Mr Jones: I am proud to have assisted those at the Ruthin food bank over the weekend—I spent four hours with them; they are doing essential work—but, frankly, rather than turning this issue into a political football, I would have thought that the hon. Lady would be far better off supporting the work of the Trussell Trust.

Bob Blackman: Being in the position to set tax rates and collect taxes will clearly bring a new-found fiscal responsibility, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the people of Wales should take that as an encouragement to vote in a Government in Wales who will look after their best interests?

Mr Jones: I certainly agree with that, and I also believe that it is essential, once the competence is in place, for the Welsh Government to call an early referendum on tax-varying powers to maximise the benefit we are creating through the measures in the Bill.

Mr Peter Hain (Neath) (Lab): Is it not the case that the Secretary of State at the weekend, when he was the only member of the Cabinet who volunteered, as many Opposition Members have done, at a local food bank. Was that because he now agrees with us that food banks have become a vital bulwark against the impact of his Government’s fiscal policies in Wales?

Mr Jones: I fear that the right hon. Gentleman has overlooked the arrangements that we put in place with the Welsh Government in October 2012, which ensure that if there is any danger of convergence, then the issue will be resolved. I believe that we should all be ambitious for Wales, and we should indeed be looking for a lower rate of income tax in Wales to give Wales the competitive advantage that it needs.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Is it the policy of the coalition parties fully to devolve income tax powers to Scotland, and if so, why does the Wales Bill still include a tax-sharing arrangement
in relation to income tax powers, with the lockstep measure for safe measure? Why are the Tories treating Wales like a second-class nation?

Mr Jones: We have made it clear that the Scottish powers would kick in only after the next general election and they will, of course, have to be the subject of a manifesto commitment. However, Wales is not Scotland. We believe that the arrangements that we are putting in place are right for Wales. I would have hoped that the hon. Gentleman would support them.

Owen Smith: On devolution, in the last hour there has been an extremely important ruling by the Supreme Court. It found in favour of the Labour Welsh Government in their attempt to preserve an Agricultural Wages Board for Wales and to protect low-paid farm workers in Wales. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to apologise for wasting court time and money on seeking unlawfully to get rid of an Agricultural Wages Board for Wales, and will he commend the Welsh Government on their actions?

Mr Jones: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right that the Supreme Court delivered a judgment this morning. We are still considering the consequences of that. Where a procedure exists and there is an issue of doubt, it is entirely right that we should go to the Supreme Court to have the position clarified, and the position has been clarified.

Owen Smith: The Secretary of State is trying to present this as a score draw. To be clear, he has lost 2-0. This is the second time he has referred Welsh legislation to the Supreme Court and the second time he has lost. This time he was trying to stop the Welsh Government trying to protect agricultural wages in Wales. I ask him again: will he apologise for wasting time? Will he agree with me that his interference and this ruling show that we definitely need Labour’s proposal of a reserved powers model for the Assembly in Wales?

Mr Jones: I do not apologise for taking into account the devolution settlement and seeking clarity where it is necessary. To repeat, we are considering the ramifications of the judgment and will come back to the House in due course.

Household Disposable Incomes

3. Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): If he will estimate the average change in disposable income for families in Wales since May 2010. [904681]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stephen Crabb): Wales has had the largest increase in disposable household income of any region or nation of the United Kingdom since 2010. Many households continue to face financial pressures. That is why we continue to introduce practical measures to help people with the cost of living at this time.

Alison McGovern: I am not sure that the Minister shared many detailed statistics with the House in that answer. Perhaps he will say a little more. The economies of Merseyside and north Wales are inextricably linked, so what is bad for north Wales is bad for Merseyside. That is why I would like to know just how much damage the Government have done to the incomes of people in north Wales.

Stephen Crabb: I thank the hon. Lady for her question and welcome her participation at Wales Office questions. As I said, the truth is that disposable household income is increasing faster in Wales than in any other region or nation in the United Kingdom. Wages and incomes are not where we want them to be—they need to be higher—but that is because this country is still recovering from the economic trauma visited on it by the Labour party. I am sorry that she has used her question to paint Wales in such a negative light.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Would the Minister care to comment on the recent dramatic fall in the disposable household income of the former Welsh Minister for Natural Resources and Food? Does he agree that, in that instance, the fall in household income was absolutely justified, given the disgraceful dirty tricks the former Minister was employing against other Members of the Welsh Assembly?

Mr Speaker: The Minister has no responsibility for that matter. The hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) has put his thoughts on the record with his usual assertiveness.

Jonathan Evans (Cardiff North) (Con): Has my hon. Friend seen the evidence from the Office for National Statistics that, since the election in 2010, the gap between disposable incomes in Wales and in the rest of the UK has narrowed every year? That gap widened in each of the three years before the last election during the tenure of the Labour party.

Stephen Crabb: My hon. Friend is exactly right. There was a huge destruction of wealth in this nation during the last three years of the Labour Government and we are still recovering from that. He is right to draw the House’s attention to the fact that the disposable income gap is narrowing. That is because we have a long-term economic plan that is working, and that is working for Wales.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): Some 46% of the people who work in my constituency and some 33% of the workers who live in my constituency work in the public sector. The figure for the constituency of the Secretary of State is 45%. Today, it was announced that public sector workers have lost £2,500 a year since the last election. What is the Minister doing about that?

Stephen Crabb: I say to the hon. Gentleman that his party’s Front Benchers are as committed as we are to the need for pay restraint across the public sector. That is one of the main ways in which we will fix the appalling record deficit that he and his party left the nation. Some 47,000 new private sector jobs have been created in Wales in the past 12 months, and he should stand up today and salute that.

Border Health Care Provision

4. Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues and Ministers of the Welsh Government on health care provision in Wales and the English borders. [904682]
10. Stephen Mosley (City of Chester) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues and Ministers of the Welsh Government on health care provision in Wales and the English borders.

Mr Jones: If the Labour party recognises the links between poverty and poor health, is it surprising that the Welsh Labour Government have cut health spending by 8%.

Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): At the moment, patients from Radnorshire and east Breconshire have to travel to Cheltenham for radiotherapy, which is a long and stressful journey at a time when they are particularly unwell. A radiotherapy facility called the Macmillan Renton unit will soon open at Hereford hospital, and it will be an excellent facility for Herefordshire and Powys. Does the Secretary of State agree that that is an example of cross-border health care at its best?

Mr Jones: It is indeed, and it also illustrates the extent to which border communities such as those that my hon. Friend represents rely on health care provided in England—all the more reason for proper protocols to be put in place to ensure that that health care is adequate.

Wylfa Nuclear Power Station

5. David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): What the time scale is for the construction of a new nuclear power station at Wylfa.

Mr Jones: The Secretary of State may be aware that Wylfa will generate 10 times as much carbon-free electricity as is currently generated by every offshore and onshore wind farm in Wales. Does he agree that it is vital that we make progress on that project?

Mr Jones: I agree entirely, and that is why the generic design assessment for Wylfa Newydd is proceeding apace. We need an energy mix, and we need to ensure that fewer carbon emissions are produced. A mixture of nuclear and wind power will achieve that.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): As someone who has supported new nuclear build in Wales since my arrival in the House in 2001, and this project since its inception in 2008-09, will the Secretary of State join me in stating that the priority now must be to get the skill base and supply chain right, so that we have the jobs and high-quality skills that we deserve in north-west Wales? That means the UK Government working with the Welsh Government, local governments and stakeholders. Will the right hon. Gentleman agree to meet me to form a framework for that to happen?

Mr Jones: I am happy to commend the efforts the hon. Gentleman has made, and I entirely agree that the new build at Wylfa offers exciting prospects for the supply chain and for education. I am particularly impressed

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that there is a clear relationship between levels of poverty and demand for health care? With 75,000 people in Wales now on zero-hours contracts and a higher number of people in poverty being in work than out of work, is it not time that he got a fair share for Wales by getting the £300 million by which we are under-supported by the Barnett formula and the capital investment needed to deliver the proper health service that we all need and demand in Wales?

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr David Jones): The Wales Office continues to engage regularly with the Department of Health and the Welsh Government to discuss health care provision in Wales and along the border. Our focus is on ensuring that everyone, regardless of where they live, has access to high-quality health services that meet their needs.

Mel Stride: Given that the NHS in Wales has had its budget cut by 8%, that waiting times are longer than in England and that it has missed its accident and emergency targets since 2009, does my right hon. Friend agree that the NHS is far from safe in the Opposition’s hands?

Mr Jones: That is manifestly clear. While spending on the NHS has increased by £12.7 billion in England, it has been subjected to a cut of 8% by the Welsh Government. As my hon. Friend says, the consequence is that the health service in Wales is not safe in Labour’s hands.

Stephen Mosley: A constituent of mine living in Chester but registered with a GP in Wales would have to wait up to 52 weeks for a hip operation. If that same constituent were registered with a GP in England, they would have to wait 18 weeks. Does my right hon. Friend think that is fair?

Mr Jones: I do not, and of course people living on either side of the border are entitled to comparable standards of care. I am concerned that long waiting times in Wales are affecting not only Welsh patients but, as my hon. Friend said, those in England.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): You really would not think the Secretary of State was the son of a north Walian chemist from listening to his answers.

Regardless of which side of the border people live on, obesity is a ticking time bomb in this country. Why do the UK Government not have cross-border talks with the Welsh Government to do something on the issue, rather than constantly talking Wales down? When will they deal with the serious issues?

Mr Jones: I am glad to say that when my father was practising, we did not have the type of devolved health care that we are experiencing in Wales at the moment.

The hon. Lady is entirely right—it is necessary that discussions should take place, and they are taking place. I urge her to urge her friends in the Assembly to engage positively with the United Kingdom Government.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that there is a clear relationship between levels of poverty and demand for health care? With 75,000 people in Wales now on zero-hours contracts and a higher number of people in poverty being in work than out of work, is it not time that he got a fair share for Wales by getting the £300 million by which we are under-supported by the Barnett formula and the capital investment needed to deliver the proper health service that we all need and demand in Wales?
with the work that Coleg Menai is putting in, and I am more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman at some future date.

Hywel Williams: There is universal opposition across north Wales to building more pylons to carry the electricity, whether from Wylfa Newydd or wind production—that extends to the point made by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) and others. Will the Secretary of State guarantee that proper and full consideration will be given to under-sea methods of transmission of electricity from any new sources?

Mr Jones: Of course, the difficulty with nuclear generation is that it requires the infrastructure to get it to the markets. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that some concern has been expressed about this issue, and where possible underground cabling has distinct advantages. No final decisions have been made, and National Grid is carrying out further environmental and technical assessments.

Broadband

6. Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): What assessment he has made of the progress of the broadband roll-out programme and the effects of that programme on the tourism industry in Wales.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stephen Crabb): The Superfast Cymru programme, which is jointly funded by the UK and Welsh Governments, is on track to deliver superfast speeds to 96% of premises by spring 2016, and more than 135,000 premises in Wales have already been connected. The Wales Office continues to be in close contact with BT, Ofcom and Broadband Delivery UK as the roll-out continues.

Guto Bebb: I thank the Minister for his response. Some £120 million of public money has been put into the roll-out of broadband in Wales, yet my constituency of Aberconwy has had no roll-out as yet. That is having a huge effect on businesses, not least in the tourism industry in Wales.

Stephen Crabb: As I said, we are in close discussions with the Welsh Government, Ofcom, and Broadband Delivery UK about how public money is being spent on the roll-out in Wales. We are aware of concerns that my hon. Friend and colleagues have raised in recent months, and we communicate those to the Welsh Government and take them very seriously.

Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Further to that question, the roll-out in Wales is excruciatingly slow, and that is when connections are available. Is the Minister aware of the latest Ofcom data that show that 10 out of 22 local authority areas are category 5—the worst for broadband? What is he doing to work constructively with the Welsh Government to sort that out?

Stephen Crabb: The right hon. Gentleman is right, and we face a significant infrastructure challenge in Wales for our digital connectivity. That is why we are putting in money from the UK Government, partnered with Welsh Government money, for the roll-out of the Superfast Cymru programme. If he has more specific concerns about the roll-out in his constituency, I would be grateful if he raised them with me so that I can take them up with the Welsh Government directly.

Mr Llwyd: The Minister is a mind-reader. Last week, Dr Carole Jones of Aberangell rang me because she was completely unhappy about the situation. When she spoke to BT, she was informed that there is no likelihood of high-speed internet reaching Aberangell in my constituency—her area—because it will be too costly. What is the point of pumping in public money from this Government and the Welsh Government if they cannot commit to providing proper broadband services throughout Wales?

Stephen Crabb: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the main superfast programme deals with 96% of premises in Wales. We are putting in additional money to look at how we connect the last few per cent. of properties that are difficult to reach, and a Welsh pilot project will be taken forward as part of that £10 million scheme. There is light at the end of the tunnel, but we cannot underestimate some of the geographical and topographical challenges that Wales faces in rolling out superfast broadband.

Infrastructure Connectivity (North Wales and England)


The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr David Jones): As part of our long-term economic plan, we are currently investing in infrastructure at unprecedented levels. Last week, we announced £10 million of investment to upgrade the Halton curve, renewing north Wales’s direct link with Liverpool and improving connectivity across the north-west of England.

Ian Lucas: On Friday, I will visit Rossett to see the investment of £44 million by the Welsh Government in the dualling of Wrexham-Chester line, which was made a single line by the Tories in the 1980s. I welcome the investment announced by the Chancellor last week, but will the Secretary of State tell us when that will happen and when the Halton curve work will be done?

Mr Jones: It is clearly intended to proceed as quickly as possible. Connectivity between Wrexham and Merseyside is extremely important. I welcome, of course, the belated investment by the Welsh Government, but there is more to be done, and I think the hon. Gentleman and I are agreed on the need to look at electrification further north.

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): The funding of the northern hub in full and the many other transport announcements are incredibly welcome, and show an investment in the north’s transport infrastructure that was barely evident under the previous Government. However, having taken four hours to get from Wrexham
to Leeds, however, I would like the Secretary of State to make sure that north Wales will enjoy the benefits of that record investment.

Mr Jones: The Halton curve is, of course, important in that it connects north Wales with the city of Liverpool, which is the most important economic centre in the region. My hon. Friend is also right that we need to make sure that connectivity is improved across the whole of the north of England.

Employment

8. Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of trends in levels of employment in Wales.

Mr Jones: The Halton curve is, of course, important in that it connects north Wales with the city of Liverpool, which is the most important economic centre in the region. My hon. Friend is also right that we need to make sure that connectivity is improved across the whole of the north of England.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stephen Crabb) said:-

Our long-term economic plan is working—and it is working in Wales. We are rebalancing the economy to give the private sector confidence to invest and create jobs. In the last year alone, we have seen more than 47,000 new private sector jobs created in Wales.

Andrew Selous: Will the Minister update us on what has happened to youth unemployment in Wales under this Government, given that it rose by 75% under the last Government?

Stephen Crabb: My hon. Friend is exactly right; he knows a lot about this issue. There was an appalling increase of more than 75% in youth unemployment on the watch of the last Labour Government. I am pleased to say that in the past four years, we have seen youth unemployment fall by 31% in Wales. We are bringing down unemployment among young people.

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Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Will the Minister not just accept the success of Jobs Growth Wales—a scheme that actually works? Why will he not implement a similar scheme in England rather than carry on with the failed policies he is currently putting forward?

Stephen Crabb: Jobs Growth Wales makes a contribution, and I am not going to knock anything that helps young people in our constituencies to get on the employment ladder. I am concerned, however, that the Welsh Government are still refusing to allow people on the Work programme to access the additional help of Jobs Growth Wales. We need to see the Welsh Government make more progress on tackling that.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): Agriculture is a significant employment sector in Wales, and many people, including the Farmers Union of Wales, wanted the Agricultural Wages Board to be protected. Will the Minister say why he has twice challenged it in the High Court and in the Supreme Court, and how much has that cost the public and the taxpayer?

Stephen Crabb: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that that the devolution settlement is a complicated one, and that it was entirely right for the UK Government to seek clarity from the Supreme Court on this issue. We welcome the fact that the Supreme Court has given its ruling and provided the clarification we needed.

Ministry of Justice Shared Services

9. Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Justice on the potential privatisation of Ministry of Justice shared services and the effect on that body’s offices in Newport.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stephen Crabb): The Wales Office remains in close contact with the Ministry of Justice on the future of its shared service centres. Central to our discussions is how we secure the future for the work force at Newport.

Paul Flynn: The Government reward the failure of the privatiser Steria, which lost £56 million of public money, in order to punish the success of the workers who have saved £120 million of public money. Will the Minister tell us who will decide whether those jobs will be offshored? Will it be the Ministry of Justice or the Cabinet Office?

Stephen Crabb: My right hon. Friend the Justice Secretary has made it absolutely clear that he does not support the offshoring of those jobs at Newport. Let me say to the hon. Gentleman, however, that we will take no lessons from him or his party about the interaction of Government with the private sector. We are introducing far more discipline and rigour into our contracts with the private sector providers.

Aerospace Industry

11. Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the contribution of the aerospace industry to the economy in Wales.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stephen Crabb): The aerospace sector is vital to the economy of Wales, providing more than 23,000 jobs in 130 companies. The aerospace sector strategy sets out how we will work with industry to maximise the opportunities for growth.

Mr Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that the NATO summit which will take place in Newport in September provides an ideal opportunity for Wales and the United Kingdom to showcase before a global audience our aerospace and defence industries, which are a vital part of our economy?

Stephen Crabb: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. One of the Prime Minister’s key purposes in deciding to bring the NATO summit to Wales was to showcase all that is good about our nation of Wales. It is absolutely true that the defence and aerospace sectors are some of the jewels in the crown of the Welsh economy, and the NATO summit provides an excellent opportunity for us to showcase them.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 9 July.
The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in paying tribute to all who have been involved in the start of the Tour de France in Britain, from the event organisers to all the great cyclists I think that the event has showcased the best of Yorkshire and the whole of what Britain has to offer. I was delighted to see such incredible support throughout the race.

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

Mr Campbell: I join the Prime Minister in welcoming the news that he has just relayed.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland is threatening legal action against a family-owned bakery because it would not print a political message on a cake. The requested message was completely at variance with the company’s Christian values. Does the Prime Minister agree that so-called equality is now being viewed by many as an oppressive threat to religious freedom, and that such freedoms should be protected by the introduction of a conscience clause?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of the specific case that the hon. Gentleman has raised, and I will of course go away and have a look at it. However, I think that a commitment to equality—whether we are talking about racial equality, equality between those of different sexes, equality in terms of people who have disabilities, or, indeed, tolerance of and equality for people with different sexualities—is a very important part of being British.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Will the Prime Minister welcome—?

Mr Speaker: Order. I want the question to be heard. I want all questions to be heard.

Mrs Spelman: Will the Prime Minister welcome the President, MPs and choir of the German Parliament, who have come to sing in a joint concert with our parliamentary choir in Westminster Hall tonight to commemorate the centenary of the first world war and the tercentenary of the Hanoverian monarchy?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to join my right hon. Friend in welcoming the German choir. I suspect that, after last night’s result, they will be in rather good voice.

On a serious note, let me say that we properly commemorate the outbreak of the first world war, the key battles of the first world war and, of course, Armistice day as we approach these vital 100th anniversaries. I am absolutely determined that, in Britain, we will mark them in appropriate ways. There will be a service in Glasgow, followed by a number of different events. I think it very important that we learn the lessons of that conflict, and commemorate those who fell.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to the way in which the organisers, the cyclists and the millions of fans made the Tour de France such a brilliant success for Britain. I was proud to be watching it on the streets, as I know he was. I was in Leeds with the hundreds of thousands of people who were lining the streets.

All of us have been horrified by the instances of child abuse that have been uncovered, and the further allegations that have been made. All the victims of child abuse are not just owed justice, but owed an apology for the fact that it took so long for their cries to be heard. Does the Prime Minister agree that all inquiries, including those conducted by the police and those that he has set up, must go wherever the evidence leads them—in whatever institution in the country, including our own—to get at what happened?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Child abuse is a despicable crime, and the victims live with the horror for the rest of their lives. It is absolutely essential that—in the two inquiries announced by the Home Secretary, and, indeed, in the vital police inquiries that are being carried out—no stone is left unturned.

The horror of the Jimmy Savile and Rolf Harris cases just shows what people were able to get away with. It was almost that on occasion they were committing crimes in plain sight, and it took far too long to get to the bottom of what happened and for justice to be done, and that is absolutely what this Government are committed to achieving.

Edward Miliband: On the issue of the 114 missing files at the Home Office, can the Prime Minister clarify when Ministers were first informed about this and what action they took? Does he agree that the review by Peter Wanless cannot be simply a review into the original review, but must seek to discover what happened to the files, who knew what about the files, and whether information was covered up, and that the Wanless review must also have full investigative powers?

The Prime Minister: It was a parliamentary question last October that revealed the points about the 2013 inquiry, but what I would say to the right hon. Gentleman is that it is absolutely vital that Peter Wanless, who has an excellent record in this regard and will carry out the review in absolutely the right way, has all the powers he needs. Let us be absolutely clear: if he wants more powers, and if that inquiry wants greater powers and ability, they can absolutely ask for it. As the right hon. Gentleman says, the inquiry must go exactly where the evidence leads. We are determined to get to the bottom of what happened.

Edward Miliband: I agree that the most important thing is to clarify what actually happened to the files and why they went missing. I welcome the overarching inquiry that has also been set up by the Home Secretary. Can the Prime Minister say more about the terms of reference of that inquiry? Will he consider the very sensible recommendations made today by Peter Wanless around making the covering up of abuse a criminal offence and ensuring that there is an obligation on institutions to report abuse where it occurs?

The Prime Minister: Taking the right hon. Gentleman’s second point first: should we change the law so that there is a requirement to report and make it a criminal
offence not to report? The Government are currently looking at that, and both reviews will be able to examine that point and advise us accordingly. I think it may well be time to take that sort of first step forward.

On the issue of the terms of reference of the wider lessons learned review, we are discussing those at the moment; we are very happy to take suggestions from other parties in this House. A number of inquiries are being carried out into specific hospitals, including the Savile inquiries; there is the inquiry taking place within the BBC; and there other inquiries, including into Welsh children’s homes. The main aim and what is vital, as I have said before, is that the Government learn all the lessons of this review. Where the Elizabeth Butler-Sloss review can really help is by having a panel of experts who can advise us about all the things that need to change in all these institutions—for instance the Church; for instance the BBC; for instance the NHS; but also, if necessary, in this place and in Government, too.

Edward Miliband: I welcome what the Prime Minister said and clearly cultural change in this is absolutely crucial in all institutions.

Edward Miliband: I would far rather have the shadow Health Secretary than the Government’s Health Secretary any day of the week. I will tell the Prime Minister what has happened in the health service. We had a top-down reorganisation that nobody wanted and nobody voted for, and it has diverted billions of pounds away from patient care. The contrast we see is between the complacent claims of the Prime Minister and people’s everyday experience. People are spending longer in A and E, and hospital A and Es have missed their four-hour target for the last 50 weeks in a row. While he tries to pretend things are getting better, patients, NHS staff and the public can see it getting worse right before their eyes.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman still has to defend the man who presided over the Mid Staffs disgrace, where standards of patient care were so bad that patients were drinking out of dirty vases because of standards in Labour’s NHS. The point is this: the reason we have been able to cut bureaucracy and the reason we have been able to put more money into the NHS is that we have taken difficult decisions, including having a 1% pay cap in the NHS. Of course, Labour said it would condemn strikes; No. Will we support that, but this week it has decided that it will back strikes instead. I have here the Labour briefing on strikes, which says, “Do we support strikes? No. Will we condemn strikes? No.” There we have it: that is his leadership summed up in one go. Have the Opposition got a plan for the NHS? No. Have they got a plan for our economy? No. Is he remotely up to the job? No.

Sir Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): Is the Prime Minister aware that British Airways is to cease the link between Aberdeen and London City in favour of increased services to the already well served airports of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dublin? Will he support the campaign to maintain the link, which is vital to the vibrant business economy of the north of Scotland?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to look into that issue with the right hon. Gentleman. It is an absolutely vital service, particularly given how strongly the economy in north-east Scotland is performing, with North sea oil and gas.
Q2. [904734] Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Tomorrow, I will be in Carmarthen with striking teachers, nurses and firefighters—the backbone of local communities. Are the Prime Minister’s reported plans to ban public sector workers from withdrawing their labour not just a cynical attempt to silence opposition to his policies?

The Prime Minister: I am very clear that I do not think these strikes are right, I condemn them and I think that people should turn up for work. It is a pity we do not have so much clarity on that issue from the Labour party or, indeed, from the hon. Gentleman’s party. Let me give one example. The National Union of Teachers is proposing a strike based on a ballot it had almost two years ago, on a very small turnout of its members. Really, is it right to continue with this situation when the education of so many children is going to be so badly disrupted?

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Speaking from the Opposition Back Benches on 9 December 2002, the Prime Minister said:

“I find the European arrest warrant highly objectionable”—[Official Report, 9 December 2002; Vol. 396, c. 107.]

and my right hon. Friend voted accordingly. I still think the European arrest warrant is highly objectionable. Does the Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: We have made a series of changes to the European arrest warrant so that we do not have the problem of people being arrested, for instance, for things that are not a crime in this country. But the question we all have to ask ourselves is, having achieved this vast opt-out from Justice and Home Affairs, which is the biggest return of power from Brussels to Britain, what are those few things that we go back into in order to fight crime and terrorism? On this I think the judgment of the Home Secretary and the Justice Secretary has been absolutely right.

Q3. [904735] Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): The head of the civil service says that the business case for universal credit has not been signed off. The Department for Work and Pensions says it has. Who is telling the truth?

The Prime Minister: The budget for universal credit has been signed off in each and every year by the Treasury and I believe it will continue to do so. The good news on universal credit is that next year we will have in one in eight jobcentres rolling out universal credit. I thought we would find that the Opposition were in favour of a system that makes work pay, but we can see today that they have gone back into the hole of being against every single welfare change and everything that is getting this country moving.

Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): The Safer Internet Centre estimates that up to 30 websites host UK online revenge pornography images, another form of sexual abuse. Does the Prime Minister agree that posting such material must be recognised for what it is—a criminal sexual offence against its victims?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is right. This is an appalling offence and a dreadful thing for someone to do, and it clearly has criminal intent. I am very glad that she is championing this cause, and I hope that having looked in detail at the amendments she is suggesting, we can take up this cause. Part of what she achieved in government—the very good work that she did in office—is making sure that we do far more to deal with porn and internet porn.

Q4. [904736] Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): If the business case for the right hon. Gentleman’s universal credit proposals is robust, why is the head of the home civil service saying that he has not signed it off?

The Prime Minister: What has happened is that universal credit has been signed off in each and every year by the Treasury. I make no apology for the fact that we are rolling it out slowly. We have learned the lesson of the previous Government, in which the right hon. Gentleman played a prominent part, where tax credits were introduced in one go and were a complete shambles.

Q5. [904737] Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): North West Air Ambulance has three helicopters and has flown thousands of missions since 1999, one of which saved the life of a friend of mine after an horrific car crash on the M6. The service costs £4.2 million a year to run. There are 27 such air services throughout the whole of the United Kingdom, and one of them may soon become a royal air ambulance service. Will my right hon. Friend pay tribute to those who man the helicopters, saving lives throughout the country, and heap praise on the thousands of people who raise funds every week on wet street corners throughout the United Kingdom to ensure that the helicopters carry on flying and saving lives?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. Our air ambulances provide an invaluable service and we should all pay tribute to the men and women who staff and support them, who often have to undertake very difficult landings and take-offs in order to rescue and get people to hospitals. It is right that up and down the country people are giving charitably in order to fund these vital services.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I am sure the Prime Minister will agree that dealing with terrorism and violence, and a commitment to exclusively peaceful and democratic means were fundamental in moving Northern Ireland forward and in taking us from where we were to where we are today. Does he agree that in the Northern Ireland of 2014 republican threats of violence for political gain must not only be deplored, but everyone in government, in governmental bodies in Northern Ireland and in the community must stand up against such threats and commit themselves to fundamental freedoms, upholding democracy and the rule of law?

The Prime Minister: All threats of violence in Northern Ireland are unacceptable and should be condemned on all sides. I am very clear about that. What I hope we can achieve in the coming weeks—it will take compromise and brave decisions on all sides—is to get the Haass talks process ongoing again, with commitments from the right hon. Gentleman’s party, as well as from the Ulster Unionist party and from Sinn Fein and the SDLP, to sit down and discuss these things so that we can make some progress. My fear is that if we do not
make progress on these issues, we leave space open for extremists on all sides of the debate to start pushing their ideas, which would be deeply unhelpful for the future of Northern Ireland.

Q6. [904738] Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con): The long-term economic plan is working in my High Peak constituency. Unemployment is down a third in the past year. Summer approaches, and, as tourism supports so many jobs in the local economy, I am walking the boundary of my constituency to promote the area. I invite my right hon. Friend to consider joining me in August for part of the walk. As well as promoting High Peak, I will be raising money for High Peak Women’s Aid, which is a fantastic charity based in Glossop that operates across the whole of the High Peak.

The Prime Minister: I wish my hon. Friend well. He makes an enticing invitation. I am a big fan of the Peak district and what it has to offer and its very beautiful countryside. It is notable that in his constituency, the claimant count has fallen by 42% since the election, and the youth claimant count has come down by 39% in the past year. What we are seeing is an economic revival, and we need to stick to our plans to get the deficit down, help people with tax cuts, make it easier for firms to employ people, produce the schools and skills that we need and reform our welfare and immigration system. That is the plan that we will stick to, and it is the plan that is delivering for High Peak.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): On GP appointments, a 62-year-old man in Eccles, who is a carer for his wife who has Alzheimer’s, sought an urgent GP appointment for her. He was told that it would be five weeks to see her GP, two weeks to see any GP, or he could take her to Salford Royal A and E. If that is the way that the NHS treats a carer of a person with dementia, does the Prime Minister not agree that it is time to support Labour’s plan to give such patients a right to a GP appointment within 48 hours?

The Prime Minister: There are 1,000 more GPs today than there were when I became Prime Minister. What we are doing is reintroducing the named GP for frail elderly people, which Labour got rid of. That is one reason, combined with the disastrous GP contract that Labour introduced, why there is so much pressure on our accident and emergency system. We need to learn from the mistakes that Labour made rather than repeat them.

Q7. [904739] Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): Is the Prime Minister aware that 16 to 18-year-olds in Northumberland who may live 50 miles from a further education college or 20 miles from a high school are facing charges ranging from £600 a year to several thousand pounds a year to get an education, because the Labour-controlled council has reversed the support given by the previous Liberal Democrat administration? Will he deplore that decision and see what central Government can do to promote fair access to education?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. As he knows, responsibility for transport for education and training rests with local authorities. Clearly, this local authority, now controlled by Labour, has made this decision. Of course we have introduced the £180 million bursary fund to support the most disadvantaged young people and perhaps that is something that his council and these families could make the most of. I certainly join him in agreeing that this is another example of the fact that Labour costs us more.

Q8. [904740] Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): It is estimated that each day 179 British girls are at risk of being subjected to female genital mutilation, joining a total of 170,000 in the United Kingdom who have been cut. Next week, the Prime Minister hosts a summit on this issue. Does he agree that FGM is not cultural; it is criminal. It is not tribal; it is torture. Will he please read the report of the Select Committee, which is published next Thursday, and implement it in full so that we can eradicate this horrendous abuse from our country?

The Prime Minister: I commend the right hon. Gentleman on the work that the Home Affairs Committee has done on that issue. He is absolutely right that this is a brutal and appalling practice that should have no place in the world, and certainly no place here in Britain and it is appalling that people living in our country are being subjected to it. I will study the report closely. The whole aim of the conference, which I am keen on us holding, is to ensure that the two practices of early forced marriage and female genital mutilation are wiped out from our planet.

Q9. [904741] Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that it would be totally unacceptable to have a statutory limitation on overseas aid without having a similar statutory provision covering defence expenditure to guarantee our NATO commitments?

The Prime Minister: We are in the happy position in this country of meeting the 2% spending on defence that NATO members are meant to undertake. When we hold the NATO conference in Wales in September we should be encouraging other countries to do the same and, indeed, to meet some of the new targets for spending on new equipment that can be used in NATO operations, which we certainly meet in this country. As well as doing that, we can also be proud of the fact that we are meeting the promise that we made of spending 0.7% on overseas aid, which is saving lives all over the world. I would not divorce that from our defence spending, because the money that we spend in places such as Somalia, Mali, Nigeria or, indeed, Pakistan is about reducing the pressures of asylum, immigration and terrorism, making our world safer. That is what our defence budget should be about, and I would argue that it is what our aid budget is about, as well.

Mrs Linda Riordan (Halifax) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Prime Minister agree that with conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, patients can be out of work for years if they do not get the right treatment? The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence should therefore look at the wider benefits rather than just the initial cost of that treatment.
The Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Lady. My understanding is that NICE does carry out that work, but I will look very closely at the particular condition that she raises and perhaps write to her about NICE’s approach to it.

Q10. [904742] Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Businesses across Lincolnshire report growing confidence and lengthy order books, highly skilled workers benefiting from the tax cuts that the Government have introduced and hard-working apprentices enjoying the sorts of opportunities that they could not have had just a few years ago. Does the Prime Minister share my assessment that the shadow Chancellor’s plans for borrowing yet more money while heaping tax on British businesses and making it more expensive for employers to hire young people are no more and no less than a long-term economic scam?

The Prime Minister: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. We have to stick to the plan, which involves training young people. We are on track to hit 2 million apprentices trained under this Government, but the very worst thing to do would be to start spending, borrowing and taxing more, which are exactly the proposals made by the Opposition.

Q11. [904743] Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister explain to the House why it is that the only people who feel that there are no problems in the national health service are members of the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: Every single health system right across the developed world is facing huge challenges and pressures. The pressures of an ageing population, the pressures of new drugs and treatments coming on stream and the pressures of children surviving with conditions that will need to be treated throughout their lives. The question is how we respond to those pressures. Our response has been to fund the health service and protect it from cuts, and to reform the health service, getting rid of £5 billion of bureaucracy so that there are more doctors and more nurses. The figures speak for themselves, because we can see more people being treated. One million more people are being treated every year in accident and emergency, and 40 million more people are getting GP appointments, but that is only because we have taken the difficult decisions that, frankly, Labour has not taken in Wales. That is why in Wales we see longer waiting lists and real problems with the NHS.

Mark Reckless (Rochester and Strood) (Con): Should taxpayer money be used to gather information on MPs that is then retained by a Chief Whip or shredded?

The Prime Minister: If my hon. Friend is referring to the situation that took place in the Welsh Assembly, which I was reading about overnight, it seems to be a very worrying development. If he is referring to something else, he might have to be a bit less delphic about it and write to me, and I will get back to him.

Q12. [904744] Andy Sawford (Corby) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Prime Minister look into the case of a young mum in my constituency who has a significant spinal injury that has left her unable to walk? Her GP has referred her for an urgent appointment with a neurosurgeon, so could the Prime Minister explain to her, and the whole country, why “urgent” on his watch means a four-week wait lying in pain?

The Prime Minister: I will absolutely look at the case that the hon. Gentleman raises. I am always happy to look at individual cases, but the figures I quoted earlier were to demonstrate that the numbers of people waiting 18 weeks, 26 weeks or, indeed, 52 weeks, are not just lower now than when the Government came to office but are lower now than at any time under the last Labour Government. I am very happy to look at the individual case he mentions.

Tessa Munt (Wells) (LD): Is the Prime Minister aware that since 2012, when he promised to increase patient access to innovative radiotherapy, particularly for cancer patients, the number of cancers treated by radiotherapy in some hospitals has actually decreased by 70% and state-of-the-art machines are lying idle because NHS England will not allow doctors to use them? Will he meet me and other cancer cure campaigners, such as Lawrence Dallaglio, to discuss this scandal before more patients are refused treatment?

The Prime Minister: I read the report that Lawrence Dallaglio referred to over the weekend and am very happy to meet the hon. Lady, and indeed him, to discuss this. We have introduced the cancer drugs fund, which is not only for drugs, but for innovative treatment. I know that there have also been changes in the way radiotherapy is carried out and in the way the new technology is being used, which might be part of the explanation for the figures she gives, but I am very happy to discuss them in more detail.

Q13. [904745] Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): Jobs Growth Wales has been hugely successful in tackling youth unemployment, outperforming similar schemes across the United Kingdom. Will the Prime Minister therefore join me in congratulating Welsh businesses and enterprises, the Welsh Government, and indeed the young people of Wales, who have made it a success? In doing so, he can end his agenda of attacking Wales at every opportunity. Who knows? He might even get a welcome in the hillside.

The Prime Minister: I want to do everything I can to support economic recovery in Wales. That is why, for instance, I think that in September, when the NATO conference comes to Wales—entirely an initiative launched by me—there will be a very strong welcome in the valleys. That will be the first time a serving American President has ever been to Wales, so I am looking forward to it. We are doing everything we can to help businesses in Wales to employ more people and grow the economy.

Economic Development (Birmingham and Lichfield)

Q14. [904746] Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): If he will meet the chair of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull local enterprise partnership to discuss economic development in Birmingham and Lichfield district, and if he will make a statement.
The Prime Minister: I met the chair of the LEP board on Monday when I hosted a meeting in Birmingham to mark the agreement of the growth deal that will see over £350 million invested in Greater Birmingham and Solihull. The projects in the deal will help to create up to 19,000 jobs, allow up to 6,000 homes to be built and generate up to £110 million from local partners and private investment.

Michael Fabricant: With unemployment at just 1.5% in Lichfield and Burntwood, and down by over 28,000 across the whole LEP region, does that not demonstrate that the LEP model, bolstered by the growth funds awarded on Monday, is working? How does my right hon. Friend plan to build on that success and encourage the most ambitious LEPs, including Greater Birmingham and Solihull, to promote the local economy still further?

The Prime Minister: As I said at the meeting with the LEP, I think that the growth deal is a very big step forward for Birmingham and the west midlands. It will result in more jobs, more investment and more houses. It will see new railway stations and transport links built. I think that we need to be more ambitious about the money we can find in central Government to support these schemes, but I also hope that local councils, including Birmingham city council, will look at every piece of unused brownfield land and every extra bit of development they can put on the table so that these growth deals get ever more ambitious.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): As bribes go, is offering that huge region less than £10 per head just 37 days before the general election not too little, too late?

The Prime Minister: I think that we can probably tell the difference between a ray of sunshine and the hon. Gentleman on this issue, as on so many others. This is an excellent deal for Birmingham and the west midlands. If he does not think so, he might want to explain why Sir Albert Bore, the Labour leader of Birmingham city council, said:

“This is good news for Birmingham. A number of major projects will now be accelerated. Transport routes across the city will be much improved... And other money will go into site development that will provide much needed jobs in the city.”

I think that the hon. Gentleman needs to spend a little more time with Sir Albert Bore.

Engagements

Q15. [904747] Mr Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con): Tomorrow Britain faces damage and disruption from strikes, none of which has been backed by a majority of union members. Since the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) became the leader of the Labour party, it has taken £13 million from Unite alone, so he will not stand up to the union barons. Will the Prime Minister make it clear that we are on the side of the public, who by 3:1 back a voting threshold for strikes to stop this licensed sabotage?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Frankly, I think the time has come to look at setting thresholds in strike ballots. I mentioned the NUT strike earlier. A ballot is taking place—[Interruption]—Look, I know Labour Members are paid for by the unions, but they might want to listen to this, because it is going to disrupt our children’s education. The strike ballot took place in 2012. It is based on a 27% turnout. How can it possibly be right for our children’s education to be disrupted by trade unions acting in this way? It is time to legislate, and that will be in the Conservative manifesto.
Universal Credit

12.36 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab) (Urgent Question): To ask the Employment Minister if she will make a statement on whether the Department for Work and Pensions’ business case for the implementation of universal credit has been approved by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): In answering, let me lay out a couple of quick facts about where we are and then deal with the hon. Gentleman’s direct question.

