July 2013	12,660
York (United House)	13 October 2013	12 December 2013	0
Merthyr Tydfil	31 October 2013	25 March 2015	18,000
Liverpool	3 November 2013	31 December 2013	0
Crosby	4 November 2013	7 May 2016	25,625
Derby	8 November 2013	24 December 2013	0
Cwmbran	20 November 2013	24 March 2018	36,258
Bournemouth	21 November 2013	24 November 2013	122,450
Luton	24 November 2013	23 June 2014	34,500
Shrewsbury	15 December 2013	24 December 2013	0

¹ This is an overpayment which the CPS is seeking to recoup.

Since 2010 the CPS have also vacated a number of police stations some of which involved a formal agreement to occupy space. Since vacating these sites, the CPS has made payments totalling £339,430 in respect of such properties.

In addition to amounts paid to date the CPS estimates future liabilities of £3.5 million in respect of vacant properties.

Notwithstanding these payments the CPS is forecasting annual running cost savings of £20 million by 2016 compared to estate running costs when the programme began.

Rental payments to leaseholders are made through the Department's property managing agents (DTZ). This answer is based on information provided by DTZ. Every effort has been made to ensure that information is complete and accurate but a full reconciliation has not been completed as it would not be cost effective to do so.

Crown Prosecution Service: Northamptonshire

Mr Hollobone: To ask the Attorney-General what cost savings have been made by the Crown Prosecution Service in Northamptonshire in each of the last three years. [192910]

The Solicitor-General: The CPS does not record expenditure separately for Northamptonshire. Expenditure for Northamptonshire is recorded under the CPS's east midlands area which also includes Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire.

Expenditure and savings for east midlands in the last four financial years are shown in the following table.

	<i>Net expenditure (£)</i>	<i>Savings</i>	
		<i>£</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
2009-10	30,469,975	—	—
2010-11	29,332,743	1,137,232	3.7
2011-12	27,020,496	2,312,247	7.9
2012-13	26,781,541	238,955	0.9
Total		3,688,434	12.1

Life Imprisonment: Scotland

Mr Chope: To ask the Attorney-General what guidance he gives the judicial system on the prosecution of cases in the Court of Session which were previously resolved via a sentence of life imprisonment by an English court before transfer of the defendant to a Scottish prison. [192642]

The Attorney-General: I have not given any guidance on this matter.

Prosecutions

Emily Thornberry: To ask the Attorney-General what proportion of successful Crown Prosecution Service rape-flagged prosecutions were for (a) rape or attempted rape, (b) any other kind of sexual assault, (c) a non-sexual offence against the person and (d) another offence in each of the last six years. [192873]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) maintains a central record of the numbers of cases flagged as rape through the electronic Case Management System. A rape flag is applied to the electronic record at the outset of a case; and remains in place if the charges are subsequently amended or dropped. As a result, it is not possible to disaggregate defendants convicted of rape offences from those that were convicted of other non-rape charges.

Official crime and court proceedings and sentencing statistics are maintained by the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice respectively.

Terrorism: Northern Ireland

Lady Hermon: To ask the Attorney-General pursuant to the Statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland of 28 February 2014, *Official Report*, columns 38-40WS, on the on-the-runs scheme, what assessment he has made of the legal status of the administrative letters issued to on-the-runs; and if he will make a statement. [192837]

The Attorney-General: I have made no assessment. The status of the letters is a matter that may be considered by the right hon. Dame Heather Hallett in her review.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Fracking

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change if he will take steps to regulate hydraulic fracturing to minimise the leakage of methane from shale gas production into the environment. [192703]

Michael Fallon: The Environment Agency has set out its regulatory controls over leakage of methane from shale gas exploration in its draft technical guidance. The Agency expects operators to aim for 100% containment of fugitive emissions of methane on shale gas exploration sites and the operator will need to provide details of how their monitoring, inspection and maintenance regime will achieve this. The Environment Agency is assessing its regulation of full production facilities and the expectation is that the requirement for 100% containment will remain in place.

Green Deal Scheme

Oliver Colville: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what savings would accrue to Green Deal customers of Green Deal providers were able to access the supporting data for Green Deal reports held by his Department. [192767]

Gregory Barker: Green Deal customers receive a Green Deal Advice Report which provides energy savings estimates for the package of improvements recommended by a Green Deal adviser. These savings are calculated by approved Green Deal software. The Green Deal Advice Report can subsequently be tailored by Green Deal providers using the Green Deal Improvement Package Tool and following discussions with customers of the improvements they want to take up. Providers

will also discuss the detail of any financing arrangement that the customer wants. Providing customers with access to supporting data held on the Green Deal Register is unnecessary as part of the Green Deal process and would not change the savings that accrue to customers.

A list of approved Green Deal software can be found at:

http://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/SAP/2009/GD_OA_software.pdf

The Green Deal Improvement Package Tool can be found at:

<https://www.gdsap.org.uk>

Nurseries

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate he has made of the number of workplace nurseries available to staff in (a) his Department and (b) his Department's Executive agencies or non-departmental public bodies in (i) 2010, (ii) 2013-14 and (iii) 2014-15. [192443]

Gregory Barker: Since its establishment in 2008, neither the Department for Energy and Climate Change nor its non-departmental public bodies have had workplace nurseries available to staff.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Affordable Housing: Harlow

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many affordable houses were built in Harlow in each of the last 15 years. [192244]

Kris Hopkins: The Department collects information about the number of affordable houses delivered in each local authority district, which are published in table 1008 here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply>

These figures include both newly built and newly acquired affordable houses.

Council Tax Reduction Schemes

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what assessment he has made of the number of people who face reduced work incentives as a result of changes to council tax support. [191529]

Brandon Lewis: We do not collect this information centrally. These are local schemes, and it is for local authorities to ensure that their schemes incentivise work.

Spending on council tax benefit doubled under the last Government, costing taxpayers £4 billion a year-equivalent to almost £180 a year per household. Welfare reform is vital to tackle the budget deficit left by the last Administration.

Our reforms to localise council tax support now give councils stronger incentives to support local firms, cut fraud, promote local enterprise and get people into work. We are ending the last Administration's 'something for nothing' culture and making work pay.

Disabled Facilities Grants

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the median time was for applicants to Disabled Facilities Grants funding to find out whether they are eligible in the latest period for which figures are available. [192521]

Kris Hopkins: This information is not held centrally.

Domestic Waste: Waste Disposal

John Hemming: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will publish Birmingham city council's bid for funding for a weekly refuse collection. [191552]

Brandon Lewis: The Weekly Collection Support Scheme's prospectus told bidding local authorities:

"we will not disclose the nature, scale and scope of individual bids... Once offer letters have been issued the department may publish top line information about bids where this is deemed to be in the public interest (for example, the name of the successful lead bidding authority, the amount that will be awarded and nature and scale of the successful proposal(s))".

The reasoning for this stance is that such information is closely linked to tendering and procurement processes in local authorities. Waste management is an area which is frequently outsourced, and where robust financial negotiations are needed by local authorities during the procurement stages to obtain value for money.

In that context, disclosure of such bids could have an adverse effect on competition between companies in this process and put local authorities in a disadvantageous position. For example, the disclosure of budget set aside for a purchase could encourage suppliers to raise their prices and prejudice the bargaining position of a local authority.

While some time has now passed since the bids were made, I believe that disclosure, contrary to the commitments made in the prospectus, could discourage local authorities from applying to other commercially-sensitive funding opportunities in the future; it would therefore not be in the public interest to break that commitment.

Housing: Construction

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) what proportion of all new housing in each local authority area since March 2010 was classed as (a) social and (b) affordable; [192103]

(2) how many and what proportion of housing starts in each English local authority area since March 2010 were classed as (a) social and (b) affordable. [192101]

Kris Hopkins [holding answer 20 March 2014]: The Homes and Communities Agency publishes information about the number of affordable housing starts on site and completions for programmes it funds, broken down by local authority and by tenure. This information can be found here:

<http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/housing-statistics>

From April 2012, the Mayor of London has had strategic oversight of housing, regeneration and economic development in London. This means that the Homes and Communities Agency no longer publish affordable

housing statistics for London and this responsibility has been taken over by the Greater London Authority. Affordable housing starts on site and completions for programmes they fund, broken down by London borough and by tenure can be found here:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/housing-land/increasing-housing-supply/gla-affordable-housing-statistics>

These statistics do not include information on any affordable housing started on site that has not been reported to either, such as some affordable housing funded solely through developer contributions.

The Department also collects information about the total number of houses started and completed in each local authority district. This information is published in table 253 here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building>

Over 170,000 new affordable homes have been delivered in England since April 2010 (to the end of September 2013). Our affordable housing programme will lever in £19.5 billion of public and private investment over the current spending review period. Over 2015-18, we will be investing a further £23 billion in public and private funding for affordable housing.

Housing: Floods

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many properties in each local authority area have been flooded during the recent severe weather; and if he will make a statement.

[189226]

Brandon Lewis [holding answer 27 February 2014]: In response to the Government's severe weather recovery scheme, local authorities have been reporting the number of residential and commercial properties flooded in their areas.

Information on properties flooded between 5 December and 7 February, the period covered by the first tranche of the recovery scheme payments, as at 21 March, are given in the following table.

Local authority	Number of properties flooded
Aylesbury Vale District Council	60
Bath and North East Somerset Council	41
Blackpool Borough Council	53
Boston Borough Council	695
Cornwall Council	199
Cotswold District Council	29
Council of the Isles of Scilly	10
Crawley Borough Council	11
Dorset County Council	323
Dover District Council	30
East Dorset District Council	23
East Lindsey District Council	15
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	240
Elmbridge Borough Council	125
Essex County Council	61
Great Yarmouth Borough Council	26
Guildford Borough Council	90
Hampshire County Council	116
Herefordshire Council	49
Kent County Council	112

<i>Local authority</i>	<i>Number of properties flooded</i>
King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council	60
Kingston-upon-Hull City Council	269
Lewes District Council	56
Maidstone Borough Council	240
Mole Valley District Council	123
North Dorset District Council	10
North Lincolnshire Council	424
North Norfolk District Council	251
Northumberland County Council	14
Oxford City Council	61
Oxfordshire County Council	20
Runnymede Borough Council	236
Spelthorne Borough Council	395
Suffolk Coastal District Council	84
Swale Borough Council	50
Tandridge District Council	75
Teignbridge District Council	42
Telford and Wrekin Council	36
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council	436
Waveney District Council	190
West Berkshire Council	85
West Oxfordshire District Council	27
West Sussex County Council	125
Wiltshire Council	445
Woking Borough Council	55
Total number of properties	6,117

Local authorities have until 6 June to submit applications for the second tranche of funding, which covers the period from 8 February to 30 May.

Local Government

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) what recent representations he has received on filming of local authority public meetings by the media and members of the public; and if he will make a statement; [192330]

(2) what consultation he has had with volunteers on parish councils and other local authorities on proposals to allow local authority public meetings to be filmed; and if he will make a statement. [192276]

Brandon Lewis: We recently invited comments from the National Association of Local Councils and the Local Government Association and other key partners on a draft of regulations which make provision for members of the public to film any council meetings which are open to them. In the light of comments received, we are now finalising the draft regulations which we intend to lay before Parliament shortly. If approved, these regulations will ensure that councils open their doors to the digital age so that citizen journalists can film, blog, or tweet to hold their council to account.

Local Government: Pensions

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will place in the Library a copy of each non-confidential individual response to the consultation on local government pension funds. [191959]

Brandon Lewis: I refer the right hon. Member to the Local Government Pension Scheme Shadow Advisory Board's website, where the non-confidential information that has been released is easily accessible:

<http://www.lgpsboard.org/index.php/structure-reform/responses-public-view>

Andy Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) when he plans to respond to the consultation on the Local Government Pension Scheme launched in May 2013; [192186]

(2) if he will publish the three commissions provided by Hymans Robertson LLP, Squire Sanders (UK) LLP and CEM Benchmarking on the Local Government Pensions Scheme. [192185]

Brandon Lewis: My Department and the Local Government Association jointly issued a call for evidence on the future structure of the Local Government Pension Scheme in June 2013. I have been considering the submissions to the call for evidence alongside the Shadow Scheme Advisory Board's advice and recommendations and the further analysis that I commissioned from Hymans Robertson and their subcontractors using the Contestable Policy Fund. I intend to consult on my proposals for reform, which have been developed in the light of all of this evidence, shortly.

London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority

Dr Offord: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will bring forward legislative proposals to amend the governance arrangements of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority to make its members more accountable to the Mayor of London. [191587]

Brandon Lewis: In the Government response to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Report: "Post-Legislative Scrutiny of the Greater London Authority Act 2007 and the London Assembly" (Cm 8761, December 2013), we stated that the Government accepts that there is scope for reform in this area and is willing to listen to alternative governance models for fire in London.

I understand that the Greater London Assembly is currently undertaking a consultation on reform of fire service decision making in London. The outcome of this consultation will help inform the Mayor as to whether he should ask the Secretary of State to use his Order making power under the Greater London Act 1999 to amend the membership of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority.

If and when we receive the Mayor's request we will consider it in accordance with the legislative requirements set out in schedule 28 of the Greater London Act 1999.

Public Sector: Pensions

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he plans to bring forward legislative proposals relating to the Transitional Protection Regulations for England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [191220]

Brandon Lewis: The Local Government Pension Scheme (transitional Provisions, Savings and Amendment) Regulations 2014 were made on 5 March 2014, laid before Parliament on 10 March and will come into effect on 1 April 2014.

The regulations make transitional provision between the existing Local Government Pension Schemes in England and Wales and the new scheme which will come into effect on 1 April 2014. They preserve benefits accrued by members under the existing schemes and make provision to ensure that members within 10 years of their normal retirement age on 31 March 2012 do not suffer any detriment. The reformed scheme will ensure that local government pensions are fair, affordable and sustainable in the long-term, and are justifiable to taxpayers who foot the bill for employer contributions.

Smoke Alarms

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the number and proportion of (a) privately rented, (b) social and (c) owner-occupied homes in England with at least one working smoke alarm in each of the last three years. [192095]

Brandon Lewis [holding answer 20 March 2014]: The latest available estimates, taken from the English Housing Survey, are in the following table.

Households by tenure and ownership of a working smoke alarm, England, 2008 and 2011

Tenure of dwelling	Households with at least one working smoke alarm (million)		Percentage of households	
	2008	2011	2008	2011
Owner occupied	13.0	12.7	86.4	88.5
Private rented	2.6	3.1	79.5	82.3
Local authority	1.7	1.6	86.4	88.8
Housing association	1.8	1.9	91.7	93.5
All tenures	19.1	19.3	85.9	88.0

Source: English Housing Survey, DCLG.

These figures show there is still more to do to encourage households to have a working smoke alarm.

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the effect on the likelihood of (a) death and (b) non-fatal injury as a result of fire in a domestic dwelling of being without a smoke alarm. [192097]

Brandon Lewis [holding answer 20 March 2014]: The Department has carried out analysis looking at the relationship between rates of fatal fires and ownership of a working smoke alarm. This combined fire incident record details of whether a working smoke alarm was present in fatal dwelling fires with national estimates of rates of ownership of a working smoke alarm. This concluded that the likelihood of dying in a fire was at least four times greater in a household with no working smoke alarm, and possibly as high as eight times greater.

The Government remains committed to ensuring the fire safety of people in their own homes. The long-running Fire Kills campaign works closely with fire and rescue authorities to promote fire prevention messages and also encourage householders to have working smoke alarms installed in their homes. Ownership has increased from 8% in 1988 to 88% in 2011. The current national advertising campaign—“Tick Tock Test”—commenced on 17 March and will run through to 30 March, encouraging people to test their smoke alarms when they change their clocks at the start of British summer time.

We are also consulting on the requirements for smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in the private rented sector.

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the (a) number and (b) proportion of (i) privately rented, (ii) social and (iii) owner-occupied homes in England with no working smoke alarm in each of the last three years. [192524]

Kris Hopkins: The latest available estimates, taken from the English Housing Survey, are in the following table.

Households by tenure with no working smoke alarm, England, 2008 and 2011

Tenure of dwelling	Households with no working smoke alarm (million)		Percentage of households	
	2008	2011	2008	2011
Owner occupied	2.0	1.6	13.6	11.5
Private rented	0.7	0.7	20.5	17.7
Local authority	0.3	0.2	13.6	11.2
Housing association	0.2	0.1	8.3	6.5
All tenures	3.2	2.6	14.1	12.0

Source: English Housing Survey, DCLG

The Government remains committed to ensuring the fire safety of people in their own homes. The long-running Fire Kills campaign works closely with fire and rescue authorities to promote fire prevention messages and encourage householders across all forms of tenure to have working smoke alarms installed in their homes. The current national advertising campaign—“Tick Tock Test”—commenced on Monday 17 March and will run through to 30 March, encouraging people to test their smoke alarms when they change their clocks at the start of British Summer Time.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Equality

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities if she will press for adoption of a specific goal on gender equality in the post-Millennium Development Goals framework when she attends the 2014 UN Convention on the Status of Women; and if she will make a statement. [192977]

Mrs Grant: The UK has been clear in its call for a standalone goal on gender equality and girls’ and women’s empowerment, as well as ensuring that these issues are addressed throughout the goals and targets in the

framework to be agreed by members of the United Nations. The UK's statement at the Commission on the Status of Women clearly set out the need for a standalone goal on gender equality, and the empowerment of girls and women in the post-2015 framework.

We are working with others across the international community, including civil society, to ensure that this is achieved.

Higher Education: Females

Martin Horwood: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities if she will highlight the importance of places for girls in higher education in science and technology at the next Commission on the Status of Women; and if she will make a statement. [192492]

Mrs Grant: On 11 March the UK delivered its national statement at the EU Commission on the Status of Women. The statement drew attention to the need for more women to be empowered and achieve economic independence. We took the opportunity to highlight the importance of enabling more women and girls to participate in education and training, preparing them for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers.

At the Commission the Minister for Women and Equalities my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Maria Miller) co-hosted an international event with Glaxo SmithKline and the Tanzanian Government, specifically to promote women working in STEM industries.

A panel session entitled "The transition of women from education to full employment and decent work, with a particular focus on employment in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)" was held at the UN on 18 March. UK officials attended the session.

UN Commission On the Status of Women

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities what representations she has received from civil society organisations on preparations for the 2014 UN Convention on the Status of Women. [192978]

Mrs Grant: Active engagement with civil society has been a key element of our preparations and plans for the 58th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. A robust programme of consultation and engagement with a wide range of civil society organisations has been put in place by my officials in the Government Equalities Office. As part of this, we have been able to take account of the views and representations of UK NGOs in our negotiations at CSW. These have included representations on the following:

i. A priorities paper on the post-2015 agenda from the UK NGO CSW Alliance; ii. A submission from the Gender and Development Network; and,

iii. Statements on millennium development goals and the post-2015 framework from faith-based organisations and international civil society organisations.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the UK has spent on construction and maintenance of Camp Bastion in each financial year since 2012. [192971]

Mr Francois: Camp Bastion was constructed in 2006, so information prior to this date, does not exist. Nor is it possible to identify all Bastion construction and operation and maintenance costs since 2006, as a number of the relevant contracts covered all of our larger bases. These costs are therefore accounted for collectively for all bases in Afghanistan and, updated for 2013-14 to date, are as follows:

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Costs (£ million)</i>
2006-07	67.809
2007-08	80.855
2008-09	87.214
2009-10	116.905
2010-11	177.029
2011-12	77.528
2012-13	48.409
2013-14	62.008

The 2013-14 costs include those associated with drawdown and remediation, as well as Force Protection measures responding to the evolving threat. Significant infrastructure has been created at Camp Bastion to repatriate vehicles and material back to the UK.

Armed Forces: Discharges

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people left the armed forces in 2012-13. [192398]

Anna Soubry: The number of personnel who left the armed forces in financial year 2012-13 was 23,520. This figure has been rounded.

Armed Forces: Redundancy

Mike Crockart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers have been made compulsorily redundant since May 2010; and what proportion of those soldiers were within one year of receiving a pension. [192382]

Dr Murrison: A total of 6,330 Army personnel have left on compulsory redundancy between May 2010 and 1 February 2014. This figure comprises both applicants and non-applicants.

Of these, we estimate that approximately 1.3% of redundees were within one year of their Immediate Pension Point (IPP).

Defence Equipment and Support

Alison Seabek: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of staff in Defence Equipment and Support who will see their terms and conditions change as a result of introducing the private sector into the procurement process. [192373]

Mr Dunne: The terms and conditions of Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) staff will not change as a result of the recruitment of managed service providers to support the acquisition process.

Defence Infrastructure Organisation

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the planned timetable for the sale of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation is; and if he will make a statement. [193099]

Dr Murrison: The Defence Infrastructure Organisation is not for sale.

Defence: Procurement

Alison Seaback: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answers of 4 December 2013 to the hon. Member for Moray, *Official Report*, column 674W, and of 25 November 2013 to the hon. Member for Poole, *Official Report*, columns 36-7W, on defence: procurement, how much defence procurement expenditure was placed with small and medium-sized enterprises with a billing address in each of the English regions and in the other constituent parts of the UK in the last three financial years. [180821]

Mr Dunne: Details of overall Ministry of Defence expenditure with small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) are available at the following link:

<http://www.dasa.mod.uk/index.php/publications/finance-and-economics/MOD-contracting-with-small-and-medium-sized-enterprises/financial-year-2012-13>

A breakdown of SME expenditure by UK region is not, however, routinely produced as part of this publication. This information will take additional time to collate and I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Substantive answer from Mr Dunne to Alison Seaback:

Further to the answer I gave on 6th January 2014, (Official Report, column 13W) to your recent question about expenditure with Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), I am now able to provide you with a substantive response.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) does not routinely record information on the geographic location of its supply chain. The information extracted from the management information systems picks up payments made by the MOD to individuals and businesses by their billing address, which therefore does not necessarily identify the location where the work was undertaken.

The level of direct MOD expenditure placed with SMEs in each of the English regions and other constituent parts of the UK in each of the last three financial years (FY) for which data is available is shown in the following table. This also shows the number of SMEs in each region that were paid directly by the MOD in each of these years. The rise in the number of SMEs engaged by MOD across these years reflects the availability of more accurate data to enable SMEs to be correctly categorised.

MOD direct expenditure with SMEs^{1, 2, 3, 4}

Region/Constituent part of UK	FY 2010-11 (£ million)	Number of SMEs	FY 2011-12 (£ million)	Number of SMEs	FY 2012-13 (£ million)	Number of SMEs
North East	17	130	14	210	13	470
North West	53	290	53	510	47	1,160
Yorkshire & The Humber	68	320	77	510	80	950
East Midlands	65	330	72	490	50	810
West Midlands	92	440	86	640	69	1,110
East of England	115	470	118	730	108	1,130
London	138	430	111	660	131	1,130
South East	286	1,000	272	1,450	275	1,980
South West	157	750	135	1,090	218	1,460
Wales	19	180	17	270	15	540
Scotland	37	280	28	450	37	890
Northern Ireland	23	80	25	110	15	210
Totals (rounded)	1,071	4,720	1,006	7,140	1,059	11,840

¹ Excludes payments to SMEs where the postcode is incorrect.

² Excludes payments to SMEs where the billing postcode is outside the UK (including postcodes in the Channel Islands and Isle of Man).

³ For 2010-11 and 2011-12 estimates are based on 2011-12 Dun & Bradstreet assessments. For 2012-13 the latest Dun & Bradstreet assessments have been used.

⁴ The number of SMEs in each region across each financial year is shown in brackets. This is rounded the nearest 10 and where a company has more than one billing address in more than one region, they have been counted in each of the regions to which a bill has been addressed.

The analysis is based on direct expenditure with companies positively identified as SMEs who have a UK billing address with a valid postcode recorded by the MOD. It does not include payments made (a) on behalf of other government departments, (b) by the MOD'S Trading Funds and Executive Non Departmental Public Bodies, (c) locally by the Department, or (d) through third parties such as prime contractors or other government departments. For these reasons, it only provides a partial assessment of total direct MOD expenditure by region and does not represent a replication of the official statistics on direct MOD expenditure by Government Office Region which were discontinued in 2008. These statistics were based on a different methodology and coverage including MOD personnel costs by region and adjustments for pan-MOD or pan-Government expenditure, amongst other items.

You should also note that, unlike the answers I previously gave to the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), on 12th December 2013 (Official Report, column 343W), on SME expenditure in Scotland and to the hon. Member for Poole (Robert Syms) on

25th November 2013 (Official Report, column 36W), on SME expenditure in the South West, the above figures include miscellaneous non-contract payments and are not restricted to contracts worth over £5 million.

A copy of this letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Dounreay

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) was informed of the leak of radiation which occurred at the Vulcan nuclear test reactor at Dounreay in January 2012; and for what reason there was a delay in informing ONR of that incident; [191350]

(2) pursuant to the statement of 6 March 2014, *Official Report*, columns 1077-79, on nuclear submarines, what consultations his Department undertook with the

Scottish Environmental Protection Agency on measurable levels of increased radiation at the Vulcan test reactor between the leak at that reactor and the date of that statement. [191371]

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department informed (a) the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator, (b) the Office for Nuclear Regulation and (c) the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency of the incident at the Vulcan Naval Reactor Test Establishment in January 2012. [191604]

Mr Dunne: There has been no leak of radiation from the reactor at the Naval Reactor Test Establishment (NRTE) at Dounreay.

The Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator (DNSR), the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) have different regulatory responsibilities in relation to the Naval Reactor Test Establishment (NRTE). They were each informed at a time appropriate to those responsibilities.

DNSR was informed in January 2012, immediately after the detection of low levels of radioactivity in the cooling water within the reactor, due to its responsibility for the regulation of the safe operation of the site and of the safety of operational submarines.

The ONR regulates emergency planning at the NRTE, under the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001, and radiation doses to workers on site, under the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1999. The ONR was first made aware of the issue in May 2012, shortly after the most probable cause was identified as a breach in a small area of the metal cladding that surrounds one fuel element within the core of the reactor, at which point the MOD and the ONR were able to make an informed judgment on issues relating to ONR responsibilities.

SEPA regulates discharges from the NRTE under a Memorandum of Understanding on matters relating to radioactive substances. SEPA was first made aware of the issue in October 2012, shortly after the relevant site regulators had assessed and agreed the way ahead, including modifications to the plant to further improve monitoring and sampling, and plans to restart the reactor, at which point the MOD and SEPA were able to make an informed judgment on issues relating to SEPA responsibilities.

Since SEPA was first made aware, there have been a number of site inspections and meetings at which updates were provided.

Electronic Warfare

Yvonne Fovargue: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many meetings he has had with industry on UK cyber hygiene policy in the last three years. [192082]

Mr Francois: Work to improve wider UK cyber hygiene is being undertaken by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and they lead on industry engagement in this area. The Ministry of Defence is also involved with industry in the Defence Cyber Protection Partnership (DCPP), which reports to the Defence Suppliers' Forum (DSF).

The DSF is chaired by the Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), and first met in July 2011. There have been seven meetings in total and cyber was an agenda item on three occasions.

Yvonne Fovargue: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the physical fitness criteria are for recruitment to the cyber reserve force. [192334]

Mr Francois: The naval service, Army and Royal Air Force have defined physical fitness criteria for all new recruits, regular and reserve. Given the specific skills required of cyber reservists and the fact that for many their normal place of duty will be in the UK, derogation from normal service medical and physical fitness standards is considered on a case-by-case basis.

Yvonne Fovargue: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many firms with contracts with his Department employ cyber reservists. [192340]

Mr Francois: The Ministry of Defence places many thousands of contracts; therefore this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Yvonne Fovargue: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cyber reservists have been recruited to the Joint Cyber Reserve Force to date; and when he expects to meet his recruitment target. [192357]

Mr Francois: Recruitment for the Cyber Reserve began in October 2013 and is on track to deliver the Cyber Reserve at full operational capability within the next two years. Specific details of the Cyber Reserve capability are being withheld for the purpose of safeguarding national security. However, I am able to confirm that applications far exceeded the numbers required.

Yvonne Fovargue: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cyber incidents were recorded by firms with contracts with his Department in 2013. [192358]

Mr Francois: This information is not held in the format requested and we do not comment on the specific detail of cyber security incidents.

Our armed forces depend on a wide range of equipment and services provided by industry and we recognise the importance of that. With the Office of Cyber Security and Information Assurance, the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure and Government Communication Headquarters, we are working closely with industry to ensure they are aware of the changing nature of the threat and have effective counters in place. The Defence Cyber Protection Partnership (DCPP) aims to meet the emerging threat to the UK defence supply chain by increasing awareness of cyber risks, sharing threat intelligence, and defining risk-driven approaches to applying cyber security standards.

Yvonne Fovargue: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the NATO Co-operative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence. [192359]

Mr Francois: During December of last year, the Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), visited the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence located in Tallinn, Estonia, ahead of the UK's official joining of the centre. He was briefed by the centre of excellence on the benefits to the UK as a sponsoring nation and the programme of research and development work that takes place there. The UK has a permanent staff member seconded to the centre, demonstrating our commitment and close ongoing relationship.

HMS Victory

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the value of artefacts and cargo found within HMS Victory 1744. [192555]

Anna Soubry: We have no reason to change the assessment made by Wessex Archaeology in 2009 that it is unlikely that bullion or other cultural assets of monetary value, with the exception of cannon, exist at the site. We have made no estimate of their potential value.

Mr Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which individuals or organisations his Department consulted before the transfer of the wreck of HMS Victory 1744. [192557]

Anna Soubry: On 25 March 2010, under the previous Government, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport launched a public consultation on the future management approach that should be adopted towards the wreck of HMS Victory 1744. The results of that consultation were published in July 2011 and are available at the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/105731/victory_response.pdf

The Government's response included a List of Contributors:

Advisory Committee on Historic Wreck Sites; Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology; Alderney Maritime Trust; Archaeologist -Bournemouth University; Archaeologist-University of St Andrews; Augurship 320 Ltd; Representatives of the Balchin Family; Representative of the Temple-West Family; BG Energy Holdings Ltd; British Sub Aqua Club; Council for British Archaeology; Diver-British Sub Aqua Club; English Heritage; Falmouth Divers Ltd; Former Premier of Bermuda G P Resorts (USA); History Hunters International; International Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage; Joint Nautical Archaeology Policy Committee; Lecturer in Archaeology-Institute of Archaeology; Maritime Historian Mary Rose Trust; Members of the Public, from the UK and overseas (mainly USA); Ministry of Defence-Defence Equipment & Spares (Salvage and Moorings Operation); National Maritime Museum Nautical Archaeology Society; Nelson Society; Odyssey Marine Exploration; Ordnance Historian; Ordnance Researcher; Planet Electronics Ltd; ProMare UK; Professional Association of Diving Instructors; Professor of Archaeology-Institute of Archaeologists; Receiver of Wreck; Rescue-The British Archaeological Trust; Retired Archaeologist; Seaquest Ltd; Searex Inc; Society of Antiquaries; Student of Archaeology-Warwick University; UNESCO; USA Publisher; Wreck Watch.

Malaysia Airlines

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance has been provided by the (a) Royal Navy and (b) Royal Air Force in the search for Malaysia Airlines flight MH370. [192199]

Mr Francois: HMS Echo, a Royal Navy Survey vessel, is currently en route to support the search effort. It will take some time to arrive and the exact role will depend on the status of the investigation when it arrives.

Experts from the Ministry of Defence, the Hydrographic Office, the Department for Transport and the Meteorological Office are working in close co-operation with Malaysian and other international partners to analyse available satellite, weather and sea data to help locate the aircraft.

Royal Air Force loan personnel on secondment to the Royal New Zealand Air Force are actively involved in maritime search operations.

Military Aid: Floods

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of military support provided during the recent winter floods; and from which budget Operation Pitchpole will be funded. [190169]

Mr Francois: In line with the standard arrangements for the deployment of military personnel, we are discussing with HM Treasury the budget from which the Ministry of Defence's net additional costs for Operation Pitchpole will be funded.

Military Bases: Northern Ireland

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when a Minister of his Department last visited a defence establishment in Northern Ireland. [192500]

Mr Francois: Since January 2012 Defence Ministers have visited Northern Ireland defence establishments on five occasions. It is important to note that the Secretary of State for Defence was unfortunately obliged to postpone his planned visit of 20 March 2014, owing to unexpected developments beyond his control. Arrangements are being made to reschedule this visit.