Universal credit is a major reform that will transform the welfare state in Britain for the better, making 3 million people better off and bringing £35 billion of economic benefits to society. Rightly for a programme of this scale, the Government’s priority has been, and continues to be, its safe and secure delivery. This is demonstrated through our approach to date, which started with the successful launch of the pathfinder in April 2013 and has continued with the controlled expansion of universal credit.

On 5 December last year, I announced that universal credit would be rolled out to the north-west and expanded to couples from the summer of 2014, and would then expand to families later that year. That is exactly what is happening. A fortnight ago, we began our north-west expansion. Universal credit is now in 24 jobcentres and will reach 90 across the country by the end of the year. A week ago, we started taking claims from couples. This careful roll-out is allowing us, as we said we would, to learn as we go along, continuously improving the process—unlike so many of the programmes the previous Government instigated which crashed and burned.

In answer to the question, my Department has always worked, and will continue to work, closely with the Treasury on these roll-out plans. As we have made clear in a number of recent debates and answers to parliamentary questions, the Treasury has approved funding for the universal credit programme in 2013-14 and 2014-15, in line with the plan that I announced in December last year. These approvals are given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury—such matters are delegated to him by the Chancellor—and are subject to rigorous controls, in line with the recommendations made last year by the National Audit Office.

It has always been the plan, as I set out last year, to secure agreement for universal credit in carefully controlled stages: first for singles, where we have agreed funding with the Treasury and are already rolling out in line with that agreement; then for couples, where we have agreed funding with the Treasury and are already rolling out in line with that agreement; and then for families, where we have recently secured agreement from the Treasury and will begin roll-out later this year. All this was confirmed by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury in an answer to a parliamentary question yesterday. That set of agreements confirms the approval of the strategic outline business case plans for this Parliament.

The final stage in this process, for which the logical point is now, has always been to approve and sign off the full business case covering the full, long lifetime of this programme, beyond this Parliament. We are in discussions over that, and it will eventually bring £35 billion of economic benefits to society. My right hon. Friend and I will, I am certain, approve that very soon.

Chris Bryant: That was a spectacular instance, as Sir Bob Kerslake might put it, of “beating about the bush”. It is a very simple question, to which the answer can only be yes or no: has the Department for Work and Pensions business case for the implementation of universal credit been approved by the Chancellor of the Exchequer? It is depressing that this Tory Minister and the Tory Prime Minister cannot tell the difference between an annual budget and a business case. It is pretty straightforward.

On 30 June, the employment Minister—who is disgracefully not answering for herself today—answered that question by saying:

“The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has approved the UC Strategic Outline Business Case plans for the remainder of this Parliament (2014-15) as per the ministerial announcement”.—[Official Report, 30 June 2014; Vol. 583, c. 434W]

She was referring to the ministerial statement of 5 December, which explicitly runs up to 2017. On Monday, however, she had the carpet pulled from under her feet, as Sir Bob Kerslake answered exactly the same question with gratifying honesty, saying that “it has not been signed off.”

It got worse yesterday when the Financial Secretary, answering the same question, said that all the Treasury has done is approve funding for the programme for another eight months, while a DWP spokesperson said that the Treasury has “approved all funding to date”, as if that was some grand vindication.

The same simple question has now been answered in eight contradictory ways. Not everybody can be telling the truth. There has been so much beating about the bush that it feels as if this House has been misled by a Government engaged in a deliberate act of deception.

The Secretary of State has told this House on 28 occasions that universal credit has always been on time and on budget; yet Sir Jeremy Heywood said on Monday that the Treasury and the Major Projects Authority had to tell the Secretary of State that his own project was “way off track”. When was he told that? Why did the Secretary of State not tell this House?

The Secretary of State has told this House that universal credit would bring “a £38 billion economic benefit to society”.—[Official Report, 5 December 2013; Vol. 571, c. 65WS.]

I notice that he has just amended that figure to £35 billion. That figure is part of the business case. Has it been signed off by the Treasury, or is he just making things up?

On 5 December 2013, the Secretary of State told the House that universal credit would bring “a £38 billion economic benefit to society”.—[Official Report, 5 December 2013; Vol. 571, c. 65WS.]

I will be honest: we would love to help the Secretary of State implement universal credit, but confession comes before redemption, and as long as he remains in denial he remains beyond help. I ask him once again to
be straight with the House: has the business case—the business case, not the budget—for universal credit, which he says will come to fruition in 2017, been signed off—yes or no? [Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Just before the Secretary of State replies, I listened very carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said. He made no personal attack on any one individual. [Interruption.] Order. I will deal with this—the hon. Gentleman will have to accept my ruling, whether he likes it or not. The hon. Gentleman made no personal attack on any individual Minister, but my judgment, having heard him out, was that he went beyond the line in making an accusation of deliberate deception against a group of Ministers. [Interruption.] Order. I know what I am doing and I certainly do not require any help from the Education Secretary—that would be completely unimaginable. I ask Members to have regard to the way in which they express themselves. The point has been made, the situation is clear and the Secretary of State can now reply.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) made the most pompous, ludicrous statement I have ever heard. I know what he did: he wrote it down before he heard the answer. I have made it quite clear and I stand by what I said: the strategic outline business case plans for this Parliament have been approved. The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Esther McVey) made that clear the other day, and that is the statement that we stand by.

The next phase, as I said in my statement—the hon. Gentleman might like to listen to them in future—is approved. On the strategic outline business case for the overall lifetime of the programme, that is being discussed right now and we expect approval of that plan shortly. I have said categorically that all the expenditures and the work in this Parliament are approved. The reality is that it is approved. The point he needs to get round his head is that, on the figures he gave earlier—the billions—the National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee and the Work and Pensions Committee agree that we need careful controls in place. It is therefore natural that we have sought that approval at each stage. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary has approved all of those elements.

I know what this is all about. The truth is that this is about Labour’s failure to come to terms with welfare reform. We had a debate a week ago in which Labour crashed and burned, and we have an urgent question today. Labour Members want to avoid the reality that the Government’s welfare reforms are working and getting more people back to work. We have capped benefits so that no household can receive more than people who are in work. There are more people in work than ever before. Under Labour, youth unemployment increased by nearly a half; under this Government, the youth claimant count has fallen for the past 30 months. The rate of workless households is at its lowest since records began.

I say to the hon. Gentleman and the Labour party that this is the best instance of a man in an ill-fitting anorak dancing on the head of a pin. It is quite pathetic. He needs to think again about welfare reform.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the very worst example of how to change any tax and benefits system was the introduction of tax credits by the previous Government, when more than £6 billion of overpayments were made within just the first three years?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** Absolutely. The Labour Government—the Labour party needs to own up to this—used to sign off business cases from day one, only to see the programme crash and burn. Tax credits left 400,000 people without money, and their reforms to the health service benefits system were an absolute disaster. We will take no lessons from Labour on how to manage a programme.

**Margaret Hodge** (Barking) (Lab): As Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, I support the intent of the policy, but I have repeatedly sought assurances on the status of universal credit. On Monday, I asked Sir Jeremy Heywood, Sir Nick Macpherson and Sir Bob Kerslake four times whether the business case had been signed off by the Treasury. There were a number of unscripted pauses, but Sir Jeremy told us:

“I cannot speak for the Treasury.”

Sir Nick Macpherson told us:

“It is signed up, up to a point”,

before Bob Kerslake finally admitted:

“I think we should not beat about the bush. It has not been signed off.”

I plead with the Secretary of State that he should be open and honest with hon. Members rather than hide behind smoke and mirrors to create a false impression that universal credit is on time, in budget and delivering in full its intended objectives.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** I respect the right hon. Lady enormously for the job she does, but I say to her clearly that it was on the recommendations of her Committee and the NAO that we instigated—that is, the way in which, at every stage and in every separate part of development, we would have approvals from the Treasury and with the Cabinet Office, which is what is going on at the moment. My point is that the answer that Mr Kerslake, the head of the civil service, gave was correct in the sense, as I have said today, that the overall strategic business case for the full lifetime of the programme is in discussion right now for completion. However, all the elements that are relevant—the strategic business plan for this Parliament, which includes all the roll-out, all the investments, of which the right hon. Lady will be aware, and the roll-out through to the north-west—have been approved. There will be no further need for approvals this Parliament, so the reality is quite clear: universal credit is on track and is rolling against the plan we set out last year. All those approvals are agreed, and we hope that the final element, which would logically come at the end of the process, will be agreed shortly with the Chief Secretary.

**Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): The Secretary of State has me convinced about the benefits of universal credit, but will he consider publishing the business case so that the House and the public outside can see the full benefits?
Mr Duncan Smith: I am quite happy to deal with that. I have also said to the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee that we are happy to talk through that. We have an invitation from the Committee to come in and discuss it.

Dame Anne Begg (Aberdeen South) (Lab): In April, the Work and Pensions Committee published a report on the progress of universal credit implementation, which said:

“DWP told us that it intended to clarify the impact of the changes to the implementation timetable on the overall costs and savings of the programme in the revised Business Case for Universal Credit, which it has now presented to the Treasury. We recommend that DWP makes its revised Business Case available to this Committee.”

Just two weeks ago, we got the Government response, which said that, no, they would not give us sight of the business case, but that some officials might talk us through it. For my Committee to be able to do our scrutiny role properly, that is not good enough. I join my colleague on the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Nigel Mills) in making this plea: why will the Secretary of State not make the revised business case available to the Select Committee?

Mr Duncan Smith: I have said to the hon. Lady that we are happy to sit down to discuss this matter with her. I remind her that no other Government have ever published business cases, but I am happy to consider what she asks.

Mr Mark Hoban (Fareham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that Opposition Members today have focused on process because they do not want to confront the reality that the welfare reforms that we have implemented successfully have helped to tackle unemployment—they have got more people into work—and that universal credit is essential in making it clear to people that work pays?

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The reality is that our welfare reforms are working, and our pensions reforms are working. The truth is that the Opposition have absolutely nothing to say about any of this. Instead, they want to delve and delve into the detail, but that will not tell them anything. Universal credit—started by this Government—will be a great success: it will get more people into work, and it will secure more households with greater earnings.

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): The head of the home civil service clearly has reservations about the full business case for the roll-out of universal credit. Which of those reservations has he expressed to the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr Duncan Smith: The head of the home civil service has expressed no reservations, and I do not believe that he has any reservations about these plans. As agreed, the plans will be signed off with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and when they are signed off, I hope that the hon. Member for Rhondda will write me a letter to say, “Thank you very much, indeed.”

John Hemming (Birmingham, Yardley) (LD): Does the Secretary of State agree that the Opposition would do a better job if, rather than asking picky bureaucratic questions, they focused on whether universal credit will improve pay for low-paid people and ensure that work pays?

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The problem for the hon. Member for Rhondda is that his Government left behind a shambles in welfare—people unemployed, long-term unemployment rising, and youth unemployment rising dramatically—and there has never been an apology about that, or about crashing the economy.

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): The Secretary of State’s problem is that on numerous occasions over the past three or four years he has given the House and the Select Committee on Work and Pensions different versions of events. He told us that the project was on track, and he stated to the Select Committee in February that the business case would be approved by April. What is actually going on with universal credit? In what sense is what people are claiming any different from jobseeker’s allowance? Does he know what happens to people whose circumstances change, and is this really universal credit at all?

Mr Duncan Smith: I do know, actually. As we go along, we are developing universal credit correctly and stably, so that it rolls out properly. To repeat, we are rolling it out for singles in the whole of the north-west; couples development is now rolling out; and family developments are to come. Towards the end of this year, we will have rolled out universal credit to the north-west. I must say that is the right way to do it: to make sure that what we produce is safe and delivers what we say it will, unlike tax credits and other problems that we got from the previous Government. I would like to know what the hon. Lady really thinks about the failure of her Government to deliver any programme correctly or safely.

Stephen Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a central contradiction in the figures from the Opposition? When the PAC last looked at this issue, the Labour Chair said: “We believe strongly that meeting any specific timetable...is less important than delivering the programme successfully.” Is it not right that we learn the lessons of the programmes that went wrong under the last Government, and that we get the programme right, rather than rush it?

Mr Duncan Smith: That is exactly correct. That is why, when the right hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) stood up, I explained to her that we are now doing what the Committee asked for. We are rolling out universal credit carefully; at every check, we make sure with the Treasury and the Cabinet Office that what we are producing works, and the next phase is then approved. We have approved all the roll-out plans for this Parliament, as was said by the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West. The strategic plan for this Parliament is exactly what the Chair of the PAC asked for, so we are giving her what she wants.
Mr Duncan Smith: What my hon. Friend says is exactly the point I have been making, but which Opposition Members just do not understand. There were too many disasters under their watch; we do not intend to repeat them. We are doing the implementation exactly as the PAC and the NAO recommended.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Once again, I am absolutely staggered at the Secretary of State’s hubris; there are more cover-ups, and everybody else is to blame apart from the Secretary of State. This has been an absolutely unmitigated disaster. UC is dead in the water, and he should go.

Mr Duncan Smith: That is pretty much what the hon. Lady says whenever she stands up on any question to do with welfare. The reality is that she is opposed to absolutely everything that we have done. If it was left to her and some of her colleagues on the Select Committee, they would repeal everything we have done, and welfare would be in the sort of chaos that Labour Members left us when they left Government.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): The Secretary of State may have seen Labour’s recent four-point plan for universal credit. Points 3 and 4 amount to significant uncosted scope increases, with no benefits applied to them. Given that, does he agree that it might be better for Labour to stay off the whole subject of business cases?

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree with my hon. Friend. The truth is that the Opposition do not want to talk about any of their welfare proposals because all of them would cost more money and deliver less. If we were to apply a business case to the Opposition, they would not exist any more.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State look at the interesting report by Sheffield Hallam university on the state of the coalfields? It shows that although the welfare reforms might be working in some parts of the country, they are certainly not working in Wales. In the south Wales area that I represent, the share of pensioners living in poverty is about double that in the south-east of England. Welfare reform is anticipated to have a more substantial impact on the average financial loss per adult of working age in south Wales than across Britain as a whole. It is important to look at the variations within the UK, and I would be grateful if he gave them some attention.

Mr Duncan Smith: The right hon. Lady knows that I respect her hugely. I am very happy to look at the points she raises. In Wales, we inherited a peculiarly difficult problem. There were very high levels of unemployment and a very high number of people on incapacity benefit. I believe that our reforms are working. We have seen unemployment fall dramatically and employment levels rise in Wales. Is there more that we can do? Absolutely. My door is open and I would be very happy to discuss anything that she thinks we could do.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) suggesting that he would like to help the Secretary of State implement universal
credit is a bit like his friend, President Putin, offering to help the Ukrainians with their elections—and, I should think, almost as welcome. Does my right hon. Friend agree that when the business case has been signed off, we can get back to what really matters, which is discussing how we can allow my constituents who are offered jobs to work as many hours as they like without having to worry about whether they will lose more in benefits than they will gain in salary?

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend is exactly right. That is what universal credit will deliver, and that is why delivering universal credit safely and securely is the key to the plan. The approvals have been signed off. All the work that is being done in this Parliament is approved by the Treasury, and the long-term strategic business case should be approved very shortly as well.

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): Free school meals are an incredibly important part of the benefits system. A number of teachers have said that some children come back after the summer break noticeably thinner. The Secretary of State promised an announcement on which universal credit recipients would be entitled to free school meals by summer 2011. What is the reason for the long delay, and when will that announcement be made?

Mr Duncan Smith: The Department for Education is making a decision about the best way to deliver free school meals. People who are eligible for free school meals will be eligible for them under the new arrangements. This is an opportunity to ensure that all those who really need free school meals actually get them. There are often problems in the existing system, so this is an opportunity to reform the system to improve the take-up and the accuracy.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): We have seen Parliament at its best over the past two days. There were a couple of points of order yesterday and there is an urgent question today. I say gently to the shadow Minister, who is one of the best shadow Ministers, that he went over the top. The Secretary of State has come back after the summer break noticeably thinner. The Secretary of State promised an announcement on which universal credit recipients would be entitled to free school meals by summer 2011. What is the reason for the long delay, and when will that announcement be made?

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digital option. He is more than welcome to come and see them and talk to them if he likes. The door is open; we have nothing to hide. If he does accept that invitation, perhaps he will also persuade his hon. Friends to visit the IT. They do not want to visit it because they are pretending that it does not work.

Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): When my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) and I went to the Harrogate jobcentre recently, universal credit recipients were passionate about the confidence that the new scheme is giving them to get a job, and recruiters were persuasive about how it is making it easier to place people in jobs. Will the Secretary of State ignore the hue and cry from the Labour party and focus on the benefits that universal credit is bringing to the lives of real people?

Mr Duncan Smith: I always make it my priority to ignore the nonsense that comes from the other side. The Opposition live in la-la land when it comes to the welfare reforms. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that this is about real people who are trying to get back to work. We are delivering for them right now, and we will deliver even more when universal credit arrives safely and securely.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): On Monday, I received an e-mail from the Secretary of State’s office telling me that he would be visiting Wrexham on Monday afternoon. Every week, I meet constituents in Wrexham who are suffering from his incompetence. The only person who is running away from conversations about benefits is the Secretary of State. Will he meet me to hear what is happening in Wrexham in respect of personal independence payments, universal credit and all the other benefits that are falling apart?

Mr Duncan Smith: I accept that the hon. Gentleman needed to plan that statement. I did visit Wrexham the other day and the jobcentre there. It has a phenomenally dedicated group of people who are doing brilliantly. As a result, unemployment levels in his area are falling. They are falling as a direct result of the welfare reforms that we have brought in. I only wish that he had said the same thing to the last Government. My door is always open. If he wants to come and talk to me about any problem, I will be very happy to see him.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): May I thank my right hon. Friend for the open and frank way in which he has responded to questions about the business plan? Does he agree that the Opposition’s role in questioning business plans is important, and would he like to encourage them to be a bit more zealous in questioning the business plan for High Speed 2?

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend always tries to tempt me, but I will resist that temptation and say that he needs to raise that matter with other Ministers who will no doubt come to the Dispatch Box.

Mr Speaker: Plenty of people raise it with me, including people who live in Swanbourne.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The Secretary of State needs to understand that when we ask questions in the House, we expect frank, honest and accurate answers from the Government, but that is not what we have had. He suggests that Sir Bob Kerslake did not know what he was talking about when he gave his answers to the Public Accounts Committee. Will Sir Bob Kerslake correct the record, or are we being misled again?

Mr Duncan Smith: I have been absolutely clear—I do not think I could have been clearer—that the strategic business plans for this Parliament have all been approved. [Interruption.] Would the hon. Gentleman like to let me finish? What Sir Bob Kerslake was referring to was the overarching full roll-out, including the years beyond this Parliament. I have already said that I and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury are about to finalise that, as approved.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): The Secretary of State has to accept that there have been valid concerns behind all the questions that have been asked about the feasible delivery of universal credit. There is also real confusion about the differing answers that have been given. Those concerns extend to Northern Ireland, where people are concerned about the implications for hard-pressed families and for local and regional economies. Given the question mark against the overall business case, is it right for the Assembly to be brow-beaten by the Treasury, through threats of cuts to other budgets, into passing the karaoke Bill that would legislate for universal credit?

Mr Duncan Smith: I believe that the welfare reforms that the Assembly is being asked to pass, which include universal credit, are right. They are already delivering for the rest of the UK, and I believe that there will be net value to Northern Ireland when it rolls them out. I hope that it gets on and does it, and universal credit will be part of that.

BILL PRESENTED

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (INDEPENDENCE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Ruane, on behalf of Mr Graham Allen, presented a Bill to define the independence of local government; to regulate the relationship between local and central government in England by means of a statutory Code; to require public authorities to act in compliance with the Code; to provide that the Code may only be amended by means of an Order under the super-affirmative procedure, approved unanimously by each House of Parliament or by a majority in each House equal to or greater than two-thirds of the number of seats in each House; to exclude any Bill to amend this Act from the provisions of the Parliament Act 1911; to make provision regarding the powers and finances of local government in England; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 5 September, and to be printed (Bill 72).
Opposition Day

[4TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Housing Supply

1.13 pm

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): I beg to move.

That this House notes that the Government has failed to tackle the acute housing shortage which is central to the cost of living crisis and over the last four years has presided over the lowest level of new homes being built in peacetime since the 1920s and the lowest number of homes for social rent being built in at least 20 years; further notes the recent reports that housing starts are forecast to fall this year with a large fall in affordable housing starts; and calls on the Government to tackle the housing shortage and commit to increasing house building to at least 200,000 homes a year by 2020, including by boosting housing supply by creating a Help to Build scheme for small and medium-sized builders alongside a reformed Help to Buy, by reforming the development industry and introducing measures to tackle land banking, by bringing forward plans to deliver a new generation of new towns and garden cities and by giving local authorities a new right to grow to deliver the homes their communities need.

We have called this debate because we are in the midst of the biggest housing crisis in a generation. We are not building even half the homes that we need to keep up with demand, and regrettably the current Government are presiding over the lowest level of house building in peacetime since the 1920s. The shortage just keeps on growing. According to figures that I obtained from the Library recently, the backlog of demand since the Government came to power is 500,000 homes, which is equivalent to Birmingham, England’s second biggest city. Individuals, couples and families are being priced out of home ownership, which has fallen to its lowest level since 1987. Average house prices are now eight times average incomes, and in some high-demand areas the ratio is even higher.

Mr John Leech (Manchester, Withington) (LD): I recognise that there is a crisis in housing. I am therefore shocked by the lack of ambition in the motion. Not only does it commit to only 200,000 extra homes each year, but it gives no commitment whatever to a target at all. In the end, what we need to see is the Government putting their money where their mouth is and committed to increasing home building to at least 200,000 a year by 2020. That means building 3.8 million new homes over the next 15 years.

Emma Reynolds: The decent homes programme was one of the Labour Government’s proudest achievements. It transformed the homes and lives of millions of people in council houses. I say to the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr Leech) that in our last year in office, we started 39,000 social homes. In the past year, the current Government started 3,900. I will come later to the affordable homes cliff edge over which they are presiding.

Millions of people across the country face the insecurity of private renting, not knowing whether they will be evicted from one year to the next or even one month to the next. Young people and families are watching as their dream of home ownership, which their parents and grandparents were able to achieve, slips out of reach.

The housing shortage is central to the biggest challenge facing Britain today—the cost of living crisis. We know that on average, working people are more than £1,600 a year worse off under this out-of-touch Government, but the problem is about more than just the pound in people’s pocket. It is about the insecurity that people feel, often in their workplaces and sometimes in their homes, and about the prospects of the next generation, with many parents feeling that their children will be worse off than they are.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I am glad that my hon. Friend mentions the impact on families in the private rented sector. As the Education Secretary has slipped into the Chamber, I wish to make the point that another real problem is the effect on children now of the uncertainty that she describes. It has long-term consequences, because children need stability and they need to be able to stay in the same school. If their parents have to keep moving, that stability is undermined and so are their long-term prospects.

Emma Reynolds: In fact, academics have conducted interesting research showing that one driver of a child becoming a NEET—being not in education, employment or training—in later life is being shuttled around from area to area. That constant churn and change in their schooling means that they do not attain what they need to educationally.

One thing that the Government are good at is making announcements, although I must say that the current Housing Minister is not quite as keen on rhetoric as one of his predecessors, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps). Ministers come to the House armed with an array of statistics designed to dazzle and to distract from the Government’s real record. I am sure that that is what the Minister will try to do this afternoon. He is fond of telling the House that the Government have delivered 445,000 new homes since 2010, but if we do the maths we see that that is just over 111,000 a year on average—hardly a record to be proud of. In the Queen’s Speech a few weeks ago, the Government promised to increase housing supply and home ownership, but in truth home ownership is falling under this Government.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Since we are talking about statistics, will the hon. Lady welcome the approximately 2,000 new homes that are being built as...
a result of the previous Conservative administration of Crawley borough council, and will she condemn the same local authority’s current Labour administration for prevaricating on the local plan?

Emma Reynolds: When I was last in Crawley I saw the white elephant of the free school there, which was refurbished and then was open for just two years. Apparently, millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money was spent on it, and for what good?

We learnt last week that the Minister’s own officials have recently forecast that house building will fall, not rise, this year, but the Minister himself seems to be in two minds about whether forecasts exist. In a written answer, he told my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central ( Hilary Benn ) that no such forecasts exist, before going on to publish his own forecast in that answer—albeit a partial one—claiming that he expected private house building to rise, with no mention of affordable homes. I am curious as to whether his Department publishes forecasts or not. Does the Minister believe they exist? The “Newsnight” leaked document seemed to suggest that they do.

In the same written answer, the Minister acknowledged that the Government are worried about presiding over a “hiatus” in affordable home building, which is probably a neat and euphemistic way of describing the Government’s record. Perhaps he could have been more direct—levels of affordable housing are set to fall off a cliff, and it is an open secret that housing associations are reluctant to bid for the Government’s affordable homes programme. No wonder Ministers are worried.

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): When the Work and Pensions Committee visited Bedfordshire in connection with its work on housing benefit, housing associations told us that in order to get grants to build so-called affordable housing—which will be at 80% of market rent—they were required to place some of their existing stock into that category as it became available for rent. This housing is not truly affordable, so what effect will that have on the housing benefit budget in due course?

Emma Reynolds: My hon. Friend makes a significant point that I was about to come to. I am sure the Minister will talk about the number of affordable homes that the Government are delivering, but 40% of those were commissioned by the previous Labour Government. Furthermore, “affordable” in the Government’s terms is 80% of market rent. That is clearly not affordable for many families up and down the country—and indeed, the National Audit Office has estimated that housing benefit will end up costing the taxpayer £1.4 billion because of the short-sightedness of this Government.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): In Northumberland, significant housing is being built on the former hospital sites at Stannington and Prudhoe, both of which lay idle for the entirety of the previous Government’s time in office. At Prudhoe, 80% of new purchases are made under the Help to Buy scheme and with help from this Government. Does the hon. Lady accept that that regional success is an example of the Government turning things around at local level?

Emma Reynolds: I do not accept that because the figures speak for themselves. We are not building even half the number of homes that we need to keep up with demand. That is an appalling record, and not one the Government should be proud of.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): We have one of the oldest district plans in the country partly because there was huge resistance to Labour’s over-heavy housing targets. Is the hon. Lady suggesting that we will be going back to much higher levels? What impact will that have on the district plans that have emerged in areas that have finalised them?

Emma Reynolds: No, I am not suggesting that we go back to regional spatial strategies. We will not do what this Government did and throw all the pieces in the air and see where they land. We will largely keep the national planning policy framework in place. Where local plans come forward and are voted on, they can be successful. There are problems in areas where local plans have not been passed, and there is also a problem with not using common methodology in some of the local plans.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I welcome this debate and the motion is a step in the right direction. The hon. Lady must acknowledge, however, that the previous Labour Administration’s understandable focus on decent homes meant that they took their eye off the ball for council housing. The last year of the Labour Administration saw just 370 council homes built. Will she explain why the official Opposition do not call explicitly in the motion for a complete lifting of the borrowing cap?

Emma Reynolds: We are not calling for a lifting of the borrowing cap, but we think that councils and housing associations have a key role in delivering a step change in the number of houses for social rent—that is real, affordable rent, not the affordable rent that we have seen from the Government.

Several hon. Members rose—

Emma Reynolds: I will make some progress because a number of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House wish to speak.

For all their hot air, Ministers cannot escape the truth that, on their watch, the number of homes built for social rent is at its lowest level for at least 20 years—hardly surprising since the first thing the Government did when they came to office was cut the affordable homes budget by an eye-watering 60%. The Government will no doubt try to say that all their success is due to the Help to Buy scheme, and the Opposition are clear that we support help for first-time buyers. Crucially, however, Help to Buy must be matched by help to build if prices are not to rise further out of the reach of families who want to get on the housing ladder.

The Government have announced and re-announced schemes, but failed to deliver. We had the NewBuy scheme, the Build to Rent fund, Get Britain Building—all failed to deliver their targets and all are part of a
piecemeal approach by this Government. With such a record of delivery, it is no surprise that the Governor of the Bank of England said recently that housing is the “biggest risk” to our economy.

Unlike this Government, Labour understands the scale of the challenge we face and that real leadership is needed at central and local levels. That is why we have made a bold and ambitious commitment to increase house building to 200,000 homes a year by 2020. Our housing commission, chaired by Sir Michael Lyons and supported by a panel of experts from across the industry, will deliver a road map to help us to achieve that step change in house building. Unlike this Government, we understand that the market is simply not delivering. It is clear that there are deep structural problems in the land market and the house building industry. That is why Labour will take action to reform the development industry, tackle land banking, boost the role of small house builders, give communities the right to grow and deliver a new generation of new towns and garden cities.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I am pleased that my hon. Friend mentioned land banking. She must be aware that, particularly in London, a considerable number of houses, newly built flats and other places are being deliberately kept empty on the expectation of a rapid rise in value, so that they can be sold on without the encumbrance of someone living in them. Does she agree that it is a disgrace at a time of housing shortage to deliberately keep places vacant? If she becomes Housing Minister will she intervene to end that disgraceful practice?

Emma Reynolds: Land banking is a real problem. It is not just developers who are sitting on land, but middlemen, promoters and agents. The Conservative Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, recognised land banking as “pernicious”, and the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), also recognised that before he was given his job as Planning Minister.

Mr Leech: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Emma Reynolds: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

It is clear that land banking is an issue. We have set out specific proposals to deal with it. First, we will give more power and flexibility to local authorities to escalate fees where land banking is taking place on land with planning permission, and as a last resort we will ensure that local authorities have proper compulsory purchase order powers so that they can sell the land to developers that want to build homes and that want to build homes so desperately need.

One key challenge in the house building industry is that it is now dominated by a small number of large players. In the 1980s, two thirds of homes in this country were built by small builders, but by 2012 that figure had fallen to below a third. As the number of small builders has declined and the big firms have grown even bigger by acquiring more firms and land, it has become easier for those big firms to buy up land. As Kate Barker found in her report 10 years ago, it is not always in the interests of big builders to build out sites as quickly as the nation needs. We must get more firms and players into the industry to build homes and provide competition.

The high cost of housing is driven by the high cost of land. Often, the cost of land means that only big house builders are able to manage the risks. Let me be clear: big house builders play a crucial role in building the homes our country needs, but we need a much more diverse and competitive industry to deliver a step change in house building.

George Hollingbery (Meon Valley) (Con): Let me ask the hon. Lady about leadership in this business. Some 30% of local plans were approved when this Government took office and that figure is now approaching 70%. Does that mean that we can expect much more house building to occur? Furthermore, let me press her on the structure of the building industry. The fact that we have larger and fewer house building companies is hardly a surprise when the Labour party so mismanaged the economy that—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that interventions should be short. Speeches must come after the Minister has spoken, and I do not want the hon. Gentleman to use up all his ammunition at this stage.

Emma Reynolds: I thought the hon. Member for Meon Valley (George Hollingbery) was starting to deliver his speech. I say gently to him that the last global financial crash was not caused by the Labour Government’s spending on schools and hospitals, and for him to tell us otherwise is completely fatuous.

Labour has set out plans to boost the role of small house builders, self-builders and custom-builders, who tell us that access to finance and access to land are the key barriers to getting homes built. We have proposed a help to build scheme, which will help them to access finance through the banks—crucially, to get them building—and on access to land we have said that we will ensure that local authorities allocate land in their five-year land supplies, while giving them guaranteed access to public land.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): The hon. Lady knows that I have a private Member’s Bill on the subject of affordable housing. In an area such as mine—not a nimby area—the housing stock has more than doubled in the last 40 years, yet the housing problems of local people have got significantly worse. She will be aware that the situation is complicated and requires a more sophisticated answer than simply producing thousands more homes. Does she not accept that we need to look at, for example, controlling the number of second homes, which have increased greatly in areas such as mine? Do we not need to deal with issues such as that as well as simply build more houses?

Emma Reynolds: I understand the hon. Gentleman’s point and I know that this is a particular issue in his constituency. I think that this whole debate around second homes is difficult. How do we prove which is someone’s first or second home? Many right hon. and hon. Members here, for example, split their time pretty much equally between London and their constituency. I am not entirely sure that the measures suggested by the hon. Gentleman would be fair or effective. I recognise
that the problem is not just a matter of building more homes; it is also about whom we are building those new homes for. That is why it is crucial that the homes we build are truly affordable, which I believe is part of the hon. Gentleman’s private Member’s Bill. I agree with him on the key point that it is not just about the numbers; it is about quality, affordability and place making. It is right not to focus only on the numbers, but in my view the numbers are important.

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Over the last four years, the problem has been the failure to build affordable homes and social homes. The truth is that what are defined as “affordable homes” are unaffordable to most people on or below average incomes. Sadly, although I have great respect for the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George), the Liberal Democrats have propped up a Government who have destroyed affordable housing in this country.

Emma Reynolds: I am delighted to say that in my hon. Friend’s constituency of Hammersmith and Fulham, we now have a Labour council that is committed to affordable homes and ensuring that developers deliver their fair share of truly affordable homes, particularly in areas of high demand, such as my hon. Friend’s, where average house prices are, frankly, eye-watering. It is different from the situation in my own constituency.

Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I am listening with interest to the hon. Lady’s proposals, but will she outline what additional resources she would attach to them?

Emma Reynolds: I am not in the business of making spending commitments in this Opposition-day debate. All I would say is that we recognise that local authorities have a key role to play in delivering the homes we need, and that it was thanks to the reform of the housing revenue account, brought forward by the last Labour Government, that we have seen councils building many more homes than they used to. In fact, Labour councils are outbuilding Tory councils when it comes to affordable homes.

There are also issues to be resolved between local authority areas. Where local authorities are land-locked, as in Oxford, but their communities need to expand due to high demand, the Government’s duty to co-operate is, unfortunately, simply not working. It seems to be a duty to talk and talk, to stall—and then to do nothing. Labour, in consultation with the affected local authority areas, will give communities that need it the right to grow, and we will ensure that local authorities and housing associations have the tools they need to get on with job of building more homes.

We are determined to ensure not just that existing communities are able to expand; we understand the need to build new communities, too. The Government have said they support new settlements—they have been saying that four years, but it has taken them four years to do anything concrete about it. Of course we welcome the proposal in the Queen’s Speech for an urban development corporation to support the building of Ebbsfleet garden city, but it is worrying that it seems to have escaped the Chancellor’s attention that he promised 15,000 homes at Ebbsfleet, when his Government had already committed to 20,000 homes on the same site just two years earlier. It would appear that there is not going to be much “garden” or “city” in the proposals for this garden city. A core principle of such garden cities is a commitment to social and affordable homes, yet the Minister with responsibility for planning, in a written answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Robert Blackman-Woods), said that there will be no such commitment. I am thus left wondering what is garden and what is city about these proposals.

In contrast to this Government’s four years of inaction on new towns and garden cities, we are determined to get going from day one. That is why the shadow Chancellor has already made a commitment that our plans will be supported by a Treasury guarantee. It also crucial that we secure greater institutional investment in housing, including, crucially, in the private rented sector. We are committed to doing so to increase supply, quality and choice in private renting. We must also act to secure a better deal for those 9 million people—couples and families, and including 2 million children—who are renting from a private landlord. Unlike the Government, we are prepared to act to give them much needed stability and peace of mind by legislating to make longer-term tenancies with predictable rents the norm, and banning letting agent fees charged to tenants.

It is regrettable that this Government not only lack determination and leadership, but have taken a piecemeal approach to housing that is clearly not delivering. The numbers speak for themselves. We understand the urgency, commitment and leadership needed to deliver a step change in house building. The next Labour Government will rise to that challenge from day one, delivering 200,000 homes a year by 2020 and providing a home for this generation and the next. I commend the motion to the House.

1.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Kris Hopkins): It is a pleasure to stand here and have the opportunity to talk about a vital part our economy—this country’s housing industry. The industry is growing in strength and confidence. More homes have been built since 2007—a 31% increase in new homes in the last year alone. Planning consents have reached 216,000 in the last year.

Alison Seabeck (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab): On a point of clarification, will the Minister explain the basis of the figures he has just provided to show that more homes have been built since 2007? What is the source of that information?

Kris Hopkins: What we do is add up all the numbers of houses that have been built; and more have been built since 2007. As I said, planning consents have now reached 216,000, and the top 10 building companies are at their maximum capacity and are planning to grow a further 15% in the next year.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Let me ask the question in a different way. The Minister’s predecessor said that the Government’s target was to build more homes than were being built before the
recession—not in 2010, but before the recession. Will the Minister explain in which year of this Parliament the Government have achieved that target?

Kris Hopkins: The hon. Gentleman raises a good point. We have gone through a massive crisis since 2007—I shall say more about it in a few minutes—and responsibility lay solely at the feet of the Government of whom the hon. Gentleman was part. We have been picking up the pieces ever since, and we aspire to deliver the houses that the country needs.

The Government’s affordable housing scheme is on track to deliver 170,000 houses as promised, and the houses committed by the previous Government are already delivered, demonstrating that we have delivered some 200,000 houses to date. We are so keen to accelerate the number of affordable houses that we are bringing forward our 2015-18 affordable housing programme and we want to deliver those much-needed affordable houses right across the country as soon as possible.

Caroline Lucas: If the Minister is really so keen to build genuinely affordable housing, why will the Government not lift the borrowing cap on local authorities? Why are they so obsessed with worrying about public sector debt levels, given that borrowing for council housing is known to be a really safe investment? Other countries do not include it in public sector borrowing, and we should not do so either.

Kris Hopkins: It is clear that the hon. Lady’s party does not care about the economy of this country. It is quite happy to add to the deficit that was created by the last Administration. This Government have taken opportunities to raise the housing revenue account cap by some £300 million, and we look forward to seeing those houses being built.

More council houses have been built in the last four years, under this Government, than were built in the previous 13 years. As a result of the right to buy, some 19,000 hard-working individuals and their families have secured their own homes. That rejuvenated scheme has delivered some 10,000 more homes than was predicted, and we have promised to provide a replacement for every house that is sold. So far, some 3,000 new council houses have been built with right-to-buy receipts.

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): Will the Minister explain why housing associations are being required not only to let newly built homes at 80% of market rent, but to turn over part of our existing stock as it becomes vacant and let it at that level of rent in order to obtain a building grant at all?

Kris Hopkins: What is of key importance is for local authorities and housing associations to understand their stock, and to redesign, restructure and, where necessary, rebuild it to reflect local demand. [Interruption.] That is the answer.

So far, receipts from right-to-buy sales have ensured that some £420 million is available for the building of houses. We want councils to build them more quickly, and we are pushing them to do so, but I think that the Government should be extremely proud of the fact that 3,000 new homes have already been delivered as a result of the extra growth that generated those 10,000 sales.

In the Budget, the Chancellor announced that £300 million in HRA funding would be provided so that more council houses could be built. The prospectus has gone out, and we have received some responses. We will keep pushing councils to deliver those houses. Whatever the tenure, whether we are talking about private, affordable or social housing, this Government want to support the housing industry that is delivering it.

One of the tragedies that came out of the 2008 housing crash and the resulting recession, the deepest since the 1920s, was the loss of jobs. Some 250,000 people—a quarter of a million—lost their livelihoods: their wage packets disappeared. Many thousands of small and medium-sized building and construction firms were lost as a consequence of the dying days of the last Labour Administration, and the loss of that capacity—a direct result of the crash—is still being felt today. That is why the Government want to attract more young apprentices to the sector to secure the future of the housing and construction industry. Thousands of the 1.8 million apprentices whom the Government have supported so far—some 14,000 of them in the building and construction industry alone—are now the plumbers, chippies and brickies who are required to build the houses.

We have put together a builders fund worth a quarter of a billion pounds to support those small and medium-sized businesses, and we are ensuring that they can gain access to it so that they can build on smaller sites. A bidding process is about to end, and we look forward to making announcements in the future. We need to increase capacity, and to do that we need skills—the skills that were lost.

Eric Ollerenshaw (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Con): I wonder whether my hon. Friend recalls a visit that he made on 24 January to Clauhghton Manor Brickworks in my constituency. It was forced to close in 2009 because there was no demand for bricks, and 35 jobs were lost. It reopened in 2013, and is now at full capacity, employing 38 people and producing bricks for tens of thousands of new houses.

Kris Hopkins: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Not only were skills lost, not only were small and medium-sized businesses lost, but the companies that made the products that built the houses were lost as well. I remember visiting that site and talking to the foreman, who had been in a hut protecting the site for the best part of four years. I saw him on television the other day. The company is thriving. I said earlier that the industry was becoming stronger, and it is. At every level, whether we are talking about attracting young people to the sector or about encouraging investors to invest in the manufacturing of materials for house building, the industry is growing, and we should celebrate that boost to our economy.

We are extending the life of the Help to Buy scheme, thus giving some stability to the industry. One of the main points that have been made to me by its representatives is that they do not want a cycle of boom and bust; what they want is some consistency. They want to see products that will give a long life to house building, and if those
products are there, they will invest. Some 1,200 businesses have signed up to the Help to Buy equity scheme, and more than 90% of them are small and medium-sized businesses.

Jack Dromey: Dawn frequently breaks to reveal the Prime Minister descending on a building site in wellington boots and a high-visibility jacket. We have heard 70 separate announcements of schemes including New Buy, First Buy, Build to Rent and Help to Buy. Will the Housing Minister explain why his own Department has forecast a 4% fall in new build housing starts next year?

Kris Hopkins: The reason the Prime Minister appears on building sites is that he supports the housing industry, the reason I visit them is that I support the housing industry, and the reason the hon. Gentleman and his predecessors could not visit them is that they had crashed the housing industry and nothing was being built. As for leaked documents, I am not going to comment, but what I will say is that every element of our Department seeks—whether through planning, supporting skills or supporting small businesses—to ensure that we have sufficient starts to take advantage of the housing offer that is out there and to enable the housing industry to grow.

Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister still has not explained why we have the lowest number of housing starts on record, and why the number is likely to be lower this year than last year. As well as spreading all the news of the developments that are heartening, why does he not address the real problems that affect house building at present?

Kris Hopkins: The reason house building is still a challenge is that the Government of which the hon. Gentleman was a member broke the economy, borrowed too much, crashed the banking system, and wiped out a quarter of a million jobs. That is why it is taking so long to put house building back on track, but it is becoming stronger.

As a direct consequence or our extending Help to Buy to 2020, we will deliver some 120,000 new homes. Help to Buy will continue to be a success. Some 30,000 homes have already been delivered, 87% of them to first-time buyers, and 91% are outside London. The average house price is about £151,000, well below the average price of a house in this country at the moment.

Mr Betts: Does the figure that the Minister has just given apply to the number of homes that will be in the Help to Buy scheme, or the number of extra homes that will be built as a result of it? The two figures are very different.

Kris Hopkins: The total Help to Buy figure, covering both guarantee and equity, is some 36,000. I was talking about the number of new homes built, which is 30,000. Those 30,000 houses have been built because businesses have taken up the Help to Buy scheme. Again, this intervention—this building of new homes—is specifically to help hard-working individuals get on the housing ladder. This intervention is there to help people who could not secure a mortgage or get a deposit together, but it is not only helping the hard-working individual; it is also supporting businesses. For every house that is built, a new job is created. The 30,000 that have come directly from Help to Buy contribute to the 1.7 million private sector jobs this Government have delivered.

As much as the small and medium-sized businesses are really important, and as much as the top 10 builders out there are extremely important in terms of capacity, we also need to expand our large-site developments. So far, our large-sites programme has provided some 80,000 new homes, but unlike the last Government with their failed eco-towns, which failed to deliver a single home, we will listen to local councils, we will support local plans, and we will encourage locally led interventions to deliver housing at scale. The garden city proposals were published in April and we look forward to continued discussions with localities about driving out those houses.

Mr Nick Raynsford (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Where does the Minister expect those new garden cities to be built?

Kris Hopkins: Having put a prospectus out there, I am not going to declare that to you. The key thing is that where individuals come forward—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We do not use the term “you” in that way. The Minister is not referring to me. I am sure that rule is for the benefit of the House.

Kris Hopkins: I apologise, Mr Deputy Speaker. The key is that where local authorities come forward, we will enter into discussion with them and hope to deliver that.

Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Does the Minister share my alarm about the words of Sir Michael Lyons on Labour’s review? The Minister has just discussed some of the hard-won commitments the Government have made to local plans and local accountability. Does he share my fear that Labour would return us to the bad old days of strict, authoritarian, top-down control?

Kris Hopkins: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The last Government went around the country telling local people what they had to do. This Government have laid out our desire to encourage local plans to come forward—to trust local authorities, to understand their local needs, and to have that dialogue with their public and come back with those approved plans. I will be shocked if Labour is again suggesting that it will dictate from Whitehall what communities will have to deliver.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am interested in the Minister’s view that powers should be returned to local government. In that respect, will he review the permitted development rights that have been imposed on local government, whereby an office block can be converted into housing with no social content whatsoever and no requirement for planning permission? Does he not think it would be better if local government were able to determine what happened to those buildings and the number of social homes that were included in any developments?

Kris Hopkins: I disagree with the point the hon. Gentleman makes. The key point is that there are lots of people who are desperate to secure their own home and, whatever the vehicle is, we need to support them in that process.
Mr Slaughter: Does the Minister have any interest in homes that are affordable on low and average incomes? In London, the targets the Mayor sets are £60,000 in income for larger properties and £56,000 for one and two-bedroom flats. Does the Minister think those are reasonable figures for affordable homes?

Kris Hopkins: I am not going to take any lectures about affordable or social housing. The last Government failed to deliver sufficient social housing at a time of economic boom. They did not build the housing required. They did not address the issue of social need. In the most difficult times, however, this Government have stepped up and are delivering those houses. We need to deliver more, but we are setting about delivering that.

Emma Reynolds: Will the Minister give way?

Kris Hopkins: No, I am going to continue.

The key aim is to expand capacity, and one of the ways we are doing that is by encouraging—right across the country—the private rented sector. Thousands of individuals rent their homes, and the vast majority of them rent their homes from good landlords, but there are a few who are damaging the market and failing their tenants, and that is why this Government have set about introducing powers to pursue those individuals and have put moneys out there for councils to make sure we can pursue and prosecute those individuals who fail their tenants.

Bill Esterson: I draw attention to my entry in the register of interests.

The Minister rightly mentions private renting, as not everybody wants to buy; some want to rent, and some do not have any choice. Does he recognise the impact on children of having to move constantly because of the nature of the private rental market, and does he accept that Labour has very sound proposals on longer-term tenancies to deal with exactly that sort of problem?

Kris Hopkins: The key point is that Labour was in power for 13 years and did not address this, whereas we have gone out there and put together a model tenancy that we plan to announce in the near future, and that will address that very issue about extending tenancies, through a negotiation between the landlord and the individual, to give some certainty, particularly for families.

We want to make sure that the private rented sector grows. We want it to be bigger, better and more professional, so that it attracts investors to take a long-term financial view, rather than having the short-term return model currently associated with this sector, which is why we went out there with a £1 billion Build to Rent scheme—a loan scheme. The first round has allocated some £124 million, which will deliver some 16,000 houses, and we are now in contact with further individuals and organisations and will make those announcements in the near future. The bulk of that £1 billion was in round two and we are in detailed negotiations about 16 projects. It is a very important part of the offer to grow and build on the private sector, to challenge poor behaviour, and to make sure we have high-quality private rented houses available.

In conclusion, we are not complacent about the position we are in. We picked up a smashed and broken industry. A strong industry is now emerging, but it has taken time to address and fix the problems left by the last Government—the banking industry issue, the lost jobs and skills, the factories that went to the wall. We are rebuilding the companies that failed and giving them the confidence to come forward and invest. So far, some 440,000 new homes have been delivered, but that is not enough, and we are determined to deliver more. I have to say to the House, however, that regardless of what I have said here today, this will be down to the graft of those individuals on the building and construction sites out there, it will be down to the risk takers who are investing in house building again, and it will be down to the young apprentices who are making a commitment to learning and developing their new career skills. The role of this Government is to support those champions of that industry. Every part of this Government is committed to delivering new homes—the homes that are needed—and I ask the House to reject this motion.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Before I call the next speaker, instead of imposing a time limit, may I suggest that Members speak for about eight minutes so we can get everybody in?

1.58 pm

Mr Nick Raynsford (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): First, may I draw the House’s attention to my interests as declared in the register?

I have to say to the Minister that his figures are very wide of the mark indeed. The simple harsh truth is that the present Government have the worst record on housing of any Government since the end of the second world war. Fewer new homes have been built in their period in office than in any comparable period of peacetime since the 1920s. On average, over their four years in office the coalition Government have managed to build just 112,000 homes a year. By contrast, the previous Labour Government built 1.8 million homes over their 13 years in office, averaging 145,000 homes a year—not enough perhaps, but very substantially more than we are seeing from the present Government, and I am surprised that the Minister does not have the honesty and integrity to admit that. Even in the depths of recession—[Interruption.] I will withdraw that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Before you do, I will just say that we are going to be courteous to each other. This is going to be a very interesting debate, and I know you do not mean that and I see you are going to withdraw it.

Mr Raynsford: I ask your leave to withdraw that last statement. Mr Deputy Speaker. I was really just saying that the Minister ought to look at the figures published by his own Department and not exaggerate, or gild the lily, by trying to give us an impression that things are much better than they are. This Government’s record is, in fact, a very poor one: in 2011, they managed just 113,000 new homes; in 2012, they built just 115,000 new homes; and in 2013, they got no further than 110,000. Those are the simple figures and they come from his own Department. All they demonstrate is that the previous Labour Government in their last year in office—in 2009, right in the depths of recession—built more homes...
Mr Leech: That is not the point I was going to make. I was going to ask whether the right hon. Gentleman would accept that 200,000 homes per year is not an ambitious enough target. The fact that the motion contains no target for social housing—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I have explained that interventions must be short. The hon. Gentleman has been here a long time and he has to help us to get other speakers in. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman got the gist of the question.

Mr Raynsford: I did indeed. I say to the hon. Gentleman that given that output is currently averaging just 112,000 homes a year, a target of 200,000 represents a very substantial increase. We can have an academic debate about whether that is enough, but the harsh reality, which his party should not have ignored, is the total failure of this Government to deliver anything near the level required. The output number has to be doubled, and I hope he will support a Labour Government when they are in power—if he is still around—and are delivering to that target.

The Minister, like his predecessor bar one, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), loves to project future increases in numbers, so we hear about 170,000 affordable homes, for example. The right hon. Gentleman used to quote that figure, and we heard about 10,990; in 2011, they started 25,000; in 2012, they started 20,000; in 2013, they started 24,000; and in 2014—the third and fourth quarters—they started 10,990; in 2011, they started 25,000; in 2012, they started 20,000; in 2013, they started 24,000; and in 2014—

Alison Seabeck rose—

Mr Raynsford: And in the first quarter of 2014, the Government have started 5,900. Their own records show that, in the 15 quarters for which they have been in power, they have started 86,810 affordable homes. So let us hear no more boasting about unrealistic targets for how the Government are going to start all these homes, given that they have lamentably failed to deliver them.

Alison Seabeck rose—

Mr Raynsford: Of course I give way.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Just to help, I think the right hon. Gentleman might be on silent meals if he does not give way quicker.

Mr Leech: I will happily give way to the hon. Gentleman. I hope he will explain why his party has supported this Government, who have had such a lamentable record.

Mr Raynsford: I agree very much with that and I will cover it in the latter part of my speech. My thesis is that we need to have a range of differing types of housing, and only by delivering that will we ensure that we meet the ambitious target of 200,000 homes in the next Parliament.

The price of this Government’s failure to build the number of homes necessary is very much reflected in the second crisis of theirs on housing, which is on affordability. The shortage of sufficient homes has been driving prices up in both the owner-occupied sector and the rented sector. Curiously, the Government have been compounding the problem by driving up rent levels themselves in the social rented sector, because in place of social housing at target rents, which was very much the objective of the previous Government, we are now seeing the Orwellian concept of “affordable rent tenancies” where rent is set as a percentage of the market rents. A level of 80% of market rents in London is simply not affordable. How can anyone suggest that 80% of a level required. The output number has to be doubled, and I hope he will support a Labour Government when they are in power—if he is still around—and are delivering to that target.

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Mr Raynsford: I agree very much with that and I will cover it in the latter part of my speech. My thesis is that we need to have a range of differing types of housing, and only by delivering that will we ensure that we meet the ambitious target of 200,000 homes in the next Parliament.

The price of this Government’s failure to build the number of homes necessary is very much reflected in the second crisis of theirs on housing, which is on affordability. The shortage of sufficient homes has been driving prices up in both the owner-occupied sector and the rented sector. Curiously, the Government have been compounding the problem by driving up rent levels themselves in the social rented sector, because in place of social housing at target rents, which was very much the objective of the previous Government, we are now seeing the Orwellian concept of “affordable rent tenancies” where rent is set as a percentage of the market rents. A level of 80% of market rents in London is simply not affordable. How can anyone suggest that 80% of a level required. The output number has to be doubled, and I hope he will support a Labour Government when they are in power—if he is still around—and are delivering to that target.

The Minister, like his predecessor bar one, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), loves to project future increases in numbers, so we hear about 170,000 affordable homes, for example. The right hon. Gentleman used to quote that figure, and we heard about 10,990; in 2011, they started 25,000; in 2012, they started 20,000; in 2013, they started 24,000; and in 2014—

Alison Seabeck rose—

Mr Raynsford: And in the first quarter of 2014, the Government have started 5,900. Their own records show that, in the 15 quarters for which they have been in power, they have started 86,810 affordable homes. So let us hear no more boasting about unrealistic targets for how the Government are going to start all these homes, given that they have lamentably failed to deliver them.

Alison Seabeck rose—

Mr Raynsford: Of course I give way.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Just to help, I think the right hon. Gentleman might be on silent meals if he does not give way quicker.
Mrs Main: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is a very pertinent point. I would like to tease out something about the intermediate option that the right hon. Gentleman is talking about. Would he like to have means-testing of current social housing tenants? As we know, some of them earn lots of money.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I am going to have to help. The hon. Lady was going to speak next. She will not mind going down the list a little bit, because it is unfair to keep intervening. The right hon. Gentleman has already taken nine minutes. I want to get everybody in and these interventions are not going to help when someone knows they are going to speak next.

Mr Raynsford: I am grateful for that, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I will now wind up because I have gone beyond my allotted time. I hope that the hon. Lady will forgive me for not answering that very detailed question. Perhaps she will be able to expand on the issue when she makes her speech.

I believe the Government need to look seriously at how they are spending money, because they are spending a lot of money on housing. The housing benefit bill has risen dramatically, despite the Government’s pledge to cut it, because they have been increasingly dependent on high-rent solutions and people have had to be given housing benefit to help them meet those higher rents. The Government have therefore been compounding the problem while talking about reducing housing benefit. At the same time, they have been spending money on the new homes bonus, a scheme for which nobody has yet produced any evidence to demonstrate that it is having any significant impact, despite more than £7 billion being committed to it. Their Help to Buy 2 scheme is highly profligate, with a £600,000 maximum limit and no tie to new homes, and, again, there is a question as to whether it is a good use of money. So I believe the Government are culpable—

George Hollingbery rose—

Mr Raynsford: I cannot take any more interventions.

The Government are culpable for failing to provide the homes, for compounding the problems on affordability and for spending money on schemes that are unproven, untested and not delivering value for money.

2.9 pm

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Suitably admonished, I shall keep my remarks brief to allow other colleagues to get in, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I wished to pick up on the comments made by the right hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr Raynsford) about what is “affordable”, because in an area such as St Albans house values and land values are so high that it is genuinely difficult for any local authority and any house builder to deliver social housing and affordable housing. That is why I wanted to ask him whether he supported considering some form of means-testing for those currently occupying social housing. I just wanted to throw that into the mix.

My council in St Albans has the second oldest district plan in the country. I brought my council leader, Councillor Julian Daly, to meet the Secretary of State because I wanted my right hon. Friend to have a sense of the pressures on a place such as St Albans. There is high demand to live in our beautiful area. It is very commutable to London. It suffers similar housing pressures to London and has similar prices. The average house price in St Albans is £401,811. That is a massive sum for any young family to afford. The average mortgage repayment in St Albans is £738 or 16.1% of average income.

Another part of the mix, which has not been mentioned today, and about which I put in a plea to the Chancellor, is stamp duty. That has not been considered by the Opposition. In high-price areas such as mine, we have the Help to Buy scheme through which the Government are helping young families and young people to get on the housing ladder. Those people are saving hard for deposits, yet they have to give over a large whack in tax. Stamp duty has not been considered by the House since 2003 and I make no bones about the fact that I am trying to lead a charge on the matter.

Stamp duty means that some people are unable to trade down and free up homes for other couples because their house values have risen so much that they would pay a large amount of tax. It also makes it difficult for expanding families to move up. It is a barrier to fluidity in the housing market and to young people moving. It seems rather odd that we as a Parliament want to get young people on the housing ladder; yet we are happy to take large sums of money off them in areas such as mine. The cost of an entry-level property in St Albans is probably more than the national average house price, so for the many people trying to get such a property in our area, stamp duty is a big deal.

The reason for our having the most out-of-date district plan is not that we have a slovenly and lazy council—far from it. Our planning department is the busiest in the country. A huge number of people want to build in our area, and we have loads of challenges from developers. My council regularly spends large amounts of money fighting off predatory developers. The Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), smiles at me—I will be making my rail freight point—but it has cost my council millions of pounds to fight off inappropriate development applications.

The reason we have such an out-of-date district plan is that my council, along with other councils in Hertfordshire, was desperately trying to resist the high housing targets that were imposed top-down by Labour. If the Opposition go back to imposing top-down targets, there will be sclerosis in planning departments again. I welcome the fact that the Government have taken by the horns the point that local areas should decide. Local areas know their housing need best.

Mr Betts rose—

Mr Love rose—

Mrs Main: I am not giving way because I listened to Mr Deputy Speaker’s guidance and I am keeping my remarks brief.

The previous policy guidance, which set a housing density of more than 50 houses to the hectare, resulted in places such as St Albans being swamped with one-bedroom flat units, and large five-bedroom houses to pay for them. This skews the market. What we want in
areas such as St Albans is to be able to decide whether we need two-bedroom flats or three-bedroom small family houses to suit the needs of the local population.

The Government have gone a long way to implementing localism. It is not perfect, or I would not keep referring—my hon. Friend the Minister is listening to me—to my rail freight point, but I would like to think that we have started listening to what residents want locally. Housing numbers should not be dictated centrally. St Albans was furious with the previous Government’s decision to lump us in with the north London arc, making us vulnerable to inappropriate development, which we have resisted. We are ringed by green belt but we do not have a NIMBY attitude in St Albans. We wish to deliver affordable local housing for young families, but we also realise that we are part of people’s investment portfolios.

The Opposition should be clearer about what they mean by “affordable” in areas such as mine. If they do not like the 80% calculation, how would they deliver affordable housing in an area where the average house price is more than £400,000? Nobody in St Albans is going to give their land away and a local authority has a duty of care to its residents, so it will not give away its assets and it has very little as a land bank of its own and very few buildings. Labour’s plans sound great, but how would it deliver affordable housing? That is very hard to deliver and the Government are going a long way to try to do so.

2.15 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): We need to build 250,000 new homes every year, probably for the next 20 or 30 years, if we are to address the housing crisis properly. That is the scale of the challenge that faces us collectively. In order to do that over that period, we probably need buy-in to such an approach from all political parties. That is a further challenge. I admitted in the Queen’s Speech debate that the Government whom I supported for 13 years did not build enough homes. The problem is that the present Government are building even fewer.

On average, year by year, fewer homes are being built under this Government than were built under the previous Government. That is a fact, however the Minister tries to dress up the figures. If we are to get that long-term buy-in to building sufficient homes, it has to be through all-party agreement, because the construction industry cannot be turned on and off like a tap. Another challenge is to train and keep construction workers to deliver the homes we need. As the Select Committee report in 2012 said, there is no single silver bullet—we need a range of different measures to provide a range of different homes.

We need the volume house builders to build more, of course. That is a challenge for them as well as for the Government. But we also need other forms of building, including building houses for social rent. We cannot simply build houses at 80% of market rent to help everyone in this country. There are people who not only cannot afford to buy, but cannot afford market rents, so we need a social house building programme as part of the total number.

Let me be clear to Front Benchers on both sides of the House. I support the campaigns of the Local Government Association and of the National Federation of ALMOs to lift the borrowing cap on local authorities. That could build us at least 60,000 new homes, but that does not go far enough. In this Parliament we have had a 60% cut in the funding for social housing. Some, if not all, of it will have to be restored if we are to build sufficient social homes in the future. Whether we are talking about local authority homes—council homes—or housing association homes, we will not get them built without more public money being put in. That is a fact of life. It is uncomfortable at a time of stringency and constraint, but that is a reality and we all have to address it.

Another uncomfortable issue is the right to buy. The Government’s policy envisages a one-for-one replacement. In many parts of the country, such as my constituency, there is no point selling a family home and offering to replace it with a one-bedroom flat. The demand is for family homes. Like-for-like replacement is what is needed, and even that is not sufficient in some areas. If there is an acute shortage of social housing in particular localities, or there is not the land to replace homes that are sold, we may have to give local authorities the powers to restrict the right to buy.

Again, that is uncomfortable. It is not what anyone wants to hear, but it is about true localism and recognising that there are particular circumstances and particular housing markets where the problems are so difficult that that is what we may have to do. That, again, is something that the Select Committee report addressed and the Government dismissed. It is a factor if we are to deal with the acute crisis faced by many people who cannot afford to buy and cannot afford to rent in the private sector.

There are two other issues that I shall address. If we are to build sufficient homes, we all want to see a brownfield-first policy. The Select Committee is conducting an inquiry into the national planning policy framework and we look forward to the Minister coming before us. We may be slightly less harsh on him than some of his own colleagues were this morning in the Westminster Hall debate, which I chaired. If we have a brownfield-first policy, we will have to deal with the question why the proportion of houses built on brownfield sites appears to be declining. It is difficult to know because the figures are available only up to 2011. There is a gap in the figures, which is not helpful.

Perhaps there has been decline because of the problem of paragraph 47 of the NPPF and developers claiming that brownfield sites are not viable. Perhaps it is because we have lost the grants that the regional development agencies used to put in to deal with contamination and other problems on brownfield sites that made them easier to develop. Perhaps it is a bit of both. We face that challenge if we are to get brownfield development going. We must also be honest with people. Even if we build on all the available brownfield sites, we will still have to build on some greenfield sites in this country. We must be honest about that and face up to it.

Then we come on to the further challenge: how do we sign up local communities? The principle of the NPPF is to support sustainable development, which is consistent with the local plan, so putting in place local plans is absolutely vital. There may be some authorities that are dragging their feet, but there are some that are genuinely struggling to get local plans in place. That is what we are finding in our inquiry, and we will produce our
findings on that in due course. There are a number of other issues that the Minister will look at in due course; perhaps he will do it when he appears before the Committee.

Let us return to the viability of brownfield sites. Is that an issue that needs to be addressed? It is stopping some local plans being put in place, as authorities are being forced to go back and relook at greenfield sites. What about the duty to co-operate? Those authorities are trying to co-operate, but cannot get a local plan in place because their neighbours will not co-operate with them. How do we deal with that challenge?

Finally, one issue that has come up time and again is the assessment of housing need. Many authorities are unclear about how they should do their sums. The planning inspector could come in at the last minute and say that they have got them wrong and that they should go back and start counting again. Although I am not generally in favour of heavy-handed centralism, should there not be a bit more guidance at the beginning of the process so that local authorities are clear about the numbers they are trying to address, and their local plans are not held up at the last stages?

I hope that those are helpful points that will help to move this matter forward. We must all face up to the fact that over the past 30 years we have had a collective failure to build sufficient homes in this country. If we are to address that collective failure, we need some collective agreement across the House about how we will proceed to build those homes over the next 20 or 30 years.

2.21 pm

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the considered speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts). I experienced a bit of déjá vu at the start of this debate, as we had the predictable trading of blizzards of carefully selected statistics and political froth, which does nothing to shed any light on this matter. As is often the case, there is, at this point, a coming together, with people trying to find constructive solutions, rather than simply trading selective statistics. People who accidentally stumble on this debate while seeking entertaining daytime television, and who happen to watch this kind of thing, will be left bemused or cold by the trading of figures that we saw at the start.

The obsession with chasing housing build targets and with trying to apportion blame is one reason why there has been, over decades, a complete failure to provide enough decent family homes that are affordable for people in this country. There seems to be an obsession with one rather two-dimensional issue, which is the building of thousands of houses. I have won the MPs’ equivalent of the national lottery by coming first in the private Members’ Bill ballot. On 5 September, providing there are not too many other Members filibustering me out of this opportunity, I will put the case for the further tools that are necessary to advance the interests of affordable housing for families in this country.

This is a bespoke Bill—not one that is off the peg—on which I will seek cross-party support; it is still being drafted. I hope to gain support for it over time. At the moment, it is a veritable Queen’s Speech of a Bill that will probably have to be narrowed down. The issue on which I will primarily focus is the still insufficiently developed intermediate market for housing, particularly in the south, where there is a big mismatch between earnings and house prices. Constructing a new lower rung on the housing ladder of shared equity, shared ownership and mutual housing is necessary to address some of the problems in areas such as mine.

Having listened to the shadow Minister, I want to speak about some of the things that are undermining our attempts to fulfil the desperate need for affordable homes in areas such as mine. They include the proliferation of second or holiday homes. I have tried to advance the case for the introduction of a new use classes order in the planning system, which would cover those who want to convert a property from permanent to non-permanent occupancy. The order would last only for the lifetime of that occupancy, because otherwise there would be a perverse incentive for us all to go for that when we wanted to sell our properties. However, there does not appear to be political support for that at present. I urge both Labour and Conservative Members to look at the impact that that issue is having on areas such as mine, where four times as many properties are sold to second-home buyers than to first-home buyers.

As I mentioned in my intervention on the shadow Minister, we are not nimbys in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The housing stock has more than doubled in the past 40 years, yet the housing problems of locals have got significantly worse. It is not simply building homes that is the issue; we have significantly more second homes and holiday homes in our area and significantly higher housing need. This obsession with building hundreds of thousands of homes is not the answer. We need to be a little more sophisticated in our approach. It is not the case that if we dump a load of homes on the countryside the market will, by magic, ensure equilibrium, and local people will have their housing needs met. I can assure Members that that policy will fundamentally fail in my constituency.

There is also the impact of the spare room subsidy. I do not think I will have time to advance that issue, but there is a principle involved here: if someone is poor, they should not be less entitled to a stable family home than if they were better off. I am not sure that I will be able to advance that principle in my Bill, but I feel very strongly that it is something that has been lost in our obsession.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): It sounds to me—I hope I have not misinterpreted the hon. Gentleman—as though there is an argument for building council houses again. What does he think about that? We have debated social housing time and again, but it would never meet the requirements of the hon. Gentleman’s constituency. Perhaps he should think about council house building.

Andrew George: Absolutely. I am not quite so obsessed with the issue of whether the property is owned by a council or by a registered social landlord. We have some fantastic housing associations in this country, and we have had some pretty rotten local authorities. What we need is social rented accommodation of a decent standard that meets the local need for affordable housing.

Mr Cunningham rose—
Andrew George: Time prevents me from taking another intervention from the hon. Gentleman. One of the unintended consequences of the spare room subsidy is that we will end up with smaller new build properties, and less flexibility for housing associations in meeting the needs of local communities. When I was involved in this sector, before I was elected to this House, I always recommended future-proofing new build estates. For example, if I identified an even demand for two and three-bedroom properties, I erred on the side of three and four-bedroom properties, because of the need to future-proof the estate. At the time of building, the marginal cost of adding another bedroom to a development is almost insignificant; it is tiny. That is why the spare room subsidy is driving policy in entirely the wrong direction, and that needs to be addressed.

Speculative landholdings need to be controlled, particularly in rural areas such as mine, where we are looking for exception sites. How can we do that when people are clinging on to land for dear life? One of the planning system’s big problems is that it is fuelled by greed, rather than need. If we are to meet local housing need, we need a system that forces landowners to use or lose their land. I would like the Government to address those needs.

In view of the time, I clearly need to bring my remarks to a close. I look forward to addressing these issues in private meetings in advance of our debate on 5 September, but people who have shared-equity or shared-ownership accommodation often find themselves stuck because they are unable to buy. The Government need to consider extending the Help to Buy scheme to shared ownership, to enhance that sector and allow for a new lower rung on the housing ladder, particularly in those parts of the country in which there is a bigger mismatch between earnings and house prices.

2.31 pm

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George). I echo what he said about the bedroom tax, not only because of its effect on those it directly affects, but because of the attitude that it shows to the 8 million people in this country who live in social housing, which is that they are effectively second-class citizens so far as the Government are concerned. I am sorry that so many of his colleagues voted for the bedroom tax, although he did not, which is entirely to his credit.

The hon. Gentleman’s constituency is very different from mine, and I hope he will not mind if I move the subject on to London, where housing problems are writ large and are intensifying. We see that in every indication, from the gap between housing demand and supply—the gap in London is some 30% of the gap in England as a whole—to rough sleeping, which has gone up 75% in London over the past three years; that is more than twice the increase in the rest of the country. It is tempting to say that the problems are too difficult to solve, and that house building should therefore take place in areas where land values are cheaper. I am well aware of that, because the median rent for a three-bedroom property in my constituency is £550 a week, which is more than the average London wage. The average purchase price for any property is approaching £750,000, which is completely unaffordable even for those on several times the average income.

Why have to address those problems, including in central London, because Government policy—and certain local policies, too—has intensified them. Local housing allowance for three-bedroom properties has been capped at £340. That is supposed to cover the bottom third of rents, but the valuation office’s up-to-date figures tell us that the lower quartile of rents in Hammersmith for a three-bedroom property is £459. The net effect of the change, and indeed of all the other changes the Government have made to benefits policy, is that it is almost impossible to find any property in the private sector that would be covered by housing benefit. We have therefore had an exodus—a process of social cleansing—that has forced people who, in many cases, have lived in London for generations out of the city, and away from where their homes, schools, jobs and families are.

That was intensified by a deliberate policy. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) for mentioning what happened at the local election in Hammersmith, which was a breath of fresh air to almost everyone who lives in the area. There was a deliberate demolition of council properties. Whole blocks of 200 or 300 good-quality council properties were held empty for six or seven years before being demolished, to be handed to the private sector. Council properties were sold off as they became empty. Over the past four or five years, 500 homes have been sold that could have been used by families on the waiting list, had the waiting list not also been abolished.

I cannot understand the mentality of the Government or local councils, who want to exacerbate an already serious housing problem. I am therefore delighted that a Labour council came in, and the first thing it did on the day after the election was to cancel the demolitions and the sales. The first thing the council did at the first cabinet meeting was to say, “From now onwards we will again prioritise social rented housing, which for eight years has been excluded from the types of housing that could be constructed.”

I want to be a bit more optimistic, and talk about how we can achieve decent affordable housing in high-value areas. Our local plan envisages 50,000 new properties being built over a 20-year period. That is perhaps slightly over-ambitious, if anything, and somewhat unwise, in the sense that it means demolishing hospitals to build housing on their sites. I think that is somewhat short-sighted.

There are three opportunity areas in Hammersmith and Fulham. One is on the site that will be used for High Speed 2; it is envisaged that 24,000 new homes will be built there. The second is in White City, on the site vacated by the BBC, where it is envisaged that 6,000 properties will be built. The third is in the Earls Court and West Kensington area, where it is envisaged that 8,000 properties will be built. The problem is that under existing policies, not a single one of those almost 40,000 properties will be a social rented home. Clearly that will change with the planning policy, but many planning consents have already been given.

I draw attention to two facts. First, across London, and probably outside London, too, developers are relying on viability assessments, which are confidential documents that are not disclosed to the public, or even to councillors on most occasions. Developers typically say that they can afford to build 5% or 10% affordable housing at 80% market sale or 80% market rent. Every time that
has been challenged and taken to the Information Commissioner, the documents have eventually been revealed. In the case of Earls Court, for example, we had to go to not only the Information Commissioner but the first-tier tribunal. It was only at that point that the local authorities gave in. Guess what? The viability assessments did not support the idea that there should be little or no affordable housing in those developments.

Secondly, much of these developments are on public land in the widest sense. If they are not on council-owned land or Government-owned land, they are on land owned by the BBC, Network Rail or Transport for London. If we cannot build decent affordable housing on publicly owned land, we are saying to developers, “In those cases, you can also get away with building 95% market housing.” In inner London, that means that properties are for sale abroad, off-plan. Most properties currently being built in my constituency are advertised on websites in the far east, Russia and elsewhere. One-bedroom and two-bedroom properties begin at £1 million-plus. Those properties are not affordable to anyone, by any means, which is why there is effectively a coalition between those who need social rented homes and those who could afford quite a lot on the private market. All my constituents say to me, “When will the Government act to ensure that houses are built that are affordable for the people who live and pay taxes in this country?”

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): If I am following the hon. Gentleman’s logic correctly, he is arguing for scrapping the ability of developers to vary section 106 agreements on the basis of a project’s financial viability. Is that the Labour party’s policy? Does he not understand that that may well reduce the overall supply of affordable housing?

Mr Slaughter: I am asking for the viability assessments to become transparent, open documents, so that everyone can see where the truth lies. I am also asking for Conservative local authorities to stop colluding with developers to drive out affordable housing for their own political, economic and ideological motives. That is what is happening across London, and I am sure outside London, too. I support exactly what Michael Lyons said yesterday at the LGA conference, which is that if local authorities are going to act in that way, there has to be an impetus to build more social housing, and that has to be in addition to any revival in the private housing market.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East that we do not want to change things back to exactly how they were, but the four principles that the Government have relied on need to be reversed. They have cut capital investment in housing, reduced security of tenure and almost eliminated affordability, certainly in London, and now they are refusing to determine on the basis of need how housing should be allocated. That is more than a generational step back. Frankly, those are not housing policies that any Government should support. I hope that when my hon. Friend is Housing Minister, she will reverse them.

2.40 pm

Nick de Bois (Enfield North) (Con): It is appropriate that I should follow another London Member, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr Slaughter). At the risk of being criticised—we often rightly are—for being London-centric, London does face specific challenges, so I would like to spend a few minutes talking about that subject, which is close to my constituents’ hearts.

It is worth setting out some context. Since 2001, London’s population, and therefore the demand for housing, has increased by 1 million. That is equivalent to creating a new borough every two and a half years, such is the speed of growth. That means we have to respond to the challenging housing needs with innovation and imagination. To borrow the words of the former Housing Minister, the right hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr Raynsford), who I think struck the right tone when talking about the failure over 30 years, we also need to find some common ground, particularly if we are to deal with some of the challenges in London.

As the Mayor has rightly identified, if we are to catch up and keep pace with demand in London alone, we will need to provide about 49,000 accommodation units every year for the next 10 years. To put that in context, that has not been achieved since 1930, an age when building on the green belt was not an issue and we did not face the challenge of having to develop brownfield sites, which I believe offer a big opportunity in London. It is probably accurate to say that we have been building, on average, about 20,000 units a year over the past 30 years.

We now have a situation, as Members on both sides of the House have rightly pointed out, in which rents and the cost of purchase in London are so disproportionate to the rest of the country that supply is clearly the key. Let us face it: we cannot simply wave a magic wand, whether at local government level, mayoral level or here, but we have to pull whatever levers we have at our disposal to try to help drive the supply solution. I have looked with interest at some of the proposed measures for doing that, and at one in particular, which I will speak about shortly—the housing zones, which were recently announced in my constituency.

So tricky is the problem we face that we are looking at more imaginative ways to provide more housing. The Mayor’s land and development programme is effectively bringing forward surplus public land owned by the Greater London authority to regenerate areas and help provide housing. About 60 live sites are already under way, which will hopefully deliver at least 40,000 homes over the period of their development. There are 20 housing zones—I will outline this later for the benefit of the House—which are ambitious plans to create 50,000 much needed homes. It is crucial, as I think we all agree, to target those on low and middle incomes who are seeking to buy affordable homes as well as those seeking to rent.

A considerable number of empty homes in London need to be brought back into use. Between 2008 and 2012, around 5,000 empty homes were brought back into use, and I am sure that we can do more. We have more funding to bring another 1,100 empty homes back into use. In fact, there are now about 25,000 fewer empty homes in London than there were in 2008. Supplying new homes is crucial, but so is work on decent homes—restoring the stock we have to make them liveable—and restoring empty homes. In my borough we have benefited from £44 million, which we are halfway through spending between now and 2015, just on decent homes alone.
Mr Slaughter: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman will address the point that the Minister would not deal with. The Mayor’s definition of affordable is an income of up to £80,000 for larger properties and up to £66,000 for smaller properties. I realise that that is a maximum, but the hon. Gentleman will have seen the story in the London Evening Standard this week about housing associations such as Notting Hill, which frankly is a disgrace. Pitching the target at those levels, they are demanding for their affordable housing a minimum income of £66,000 in order to qualify.

Nick de Bois: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I did not quite catch the whole point, but I think that my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) made the point about the steep variation in what is an affordable home. Some regard it as just 80% of market value, which is a lovely description and quite enticing, but we know that that still faces a lot of challenge. However, I welcome many of the Government programmes, such as Help to Buy, that will help to overcome the challenges, particularly on deposits, which are crucial. I happily declare an interest in that regard, having had to help finance one of my daughters when she bought a home. I was lucky enough to be able to do that, but many people are not. The Help to Buy scheme was not around at the time, but I have two more daughters to go, so who knows—I am in trouble now.

I will briefly mention the housing zones. I am grateful that the Mayor and the Chancellor—local government working with national Government—have come together to launch a housing zone scheme across London. They will create 20 zones where home building will be accelerated by working in partnership with boroughs, landowners, investors and builders—all the key stakeholders brought together. They are based on a “something for something” deal, not just a handout. That will enable the GLA to act in concert with the key boroughs and stakeholders so that we can focus resources on sites that will be expensive to redevelop, such as brownfield and former industrial sites. With such policy interventions, we can either drive and fast-track developments that are planned at the moment but facing the hurdles we have all talked about, or stimulate new plans and new sites.

In order to ensure that we see progress on housing zones as quickly as possible, the Government will grant the Mayor the powers he needs—so-called mayoral development orders—to remove planning obstacles. That will accelerate the much needed construction in the zones. The site in my constituency has not, I hasten to add, been formally approved yet. The London borough of Enfield, in concert with Network Rail, has already secured development of a third track up to Angel Road. The development will hopefully be called Meridian Water and be on the very important line between Liverpool Street and Cambridge. That crucial ingredient helped to stimulate developers to show their interest and invest in a site that was once industrial and had gasworks on it. The point is that that fast-tracking will enable us to deliver 5,000 homes at a relatively fast speed, if the scheme is approved, which I am optimistic it will be. That will be critical in achieving the overall challenge that London faces. If it is repeated in 20 other zones, that will make a significant difference. I commend those steps to the House.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I very much welcome this debate. The last two speakers have talked about their own constituencies in London. Clearly, my constituency is not in London, but it is experiencing similar house prices and many of the stories that we have heard this afternoon have resonance in Brighton, Pavilion. The failure of successive Governments over the past 30 to 40 years to build anything like enough homes is a scandal that has been ignored by those in power, who have been busy enjoying the short-term economic benefits of inflated house prices. Those prices have skyrocketed in the past year in a market that is both irresponsible and unfair.