The following visits have taken place since January 2012:

	<i>Date</i>
Peter Luff Minister for Defence Equipment Support and Technology	15 February 2012
Sir Nick Harvey MP Minister for the Armed Forces	30 April 2012
Rt Hon Andrew Robathan MP Minister for the Armed Forces	29 to 30 October 2012
Rt Hon Mark Francois MP Then Minister for Defence Personnel Welfare and Veterans	21 to 22 March 2013
Rt Hon Andrew Robathan MP Minister for the Armed Forces	13 to 14 May 2013

Military Police

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to bring the Service Police Force under the remit of the Independent Police Complaints Commission. [192671]

Anna Soubry: I can confirm that the scope for independent oversight of complaints against the Service police forces is currently under consideration. No decisions have yet been taken, including on the question of whether the IPCC would be best placed to provide such oversight.

Navy: Disciplinary Proceedings

Ms Gisela Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what disciplinary proceedings have been put in place following the incident at Devonport Naval base regarding the Test Variant Torpedo. [192480]

Mr Francois: This incident is the subject of an ongoing MOD investigation. It is, therefore, inappropriate to comment at this time.

Nuclear Submarines

Alison Seabeck: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the longevity of fuel rods used in the Vanguard and Astute class submarines under normal patrol conditions since the leakage incident at Dounreay. [192376]

Mr Dunne: There has been no leak of radiation from the reactor at the Naval Reactor Test Establishment (NRTE) at HMS Vulcan, Dounreay.

We have not identified any issues with our operational submarines. The decision to refuel HMS Vanguard is a responsible and prudent precaution to help mitigate the risk to deterrent operations until the Successor submarines enter service starting in 2028.

The implications for the three remaining Vanguard class submarines and for the Astute class will be the subject of further analysis, particularly once we have had the opportunity to examine the reactor core from the NRTE.

Nurseries

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of workplace nurseries available to staff in (a) his Department and (b) his Department's Executive agencies or non-departmental public bodies in (i) 2010, (ii) 2013-14 and (iii) 2014-15. [192441]

Anna Soubry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 3 March 2014, *Official Report*, column 720W, to the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson).

Royal Fleet Auxiliary

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what steps he is taking to recruit more cadet engineers to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary; [192462]

(2) how many engineers there are in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary; [192463]

(3) how many personnel are employed by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary; [192465]

(4) how many ships are operated by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. [192466]

Anna Soubry: The current Royal Fleet Auxiliary recruiting campaign targets engineers through a number of advertising mediums including radio, digital media, specialist publications and a virtual careers fair.

As of 1 January 2014, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary employs 1,860 personnel of which 550 are engineers (rounded in accordance with Defence statistics rounding policy).

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary operates 13 ships.

Service Prosecuting Authority

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times civilian counsel have been briefed by the service prosecution authority in each year since 2006; and if he will make a statement. [191444]

Anna Soubry: The Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA) did not become fully operational until 2009. The following table shows the number of cases in each year since 2009 that the SPA has instructed civilian counsel.

	<i>Number of cases civilian counsel instructed</i>
2009	7
2010	7
2011	7
2012	10
2013	12
2014	11
2014 (to 17 March 2014)	3

The SPA may have instructed civilian counsel on a number of occasions for each case.

The SPA, in the same way as the Crown Prosecution Service, instruct counsel on complex, serious and high profile cases.

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service prosecutors there were in the service prosecution authority of each branch of the armed forces in each year since 2006, what the length of their service in each authority was; how many have received specialist training in the investigation of sexual offences; and if he will make a statement. [191530]

Anna Soubry: Since the formation of the Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA) on 1 January 2009, the SPA has had an establishment of 36 military prosecutors and one civilian prosecutor (the director of service prosecutions). The military establishment can be broken down by service as follows:

	<i>Posts</i>
Royal Navy (RN)	5
Army	27
Royal Air Force (RAF)	4

Since January 2009, there have been periods where posts have been gapped for various reasons, such as operational deployments and maternity leave.

The length of assignment varies within the SPA, dependent primarily on rank, but other factors can, and have, made standard 'tour' lengths fluctuate from time to time. Generally OF2s (Army captains, Royal Navy lieutenants and RAF flight lieutenants) will be assigned to the SPA for 18 to 24 months. OF3s (Army majors, Royal Navy lieutenant commanders and RAF squadron leaders) are assigned for two to three years. OF4s (Army lieutenant colonels, Royal Navy commanders and RAF wing commanders) are generally assigned for three years. However, the SPA currently has four OF4s who have spent between four and five years in post. OF5s (Army colonels, Royal Navy captains and RAF group captains) are on average in post longer than three years.

In addition, the majority of OF3s and above will have previously served in the SPA (or the previous individual service prosecution authorities) and have returned to carry out a further tour; in some cases a third tour.

16 SPA prosecutors have attended the Crown Prosecution Service rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) course and other specialist training since 2010. The following table shows the breakdown by year.

	<i>Number of prosecutors attending RASSO course</i>
2010	4
2011	4
2012	3
2013	5

It is the SPA policy that only suitably trained and experienced prosecutors conduct rape and sexual assault prosecutions. Currently the SPA has 10 prosecutors who have attended the RASSO course and other specialist training.

United Arab Emirates

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons HMS *Tireless* was refused permission to dock in the United Arab Emirates. [192900]

Mr Francois: As a matter of routine we do not discuss submarine operations, but I can give assurances that HMS *Tireless*' visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was not for any maintenance-related issues or repairs. HMS *Tireless* paid a successful visit to the UAE between 15 and 20 March.

Unmanned Air Vehicles

Henry Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional surveillance capability the Watchkeeper system will provide over the Hermes 450 UAV following the commencement of army trials. [192368]

Mr Francois: The H-450 Tactical Unmanned Air System currently provides operational commanders in Helmand with a 24 hour, Intelligence Surveillance Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) capability supplying accurate, timely and high quality imagery

intelligence to support decision making, using electro-optical and infrared sensors. Watchkeeper, while similar in appearance to H-450, is fitted with an additional sensor payload of a synthetic aperture radar/ground-moving target indicator radar. This radar will create a persistent and flexible all-weather ISTAR capability with the ability to conduct surveillance through cloud and obscuration. This radar also allows Watchkeeper to conduct wide-area surveillance of a battlefield and, when operated as part of an integrated ISTAR network, will enable Watchkeeper to cue and direct other ISTAR platforms. With improved sensor range when compared to the optical systems, the radar will also enable the covert surveillance of targets.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Football

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills on bringing forward legislative proposals to abolish the Football League creditors' rule; and if she will make a statement. [192979]

Mrs Grant: The Government has no current plans to legislate regarding the insolvency of football clubs. The football authorities have made significant moves over recent years to put their clubs on a stronger financial footing, principally through the introduction of financial fair play rules, and I hope that these rules will negate the need for football to rely on the Football Creditors Rule in cases of club insolvencies. I will continue to monitor this area closely, however, and will not hesitate to bring forward legislation if required.

Gambling: North West

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the number of people in (a) the North West, (b) Lancashire and (c) Pendle constituency who suffer from a gambling addiction. [192374]

Mrs Grant: The Government does not hold problem gambling statistics on a local level however the latest Health Survey for England recorded an overall problem gambling rate of between 0.4% and 0.5%, depending on the measure used.

Nurseries

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the number of workplace nurseries available to staff in (a) her Department and (b) her Department's Executive agencies or non-departmental public bodies in (i) 2010, (ii) 2013-14 and (iii) 2014-15. [192440]

Mrs Grant: DCMS employees have not had access to workplace nurseries in 2010, 2013-14 and 2014-15. DCMS has one Executive agency, The Royal Parks. Their employees do not have access to workplace nurseries. DCMS does not hold this information for its 44 arm's length bodies.

Television: Licensing

Mike Crockart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was raised from the payment of licence fees to the BBC in the last year for which figures are available; and how much additional funding her Department provided to the BBC in that year. [192372]

Mr Vaizey: The BBC's annual report 2013 contains details of all the BBC's income, and its expenditure for 2012-13. In this the total income from licence fees collected for the period was £3.7 billion. The BBC receives no additional funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

CABINET OFFICE

Charities

Martin Horwood: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) what steps he is taking to encourage charities to become signatories to the Financial Reporting Council's UK Stewardship Code; [192620]

(2) what steps he is taking to incentivise charities to manage their assets in a manner compliant with the Financial Reporting Council's UK Stewardship Code. [192631]

Mr Hurd: The Financial Reporting Council's Stewardship Code does not direct itself to matters particular to charities such as their responsibilities under charity law and their focus on beneficiaries. "Good Governance—a Code for the Voluntary and Community Sector" developed by a coalition of charity and voluntary sector bodies is a code designed for charities and the voluntary sector. This code has the support of the Charity Commission which encourages its adoption through publications and signposting on its website.

Conditions of Employment: Yorkshire and the Humber

Andrew Percy: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what estimate he has made of the number of people in (a) Brigg and Goole constituency and (b) Yorkshire and the Humber who have jobs which primarily require working (i) during the day and (ii) at night. [192966]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson, dated March 2014:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Minister for the Cabinet Office for the estimate of the number in (a) Brigg and Goole constituency and (b) Yorkshire and the Humber who have jobs which primarily require working (i) during the day and (ii) at night. (192966)

Estimates of employment are derived the Labour Force Survey (LFS). During the survey, people who are identified as being in employment are asked about their regular pattern of work and whether it is usual for them to work (i) during the day, (ii) during the evening and (iii) at night. Respondents can say "yes" to any categories that apply. For those working 'during the evening' these hours are commonly between 15:00 and 24:00 and 'at night'

they are commonly between 18:00 and 06:00. Therefore in some instances respondents may work both evenings and nights.

Estimates derived from this question are available for the Yorkshire and the Humber. However, estimates for the Brigg and Goole parliamentary constituency are not available because the limited size of the LFS sample means that they are not of sufficient quality. The available estimates are given in the attached table along with the employment total to provide context.

*People in employment by usual time of working, April to June 2013
(thousands, not seasonally adjusted)*

<i>Usual time of work under regular work pattern¹</i>	<i>Yorkshire and the Humber</i>
During the day	1,829
During the evening	547
At night	177
Total employment	2,491

¹ The columns do not add up to the total as respondents can be counted in more than one category. Also, some respondents would not have answered this question.

Note:

As with any sample survey, estimates from the LFS are subject to a margin of uncertainty. The above estimates all have a coefficient of variation (CV) of less than 20%. The true value is likely to lie within +/- twice the CV. For example, for an estimate of 100 with a CV of 20% we would expect the true value to be within the range 60-140.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Diabetes

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many people died as a result of diabetes in (a) 2008 and (b) 2013. [192501]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Peter Fullerton dated March 2014:

On behalf of the Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for Health how many people died as a result of diabetes in (a) 2008 and (b) 2013. (192501)

Table 1 provides the number of deaths where diabetes mellitus was the underlying cause of death in England and Wales, for deaths registered 2008 and 2012 (the latest year available).

Figures for 2013 will be available in July 2014. The number of deaths registered in England and Wales each year by sex, age, cause, marital status, and place of death are published annually on the National Statistics website at:

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/mortality-statistics--deaths-registered-in-england-and-wales--series-dr-/index.html

Table 1: Number of deaths where the underlying cause of death was diabetes mellitus in England and Wales, deaths registered in 2008 and 2012^{1, 2, 3}

<i>Registration year</i>	<i>Deaths</i>
2008	5,541
2012	4,931

¹ Cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes E10-E14 (Diabetes mellitus).

² Figures include deaths of non-residents.

³ Figures are based on deaths registered, rather than deaths occurring in the years 2008 and 2012. Further information on registration delays for a range of causes can be found on the ONS website: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/user-guidance/health-and-life-events/impact-of-registration-delays-on-mortality-statistics/index.html

Government Departments: Pay

John McDonnell: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what payroll deductions other than trades union subscriptions are made from Government Department employees through the check-off system. [192676]

Mr Maude: It is a matter for each Government Department to decide which organisations can collect their subscriptions through the employers' payroll service.

Manufactured Goods: Sales

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office for what purposes information provided via the UK manufacturers' sales by product (Prodcom) form is used. [192495]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Peter Fullerton, dated March 2014:

On behalf of the Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Minister for the Cabinet Office, for what purposes information provided via the UK Manufacturers' Sales by Product (PRODCOM) form is utilised (192495).

The UK Manufacturers' Sales by Product (PRODCOM) provides a comprehensive picture of industrial production in the UK. The statistics help users (such as Government, Policy Makers, Business/Market Analysts, and Trade Associations) gauge market share, and businesses to better understand how to establish new markets for their products.

The PRODCOM Survey is carried out annually by all EU member states, under EU regulation. This enables comparison and, where possible, produces a picture of emerging developments of an industry or product in a European context.

PRODCOM statistics are used to produce the UK National Accounts Supply and Use Tables, an integral part of measurement of UK Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The PRODCOM Survey identifies businesses that make particular products, and are also used to create a sampling frame for the ONS Producer Price Index (PPI). The PPI is a monthly survey that measures the price changes of goods bought and sold by UK manufacturers and provides a key measure of inflation.

More detailed information on uses and users of the PRODCOM statistics is provided in our User Engagement Report, which is published on the Office for National Statistics website:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/business-and-energy/manufacturing/user-engagement-and-survey-management/prodcom-user-engagement.pdf>

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will review the requirements for small and medium-sized enterprises to complete the UK manufacturers' sales by product (Prodcom) form on an annual basis. [192498]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Peter Fullerton, dated March 2014:

On behalf of the Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will review the requirements for small and medium-sized enterprises to complete the UK Manufacturers' Sales by Product (PRODCOM) form on an annual basis (192498).

The PRODCOM Survey is carried out annually in the UK under an EU regulation which requires each member state to capture data covering 90% of the Mining and Manufacturing activities as defined in the European Classification of Economic Activities (NACE). This requires robust sampling methods, to ensure suitable quality results, while minimising the burden on business.

To ensure the EU regulation is met, all manufacturing businesses with employment of more than 100 are selected to complete the PRODCOM questionnaire every year. In some industries, where product sales are more variable, businesses with employment of more than 20 are also sampled every year. In general, for smaller businesses only a small proportion of are selected and they then stay in the sample for 10 years.

It is ONS policy to regularly review the samples for all of our surveys, and the last review for the PRODCOM Survey was in 2009. There are currently no plans to exclude small and medium-sized enterprises from the sample as this would impact the quality of results and our compliance with EU regulations and wider user needs. However, we are reviewing the sample design in 2014/15. The results from this investigation and any plans to change the sample design will be published on the ONS website.

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many businesses in (a) the UK, (b) Scotland and (c) Kilmarnock and Loudoun constituency were required to return the UK manufacturers' sales by product (Prodcom) form in the year ending 31 January 2014. [192499]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Peter Fullerton, dated March 2014:

On behalf of the Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many businesses in (a) the UK, (b) Scotland and (c) Kilmarnock and Loudoun constituency were required to return the UK Manufacturers' Sales by Product (PRODCOM) form in the year ending 31 January 2014 (192499).

The number of UK businesses selected to complete the PRODCOM questionnaire was 21,704 in the year ending 31 January 2014. Of these, 1,480 businesses were in Scotland, and 26 in the Kilmarnock and Loudoun constituency.

Profumo Inquiry

Frank Dobson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the answer of 17 March 2014, *Official Report*, column 469W on the Profumo Inquiry, who holds the requested information; and how does the fact that requested data is not held centrally affect the comment by Lord Wallace of Saltaire that papers relating to the interviews by Lord Denning should not be published while those interviewed are still alive. [192614]

Mr Maude: Lord Wallace of Saltaire set out the Government's approach on 18 July 2013, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column 873.

Trade

Cathy Jamieson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) what the total amount was of financial penalties collected in respect of breaches of section 4 of the Statistics of Trade Act 1947 in each of the most recent three years for which figures are available; [192496]

(2) what assessment he has made of the number of businesses in (a) the UK, (b) Scotland and (c) Kilmarnock and Loudoun constituency who have incurred penalties under section 4 of the Statistics of Trade Act 1947 in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [192497]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Questions on behalf of the Minister for the Cabinet Office, asking for (1) the total amount of financial penalties collected in respect of breach of section 4 of the Statistics of Trade Act 1947 and (2) what assessment he has made of the number of businesses in (a) the UK, (b) Scotland, (c) Kilmarnock and Loudoun constituency, who have incurred penalties under this section; in each of the last three years, for which figures are available (192496 and 192497).