I also welcome the motion tabled by the official Opposition. It represents a step in the right direction, but I am concerned that it is quite vague and I hope that they will fill in some of the gaps during the debate. That is why I have amended the motion, and I will say a few words about that in a moment. I want to focus on the issue of council homes, which have not been built in significant numbers for decades. Instead, hundreds of thousands of them have been sold off cheap. On the failure to build, a recent House of Commons Library note shows the long-term steep decline in house building in England over the past 35 years.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Perhaps I can help the hon. Lady. She might have tabled an amendment but it was not selected, and the motion has not been amended. We are dealing with the motion before us and no other.

Caroline Lucas: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I can assure you that I was not speaking to the amendment—perish the thought. I was speaking to the items in the motion—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady said that she had amended the motion, and the problem is that people might therefore think that there is an amendment to the motion. That is all I am bothered about. There will be just one vote.

Caroline Lucas: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I sought to amend the motion—devastatingly unsuccessfully—and I will not mention the matter further. I do, however, want to mention the substantive issues in the Opposition motion, as well as certain things that are not in it but have nothing to do with my amendment—or rather, my proposed amendment that does not exist. It was a figment of my imagination.

On the failure to build, a recent House of Commons Library note shows the long-term steep decline in house building in England over the past 35 years. Nearly 307,000 homes were built across all tenures in England in 1969-1970, but the number fell to just 107,000 in 2012-13. There was a minor increase in housing association building over that period, although it amounted to fewer than 15,000 more dwellings being built last year than in 1969-70. What is most striking is that the steepest decline was in the building of council homes, which fell from 135,000 to 1,360 over that same period.
To their credit, the last Labour Administration did attempt to address the chronic backlog of repairs and maintenance left after 18 years of deliberate Tory neglect. It is just a shame that this was done at the expense of building the council homes that were needed. For example, only 60 council homes—a tiny number—were built nationally in 2001-2002. By 2008-9, the figure had gone up, with 490 council homes completed in that year, but that was still fewer than one per constituency. The number of housing association homes was higher, with 14,000 in 2001 and 26,500 in 2008, but the numbers were still woefully low. The current Government are clearly worse; they have cut funds for social housing by 60%. The need for strong solutions to get the council and social housing we need built is an absolute priority in our discussions this afternoon.

I see the reality of the housing crisis every day in my constituency. The chronic long-term lack of housing supply is evident everywhere in Brighton, Pavilion and I am regularly contacted by people in despair and in real housing need. Our local paper, the Brighton Argus published a housing special last Saturday entitled “Can you afford to live in the city?” This was a rhetorical question, because for most people in housing need, the answer is a very clear no: the average price in the city has been driven up to more than £367,000. We have seen a 13% increase in house prices in the last quarter alone. Therefore, it is no surprise that we have 18,000 people on the council’s housing waiting list.

The city’s housing market is fast becoming known as a “mini-London”, with average house prices in Brighton nearly twice the national average. Young Brightonians who do not have rich family backers have no hope of getting on the housing ladder. The combination of stratospheric rent and price rises and policies such as the pernicious bedroom tax—which appear to be designed to push people in need of housing benefit, particularly those with disabilities, out of desirable areas—has created a situation in which people on low incomes and those on average wages are being pushed to the margins.

The motion does not say very much about how the Opposition would achieve the aims that they are putting forward. Those aims are laudable, but where are the means? I would like the unfair restrictions on local authorities to be lifted. Housing associations are allowed to borrow against their assets to build but councils are not, despite being able to do so more cheaply. That makes no sense. We must fully lift the borrowing cap to get council homes built again. Councils suffer unnecessary restrictions. They are bound by prudent borrowing rules anyway, so the cap is arguably unnecessary; it is just stifling the building of local authority homes.

Using the Department for Communities and Local Government self-financing model, a joint report published in 2012 by the National Federation of ALMOs, the Local Government Association, the Chartered Institute of Housing, the Association of Retained Council Housing and many others showed that if the borrowing cap were fully lifted and councils were able to make prudent use of their borrowing potential, they could borrow up to £20 billion over five years. That extra borrowing could enable between 170,000 and 230,000 extra homes to be built.

The main justification for the imposition of borrowing caps on local housing authorities is that the additional debt incurred by councils would add to the overall Government debt, but that need not be the case. The UK is unique in Europe for classifying a wide range of bodies as coming within the definition of “public sector” that is used to measure public debt. No other EU country treats social housing investment in the way that happens in England. There is a strong case for local authority borrowing for housing not to be counted towards the public sector debt. Local authority borrowing for housing would be largely self-financing in any case, and it is transparent and low risk.

I would be the first to admit, however, that lifting the borrowing cap will not be enough on its own to replenish our social housing stock following the giveaway of council houses under right to buy and the failure to build. A significant increase in grant funding is needed if we are to begin to reverse the chronic failure to build the housing that we need. That money would also create the benefit of a multiplier effect, generating jobs, apprenticeships, an increase in tax revenues and reduced welfare spending. Shelter has said that £1.22 billion extra, on top of the current £1 billion of Government grant spend, could be sufficient to get us building enough homes if it was combined with a package of reform. That would certainly be a good start. Serious consideration should be given to channelling some of the huge windfall increase in stamp duty revenues predicted by the Office for Budget Responsibility into building new council homes. That would be one way of using some of the tax proceeds from our distorted market to increase social housing supply.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you are looking a little fidgety, if I may say so. That indicates to me that you would like me to wind up shortly, and I will do so. However, I just want to mention one other matter, which has not been raised this afternoon. The increase in housing supply that we need must involve housing that people can afford to run, as well as buy or rent. This is an opportunity to tackle the scandal of fuel poverty and the rising cost of living. We must use house building to reverse this Government’s weakening of energy saving, water efficiency and other standards. This Government have acted to prevent local authorities from going further than minimum national standards for energy efficiency, despite those standards looking weaker by the day.

Given the scandal of fuel poverty and the hardship being caused by high energy bills, as well as the urgent need for radical cuts to carbon emissions, new homes must be built to a genuine zero carbon homes standard. The Government’s exemptions for small developments mean that around a third of all homes could be exempted altogether. If the Government were sticking to the original zero carbon homes standard, the situation would not be so bad. Under the original standard, annual energy bills for residents in new homes would be under £300, but the Government are again capitulating to big business, watering down the standards and creating loopholes, so energy bills will be around £800.

In summary, we need sufficient homes, which means lifting the borrowing cap and ensuring that imaginative sources of revenue such as stamp duty funding are properly ring-fenced. It also means ensuring that our homes are fit to live in.
Mr Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): Listening to some of the speeches by Labour Members made me feel that they were in deep denial about what happened at the back end of the previous decade, which had a significant, if not catastrophic, impact on the construction industry and the house-building programme. I gently remind the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) that it was the previous Labour Government that brought the economy to its knees, causing problems which had such a devastating impact on the construction industry that there was no possibility of providing the houses that were needed. Frankly, it is living in cloud cuckoo land to suggest that there has been no improvement since then. Since April 2010, 445,000 new homes have been delivered. That, to me, is quite an achievement. We have seen a reduction in the number of empty properties, and rightly so. Just over 200,000 planning permissions were granted last year. Those are signs of the beginning of improvements in a market that had been brought to its knees.

Having said that, I agree with everyone who has spoken that it is crucial that we meet the housing needs and requirements of a growing population. My own local authority, Chelmsford, has been extremely good. Between 2001 and 2020, we are being required to provide 16,000 extra homes to meet local demand. The council has been imaginative and innovative in identifying brownfield sites, to start with, throughout the borough and providing new planning permissions for housing on them. Owing to the scale of the housing provision required, it is moving on to greenfield sites in the north-east of Chelmsford, where we are hoping to get a new station as a result of a new almost-ward of just over 3,000 properties, of which 35% will be affordable housing to meet the needs of local people who will benefit from it.

I would like to raise an issue with my hon. Friend the Minister about affordable housing. The main provider of social housing in Chelmsford is Chelmer Housing Partnership. That housing was originally the housing stock of Chelmsford borough council, as it was then. Chelmer Housing Partnership has had an imaginative way of developing its properties since it took them over about 20 years ago. For example, all the houses have had central heating put in, which means that no one comes to my surgeries any more complaining about massive condensation. It has improved the fabric of the buildings, and, through its imaginative policies, is investing in building more housing stock for its tenants.

The other housing associations vary as to the quality of the service that they provide to their tenants, and that worries me. Chelmer Housing Partnerships operates a policy of housing for local people. The problem in Chelmsford—I am sure it is not unique—is that significant numbers of young people are leaving school or university and living at home because they cannot afford, at that stage in their lives, to buy a property. Meanwhile, there is not enough social housing available, because most of the housing associations have a policy whereby half the allocations are for local people and the other half are up to the housing association. A lot of people from outside the borough, often from London, are being rehoused in social housing in Chelmsford. If we had a surfeit of properties, that would be perfectly reasonable, but we have long waiting lists for housing. Realistically, a 21-year-old in Chelmsford who is single, has no children and lives with their parents would be on a housing waiting list for a minimum of 10 years before they might get anywhere consideration for an offer. I believe that is wrong.

Local housing should, first, be for local people, and if there is then spare capacity, people from elsewhere may certainly be encouraged to go to live there. Chelmsford is a very attractive place. It has two of the finest grammar schools in the nation. It has good communications with London. About 8,000 of my constituents commute by train down to London to work. It is an area with good shopping, and so on. That means that there is constant demand for housing in the borough. We therefore need to look at this issue again, to make sure that local residents who were born there and whose families have lived there all their lives are able to get housing, along with other family members who may wish to come back to Chelmsford to help to look after elderly or ailing family members and parents.

I make a plea to my hon. Friend the Minister: is there any way of fine-tuning the allocation of social housing to make sure that local people are given greater priority, rather than having to compete with people who have no connection with the area and, in effect, queue-jump? That causes tensions within the community, because people ask why they have to wait so long to get housing when people who have never been there before and have no connections can get an allocation through a housing association and come to live in a very attractive and vibrant city.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I am pleased that we are having yet another debate on housing, and I hope there will be many more between now and the next election.

There is clearly a housing crisis facing very many people in this country. Basically, the problem is that 200,000 new households are being created every year through population growth or people choosing to live alone. New house building comes nowhere near to meeting those demands. Thus the shortage is dealt with by rising property prices, rising private sector rents and greater demand on social housing—or, at the other end of the scale, increasing homelessness, rough sleeping, overcrowding, underachievement in schools, and desperate poverty among many people who deserve somewhere decent to live.

I hope that we can look at this debate on the basis of the needs of the entire population. I am particularly concerned about those who are really up against it in inner-city communities such as the one I represent. I am very proud to represent an inner-London constituency. It is a place of growing division, I am sorry to say, because of the housing situation. House prices are rising very fast. The number of owner-occupiers is now well below 30% and falling fast. The number of council properties is increasing only as far as the council is able to find land to build and develop council housing, which is the most secure and affordable form of housing available to people. The remaining provision comprises the private rented sector, which has limited regulation and tends to be very expensive.
The strategy adopted by this Government, through the Department for Work and Pensions, on limiting the local housing allowance but not controlling rents means that large numbers of private tenants, who are often in work—as well as some who are not in work but have right of access to the local housing allowance—cannot afford to remain in those properties and are therefore decanted out of the area. That is happening not just in central London but in the central and more expensive parts of every town and city in the country. Frankly, there is a process of social cleansing going on. That is the effect of the overall housing shortage and the very great increases in costs associated with it.

I have raised with the Minister a specific concern about the development of new properties in former industrial or office buildings under what are known as permitted development rights. The Government decided that they would lift the planning restriction applied to permitted development rights on former office buildings. That means that a local authority has no control over what happens to a former office building, which can then be converted into housing. In some cases, it might be entirely appropriate to convert an office block into housing if there is no longer any requirement for an office block or likelihood of anybody wanting to use it as such. The problem is that if the local authority has no say in the matter, it has no opportunity to try to protect local employment, as it might sometimes wish to protect. Moreover, the local authority has no power whatever to insist that a proportion of the dwellings created are available for social rent. I do not like using the phrase “affordable rent,” because most of the “affordable” rents in London are not at all affordable to anyone on an average income or below.

Yesterday, the all-party group on the private rented sector had a very interesting meeting about access to housing for under-35s. We took evidence from Crisis, the National Union of Students and a company called Essential Living, which is backed by $200 million of equity funding from American pension funds and is very keen on developing the larger-scale private rented sector in London. It says that at some point in the future it wants to develop some kind of affordable rented model, but it is very unclear what that model is. It has bought into an office block in my constituency called Archway tower and turned it into, I think, 120 flats marketed at people earning more than £80,000 a year. It does not require local authority permission to do that; it is only building control and any external work to the building that need to be passed by the local planning authority. Requests have been made of the company to contribute to the social needs of the area by providing a proportion of those properties for social rent. Its responses have been polite and well informed, but the answer has always been the same: it says no, it will not do it.

When I say to the Minister, therefore, that there is a need to intervene in the development of the private rented sector, I do so not only because I want to see the continuation of the diverse mosaic of London’s communities, but, quite simply, for the sake of the survival of the economy of this very big city, which, indeed, will affect that of other very big cities. I pray in aid the London chamber of commerce statistics on the numbers of people who are finding it difficult to afford to buy or rent anywhere to live in London. There is a growing problem of labour shortage, and the same applies to other parts of the country.

Mr Stewart Jackson: I am rather puzzled by the hon. Gentleman’s comments about his constituency. Given the paucity of greenfield and urban exception sites available to build new estates in boroughs such as Islington, I would have thought that he would welcome permitted development rights, to enable the cumulative release of more housing of all types and perhaps even affordable housing for his constituents and people across London.

Jeremy Corbyn: Uncharacteristically, the hon. Gentleman does not seem to have been listening very carefully. I did not say that I was opposed to the conversion of vacant office blocks or industrial premises into housing. My point is that if there are jobs to be protected—this could apply anywhere in the country—the local authority should at least have a say, so that a rational decision could be made. Secondly, any development has to have a sense of social responsibility, so at least a proportion of those properties should be available for affordable social rent rather than market rent, which is completely unaffordable for the majority of people in my constituency.

When the Minister replies to the debate, I hope he will reflect on the ways in which permitted development rights are actually militating against the housing needs of those people who are most desperately in need of somewhere safe, secure and affordable to live.

3.13 pm

Mr Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): It is a pleasure, as ever, to follow the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), who made some interesting points about the particular demand for housing in London. It has already been said in this debate—but it needs to be reiterated—that London is the key to the national housing supply. There is a chronic shortage and it is having a ripple effect, not only in the south-east, but more widely.

I suppose the situation is an echo of developments after the war and during the post-war era, when the so-called London overspill moved out from the slums of many parts of the metropolis into the bright new housing provided, among other places, in Swindon. I have the pleasure of representing estates that were very much part of that London overspill planning. Indeed, many of those Londoners still live in the houses they occupied in the 1950s and ’60s. The 1950s were a time of mass house building in this country, presided over by a Conservative Government and a Conservative housing Minister, Harold Macmillan. As the result of a pledge at a Conservative party conference, 300,000 houses were built every year in the early 1950s.

Emma Reynolds: The hon. Gentleman’s history is very interesting, but will he confirm that it was under the Wilson Labour Government that house building actually reached its peak?

Mr Buckland: The hon. Lady is talking about 1968—the year of my birth. I agree that house building reached its peak at that time, but I also remind her that in the immediate post-war era, between 1945 and 1951, about
700,000 houses were built, which is only just over 100,000 a year, and that Aneurin Bevan’s record on housing does not match that of Harold Macmillan.

It is important to make such points, historic though they may be, because neither of the main parties in this House can claim a moral authority when it comes to house building. It ill behoves the hon. Lady and her party to make intertemporal criticism of this Government when the previous Labour Government’s public house-building record speaks for itself as poor. The year 2008-09 saw the lowest level of house building since, I think, 1923, which is hardly a record of which the Labour party can be proud. If Labour’s record was so poor then, why on earth should we believe its pledges now about house building from 2015? Please forgive me, but, to be frank, I am sceptical of those claims, though I am sure they are well-intentioned.

Swindon is a town that continues to grow—it now has in excess of 200,000 people—and we have delivered house growth for much of the past 30 to 40 years: first, in the form of the London overspill estates, such as Park North and Park South, and then through developments in the ’70s and, indeed, the ’80s in west Swindon, which comprise the constituency that I have the honour of representing today.

We are no strangers to, or shy of, house building, and we continue to do it. The Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), who has responsibility for planning, is familiar with the Wichelstowe development in my constituency. It is one of the biggest developments in the country and it continues to be rolled out. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend and the Government for contributing £800,000—nearly £1 million—to allow a joint venture to be set up, which will enable the local authority, Swindon borough council, together with a private partner, to start developing homes specifically geared towards retired people who wish to downsize and live in homes that, while they do not meet the criteria of sheltered housing, are designed with the needs of older people in mind.

I am talking about homes with fewer bedrooms but larger living accommodation and that are adaptable for the disabilities that sometimes come with old age. That detailed work has been commissioned by the local authority. It has identified a growing ageing population in Swindon who will need that type of housing, and I look forward to the joint venture being set up in the early part of next year and to houses being delivered in Middle Wichel. A new Waitrose supermarket has been opened on the site, which is welcome. We already have shops and infrastructure, which I hope will match the housing to be built there. I am delighted that this week’s announcement of local growth funding has earmarked more than £20 million for the development of infrastructure to facilitate the development of Wichelstowe, which will include the enhancement of junctions 15 and 16 of the M4. That is vital if Swindon is going to be able to sustain the housing expansion expected of it.

In recent years, planning and development have not had the best of reputations. Accusations have been made that developers have land-banked. Until a few years ago, I think there was a case to be made, but the evidence is shifting. My recent experience of the granting of local planning applications is that developers are, in fact, keen to get on site and start developing. I am no longer as convinced as I was about the accusations of land-banking. I have read the detail of the Opposition motion and think that they are a little behind the curve when it comes to the real evidence. They are quite right to be concerned about land-banking. I do not approve of it at all—but I think the evidence is moving against them as the economy picks up and construction development continues.

Mr Stewart Jackson: My hon. Friend makes a good point about land banking. Is there not a huge difference between using the fiscal system to encourage developers not to bank land, and the Opposition proposal to appropriate land in an arbitrary way?

Mr Buckland: That leads on to my point. I have concerns about proposals that address non-existent problems. The Opposition proposal could make the situation worse—poorly prepared and considered developments could go ahead, but that is not we want, and certainly not in Swindon.

Development problems concern not only those of us with an interest in housing, but everybody who wants quality of life. I deal regularly with what I call speculative planning applications, which fall outside the line of development as agreed by local plans and do not capture the consent of local people. Although I was delighted that the old top-down regional spatial strategy was abolished—the number of houses being imposed on my area was excessive—we are in a transitional period between the abolition of the old regime and the adoption of a new local plan. There has been an over-reliance on the five-year land supply argument. That causes a problem for growing towns such as Swindon—it is very difficult to argue that we have such a supply.

My hon. Friend the Minister is well aware of those problems, but the message on development and new homes must go out loud and clear. In Swindon alone, 258 new homes have been purchased through Help to Buy, and under the affordable homes scheme, just under 1,000 homes have been delivered. Real progress is being made. The Government are sowing the seeds of a renaissance in housing development. The proposals in the Opposition motion are ill-conceived and do not address the issues properly, and they would cause more problems than they seek to solve.

3.22 pm

Alison Seabeck (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab): I start by making my usual declaration of an indirect interest, which relates to the entry in the register of my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr Raynsford).

I agree with the hon. Member for South Swindon (Mr Buckland) on the need for a mix of new housing, including housing for people who are retiring. However, I disagree with his assessment of the housing crisis and the figures. In 2009, in the depths of the recession, which was caused in America and ultimately affected countries globally, Labour built—completed—124,980 homes, which is more than we have seen in any single year under the current Government. We need to have that on the record.

We face a housing crisis, with too few homes being built. In parts of the country, mortgage levels are racing ahead. Rents are rising, and the availability of homes
for those in the highest housing need does not meet demand. Homelessness and rent arrears are rising because of Government policies such as the bedroom tax. The housing benefit bill is not falling, but rising. All the Government’s policy changes, which were clearly based on sums written on the back of a fag packet, are failing. Their decision to come into office and throw all the cards in the air—it did not matter whether the Labour Government’s policies were starting to work, even with the problems faced in the recession—was injudicious, unwise and ideologically driven.

The Government and the Minister seem to be burying their collective heads in the sand. It would be nice if the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Keighley (Kris Hopkins), were on the Front Bench to listen to hon. Members’ contributions, and particularly those from Government Back Benchers. Some of their contributions have been thoughtful—the hon. Member for Enfield North (Nick de Bois) made a sensible and interesting contribution about the problems in London.

House builders have been given quite a lot of freedom by planning changes. I am disappointed, because when I was shadow Housing Minister, house builders frequently told me that, when conditions were right, they could step up to the plate, and build quickly and in numbers, but that is not happening. There are a range of complex reasons, some within the control of house builders, and some that are not, which the Government ought to address to expand the number of new homes being built.

The evidence appears to show that we are likely to have a fall in housing starts. The Home Builders Federation briefing to hon. Members says that that could happen, and with new政权 and before the new communities”.

I would have expected the Government to have had a decent transition to ensure that that reduction does not happen, but the Minister was not clear. He threw in a number and said, “We are going to bring forward money from the 2015 to 2018 programme in order to deal with it and everything will be okay,” but he was completely unclear about how much and where. All such questions were left hanging in the air.

We have a problem about where value sits in a housing development. That is a big issue. The Government should be putting their hands up and saying, “We are not doing enough.” They should stop pretending that everything is rosy, when in fact it is shocking. We have the lowest level of house building in peacetime. Young people are finding it difficult to find a place to rent, let alone buy. In the south-west there is a shortfall of some 36,000—that is the difference in the past three years between housing completions and demand. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) said from the Opposition Front Bench, help to build is an interesting concept and would take us in the right direction.

The Government’s complacency and, at times, arrogance, needs to be challenged. The figures that were bandied about by the former Housing Minister, the Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps) were fanciful. He made the allegations and assertions repeatedly in the House, and I have advised his office that I will talk about him today. He repeatedly made the claim that the Government would build more homes in five years than the Labour Government had built in 13 years, and fell foul of the UK Statistics Authority and the Information Commissioner. An article in The Independent on 7 June 2013 highlighted internal e-mails from officials that confirmed that the figures the former Housing Minister had used were not correct, and that Labour had built 500,000 affordable homes while in office, which was almost double the figure being pumped out at the time by the Tory machine. Is it any wonder that the voting public wonder what on earth to believe?

Government Members repeatedly quote figures on the number of social homes that are based on a subtraction of right-to-buy sales, which serves an interesting purpose from their point of view, but is incredibly misleading. That is from a Conservative party that wholeheartedly supported the sell-off of social housing. Both Labour and the Conservatives have failed to build using the proceeds of those sales. A number of Opposition Members have put their hands up to that. One of those parties—the Conservative party—did so willfully, and one believed that the priority was getting the assets, or the housing stock, back up to a decent standard, because the previous Conservative Government had let it rot, which is not wise with valuable assets against which we might want to borrow for further investment. That was incredibly poor housing management from an ideologically blinkered Tory Government.

The Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Keighley mentioned right-to-buy sales of about 10,000 and the delivery of 3,000 new homes, but that falls well short of the one-for-one provision promised by the previous Minister, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield, or even like-for-like provision.

In Plymouth, despite the best efforts of the Labour council, there is still a shortage of homes to buy and to rent. The city council has been extremely imaginative in looking at self-build and eco options, as well as at making good use of brownfield sites. We also have one of the largest regeneration schemes in the country, begun under the previous Labour Government, which is transforming the area. However, Shelter has highlighted problems in our region. Some 80% of UK properties are too expensive for new buyers. That figure rises to 94% in the south-west, and to 99% in Exeter. The managing director of a large company linked to property sales in Plymouth, James Clarke from Lang and Co., has said that it is not selling to first-time buyers, but to second or even third-time buyers, as first-time buyers are not coming forward.

We have heard about the bank of mum and dad, but it simply is not available to most young people in low-income areas such as mine. We should also consider some of the other pressures. People are living longer in their homes; those homes are not being passed on through inheritance; and the money and equity in those homes are being used up for care purposes. That money is not therefore coming back into the housing market.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East very clearly set out Labour’s priorities and how we will deliver the house building that we need. Effectively, a number of ducks have to be got in a row...
before we can get such numbers, including land parcelling and construction skills. This Government are simply not getting their ducks in any sort of a line: frankly, they are shooting them one by one as each of their housing policies fails. We need a change of direction, and a change of Government.

3.30 pm

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) on securing a debate on this exceptionally important subject.

It is less than a year since we in this country were talking about a sclerotic housing market, in which people were not confident and housing was not being built. Now, almost every time the Governor of the Bank of England opens his mouth, we are talking about a housing bubble. We have gone from one to the other inside 12 months, with no intervening period of sanity, despite the ever-present, predictable and long-run need to have a roof over one’s head. One might have thought that that indicated a systemic flaw in our housing market.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred to the Government’s failure to build houses. I want to point out the very simple fact that Governments do not build houses. They can get in the way and make building houses easier or more difficult, but they do not build them. House builders build houses, in response to demand from tenants who wish to rent, and from buyers who wish to buy. At least, that is how it is supposed to work. We do not have a national shoe service, yet everyone in the Chamber is wearing shoes. The supply of shoes rises to meet demand, and the same is true of chairs. We do not feel the need to have a national chair service, yet we all have chairs to sit on when we need them.

That suggests that we need to deploy another factor, something that is not yet fully available: the energy of the people who want houses or somewhere to live. Rod Hackney, the Prince of Wales’s architectural adviser, said:

“It is a dangerous thing to underestimate human potential and the energy which can be generated when people are given the opportunity to help themselves.”

That is why I formed the all-party group on self-build, custom-build and independent house building. It is why I was so delighted that when Kevin McCloud addressed the group only a few weeks ago, both the Minister with responsibility for planning—my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles)—and the shadow Housing Minister were able to attend.

For that reason, I was also delighted to take some all-party group members, the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen), and people from several local authorities and housing associations, including the excellent Saffron Housing in my constituency, to look at Baugruppen, or building groups, in Berlin, where more than 5,000 dwellings have been created from the bottom up by more than 300 groups. I am sorry that the Minister with responsibility for planning and the shadow Housing Minister were not able to come, but the Department for Communities and Local Government sent some officials, and I know that the Minister will hear more about the visit. It was interesting to see both affordable rentals provided by Genossenschaften—so-called housing co-operatives—and, in some cases, housing for purchase. Most of what we saw was affordable housing, which shows that with imagination, drive and energy from the bottom up, more can be achieved.

I have not drawn first prize in the lottery of life, as the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) has, but I drew prize No. 4, so on 24 October I will introduce—I hope, with the support of all parties—the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Bill. I keep calling it an Act, but the Public Bill Office reminds me that I have to get it through the House of Commons first.

Mr Simon Burns: And the Lords.

Mr Bacon: And the House of Lords. I will briefly mention the three things that I hope the Bill will do. First, it would impose a requirement or duty on local authorities to keep a register of people or community groups, whether they want to rent or purchase, who are interested in bringing forward or acquiring land for what in Berlin are called self-organised projects. Secondly, when bringing forward housing initiatives in local plans, local authorities would have to take account of and make provision for the needs of people on the register. Thirdly, they would have to do something in the affordable space, so that people with affordable obligations can meet them, or at least part of them, as a result of people’s contributions from the bottom up.

3.34 pm

Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con): I am the tail-end Charlie again; that is the position that I like to have in these debates.

What an interesting debate we have had this afternoon. Yet again, the Opposition think that the glass is half empty. They need to look at the whole of the country. They need to look at beautiful South Derbyshire. In 2012-13, not only did we build twice as many houses as the average constituency across the country, but a third of those were affordable houses. South Derbyshire district council, which has been Conservative-led for the past seven years, has been building new council houses. How is it able to do that? By managing the housing revenue account very successfully. All those things are possible when an area has a council that cares about its people, understands value for money and does not waste money. Of course, that Conservative council has not put the rates up for four years, either.

Another reason why this glass-half-empty Opposition debate is astonishing is that they are talking only about new builds, and not about bringing properties back into use. The most imaginative scheme has come from a charity that looks after ex-service people. It has bought two rows of houses in the north-east for £1 a street. The houses are being brought back into use by the people who will live in them. That is not costing the public purse anything. Everybody had written off those houses because they are up in the north-east and stuff does not happen up there. That is not good enough. It is time that the Opposition decided to play a better and bigger part in solving this problem.

There are lots of empty homes in our country. Councils that are using their initiative are not just putting the council tax on empty homes up from 50% to 80%; they are charging 100%, then 110% if the home is still empty the next year, and 120% if it is still empty the year after
that. That can go up to 140%, because we want homes to be brought back into use. That is not about restricting people or taxing them out. The council wants the homes to be brought back into use, so it says to the people who own them, “Do you want tenants? Our council housing people will organise tenants for you.” That is done at private rent prices and can involve short-term lets, three-year lets or whatever they want. Innovative councils are bringing empty homes back into use.

I will finish on that point, because I think that Madam Deputy Speaker wants to move things along. I find it so depressing that, as usual, all we get is a mithering, miserable debate from the Opposition. Where are the Opposition Members? Yet again, there has been speaker after speaker from the Government Benches, because we are proud of what we are doing on new housing and on bringing properties back into use. We are proud that we have really good-quality builds, such as the one that the Minister with responsibility for planning, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), kindly came to see in Melbourne in South Derbyshire. We are proud of what we are doing on new housing and on bringing properties back into use.

Today, we have heard the latest stats, and clever words from Government Members that are, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) called for all-party agreement on increasing house building and on the need to build social homes. He has done much work to build that cross-party agreement through his chairmanship of the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government. The hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) spoke of his private Member’s Bill on social housing. I know that the shadow Minister will talk constructively with him about that Bill. He talked a great deal of sense about the bedroom tax, which he opposed, and he highlighted its consequences. Of course, his party is accountable for that policy, and we have used Opposition days to give it many opportunities to overturn it, but it does not take the opportunities that we present.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr Slaughter) spoke about the deliberate demolition of council properties in his area, and why voters at this year’s local elections rejected that social cleansing so comprehensively. I pay tribute to him for highlighting the issue so consistently in the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) talked about the same issue—what he sees as social cleansing—but he also mentioned his concerns about the need for reform of the private rented sector.

It is clear that the Government are failing. House building is at its lowest levels in peacetime since the 1920s, and the number of completions has been lower in each year of this Government than in every year of the last Labour Government. The Government cannot continue to claim otherwise. The number of homes built for social rent fell to 7,759 last year—the lowest number since records began, and a fall of 75% from 2009-10, the last year of the Labour Government. The number of affordable homes built fell last year to the lowest in at least five years; that represented a fall of 32% from 2009-10. Overall, home ownership fell to its lowest level in 25 years—it is lower than in any year under the last Labour Government. The latest English housing survey showed that the proportion of homes lived in by owner-occupiers had dropped to 65.2% from 71% in 2003. It is at its lowest level since 1987.

Many Members have raised the issue of affordability. The hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) said that house prices in her area are not affordable. I agree that we need to deliver more affordable homes, and different types of homes. I reassure her that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East said, we do not intend to impose housing targets of the type that she fears, but of course we want people in all areas of the country to think about the relationship between house prices and the availability of houses. That is as important in the hon. Lady’s community as it is in mine.

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It is clear that the Government are failing. House building is at its lowest levels in peacetime since the 1920s, and the number of completions has been lower in each year of this Government than in every year of the last Labour Government. The Government cannot continue to claim otherwise. The number of homes built for social rent is at its lowest for 20 years, home ownership is down, and millions are facing insecurity in the private rented sector as house prices rise faster than wages. The Governor of the Bank of England says that housing is the biggest risk to our economy, and the Opposition recognise that risk. That is why we are putting policies in place to tackle the housing shortage that is so central to the cost of living crisis.
I came back this morning from Bournemouth, where I attended part of the Local Government Association conference. I spoke to a lot of Labour councillors; many of them were familiar faces, but there were many new faces, following our success in this year’s local elections. Many of them told me proudly about the homes that they are building for their communities. Councils such as Southwark, York, Exeter, Leeds, Nottingham, Ipswich and Stevenage are all using the new financing agreed under the Labour Government to push ahead with building more council houses. Overall, five times as many social homes are being built in Labour authority areas as in Conservative ones. Of course, I welcome Conservative councils that are building—the hon. Member for South Derbyshire spoke about how her council is building homes and bringing others back into use. Of course we want to work with councils of all political types to bring forward new homes across the country, but it is clear that Labour councils are already showing the commitment that the next Labour Government will show.

In contrast to the current Government’s failure, we will tackle the housing shortage. We recognise that there are deep structural problems in the land market and the house building sector. As the number of small builders has declined and the big firms have grown even bigger, it has become easier for the dominant firms to buy up land. The truth is that to get the number of houses built that we need, there has to be a change in how the housing market works, but Ministers have simply failed to acknowledge that.

We must get more firms into house building to build homes and provide greater competition, because as we know, the high cost of housing is driven by the high cost of land and the shortage of housing supply. That is why Labour set out plans to boost the role of small and medium-sized house builders and get them building again. We have proposed a “help to build” scheme, which would help small and medium-sized builders to access finance through the banks. Those builders tell us that access to finance is a key barrier to getting homes built, and we will help them overcome it.

Access to land is another key barrier. That is why we have set out plans to ensure that a higher proportion of small sites are allocated in local authority five-year land supplies, and we will give them guaranteed access to public land. The system is not releasing enough land for housing development, and by the time land is given planning permission it is often prohibitively expensive. That creates an incentive to bank land, rather than build on it.

According to documents written by the Minister’s Department and obtained by “Newsnight”, there are 9,000 sites with planning permission to build 350,000 new homes that have not yet been started. Under the current system, however, there is little that local authorities can do about land banking. That is why we would create greater transparency by ensuring that developers register the land they own. We will also give councils and communities the power to charge developers escalating fees for sitting on land with planning permission, to incentivise them to either build or release the land to someone who will. As a last resort, we would give local authorities the power to compulsorily purchase land, so that they could assemble the land and we could make progress.

The purpose of those measures is to address the imbalance of power between local communities and developers. There are also issues to be resolved between authorities. Where local authorities are landlocked but their communities need to expand, the Government’s duty to co-operate is nothing more than a duty to talk and talk. In my area—in Corby and East Northamptonshire—the two neighbouring district authorities have worked well together. There is a huge amount of house building—indeed, both Ministers on the Front Bench have been to see it—and Corby is set to double in size by 2020 because of that co-operation between neighbouring authorities. We need to have that all around the country, and that is why we will give communities the right to grow.

After four years of promises but inaction by this Government, we welcome the proposal for an urban development corporation to support the building of Ebbsfleet garden city. We are disappointed, however, that the Minister says there will not be a requirement for affordable housing. Garden cities can offer a considerable amount of social and affordable housing; that is part of the principles behind them. Labour is determined to bring forward plans to deliver a new generation of new towns and garden cities as part of fulfilling our commitment to build 200,000 new homes a year by 2020. The right to grow; use it or lose it on land banking; reform to the housing revenue account; backing small and medium-size builders; tackling empty homes; reforming the private rented sector; scrapping the cruel bedroom tax—those are serious measures to bring about the step change that we need to ensure that everyone gets a fair chance of having a good home. I urge hon. Members to support the motion.

3.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Nick Boles): This has been an illuminating and at times arresting debate. We have witnessed a near domestic in the household of the right hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr Raynsford) and the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Alison Seabeck). The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) has tantalised us with talk of an amendment that seemingly never was, and the contribution by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr Burns) had, I fear, the absolute opposite of his desired effect because it made us all want to move to his constituency and put ourselves on the list of the excellent Chelmer housing authority.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George) spoke movingly about the particular issues facing areas that are attractive to people who want second homes. He sits next to my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), who will have similar issues in the beautiful end of the country that he represents. I hope that both my hon. Friends will be able to explore the potential for community land trusts to provide a form of housing for sale that can be secured in permanence for people on typical average local incomes.

I believe that the best contribution in this debate came from the Chair of the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government. He enjoined us all to recognise that we as a country, one Government after another, have been building too few homes for
30 years. He urged us to put aside debates about statistics—endlessly tedious debates, I might add—and instead to focus on a long-term cross-party strategy to correct our common failure. It will be hard—not least because the hon. Member for Corby (Andy Sawford) fired quite a few political bullets over the Dispatch Box in his winding-up speech—but I am going to try to follow the injunction of the distinguished Select Committee Chair. [Interruption.] The hon. Gentleman makes the point that this is the first time I have tried to do that. I feel that is a little harsh. But I promise not to do it again.

To build houses, we need a few basic things. As everyone has pointed out, the first thing we need more than anything is land. I am delighted that this Government have done the hard work of reforming planning policy to create the national planning policy framework, and I am even more delighted that the Labour party has agreed not to scrap it and to continue to work within that framework.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Nick de Bois) is about to leave his seat, let me say that I am very pleased that the Mayor of London and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer have announced housing zones, working on ideas drawn up by the excellent organisation, Shelter, to bring forward brownfield sites in areas of desperate housing need. I look forward to a successful housing zone in my hon. Friend’s Enfield constituency.

I am delighted that the Chancellor is spearheading the right to build—a proposal included in the Budget—which is intended to provide small blocks of land for thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands or even millions of people who would rather not rely on a big house builder, but want to get on, hire a local builder and an architect and build themselves a house—and they often find that they can get it built a good deal cheaper, too. Again, I am glad that the Opposition have indicated their support for this initiative.

Proposals to bring forward land, then, are the first key step. I believe that this Government have done a lot, although it is taking a long time to come through—longer than any of us would have wanted to deliver the houses we need. It is right and proper that we have that as part of our long-term strategy.

The second thing we need is lots and lots of different institutions building homes. Sadly, as a result of the crash, I shall not get into the debate about where it came from; there was a crash and it was one of the worst this country has ever faced—where 5,000 firms were building between one and 10 houses a year in 2007, a few years later, there were fewer than 3,000 such firms. We have thus seen a collapse in the small and medium-sized builder market.

Every Member has talked about the falling off of council house building. I do not believe that any of us should be ideological about this issue. I want as many institutions that have the money and want to build houses to be able to do so. That is why I welcome the relaxation of the HRA borrowing cap announced by the Chancellor, for which bids are now being sought.

We need institutions to be able to get working capital in order to buy the land and to carry the land on their balance sheet while they are working through the planning process. That is why the Government have introduced a builder’s finance fund, and I am glad that the Opposition also have proposals to provide finance for small and medium-sized builders. In that long-term strategy, as well as a common approach on bringing forward land, there can be a common approach on ensuring that as many institutions as possible and as many individuals as possible are able to get on and build houses.

In addition, we need people who want to buy houses to be able to get mortgages. I am afraid that that is another thing that was entirely devastated by the crash. It was devastated perhaps for good reasons, with the banks, having over-extended themselves by lending people too much money off slightly flaky asset values and having gotten themselves into terrible problems, having to retrench and pull back their balance sheets to rebuild their equity reserves. As a result, for love nor money, people could not get a 95% mortgage—unless their daddy was very rich, in which case the mortgage probably was not needed in the first place. That explains why this Government have brought forward Help to Buy.

I know that the Opposition like to snipe about Help to Buy, but there is no question about it. Every house builder in the country will say that they are building again because they have people to sell to who are able to get mortgages. That is why I trust that once the heat of the election has subsided, the Opposition will acknowledge that Help to Buy is a key part of the long-term strategy for house building.

Notwithstanding my attempts to be bipartisan and ecumenical, I shall be urging my hon. Friends to oppose the motion. My reason for doing so is simply this: in the Opposition motion, there are some glib proposals, which I hope might work, but I fear that Opposition Members have not thought them through and that they might do more harm than good.

There is the proposal, simply named, for a “right to grow”. We heard a complaint about the duty to co-operate—the complaint that it involved endless conversations—but, when challenged on whether the “right to grow” meant a right just to impose, the Opposition said “No, of course there will be consultations.” What are consultations? Consultations are exactly the conversations that are happening as a result of the duty to co-operate. The boroughs surrounding Oxford have got together with the city of Oxford to produce a joint housing market study, so that they can understand jointly what their needs are and decide jointly how they will meet them. That is the duty to co-operate in action. Either we continue that approach, or we become more heavy-handed and we impose. I think it important to be honest: the right to grow certainly sounds more like an imposition, and I fear that those who apply it will find that they are building resentment, not houses.

I am troubled, too, by the glib approach to garden cities. The Government have been very clear about the fact that they are dying for local authorities to come forward with proposals for large new settlements which we could help to fund with a mixture of guarantees and other support, and which would deliver substantial amounts of new housing. We have made that plain for many, many years, but I have to say that we have not been overwhelmed with proposals as yet. The one place from which we did receive a proposal is the one place where we are providing that support: Ebbsfleet, where both local authorities want a garden city and absolutely
see the need for it, and where we have responded by arranging for an urban development corporation to provide it.

The Opposition policy on garden cities means one of two things. Either it means that local authorities are invited to come forward with proposals for new garden settlements, in which case it is precisely the same as the Government’s current policy, or it means a proposal for Sir Michael Lyons—or some other distinguished gentleman or lady—to get out his red marker pen, look at a map of England, and start drawing his own maps of where those garden cities will go. It must be one or the other. Either it is a voluntary process in which local authorities—

Emma Reynolds: It is in between.

Nick Boles: Oh, it is in between! Everything is “in between” when the detail becomes awkward, but the detail is the responsibility of Government. We cannot smooch around the words and hide among the vagaries when we are in government, which is why that policy, too, is a dangerous one.

There is also the proposal to confiscate land from builders who do not build. There is nothing more frustrating for any of us than to see a site that has had planning permission for a while not being built out, but it is important that we ask ourselves what the fundamental reasons are for that. Usually, it is because the site will not make money if it is built out and sold on now. We must also ask ourselves this: what will be the result of solving this problem. We must work together to establish either side of the House, we have not yet succeeded in that we will have made the problem worse.

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I fear—and not as a result of any ideological prejudices—

that there will be fewer applications for planning permission

and that we will have made the problem worse.

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The Chairman of the Select Committee is right. On either side of the House, we have not yet succeeded in solving this problem. We must work together to establish a long-term strategy in order to do so, but I do not believe that the proposals in the Opposition motion will achieve that, and I therefore urge the House to reject it.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 235, Noes 291.

Division No. 34] [3.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bain, Mr William
Balls, rh Ed
Barron, rh Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Dame Anne
Benn, rh Hilary
Benton, Mr Joe
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Roberta
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craig, Mr David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Sir Tony
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Wayne
Davidson, Mr Ian
Davies, Geraint
Denham, rh Mr John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, rh Frank
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Doran, Mr Frank
Doughty, Stephen
Dodw, Jim
Doyle, Gemma
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natalasha
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Mr Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fiello, Robert
Fint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Hain, rh Mr Peter
Hamilton, Mr David
Hamiton, Fabian
Hansan, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Mr Dai
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Heron, Lady
Heyes, David
Hillier, Meg
Hilling, Julia
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoej, Kate
Hood, Mr Jim
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hunt, Tristram
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda
James, Mrs Siân C.
Jameson, Cathy
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keely, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Mr Ian
Llywyd, rh Mr Elfyn
Long, Naomi
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCann, Mr Michael
McCarthy, Kerry
McCrean, Dr William
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andi
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKechn, Ann
McKenzie, Mr Iain
McKinnell, Catherine
Meale, Sir Alan
Miliband, rh Edward
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme (Livingston)
Morris, Graham M. (Easington)
Mudie, Mr George
Munn, Meg
Murphy, rh Mr Jim
Murphy, rh Paul
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Nash, Pamela
O’Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Osborne, Sandra
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Ian
Pearce, Teresa
Perkins, Toby
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reed, Mr Steve
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Ritchie, rh Miss Margaret
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Roy, Lindsay
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, rh Dame Joan
Sawford, Andy
Sebeck, Alison
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, rh Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shuker, Gavin
Simpson, David
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Mr Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smith, Peter
Spellar, rh Mr John
Straw, rh Mr Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thomson, Emily
Turner, Karl
Tigg, Derek
Tigg, Stephen
Urmunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valérie
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mr Tom
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Sammy
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wood, Mike
Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Ayes:
Phil Wilson and
Tom Blenkinsop

NOES

Afriey, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Amess, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Steve
Baldry, rh Sir Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, rh Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bingham, Andrew
Binley, Mr Brian
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brake, rh Tom
Bray, Angie
Brazier, Mr Julian
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brown, Mrs Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
Bruce, rh Sir Malcolm
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burl, Mr Aidan
Burns, Conor

Smith, David
Fabricant, Michael
Farron, Tim
Featherstone, Lynne
Foster, rh Mr Don
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Garnier, Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
George, Andrew
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, rh Damien
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Guinness, Ben
Halfon, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hans, rh Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harvey, Sir Nick
Hasselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Mr David
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendy, Charles
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damien
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howwood, Martin
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Hughes, rh Simon
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Huppert, Dr Julian
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Said
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Gareth
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kelly, Chris
Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamb, rh Mr Nick
Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Dr Philip
Leech, Mr John
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lloyd, Stephen
Lopresti, Jack
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Sir Peter
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
Main, Mrs Anne
Maude, rh Mr Francis
Maynard, Paul
McCafferty, Jason
Mcintosh, Miss Anne
McVey, rh Esther
Metcalf, Stephen
Mills, Nigel
Milton, Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, rh Michael
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Sheryll
Morrison, Dr Andrew
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Noakes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
O’Brien, rh Mr Stephen
Offord, Dr Matthew
Ollershaw, Eric
Opperman, Guy
Ottaway, rh Sir Richard
Paice, rh Sir James
Parish, Neil
Paton, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pugh, John
Raab, Mr Dominic
Randall, rh Sir John
Reckless, Mark
Redwood, rh Mr John
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reid, Mr Alan
Robertson, Mr David
Robertson, rh Hugh
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I now have to announce the result of a Division deferred from a previous day. On the question relating to the draft Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (Amendment of Schedule 1: injunctions to prevent gang-related violence) Order 2014, the Ayes were 274 and the Noes were 203, so the Ayes have it.

Question accordingly negatived.

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes that the previous Government rescued the idea of apprenticeships and quadrupled apprenticeship starts; furthermore believes that a transformation in vocational education has eluded Governments for decades; therefore believes that the UK needs a new settlement for those young people who do not wish to pursue the traditional route into university and the world of work; and further believes that in order to achieve a high status vocational education system that delivers a high-skill, high-value economy the UK needs a new Technical Baccalaureate qualification as a gold standard vocational pathway achieved at 18, a new National Baccalaureate framework of skills and qualifications throughout the 14 to 19 phase, the study of mathematics and new technical degrees.

This motion is further testimony to the Labour party’s belief that education offers the surest means to deliver social justice, economic competitiveness and a route out of the fearful isolationist impulse adopted by the UK Independence party and increasingly by the Conservative party. Labour wants a skilled Britain, not a little England. In just under a month’s time, we shall mark the 70th anniversary of the Education Act 1944. The Minister for Skills and Enterprise likes to compare himself with the young Winston, but that Education Act was the product of a slightly more heroic coalition—a genuinely cross-party one-nation moment to broaden the focus of education and extend its emancipatory power to all classes. This, along with the national health service that the Conservatives tried to block, was to be the centre point of the post-war new Jerusalem. As Winston Churchill said, it would be a society in which, “the advantages and privileges which hitherto have been enjoyed only by the few, shall be far more widely shared by the men and youth of the nation as a whole.”

Yet the sad truth, at least as far as education is concerned, is that we are still waiting for this new Jerusalem. In post-war Germany, Ernest Bevin implemented a new National Baccalaureate and Erasmus scheme. Our ambition in office is to right that wrong and to do what this Government, with their narrow focus on free schools and curriculum tinkering, have signally failed to achieve. We do so because our economic future depends on it. Our shortage of technicians, engineers and skilled apprentices is hindering growth and a more balanced economy.

Sir Peter Luff (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I am slightly disappointed by the partisan note in the hon. Gentleman’s remarks. The truth is that apprenticeships were ignored by generations of politicians. The previous Government, to their great credit, started the process of rehabilitation. The present Government have continued the work. We should celebrate that consensus and that spirit of shared endeavour and not score party points.

Tristram Hunt: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his work with the engineering sector. The fact of the matter is that we are not delivering the results. The
[Tristram Hunt]

Royal Academy of Engineering forecasts that the UK needs an extra 50,000 STEM technicians and 90,000 STEM professionals every year just to replace people retiring from the work force. Similarly, new nuclear capacity could boost the UK economy by an estimated £5 billion and create more than 30,000 jobs, but the sector needs thousands of new recruits a year.

If we want to build a high-skill, high-wage economy, we need to build a recovery that delivers for working people. We need an education system that marries the vocational with the academic, and values what people can do alongside what they know. The modern workplace demands non-routine analytic and interactive skills. Businesses want employees who are innovative, flexible, creative team players. Sadly, that has not been the focus of Her Majesty’s Government. At exactly the point when we need a long-term economic plan, there is absolutely nothing in sight.

Mr Brooks Newmark (Braintree) (Con) rose—

Tristram Hunt: Talking of which.

Mr Newmark: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why the number of people not in education, employment or training went up by a third under a Labour Government?

Tristram Hunt: We have a proud record of tackling unemployment and youth unemployment. We championed the delivery of young people into work with a future jobs fund which this Government scrapped when they came into office. As this week’s CBI—

The Minister for Skills and Enterprise (Matthew Hancock) rose—

Tristram Hunt: I would have thought the Minister would want to listen to what the CBI has to say. This week’s CBI survey found that 58% of businesses are not confident that they will have enough highly skilled staff available for their future needs, which is up from 46% last year. [Interruption.] I know the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss) is keen on maths, so let me tell her that that is a rise of 12% in a single year under this Government. The Government’s focus has been on tinkering with the curriculum, undermining teaching and introducing a mishandled free schools policy.

Steve Rotheram (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that simply converting short-term vocational training programmes under the apprenticeship brand only damages that brand? What employers want are highly skilled, highly motivated individuals to ensure that we have a world-class work force.

Tristram Hunt: My hon. Friend speaks of what he knows, and he is absolutely right about the devaluing of apprenticeships under this Government, which I shall come to.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I know my hon. Friend agrees that the lack of skills is one of the biggest impediments to our development as a country. Skills are essential to the prosperity of this nation. Does he agree that it is a great shame, and says everything about this Government, that the Secretary of State for Education is not in the Chamber for this essential debate?

Tristram Hunt: I am grateful for my hon. Friend’s intervention, and normally I would be 100% behind him and seek to knock it out of the park, but on this occasion the Education Secretary has organised an international conference of educators here in the UK, which is not a bad place for the UK to be. However, my instincts are with my hon. Friend.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I urge my hon. Friend to continue making party political points, because they are rather good. Will he add that too many Government Members have no history of further education or technical colleagues, as I do? I did my A-levels at Kingston technical college.

Tristram Hunt: My hon. Friend is exactly right.

Talking of political divisions, the Government’s focus, as we have seen, has been not on the vocational demands of our education system but on tinkering with the curriculum and a free schools policy. At the Skills Minister’s favourite school, the Swedish private equity free school IES Breckland, which he has supported so much, Ofsted discovered “inadequate” teaching, poor behaviour and declining student literacy levels. The Swedish for-profit model that the Government were so keen to import has been exposed and discredited in the Skills Minister’s own backyard—responsible for one of the biggest falls in educational standards anywhere in the world.

Matthew Hancock: I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman broke away from his overly partisan tone when mentioning the Secretary of State, who apologises for not being able to be here. My right hon. Friend made it clear that if the Labour party had made this the first and most important debate this afternoon, he would have been here at the Labour party’s request. He would have liked to have been here, but the Labour party chose to make this the second debate, and therefore he cannot, and so I shall be responding for the Government.

Tristram Hunt: The record will note that the Skills Minister did not want to defend IES Breckland and the free schools policy.

We are beginning to see a widening attainment gap, but it is on vocational education where the Government’s negligence hits hardest. The Government are failing young people who want a gold-standard technical education, and they are not securing our skills base.

Let us be clear about the Government’s record. The number of apprenticeship starts by under-25s has fallen by 11,324 since 2010. The number of STEM apprenticeships for 16 to 24-year-olds has fallen by more than 7,000 since 2010. Too many apprentices in England are existing employees, not new job entrants, and too many are over 25. Let us add to that the Government’s scandalous destruction of careers advice.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman’s motion refers to the United Kingdom, but he will know that in Scotland vocational education and skills development is devolved and the
cross-party Wood commission is looking at that very issue. Does he intend to overrule what has been proposed in the Scottish Parliament in favour of his proposals, or did he just get a bit confused when drafting the motion?

Tristram Hunt: We will devolve our skills budgets to a regional, local level in England, because we believe that those decisions are best made locally.

Karen Lumley (Redditch) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is being very talkative, but what practical steps has he taken? How many skills and apprenticeship fairs, such as the one I held in Redditch on Friday, have he and his Front-Bench team held in their constituencies?

Tristram Hunt: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for the work she has done to promote skills in Redditch. I have seen some great schools there that are combining vocational and academic work, such as the RSA academy, and I know how important that is.

Sadly, this Government have undermined careers advice. Thanks to their reforms, prisoners now have more access to careers advice than school pupils. In 2013 the Education Committee raised its concerns about “the consistency, quality, independence and impartiality of careers guidance now being offered to young people.” Similarly, Ofsted has found that only one in six schools offer individual careers guidance from a qualified external adviser. For the Labour party, this is a matter of both social justice and economic efficiency. For those young people without the networks and internships, decent careers guidance is essential. Similarly, the complexity of navigating a vocational technical course, mixing an apprenticeship with further education provision, demands decent advice and information. All the colleges I have visited, from Dudley to Chichester, Manchester to Tamworth and Lambeth to Stoke-on-Trent, complain that they are not being properly promoted to potential students.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman welcome the creation of university technical colleges across the country, including the one that is due to be built in my constituency? At the same time, apprenticeship places have more than doubled since the general election and youth unemployment has fallen by more than a third. Does he welcome those three things?

Tristram Hunt: The hon. Gentleman has clearly been reading the Adonis review, as we look forward to more university technical colleges opening under the forthcoming Labour Government, but we must keep a watch on the quality of provision in UTCs and ensure that they are rolled out appropriately.

The coalition Government’s third mistake was an overly restrictive approach to syllabus reform. I agreed with much of what the Wolf report said about cutting the number of semi-vocational qualifications with over-inflated GCSE equivalents. I also think that it is absolutely right that pupils from working-class backgrounds in Stoke-on-Trent and elsewhere have full access to academic courses, but the current balance within the Progress 8 attainment measures can often seem out of kilter if we want young people to pursue engineering, design and technology, and art.

Similarly, the destruction of practical learning in the curriculum is very worrying. From geography to physics, the move to a more knowledge-focused curriculum, although important in some respects, has seen a withering away of skills, whether field trips, speaking skills or project work. This Government are undermining a powerful component of English education.

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab): I recently had the pleasure of taking my hon. Friend to visit the BRIT school in Croydon, which is sadly the only state school of its kind anywhere in the country. It has a very strong relationship with the music and performance industry. Does he agree with the young people we met there that the Government’s downgrading of vocational qualifications downgrades their hard work and their futures?

Tristram Hunt: I absolutely agree; dance, drama, art, design and creativity are among the most successful components of modern English in our culture and economic competitiveness. We need an education system that will promote and inspire that. Sadly, however, Ofsted, to which I would have thought the Ministers should have paid some heed, has stated:

“too many school leavers are not well-enough equipped scientifically with practical, investigative and analytical skills.

That cannot be in the long-term interests of this country.

Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): I am slightly worried about the hon. Gentleman and others on the Opposition Benches who seem to have been overtaken by mass amnesia. Does he not remember that the Labour Government presided over an entire generation of 16 to 24-year-olds who are now likely to have fewer skills than their grandparents? We are the only country in the western world where that is the case. Will he apologise for that?

Tristram Hunt: The hon. Lady should worry no more, because in 10 months’ time we will have a Labour Government delivering a sustainable education and skills policy.

Our motion talks of “a new settlement for those young people who do not wish to pursue the traditional route into university”. Let me lay out the Labour party’s ambition for Government to deliver equal status for vocational qualifications from school to university and beyond, to provide clear routes for highly skilled technical or professional careers and to have a dynamic, modern education system that will ensure that Britain can compete as an innovative, productive economy. We shall start with technical baccalaureates for 16 to 19-year-olds, in order to provide a clear, high-status vocational route through education. That is a Labour policy. The tech bacc will include quality level 3 vocational qualifications and a work placement to provide a line of sight through education into employment.

Our next policy is to ensure, unlike this Government, that all young people continue to study English or maths to the age of 18. These are the most essential of all 21st-century skills, and getting them right is fundamental to future career prospects. That does not mean asking young people to redo their GCSEs over and over again. Rather, it means ensuring that applied, functional and useful English and maths will help them to succeed with
their careers. We will have slimline English and maths courses designed to complement a student’s core programme of study.

Furthermore, we think that English and maths should be part of an ambitious national baccalaureate framework for all learners. Alongside core academic or vocational learning in English and maths, we want young people to undertake a collaborative project and a personal development programme, which would nurture the character, the resilience and the employability skills of all our young people. Much of the tech bacc route will be delivered through further education colleges.

Mr Sheerman: My hon. Friend will recall that the Skills Commission inquiry into pathways at 14, chaired by Mike Tomlinson and Ian Ferguson, strongly recommended GCSE papers in practical English and practical maths. Does he think that that would be a good way forward?

Tristram Hunt: We want an education system in which those young people who wish to pursue technical and vocational pathways have a grounding in English and maths that will allow them to succeed in their own fields, and in which there is a much greater interrelationship between the academic and vocational pathways. That kind of qualification would provide exactly that.

This Government have hammered further education provision. They can find £45 million for a Harris free school in Westminster, but they have done that by slashing funding for further education learners and sixth-form colleges. That is a scandalous set of priorities. We will work with FE providers to improve teaching and to ensure that colleges focus on local labour markets. Our highest performing FE colleges will become institutes of technical education with a core mission to deliver Labour’s tech bacc and the on-the-job components of apprenticeships.

I have laid out the Government’s mendacious record of spin and subterfuge on apprenticeships. We will deal with the devaluing of apprenticeships by introducing a universal gold standard level 3 qualification lasting two years. We will ensure that every firm that wants a major Government contract offers apprenticeships. We will also ensure that employers are involved in the development of apprenticeships by giving them support over standards and funding.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): On apprenticeship figures, would the hon. Gentleman be interested to know that, according to the House of Commons, apprenticeship starts are up by 62.8% in Hexham? Indeed, apprenticeships are up significantly in every single one of the 29 seats in the north-east of England.

Tristram Hunt: The fact is that the number of starts for under-25s has gone down by 11,400. Ministers can rebadge their apprenticeships and reconfigure the figures as much as they like, but people in the country know that on apprenticeships, this lot are not to be believed.

[Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Gentleman may be making points that are not amenable to those on the Government Benches, but he must be heard, no matter what he wants to say.

Tristram Hunt: I think, Madam Deputy Speaker, that a national baccalaureate might enable the Minister to learn about character, self-control and resilience in these kinds of situations. If he wants to pursue lifelong learning, that is an ambition Labour Members absolutely pursue.

Matthew Hancock rose—

Tristram Hunt: I am trying to conclude.

The culmination of our vision for young people on a technical or vocational pathway is our new plan, announced by the Leader of the Opposition yesterday, for technical degrees. These courses will be designed by some of our best universities and our leading employers, teaching people the skills they need to prosper in the new economy. Currently, just 2% of apprenticeships are available at degree level. For the first time, those who have excelled in vocational education and training—those who have gained a first-rate tech bacc and completed a level 3 apprenticeship—will be able to take their aspirations further. For the first time, young people will have the chance to earn while they learn at university, with a degree that provides a clear route to a high-skilled technical or professional career.

At the next general election, we have a choice between a Labour party determined to equip an outward-facing Britain with the skills and education it needs to succeed and, on the other hand, coalition parties tinkering with the curriculum here and there, increasing the number of unqualified teachers, and promoting for-profit schooling. It is a choice between more young engineers and more IES Breckland free schools; between a modern curriculum focused on thinking and doing, building character and creativity and harnessing the aspirations of all young people, and the narrow exam-factory model of recent years; and between a high-wage, high-skill, business-as-usual race to the bottom and a high-skill, high-innovation economy that works for all. Only one party is offering this country an economy and an education system fit for the punishing demands of the 21st century. I commend the motion to the House.

4.37 pm

The Minister for Skills and Enterprise (Matthew Hancock): We heard a regrettable tone from Labour in opening this debate. Before going into the details of the radical reforms of vocational education that we are undertaking to promote apprenticeships and to strengthen vocational qualifications, it is worth going through a couple of points of detail.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) stated that the number of apprenticeships for those under 25 has fallen by 11,000 since 2010. He refused to take my intervention, probably because he knew I was going to point out that figures show that since 2010 the number of apprenticeships for those under 25 has risen by 49,000. He mentioned careers advice but forgot to mention the new National Careers Service, which has 3,700 careers advisers who have in the past year delivered 1 million pieces of careers advice. He did not even know that education is a devolved area of policy and talked about education across the UK. On the withering away of skills in science, according to Ofsted that is precisely the legacy we were left by the Labour party. On degree-level apprenticeships—I take this one as a personal compliment—he was critical of
their representing only 2% of apprenticeships. I introduced degree-level apprenticeships this time last year, and under Labour there were no degree-level apprenticeships. Perhaps now we know why the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna) left the Chamber halfway through the opening speech—it was to go and cross off another name from his list of leadership challengers.

Mr Rob Wilson (Reading East) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, because the shadow Education Secretary would not do so when I tried very hard to get in earlier on. I listened very carefully to the shadow Education Secretary and heard a lot of top-down stuff, but very little about business. Why would he be so afraid of talking about business? Is it because his party is the anti-business party?

Matthew Hancock: It is certainly true that Labour is the anti-business party, but it is much more worrying that the Labour party seems to oppose our reforms to bring the world of education and the world of work closer together. We are undertaking the most radical reform of vocational education in Britain for a generation. We have swept aside thousands of qualifications that employers did not value and replaced them with clearer technical awards, tech levels and the tech bacc, which the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central mentioned and which starts in September. We have boosted apprenticeship numbers—there are record numbers under this Government—and introduced higher-quality apprenticeships that reflect the modern economy, and strengthened the requirements for English and maths.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I have raised this point before, but I think it would be useful to do so again. The Minister is currently consulting on changing the apprenticeship rules, and 400 businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises in the north-west, have responded by raising very serious concerns about the future for apprenticeships under his proposals. Why will he not address their legitimate concerns and ensure we can have those apprenticeships in the future?

Matthew Hancock: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that we have to ensure that the reformed apprenticeships are super simple, especially for small businesses, but representatives of 500,000 businesses wrote in support of the principle of the reforms and that is why we are going ahead with them.

The reforms are starting to pay off. Standards are starting to rise. Youth unemployment, which rose 40% in the first decade of this century under the Labour Government, is falling—it is down 10% over the past year—and is lower than it was at the election.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we have to ensure that the reformed apprenticeships are super simple, especially for small businesses, but representatives of 500,000 businesses wrote in support of the principle of the reforms and that is why we are going ahead with them.

Matthew Hancock: I have will have to add that to my list of erroneous facts from the Labour party that need sorting out.

Mr John Denham (Southampton, Itchen) (Lab): Does not a more measured view of the history tell the following: in 1997, fewer than 20,000 people completed apprenticeships, but by the time the previous Labour Government had finished, 285,000 people were starting apprenticeships each year? That number has continued to grow, but there are legitimate concerns about an increasing number of late starts and a smaller proportion of youthful starts, and those are the issues we need to address.

Matthew Hancock: That intervention was rather better than the whole speech given by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central. It is absolutely true that modern apprenticeships were started by the great Lord Hunt of Wirral in 1994 and they grew. Under this Government, they have doubled in number and the latest figures show an increase in the proportion of apprentices who are under 25, which I welcome. More apprenticeships are good news, but we have to make sure that they are also of a high quality.

Steve Rotheram: Will the Minister give way?

Matthew Hancock: I will take this intervention, because I think I know what the hon. Gentleman is going to say.

Steve Rotheram: I hope not. When I was first elected in 2010, I took on an apprentice who has turned out to be an absolutely fantastic employee. How many of the Minister’s colleagues on the Tory Front Bench have put their money where their mouths are and taken on apprentices?

Matthew Hancock: Plenty have done so, including me. I went out to recruit one apprentice and came away with two because the applicants were so good. They are both absolutely brilliant. There are many more in the Department—there are now 58 apprentices in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. I recommend an apprentice to everyone.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): It might help my hon. Friend to know that, as an employer, I took on an apprentice under the Labour Government. The course he was required to do and the apprenticeship bore no relationship to, and were a disaster for, each other. Quality as well as quantity has improved in recent years, which is a point Labour Members always forget.

Matthew Hancock: That is certainly true. I want to address an important point sensibly made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram). He asked whether too many apprenticeships are short courses and whether they are not high enough quality. It is true that the Government inherited a system in which apprenticeships could be less than six months. That was wrong, so we have said that every apprenticeship must be for a minimum of a year. We have increased quality while increasing the number of apprentices.

Matthew Hancock: That is certainly true. I want to address an important point sensibly made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram). He asked whether too many apprenticeships are short courses and whether they are not high enough quality. It is true that the Government inherited a system in which apprenticeships could be less than six months. That was wrong, so we have said that every apprenticeship must be for a minimum of a year. We have increased quality while increasing the number of apprentices.

It is good news for the nation that the Opposition have accepted their failure in office—the wording of their motion shows that they forgot half the population—
and now back our reforms. Some say that imitation is flattery, and I suppose they are right. On Sunday, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central called for a new elite grade of master teachers. That sounds like a good idea, and we have them. They are called specialist leaders in education—top teachers who get dedicated training and share their expertise with other schools. There are 3,800 of them in England. By next year, we will have 5,000.

On improving reforms and driving up standards, the hon. Gentleman mentioned technical degrees, which the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) described yesterday. They sound like a good idea, and we have them. More than 200 colleges already teach technical degrees. It is called higher education in further education. I suggest he goes around the country and has a look.

Mr Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): May I return the Minister to the subject of apprenticeships? Apprenticeships need to be of a decent length, but they also need to be high quality. There have been steps forward on both, but the other vital element of a successful apprenticeship is that it should be income transformative—it should lead to a significant increase in the market value of the person doing it. Has he looked at any mechanisms that could be put in place to ensure that, however worthy in concept apprenticeships are, they are held to account for delivering true market transformation of income expectation for the people who take them, young or old?

Matthew Hancock: Absolutely. The evidence shows that apprentices on the existing scheme increase their lifetime earnings, but we are not content to rest, so we are redesigning apprenticeship standards. Four hundred employers from different sectors of the economy are engaged to ensure not only that the training is rigorous, which is important, but that it responds to the needs of employers and gets people into higher-paid jobs. We want to ensure that the money that we, on behalf of taxpayers, put into subsidising apprenticeships, is well spent and that we get value for it. Ensuring that the money helps people to get higher-paid jobs is a vital part of that reform. I welcome any suggestions on how to entrench that link between what is taught to apprentices and the needs of employers. That can lead to higher pay for young people, which is what the policy is all about.

Mr Newmark: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important to have joined-up thinking in government? The Chancellor’s proposal, working with the Million Jobs campaign, to abolish national insurance for young people who get jobs, saves employers about £500 a year, and gives them the extra impetus they need to hire a young person.

Matthew Hancock: As my hon. Friend may well know, I am an enormous fan of the work of the Million Jobs campaign. The idea that we should not require national insurance from those who employ young people under the age of 21 is such a good one that the Chancellor put it in the Budget.

Bill Esterson: I am happy to withdraw my earlier remarks about the Secretary of State’s absence.

On quality and ensuring that apprenticeships do the job needed for the economy and for the individuals involved, does the Minister accept that we need the same approach as in Germany, where vocational and academic qualifications are of the same quality and have the same status? Does he agree that we need to offer apprenticeships in businesses of all sizes? That happens in Germany, but is it really happening in this country? I do not think it is.

Matthew Hancock: It was gracious of the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his remarks about the Secretary of State.

In the hon. Gentleman’s constituency, the number of apprenticeships has gone up by 118% since the election, so I know that he is a supporter of apprenticeships. Of course we must ensure that we drive up their quality. More than half of apprenticeships are in small and medium-sized enterprises, so they can be got in smaller businesses. An important part of the reform is to ensure that they work for small businesses as well as large ones, and that is happening at the moment.

The crucial point is that apprenticeships are based not only on the needs of employers, but on the basics, especially the key vocational skills of maths and English. We are strengthening maths and English at primary and secondary school, but it is shocking that, despite recent improvements, 40% of pupils do not get GCSEs at A* to C in English and maths by the age of 16. It is a national scandal that nine out of 10 of those who do not reach that basic standard by 16 do not achieve it by 19 either.

Under Labour, Britain was the only major country where young people were less numerate and literate than their grandparents, and we became one of the few major countries that did not insist on continued studies of maths and literacy for those who did not get such qualifications the first time around. We are ending that scandal. From September, all students will for the first time have to continue studying maths and English if they do not get a good GCSE, which will improve the life chances of millions.

Mr Steve Reed: I am sure that the Minister understands that it is important for many young people who do not gain the qualifications they need at school to be able to go back to college to get them later on. Will he therefore take this opportunity to apologise for trying to impose on Croydon college the largest cuts in the country for 18-year-olds in further education, despite the continuing high levels of unemployment in many parts of the borough?

Matthew Hancock: The hon. Gentleman mentions unemployment in Croydon. In his constituency, it has fallen by 29% over the past year, and the number of apprenticeships has increased by 170% since the election, so he should be saying thank you very much. As for the difficulties of managing a tight budget, whose fault is that? It is the fault of the Labour party, which left us with the biggest deficit in modern peacetime history.

Mr Sheerman: I apologise for having made a political point earlier. People outside the House are worried about the fact that we get into an argy-bargy between
the two parties. [Interruption.] Come on. Surely there must be commonality of purpose in doing something for the young people in this country who do not go down the higher education route. Will the Minister please now give his attention to the further education sector? As hon. Members from either side of the House who care about this know, we must galvanise the FE sector to deliver what we want.

Matthew Hancock: Absolutely, and I am happy to work with the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham), who spoke so powerfully earlier. It is a great pity that the Front-Bench spokesman's speech was one of unremitting negativity and, crucially, that it was based on an utterly a misunderstanding of what is happening in vocational education. The reforms we are pushing through are about driving up standards, having higher expectations and ensuring that more young people have the chance to achieve their potential. Instead of saying that 50% should go to university and not caring—indeed, forgetting—about the rest of them, we are making sure that all young people get the chance to succeed.

Guy Opperman: Like the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), I have hired and trained an apprentice, who I have retained for the past four years. She is outstanding and has been a great success.

To take the Minister back to what he said a moment ago about education funding on a difficult budget, is it not fantastic that the fairer funding formula has been readdressed so that—in these difficult times—Northumberland, for example, will from next April have an extra £10 million for schools that have been so underfunded for so long?

Matthew Hancock: Of course it is. Furthermore, in the 16 to 18 sector, instead of providing funding on the basis of how many qualifications young people take, we are providing it on a per pupil basis, with extra support for those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. That has strengthened the funding for those who take fewer qualifications, and it provides an incentive for FE colleges and schools to do what is right for the young person.

The second part of our reform is about strengthening qualifications and having clearer pathways through tech awards, tech levels and the tech bacc. People must know that, instead of the mushy muddle that went before, we have strong and clear vocational pathways that are endorsed by employers.

The third and final strand is apprenticeships. In the previous Parliament, there were just over 1 million apprenticeships. We are on track to deliver 2 million apprenticeships over this Parliament. We have doubled the number of apprenticeships and driven up quality. There are stronger English and maths requirements. Apprenticeships now have a minimum duration of a year. Employers have been given the pen to design apprenticeship standards. We are reforming funding so that the training that apprentices receive follows the needs of employers.

As apprenticeships become more stretching, we are, for the first time, introducing traineeships for young people who need extra help with work experience, maths and English so that they have the skills and behaviour that they need to hold down an apprenticeship or a sustainable job. We are reforming the advice that young people receive so that they can be inspired by work experience, and we are ensuring that there are more mentors. We are reforming league tables so that schools are rewarded not only for exam results, but for where their pupils end up. Will the Minister now give his attention to the further education sector? Please give us the chance to deliver what we want.
Germany has three times as many apprentices as the UK. The number of young apprentices—those who are under the age of 19—is falling, as is the number of apprentices in information technology and construction. It is good that the Minister has introduced degree-level apprenticeships, but they account for less than 2% of apprenticeships.

Britain is also falling behind our competitors in basic numeracy and literacy. In basic skills, we now lag behind not only countries such as Finland, South Korea and Germany but even Estonia, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. England is the only country in the developed world where the generation approaching retirement is more literate and numerate than the one entering the work force.

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): And when did that happen?

Ian Austin: If I may say so, that is a narrow party political point. I believe that the last Government took many great steps in education and skills, and if the hon. Gentleman bothers to listen, he might discover that I am saying some things that he and his party’s Front Benchers actually agree with. He ought to sit down, listen carefully and then perhaps contribute later to a serious debate about what I am saying should be the No. 1 priority for every political party.

We should agree as a country—all parties, Government, schools, universities, the teaching profession and businesses—clear long-term targets to transform education and ensure that we have the skills that we need to compete. We should set an ambition for Britain to produce the best-educated and most highly skilled young people in the world. Someone is going to do that, so why can it not be us? We have to drive up standards in our schools and get behind head teachers and teachers who are working to improve standards. If we recruit good teachers, motivate them, set high aspirations and tough targets, focus on standards and discipline and make the kids believe in themselves, the sky is the limit.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that companies such as Jaguar Land Rover need highly skilled and highly qualified technicians? Fairly recently, they were having difficulty recruiting them. If we cannot get people with high skills and technological qualifications, how will we expand our manufacturing base in the west midlands, for example? Does he agree that that is critical to the area?

Ian Austin: I completely agree. That is a critical issue, particularly in the black country, where we are getting the new engine plant. It is fantastic that Jaguar Land Rover is sponsoring a university technical college, and skills are crucial not just for JLR but for all the people in its supply chain.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): The hon. Gentleman and I both represent parts of Dudley. Does he agree that we need better matching of skills and employers? The black country local growth deal, signed this week, will bring significant investment to both Halesowen college and Dudley college in his constituency, it will go a long way towards addressing the issue that the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) mentioned.

Ian Austin: I welcome every penny that will be spent on improving the facilities at Dudley college. It is fantastic that we will get a new construction centre to go alongside the new manufacturing centre that is being built, the new sixth-form college, and the new college buildings that the shadow Secretary of State visited a couple of weeks ago, which were funded entirely locally, rather than by central Government.

Research by the Sutton Trust shows that bringing the lowest-performing 10% of teachers in the UK up to the average would make our country the third best-performing country in reading, and the fifth best in maths—subjects in which we currently fail to make the top 20.

We need to recruit and train a new generation of head teachers. Ellowes Hall, a comprehensive school in my constituency, has gone from fewer than four in 10 students getting five good GCSEs a few years ago, to more than eight in 10 doing so today. They are kids from the same families, and largely with the same teachers, but what has changed is that there is a brilliant new head teacher, Andy Griffiths. We need to find new ways of identifying, recruiting and training head teachers and improving the quality of teaching. We should expand Teach First massively, and I commend the shadow Secretary of State’s proposal to introduce a new master teacher status, inspired by education reforms in Singapore.

We should find new ways of enabling popular, well run and financially sound schools that are consistently over-subscribed to access the funding they need to expand, so that parents can send their children to the schools they want to, not ones that they would prefer them not to have to go to.

We should expand Lord Baker’s brilliant work on university technical colleges. Unfortunately, our bid for a UTC in Dudley was not successful, but undeterred, Lowell Williams, the brilliant principal of Dudley college, is working with local employers and Aston university to open Dudley Advance, a new technology and manufacturing centre that will soon be open to help students of all ages get new skills and jobs. We should aim for all apprenticeships to provide level 3 qualifications and to last for two years, and insist that every firm that wants major Government contracts provides apprenticeships. We need higher education, and a university campus in every town. It is a scandal that Dudley is England’s biggest town with no university campus.

People say to me, “Look Ian, what’s the point of going to university when there aren’t the jobs afterwards?” but they are completely wrong. More than 94% of students who graduated from the university of Wolverhampton in 2013 are in work or undertaking further study. Three out of four were working in graduate-level professional and managerial jobs earning graduate-level salaries, with 60% earning between £15,000 and £30,000, and more than a fifth earning between £30,000 and 60,000. Scores of its students have gone on to set up their own business. Under Vice-Chancellor Geoff Layer’s leadership, Wolverhampton is achieving its ambition to be the university of opportunity, contributing to the local economy and economic regeneration, providing the skills and knowledge our economy needs, helping
local businesses grow and succeed, setting up new businesses, and creating jobs and wealth in the black country.

Despite accounting for just 7% of school pupils, those from independent schools represent seven out of 10 High Court judges, more than half our leading journalists and doctors, and more than a third of MPs. Just five public schools send more pupils to Oxford and Cambridge than 2,000 state schools. I therefore reiterate my call for Ministers and those on our Front Bench to take up the Sutton Trust’s open access proposals.

In conclusion, let us agree as a country to make education the No. 1 priority, and to have the best-educated young people in the world. Let us support teachers and heads in improving schools. We need more technical colleges, more apprentices, and more people studying for technical qualifications. Let us open up the best schools in the country to the brightest students, whatever their background. Better schools, better skills, better jobs—that should be our rallying cry for the 21st century.

5.7 pm

Mr Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): What an excellent list of characteristics that was, and it is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin). I welcome today’s theme, because too often we focus on the part of our education system in which there are the fewest problems—the more academic routes. We should spend more of our time on the vocational routes that the majority of the population go through, which, as hon. Members have said, are harder to navigate. Those routes need to be made more navigable, and need to be linked closely to the needs of employers and the long-term earnings potential of the people who take them, whether they are young or not.

The Education Committee will soon launch its dedicated inquiry into apprenticeships and traineeships for 16 to 19-year-olds, so this debate is of particular interest to me and the rest of the Committee. Too often, vocational courses have been the Cinderella element in our education system, and denied the limelight given to academic qualifications that are sometimes perceived as more glamorous and socially transformative. This is a timely opportunity for the House to discuss how to change that.

Under the previous Government, getting as many young people as possible into university sometimes appeared to be an end in itself, regardless of whether that was necessarily a good deal for those young people, employers or wider society. I do not think that Ministers then thought of it that crudely, but that was the message that went out. It is important that we get the message right, so that the next generation has the right signals to make choices that will make the biggest difference to them.

It is regrettably true that overall, youth unemployment rose by 40% under the previous Government, and it did not go down in the boom years. That challenge was not new to the Labour Government, but there was a long-standing problem. Other countries such as Austria, Germany—famously—and the Netherlands had the same social problems and challenges, but managed to have fewer people ending up in unemployment, but even in the boom years we had high numbers of people in unemployment.

When I sat on the Children, Schools and Families Committee in the last Parliament, I used to challenge Ministers and ask them what counted as educational success. Was it the PISA—programme for international student assessment—tables, for example? One crude proxy would have to be ensuring that the educational system did not leave anyone completely behind, trapped in poverty for life and without a job. That is exactly what we had. It so important for whoever is in government after next May that we get this right.