The Statistics of Trade Act (STA) 1947 only extends to Great Britain encompassing England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland collects under the provisions of The Statistics of Trade and Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988.

The following table shows the total financial penalties incurred and the corresponding number of businesses penalised under the STA for the last three years:

<i>Great Britain</i>	<i>Financial penalties (£)</i>	<i>Number of businesses</i>
2011	2,000	1
2012	26,600	12
2013	14,250	9

No businesses in Scotland incurred penalties during 2011, 2012 and 2013.

Unemployment: Brigg

Andrew Percy: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent estimate he has made of the number of jobseekers over the age of (a) 50 and (b) 60 years old in Brigg and Goole constituency. [192967]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson, dated March 2014:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent estimate he has made of the number of jobseekers over the age of (a) 50 and (b) 60 years old in Brigg and Goole constituency. (192967)

For this question Jobseekers has been interpreted as those claiming Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) which covers about half of those considered to be unemployed. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles data on the number of people claiming JSA from the JobcentrePlus Administrative System.

The table shows the number of people aged 50 to 59, 60 and over and 50 and over who were claiming Jobseeker's Allowance in February 2014 resident in the requested parliamentary constituency.

National and local area estimates for many labour market statistics, including employment, unemployment and claimant count are available on the NOMIS website at:

<http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

Number¹ of people claiming jobseeker's allowance in Brigg and Goole, February 2014, not seasonally adjusted

	<i>Number</i>
Aged 50 to 59	245

Number¹ of people claiming jobseeker's allowance in Brigg and Goole, February 2014, not seasonally adjusted

	<i>Number</i>
Aged 60 and over	50
Aged 50 and over	295

¹ Rounded to nearest five. Totals may not equal the sum of the independently rounded components.

Source:

JobcentrePlus Administrative System.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Afghanistan

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what estimate he has made of the number of (a) male and (b) female postgraduate students in Afghanistan; [192263]

(2) what recent estimate he has made of the number of undergraduate students in Afghanistan. [192264]

Hugh Robertson: According to the Afghan Central Statistics Organization (CSO), data collected from the Afghanistan Ministry of Higher Education show that 160,781 students studied in public and private universities in 2012-13. This included 28,713 female students. The Ministry also recorded that 13,061 students graduated from public universities in 2012-13, which included 2,256 female students. There are no CSO data on the number of students that graduated from private universities during that period. The data do not distinguish between undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Arctic

Kerry McCarthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department will take with the Arctic Council and its member states to implement the recent resolution of the EU Parliament on protecting the Arctic environment and (a) create a conservation area in the waters around the North Pole, (b) develop an agreement to prevent pollution from Arctic drilling and (c) institute a ban on industrialised fishing. [192765]

Mark Simmonds: Our officials are attending the Arctic Council meeting of Senior Arctic Officials taking place in Canada this week. We will (a) reiterate our support for the principle of designating marine protected areas in international waters, where the science supports it; (b) welcome the work of the Arctic Council's Task Force that is developing an oil spill prevention agreement between the Arctic states, and encourage its early conclusion; and (c) consider the emerging outcomes of discussions between the five coastal Arctic states to identify interim precautionary measures to prevent future fisheries in the Arctic high seas.

Burma

Mr Burrows: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether HM Ambassador to Burma has discussed with the Government of Burma its failure to implement drug eradication agreements with the Restoration Council of Shan State and UNODC. [192973]

Mr Swire: HM Ambassador to Burma has not discussed with the Burmese Government the implementation of drug eradication agreements with the Restoration Council of Shan State and the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

China

Mr Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress his Department has made in securing Mark Reilly's freedom to leave China and return to the UK. [192540]

Mr Swire: Consular staff in China are in regular contact with Mr Reilly and have provided assistance to him since his return to China. They last spoke with him on 13 March 2014. We have raised his case, with the Chinese authorities. I last did so when I met with Minister Wang Chao on 27 February 2014. The Chinese have made clear that their judicial processes have to be followed. We will continue to provide Mr Reilly with all appropriate support and assistance.

Colombia

Robert Flello: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason no representative of the UK Embassy in Colombia has visited Francisco Toloza, Huber Ballesteros and David Ravelo in the last six months. [192829]

Mr Swire: The UK cannot interfere in Colombia's judicial process nor can we visit non-British nationals without the permission of the Colombian authorities.

Robert Flello: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the UK Embassy in Colombia will observe the trials of Francisco Toloza, Huber Ballesteros and David Ravelo. [192830]

Mr Swire: The embassy is monitoring the trials of Huber Ballesteros, David Ravelo and Francisco Toloza.

Robert Flello: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made to the Colombian Government about extra-judicial killings. [192831]

Mr Swire: During Colombia's Universal Periodic Review in April 2013 the UK recommended that all cases of extra-judicial killings be investigated promptly and in line with international humanitarian and international human rights law. The Permanent Under-Secretary and the ambassador also made representations to the Colombian Government on this point in 2013.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), and the Deputy Prime Minister both raised wider human rights issues with President Santos during their visit to Colombia in February.

Robert Flello: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of the killing of human rights activists in Colombia in 2013; and what assessment he has made of the human rights situation in that country. [192832]

Mr Swire: We are aware of the report by non-government organisation (NGO) coalition 'We are Defenders' which suggests that attacks against Human Rights Defenders in 2013 went down by 4% while assassinations increased by 10% from the previous year. Guaranteeing the security of human rights defenders remains a top priority for the Colombian Government and the National Protection Unit, whose budget is around £120 million and provides protection to over 2,500 human rights defenders.

The British embassy continues to publicly support the work of human rights defenders and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), and the Deputy Prime Minister both raised the issue of their security with President Santos in February.

Robert Flello: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations and on what dates the UK Embassy in Colombia has made to the Colombian authorities about the prison conditions and health of and the security risks to Francisco Toloza, Huber Ballesteros and David Ravelo. [192853]

Mr Swire: The British embassy in Bogota is currently requesting permission from the relevant authorities to visit Mr Ballesteros.

In December 2012 embassy staff visited Mr Ravelo in jail and the ambassador also wrote to the Attorney-General's office.

The embassy will write to the Colombian authorities regarding the charges against Mr Toloza.

EU External Relations

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with which countries the EU acting as a legal personality has concluded co-operation agreements in the field of justice and home affairs. [191707]

Mr Lidington: In the course of this Government, agreements with JHA content have been concluded with the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Australia, Canada, Cape Verde, Colombia, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Republic of Korea, Peru, San Marino, Switzerland, Turkey, and the USA.

Kenya

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many vehicles are owned or leased by the British High Commission in Nairobi; and what the make of each such vehicle is. [192414]

Mr Lidington: The British high commission (BHC) in Nairobi has 67 vehicles in its general purpose fleet. 38 of those are owned by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the remainder are owned by other UK Government Departments working in Kenya. The FCO vehicles are:

<i>Model</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Land Rover Defender	4
Land Rover Freelander	1

<i>Model</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Land Rover Discovery	1
Toyota Prado	4
Toyota Fortuner	2
Toyota Hiace	3
Toyota Landcruiser	5
Isuzu TFR	3
Isuzu NPR Truck	1
Isuzu TFR Truck	2
Toyota Doublecab	8
Toyota Condor Minivan	3
Toyota Probox	1
Total	38

The vehicles are used for the official business and operations of the British High Commission in Nairobi.

Nurseries

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of workplace nurseries available to staff in (a) his Department and (b) his Department's executive agencies or non-departmental public bodies in (i) 2010, (ii) 2013-14 and (iii) 2014-15. [192445]

Hugh Robertson: The Foreign and Commonwealth has two workplace nurseries. Both nurseries were operating in 2010 and 2013-14 and both will be operating in 2014-15. Since September 2013 FCO staff have also been able to use the House of Commons onsite nursery.

None of our non-departmental public bodies operate a workplace nursery. Nor did they in 2010 or 2013-14. They do not have plans to open one this financial year.

Republic of Ireland

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what official visits to the UK President Higgins of Ireland made prior to April 2014. [192502]

Mr Lidington: President Higgins has made several official visits to the UK, most recently in July 2013.

Russia

Mr Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the restrictions announced in respect of Mr Slutsky, a member of the Russian Parliament, apply to his privileges and immunities as a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; and if he will make a statement. [192493]

Mr Lidington: Membership of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe does not prevent the European Union from designating any individual under Council Decision 2014/145/CFSP nor from them being subject to both the asset freeze and travel ban provisions set out in that Decision. However, Article 1(3)(a) of the Council Decision 2014/145/CFSP provides for an exemption to the travel ban where a member state is bound by an obligation of international law as a host country to an international intergovernmental organisation. The General Agreement on Privileges and Immunities

of the Council of Europe requires States Parties (including the UK) to allow Representatives free movement to and from the place of meeting of the Assembly. EU member states also have the discretion under Article 1(6) of the Council Decision to consider granting an exemption to a designated person where travel is justified on other grounds including on the grounds of attending intergovernmental meetings.

Mr Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 10 March 2014, *Official Report*, column 49W, on Russia, whether the Government has made an attempt to have a discussion with Council of Europe counterparts about suspending the Russian Federation from membership. [192494]

Mr Lidington: We have not had or requested any discussions with Council of Europe counterparts on the Russian Federation's membership. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague) met Secretary General Jagland of the Council of Europe on 20 March 2014 when he discussed the situation in Ukraine and the role of the Council of Europe.

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he plans to impose visa bans and asset freezes on named Russian officials associated with the Magnitsky case. [192677]

Mr Lidington: The UK does not intend to introduce a US-style "Magnitsky list". We have a robust visa regime which enables us to deny entry to those who commit human rights abuses. It is a declared policy of the present Government that people against whom there is credible evidence of complicity in the abuse of human rights should not normally expect to be granted admission to the United Kingdom.

Mr Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on implementation of the Resolution of the House of 7 March 2012 relating to human rights abuses and the death of Sergei Magnitsky. [192678]

Mr Lidington: The discussion on Sergei Magnitsky in the House on 7 March 2012 was an important opportunity to hear a range of views on this worrying case. However, the UK does not intend to implement the resolution of that discussion to introduce a US-style "Magnitsky list". It is a declared policy of the present Government that people against whom there is credible evidence of complicity in the abuse of human rights, should not normally expect to be granted admission to the United Kingdom.

Dr Offord: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports his Department has received on the effect of EU sanctions on Russia on the economy of Cyprus. [192710]

Mr Lidington: Along with other EU member states, Cyprus has been clear in sending a united EU message to Russia that its actions are in flagrant breach of

international law and will incur consequences. We remain in close contact with the Cypriot Government and I discussed the Ukraine crisis with Cypriot Foreign Minister Kasoulides during his visit to London on 13 March 2014.

UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which is the lead Department for the UK's participation in the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing. [192632]

Mr Lidington: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has represented the UK at the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing and consulted widely with relevant Government Departments to inform the UK approach.

Venezuela

Simon Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Venezuela on freedom of press and speech and the detention of political opponents; and if he will make a statement. [192259]

Mr Swire: The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), commented on the situation in Venezuela on 18 February, during an official visit to Brazil. He expressed concern at the reports of violence associated with protests and the arrests of students and opposition politicians. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs highlighted the importance of freedom of expression and of the press and the right to protest peacefully.

I have written to the Venezuelan embassy in London emphasising the importance of respecting peaceful protest and creating the right conditions for dialogue to take place between the parties. I have also asked to speak to my Venezuelan opposite number. I will continue to monitor the situation carefully, and call on all sides to refrain from violence, to reduce tensions and to create the conditions for genuine dialogue.

EU High Representative Catherine Ashton also made statements on 14 and 21 February regarding the situation in Venezuela on behalf of all member states. The Government fully supports those statements.

Simon Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on political unrest in Venezuela; and if he will make a statement. [192260]

Mr Swire: I am deeply concerned about the reports of violence associated with protests in various cities in Venezuela since early February. I receive regular reports on the situation from our embassy in Caracas.

The majority of the demonstrations, including large-scale gatherings organised by the Government or by the opposition, have been peaceful, but some disturbances have been marred by violence. At least 30 people have been killed and over 350 injured. About half the victims are anti-government protestors, but members of the

police and national guard, pro-government supporters and bystanders have also been killed. According to official figures, there have been over 1,600 detainees, out of which around 1,300 have been released on parole and await trial. Over 100 remain in detention also awaiting trial. Over 40 police officers are being investigated for using excessive force in dealing with protestors, of which 15 have been detained.

The number and frequency of the incidents has decreased in the last two weeks but there are still violent incidents. We continue to monitor the situation carefully, and call on all sides to refrain from violence, to reduce tensions and to create the conditions for genuine dialogue.

The UNASUR group of South American countries agreed on 12 March to send a commission of Foreign Ministers to Venezuela by early April to accompany, support and advise a broad and constructive process of political dialogue. We hope that this can play a positive role in helping to prevent violence and to promote reconciliation in Venezuela.

EDUCATION

Academies

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many and what proportion of academy trusts have applied to open a free school. [192221]

Mr Timpson: There are 2,581 academy trusts in England. 207 (8%) of the free school applications submitted in application waves 1 to 5 have been submitted by, or have links to, academy trusts. Some academy trusts have applied a number of times.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many academy trusts account returns remain outstanding. [192304]

Mr Timpson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), on 18 March, *Official Report*, column 555W.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many academy trusts did not submit their account returns on time in each year since 2011; [192305]

(2) what proportion of academy trusts did not submit their account returns on time (a) in the current year, (b) in 2013, (c) in 2012 and (d) in 2011. [192306]

Mr Timpson: The number and proportion of academy trusts that did not submit an accounts return on time is detailed in the following table:

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Date due</i>	<i>Number late</i>	<i>Percentage late</i>
2012-13	31 January 2014	166	7.6
2011-12	31 January 2013	119	8.2
2010-11	31 January 2011	100	17.4

Academies were not required to submit accounts returns prior to 2010-11.

Adoption

Helen Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps his Department plans to take to ensure that children and adoptive parents receive support beyond the initial stages of the adoption process. [903202]

Mr Timpson: People who adopt are making a life changing decision, both for themselves and the children they adopt.

Research indicates a high level of need among adoptive families for therapeutic services often many years after the adoption process has ended.

It is for this reason that we have committed £19.3 million into an Adoption Support Fund to make therapeutic support much more widely accessible, timely and of high quality for adoptive families.

Children and Young People: Autism

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he has taken to improve the education of children on the autism spectrum. [192755]

Mr Timpson: The Department for Education continues to fund the Autism Education Trust to provide training to early years, school and further education staff on autism. From January 2012 to February 2014, 22,451 staff have received level 1 basic awareness training, 3,214 have received level 2 hands-on tools and techniques training and 775 have received level 3 training for those who want to develop their knowledge of autism further and those who will themselves take on a training role, such as school special educational needs co-ordinators.

The Department is also funding three autism organisations over 2013 to 2015, including Ambitious about Autism to work with four general further education colleges and schools to test innovative ways of supporting the transition of young people with autism from school to college and the National Autistic Society to help young people with autism take part in the development of 'local offers', to provide advice to professionals and to fund an exclusion adviser for parents and professionals.

Mr Simon Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of teachers teaching in (a) the UK, (b) England, (c) Essex and (d) Chelmsford constituency undertook specialist training on educational provision for children and young people on the autism spectrum in each of the last five years. [192349]

Mr Timpson: These figures are not collected centrally. Schools make their own decisions on what training their staff need to support their pupils, based on the individual circumstances of the school.

The Department for Education funds the Autism Education Trust (AET) to provide tiered training on autism: basic awareness training for teaching and non-teaching staff at level 1; practical knowledge and hands-on tools and techniques for all staff working directly with children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders at level 2; and level 3 training for those seeking more advanced knowledge and those pursuing a training role, such as lead practitioners in autism and special educational needs co-ordinators. Between 2011 and 2013 the AET

received grant funding under grant from the Department to provide training to schools and from 2013 to 2015 is contracted to provide training to early years providers, schools and further education colleges.