It is a priority to work out how to improve the offer made to the hundreds of thousands of young people who take vocational courses and enter the workplace every year. As I say, if anything, they face greater complexity than those who take academic courses. The Government inherited a remarkable 3,175 equivalent qualifications on offer in schools for 14 to 16-year-olds alone. As Alison Wolf reported, some of them were not worth the paper they were written on, so it was right to change that.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Does the Chairman of the Select Committee recognise, however, as Alison Wolf did, that the most widely used qualifications, such as BTEC first and BTEC national, were valuable and necessary to the overall panoply?

Mr Stuart: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, whose expertise and interest in this issue is of long standing and dates from long before he came to this House. He is, of course, right in what he says, but in too many cases, institutions were putting young people on courses that they may or may not have known were of limited value, but that were in fact of little or no long-term value, because it suited the interest of the institution, rather than the interest of the young people. That is why it was right to look carefully at that problem.

When Professor Wolf published her review, she warned:

“The staple offer for between a quarter and a third of the post-16 cohort is a diet of low-level vocational qualifications, most of which have little to no labour market value... Among 16 to 19 year olds, the Review estimates that at least 350,000 get little or no benefit from the post-16 education system.”

That was a pretty terrible inheritance, with more than a third of a million people being educated at great public expense, with no benefit to themselves or the country as a whole. Both literally and metaphorically, Britain cannot afford to continue to fail young people in that way, and it is to the Minister’s credit that a considerable amount of work has been done, including the commissioning of the Wolf report.

Almost 100 university technical colleges and studio schools have been established. I hope that there will be a Humber UTC in the not-too-distant future, and I know that the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) is working hard, championing it. I hope there will be involvement from companies such as Able UK, Total, Centrica Storage, Tata Steel and Clugston.

The Government have published a new 16-to-19 accountability framework, the headline measures of which focus on pupil progress, attainment, retention and destinations. As others have commented, the apprenticeships programme has had rocket boosters put under it. It has been lengthened, and there have been improvements to quality.
Returning to the question about the number of apprenticeships raised by the shadow Secretary of State, if there are fewer 16-to-18 apprenticeships, more of them are a year long or longer; a year is now the minimum length. Overall, I do not know—I hope our inquiry will find out—whether the package for 16 to 18-year-olds is better than it was, in respect of quality and long-term impact. Whatever happens, we need to keep wrestling with the question—that is why my Select Committee will look further into it—of how to get more people in the young age group on to high-quality apprenticeships, particularly in view of concerns raised about the way in which some employers were training people who were already in their employ. Morrisons was criticised for some pretty short-term apprenticeships in supermarket skills that were unlikely to have been income-transformative—a point I raised earlier.

I am mindful of the time, so I shall try to conclude. I hope that we will keep focusing on vocational qualifications. It is the route that most people in this country follow: It is therefore the route that this House should focus on. Notwithstanding the excellent personal experience of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), the truth is that Members of all parties have little personal experience of the further education sector and associated sectors. That is all the more reason why we need to focus on them, read about them, conduct inquiries into them and make them better. Our problem as a nation has not been the way in which we have educated the academic elite; it has been the fact that we have failed to make decent provision for a decent education, whether academic or vocational, that gives people an entitlement to the income-transformative—a point I raised earlier.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Members are tending to get As in rhetoric and Ds in arithmetic. Six minutes from now is 5.21 pm.

5.15 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The debate is timely: timely because it is about opportunity and life chances, and timely because the discussion about opportunity and life chances in this country has become tied up with the discussion about immigration and our place in the world. It has been argued that opportunity will somehow be enhanced and pressure on public services will be eased by our keeping out workers who were born overseas, whatever steps that would require in terms of Britain’s place in the world.

The debate takes place against the backdrop of the publication of two important reports that shed light on that argument. The first—published a couple of weeks ago by the Education Committee, chaired by the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr Stuart)—is entitled “Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children”. The second, published yesterday, is the Migration Advisory Committee’s report on the labour market impact of EU migration. I want to say a word about both reports.

According to the Education Committee’s report, the proportion of white children receiving free school meals who attain the benchmark standard of five good GCSEs including English and maths is only half the proportion of white children as a whole. Among other ethnic groups, the gap is much smaller. Among children from an Indian background it is just 15%, and among children from a Chinese background there is almost no attainment gap at all. Indeed, Chinese children receiving free school meals are, at this stage, the highest-achieving of any group at school—except for Chinese children who are not receiving free school meals, and even then the gap is tiny. So the attainment gap between children from low-income families and better-off children does not affect all children equally. Although there is an attainment gap, the fatalistic argument that deprivation can be used as an excuse to explain away educational failure does not hold up, because deprivation has such contrasting effects among different groups.

While the Education Committee’s report may give us cause for despair, it also gives us reason for hope. There is hope because the report draws attention to things that make a difference. It found that how highly a school is rated by Ofsted makes a “dramatic” difference to the performance of pupils. Just 25% of children receiving free school meals at a school that is rated “inadequate” will get five good GCSEs, but in schools that are rated “outstanding”, the figure is 50%. The more “good” and “outstanding” schools an area has, the more opportunity it will be providing for the children who need that opportunity most. The issue is urgent for cities such as Wolverhampton, which last year was judged by Ofsted to have a lower proportion of children attending schools rated “good” or “outstanding” than any other area in England. I believe that changing that situation should be the absolute top priority for the city that I represent.

In fact, despite that harsh verdict, there is hope and there is excellence in Wolverhampton. Holy Trinity Roman Catholic primary school in Bilston, which has twice as many pupils on the pupil premium as the national average, recently received an Ofsted report which states:

“This is an outstanding school. School leaders and governors are relentlessly focused on securing the very best for their pupils. From the moment they start in the nursery, children achieve exceptionally well...by the time pupils leave in year 6 they are extremely well prepared for their next stage, educationally and personally...pupils eligible for the pupil premium make phenomenal progress and outperform all pupils in the school and all pupils nationally”.

Holy Trinity is a success because from the brilliant head, Carroll McNally, down, failure is not accepted. The school has the highest ambitions and wants the best for its children, and if Holy Trinity can do it, other schools can, too.

Let me turn to the Migration Advisory Committee report. Not only did that report show that migrants add £22 billion to the public purse, are less likely to be in social housing than UK-born citizens, and pay in more than they take out in benefits, but it stressed that the difficulty faced by some UK workers was lack of skills and qualifications. People are shut out of the labour market because employers do not feel they are equipped to take part in it and do the jobs that are there. That is the heart of this: not blaming others, but increasing the life chances of children born here.
The debate on these issues is a debate between the policies of grievance and the politics of hope. Constant attacks on Britain’s openness to ideas, people and talent from around the world do not add a single job to this country. They do not add a single qualification. They do not help a single young person. They provide someone to blame, but they do not provide anything else. We should be the champions of hope: give young people a chance, not an enemy; give them an opportunity, not a target for blame; and let us have passion for achievement in all parts of the education system, from the top to the very bottom.

5.21 pm

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to this important debate and to follow the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), who made a very thoughtful speech. Indeed Members on the Opposition Back Benches have made very thoughtful contributions, but I have to say that stands in stark contrast to the partisan tone struck by the shadow Education Secretary, on a subject where strident partisan points should not be made, because if we strip away all the bluster, most of us are on the same page.

The shadow Education Secretary did make one correct point, however: there is a looming need to have more people going into STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths—careers. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) made the important point that for too long—for generations—we have undervalued apprenticeships and further education. I congratulate the last Government on having started to right that, and this Government have built on it.

Let me highlight one example of why I think there is a growing skills gap. In civil and electrical engineering, a large section of the current work force will retire in the not too distant future, and with the vast investment in infrastructure that is coming in the railways, road building and utilities, we are going to face a significant gap if we do not inspire and encourage more people into those careers.

The Government have done much to boost apprenticeships and vocational education. I will not go through all the points my hon. Friend the Minister made, but I want to highlight the £1,500 grant to employers to take on apprenticeships. That is doing a lot to encourage more employers to take on apprentices where they may have been reluctant to do so in the past. Specifically on the transport side, the new proposed High Speed 2 skills academy is absolutely the right thing to do to boost the number of people going into that sector. I am just disappointed that the excellent bid from Milton Keynes to be the host of the new skills academy has not made the shortlist, but I wish the remaining towns and cities in the process all the very best.

I wish to make three points, which I hope are constructive. First, we can talk about specific qualifications and the specific nature of the careers advice given to young people, but beyond that I think there is a need for a cultural shift. For too long we have allowed ourselves to get into the situation where, for too many young people, going straight from school to a campus-based university course is the automatic next step. I do not want in any way to diminish the importance of that step for the people it is right for, but it is not the right answer for everyone at that time. We need to get into schools much earlier than we are doing to explain to young people that when they finish their school career they have a range of options, be it university, an apprenticeship or some other form of vocational learning. Above all, we are talking about a cultural shift, and we need to put all these options on an equal footing.

My second point relates specifically to apprenticeships. I have talked to a large number of employers in my constituency who take on apprentices, and one of their concerns is about the level of mentoring available to young people. As employers, they can provide the workplace learning, and the colleges they are associated with can provide the educational side of things, but young people often need a mentor to help them through their training. Small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular, do not always have the ability to release their staff to help the apprentices. If a large cohort of engineers are about to retire, could we not set up a voluntary mentoring scheme whereby their skills and experience could be very profitably used to help coach and guide these young people? There are some of these schemes in the country, but it is a piecemeal situation at the moment, so I urge my Front-Bench colleagues to examine ways in which such a scheme could be developed. I am discussing with the excellent principal of Milton Keynes college a way in which we might do that locally in Milton Keynes, but this could be a national thing, too.

I am conscious that I am in the last minute of my time, so I shall briefly mention my third point, which is about the need for flexibility in moving from technical qualifications into higher education. That happens at different points in people’s careers. I am on a bit of a sales pitch here, because we already have an excellent mechanism to deliver that—the Open university, in my constituency. I urge everyone to look at the engineering degrees it has on offer. I will draw my remarks to a conclusion, but I hope we can move forward with a consensual and constructive tone in this debate. Let us not have some of the nonsense, partisan points which were made earlier.

5.27 pm

Mr John Denham (Southampton, Itchen) (Lab): In a lecture to the RSA in January, I set out the case for employer co-sponsored degrees, so I am delighted by my right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party’s announcement of his backing for new high-level technical degrees that, as he said, would be delivered in partnership with industry, co-funded and co-designed by employers. In the furore around the £9,000 tuition fees, not so much attention was given to an early decision of the coalition to close down Labour’s work force development programme. After just three years, it had created 20,000 co-sponsored degree programmes a year, with an average employer contribution of nearly £4,000. The scheme was different from other higher education funding, because instead of having central allocations, employers and universities had to bid for funds. That element of competition created the incentive to design courses that employers really wanted to help pay for, and employer contributions could be varied according to ability to pay and the course on offer. We need something like that, and more of it, today.
At the moment, we have a persistent degree-level skills shortage in parts of the economy, but we also have record numbers of students going to university. However, a third of graduates are not working in graduate jobs five years after they graduate. They are up to their neck in debt, but higher education has not delivered what they expected. The problem is that we have too many graduates; it is the mismatch between supply and demand, which arises because employers have too little influence over the process. As the CBI said last July, we need more partnership-based provision, with greater business involvement in colleges and universities, as well as to boost apprenticeships. But the market in “learn while you earn” models, such as higher apprenticeships and more flexible degree programmes, is underdeveloped.

Mr Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab) rose—

Mr Denham: I will give way to my right hon. Friend, but I do not have long.

Mr Byrne: My right hon. Friend is being characteristically modest in understating the influence he had on the announcement that was made yesterday. Is he as concerned as I am that the number of people who had the chance to study for foundation degrees, HNCs and HNDs in a full-time role has fallen by 40% since 2010?

Mr Denham: I shall come to that point.

There are other reasons why we need the change. The welcome expansion of higher education has had a less welcome aspect, in my view. Universities have increasingly concentrated on the most expensive model of higher education—the full-time honours degree studied away from home. More than ever before, higher education is a one-shop deal for 18 and 19-year olds. Our graduates are the youngest in the OECD. There are two consequences. With an uneven schools system, such as that described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), there is no chance of those currently entering higher education. In the proposals that I set out earlier this year, I showed how those could be delivered without student debt and with better value for money for the taxpayer. If we recognised that employed students do not need maintenance, and if we made the cash available not as debt cancellation, but as subsidy to the employer, we could create the finance for a good co-sponsored degree. I look forward to my own party’s development of the idea.

Businesses will contribute, as they have done in the past. If they can educate an employee whom they have chosen, on a course that they have helped design, which is delivered full-time, part-time, on site or by distance learning, according to their business needs, at times that suit their business, the cost of contributing to the education of the graduate will be much less than the typical recruitment costs of employing a new graduate, let alone the typical retention costs when the business or the graduate finds out that they have made the wrong choice.

I hope my party retains at least the flexibility and the competitive elements of the work force development programme. Not only did they help to ensure that both employers and universities worked in effective partnership, but they will avoid the need to create cumbersome structures to design and validate new degrees. The Wolf report was in part a comment on my time as a Minister. What Professor Wolf said, rightly, was that the genuine attempt to create employer-led bodies to design qualifications, which was shared by all sides, had not worked in delivering the qualifications that we needed. The innovative effort should go into ensuring that SMEs, not just the major employers, have sufficient voice and weight to negotiate with universities.

In the autumn statement, the Chancellor announced huge new funding to take the cap off university places. As things stand, that will all go to three-year degrees studied away from home by young people. Putting that money, or some of it, into the type of technical degrees now being discussed might be a much better use of the money.

Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): The right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) said that today’s debate was timely. I could not agree with him more. Yesterday I visited the brand new CEMAST centre in the brand new enterprise zone in my constituency. CEMAST stands for the Centre of Excellence in Engineering, Manufacturing and Advanced Skills Training, and there could be no more powerful emblem of this Government’s commitment to the high-end skills training and vocational training that we desperately need in this country. Nine hundred students will start at that college in September. It is the most fantastic educational environment that I have seen in a long time.

Many hon. Members have spoken about the Wolf report. It is worth dwelling on some of the facts that we all know very well: one in five young people leave school with qualifications so poor that they cannot progress; the graduate finds out that they have made the wrong choice.

I am delighted that the Opposition education spokesman, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) acknowledged that under the previous Government qualifications that meant nothing to potential employers were widespread. There were more than 3,000 so-called equivalent to GCSE qualifications on offer to 16 to 18-year-olds. They could get a BTEC level 2 extended certificate in fish husbandry, worth two GCSEs; a level 2 certificate in nail technology services, which I would find quite valuable, worth two GCSEs; or a level 2...
dipлом in horse care—I am allergic so I probably would not be too keen—worth four GCSEs. Those courses were not valued by employers and were not preparing young people for life; they were simply bundling them over the five A to C GCSE line. Those young people were given false credentials and, criminally and crucially, false hope.

Perhaps the most damning indictment was the finding that young people were deliberately steered away from qualifications that might stretch and reward them and towards qualifications that could be passed easily. Sadly, the result was that, while the rest of the world was making progress, we were falling behind. Between 2000 and 2009, the OECD average for those not in education, employment or training fell, while in the UK, it went up. England is now the only country in the developed world where pensioners are likely to have better skills than those aged 16 to 24, which is obviously incredibly sad.

I do not want to be partisan on this matter—we have already had too much partisan comment—but when Labour talks about a high-skill, high-wage economy, you should remember that on its watch, one in five young people were left with no skills, no wage and no future. Thankfully, however, Labour has now seen the light. It wants more people doing apprenticeships, so it must welcome the fact that under this Government we have had a record number of apprenticeships. It wants a new technical baccalaureate, so it must be excited by the prospect of the technical baccalaureate that comes into place in two months’ time. It also wants more people taking the vocational equivalent to a degree, so it will be thrilled at the number of under-25s taking higher apprenticeships.

On the Government Benches, the skills gap in this country is not the source of a press release; it is a call to action. By investing in 2 million apprenticeships and replacing low-value vocational qualifications with new tech levels that are backed by employers, this Government are taking decisive action. What we now need is even more employer involvement in education. According to a recent CBI survey, 85% of businesses now have links with some type of school or college. That is fantastic news, but that number needs to be even higher, because businesses know better than anyone else what businesses want. As a bare minimum, they are looking for employees who are numerate, literate and employable.

We must always remember that our schools are preparing children for the world of work, and a failure to provide them with the necessary skills to flourish in this world is to hold them back from achieving their true potential. That means a hard-headed focus in schools on what employers really value.

In the motion, the Opposition note that a “transformation in vocational education has eluded Governments for decades”.

That might be the closest we ever get to an apology from the Labour party for its woeful failure to prepare our young people for the modern economy. This Government are transforming vocational education, but there is more to do. If we stick to the plan, we can ensure that our young people have the skills they need to face the future and to succeed.

5.37 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate. There have been some good contributions already this afternoon. The Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr Stuart) is consistent in reminding us, as he was when I was a member of the Committee, that we spend a lot of our time focusing on those students who succeed at whatever they do. It is right and proper to focus on students who sometimes find it more difficult to succeed. I hasten to add that those are not necessarily students in vocational and technical education, but we often neglect that area as well. His laser-like approach to keeping up that consistency is very important.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden), in a powerful contribution, reminded us of the need to dispose of the politics of grievance and grab the politics of hope.

In the 1990s, I was running the then Conservative Government’s technical and vocational education initiative in the north Lincolnshire area. I mention that because it is a reminder that this country has been grappling with technical and vocational education for a long time. In fact, that was one of the best initiatives that came out of the Thatcher Government, as it used carrots to incentivise change. It put forward many of the things that we now take for granted in our education service.

Whenever we look at education in the UK, we always ask which areas of the world have performed better in relation to technical and vocational education. In fact I put that very question to the Business Secretary this week. The answer was the one I expected: Germany. In some ways, the German football team, as we saw last night, is a metaphor for how Germany gets things right. Over time, Germany ruthlessly puts things together in a cross-party way that engages across generations and across parties, whereas too often we flip-flop around instead of building on the positives.

I do not accept that things were disastrous in 2010, because they were not. We had had the biggest investment in education for a generation, building on other investments, such as the one under the previous Conservative Government. Politicians, educationalists, students, parents and others took education to a different place, where it was performing far better than before. That does not mean that everything was right and rosy, but the secondary curriculum at the end of that period was delivering better outcomes for young people than ever before by using a mix of vocational and technical qualifications, such as BTECs, alongside the necessary and appropriate increased rigour on maths and English. We saw schools, on a two-year lag, beginning to improve on their number of five A* to C grades with maths and English, by changing the culture of aspiration, which makes a profound difference to performance.

The Government have built on certain things effectively, and I welcome their commitment to furthering the delivery of apprenticeships. I welcome the introduction of destination monitoring and the increased rigour and focus on maths, English and science, but frankly the move to prioritising things such as the EBacc will have negative consequences because, as the Chair of the Education Committee said, it is not the area to which we need to be paying attention. We need to be focusing our attention on what we are discussing today.
teachers must not only have strong pedagogical skills, but be fully up to date with practices in their vocational area.

Last year’s report by the commission on adult vocational teaching and learning highlighted the value of industry experts getting involved in vocational teaching and curriculum development. Since then, the Education and Training Foundation has commissioned the development of a Teach Too initiative, which will bring industry experts and those involved in vocational teaching and training closer together. It will help to gain a better understanding of current practice and build on it to lead towards a national framework for Teach Too. I encourage Ministers to see what can be learned from the initiative as it progresses. I also encourage Ministers to consider what more can be done to encourage industry secondments to FE colleges, which offer a low-risk means for colleges and employers to engage industry professionals in teaching and learning. The Education and Training Foundation might be well placed to conduct work in that area too.

One area of Government policy that has seen industry and education partnerships blossom is the university technical college programme. I am delighted that this September Norfolk UTC will be opening in my constituency. It will specialise in the skills needed for the energy and high-value manufacturing sectors, both of which are important drivers of growth in the East Anglian economy. Employers are involved in shaping the curriculum so that courses meet the needs of local industries and provide routes for young people to go on to employment, training or university. Places at Norfolk UTC are in high demand, and I hope that in due course the UTC programme can be further expanded at a sustainable pace.

I would like to point to a further challenge: how we can best ensure that young people are fully aware of their options from school. It is meaningless to create education and career paths if young people do not know about them and do not have the support they need to access them. Ofsted has highlighted that too many young people are left to wade through the frequently confusing array of options available to them with no real idea of what skills they need or the path most suitable for them.

Mr Stuart: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need many more employers to go into schools and help embed careers in the curriculum, perhaps by helping with science practicals in sixth form? There are all sorts of ways that employers can embed careers in the curriculum by getting involved in teaching.

Simon Wright: I agree 100%. At the moment, too few schools value vocational qualifications or the needs of the 60% who do not go to university, and we do not start learning about careers in school at a young enough age. At the same time, there is a perception gap among industry, education providers and learners about employment markets.

I welcome the strengthened statutory careers guidance for schools announced earlier this year and the proposal for a UCAS-style system to provide a single route for 16-year-olds. We need to consider how we can further strengthen the role of Ofsted and how school destination
measures will fully support vocational and technical education routes being treated with equal esteem as academic education.

Finally, I want to emphasise the contribution of city deals and local growth deals, supported by local enterprise partnerships and local employers, who know better than Whitehall what skills their area needs. In Norfolk and Suffolk, a LEP-wide skills programme will maximise employer involvement and investment and increase apprenticeships and graduate internships, as specified in the region’s city deal, which was confirmed last year. This week the New Anglia local growth deal confirmed that colleges in the region, including Easton college, which is just outside my constituency, will benefit from additional investment, enabling the building of a new construction training centre and new agri-tech laboratory areas to accommodate employers’ needs.

A transformation in vocational education is under way, and we need to be undeterred in our determination to continue the progress that has been made. The quality and status of vocational qualifications has improved; the number and standard of apprenticeships has increased considerably; and employers, professional bodies and providers are working to ensure that training reflects our future skill needs. Most importantly, the foundations for a stronger economy are being laid while giving every young person the opportunity to gain the skills they need to get on in life.

5.50 pm

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): People like you and I, Mr Speaker, who are interested in history will remember that about 50 years ago Harold Wilson made his great “white heat of technology” speech. I recommend that Members read it, because it leaps off the page. He was talking, as Leader of the Opposition, about how Britain must transform itself in order to be a place where all of us could share in a good life. I came into politics to secure the good life for the people of this country and, in particular, my constituents. Re-reading that speech—I had not looked at it for many years—I found it remarkable how he was looking at the changed social and economic structure. He said that there should be no unemployment or idleness in our country, that a production line in Detroit could not be any room for unskilled and semi-skilled people to continue the progress that has been made. The quality of FE maths teaching is deplorable, so let’s go to FE colleges and they need the best help available. Young people who have failed in other education pathways have to be given that push and the resources. A lot of them need maths and science as part of their background is never going to make it. I applaud the maths hub launched by the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss). We absolutely need that.

In the last few moments of my speech, I want to make another radical proposal: I want a citizenship service. People who go to university are too young and some young people remain idle for too long, so we need a citizenship service for everyone, including those at university.

The only way any of us will get what we want is by reinventing the further education sector. There are more than 350 FE institutions and we all have one not too far from our constituencies. We can have university technical colleges and all sorts of new-fangled things, but FE colleges will deliver the numbers we need. They have to be given that push and the resources. A lot of young people who have failed in other education pathways go to FE colleges and they need the best help available. The quality of FE maths teaching is deplorable, so let’s do something about FE.
Finally, let us not forget the parents. No one has mentioned the parents yet. A child’s parents can buck them, put them up and wipe away their tears if they are being bullied at school. We learned last night that a supportive mum and dad can compensate for horrible bullying. There is something wrong when a reasonable percentage of people in this country do not get that family support.

5.56 pm

Mr Rob Wilson (Reading East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the passionate contribution of the former Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman).

To be honest, I was a tad surprised that Labour called for this debate, given that its record on the subject is quite mixed. I am, however, of a charitable disposition and I wish to be charitable now because I agree with certain things in the motion. It admits, for example, that the previous Government failed to transform vocational education in this country. We can also agree that credit should be given across the board to Lord Hunt for his work back in the 1990s and to Ministers in the previous Labour Government who increased the number of apprenticeships. I think we also agree that there is a need to study maths and English for longer and to place greater emphasis on the technicals.

There are, therefore, things that we can agree on, but I cannot agree that this Government have failed in the same way as the previous one in their attempts to reform apprenticeships and vocational and technical education. Their changes have transformed tens of thousands of young people’s lives. I guess that the problem for the Labour party is that it is in a negative spiral—it sees only the negative in everything at the moment and seems to want to talk down the country and young people. I find that very disappointing.

I am very proud of what this Government have achieved. They have transformed our educational system and the opportunities within it, driving up aspiration both in my Reading constituency and nationally. We have done that by recognising that vocational and academic education are two sides of the same coin—that vocational and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education are two sides of the same coin—that vocational and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable and technical education is every bit as valuable

The UTC’s only focus is on providing high-quality education, but it does it in a different way that is much more hands-on and technical. It does not try to pretend, as Labour has for years, that that can be achieved without the fundamental building blocks of learning. Therefore, it runs what it terms as basic academic courses for those who may have struggled with English, maths and computer science at another school.

The UTC concentrates on building strong relationships with business, because it understands that, without business confidence in the qualifications it offers, it will not succeed, and young people will not thrive. Businesses see that the UTC offers young people something unique—something that will allow them to stand out in the jobs marketplace. Parents see their young people gaining confidence as they gain in-depth knowledge of their specialism.

Having seen the impact that the UTC has made in the eastern part of my constituency, I am proud to support Lord Baker’s aspiration that many more UTCs should be invested in throughout the country. The local community school, which had drifted for years, suddenly sat up and took notice when it saw a world class UTC on its doorstep. That led to a new management team and new investment from the local education authority. Bulmershe school in my constituency is now on an upward and impressive trajectory.

Reading college, which runs a range of important vocational courses, has raised its game, and was recently awarded a good rating by Ofsted, with some elements of outstanding. It also recently announced funding for a solutions lab, which will bring together businesses, FE colleges and students to shape curriculums so that they are aligned with the needs of technical-based businesses in my constituency and the Thames valley. Its assistant principal described Labour’s old system as like “being handcuffed to a set of qualifications to drive funding”, whereas he welcomed the new system because it allows the college to provide a study programme that is crafted by the needs of learners, and not with funding in mind.

The final piece of the jigsaw in east Reading was an outstanding Wokingham-based school, Maiden Erlegh, which agreed to imprint its DNA on a free school from September 2015. It is nothing short of a revolution in my constituency in the provision of high-quality education for young people, whether vocational, academic or technical.

Labour failed in office to understand that equality between academic and vocational routes cannot be enforced by Government diktat. Setting up yet another body or qualification does not work by itself. The important thing is that qualifications are respected by
business and the wider public. People can and will vote with their feet, as they did under Labour, if they think a qualification is not valued.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I warmly welcome the motion proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt), in particular the acknowledgment in it that “a transformation in vocational education has eluded governments for decades”, meaning Governments of both the main parties. My hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) spoke powerfully and mentioned Germany. I have used this quote in a previous debate but it is worth repeating. Tim Oates, who is one of the foremost experts in the country on the subject said that, in the 1940s, we devised an excellent system of technical education and exported it to Germany, where it has thrived ever since.

Youth unemployment is one of the biggest challenges we have faced in this country for many years. In Germany, youth unemployment is below 8%. In this country, it has fallen in recent months, which is welcome, but it is still above 18%. Overcoming that is crucial to achieving the politics of hope, about which my right hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) spoke so powerfully. This is not a new problem, but a long-term and intractable one. In 1984, the youth unemployment rate was 20%. It fell modestly in the first 10 years of the previous Labour Government and in 2007 was 14%, but that is still far too high.

We know that half of young people in Germany undertake apprenticeships, whereas the number undertaking technical and vocational courses and apprenticeships in this country is far lower at about 32%. We need a change on the supply side, as the motion sets out, with more and better vocational qualifications that are fit for purpose, but we also need a change on the demand side, with a cultural change in our attitudes to vocational education in this country.

The Edge Foundation does brilliant work in this area. Earlier this year, it did a survey of 2,000 18 to 25-year-olds, some of whom had followed an academic route and some a vocational route. About two thirds of those on the academic route felt that they had been supported by their school, whereas only one third of those on the vocational route gave that response. My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) talked about parents. About half of those following the vocational route felt that their parents had encouraged them, whereas three quarters of those who followed the academic route felt the same.

We therefore need to achieve a cultural change involving independent advice and guidance in schools. The shadow Secretary of State spoke about that, and we must get it right. Some schools do get it right, and we should praise them. In the Budget debate, I spoke about Cardinal Heenan school in my constituency, which has done some fantastic work. I visited another Liverpool school last week, Calderstones school, which does a lot of work to ensure that from when students arrive at the age of 11, they are thinking about their options for the future, so that when they are 16 they make the best choice for them, including those who follow a technical and vocational path.

Julie Hilling (Bolton West) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that not only careers guidance but work experience is vital as a way of trying out different types of work and different professions?

Stephen Twigg: That is absolutely vital, and I welcome the fact that it is integral to what is set out in the motion.

It is crucial that advice is personalised to the individual student. I want to warn against us getting into a position where we have to choose between the forgotten 50% and widening participation in higher education; we need to do both. I am proud of the fact that the previous Labour Government expanded higher education, but we did not do enough on vocational education.

I am working with schools in Liverpool to encourage more of the most academic young people to consider applying to top universities, including Oxford and Cambridge. I want to put on the record a tribute to Calderstones school, which I have already mentioned, because that comprehensive school in the heart of Liverpool gets a lot of its young people to go to Oxford or Cambridge. I want to mention Elle Shea, the head girl of St John Bosco school in my constituency, who has an offer of a place at Cambridge university. There are still not enough young people from low-income families getting into our top universities, but we should not have to choose between saying that and saying that we are passionate about the forgotten 50% and want to improve technical and vocational education; we need to do both.

The motion draws on the excellent work done for the Labour party during the past two years by Chris Husbands, from the Institute of Education in London, on how we can best strengthen the status of vocational and technical education. I particularly welcome the proposal for a national baccalaureate that seeks to put alongside fit-for-purpose qualifications, whether academic or vocational, concepts such as extended projects, personal development and an emphasis on character, resilience and employability. Those things matter, and it is very welcome to have such an emphasis in the motion.

I want to echo what my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham) said about the new forms that higher education will take. I particularly welcome the proposal made by the Leader of the Opposition yesterday for new technical degrees.

Let me finish by making a point about how we can take this matter forward. In my opinion, the Husbands review for the Labour party worked because it engaged with all those who have an interest in the area. They have all been mentioned in this debate—the further and higher education sectors, businesses and other employers, and young people themselves and parents—and it is important for their voices to be heard. Getting the national framework right is absolutely critical to the success of this work, but as several hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, in the end it cannot simply be imposed from on high; it is in our communities that it will make a real difference.

In Liverpool, I certainly pay tribute to the extraordinary work, yes, in our schools and further education colleges, but also what is done in partnership between businesses or other employers and the mayor of Liverpool, Joe Anderson, and Liverpool city council in particular in delivering more high-quality apprenticeships. We can
say things in the House and the Government can set a framework, as they should, but if we are to transform life chances, in the end the differences must be made on the ground in our communities.

6.9 pm

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): This is the first time that I have taken part in an education debate, so I was pretty shocked by the tone and content of the speech by the shadow Secretary of State. He implied that vocational qualifications required an overhaul. I would argue that the quality of vocational education in this country has risen under this Government, and that the policies that are in place will only continue to improve.

Vocational education plays a vital role in equipping young people with the skills that they need to thrive later in life. The introduction of university technical colleges, which were conceived by a Conservative Secretary of State for Education and Science, Lord Baker, will undoubtedly mean that practically minded students have the opportunity to train for careers in well resourced and appropriate environments, without the vital skills that are taught in comprehensive schools being neglected. What is most encouraging about the education that UTCs offer is that they teach students the practical and administrative skills that they will need to survive in their vocation.

I look forward to the opening of the manufacturing college in Derby in September 2015. Given that world-class engineering firms such as Toyota, Rolls-Royce and Bombardier are based in the city, it is clear that the college is well located to offer a comprehensive and hands-on technical education. By academic year 2015-16, 300,000 students will be able to receive a top-quality vocational education in a UTC. I am proud that the Government are so committed to ensuring that the colleges are a success.

Another education facility in my constituency that I am very proud of is Broomfield Hall, which is part of Derby college. It offers a range of land-based, public service and sports courses. They are incredibly popular; there are 500 full-time students enrolled on land studies courses, with a further 800 people studying them part time. The college now offers foundation degrees in animal care; that is a great way for students who do not wish to take A-levels to get into university to study for a career in zoo-keeping or veterinary nursing. The college feels empowered to offer a greater range of courses in a large variety of subjects. It is obvious from that example that, contrary to the Opposition’s belief that vocational education in this country needs to be overhauled, colleges feel motivated by the policies of this Government to diversity and improve the quality of the qualifications that they offer.

Like Broomfield Hall, the university of Derby has extended the range of courses it offers to include BTECs and foundation degrees in subjects such as business, management and civil engineering. As at Broomfield Hall, the vocational qualifications are extremely popular, with 930 people currently studying for them. I am pleased to say that as a result of the focus on running courses that are attractive to employers, the employment rate among Derby graduates within six months of course completion is 4.6% above the national average of 92%. That again illustrates that higher education institutions in this country are following the Government’s lead and providing high-quality and well-regarded vocational courses.

A vocational college that I hope will come to Derby is the proposed High Speed 2 skills academy. The Government see the landmark HS2 project as a means of offering high-quality vocational education. If the college was located in Derby, its students would benefit from a diverse range of employment and training options because of the excellent engineering firms that are located in the city. Given its proximity to the proposed HS2 route, they could expect to receive on-the-job training. It is clear from the focused vocational education that the skills academy will offer that its students will be fully equipped to head straight into a career in the railway industry. I am pleased that the Government have harnessed that opportunity.

The Government have been keen to encourage the uptake of apprenticeships. They have taken steps to increase the quality of the schemes that are offered, which has done a good deal to increase the value that employers give apprenticeships. In addition, the Government have tried to make apprenticeships more attractive as further education options for school leavers by introducing the apprentice minimum wage, which has given more employers the support they need to take on apprentices. That focus on vocational education has led to an unprecedented uptake of apprenticeships, with 1.8 million starts since 2010.

Given all the hard work that the Government have put into that initiative, it seems absurd for the Opposition to criticise a number of apprenticeship policies that have proved successful. In my constituency alone, there are a number of examples that show that the Government’s policy on vocational education is working. The motion denigrates the fantastic work that individual colleges do to offer their students the skills they need to thrive in a working environment. Institutions such as Broomfield Hall and the university of Derby now feel able to offer foundation degrees. The Opposition claim that the quality of vocational education is not up to standard, but that is obviously not representative. The increased uptake of apprenticeships is further evidence that what the Government are doing is positive. I am concerned that any effort to divert us from the work that has already been done will only harm the great progress made.

6.16 pm

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham). I find myself wishing that you had put us on the clock, Mr Speaker, because I care so much about this matter that I feel I may rattle on. My hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) promises me that he will cough vigorously at about the six-minute mark. I commend the Opposition Front Benchers on securing the debate. We do not spend enough time thinking about what happens to young people who do not choose to follow an academic route post-16.

I associate myself with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), because in Darlington students do exceptionally well up to GCSE—as well as those just about anywhere
else in the country. Yet given those GCSE results, far fewer than we would expect go on to do A-levels and attend university. Very few attend what we have loosely come to term the “top universities”. I will not stop encouraging people from my constituency to go to those universities until we achieve parity with other parts of the country.

In my constituency, there is a sixth-form college and an FE college. I attended one of them, and I visit the other often. When I look at the curriculum on offer and the number of students taking each course, I find that we train more hairdressers per head of population in Darlington than just about anywhere else in Britain. I am not against hairdressers at all—I am a big fan, and in fact I wish I could use them more often. However, it strikes me that there is no incentive in the system for colleges to offer more STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths—and train more technicians. If we want them to do that, they will have to stop doing something else. Some of our colleges have invested heavily in training people in subjects such as hairdressing, beauty therapy, travel and tourism, but they are not leading people into the types of jobs that they hoped for.

I find that it is easy to persuade 15-year-old girls to study hair and beauty, particularly when they are not getting any information, advice and guidance at school that is worth having. Instead, we need to find a way of incentivising FE colleges to restrict the number of students that they recruit to some courses, and expand the number that they recruit on to others that are much more in demand from local employers. We have not cracked that yet. One way of doing so that we might want to consider is payment by results—I hesitate to use the term, because my expertise is more in the field of justice, in which payment by results has been a mixed bag. In education, however, there may be a way that would help colleges to divest themselves from some forms of activity and to invest in others, and until we crack that we will not change the investment behaviour of some of our colleges, which is what we need to do.

Pathways into further education are confused. We know there is no information, advice and guidance worth having—the CBI has stated that advice and careers guidance are on “life support”—but there is no standardised application process or single source of information, and it is difficult for a young person to choose in any sensible way between different providers and courses. So many different funding options, routes and types of qualification are available that it is confusing. Young people are not making decisions in their long-term best interests; they are sometimes enticed to make decisions that may be in the best interests of their local college.

I would like some thought to be given to having a single pathway into FE, just as we do for university. There is a well organised, well established application process for university, but nothing like that for FE. Once we have such a process, we will get some kind of support, and understanding and appreciation of what is on offer, from parents. Parents are key to this issue, and the real test of how successful apprenticeships or vocational qualifications are will be the confidence that parents have in them.

One or two colleagues have mentioned that they went to an FE college. That is great; where we went does matter. Where we send our children, however, will really demonstrate the success or otherwise of these measures. Do we have the confidence to advise our children not to do A-levels or go to university, but to take a risk on some of these other qualifications? I hope we do, and that they are good enough and of a high enough standard for us to have the confidence to advise our young people to make that choice.

Some Government Members have been very pleased with themselves and their Government, but I encourage them not to count their chickens before they are hatched, because the proof of whether these measures work will be seen a long way into the future. This is about parents, confidence, people from working-class backgrounds doing A-levels, and those from middle-class backgrounds studying for vocational qualifications.

6.22 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman) on a good speech and on her recent engagement. I hope she enjoys her party; I gather that she will celebrate after this debate.

I am pleased to be returning to the topic that I raised in my maiden speech—vocational training—because like the hon. Lady I feel passionate about it. Vocational training, properly delivered alongside academic training, will undoubtedly drive economic growth. That growth has already started, but vocational training will help it to build and gain the momentum that we need for the longer term. Between 2012 and 2020, it is estimated that we will need 830,000 science, engineering and technology professionals, and 450,000 science, engineering and technology technicians. That is a huge challenge, and I think that the Government have performed outstandingly in ensuring that we meet it.

I welcome the steps taken. The new high-quality tech awards that will run alongside GCSEs, the new tech levels that run alongside A-levels, and the new tech-baccalaureate are very much to be welcomed; I am only sad that we do not have time today to consider exactly how they will work. A significant amount of employer involvement in those courses is absolutely what we need; I think that will be agreed on by Members across the House.

Interestingly, the move to get business and education closer and closer together has almost gone viral, and I am pleased that my council came to me today to talk about how it and the education authority can work to develop projects that will bring together business experience with what is happening in the schools that they are responsible for. That I applaud. For me, however, the crown has to be the 100 studio schools and UTCs that have been opened, and it is no surprise that UTCs have formed a large part of this debate. They are a fantastic concept, introduced by this Government. They integrate technical, practical and academic skills. By 2016, 30,000 students will be undertaking courses in them. They specifically address some of our key skills shortfalls in engineering, manufacturing, health sciences, product design, digital technologies and the built environment. Youngsters will be able to get access to the latest research and to real-life employer projects.