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent assessment he has made of the quality of educational provision for children and young people on the autism spectrum in (a) the UK, (b) England, (c) London, (d) the London borough of Lambeth and (e) Streatham constituency. [192472]

Mr Timpson: The Department for Education recognises that provision for all children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) across England, including those on the autism spectrum, needs to be improved and that is why we are taking forward the reforms in the Children and Families Act, which recently received Royal Assent. Part 3 of the Act will bring about significant reforms to the SEN system from which children and young people with autism will benefit along with their peers, in particular from earlier, and more comprehensive, assessment and intervention and stronger arrangements for the transition from children's to adult services, which many on the spectrum can find extremely difficult.

In 2008 the Autism Education Trust published a report "Educational provision for children and young people living in England". That report found that

"practice in many mainstream and special schools had improved tremendously over recent years"

but that there was still much to be done

"in reaching staff in schools who are not yet familiar with the particular needs of pupils on the autism spectrum and who struggle to teach them effectively".

The Government has continued to fund the trust, putting the emphasis on improving awareness and skills among early years, schools and further education staff. From January 2012 to February 2014, 22,451 staff have received level 1 basic awareness training, 3,214 have received level 2 hands-on tools and techniques training, and 775 have received level 3 training for those who want to develop their knowledge of autism further and those who will themselves take on a training role, such as school special educational needs co-ordinators.

Education, including SEN, is a devolved matter and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have responsibility for autism educational provision in their administrations.

Children's Centres

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many Sure Start centres have reduced the services they offer since May 2010; [192307]

(2) how many Sure Start centres have fewer staff now than in May 2010. [192314]

Elizabeth Truss: Local authorities are responsible for, and retain the flexibility for, children's centres provision in their area. They have a statutory duty to consult if any changes are planned and to ensure there is a sufficient number of children's centres to meet the needs of their local communities.

Diabetes

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he has taken since 2010 to ensure that (a) primary and (b) secondary schools are equipped to support children with diabetes. [192597]

Mr Laws: Schools are already required to support children with long-term medical conditions such as diabetes. Non-statutory guidance, “Managing Medicines in Schools and Early Years Settings”, is available to schools to help them manage medicines and support children with medical needs such as diabetes.

From September 2014, there will be a new duty, which was introduced in the Children and Families Act 2014, on governing bodies of maintained schools and proprietors of academies to make arrangements to support pupils at school with medical conditions and to have regard to statutory guidance. The guidance, upon which we have consulted publicly, will set out the requirements on schools to support children with medical conditions, which we would expect them to apply to conditions like diabetes.

Education: Essex

Mr Simon Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pupils in (a) Chelmsford constituency and (b) Essex continued into (i) further education, (ii) higher education (iii) apprenticeships in each the last five years for which figures are available. [192350]

Matthew Hancock: Destination measures data, following key stage 4 and key stage 5, are published at local authority level for the year 2009/10 and 2010/11. Parliamentary constituency level data are published for 2010/11 only.

The requested data, for the available years, are shown in the following tables.

The information is taken from Statistical First Release data, which is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-destinations>

Destination measures for key stage 4 and key stage 5, 2009/10 and 2010/11

<i>Local authority level</i>							
<i>Key stage 4</i>			<i>Percentage going into a sustained¹ destination</i>				
<i>Cohort² year</i>	<i>Destination³ year</i>	<i>Local authority</i>	<i>Number of students⁴</i>	<i>School sixth form</i>	<i>Further education⁵</i>	<i>Of which: apprenticeships⁶</i>	<i>Higher education⁷</i>
2008/09	2009/10	Essex	15,940	34	50	5	x
2009/10	2010/11	Essex	15,990	34	51	7	0

<i>Local authority level</i>							
<i>Key stage 5</i>			<i>Percentage going into a sustained¹ destination</i>				
<i>Cohort⁸ year</i>	<i>Destination⁹ year</i>	<i>Local authority</i>	<i>Number of students⁴</i>	<i>School sixth form</i>	<i>Further education⁵</i>	<i>Of which: apprenticeships⁶</i>	<i>Higher education⁷</i>
2008/09	2009/10	Essex	8,300	1	10	2	51
2009/10	2010/11	Essex	8,700	1	10	4	48

<i>Parliamentary constituency level</i>							
<i>Key stage 4</i>			<i>Percentage going into a sustained¹ destination</i>				
<i>Cohort² year</i>	<i>Destination³ year</i>	<i>Parliamentary constituency</i>	<i>Number of students⁴</i>	<i>School sixth form</i>	<i>Further education⁵</i>	<i>Of which: apprenticeships⁶</i>	<i>Higher education⁷</i>
2009/10	2010/11	Chelmsford	1,460	52	35	5	0

<i>Parliamentary constituency level</i>							
<i>Key stage 5</i>			<i>Percentage going into a sustained¹ destination</i>				
<i>Cohort⁸ year</i>	<i>Destination⁹ year</i>	<i>Parliamentary constituency</i>	<i>Number of students⁴</i>	<i>School sixth form</i>	<i>Further education⁵</i>	<i>Of which: apprenticeships⁶</i>	<i>Higher education⁷</i>
2009/10	2010/11	Chelmsford	1,280	—	7	3	52

“x” means the value is suppressed due to small numbers.

“—” means the percentage is less than 0.5% but greater than 0%.

¹ Sustained participation for the first two terms, October to March.

² All students who are in state-funded mainstream schools and are at the end of key stage 4 and compulsory schooling.

³ The year following the end of key stage 4.

⁴ Number of students in the cohort for the stated year and key stage rounded to the nearest 10.

⁵ Further education includes further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and other further education providers.

⁶ All apprenticeships are also reported in the school sixth form and further education columns. Apprenticeships are identified where any qualifying learning has occurred at any time during the October to March participation period.

⁷ Higher education includes students at higher education institutions or undertaking higher education provision at a further education college.

⁸ All students who entered an A level or other level 3 qualification. This includes all level 3 qualifications i.e. general or applied A levels, AS examinations or other level 3 qualifications.

⁹ The year following Key Stage 5.

Source:

National Pupil Database.

Foster Care

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps his Department takes to identify unutilised foster carers. [192802]

Mr Timpson: The Department does not collect information of unutilised foster carers.

However, Ofsted collects annual statistics supplied by local authority fostering services and independent fostering services, which include occupancy rates of foster places. Details can be found at:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/fostering-quality-assurance-and-data-forms-2012-13-first-statistical-release>

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps his Department takes to assist local authorities which possess insufficient foster carers. [192803]

Mr Timpson: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave him on 10 December 2013, *Official Report*, column 213W; 6 January 2014, *Official Report* column 94W; and 11 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 542W, which set out a range of activities the Government is funding to support the recruitment and retention of foster carers by local authorities.

Free School Meals

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to help schools that are unable to deliver free infant school meals in September 2014 because of a lack of capital funding. [192335]

Mr Laws: The Department for Education has previously confirmed that it would be allocating £150 million in the 2014-15 financial year to support the implementation of the universal infant free school meals (UIFSM) policy. Local authorities (LAs) are also free to use their budgets for improvement and maintenance to support this objective. We allocated £1.4 billion to schools, LAs and the Academies Capital Maintenance Fund for maintenance and improvement in 2014-15.

On 6 March we launched a package of implementation support measures to help schools to provide meals to eligible pupils. This includes a national UIFSM support service, run by school food experts, which will offer advice and guidance to schools that need assistance in implementing UIFSM. The support will include a telephone helpline, the sharing of good practice, and intensive face-to-face support

The Department also announced on 6 March that it would be providing transitional funding to small schools with eligible pupils, worth a minimum of £3,000, which qualifying schools will be able to use to help them overcome delivery challenges.

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what extra funding his Department plans to provide to smaller schools to help them to provide free school meals for under-sevens; and if he will make a statement. [192735]

Mr Laws: On 6 March the Department for Education announced that we will allocate additional funding totalling £22.5 million in the 2014-15 financial year to help small schools (those with a total roll of up to 150 pupils according to the January 2014 Schools Census) with the transitional costs of implementing the universal infant free school meals policy.

Schools eligible for this funding will receive a minimum of £3,000 to be spent as they choose in support of their implementation of the policy, including for the purpose of improving kitchen or dining equipment.

Further information is available in the departmental advice document on universal infant free school meals, which can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-infant-free-school-meals>

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will allow a transitional period for schools to prepare to provide free school meals for under-sevens in cases where those schools need to set up their own kitchens; and if he will make a statement. [192736]

Mr Laws: The Government announced in September 2013 that state-funded schools will be required to offer free school meals to infant pupils from September 2014, giving schools a full year to put arrangements in place. We know from the universal free school meal pilots, in which schools were required to provide meals to all infant pupils and all key stage 2 pupils, that it is possible for schools to prepare to implement this policy with much less notice.

In order to help schools to implement universal infant free school meals in September 2014 we have put in place a national support service, run by school food experts. The assistance available through that service includes a telephone helpline, the sharing of good practice, and intensive face-to-face support. We are also providing additional funding of £22.5 million to help small schools with the transition to providing meals for all their infant pupils.

Free Schools

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the names are of the free school projects proposed to open in (a) 2013-14 and (b) 2014-15 that have been cancelled or withdrawn; and what the pre-opening expenditure was for each of those projects. [191590]

Mr Timpson: The revenue funding provided to free schools that opened, or projects that planned to open, in 2011 and 2012 is published online:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/revenue-expenditure-for-free-schools

This publication includes pre-opening expenditure levels. When a project is cancelled or withdrawn, the Department for Education seeks to reclaim as much pre-opening expenditure as possible.

The publication will be updated shortly to include free schools that opened, or projects that planned to open, in 2013.

ICT: Curriculum

Adam Afriye: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what progress he has made on encouraging computer science and programming in UK schools. [192351]

Elizabeth Truss: As part of the reforms to the national curriculum, the Department for Education is strengthening the teaching of computing in schools by replacing information and communications technology with computing. The new programmes of study for computing, which will be taught in maintained schools from September 2014, have a much greater emphasis on computer science. For example, pupils at key stage 1 will be taught to create and debug simple programs and key stage 3 pupils will be taught to use two or more programming languages.

We are also working with exam boards and sector experts to review the computer science GCSE and A level so that they reflect and build upon the changes made to the curriculum. The inclusion of computer science in the English Baccalaureate will provide further encouragement for pupils to take up the subject at GCSE level. We are also providing funding for several projects to help teachers acquire the necessary subject knowledge and skills to teach the new computing curriculum.

We are funding the British Computer Society to build a network of 400 'Master Teachers', create online teach-yourself resources and deliver 800 in-school workshops to help primary school teachers improve their subject knowledge. A further £500,000 competitive match-funded scheme was announced on 4 February 2014 to support excellent computing teaching and lever additional investment and engagement from business.

Languages: Curriculum

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to expand the languages curriculum to encompass Urdu. [192434]

Elizabeth Truss: Schools are already able to choose which modern foreign languages they teach, and these can include Urdu. The new programme of study for languages, to be taught in maintained schools from September 2014, makes clear that learning a foreign language should provide an opening to other cultures, foster pupils' curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world.

Mathematics: Teachers

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how the mathematics teachers recently brought by his Department from Shanghai to England to help raise standards were chosen; who those teachers are; and which schools they came from. [192916]

Elizabeth Truss: We launched the maths teacher exchange between England and China in March 2014. Up to 60 teachers from each country will participate in the exchange which will start in the autumn term of the next academic year. Teachers from Shanghai will be sent to English schools designated as centres of excellence for maths.

We are in the process of confirming arrangements, including which teachers and schools will take part. The programme will be managed through our Maths Hubs network which will be in place by September.

Private Education: Offences Against Children

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) has received any allegations of child abuse in independent schools that occurred before the establishment of the NCTL; and what powers the NCTL has to follow up any such allegations. [192695]

Mr Timpson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 3 March 2014, *Official Report*, columns 676-77W, to the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Mr Watson). 16 of the cases referred to relate to incidents that are alleged to have occurred prior to the establishment of National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL).

The Teachers' Disciplinary (England) Regulations 2012 provide NCTL with the power to regulate teachers including those in independent schools. These regulations provide for any referral to be investigated regardless of the date of the alleged incident.

Pupil Exclusions

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the number of school-age pupils who have been illegally excluded from school in each of the last five years. [192512]

Elizabeth Truss: The Department for Education's statutory guidance makes clear that all exclusions from school must be lawful, reasonable and fair. The guidance sets out schools' responsibilities in relation to exclusion and includes examples of unlawful use of exclusion. 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 its use of exclusion.

Pupil Referral Units

Charlotte Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the average cost per pupil of running a pupil referral unit was in the last year for which figures are available. [192568]

Elizabeth Truss: The Department for Education does not routinely collect data on the average per pupil cost of running a pupil referral unit. Pupil referral units cater for a diverse range of needs and so the actual cost per pupil will vary significantly between institutions.

The Department introduced new funding arrangements in April 2013 that take account of this variation. The new system offers stability for pupil referral units by providing £8,000 for each identified alternative provision place. This funding is supplemented by local authorities or schools when they place pupils into a pupil referral unit. The amount of top-up funding provided is determined locally to reflect the actual costs of educating pupils at that pupil referral unit.

Pupils: Disadvantaged

Sarah Champion: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what funding was allocated for disadvantaged two year olds in Rotherham in (a) 2013-14 and (b) 2014-15. [192809]

Elizabeth Truss: Figures for the amount of funding allocated to deliver the early education entitlement for two-year-olds in Rotherham are published online.

Figures for 2013-14 can be found at:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130903192841/http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/delivery/free%20entitlement%20to%20early%20education/b0070114/efortwoyearolds/la-funding-allocations>

Figures for 2014-15 can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/funding-for-learning-for-2-year-olds-letter-from-elizabeth-truss>

Pupils: Per Capita Costs

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the education funding per pupil is in (a) Staffordshire and (b) Brent for 2014-15. [192248]

Mr Laws: The information requested is provided in the table.

	Funding per pupil (Dedicated schools grant) 2014-15 (£)	Early years block per pupil, 2014-15 (£)	Higher needs block 2014-15 total ¹ (£ million)
Staffordshire	4,310	3,515	62.19
Brent	5,066	5,930	55.54

¹ High needs funding is no longer allocated on a per-pupil basis.

In addition, schools will receive money from the pupil premium for pupils recorded on the January 2014 School Census: £1,300 for each primary pupil, and £935 for each secondary pupil, known to have been eligible for free school meals in the last six years; £1,900 per pupil for each pupil recorded as adopted from care under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 or who has left care under a Special Guardianship or Residence Order; and £300 for each pupil whose parents were in the armed services in the last four years or is in receipt of a child pension from the Ministry of Defence.

School Information (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012

Mr Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list all (a) primary and (b) secondary schools which have successfully implemented the School Information (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 to date. [R] [192810]

Mr Laws: The Secretary of State for Education has not assessed implementation levels centrally and therefore lists of schools are not available. However, Ofsted checks school websites routinely before inspections.

If a parent, or other party, believes that a school is not complying with the requirements, they are entitled to raise this with the governing body. If their complaint

is not resolved and they believe that the school has failed to discharge its duty or acted unreasonably, they can raise their complaint with the Secretary of State.

Schools

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the statement of 13 March 2014 by the Minister for Schools, how much of the funding announced will come from (a) his Department's budget and (b) the Treasury. [192041]

Mr Laws: The Government has agreed to provide £350 million in 2015-16 to the least fairly-funded local authorities in England. We are able to achieve this without any local authority receiving a cut to its per-pupil schools budget.

We are able to deliver this boost by using money from within our protected schools budget and because HM Treasury will provide additional funding as required.

The Department for Education intends to find the majority of the £350 million from within its existing protected schools budget as determined at the Spending Round in June 2013. Based on current forecasts, the Treasury will provide around £90 million in addition to the Department's contribution.

The precise level of any additional funding from the Treasury will become clear when we have final data on pupil numbers.

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the statement by the Minister for Schools, of 13 March 2014, *Official Report*, columns 427-42, on school funding, whether any of the funding announced will generate a Barnett consequential. [192042]

Mr Laws: The Government has agreed to provide £350 million in 2015-16 to the least fairly-funded local authorities in England. We are able to achieve this without any local authority receiving a cut to its per-pupil schools budget.

The Department for Education intends to find the majority of the £350 million from within its existing protected schools budget as determined at the Spending Round in June 2013, with additional money from the Treasury as required. Any funding provided by the Treasury will be agreed by the end of 2014 and will attract Barnett consequentials in the normal way.

Justin Tomlinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what his policy is on opening up school facilities to the local community for use outside of the school day. [192551]

Elizabeth Truss: The out-of-hours term time and holiday child care that schools provide are vital to working parents. Many parents still find that the high cost and inflexibility of child care is a barrier to working, or increasing their working hours. The Government wants more schools to make their facilities available to the local community. The Department for Education believes that if schools open up their facilities, it can make them a valuable resource and can strengthen links with the wider community that they serve. The Department wants to encourage more schools to offer child care

between 8am to 6pm during term time and during school holidays by removing all unnecessary red tape and increasing freedoms. For example, we are removing the need for schools to have to consult when introducing community facilities and to have regard to guidance from the Secretary of State for Education, my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) or local authorities and we are clarifying the rules on charging for community facilities.

Schools: Collective Worship

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the number of schools in (a) England and (b) Gloucestershire which carry out collective acts of Christian worship each day; what proportion those schools form of the total number of schools which are required to do so; and if he will make a statement. [192737]

Elizabeth Truss: All publicly funded maintained schools in England remain legally required to provide a daily act of worship for all registered pupils up to age 18 and the Government has no plans to change this. It does not, however, collect data on school provision in this area.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Developing Countries: Education

Mr Mark Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much funding her Department has contributed to the Global Partnership for Education Fund in each of the last five years. [192720]

Lynne Featherstone: The Department for International Development has contributed the following amounts to the Global Partnership for Education in the past five years:

	<i>£ million</i>
In financial year (FY) beginning 2009	0
In FY beginning 2010	88
In FY beginning 2011	120
In FY beginning 2012	40
In FY beginning 2013	60

These figures are rounded to the nearest million pounds.

Nepal

Alison McGovern: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what programmes her Department supports to support job creation in Nepal; and what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of those programmes. [192739]

Mr Duncan: DFID Nepal's operational plan aims to create 230,000 jobs. Job creation is an important part of DFID's economic development work in Nepal, with five programmes delivering important results for poor

people. The Employment Fund Programme (£14 million) has trained 48,000 new entrants to the job market, of which half are women and girls, since 2011. The Nepal Market Development Programme (£14.5 million) has increased the incomes of 48,000 small farmers since 2011. The Rural Access Programme, Phase 3 (£39.9 million) has created 80,400 short-term jobs. The Multi-Stakeholder Forestry Programme (£20 million) has contributed to the creation of 14,600 jobs since 2011. The Access to Finance Programme (£29.7 million) has helped provide new loans to 2,100 poor households in its first year and, on completion in 2018, will have generated 88,000 jobs.

Nurseries

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of the number of workplace nurseries available to staff in (a) her Department and (b) her Department's non-departmental public body in (i) 2010, (ii) 2013-14 and (iii) 2014-15. [192448]

Mr Duncan: Workplace nurseries are not available to staff working for DFID or the Department's non-departmental public bodies.

Overseas Aid

Jack Lopresti: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will publish a detailed list of end-point recipients of aid allocated by her Department in each of the last three years. [192731]

Justine Greening: Official UK spend on international development by country, type and year up to 2012 is published in DFID's National Statistics publication, "Statistics on International Development" 2013, which is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-development/about/statistics>

Information in relation to 2013 will be published in autumn 2014.

Palestinian Authority

Mr Hollobone: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department contributed to the (a) Palestinian Authority and (b) Palestinian Authority general budget in each of the last three years; and how such contributions are distributed. [192811]

Mr Duncan: The UK's financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority over the last three years was:

	<i>£ million</i>
2011-12	30
2012-13	34.1
2013-14	41.5

Our financial assistance is provided through a World Bank Trust Fund.

Palestinians

Jack Lopresti: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department allocated in aid to the Palestinian Territories in each of the last five years. [R] [192732]

Mr Duncan: The amount of aid allocated to the Palestinian Territories in each of the last five years was:

	<i>£ million</i>
2012	42.8
2011	75.5
2010	63.2
2009	60.7
2008	56.7

UN Commission On the Status of Women

Martin Horwood: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will press for the inclusion of a strong gender goal in discussions on the post-2015 development agenda at the Commission on the Status of Women. [192491]

Lynne Featherstone: The UK has been clear in its call for a standalone goal on gender equality and girls and women's empowerment as well as ensuring that these issues are addressed throughout the goals and targets in the framework to be agreed by members of the United Nations. The UK's statement at the Commission on the Status of Women highlighted the need for a standalone goal on gender equality, and the empowerment of girls and women in the post-2015 framework.

We are working with others across the international community, including civil society, to ensure that this is achieved.

JUSTICE

Barristers

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many incidents of barristers terminating their contractual involvement in cases there have been since the introduction of changes to very high cost case fees in December 2013. [192214]

Mr Vara: Very high cost cases represent a tiny number of criminal trials—less than 1% of the total Crown court cases in the last year were classified as VHCCs. On average 10,000 trials are listed to be heard in the Crown court each quarter. Despite their tiny number in comparison to wider Crown court trials, VHCCs are disproportionately expensive.

41 barristers terminated very high cost case contracts following the change in rates announced in November 2013. This relates to seven cases.

Coroners

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what guidance he has issued to coroners in England and Wales on the storage and retention of files over 30 years old. [192068]

Simon Hughes: Regulation 27 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2013/1629/regulation/27/made>

states that a document related to a coroner investigation must be retained by, or on behalf of, the coroner for at least 15 years from the date on which the investigation is completed.

The regulation allows a court or the Chief Coroner to direct a coroner to keep a document for a different length of time. I understand that the Chief Coroner intends to issue joint guidance with the Keeper of Public Records to coroners on retention of documents in due course (see paragraphs 181-182 of the Chief Coroner's Guide to the Coroners and Justice Act 2009:

<http://www.judiciary.gov.uk/Resources/JCO/Documents/coroners/guidance/chief-coroners-guide-to-act-sept2013.pdf>

Courts

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) which towns in England and Wales have more than one court housed in separate buildings; and which type of court in each case; [192344]

(2) which towns in England and Wales have only a (a) magistrates court, (b) crown court and (c) county court; [192346]

(3) which towns in England and Wales have more than one court in the same building. [192528]

Mr Vara: Details of the Government Central Estate, such as the property name, location and type of court are recorded on the Central Government property database e-PIMS. These records are available from the following link:

www.data.gov.uk/dataset/epims

Courts: Television

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much has been spent on televising courts to date. [190213]

Mr Vara: Filming and broadcasting from the Court of Appeal began for the first time on the 31 October 2013. The media organisations that are permitted to film and record in the Court of Appeal have met the costs for the televising of courts to, date. These media organisations will continue to meet these costs for the duration of three years from the date that broadcasting commenced, as outlined in their agreement with the Lord Chancellor.

The Supreme Court has televised its own proceedings since October 2009 and has spent a total of £821,000 to the end of January 2014, including running costs, equipment costs, and archiving costs, which are met from the Supreme Court's own budget settlement.

Crime: Yorkshire and the Humber

Andrew Percy: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he has made of trends in the level of crime in Yorkshire and the Humber in each of the last five years. [192964]

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 Peter Fullerton, dated March 2014:

On behalf of the Director General for the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Secretary of State for the Home Department for the total number of crimes recorded by the police in Yorkshire and Humber region, in each of the past five years.

Police recorded crime figures are provided for the last five financial years (April to March) for the Yorkshire and Humber region.

	<i>Police recorded crime</i>				
	<i>Number of offences</i>				
<i>England and Wales</i>	<i>2008/09</i>	<i>2009/10</i>	<i>2010/11</i>	<i>2011/12</i>	<i>2012/13</i>
Yorkshire and the Humber Region	485,738	433,282	410,754	395,670	357,691

Note: Data on police recorded crime are designated as Official Statistics following the UK Statistics Authority's decision to withdraw the National Statistics badge from the police recorded crime data series. The full assessment report can be found on the UK Statistics Authority website.

These data have been published by the ONS and have been extracted from the data tables within the file entitled 'Recorded crime data at police force area level (including pivot table) from 2002/03'. This file is available here:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-324159>

Consistent with published ONS crime trends data, the table above show figures for financial year periods, with the last data point covering the year ending March 2013. ONS have published data covering a more recent time period, with most recent data available is for the year to September 2013, where there were 356,284 crimes recorded by the police in the Yorkshire and Humber Region. This figure has an overlap of six months (October 2012 to March 2013) with the 2012/13 financial year.

Police recorded crime data covering the year to September can be found in the 'Police Force Area Data Tables-Crime in England and Wales, Year Ending September 2013' file, available here:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-326518>

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Paul Blomfield: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the average length of time taken is to determine an appeal of an initial award made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority. [188602]

Mr Vara: The First-tier Tribunal—Criminal Injuries Compensation (CIC), administered by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS), hears appeals against decisions made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority on claims for compensation for criminal injuries.

In the financial year 2012-13, the average length of time between an appeal being lodged with the tribunal to determination was 59.1 weeks¹. CIC appeals frequently involve requests for further evidence, including medical evidence, and a number of cases are stayed while a lead case is determined. These issues, together with the age of the cases presented to the tribunal, have an inevitable effect on the average time taken. This Government is

prioritising those cases that have been waiting the longest in order to ensure that they are resolved as quickly as possible.

¹ This is Management Information only and not subject to the same level of checks as Official Statistics.

Custodial Treatment

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what proportion of offenders who received a custodial sentence have previously served (a) no, (b) between one and four, (c) between five and nine and (d) more than 10 community sentences in the most recent year for which figures are available. [179869]

Jeremy Wright: The Government is committed to transforming the way that offenders are rehabilitated in the community, so that more offenders engage with court orders and post-release supervision and fewer reoffend. By drawing on the best of the public, voluntary and private sectors the Government wishes to see new, innovative approaches to tackling our current stubbornly high reoffending rates. From 11 December provisions in the Crime and Courts Act 2013 will require community orders to include a punitive element.

In order to impose a custodial sentence the court must be satisfied that the offence(s) is/are so serious that neither a fine alone nor a community sentence can be justified, and in considering seriousness the court must treat recent and relevant convictions as an aggravating factor.

The number of offenders who received a custodial sentence in 2012 and who had previously not been sentenced to a community order, or had received between one and four; between five and nine, or more than 10 community orders, is shown in the following table. Of those offenders sentenced to immediate custody in 2012, 72% had at least one previous custodial sentence.

<i>Number of offenders sentenced to custody in 2012 by the number of previous community sentences received</i>	
<i>Number of previous community sentences</i>	<i>Number</i>
No previous community sentences	24,971
1-4 previous community sentences	42,385
5-9 previous community sentences	26,699
10 or more previous community sentences	10,320

¹ Figures are based on counting the number of occasions on which offenders have previously received a community sentence for any offences recorded on the Police National Computer, including some offences committed outside of England and Wales. Where there were multiple offences on the same occasion, only the primary offence as recorded on the Police National Computer would be counted.

Source:

Police National Computer, Ministry of Justice.

Employment and Support Allowance: Appeals

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps he (a) has taken and (b) plans to take to ensure that claimants required to present their appeals against the refusal of employment and support allowance on a Saturday have advocate support. [189746]

Mr Vara: The First-tier Tribunal (Social Security and Child Support), administered by HM Courts and Tribunals Service, hears appeals against Department for Work

and Pensions' decisions on a range of benefits, including employment and support allowance. The tribunal is designed to hear appeals from individuals without the need, for support from advocates.

The panel that hears the appeal, which will comprise experts such as judges, doctors, translators, and mental health experts, will guide the appellant through the appeal process. An appeal is inquisitorial rather than adversarial in nature. Appellants may engage advocates to help in preparing for or attending an appeal, but this is a matter entirely for the individual.

Appellants are asked before their case is listed if there are any days of the week, from Monday to Saturday, when they would be unable to attend a hearing. If Saturday is not convenient they can say so. Hearings which are held on a Saturday proceed exactly as they would on a weekday.

If an appellant has engaged an advocate but the advocate is not available to attend the scheduled hearing the matter will be put to a judge as to whether the hearing should be re-listed.

Empty Property

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what estimate he has made of the empty property business rates for the vacant properties recorded on the e-PIMS database owned by (a) his Department and (b) any Executive agencies or non-departmental public bodies of his Department in the current financial year. [191812]

Simon Hughes: Information on empty property business rates paid on vacant properties owned by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) or any Executive agencies or non-departmental public bodies of the MOJ is not held centrally.

Empty properties are eligible for a temporary exemption from business rates for a period of six months for industrial properties and three months for other properties. Once this period has expired, empty business properties are liable for full business rates. There are permanent exemptions for empty properties with a rateable value of less than £2,600, listed buildings, charities and community and amateur sports clubs.

The Government Property Unit has been supporting departments to rationalise the Government's estate by taking a cross Government view of property. Since 2010, over £1.25 billion has been raised by selling surplus freehold properties. Through leaving property across the central civil estate, we have also delivered cumulative, gross run rate savings of over £454 million per year. Where surplus property is awaiting disposal or lease end, the Government looks to explore all disposal options, including commercially sub-letting all or part of the space. Surplus property is listed on gov.uk

Where surplus property is awaiting disposal or lease end but cannot yet be sold or sub-let commercially, the Space for Growth scheme, run by the Government Property Unit, invites small and medium-sized businesses, charities and social enterprises to utilise this space for free, boosting economic growth. Over 1,500 workstation spaces are now available in 57 different locations around England.

Essex Probation

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what complaints against Essex Probation were upheld in each month since November 2013; what (a) response was made and (b) steps were taken by Essex Probation in each such case; and if he will make a statement. [192559]

Jeremy Wright: Since November 2013, one complaint against Essex Probation Trust has been upheld and two have been partially upheld. It would not be appropriate to disclose detailed information about responses to complaints (other than to the complainants), as they contain personal information.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice when he plans to announce the membership of the board to succeed Essex Probation Trust; and if he will make a statement. [192560]

Jeremy Wright: From 1 June 2014, responsibility for probation provision in Essex will become the responsibility of the National Probation Service and the Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) for Essex. The National Probation Service will form part of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and will be accountable to the Secretary of State, via the chief executive of NOMS. The appointment of the chief executive of the CRC was announced on 2 December 2013. We are in the process of selecting the other CRC board members and these appointments will be announced in due course.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much Essex Probation (a) budgeted for and (b) spent on security in (i) 2013 and (ii) 2014 to date. [192561]

Jeremy Wright: The information requested is not collected centrally and could not be obtained within the timescale. I will write to the hon. Member in due course.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps he plans to take to increase the cost-effectiveness of Essex Probation in the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [192563]

Jeremy Wright: As in all areas of the country, our Transforming Rehabilitation proposals will tackle high rates of reoffending by opening up the market to a wide range of providers, encouraging innovation in the way that we rehabilitate offenders, extending rehabilitation to offenders sentenced to less than 12 months in prison, and introducing "through-the-gate" support to offenders before release. By introducing competition within probation services, and paying providers for their success in reducing reoffending, we will drive efficiency, getting better value for money for the taxpayer.

We are on course to deliver these changes. The contract with Essex Probation Trust will end on 31 May, after which offender rehabilitation services will be delivered by the new national probation service and community rehabilitation companies.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many times the Chief Executive of Essex Probation has met hon. Members since November 2013; when and for what purpose each such meeting took place; where each such meeting took place; what the duration of each such meeting was; and if he will make a statement. [192581]

Jeremy Wright: On 20 December 2013, the chief executive met my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Mr Carswell) at Essex Probation head office, to discuss offender accommodation.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what progress Essex Probation Trust has made since November 2013 on the integrated Offender Management project; how much has been spent by Essex Probation Trust on that project to date; and if he will make a statement. [192582]

Jeremy Wright: The information requested is not collected centrally and could not be obtained within the time scale. I will write to my hon. Friend in due course.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will place in the Library a record of Essex Probation's government procurement card transactions indicating the (a) date, (b) merchant and (c) amount of each such transaction since November 2013; and if he will make a statement. [192583]

Jeremy Wright: When Essex Probation Trust has provided us with the requested information, I will arrange for it to be placed in the Library.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many members of the public have attended each meeting of the Essex Probation Trust in each month since November 2013; and if he will make a statement. [192584]

Jeremy Wright: No members of the public have attended Essex Probation Board meetings since November 2013.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what progress his Department has made in the winding up of Essex Probation Trust; how much he plans to pay members of the Essex Probation Board in redundancy payments; and if he will make a statement. [192585]

Jeremy Wright: A notice of termination in relation to the Secretary of State's contract with Essex Probation Trust was issued on 17 January 2014. It will come into effect on 31 May 2014. The trust, in consultation with the National Offender Management Service, is engaged in completing scoping of the outstanding tasks that are needed before the trust can be dissolved. This work will continue for a short period after contract termination, principally to finalise the annual accounts and associated financial statements.