I am particularly proud that Lord Baker and the education team have approved my UTC—the South Devon university technical college, which will be based
in Newton Abbot and is due to open in 2015. It will provide 15 state-of-the-art engineering and science workshops and laboratories, along with a great deal of input from local sponsors. It is to their credit that Centrax, Galliford Try, South West Water, the Environment Agency and WaterAid are all playing their part in designing the curriculum, and in providing and, in some cases, funding some of the tools and equipment that are crucial to make these courses live. As has been said, to be real, we must have hands-on experience, not just work in the classroom. I am pleased, too, that Exeter university and South Devon college—two outstanding educational institutions—are involved. This course will lead to apprenticeships, degrees and all sorts of job opportunities.

The apprenticeship revolution, which this Government have put a rocket behind, is something that I very much welcome. I shall not dwell on the subject, because we have already heard a lot about the successful doubling of apprenticeship starts since 2010. I am pleased that Newton Abbot has had 3,450 starts since 2010, which is a 60.7% increase on where we were at the last election.

The next steps will be even more important, and it is to their credit that the Government have listened to some of the more forward-thinking additional proposals. First, there is Lord Young’s report, “Enterprise for all”, which sets out the steps he believes we should take to get even further integration between business and education to ensure that our youngsters really have the capability to think about going into business. Then there is the Minister for Skills and Enterprise, who has given his support to “An Education System fit for an Entrepreneur”, a report by the all-party parliamentary group for micro-businesses, which I chair. That is the way forward. All these steps taken by the Government are far-sighted. I look forward to seeing how they will introduce all these measures. All power to the Government’s elbow. They have a great record, and I would encourage them to continue to deliver in the same vein.

6.27 pm

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): ATMs and self-checkouts have already taken over jobs that we assumed would always be there. It is difficult fully to take in the potential structural change that will come from driverless vehicles and 3D printers, let alone from cleaning robots and Amazon drones delivering what is left and cannot be transmitted through the ether. More and more markets become more contestable, and more and more things can be offshored. We will never again make T-shirts cheaper than China can.

As we look to the future, we need to focus not only on high-value sectors, but on areas where we have competitive advantage. What those things are is for a debate on another day, but we need to note that those two forces—technological change and globalisation—are accentuating the hollowing out of the labour market that we are already seeing, with more jobs at the bottom of the scale, more at the “knowledge economy” top and fewer in the middle. That has serious implications for social mobility and progression.

We know that the way in which those forces impact on people will depend on whether the particular job is enhanced by technology and the computer or competes with them, and there are major social justice questions attached to that. There will, of course, always be jobs that have little or nothing to do with technology—in care, retail, hospitality and so forth. For all employment sectors, however, we need a significant improvement in skill levels in the economy.

What skills will be required? We are going to see a merging of the academic and the vocational, the intellectual and the practical, and a further emphasis on some skills that we are not used to considering in either group. The Wolf report was right to talk about the primacy of English and maths—the skills for which employers look before all others. We need more attention, as the shadow Secretary of State mentioned, on character and resilience skills and on workplace skills. They are not the same thing but they overlap. Character and resilience skills are about what is in you—self-belief and the ability to set realistic goals, for example. Workplace skills are primarily about how people interact with others—customer empathy, including the ability to smile and make eye contact, teamwork, organising tasks, leading and motivating others. At the intersection of the two are perseverance and the ability to bounce back, which is, of course, so important throughout life.

Our success as an economy will depend on how we adapt to those new realities, and on how quickly we adapt. One benchmark is probably South Korea, whose story of change is dramatic. The youngest people in its work force have materially better basic skills than those approaching retirement. It is a shame that this country must currently contend with the opposite position.

I fear that a great error in the first decade of this century was the overriding obsession with the “five-plus C-plus” target for GCSEs. I say that not just because this is an Opposition-day debate and this is what happens in the House of Commons, but because we owe it to young people not merely to file recent history, but to learn from it. The system found increasingly clever ways of helping schools and helping itself—the system as a whole—to find their way up the league. Half-courses, double awards, modularisation, early sits and retakes all helped, but the daddy of them all was “equivalents”, which helped to perpetuate the diet of low-value qualifications. The 350,000 young people of whom Alison Wolf spoke were let down by courses with little or no labour market value, and that in turn contributed significantly to the terrible rise in the number of young people who were not in education, employment or training.

The other big target was the 50% target for the number of people who should go to university. The Opposition now talk about the “forgotten 50%”, but we only talk about that 50% because of the first 50% target which they introduced. Actually, I am not sure that 50% is a bad target. I think it is the rest of the sentence that we need to look at. The target should be not just about the proportion of young people who go to university, but about the proportion who finish university courses that will be of use to them later in life. An increasing number of those courses—degree courses—will be vocational, and many careers that used to involve a vocational route straight after school have themselves become “graduatised”. The number of people embarking on undergraduate degrees more or less matches the number of occupations that now require people to have degrees and did not do so previously.
I rather welcome what the Opposition have been saying about tech degrees. I think that that is a direction of travel that we see on both sides of the House. However, it is the Government who are grasping the nettle and doing what it takes. The importance that my right hon. and hon. Friends attach to vocational education and training is exemplified by the fact that the Wolf report was commissioned at the very start of the Government’s tenure, before the completion of some of the other reforms that we have had plenty of opportunities to debate in the House. I think it right to move away from that “one target that trumps all others”, the “five-plus C-plus”, and towards measures that reward and value the progress made by all young people, whatever their abilities. I also think that we should take into account not just the results those young people achieve at the end of their time at school or college, but where they go after that, and where they end up.

This Government are determined that all qualifications will have rigour, because with rigour come respect and value. I welcome tech levels that involve local employers, and I welcome the tech bacc, including the core maths qualification and the extended project. I also welcome the massive increase in the number of apprenticeships—it is up 86% in my constituency—the higher apprenticeships fund and the huge growth in UTCs. This goes further than that, however. It is about employers being in control of apprenticeship training budgets, it is about more young people studying maths after the age of 16, and it is about getting 3D printers into schools and enabling more young people to study coding and app design.

You are indicating that I should stop at this point, Mr Speaker, so I shall do so. Let me end by saying that, as we heard from the shadow Secretary of State, this is a matter of social justice and economic efficiency.

6.34 pm

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds), who is very knowledgeable about educational matters, and to speak in this important debate. I enjoyed the rhythm of the shadow Education Secretary’s speech, liberally laced as it was with quotations from Sir Winston Churchill, but the speed with which he rattled through his speech did on occasion remind me of Churchill’s observation about Ramsay MacDonald: he rattled through his speech did on occasion remind me of Churchill’s observation about Ramsay MacDonald: he had the great ability of compressing the largest amount of words into the smallest amount of thought. Notwithstanding that, however, there is some startling honesty in Labour’s motion because it says that it believes that “transformation in vocational education has eluded governments for decades”, so clearly Labour takes its share of the blame for any failure to deliver the sort of vocational education and qualifications that we want to see in our country.

For far too long, far too much stress and pressure have been put on the traditional route through A-levels and into university. Parents have for too long been left with the impression that, unless their children go to university, they have failed. Schools and teachers have been left with the impression that, if they do not get their students into university, they have failed, and the students themselves have been left with the impression that, unless they pass their A-levels and go to university and find a room in a hall of residence, they, too, have failed. That is a corrosive narrative that has undermined the importance of the vocational qualifications that R. A. Butler envisaged in 1944. As the shadow Education Secretary said, on 3 August we will celebrate the 70th anniversary of Royal Assent to the 1944 Education Act.

It is important, therefore, that we focus anew on vocational qualifications, and I am pleased and proud that the Government are focusing on expanding the number of apprenticeships—the figure is 1.8 million since 2010—that they have introduced the higher apprenticeships fund, which will create 10,000 places for state-of-the-art degree level apprenticeships, and are introducing the technical baccalaureate at the end of this year. I am pleased that Labour appears to be supporting that proposal, but I hope it has a less bumpy ride than the English baccalaureate had. I see the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) in his place. In 2011 he said that the EBacc was a measure to be praised because it might reverse the decline in children studying languages, but by 2012 he was saying that education could not be improved by the EBacc reverting to a system that was considered out of date 30 years ago. I rather hope Labour will not flip-flop on the tech bac as it appeared to flip-flop on the EBacc.

Stephen Twigg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Christopher Pincher: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman as we do not have much time, but what I will do is say that if I am wrong he should write to The Guardian, and make sure he has lots of spelling errors in the letter, which will ensure it is published.

I am very pleased by what the Government are doing with the tech bacc, because in my town we suffered terribly in the recession. A large number of young people found it difficult to find work and did not get the qualifications necessary to find work, so it is going to be important. When Labour left office in 2010, the main source of vocational qualifications in Tamworth was South Staffordshire college, which the shadow Education Secretary visited earlier this year. Now we have a sixth-form and Tamworth enterprise college, which together provide BTEC courses on everything from construction to IT. South Staffordshire college offers 33 courses and 24 apprenticeships, ranging from veterinary husbandry to bricklaying. That college has a 97% pass rate and a 91% satisfaction rate among students, so it is doing really very well. It is no wonder therefore that Jaguar Land Rover and JCB are recruiting in Tamworth and BMW has come to set up in Tamworth, bringing over 100 skilled and professional jobs. So I welcome what the Government are achieving.

My hon. Friends on the Front Bench should be pleased. They should be pleased that Labour appears to be supporting much of what they are trying to achieve. Labour appears to want to get aboard this vessel because it thinks it is rather a good one. Unfortunately for Labour, however, I fear that vessel has sailed, carrying my constituents to a better and brighter future, and all the shadow Education Secretary can do is wave from the quayside.
Mr Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): This has been an excellent debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) made the first Back-Bench contribution to it and said that the debate was urgent and important. I could not agree more with my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman), who said that we do not spend enough time in this House talking about the subject of today’s motion. It has been an important debate because it has revealed that, on the future of vocational education and on the basic question of how our constituents are going to learn what they need to earn their way out of today’s cost of living crisis, there is no long-term plan. There is nothing long-term and nothing short-term; there does not appear to be much of a plan at all. The Chair of the Select Committee is not in his place, but we have heard some powerful calls today for a new cross-party consensus on the content of this debate, and I hope we can achieve that today. Therefore, I hope that the Minister for Skills and Enterprise, who is talking away from a sedentary position, will not divide the House today and that the motion will go through with full support, because that cross-party consensus, now and for the long term, is something this country desperately needs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) started this debate with a candid admission that the problem we are talking about is decades old and decades deep. Indeed, Lord Percy reported to the Government shortly before the Education Act 1944. His Committee said that “the position of Great Britain as a leading industrial nation is being endangered by a failure to secure the fullest possible application of science to industry… and…this failure is partly due to deficiencies in education.”

That was the position we found ourselves in again in the 1970s, as my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) pointed out, and we find ourselves there again today. So I am pleased that the Select Committee, chaired by the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr Stuart), is going to look at this in detail. A new consensus is needed, and the business community is saying that to us loud and clear.

Labour left this Government strong foundations. I am sorry that the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) felt that there were errors made between 2000 and 2010—no doubt there were—because some awfully strong foundations were left, too. I thought my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) put it well when he said we rescued the apprenticeship system from the state of complete collapse that we inherited in 1997, rebuilding schools and school standards, rebuilding further education colleges all over this country and rebuilding our university system. Labour Members are very proud of those achievements, and what we needed in this Parliament was a Government who were determined to build on those foundations and create a strong, new, wide path for vocational education from 14 through to 21 and above. I am sorry to say that instead we have the kind of chaos that means that at the age of 14 pupils can look forward to passing through systems regulated by Ofqual, Ofsted, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, the Education Funding Agency, the Skills Funding Agency and the Higher Education Funding Council. It is a dog’s breakfast; it is a complicated situation that is not delivering the skills we need.

That is what business is saying to us clearly. When I left business school in America, I was clear that the UK was the only country where I wanted to build my business. Thousands of firms want to bring work back to this country, but let me tell hon. Members what KPMG said a few weeks ago. It said that the ability of manufacturers to bring jobs back to Britain is being crippled by the lack of available skills. Mike Wright, the head of Jaguar Land Rover, said the following not too long ago:

“We are not educating nearly enough skilled apprentices or graduates to replace those retiring from manufacturing roles.”

Lord Adonis has said that skills are now the “single biggest impediment” to economic growth. The Migration Advisory Committee, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) referred to, made an important contribution to this debate yesterday. The MAC has added more than 100 different roles to the shortage occupation list over the past three or four years. Firms have had to sponsor in 282,000 people from abroad because they could not get the skills they need here in this country. So my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North is absolutely right when he says that a better deal for vocational and technical education is crucial if we are to regenerate significant parts of our country. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East made a powerful speech and the point he drew our attention to is that we do not just owe it to the business community; we owe it to our constituents, too.

Training up to degree-level skills unlocks a life in which people can earn over £100,000 more over the course of their career than if they had only two A-levels. If we want to transform life chances for everyone in our constituencies, we need to build a better system. I hope our motion today is the basis of that new consensus.

The Minister for Skills and Enterprise is chuntering away. Let me tell him where I think he is getting a few things wrong.

A new, stronger system must start in schools. I am sure that, like me, he is slightly worried that there has been a 16% rise in unqualified teachers in my children’s classrooms. I am sure that he is concerned, like me, that when we say that people should be able to study English and maths up to the age of 18, that is not the policy of the Education Secretary. The Minister gave us a new piece of information this afternoon about 1 million bits of careers advice being distributed to our children. I was not quite sure what that meant, but I do know that the CBI has said that the careers service is “on life support”. That is not a system fit for the future.

Those lucky enough to graduate to a further education college confront colleges that have seen a £700 million fall in their funding. That has weighed heavily on those aged 18 studying in FE colleges. For those going on to study in further education beyond the age of 19, funding has fallen by 22%. The Minister for Skills and Enterprise made great play of apprenticeship numbers. He wanted to make the point that apprenticeship numbers have risen since 2010, and of course they have. But, like me, he will be worried that over the past year apprenticeship numbers for the under-25s have fallen by 11,400. He will be concerned about the fall in apprenticeships started in his constituency, and so will the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss).
The Minister for Skills and Enterprise should take great care in the changes that he proposes and he should listen hard to small and medium-sized enterprises up and down the country that say that putting apprenticeship funding wholesale into their hands through the PAYE system could be a disaster that sees apprenticeship numbers fall off a cliff. He needs to listen carefully to that.

Earlier this week the Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), announced the final stage of our proposals. It was not the Minister for Skills and Enterprise who introduced the chance for apprentices to go on and study at the highest level of skill. That was a change that was made many years ago, and it is not acceptable that just 2% of apprentices go on to study degree-level skills. There has been a 40% fall in the number of people studying for HNCs, HNDs or foundation degrees.

That is not the way to empower apprentices and enable them to go on and study to degree-level skills, and it must change.

We know that there is a big appetite among young people for a vocational path to the highest level of skill. That is why it is now harder to get an apprenticeship in this country, it is about to get into university. It is far harder to get into BAE Systems’ apprenticeship programme than to get into Oxford. It is harder to get into Rolls-Royce than to get into Cambridge. These are brilliant programmes and if we are to create more chances like that, we must introduce the kind of proposals for a technical baccalaureate that have been discussed. We must give people the chance to study English and maths through to the age of 18. We must raise the quality of further education across the board by introducing institutes of technical education.

We must radically increase the number of apprenticeship opportunities, crucially using the power of public procurement to increase the number of opportunities. Finally, we must put more resources into the hands of employers so that, with universities and colleges, they are able to use that buying power to expand the opportunity to study technical degrees to the highest level of skill.

This is a proposal that was pioneered by my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr Denham) when he was in office. It is a tragedy that the work force development programme was shut down. It was popular with employers, with students and with universities and colleges, too.

I finish on the point underlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East. We need to offer our young people a chance, not an excuse and not a target. The hon. Members for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) and for Beverley and Holderness were among those who called for a new cross-party consensus. If we on the Labour Benches sound partisan, it is because we are passionate about transforming the life chances of the people whom we represent. We have a simple belief that the world around us is changing in a way that it has never changed before. There is a new competitive threat to this country from rising economies in the east. If we want to live better than others, we will have to be better than others, and that means giving us a skills system that gets everybody, not just some, to the very highest level of their potential. Only in that way can we offer a future that is optimistic and ambitious. Only in that way can we be a country that is full of hope and not a country that is facing fear.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Elizabeth Truss): There is nothing more vital to the future of our country than the education and skills of our young people. I find myself in violent agreement with the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) and the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden). They are absolutely right that it is the No. 1 priority for our future competitiveness, social mobility and outcomes as a nation.

As the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) and my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) pointed out, education and skills are becoming more and more important over time as our world is transformed by technology and globalisation. We will not be dividing the House on this motion, because we realise that the Opposition acknowledge their failings over previous years, and that they back our direction. Indeed, they back many of our policies, such as the technical baccalaureate and the availability of more degrees from apprenticeships, and also our reforms in English and maths.

We need to ensure that every qualification, whether it is academic or vocational, is demanding, rigorous and a route to employment. Many Members today commented on the vital importance of English and maths. As the Secretary of State said, those are the most important vocational subjects, which is why we care passionately about ensuring that all children achieve. We are setting up maths hubs, so that all children can master maths. There will be 32 hubs across the country, which will learn from those high performing countries in east Asia that so many hon. Members have talked about this afternoon. In those countries, all children, regardless of their background or whether they are boys or girls, perform very highly.

We are putting in new grammar, spelling and punctuation tests at age 11, and double-weighting English and maths in the performance tables to make sure that every child is literate and numerate by the time they leave school. Students who do not secure good passes in GCSE maths and English will continue to study those subjects until 18 so they can earn those vital passports into future careers.

In addition, we are introducing a new mid-level maths qualification, which students on both the academic and vocational route can study. The core maths qualification comes into being next year, but we have some early adopters—179 colleges and schools. All seven of our Tech bacc trail blazers will be trialling core maths from this September.

Until now, 40% of students who got a C at GCSE and who wanted to continue with maths did not have an option to do so. Those students will now be able to maintain their confidence and competence in maths. They will be able to apply maths in real-life situations and use statistics, which are so vital in so many jobs today. The core maths qualification is part of our technical baccalaureate, which is our way of ensuring that technical and vocational qualifications are world beating.

The Chairman of the Select Committee talked about Alison Wolf’s report. He used some of the quotes that I was going to use in my speech. Essentially, her report showed that too many young people were fobbed off
with qualifications of little market value. What we are doing is ensuring that all the qualifications that students study are of high value.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading East (Mr Wilson) talked about how we have transformed vocational education. We have introduced technical awards, which are genuinely equivalent to GCSEs, and tech levels, which are backed by employers and will help students get jobs in occupations such as engineering, computing, hospitality and accountancy. We are ensuring that the Tech bac is taught across some of the 50 new university technical colleges, which many hon. Members have praised.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) pointed out, we are hugely expanding apprenticeships. There will be 2 million apprenticeship starts over the course of this Parliament, which is a record for our country.

Mr Byrne: The Minister gives way with characteristic generosity. I know she will be concerned by the fall in apprenticeship starts in her constituency—apprenticeship starts were down by 150 between 2011-12 and 2012-13. Is she as worried as I am that small and medium-sized enterprises, no doubt in her constituency, are concerned about some of her colleague’s proposed changes?

Elizabeth Truss: Apprenticeship starts are actually up in my constituency since 2010, and we are seeing record levels across this Parliament. One of the most important things, as many hon. Members have talked about, is the quality, as well as the quantity, of apprenticeships, and it is important that employers are engaged.

My hon. Friends the Members for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) and for Gosport (Caroline Dinenage) talked about the importance of ensuring that young people are doing the right courses and taking on the right apprenticeships in areas of huge demand, such as STEM. Our Your Life campaign, which has been launched by industry and will go forward to students and young people this autumn, is all about encouraging more young people, particularly girls, to consider future careers in technology, engineering and business. I met some fantastic young women at the Big Bang fair who have taken on apprenticeships at Jaguar Land Rover. They are passionate about what they are doing, and we want to see more of that, because too many young people are not necessarily taking the choices that will help them to get great jobs in the future. The hon. Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman) pointed out that out and made some very good points.

As early as 2004, before the great recession, youth unemployment was on the rise—it was up 40% in the first decade of this century. The reality is that the basic skills that many Opposition Members bemoan were not being taught properly in our schools, and the reality is that many young people were let down by not having basic literacy and numeracy skills. The sad truth is that those young people were let down by low expectations of work; and further believes that a transformation in vocational education has eluded governments for decades; therefore believes that the UK needs a new settlement for those young people who do not wish to pursue the traditional route into university and the world of work; and further believes that in order to achieve a high status vocational education system that delivers a high-skill, high-value economy the UK needs a new technical Baccalaureate qualification as a gold standard vocational pathway achieved at 18, a new National Baccalaureate framework of skills and qualifications throughout the 14 to 19 phase, the study of mathematics and English for all to age 18, for all large public contracts to have technical degrees, baccalaureates and employer-led apprenticeships, the Opposition do not seem to realise that we are already doing that and young people are benefiting. Under this Government, our young people are getting the opportunities they deserve, and they are gaining the skills to get on in life.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes that the previous Government rescued the idea of apprenticeships and quadrupled apprenticeship starts; furthermore believes that a transformation in vocational education has eluded governments for decades; therefore believes that the UK needs a new settlement for those young people who do not wish to pursue the traditional route into university and the world of work; and further believes that in order to achieve a high status vocational education system that delivers a high-skill, high-value economy the UK needs a new Technical Baccalaureate qualification as a gold standard vocational pathway achieved at 18, a new National Baccalaureate framework of skills and qualifications throughout the 14 to 19 phase, the study of mathematics and English for all to age 18, for all large public contracts to have apprenticeships places, new employer-led apprenticeships at level 3 and new technical degrees.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

PREVENTION AND SUPPRESSION OF TERRORISM

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Code of Practice for Examining Officers and Review Officers) Order 2014, which was laid before this House on 12 June, be approved.—[Anne Milton.] Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),


TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Requests and Site Visits) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2014, which were laid before this House on 16 June, be approved.—(Anne Milton.)

Question agreed to.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO INDUSTRY

That this House authorises the Secretary of State to undertake to pay, and to pay by way of financial assistance under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982, sums exceeding £10 million and up to a total of £300 million in respect of compensation of EU Emissions Trading System and Carbon Price Floor in each case to Aylesford Newsprint Limited; Celsa Manufacturing (UK) Ltd; DS Smith Paper Ltd; GrowHow UK Group Ltd; INEOS Chemical Grangemouth Ltd; INEOS ChlorVinyls Limited; Kimberly Clark Limited; Outokumpu Stainless Ltd; Palm Paper Limited; SABIC UK Petrochemicals Ltd; Sahaviriya Steel Industries UK Limited; Tata Steel UK Limited; and UPM-Kymmene (UK) Ltd.—(Anne Milton.)

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Development Proposals in Barton (Salford)

7 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I am pleased to present this petition on behalf of residents of Irlam, Cardishead and Barton wards in my constituency who are concerned about proposals to build on an area of Barton that is in the green belt.

The petition states:

The Petition of residents of Irlam, Cardishead and Barton, Declares that the Petitioners strongly oppose the proposals of Peel Holdings to build up to 1,400 houses as well as warehouses in the green belt area at Barton (Irlam ward), which is bound by the M62 (North), A57 (South), Manchester City Airport (East) and Irlam (West); and further that the Petitioners believe that Boysnape Golf Course (an excellent leisure facility for the local community) should not be shut down.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons does all in its power to prevent this development proposal from taking place.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

Dual carriageway for the A303

7.2 pm

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): I rise to present a petition on behalf of more than 2,000 petitioners calling for urgent upgrades to be made to the A303 at Stonehenge. Members of the Stonehenge traffic action group in my constituency started the petition in response to the long-standing and infamous problems on the A303, which have worsened following the recent closure of the A344.

The petition states:

The Petition of residents of the UK, Declares that the Petitioners believe that urgent action is needed to make the A303 road west of Stonehenge a dual carriageway following dramatically increased traffic levels caused by the closure of the A344; further that the Petitioners believe a bypass road should be created to relieve the village of Winterbourne Stoke and other blighted communities; further that increased traffic has been diverted on to local roads to the detriment of those resident in the surrounding villages; and further that the Petitioners believe that the Government’s feasibility study into improving the A303 must take the impact of disruption on their lives caused by increased traffic into consideration.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to improve the A303 west of Stonehenge by constructing a dual carriageway at the earliest possible opportunity.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.
Navitus Bay Wind Farm

Motion made, and Question proposed. That this House do now adjourn.—(Anne Milton.)

7.3 pm

Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con): It is a pleasure to rise to address the House in this Adjournment debate. It is four years and two weeks since I stood in exactly the same place and made my maiden speech, which was in an Adjournment debate on student visas. I was pleased on that occasion to make significant progress with the Government afterwards. I hope that the same will be the case today. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is responding and the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey), is in his place.

This is not a debate about the Government’s energy policy or about their renewables policy; those are debates for another day. This is about a particular proposal to build a wind farm off the Dorset coast. It is appropriate that we are debating it while councillors from across the country are enjoying the Local Government Association’s annual conference in Bournemouth and the stunning views from the wonderful conference facility. I recently conducted a survey on the proposed wind farm and have brought with me a small sample of the responses. They show overwhelming opposition from my constituents and others, and for good reasons.

I wish to discuss the potential impact of the Navitus Bay wind farm on England’s only natural world heritage site, the Jurassic coast, designated by the Government and UNESCO in 2001. That status, under article 4 of the world heritage convention of 1972, obliges the Government to protect, conserve, present and transmit to future generations the sites identified as being part of the cultural and natural heritage. A proposal for a wind farm of up to 194 turbines, each of up to 200 metres in height, is currently before the Planning Inspectorate for evaluation. It will be sited within full view of the Jurassic coast and its main visitor centre at Durlston castle. As part of the planning process for this proposal, DCMS submitted an environmental impact assessment to UNESCO. I wish to address the response of UNESCO and the International Union for Conservation of Nature to that environmental impact assessment.

In its comments on the environmental impact assessment, the IUCN raised a number of concerns about the potential impact of the proposed wind farm on the Jurassic coast world heritage site, particularly regarding the unique processes that shape the Jurassic coast and contribute to its outstanding universal value. If this outstanding universal value is compromised and the natural erosion processes on the coast are affected, the reason for the site’s designation as a world heritage site would be threatened. The IUCN notes, too, the potential for the proposal to affect the protection and management of the property. It states that

“in particular, the adequate protection of the wider setting of the property, recognized by the World Heritage Committee to justify at the time of inscription the lack of a defined buffer zone, will be compromised.”

As such, the IUCN said that

“any potential impacts from this project on the natural property are in contradiction to the overarching principle of the World Heritage Convention as stipulated in its Article 4”

as “the completion of the Project would result in the property being presented and transmitted to future generations in a form that is significantly different from what was there at the time of inscription and until today.”

The first of a number of questions I would like to put to the Minister is this: what is his response to IUCN’s conclusions, and how will the Government meet their obligations under the convention to protect the setting of the site, as well as its listed outstanding universal values?

UNESCO does not make hollow threats. In 2011, there were plans to site a three-turbine wind farm development 10.5 miles from the shore near Mont St Michel in Brittany. As this threatened the setting of the world heritage site, the French Government acted to exclude wind farms from a buffer zone around the site. They were right to do so, as UNESCO is not afraid of removing a site’s designated status. The Elbe valley in Germany was removed from the list of world heritage sites in 2009 following the construction of a four-lane bridge in the valley which meant that

“the property failed to keep ‘its outstanding universal value as inscribed.’”

My colleagues would not expect me to say this, but my second question to the Minister is this: will he follow the French example and take action in England to protect the setting of our only natural world heritage site for future generations, thus avoiding the fate that befell the Germans?

I believe that if the Jurassic coast were to lose its designated status as a world heritage site, the tourism economy throughout Dorset would suffer drastically. Over 30 million trips were made to Dorset in the past year, some 5 million of which included the Jurassic coast, and evidence suggests that visitor numbers have increased since the Jurassic coast’s designation as a world heritage site. Given that Navitus Bay’s own research shows that 48% of people visiting the area cite the sea view as a reason for doing so, and that IUCN “considers that the impact of the Project on the visitors’ experience and appreciation of the property in its wider natural setting is likely to be significant”, it is by no means a leap of the imagination to say that the proposed wind farm will have a significant impact on tourism numbers.

Mr Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): The fact that there are many Dorset MPs in the Chamber today shows that we fully support the compelling case that my hon. Friend is making. My constituents are very worried about this proposal and the impact that it will have on the local economy.

Conor Burns: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend and I salute his dogged determination in opposing this plan and, indeed, that of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) and for South Dorset (Richard Drax), who are sitting behind me. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) would be present, except that he is on manoeuvres on Salisbury plain as part of his Territorial Army activities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr Symms), who is my parliamentary neighbour, knows about the vital impact on Bournemouth and the conurbation. Tourism is Bournemouth’s second most important sector...
of the economy after financial services and it is worth about £475 million to the town annually. It directly supports 8,500 local jobs, with a further 2,000 jobs indirectly dependent on visitors. Across Dorset as a whole, tourism is worth in the region of £1.7 billion annually and supports in the region of 47,000 jobs.

Given that 20% of summer visitors surveyed by Navitus Bay—they were surveyed by the development company itself—said that they would be unlikely to visit Bournemouth during the five-year construction phase and 14% said that they would be unlikely ever to return, the development would have a major impact on our tourism economy and change the nature of our town and comurbation.

May I, therefore, ask the Minister another direct question? Given the importance of tourism to Bournemouth and Dorset’s economy and the Government’s commitment to our long-term economic plan—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!” I am not surprised that my colleagues expected me to say that—what steps will the Minister take to ensure that this damaging proposal does not go ahead?

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and fighting, as we all are, this cause. Does he agree that what is surprising is that it is not as if there is nowhere else to locate this wind farm? The Crown Estate identified eight other sites totalling about 225,000 sq km that would be nowhere near the land and that certainly would not damage this fantastic site. Why on earth did the Crown Estate choose this most special site, which we are trying to protect?

Conor Burns: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The development company was given a vast area to put the wind farm and my hon. Friend will remember that in our initial meetings with its representatives, we told them that we would not oppose it if it was not visible from the shore, if its visual impact did not deter visitors and if it did not damage the world heritage site. All the company had to do was push it further out within the area given to it by the Crown Estate, but it did not do that.

I want to turn to some of the criticisms of the submission process, starting with the independence of the environmental impact assessment. I agree with the IUCN that it would have been more appropriate for DCMS to have commissioned an independent environmental impact assessment, rather than use one prepared by the proponents of the scheme—the Navitus Bay development company. In the words of IUCN, “this raises questions on the credibility and objectivity of the assessment.”

I have heard some of the arguments made by Navitus Bay to discredit IUCN’s comments, including that they were merely interim and are not aligned with other impact assessments. Could that be because other impact assessments have been provided or commissioned by Navitus Bay itself? Is this a case of, “We’re right, because the documents we have written say so”? Then there is the question of the appropriateness of the guidance used. The IUCN notes that the guidance used by Navitus Bay for its assay would not have been most appropriate possible. Rather than using the IUCN world heritage advice note on environmental assessment, Navitus Bay used the International Council on Monuments and Sites “Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties”, which is adapted to cultural heritage. According to the IUCN, it did so despite being aware of the IUCN guidance, which is referred to in the environmental impact assessment.

IUCN claims that by adopting the other guidance rather than the IUCN advice note, Navitus Bay failed to adhere to all eight world heritage impact assessment principles. Notably, IUCN believes that Navitus Bay failed to adhere to the principle that “reasonable alternatives to the proposal must be identified and assessed with the aim of recommending the most sustainable option to decision-makers, including”—crucially—“the possibility of the ‘no project’ option”.

Why did the DCMS not commission an independent environmental impact assessment?

I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing this important debate. Does he share my concern that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport did not issue a formal response to the UNESCO letter of 2 May? That letter contains some powerful arguments. Surely they merited a response from my hon. Friend the Minister. Instead, according to a parliamentary answer I received from him on 23 June, that letter was passed to the planning authorities as part of a process. Is that not most unsatisfactory?

Conor Burns: My hon. Friend makes a very important and valid intervention. One reason why I attempted to secure the debate was so that the Minister has the opportunity to explain the Department’s thinking. He also has the opportunity to explain to the House that this is not simply a matter for the Department of Energy and Climate Change or the planning inspector in Bristol, but a matter for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which has a vital, and indeed legally binding, obligation to do all it can to protect that world heritage site, and, as it says, to pass it on intact to future generations. I look forward to his response in a moment.

I conclude as I began. This is not about the Government’s energy policy, renewable energy or subsidy. Hon. Members have different views on those. The debate is about a proposal that my constituents and those of my hon. Friends fundamentally believe is the wrong proposal in the wrong place. Its demerits vastly outweigh its merits. The Government can achieve all their energy ambitions and still say no to the application. My hon. Friend the Minister of State now has an opportunity to tell us what he is prepared to do to assist us. It does not just affect us in Dorset. As things develop, it could affect
[Conor Burns]

Hampshire Members—I notice that my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne) is sitting on the Front Bench. The New Forest would be torn up to allow energy to get into the grid.

This is very serious. I say without exaggeration that it is possibly the most significant issue in Bournemouth and the conurbation, and Dorset more widely, in a generation. I hope that the Minister, in his reply, can assure us and our constituents that he is with us and will do what he can to protect that fantastic bit of England.

7.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr Edward Vaizey): I am grateful for the chance to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns) and thank him for promoting me to Minister of State ahead of the reshuffle. I hope that the Whip in the Chamber will pass tribute to Sir Merrick Cockell, who is standing down as chairman of the LGA. He has been a fine servant to the LGA as well as to Kensington and Chelsea council.

Let me respond to the pertinent points my hon. Friend has made about the Jurassic coast, the world heritage site and the potential impact of the Navitus Bay development. It is important to note that several colleagues are in the Chamber—my hon. Friends the Members for South Dorset (Richard Drax), for Poole (Mr Symz), and for Christchurch (Mr Chope), and the Whip, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne), who may well wish to involve himself in the debate in future, given what my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West said about the potential impact of the wind turbines on the New Forest West constituency.

As I have said, my hon. Friend has made a number of important points. Let me try to deal with them as effectively as I can. He asked six direct questions, and I shall try to answer them in the course of my speech. I will start with the letter from Kishore Rao from the International Union for Conservation of Nature, but let me first set out the framework of my remarks. It is important to state that a process has to be gone through in considering the planning application for Navitus bay. That approach is effectively quasi-judicial, which means that one’s personal opinion must necessarily come second to the opinion of experts and to the process itself.

Let me make it absolutely clear that the letter was from the IUCN, which is a UNESCO advisory body—IUCN advises on natural heritage sites, but it is not UNESCO—so the letter does not give UNESCO’s opinion on the world heritage status of the Jurassic coast. The proposed wind farm development has not to date been examined by the world heritage committee, so neither the world heritage committee nor UNESCO has an official view on the potential impact of the Navitus bay site on the world heritage site. Currently, the world heritage property is not considered by UNESCO to be under threat, and it is not in immediate danger of losing its world heritage status.

My Department, which my hon. Friend mentioned, is responsible for acting as the UK state party on all world heritage matters and for liaising with the UNESCO world heritage centre. The IUCN submitted its comments to UNESCO, and they were forwarded to the DCMS on 2 May. It is our responsibility not to respond to the IUCN, but to ensure that the Planning Inspectorate is made aware of its comments, and we passed on the IUCN’s comments to the Planning Inspectorate on 7 May.

The IUCN letter referred to the effect of the wind farm on the world heritage property and its setting, and such views will be taken into account by the Planning Inspectorate alongside those of English Heritage, which is a statutory consultee.

Mr Chope: Is it not correct that the letter that arrived on 2 May was deliberately sent in advance of the Government’s decision to refer this application to the Planning Inspectorate, and that the letter urged—and, indeed, pleaded with—the Government not to refer the application to the Planning Inspectorate because it had not passed the first hurdle?

Mr Vaizey: It is not the IUCN’s role to say whether a letter should be passed on to the Planning Inspectorate. My reading of the letter is not the same as my hon. Friend’s, but I will re-read it to double-check his point, and I will respond to him by letter if necessary. As I have said, our responsibility is to pass the letter on to the Planning Inspectorate so that the IUCN’s views are taken into account.

As well as the views of the IUCN, the Planning Inspectorate will take into account those of English Heritage, Natural England, and of course the world heritage site steering group, plus all other representations made to it as part of the planning process. Natural England has made representations about the effect of the proposals on the natural beauty of the coast, as has English Heritage about the effect of the wind farm’s setting on listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments.

It is important to stress that the Jurassic coast is a world heritage site not on the basis of its natural setting, but on that of its unique geological interest. In addition to the world heritage site, there are two areas of outstanding natural beauty and two stretches of heritage coast. The need to protect the natural beauty of those areas and the effect of the wind farm on them will be considered as part of the planning process, as indeed will the cultural heritage. All such representations are publically available on the Planning Inspectorate’s website.

I will touch briefly on the UK marine policy statement, which is the framework for preparing marine plans and taking decisions that affect the marine environment that is required by the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. The marine policy statement identifies the social, economic and environmental factors that should be considered in the preparation of marine plans. Those include the seascape.

This proposal is classed as a major infrastructure proposal under the terms of the Planning Act 2008. Its determination is subject to the overarching energy national policy statement and the renewable energy infrastructure national policy statement. The Planning Inspectorate
has to assess the wind farm proposal in relation to those provisions and under the national planning policy framework and other relevant planning policies.

It is important to stress that heritage protection policies and nature conservation policies are reflected in that guidance. It includes the recognition that heritage assets can be affected by offshore wind farm development, either directly through the physical siting of the development or indirectly through the impact on the marine environment. The guidance includes a presumption in favour of the conservation of designated heritage assets. The more significant the heritage asset, the greater the presumption in favour of conservation. The setting of heritage assets can contribute to their significance. National planning policy is clear that applications for renewable energy schemes should be approved only if the impact on the local environment is or can be made acceptable. The guidance states that local concerns should be listened to.

Perhaps it would be appropriate at this point to talk about the environmental impact assessment. My understanding is that it is normal practice for the developer to pay for the environmental impact assessment. However, it is still an independent environmental impact assessment. It is not the job of the DCMS or any other Department, as far as I am aware, to pay for the impact assessment or to commission another one if it has not been paid for adequately by the developer. There is no suggestion that it is still independent and is effectively done at arm’s length from the developer. The Planning Inspectorate has received many representations and will convene a preliminary meeting, where the process for the consideration of the application will be set out and questions about it considered. The inspectorate will have six months to carry out its investigation of the application, which will be undertaken by way of hearings and the consideration of written representations. It will consider all the important and relevant matters that are brought to its attention. It will then report and make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West made his point effectively. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth the environmental impact assessment is not independent. There is no suggestion that it is normal practice for the developer to see whether it could be moved. Although the process is of course independent and quasi-judicial, and although there are objective considerations to be taken into account to do with the designation of the world heritage site, common sense and simple corporate responsibility surely dictate that the Navitus developers should sit down with my august friends who are here this evening and discuss alternatives.

Mr Vaizey: I hear what my hon. Friend says. As I said, I am not close to the planning application itself and do not know the technical considerations that Navitus has made. Clearly money, and the return on capital that it hopes to achieve, will be a factor, but as I understand it the Crown Estate is the landlord. It should be encouraged to enter a dialogue with my hon. Friends, who represent their constituents’ and the nation’s interests so ably on the matter, and I hope it will do so.

Mr Drax: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Vaizey: I am incensed about what the Minister has just said. If Navitus Bay has paid for the assessment, how on earth can it be independent?