Probation Trust appointments are regulated by the Code of Practice of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. They do not attract redundancy payments.

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much his Department plans to pay each member of Essex Probation Trust Board in each of the next six months; and if he will make a statement. [192621]

Jeremy Wright: The chair of Essex Probation Trust receives annual remuneration of £17,600. He will be paid at this rate during the continued operation of the trust board. The other trust members, other than the chief executive, who is an employee of the trust, are paid an hourly allowance of £15.40.

Legal Aid Scheme

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what arrangements he has put in place to mitigate the effects of planned reductions to legal aid under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 on (a) unaccompanied migrant children who have made Article 8 right to private life and family claims, (b) unaccompanied migrant children who have mixed claims and (c) trafficked children who are seeking leave to remain from his Department and have Article 8 claims; and if he will make a statement. [192051]

Mr Vara: Legal aid funding remains available for asylum cases, which account for the vast majority of unaccompanied children. Legal aid also remains available for immigration advice for an application to enter or remain in the UK for victims of trafficking, including children.

Unaccompanied children would have a social worker assigned to them and receive the full range of support and services as all looked after children. For those over 18, many will be treated as care leavers and will continue to be entitled to a range of support from local authorities.

The immigration process is designed to be straightforward and easy to navigate. Therefore people in immigration cases should generally be able to deal with their own application and not need a lawyer. In the relatively few cases that are more complex, pro-bono advice or access to a law centre is an option for further support.

The Government had to take difficult decisions to respond to the unprecedented economic challenge we are facing, and the Ministry of Justice is making significant reductions to its budget as part of this. Legal aid could not be exempt from these tough choices—but we have ensured it remains available in cases that need it most.

Magistrates: Training

Andrew Bridgen: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much his Department spent on TV licensing training for magistrates in (a) 2008, (b) 2009, (c) 2010, (d) 2011 and (e) 2012. [192326]

Mr Vara: This information is not collated centrally. It could be provided only at disproportionate cost by contacting each of the 26 local regions of Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service to isolate the information from the individual training records for 23,244 magistrates (1 April 2013).

The Judicial college provides comprehensive training materials which are always available to all members of the judiciary.

Maternity Leave

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what proportion of civil servants in his Department who were on maternity leave in each of the last five years returned to work. [189067]

Mr Vara: The Department does not hold a full set of administrative data regarding expected return to work dates from maternity leave and live administrative data for MOJ (excluding NOMS) sets only go back to May 2011.

As a consequence estimates, based on the minimum (six months) and maximum (12 months) time permitted for a period of maternity leave have been made. These estimates show that between 96% and 97% of staff returned to work following a period of maternity leave which was due to end between 1 May 2011 and 31 December 2013.

These percentages include staff who have left the MOJ but transferred to another government department but exclude staff on fixed term contracts whose contracts ended during their period of maternity leave.

Non-molestation Orders

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many times a non-molestation order was breached on average before the perpetrator was jailed in the most recent period for which figures are available. [192243]

Jeremy Wright: There are two ways in which a breach of a non-molestation order can be dealt with:

(a) as a criminal offence, which can attract a custodial sentence of up to five years; and

(b) by the applicant applying for a committal hearing for civil contempt and which can attract a custodial sentence of up to two years.

Offenders receiving their first immediate custodial sentence for the criminal offence of breaching a non-molestation order in the 12 months ending September 2013 had received, on average, less than 1 (0.5) previous convictions or cautions for the same offence.

It is important to note that these figures are based only on those offences recorded on the Police National Computer (PNC) by an English or Welsh police force, including the British Transport Police. This database holds details of all convictions or cautions for breaching a non-molestation order since their introduction as a criminal offence in July 2007.

Information on committal hearings for civil contempt is not held centrally by MOJ. The information may be recorded in the physical case files held at the courts, but locating and extracting it would involve looking at thousands of individual files and would incur disproportionate cost.

Nurseries

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what estimate he has made of the number of workplace nurseries available to staff in (a) his Department and (b) his Department's executive agencies or non-departmental public bodies in (i) 2010, (ii) 2013-14 and (iii) 2014-15. [192449]

Mr Vara: The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) including its executive agencies HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS), the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG) and the Legal Aid Agency and National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) excluding probation trusts, do not provide child care facilities for staff.

MOJ recognises that employees need flexible pre-school and out-of-school child care of a type and in a location most convenient to them. MOJ operates a salary sacrifice scheme for child care vouchers which enables employees to choose their own child care provider (subject to meeting eligibility requirements) and have their child care costs reduced by taking part of their salary in the form of child care vouchers (called salary sacrifice) up to prescribed limits. Child care vouchers are free from tax and national insurance contributions (NICs) so employees who use the scheme will make a saving on their child care costs. In addition MOJ at present offers a limited number of subsidised holiday play scheme places in Westminster Holiday Play scheme.

In order to obtain the information for Probation trusts an individual commission would need to be sent to each of the 35 trusts which would incur disproportionate costs.

Oakwood Prison

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) what the staff to prisoner ratio at HM Prison Oakwood is; [182795]

(2) what the staff to prisoner ratio at each prison in England and Wales is. [182797]

Jeremy Wright: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan) on 4 March 2014, *Official Report*, column 805W.

Figures represent the ratio of prisoners to prison officers and prison officer specialists in public sector prisons, and the ratio of prisoners to prison custody officers in private prisons. Contractual variations with private providers has resulted in differences relating to whether functions are civilianised, contracted out, or performed by prison custody officers, resulting in limitations in comparability between public sector and private prisons. A review is under way into the most appropriate methodology for calculating prisoner staff ratios.

Prison Service

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many unfilled prison officer vacancies there have been, by prison, in each month since May 2010. [181118]

Jeremy Wright: The following table provides an estimate of the average monthly officer vacancy numbers in public sector prisons. The total number of officers is also provided to put the figures into context.

	Average of monthly vacancy figures	Vacancies as a percentage of average monthly full-time equivalent staff of non-specialist prison officers
2010-11	850	4.7
2011-12	600	3.4
2012-13	520	3.1

	Average of monthly vacancy figures	Vacancies as a percentage of average monthly full-time equivalent staff of non-specialist prison officers
2013 ¹	360	2.3

¹ April to September.

The data in the table represents approximate figures (rounded to the nearest 10) which are our best estimate on the basis of the information provided by public sector prisons.

We do not hold data centrally for private prisons.

Although vacancy numbers are reported to the centre, workforce planning is managed locally by prisons. There are a number of complexities around the reporting of vacancies, in particular variations to staffing levels arising from changes in prison function or role, changes to prison capacity and changes resulting from the prison benchmarking and efficiency programme.

In addition headquarters guidance on how prisons should report vacancies to the centre was amended in 2010 and also 2011. As a result there has been inconsistency in reporting and the level of uncertainty in the data held by the centre means it is not possible to provide an accurate prison by prison breakdown. For this reason we have provided our best estimate for total figures as set out above.

A new workforce reporting tool is being implemented from April 2014 which will improve the consistency of reporting at prison level and enable accurate data to be held centrally.

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many prison officers were employed in each prison in England and Wales in 2013. [187963]

Jeremy Wright: Staffing levels are being reviewed prison by prison as part of our prison benchmarking exercise.

Benchmarking optimises the skills of staff by introducing new ways of working and puts all prison officers in prisoner facing roles. The approach 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.

The number of full-time equivalent prison officers employed in each establishment of the public sector Prison Service of England and Wales can be found in table 10 of the publication available on the government website by following this link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/261632/noms-workforce-tables-30092013.xls

The headcount of prison custody officers in privately run prisons in England and Wales, as at 30 September 2013, is shown in the following table:

Establishment	Headcount of prison officers
Altcourse	296
Ashfield	155
Birmingham	342
Bronzefield	141
Doncaster	184

Headcount of prison custody officers in private sector prisons in England and Wales, as at 30 September 2013

Establishment	Headcount of prison officers
Dovegate	234
Forest Bank	204
Lowdham Grange	216
Oakwood	257
Parc	323
Peterborough	267
Rye Hill	140
Thameside	266

Prisoners: Domestic Violence

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) what data his Department collects on the number of men in prison who have been victims of domestic violence; [191431]

(2) what data his Department collects on the number of women in prison who have been perpetrators of domestic violence; [191432]

(3) pursuant to the answer of 5 March 2014, *Official Report*, column 866W, on prisoners: females, in how many of those cases were the women victims of (a) partner domestic violence where the perpetrator was (i) male and (ii) female and (b) family domestic violence where the perpetrator was (i) male and (ii) female. [191528]

Jeremy Wright: An estimate can be made using the Offender Assessment System (OASys), which asks whether there is "Evidence of domestic violence/partner abuse (including threats and psychological abuse)" and whether this is as victim or perpetrator.

Of the 2,192 women under sentence in custody at 31 March 2013 who had an OASys assessment of sufficient quality, 382 (17.4%) were recorded as having been perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Of the 51,362 men under sentence in custody at 31 March 2013 who had an OASys assessment of sufficient quality, 3,750 (7.3%) were recorded as having been victims of domestic abuse.

However, there are no further items in OASys identifying the gender of the perpetrator where the prisoner has reported being a victim, or to distinguish whether domestic abuse was partner or familial abuse. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

NOMS provides a range of programmes and interventions which are suitable for prisoners who have experienced domestic and other forms of abuse, as well as interventions aimed at those who have been perpetrators. These are available in both the male and female estate.

Prisoners: Repatriation

Mr Hollobone: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps his Department is taking to negotiate compulsory prisoner transfer agreements with (a) Jamaica and (b) Pakistan. [191919]

Jeremy Wright: We already have a voluntary arrangement with Pakistan. A compulsory PTA is a longer term objective.

Compulsory PTAs can be difficult to negotiate, but we remain determined to secure them wherever possible. In January this year we signed a compulsory PTA with Nigeria and last year we signed a PTA with Albania. We expect to see prisoner transfers to both these countries before the end of this year.

The Prisoner Transfer process is just one mechanism for removing Foreign National Offenders (FNOs). The number of FNOs deported under the Early Removal Scheme (ERS) has increased under this Government. In 2013, we removed nearly 2,000 FNOs under ERS and under the Tariff Expired Removal Scheme (TERS), which we introduced in May 2012, we have removed 234 FNOs to date.

Jamaica has stated that a PTA is incompatible with their constitution. We are currently providing them with advice on prison reform with a view to returning to discussions on this matter.

Prisoners: Sexual Offences

Jenny Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many sex offenders were held in each prison in England and Wales between 2010 and 2013.
[189463]

Jeremy Wright: Since 2010, those who break the law are now more likely to go to prison, and they go to prison for longer. 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. A range of interventions is delivered or enabled by the National Offender Management Service to rehabilitate, and reduce the risk posed by, sex offenders.

NOMS has created a sex offender management board to look at which prisons sex offenders should be held in, how sex offender treatment programmes can be best targeted and regimes for sex offenders who are not engaging in programmes.

The following table gives the number of sentenced and recalled sex offenders held in each prison in England and Wales as at 30 June for each year from 2010 to 2013.

Table 1: Number of sentenced and recalled sex offenders held in each prison in England and Wales at 30 June for year shown

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Altcourse	80	62	69	67
Askham Grange	0	1	0	0
Ashfield	13	10	8	0
Aylesbury	97	123	125	104
Belmarsh	31	43	45	32
Buckley Hall	6	7	5	4
Blundeston	28	11	11	16
Bedford	7	13	22	15
Bristol	25	36	25	40
Birmingham	111	97	132	119
Bullingdon	149	157	149	149
Bure	430	445	435	439
Brinsford	19	15	18	24
Bullwood Hall	0	0	1	0
Brixton	16	31	91	191
Bronzefield	8	11	8	7

Table 1: Number of sentenced and recalled sex offenders held in each prison in England and Wales at 30 June for year shown

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Chelmsford	19	21	29	29
Cardiff	24	13	11	5
Cookham Wood	1	2	4	5
Coldingley	6	10	14	6
Channings Wood	132	136	225	222
Canterbury	3	6	2	0
Dartmoor	121	121	175	233
Dovegate	135	139	148	115
Drake Hall	6	2	5	3
Durham	40	50	53	56
Doncaster	80	65	75	75
Dorchester	11	11	9	13
Deerbolt	19	20	19	19
Downview	4	4	10	9
Erlestoke	11	9	13	10
Standford Hill (Sheppey cluster)	2	0	0	0
East Sutton Park	0	0	1	2
Everthorpe	12	8	12	20
Eastwood Park	7	12	6	3
Exeter	46	36	35	40
Elmley (Sheppey cluster)	63	58	70	105
Forest Bank	36	38	56	67
Ford	3	1	0	2
Foston Hall	7	9	9	9
Frankland	235	244	246	209
Feltham	6	14	4	10
Full Sutton	195	197	194	194
Featherstone	1	1	1	3
Garth	8	4	2	2
Gloucester	25	24	18	0
Guys Marsh	12	9	6	5
Grendon/Spring Hill	43	37	40	38
Glen Parva	26	27	37	19
Gartree	2	2	0	0
Hollesley Bay	8	1	0	0
Huntercombe	1	4	6	43
Moorland / Hatfield	16	15	301	313
Hewell ¹	44	51	69	66
Holme House	77	95	105	133
Hindley	17	6	10	4
Hull	256	248	245	232
High Down	23	42	73	129
Highpoint (North and South)	14	28	34	34
Haverigg	11	8	6	10
Holloway	7	5	6	7
Isis ²	0	10	9	12
Isle of Wight ³	736	753	804	898
Kirkham	0	1	0	2
Kennet	7	0	1	0
Lancaster	6	0	0	0
Leicester	15	11	21	35
Leeds	76	88	92	111
Lancaster Farms	19	11	21	15
Lowdham Grange	2	4	3	4
Lindholme	26	22	25	17
Lincoln	80	79	99	103
Long Lartin	135	145	129	130
Low Newton	9	7	10	7

Table 1: Number of sentenced and recalled sex offenders held in each prison in England and Wales at 30 June for year shown

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Liverpool	74	98	93	66
Littlehey	504	530	544	533
Lewes	22	31	37	44
Leyhill	47	49	72	102
Morton Hall IRC ⁴	8	0	0	0
Manchester	121	123	118	123
Maidstone	368	410	439	263
Mount	0	2	1	0
Edmunds Hill	11	0	0	0
New Hall	9	11	9	12
Nottingham	53	87	76	77
Northallerton	12	5	6	3
North Sea Camp	35	49	89	106
Northumberland ⁵	406	422	376	379
Norwich	26	41	74	74
Onley	17	19	8	13
Oakwood ⁶	0	0	5	291
Peterborough ⁷	23	51	60	34
Portland	11	15	17	14
Preston	37	34	44	50
Parc	107	269	306	236
Kingston	13	10	8	0
Pentonville	52	36	69	70
Rochester	9	4	8	1
Reading	7	14	7	7
Rye Hill	149	147	142	140
Ranby	42	52	45	25
Risley	192	177	177	191
Send	9	9	5	6
Stafford	256	259	266	263
Stoke Heath	24	6	4	6
Stocken	18	19	27	24
Swaleside (Sheppey cluster)	3	8	1	1
Shepton Mallet	60	62	72	0
Swinfen Hall	157	177	189	180
Styal	7	5	6	7
Sudbury	5	0	3	0
Swansea	3	6	4	3
Shrewsbury	172	213	174	0
Thorn Cross	9	3	2	0
Thameside	0	0	15	27
Usk/Prescoed	195	206	207	240
Verne	3	4	3	4
Wellingborough	18	13	9	0
Winchester	48	62	66	49
Wakefield	421	437	442	445
Wealstun	5	7	9	10
Woodhill	43	51	62	43
Warren Hill	12	9	13	4
Wayland	21	22	16	19
Wymott	530	509	489	501
Werrington	2	2	2	2
Wolds	3	0	2	5
Whitemoor	17	19	15	16
Wormwood Scrubs	23	16	14	16
Whatton	677	728	710	714
Wandsworth	242	263	49	46

Table 1: Number of sentenced and recalled sex offenders held in each prison in England and Wales at 30 June for year shown

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Wetherby	20	23	25	15
Total	9,304	9,850	10,473	10,540

¹ HMP Hewell was created by an amalgamation of the three former prisons, Blakenhurst, Brockhill and Hewell Grange on 25 June 2008; as of 31 December 2011, the Brockhill site closed.

² HMP & YOI Isis, which opened on 28 July 2010, is sited within the perimeter wall of HMP Belmarsh.

³ HMP Isle of Wight was created by an amalgamation of the three former prisons, Albany, Camp Hill and Parkhurst on 1 April 2009.

⁴ HMP Morton Hall closed (having previously been a female prison) and then re-opened as an Immigration Removal Centre, holding immigration detainees on behalf of UKBA. On 16 May, Morton Hall began operating as an Immigration Removal Centre.

⁵ HMP Northumberland is the new name for Acklington and Castington

⁶ HMP Oakwood opened in April 2012, and came into full operation by spring 2013

⁷ Peterborough is a dual purpose prison for men and women.

Source:

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

Prisons: Vandalism

Chris Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how much was recovered from (a) convicted offenders and (b) prisoners on remand following damage caused by them to prison service property in the last full financial year for which figures are available; [192318]

(2) what the cost was of damage to prison service property caused by (a) convicted offenders and (b) prisoners on remand in the last full financial year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [192319]

Jeremy Wright: The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) introduced the system of recovering monies from prisoners for damage to prison property from 1 November 2013 following the implementation of Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 31/2013. Following a finding of guilt on adjudication, a requirement to pay compensation can be made for up to 100% of the damage caused, including labour costs. However the maximum must not exceed £2,000 and must never exceed the value of the damage caused.

Figures for the full financial year 2013-14 are therefore not yet available.

Monies recovered from prisoners as a result of damage to prisons or prison property are recorded centrally by NOMS in summary format and do not distinguish between convicted or remand prisoners.

To obtain this information would require an examination of local records held at each establishment which could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Prisons: Visits

Mr Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many closed visits there were in English jails in (a) 2012 and (b) 2013. [192194]

Jeremy Wright: "Closed visits" is a term applied to visits where the prisoner and visitor are prevented from having any physical contact. They are an administrative measure imposed for a limited period and on the basis

of reasonable suspicion to prevent the smuggling of contraband through visits. The information about the number of closed visits that occur is not recorded centrally. It could be provided only at disproportionate cost by cross referencing and collating information from records held by individual prison establishments.

Probation

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many vacancies there were for posts in the new (a) National Probation Service and (b) community rehabilitation companies on 1 February 2014; [189938]

(2) how many senior management posts there will be in the new National Probation Service and the community rehabilitation companies. [189939]

Jeremy Wright: The National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) will commence operation on 1 June 2014, and the process of moving staff into the new structure is nearing completion. According to information collected directly from Probation Trusts, less than 5% of posts across Trusts were vacant on 1 February 2014. These vacancies are managed as part of the business as usual process. We will continue to monitor and manage staff movements as transition to the new system progresses.

In terms of senior management posts the NOMS director of probation will be responsible for the NPS in England, with responsibility for the NPS in Wales covered by the NOMS director for Wales. In addition to these posts, there will be 7 NPS deputy directors and each of the 21 new CRCs will have its own chief executive, all of which have been appointed. Below this level, senior management posts have been filled through an expression of interest and assignment process. Under the terms of the National Agreement, all senior managers currently working within Trusts will be assigned to a role in either the NPS or a CRC.

Ian Lavery: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many offender cases will be transferred from one officer to another following the creation of the National Probation Service and community rehabilitation companies; [191964]

(2) whether the circumstances under which an offender should stay with a particular team or probation officer and not be transferred will change as a result of the introduction of the National Probation Service and the 21 community rehabilitation companies; [192014]

(3) whether he expects the rehabilitation activity requirement to reduce unit costs in the courts and the community rehabilitation companies. [192044]

Jeremy Wright: Responsibility for the initial assessment of offenders, and management of those who are assessed as high risk, will rest with the National Probation Service (NPS). Once the NPS has assumed responsibility for an offender's case, they will continue to retain responsibility even if the offender's risk of serious harm decreases during their sentence. If an offender's risk of harm escalates to high, responsibility for the management of the case will transfer from the Community Rehabilitation Company to the NPS. The number of cases transferred will depend on the outcomes of risk assessments on

offenders, and case transfers will happen in a way that ensures public protection, which remains our primary concern.

It is envisaged that reductions in reoffending delivered through the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms will reduce overall costs across the CJS.

Procurement

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what estimate his Department has made of the full costs of the National Compliance and Enforcement Service and the value of its business; and when this estimate was made. [190327]

Mr Vara: The cost of the National Compliance and Enforcement Service for the financial year 2012-13 was £49 million.

Costs are the direct staff, office and court costs relating to the enforcement of financial penalties imposed by the courts. Approved enforcement agents costs which are reimbursed by the offender, and central overhead costs are not included.

The total value of debt estimated to be recoverable as at 31 March 2013, as published in the HM Courts and Tribunals Service Trust Statement 2012-13, was £320 million.

Re-employment

Karl Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many staff of his Department and its agencies have been made redundant and subsequently re-employed by his Department and its agencies on (a) permanent and (b) fixed-term contract basis since May 2010. [192089]

Mr Vara: I refer the hon. member to the answer given on 4 February 2014, *Official Report*, column 227:

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140204/text/140204w0004.htm#140204.htm_snew20

Secure Training Centres

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether the National Offender Management Service review of Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork includes secure colleges in its scope. [190353]

Jeremy Wright: The Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) process is a prisoner-centred, flexible care planning system for prisoners who are identified as being at risk of suicide or self-harm. Its use for young people (under 18) is currently under review.

Secure colleges are not part of this review. However, as the Ministry of Justice develops the approach for secure colleges, we will need to ensure processes are in place to safeguard young people held in them. This will take into account learning from the current youth estate including the applicability of the ACCT process.

Sentencing: Foreign Nationals

Dr McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps he is taking to ensure that the sentencing of foreign criminals in British courts is in accordance with the relevant sentencing guidelines. [191886]

Jeremy Wright: The Government is committed to ensuring that foreign nationals who commit offences in this country are subject to the criminal law and where appropriate are also subject to deportation action.

Sentencing guidelines are produced independently of Government, by the Sentencing Council for England and Wales. The guidelines relate to the sentencing of offenders in England and Wales regardless of their nationality. Judges and magistrates have a statutory duty under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 to follow the sentencing guidelines unless it would not be in the interests of justice to do so. The Attorney-General also has a power to refer to the Court of Appeal certain cases where he considers that the sentence in an individual case is unduly lenient. This referral process also applies to sentences imposed on foreign national offenders.

Social Security Benefits: Appeals

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to charge recipients of welfare benefit who appeal against decisions made by his Department. [189875]

Mr Vara: The Secretary of State has no plans to introduce fees to bring an appeal to the First-tier Tribunal (Social Security and Child Support).

Stalking

Mr Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what proportion of probation staff have received training in sections 2A and 4A of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. [191756]

Jeremy Wright: Sections 2A and 4A of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, which were inserted by virtue of section 111 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, have been included in the curriculum of the Probation Qualification Framework since 2012.

The Home Office has funded the development and delivery of a training package on stalking for frontline professionals which is being delivered by Women's Aid, in collaboration with Paladin, the National Stalking Advocacy Service. This training is currently taking place nationwide. The training material is also available for use by organisations and agencies to deliver sessions themselves.

Employment information, including training details, relating to probation staff is held by the 35 probation trusts. It is not collected centrally and could not be collected without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what treatment is available for persons convicted of stalking (a) in prisons and (b) as a condition of a community order. [191758]

Jeremy Wright: NOMS commissioning strategy focuses investment on higher risk/harm groups of offenders with whom interventions have a proven impact. Stalkers are a comparatively small group within the offending population with a broad range of offending behaviours which may have different underlying motives or risk factors. The needs of offenders convicted of offences

involving stalking behaviour can in some cases be addressed through existing accredited offending behaviour programmes or through one-to-one work.

NOMS Commissioners continually bear in mind the need to examine the needs of particular offender sub groups. If it becomes apparent that there is any discrete and significant subgroup of offenders with specific needs that are not met by existing provision, our commissioning strategy will change.

Television: Licensing

Andrew Bridgen: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many prosecutions were heard in magistrates courts for non-payment of television licences in each year between 2007 and 2012; and how many such cases failed to result in a prosecution. [189718]

Mr Vara: The number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts for offences relating to installing or using a television receiver without the appropriate licence is shown in Table 1, along with the number found guilty and the number not found guilty.

Most TV licensing cases that are heard by magistrates courts are uncontested and the case is therefore often resolved in the defendant's absence. However, as part of our ongoing work to make court processes more efficient, the Ministry of Justice has brought forward proposals in the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill that would permit such high-volume, low-level cases as TV licence evasion, when unopposed, to be heard by a single Justice.

Table 1: Defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts for offences relating to installing or using a television receiver without the appropriate licence^{1,2,3}

	Defendants proceeded against	Found guilty and sentenced	Not found guilty
2007	135,548	120,908	14,640
2008 ⁴	134,544	120,804	13,740
2009	166,913	148,854	18,059
2010	164,450	142,380	22,070
2011	170,645	149,236	21,409
2012	193,049	164,932	28,117

¹ An offence under Section 363 of the Communications Act 2003.

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. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

³ Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

⁴ Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates court for April, July and August 2008.

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people were fined for not holding a television licence in each local authority in North Wales in the last year for which figures are available. [192104]

Mr Vara: The number of defendants sentenced to a fine for TV licence evasion in the North Wales police force area, in England and Wales from 2009 to 2012 (latest data available) can be viewed in the table.

Figures are provided by police force area and local justice area as the Ministry of Justice court proceedings database does not hold details of offences by local authority area.

We want to keep the amount of court time and resource dedicated to dealing with these cases to a minimum. That is why the Government is already bringing forward legislation to ease the burdens on the courts, for example through using single magistrates for high volume, low level cases.

Please note that court proceedings statistics for the year 2013 are planned to be published by the Ministry of Justice in May 2014.

Defendants sentenced to a fine for TV licence evasion¹, by North Wales police force area, England and Wales, 2009-12^{2,3}

Force	Local justice area	Year			
		2009	2010	2011	2012
North Wales	Wrexham	1,189	1,085	936	955
	Maelor LJA				
	Denbighshire LJA	585	484	463	483
	Ynys Mon/Anglesey LJA	167	110	155	55
	Gwynedd LJA	226	164	86	177
	Miscellaneous court	—	3	—	—
Total		2,167	1,846	1,640	1,670

¹ Offence included: Television Licence evasion—Licence required for TV receiver—Communications Act 2003, S.363.

² The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

³ Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice.

Third Parties (Rights against Insurers) Act 2010

Alun Cairns: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what progress he has made on implementing the Third Parties (Rights against Insurers) Act 2010; and when he will take steps to bring this Act into force. [191783]

Mr Vara: I refer to the written ministerial statement made by the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), on 25 April 2013, *Official Report*, column 71WS. The position remains that we intend to introduce legislation to amend the 2010 Act as soon as parliamentary time permits and to commence the 2010 Act as amended as soon as reasonably possible thereafter.

Young Offenders

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many 18, 19 and 20 year olds are currently held in adult prisons. [189991]

Jeremy Wright: As at 31 December 2013 there were 5,915 young adults (18 to 20-year-olds) in the secure estate. The following table shows the number of young adults held other than YOIs designated solely for 18 to 20-year-olds. Most of these will be held in institutions that are designated as both HM prison and HM young offender institution (YOI).

Prisoners aged 18-20 held in the adult estate¹, 31 December 2013, England and Wales

	18	19	20	All
Total	565	881	1,170	2,616

¹ Some prisons are dual designated to hold both adult and young offenders. While adult and young offenders will be housed separately the data does not allow us to determine which part of the prison prisoners are held in. Therefore some young offenders included here will be held in wings specifically designed for young offenders rather than the adult part of the prison.

Data Sources and Quality:

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

Youth Custody

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much local authorities contributed towards the cost of places in the youth secure estate in each of the last four years. [189759]

Jeremy Wright: The Government believes that local areas and frontline practitioners should have greater discretion and ownership in tackling youth offending. Local authorities have since 1 April 2013 had greater financial responsibility for the cost of children detained securely on remand.

Over the last four full financial years (2009-10 to 2012-13), the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales met the cost of detaining under-18s on remand in young offender institutions, while local authorities met one third of the cost of detaining children on remand in secure children's homes and secure training centres.

As invoices in relation to places in secure children's homes were paid by the local authority designated by the court directly to secure children's homes, the local authorities' contribution to the cost of this sector is not held centrally and would be available only at disproportionate cost.

The Youth Justice Board's income from local authorities in respect of children detained on remand in secure training centres over the last four full financial years is set out:

on page 49 of its "Annual Report and Accounts 2009/10"

http://www.google.co.uk/url?q=http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/yjb/2010/YJB-Annual-Report-and-Accounts-2009-10.pdf&sa=U&ei=glgQU5OIDcy3hAffmYD4DA&ved=0CCcQFjAA&usq=AFQjCNEPmBhAGX3GNSEVnRJDRVVJfaD_Eg

on page 52 of its "Annual Report and Accounts 2010/11"

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/yjb/yjb-annual-report-2010-11.pdf?type=Finjan-Download&slot=00000077&id=00000476&location=0A64020C>

on page 64 of its "Annual Report and Accounts 2011/12"

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/corporate-reports/yjb/yjb-annual-report-2011-12.pdf>

on page 64 of its "Annual Report and Accounts 2012/13"

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/corporate-reports/yjb/yjb-annual-report-2013.pdf>

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales meets the cost of detaining under-18s in the youth secure estate who are serving custodial sentences.

Zahid Mubarek

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what progress his Department has made on each of the recommendations in Lord Justice Keith's Report into the death of Zahid Mubarek in YOI Feltham in 2000.

[192345]

Jeremy Wright: The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) fully implemented 71 of the 88 recommendations made in the 2006 report of the Zahid Mubarek inquiry. Two recommendations were rejected at the time of the publication of the report. The remaining 15 recommendations were either partially implemented or became obsolete as a result of other developments. The final version of the action plan, giving a detailed account of the progress made against each of the 88 recommendations, was produced in June 2011 and placed in the House of Lords Library. Activity in response to the individual recommendations is no longer tracked, but the general themes have been absorbed into wider activity across NOMS.

[Continued in Column 111W]

Ministerial Correction

Monday 24 March 2014

JUSTICE

Legal Services (Red Tape Challenge)

The following is an extract from the Written Ministerial Statement presented by the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), on 27 January 2014.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Grayling): ...We will work with the Land Registry to simplify the process of searching for local land charges by making the legislative changes necessary to allow the Land Registry to have sole responsibility for maintaining a local land charges register, and for supplying local search results. This should make searching simpler as there will be one register of local land charges, rather than separate registers with different local authorities as at present. It will also enable the Land Registry to standardise the price of searches, turnaround times and the format of searches and will mark a significant step towards making the Land Registry a “one-stop shop” for property searches by April 2015. The Land Registry will continue to make the necessary changes to move towards “digital by default”, including enabling all

applications to update/change the Land Register to be made electronically, should people wish to do so, by March 2014.

[Official Report, 27 January 2014, Vol. 574, c. 23-24WS.]

Letter of correction from Chris Grayling:

An error has been identified in the Statement given on 27 January 2014.

The correct Statement should have been:

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Grayling): ...**Subject to the outcome of the consultation, ‘Land Registry: Wider Powers and Local Land Charges’ published on 16 January 2014,** we will work with the Land Registry to simplify the process of searching for local land charges by making the legislative changes necessary to allow the Land Registry to have sole responsibility for maintaining a local land charges register, and for supplying local **land charge** search results. This should make searching simpler as there will be one register of local land charges, rather than separate registers with different local authorities as at present. It will also enable the Land Registry to standardise the price of searches, turnaround times and the format of searches and will mark a significant step towards making the Land Registry a “one-stop shop” for property searches by April 2015. The Land Registry will continue to make the necessary changes to move towards “digital by default”, including enabling all applications to update/change the Land Register to be made electronically, should people wish to do so, by March 2014.

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