Mr Vaizey: I am not the planning Minister, but as far as I am aware, it is normal practice for the developer to pay for the independent assessment. The assessment is still independent and is effectively done at arm’s length from the developer.

The Planning Inspectorate has received many representations and will convene a preliminary meeting, where the process for the consideration of the application will be set out and questions about it considered. The inspectorate will have six months to carry out its investigation of the application, which will be undertaken by way of hearings and the consideration of written representations. It will consider all the important and relevant matters that are brought to its attention. It will then report and make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West put a number of points to me. First, he suggested that I follow the example of the French. He should be aware that that is something which I try to do on many occasions. I am one of the people in the Chamber who has some admiration for the French in general, although not necessarily for their Government or policies. The case of Mont St Michel was unique, as is every case in which a world heritage site is considered. It is impossible to read across from one case to the other just because they both involve a world heritage site and an offshore wind farm. That does not make the two cases identical. However, that example from my hon. Friend is a reminder of the power that UNESCO has and of the need to be vigilant about world heritage sites.

English Heritage has advised me on world heritage sites in the past. For example, I wrote to oppose the development of Elizabeth house, which is just across the river, because of its impact on the setting of this august building. Indeed, English Heritage took the Government to court and judicially reviewed the decision of the planning Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), which did not make him particularly happy. That example shows that English Heritage is prepared to make a stand when it has a genuine view that a world heritage site is under threat. Unfortunately, from the perspective of my hon. Friends who are here this evening, that is not currently English Heritage’s position in this case. Its current advice is that the offshore wind farm would not have an undue adverse effect.

Mr Chope: My hon. Friend will know that the Crown Estate gets money only for developments within the 12-mile limit. If the wind farm were pushed beyond the 12-mile limit, it would not get any money for it. That is why it is not in favour of doing that.

Mr Vaizey: The Crown Estate is free to grant planning permission for individual developments, and I am sure that it will take into account its wider responsibility and its relationship with local communities and stakeholders.
in deciding how it wishes its estate to be developed. I believe that it should sit down with my hon. Friends and local stakeholders and discuss the merits or otherwise of the proposal.

To return to my role and that of the DCMS, I hope that I have emphasised that we are not shy in coming forward when we think a world heritage site is under threat, even if it involves disagreeing with colleagues in other Departments, because we put the interests of world heritage sites first. As I understand it, the professional advice from English Heritage and English Nature is that although they have some concerns about the impact on some historic buildings, they do not state that the current proposal for the offshore—

7.33 pm

House adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 9(7)).
Deferred Division

LEGAL AID AND ADVICE

That the draft Civil Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (Amendment of Schedule 1) Order 2014, which was laid before this House on 31 March 2014, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 274, Noes 203.

Division No. 33]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Alexander, rh Danny
Amess, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Baker, Steve
Baldry, rh Sir Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, rh Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Bingham, Andrew
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brake, rh Tom
Brazier, Mr Julian
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, James
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
Bruce, rh Sir Malcolm
Burns, Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burstow, rh Paul
Burt, rh Alistair
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cable, rh Vince
Caims, Alun
Cameron, rh Mr David
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
Carmichael, Neil
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clark, rh Greg
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Crabb, Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davey, rh Mr Edward
Davies, David T. C. (Monmouth)
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Philip
de Bois, Nick
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Dorries, Nadine
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Mr Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunn, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Featherstone, Lynne
Foster, rh Mr Don
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Freeman, George
Frer, Mike
Fulier, Richard
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gilbert, Stephen
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Gove, rh Michael
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hafon, Robert
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harriss, Rebecca
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Oliver
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Charles
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Hopkins, Kris
Howell, John
Hughes, rh Simon
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hunter, Mark
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Gareth
Jones, rh Mr David
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kelly, Chris
Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamb, Norman
Lancaster, Mark
Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
Latham, Pauline
Laws, rh Mr David
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Jessica
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lloyd, Stephen
Lopresti, Jack
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Sir Peter
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
Maude, rh Mr Francis
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCARTHY, Jason
McCrea, Dr William
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Miller, rh Maria
Mills, Nigel
Milton, Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, rh Michael
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
MOWAT, David
Murray, Sheryll
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
O’Brien, rh Mr Stephen
Oxford, Dr Matthew
Ollerenshaw, Eric
Opperman, Guy
Ottaway, rh Sir Richard
Paiace, rh Sir James
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Prisk, rh Mr Mark
Pugh, John
Raab, Mr Dominic
Randall, rh Sir John
Reckless, Mark
Redwood, rh Mr John
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reid, Mr Alan
Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
Robertson, rh Hugh
Robertson, rh Mr Laurence
Rogerson, Dan
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, Amber
Ruffley, Mr David
Russell, Sir Bob
Rutley, David
Scott, Mr Lee
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Shepherd, Sir Richard
Simpson, David
Simpson, Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Sir Robert
Soubry, Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mr Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stirde, Mel
Stunell, rh Sir Andrew
Sturdy, Julian
Swales, Ian
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swinson, Jo
Symes, Mr Robert
Tapsell, rh Sir Peter
Thomton, Mike
Thurso, John
Timpson, Mr Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tredinnick, David
Turner, rh Andrew
Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Uppal, Paul
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vickers, Martin
Walker, Mr Charles
Wallace, Mr Ben
Ward, Mr David
Weatherley, Mike
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, rh Mr David
Williams, Roger
Williams, Stephen
Williamson, Gavin
Willott, Jenny
Wilson, Mr Rob

Wilson, Sammy
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, Jeremy
Wright, Simon
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bain, Mr William
Barron, rh Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Dame Anne
Benten, Mr Joe
Berger, Luciana
Bests, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Roberta
Blenkinop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Blunkett, rh Mr David
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, Mr Russell
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Byrne, rh Mr Liam
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Jenny
Clark, Katy
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coaffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crausby, Mr David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Sir Tony
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davis, rh Mr David

Denham, rh Mr John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Doran, Mr Frank
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Dove, Gemma
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Elford, Clive
Elliot, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natascha
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Field, rh Mr Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flello, Robert
Flyn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Goodman, Helen
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Hain, rh Mr Peter
Hamilton, Mr David
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Mr Dai
Healey, rh John
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Heron, Lady
Heyes, David
Hillier, Meg
Hillling, Julie
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Mr Jim
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hunt, Tristram
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda
James, Mrs Siân C.
Jamieson, Cathy
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keelie, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Lavery, lan
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leech, Mr John
Leslie, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn
Long, Naomi
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCan, rh Michael
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
McDonnell, John
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenzie, Mr Iain
McKinnell, Catherine
Meale, Sir Alan
Meama, Ian
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morrice, Graeme (Livingston)
Morris, Grahame M. (Easington)
Munn, Meg
Murphy, rh Mr Jim
Murphy, rh Paul

Murray, Ian
Nash, Pamela
O’Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Perkins, Toby
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Reed, Mr Steve
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Roy, Lindsay
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, rh Dame Joan
Sawford, Andy
Seabeck, Alison
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shuker, Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Mr Andy
Smith, Angela
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Straw, rh Mr Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thornberry, Emily
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Walley, Joan
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wright, rh Sir George

Question accordingly agreed to.
Westminster Hall

Wednesday 9 July 2014

[MR CLIVE BETTS in the Chair]

Local Plans (Public Consent)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(Amber Rudd.)

9.30 am

Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): It is a delight to see you in the Chair, Mr Betts, for a debate on a subject in which I know you have a particularly keen interest. I must say that there is no tumbleweed today; looking around me, I can see that my Conservative colleagues have a clear interest in this subject as well. I will try to give the short version of my speech. I had planned lengthy remarks, but if I was to say everything I have in mind I would consume my colleagues’ time.

I begin by outlining two key problems. First, land for development is extremely scarce in Wycombe, and there is real public anger at the prospect of building on all of High Wycombe’s reserve sites, which would further burden the inadequate infrastructure, especially our roads. Secondly, there is an obvious, acute need for more homes, especially those that people, particularly young people and families, can afford. In some cases there is a real sense of despair; I am thinking particularly of one working father I talked to with a family of four who will not only struggle to buy a home locally but might find himself facing the prospect of a Bank of England cap on the mortgage he would need.

There is a real problem of despair among those who do not own homes, and there is also a clear need for public consent. We need to find a way forward because the current approach is failing for three key reasons. First, collaborative democracy is inherently unlikely ever to meet policy makers’ aspirations. Secondly, a duty to co-operate is not the right way to co-ordinate decision making and works against localism. Thirdly, the crux of the matter is that the current system leaves individuals and families facing the imposition of costs without adequate recompense. I am going to say something about each of those points.

I rather regret that I cannot put a map in Hansard, but I will try to describe the problem in High Wycombe. It is surrounded by an area of outstanding natural beauty, apart from where the M40 emerges to the south-east, where it is green belt. That creates enormous pressure on development land—and, indeed, the district, which is larger than my constituency, is 71% AONB. There are four reserved sites in Wycombe: Abbey Barn north, Abbey Barn south, the Gomm valley and Terriers Farm, all of which are highly prized by local residents and would be served by roads that are already heavily used. We are short of school places and our hospital is already falling short of public expectations, having lost services; it is no surprise that the public have concerns.

Among all that, I have been very impressed by the commitment of Wycombe district councillors to represent their electorate and mine, as well as by the cool-headed professionalism of the planning officers. They are operating a system that they have been given, with all its complexities, uncertainties and, crucially, areas of discretion. They are determined to be constructive and certainly not to indelicate control to the Planning Inspectorate and developers, which is how they perceive things. They have explained clearly that, under their current proposals, most of the Gomm valley and Abbey Barn north in particular would remain undeveloped. Nevertheless, people remain concerned.

Turning to the results of a quality assurance survey about the local plan, I observe that of the 3,800 survey packs sent out, only 550 people replied. That tells me that non-participation remains a crucial problem. Nevertheless, about a third of people had seen the council’s leaflet on the local plan and read some of it, and 71% felt that new homes were needed locally. Aside from talking to local families, I have experience of talking to residents’ groups and finding out just how irate they are about the notion of their lives bearing specific costs without adequate compensation—and, it turns out, without adequate opportunity to participate.

The Government’s approach is an implementation of the collaborative approach to planning described in the Conservative party’s Green Paper, “Open Source Planning”, which was available online to download before the election—I did so and read it. Another thing I would observe about non-participation is that, given that the Green Paper very much explains what the Government have been doing, it is surprising that there has been so much controversy about the presumption of sustainable development—it was clearly articulated that a Conservative-led Government would implement that. It says something about non-participation in democracy that even the most interested campaign groups nationally appear not to have read the Green Paper.

I challenge the notion of open source consent. Without going off on too much of a tangent, as a software engineer who has participated in open source software projects, I observe that open source software is entirely voluntary—if someone does not wish to use it, they can do something else—and the incentives to participate are strong. In contrast, the land use planning system involves coercion and imposed costs, and there is no exit from it. The whole open source metaphor has been flawed.

The Green Paper said:

“Our conception of local planning is rooted in civic engagement and collaborative democracy as the means of reconciling economic development with quality of life. Planning issues drive members of the public to become engaged in local political campaigning and decision-making. Communities should be given the greatest possible opportunity to have their say and the greatest possible degree of local control. If we get this right, the planning system can play a major role in decentralising power and strengthening society—bringing communities together, as they formulate a shared vision of sustainable development. And, if we enable communities to find their own ways of overcoming the tensions between development and conservation, local people can become proponents rather than opponents of appropriate economic growth.”

We can see how that approach fed into our manifesto, the “Invitation to Join the Government of Britain”, and then into the national planning policy framework, but I want to argue that it has failed. I am very sorrowful that it has, but I would like to explain why by describing some local experience.

The residents of Daws Hill have strong incentives to participate in local neighbourhood planning. The Daws Hill site is bracketed by RAF Daws Hill to the east and
Wycombes sports centre to the west. The sports centre is going through a major redevelopment, and more housing will be built on RAF Daws Hill because it is a brownfield site. The residents formed a neighbourhood forum and set out in good faith to participate in the system that the Government had set out. However, the council ruled that neither of the two developments of interest to residents could be considered by the neighbourhood forum. There was a judicial review and an appeal, and the council was found to have acted properly within the law.

The chairman of the neighbourhood forum said:

“Having encouraged participation in local development through the formation of a neighbourhood forum, as set out in the Localism Act, the forum now finds that the local planning authority has the discretion to restrict its area, it appears, for whatever reason it chooses.

“In our opinion, this makes a nonsense of the legislation, which is supposed to be there to encourage participation.

“It’s not surprising we feel aggrieved at the outcome of the legal process. We are struggling to see any advantage in participating in local affairs.”

I am dismayed that that happened, because I stood on a platform of radical decentralisation of power, which I very much expected we would deliver. People have wasted their time, money and energy—the outcome has been everything that open source planning was not supposed to be.

Elsewhere in High Wycombe, people are not participating to any great extent. Across the district there were about 1,700 responses to the local consultation; I have about 75,000 electors. In the rather unfortunate jargon of public policy theory, people are “rationally ignorant”—it is just not worth the effort of participating in these matters because they are complex and tedious. The process of information gathering, discussion and decision often produces unacceptable results that people are forced to accept. That is the problem with public choice factors. In reality, the public either have too few incentives to get involved or have found that in practice the system excludes them from the involvement that they want: the power to avoid having costs imposed on them.

Another active local group, Penn and Tylers Green residents society, which is most concerned about the Gomm valley, provided this eviscerating judgment on the national planning policy framework:

“The NPPF seems to us to be a disingenuous mixture of high-sounding intent and contradictory assertion. It identifies planning as something to achieve ‘sustainable development’, a term which, because it defies succinct interpretation, has come to mean popularly, ‘the importance of building houses’.

Notwithstanding the Government’s honourable intent, we now have council, not community, power. Land use planning remains a complex and specialist subject, so Wycombe’s local plan was produced by planning officers, not residents bravely taking control of their own lives. Planning regulations remain so complex that specialist expertise is required even to work out whether a proposal is permitted development, about which I will talk more in a few moments.

It also turns out that the process of electing councillors every four years does not persuade people to accept the costs imposed on them by the plans and decisions of officials. The process followed is certainly lawful but it cannot be said to be democratic, given that the electors do not have the opportunity to discard the plan if they do not like it. I suggest that we see, by harsh experience and by reading the Green Paper, that the NPPF and collaborative democracy in planning have turned out to be an opportunity to compromise enthusiastically with the goals set by authority, which is, I am afraid, the freedom to obey.

Regarding the duty to co-operate, if collaborative planning has not worked at the local level, what of collaboration among planning authorities? Whenever decision making is decentralised, a problem of co-ordination arises. The duty to co-operate was bound to bring different plans into conflict, and such conflicts were bound to be difficult to resolve.

I understand from planning officers that the burden of co-operation is now simultaneously slowing down delivery, as authorities communicate with the constellation of organisations indicated in the NPPF, and making planning less accountable to local people. How is public consent for a local plan to be obtained when it is bound to be the product of an opaque process of collaboration between many individuals working for many official bodies?

I understand that moves are now afoot to ask local enterprise partnerships to co-ordinate local planning authorities. When the chief executive of our LEP told me that a particular problem was that there were now so many economic plans that people could not reconcile them, I asked him, light-heartedly; “Are you saying that what we need is a strongman, with the power, authority and vision to resolve the plans and impose the solution on everyone?” He said yes, but of course I was parodying Hayek’s “The Road to Serfdom”; it seems that, once again, life imitates literature, if not art.

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): I will certainly not be quoting Hayek back to my hon. Friend. I congratulate him on securing this debate. Does he share my concern, however, that there is a lack of joined-up thinking among neighbouring councils? For example, in Northumberland, Northumberland and Newcastle councils act differently in relation to the green belt on their border. Does he agree that that sort of problem needs the overarching view that he is so enthusiastically endorsing?

Steve Baker: I do. One of the problems is that the valuation of things such as the green belt is subjective—different people will have different opinions about different pieces of land. Some green belts are not especially high in quality. Around Wycombe, as I have said, most of it is AONB, but it is probably true that some of what is just green belt is not especially high in quality. Where it is poor in quality, people will value it differently. When elected representatives are involved at a local level, it is not surprising that they are unable to agree a valuation of land.

That is the point I want to make. When it comes to co-ordinating plans among decentralised decision makers, only the price system can promise to reconcile those differences, through voluntary and mutual adjustment. It is precisely because only the price system can co-ordinate human action that economic planning by authority always falls short of people’s ambitions for it.

I turn to what I propose the Government should do. In the short term at least, we must inevitably continue to attempt to make planning by authority in land use function without doing too much harm. I therefore ask the Government to take three short-term actions.
First, the Government should take the time to deliver a genuine simplification of the existing rules, so that complexity does not undermine public trust in the system. For example, I understand that permitted development can now be farcical in practice. I looked at the website, and to me it seems that some of it can be simple. In practice, however, people find it so difficult to decide whether something is permitted development, and are so afraid of the consequences of being fined if they get it wrong, that, in practice, they often end up applying to the planners for a certificate confirming that permission for the development is not required. That is absurd. A solution has been put to me. It essentially involves abolishing permitted development and making things simple: if there were no response within an eight-week period, the development would be allowed to go ahead.

Secondly, the Government should ensure that the duty to co-operate is not allowed to produce a creeping reinstatement of unaccountable, unelected regional government through the LEPs. I endorse everything that the Conservative party has said about regional government; I do not want to see it reinstated through LEPs.

The Government should narrow the range of bodies among whom co-operation is required and state clearly that local planning authorities must resolve differences among themselves without adjudication by authorities of broader scope—notwithstanding the wise comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman). If necessary, the test on the duty to co-operate should be relaxed to avoid reinstating the failed concept of regional government.

Finally, I ask the Minister to confirm the view he set out in his letter of 3 March 2014 to Sir Michael Pitt, chief executive of the Planning Inspectorate, regarding inspectors’ reports on local plans. The Minister says, in the letter:

“The special role of Green Belt is also recognised in the framing of the presumption in favour of sustainable development, which sets out that authorities should meet objectively assessed needs unless specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted. Crucially, Green Belt is identified as one such policy.”

What I understand from that is that authorities are not required to consume green-belt or other protected land to meet those objectively assessed needs. That is critical for a place such as High Wycombe; although the housing need is clear, it is also clear that the place is surrounded by AONB. I am looking for the Minister to confirm that that is his view.

I turn to reserve sites and one of the difficulties of the NPPF. The reserve sites are all in close proximity to the communities they serve, special to the adjacent communities and local in character. Under the NPPF, they could be designated as local green space and managed as for the green belt. Will the Minister confirm that that could be done, in which case local councillors and planners would have the discretion to decide whether to do so, to protect those areas? After scrutinising the documents and considering the sites, which I know well enough, I am absolutely sure that that is the case. It would mean that we have local power, at least at council level, over those sites.

In the longer term, the crux of the matter is that the development of land imposes costs on other people. The fundamental reason why local plans are failing to attract public consent is that compensation for such so-called “externalities”, as the literature puts it, is provided to councils as the embodiment of community, not to the people affected. People simply have inadequate reason to consent and every reason to object. What is necessary to achieve public consent in land use decisions is what economists call “internalising the externalities”—that is, making developers cover the costs that they impose on others when they wish to proceed.

In the longer term, it cannot be right to leave young people and working families facing a housing market with too few homes whose prices are too high. It is perfectly plain that more homes must be built, and built at reasonable prices with widespread public consent. There is extensive literature on how to deliver such a system through common-law property rights and market mechanisms. For example, “Liberating the Land” by the Institute of Economic Affairs provides a good survey. Its ideas include: covenant protections and deed restrictions, combined with affordable land use tribunals; tradable development rights; strengthening the law on nuisance; and various restraints from economic forces. National protection in law could be retained for AONB, green belts and places of historic value.

I do not doubt that such a system would have its own difficulties, but it would offer a promise of a way forward, in which people had genuine power to say no and every incentive to say yes. We must abandon command-and-control economic planning in land use, and instead find ways to meet the laudable goals of the present system in a way that is realistic about public participation, incentives and the efficiency and effectiveness of bureaucratic processes. We certainly must not continue to preach market capitalism, only to practise socialism in land use before blaming inevitable failure on the market.

There is a clear way forward. In the short term, planning inspectors should accept local plans that meet the aims of the NPPF by protecting designated land, even if that means not building the full quantities of homes identified as being objectively needed. This is necessary to establish public confidence in the democratic legitimacy of the system. In the longer term, policy should give real power to the public, which means the power to say no, combined with proper incentives to say yes, including due compensation, without the public having to acquiesce to costs imposed by other people, including the long-term costs of losing beautiful, highly valued land.

Democracy is government by consent. Only when the public do not face costs without compensation will our system of land use control meet that aspiration.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): I have just done a quick tot-up of those who wish to speak. We have about 50 minutes before the Front-Bench spokesmen come in. So, just as a guide, that means about six minutes for the eight Members who are standing. Can we take account of that, please? I will not impose a time limit at this stage, but I have given clear guidance to ensure that everyone can get in and have their say.
9.50 am

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): As always, Mr Betts, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) on securing this debate and I will try to keep my comments as brief as possible.

Local planning is, without a shadow of doubt, the single most controversial issue facing Romsey and Southampton North. Planning is incredibly difficult for local councils, the elected Member, council officers and, most importantly, local residents. The constituency is split between urban and rural areas, but that makes no difference in planning terms; wherever you are in my constituency, planning is simply difficult and controversial.

It is very hard to balance the competing issues of housing need with an entirely justifiable desire to protect green fields, countryside locations and—just as importantly—the character of urban areas.

I will use Bassett, on the edge of Southampton, as an example of where urban planning pressures are every bit as complicated as those of greenfield sites. The drive by developers to squeeze additional properties into back gardens and to demolish family housing and replace it with blocks of flats, as well as the continued spread of houses of multiple occupation, turn Bassett into a classic example of where garden-grabbing has continued apace. However, it is not all bad news. I commend the work of local councillors, particularly Les Harris, who has worked tirelessly with local residents on the Bassett neighbourhood plan. Bassett has been designated as a neighbourhood area in its own right, and in the autumn there will be a referendum on the plan. It is a perfect example of a community coming together to identify problems, and potentially using the planning system to its advantage. Obviously, I hope that the referendum will be supported and that the people of Bassett will have a defining say in the future of their own area.

Elsewhere in Romsey and Southampton North, the situation is less happy. The revised local plan comes before Test Valley borough council in the next few weeks, and there is a difficult balance to be struck between protecting green fields and meeting the demand for new homes. What is very sad is when one part of a wider community is set against another, and a determination to protect one greenfield site is at the expense of others. I do not pretend that there are easy answers—there are not—but I am quite convinced that planning officers and councillors continue to work extremely hard to identify the least worst options. The reality is that all the options would impact green fields or woodland, and all would have an impact on roads, schools and services. Whether it is in Whitenap, on the edge of Romsey; in Great Covert, between North Baddesley and Valley Park; or in Parkers Farm in Rownhams, there are some very difficult choices to be made.

Of course, I would prefer to see greenfield sites remain undeveloped. They not only add to local amenity but provide valuable agricultural land, and importantly they can act as sponges to soak up rain when it falls in massive quantities, as happened in Romsey at the start of the year. I have long argued in favour of a brownfield-first policy; more green belt for Hampshire, which has virtually none; and powers to enable those who have sat on brownfield land with extant planning permission for a generation to be obliged to bring it forward for development.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe has made some important points about collaborative planning and the difficulty of bringing forward a plan that everybody is content with. Undoubtedly, the experience of southern Test Valley shows why it is critical to have a robust adopted plan, because until one is in place developers will continue to make speculative applications for land in local strategic gaps and in the countryside.

Public consultation is crucial but, as my hon. Friend said, too few people take part and it tends to be only those directly affected by a specific development who participate. In Romsey, there has been a fantastic effort to involve more of the community, and Romsey Future is an exciting project that aims to ensure the town’s future as a thriving market town. Many other bodies, including the Romsey Forum and the Romsey and District Society, have been proactive.

It is a huge frustration for local residents that localism has not delivered what they hoped it would. My hon. Friend concluded with an interesting point on “internalising the externalities”. I am not sure what it would take for residents of Romsey to view development adjacent to them as a good thing. However, we have to find a way to square that circle, because until we do we will continue to see community set against community and not the local co-operation that we all want.

9.55 am

**Sir Bob Russell** (Colchester) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) on setting out the case. The Minister will have noticed that there are a dozen or more Conservative MPs here, and it will be interesting to see how many of them speak in support of his policies, because in the last debate that we had here on this subject not one Conservative MP did.

The simple fact is that, as the hon. Member for Wycombe has pointed out, the Government are not delivering what the Conservative party said in opposition, and I will cite—

**Steve Baker**: That is not quite the point I made. The party is delivering what it set out in its Green Paper; it is just not achieving the intended effect.

**Sir Bob Russell**: Whatever it is, the general public are not exactly dancing in the streets. The public consent for local plans is the issue we are debating, and the Minister is personally culpable for what he approved in north Colchester not that long ago. He approved it despite the fact that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government personally visited the area to see it for himself. I got a Transport Minister to come down and see the existing congestion in the North Station road area, and despite that this Minister rubber-stamped a plan, knowing full well that the land had never previously been zoned for housing. How the plan came through the system is one of those great mysteries of life, but it did. Myland community council, the only parish council area in my constituency, was opposed to it.

Councillors across the borough ganged up and shoved the housing allocation on one area, so it could be argued that the public consent came from the democratically elected local borough council, but there was not public consent in the area affected. It is an area that had had...
We need to get that message out more often.

Indeed, only this Monday the Colchester Daily Gazette reported that around £2 million of public money will go towards a project to encourage commuters to car-share, use public transport, or cycle or walk instead of driving through the North Station road roundabout. Even before a brick is laid, public money is having to be spent and it will not sort out the mess that is already there, let alone the problems caused by having the additional housing on two sites, one the site of a former psychiatric hospital—allegedly, it is a brownfield site, but some brownfield—and the other on virgin open countryside. All that will come into this area.

There is another problem. Because the section 106 agreement did not produce sufficient funds for a primary school in that area, the local authority is now going to expand a proposed school that is yet to be built, over and above what was originally intended. Far from it being a community school, it will become a destination school.

Those are two direct results, Minister, of a decision made by you, for which you are culpable as the Minister responsible.

I now move on to a second development, which is causing great worry. A local authority wants to build all its housing allocation, or a large part of it, on the border of another local authority area. I will end my remarks by asking the Minister and his officials to investigate urgently what Tendring district council is playing at in wanting to build a large proportion of its housing allocation immediately on the eastern border of urban Colchester, which will create an urban sprawl going eastwards. I urge the Minister and his officials to look at that urgently, because Tendring district council is putting its housing allocation where the local people in Colchester do not want it. The people in Colchester will have no say on Tendring district council’s housing allocation.

9.59 am

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Betts. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) on securing this important debate on public consent for local plans. As ever, his take on it was challenging, original and stimulating.

I think that we all accept—we know—that we need more housing in this country, and we need it urgently. The Office for National Statistics projection is that 232,000 net additional homes are needed per year to satisfy demand, although now it is a bit more than that because the target has been missed for a number of years, so a backlog has built up.

Contrary to what a lot of people believe, demand is not all driven by immigration. Without any net migration, the net additional demand would be 149,000 per annum. There are various reasons for that—smaller households; no one has a lodger; students going away to university; divorce, and so on—but, of course, the biggest single factor is that people are living longer, which is positive. We need to get that message out more often.

I should like housing demand to be more re-balanced across the country. The recent regional growth figures are encouraging: over the medium term what has happened in Leeds, Manchester and elsewhere has been strong and, in the fullness of time, High Speed 2, and perhaps even HS3, will contribute to that further. However, these things cannot be decreed and they do not happen immediately. We cannot escape the fact that the south-east will continue to over-index on housing demand for quite some time.

It is for those reasons that, in my constituency of East Hampshire, the average first-time buyer is almost as old as I am; the average home costs over £320,000, and the median house price is 10 times median earnings. We know that to maintain the vibrancy of our towns and villages we need to have a mix of age groups and we need new people coming in.

We certainly need to promote the primacy of brownfield land, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) said. It is also true—we need to get this message out more often, too—that both nationally and in East Hampshire there is not nearly enough brownfield land to satisfy demand.

I received an answer to a written question from the Minister yesterday, which, with my rough maths, suggests that brownfield sites could satisfy 4% or 5% of demand for housing over a 15-year period.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a good point on brownfield sites. I welcome the Government’s announcement this week on the local enterprise partnership funding, which will unlock a key brownfield site in York, on the edge of my constituency.

Is not the key point that we have to ensure that brownfield sites come forward more quickly? Actually, that is what green belt does. We always talk about green belt as protecting the character and setting of communities, which it does, but it is also important for driving urban regeneration. We must not forget that.

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend puts the point about prioritising brownfield land well, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North. I cannot really talk about green belt, because we do not have any in East Hampshire, so, unfortunately, green belt protection does not really help us.

In general, people accept the need for more housing and for places for their children and grandchildren to live, but I rarely meet anybody who wants large-scale residential development to happen next to them. Often, people who use the term “nimby” do so because it has not yet happened in their back yard. It is just part of human nature that people do not want large-scale developments to be built next to them.

In that context, I support local plans and neighbourhood plans. We can never make everybody happy, but the local plan plus neighbourhood plan process gets about as close as possible. However, plans alone are not enough: do-ability also has to be demonstrated, which is why the five-year land supply is logical. Once a process is set there must be insistence that it is followed; otherwise there is a risk of legal challenge from developers saying that there is restraint of their trade.
There is big issue around public consent for local plans while they are still in process. In East Hampshire, our local plan is not finished and the five-year land supply is not in place, but applications have been proceeding apace and East Hampshire district council has been approving apace. Neighbourhood plans are in progress in a number of places, including in Petersfield, which is getting quite close to having a referendum, and in Alton, Four Marks and Medstead. I pay tribute to the volunteers who are doing an outstanding job on those neighbourhood plans, although I will not name individuals, because there are many of them.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): I am a keen supporter of neighbourhood plans. How much involvement have the plans in my hon. Friend’s constituency attracted and how much interest in them there has been, more widely, in his constituency?

Damian Hinds: They have attracted a huge amount of interest in Petersfield and Alton. I have attended public sessions where masses of people have come along and taken part. That has been an interesting and exciting confidence-building process.

A particular issue in my constituency has divided people. Part of my constituency is in the South Downs national park and part is outside. People in a town or village that is deemed sustainable, to use the terminology, and is just outside the national park may consider themselves to be at risk of development. That happens in Alton and Liphook and is a particular problem in Four Marks and Medstead. To hit the local plan target for a settlement in Four Marks and part of the parish of Medstead, 175 homes need to be built by 2028. The council has already permitted 151; there are applications pending for a further 322 and applications for a further 181 are waiting to be submitted. Of course, not all those applications may be approved, but multiples of the requirement for that settlement could be in place in, say, the first third of the plan period, rather than over the full 15 years. In that context, there is a danger of confidence in the plan process being eroded.

My big ask to the Minister is for more recognition of in-progress plans. There should be guidance on plans that are well progressed. Where per settlement plans—in our case it is called the interim housing statement—measure up to the overall local plan requirements, where local authorities are approving housing comfortably ahead of the pace required to meet the 15-year target and where numbers are already fast being approached in individual settlements, it should be possible for those settlements to defer applications for a reasonable period, to complete plans and carry public consent with them.

There are two further aspects. First, in respect of clarity on infrastructure, I realise that statutory requirements are involved and sometimes the process takes time, but authorities ought to be allowed to take time to pace applications. Secondly, with regard to incentive moneys, it should be made clear that at least some of that should be ultra-local, to maintain public support.

10.7 am

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I am also pleased to see my hon. Friend the Planning Minister. It was a great pleasure, during my time at the Department for Communities and Local Government, to work alongside him, so I understand some of the issues that he faces.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) on securing this debate on a subject that is of great concern to many of our constituents, as can be seen from the turnout in the Chamber. My hon. Friend raised many points that are relevant to Fylde, but I wish to focus specifically on local plan matters relating to my constituency.

The Localism Act 2011, of which I am a great supporter, was warmly received by communities in Fylde. Upon its introduction there was a clear intention to move away from the previous Government’s imposed top-down approach to planning that was driven by the regional spatial strategy. When Fylde borough council set about developing its own local plan, it accepted from the outset that this would result in a considerable number of new homes being built across the borough. However, during the process the council found itself frustrated on a number of key points.

First, when arriving at the total number of houses necessary for the 15-year plan period, the council found itself required to meet the previous housing numbers shortfall, despite having a new housing moratorium placed on them by the previous Government. As a result of this previous shortfall, many believe that the number of houses now required to meet Fylde borough council’s needs is greatly inflated and distorted. In a ministerial statement in March, my hon. Friend the Minister said that councils that had been under a housing moratorium could take this into account if struggling to meet their five-year housing supply. For the record, Fylde borough council is currently sitting at 4.5 years, with a number of plans in the process that could quickly take us to the five-year threshold. However, when Fylde borough council raised this with officials, it was informed that it would be unable to use the previous moratorium as part of its calculations. I have sent a letter to my hon. Friend, asking for urgent clarification on this issue. I would hate to think that the Planning Inspectorate is failing to follow his wise ministerial guidance.

Secondly, the Fylde local plan has been out to consultation, and the council is working to adjust it to take on board the often valid suggestions put forward by local communities. In the village of Warton, the local community has been exemplary in how it has embraced the local planning process. In the draft local plan, it was proposed that Warton would receive up to 1,400 new homes, which would have in effect doubled the size of the village, and that rightly caused great concern at a local level. However, the way in which the village responded truly embraced the core principles of the Localism Act 2011 in a way that I hope the Minister would appreciate. A number of public meetings were held and every home was leafleted to seek their opinions, culminating in a local referendum. While at times passions ran high, the primary focus was to find the correct long-term housing solution for the community.

As a result of the people of Warton’s hard work, it is my understanding that Fylde borough council is looking to reduce the number of new houses in Warton to somewhere in the region of 600. To reassure the Minister, the council has identified other areas in the borough that it believes are more suitable for taking up the balance of the houses proposed for Warton. I believe
that that approach reflects the core principles of the Localism Act 2011. To my disgust, I have learned that developers want to ignore all that work and are proposing to put in planning applications to take the number of houses in Warton to more than 1,400. It appears that developers are using the lack of a five-year housing supply as a loophole to ram through applications against the intentions of the council and the wishes of the local people.

Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con): I am listening to what my hon. Friend is saying with great interest. We have similar situations in High Peak. Does he agree that the situation is causing a belief to fester among our constituents and residents that all these housing targets are being more centralised, as opposed to decentralised to the local authorities, as we are trying to do?

Mark Menzies: Sadly, I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. The aims of the Localism Act 2011 are not being delivered on the ground, and that is one of the areas of great frustration.

Developers know that if the council’s planning committee refuses applications for 800 homes in Warton, they can go straight to the Planning Inspectorate to appeal. We have seen that on a number of occasions across the borough. I have been informed that each appeal costs the council tax payers of Fylde something in the region of £50,000 plus costs and is done in the almost sure-fire knowledge that the Planning Inspectorate will bow to the developers’ demands. That ignores the views of democratically elected Members, local planners and, above all, the local community, which has worked tirelessly to come up with sensible alternatives. I hope the Minister will agree that that makes an absolute mockery of the principles of the Localism Act 2011. If that approach is allowed to continue, we will end up with not a local plan, but a mishmash of planning decisions that have been railroaded through by developers and speculative land agents. I am not prepared to sit around and let that happen in Fylde.

The example I have given relates to Warton, but the same could be said of developers in Wrea Green, Staining, Wesham, Kirkham and now, as I have learned in the past week, Lytham St Annes. The problem is that each scheme is examined on its own merits by the Planning Inspectorate, rather than as a joined-up plan. As a result, there is a real danger of infrastructure failing to keep pace with development. The approach is unsustainable and could lead to a vast array of problems in our communities.

Developers need to understand that the Government have reformed planning policy to ensure that the UK’s housing and development needs are met in the future. It appears that some developers are starting to abuse the aims of the legislation. The planning Minister needs to understand that the Planning Inspectorate must work better with local councils. If the Planning Inspectorate fails to recognise the changes borne out of the Localism Act 2011 and continues to dance to the tune of developers, it should not be surprised if there is a groundswell of Members demanding that it be reformed. The subject is important for my constituency and I wish the Minister well in his endeavours, but it is important that he takes on board the concerns.

10.13 am

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) for introducing the debate and making many sensible points. The previous speaker, my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies), touched on what I want to say right at the end of his speech, when he talked about the Planning Inspectorate perhaps not reflecting the Government’s intention. On 24 October last year, I held a debate in this Chamber that was well attended by a number of Members, each of whom made their own different points. My point then was that planning policy needed to be clarified. On the one hand, the Government were saying that we have to have loads more houses, but on the other, they were saying that we need to protect the green belt and such areas. The Minister, to his great credit, listened carefully to that debate and some while after that called a number of us together to present the clarification of the policy, particularly on unmet need and the impact that that could have on the green belt. He said that the green belt should take precedence. He also clarified the duty to co-operate when he said that it was not necessarily a duty to agree, if that meant that the green belt would be compromised. He made very many other clarifications, which were extremely useful.

My concern is on the extent to which the guidance is being followed by the Planning Inspectorate and the local councils that are putting together plans and joint core strategies in my area. To give an example of the problems in Tewkesbury, we have a great deal of green-belt land, many areas of outstanding natural beauty and an awful lot of flood-risk areas. Tewkesbury’s assessed housing need for the next 20 years is 10,900 houses, yet it is proposed that it will take 18,900. A lot of those houses will be built on the green belt, which I believe to be contrary to Government policy. I have taken that up with the local councils, and they fear that the inspectorate, which will look at the plan and say whether it is sound, will not follow the Minister’s guidance. That is what they genuinely feel. At this stage, it is difficult to say who is right, but the councils, although they do not want to build on the green belt or in flood-risk areas, feel that they might have to do that.

There are various recent inspectors’ reports—there was one just last week in Somerset—where the inspector appeared to disregard consideration for the green belt. I say “appeared”, because it was a rather confusing report, and much confusion surrounds the decision. In my area, there seems to have been a compromise on an area of outstanding natural beauty in an appeal that was allowed on a development of 50 houses in the village of Alderton. That does not sound like a lot, but it is a significant increase on the number of houses it has. Although it is an area of outstanding natural beauty, the inspector seemed to say that where there is unmet housing need, the AONB might have to be compromised. I believe that to be contrary to the Government’s policy. They have clearly said that unmet need should not outweigh any significant harm that might be caused to the green belt or other such areas.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): I strongly support my hon. neighbour’s view that local councillors in all three councils have in effect been bludgeoned into voting
for a very unpopular joint core strategy for Gloucestershire, because of the fear of the inspectorate, but it is not just about AONB and green belt. The only request for local green space status in the entire JCS area is at Leckhampton, in my constituency. It is supported by me, the Leckhampton Green Land Action Group and in great detail by Leckhampton and Warden Hill parish council. That request has not been so much refused as completely ignored by the joint core strategy team, thereby defying every consultation on the subject in the local area for the past 10 years, in which development has been universally opposed. I want the Minister to look specifically at that case, but I strongly support the points that my hon. neighbour is making.

Mr Robertson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point.

When the Government came to power they got rid of the regional spatial strategy system of planning, and that was welcomed. That was a good move. We introduced the Localism Act 2011, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) correctly said, people feel let down. They feel that the 2011 Act and the principle of localism have not delivered and do not look like they will deliver what people want.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): I entirely endorse what my hon. Friend says. One thing that I have lobbied hard for is the introduction of a new community right of appeal, which would give local people a real opportunity to have a say and would rebalance planning and deliver localism in the same way we have delivered an improvement in the planning process. Does he agree that that is a good idea?

Mr Robertson: Yes, I certainly would agree. We need to give more power to people, and that was suggested by the title of the debate, which my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe introduced. Local people feel that they are being ridden over by developers and that there is further confusion in the planning system. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that we need to simplify, to ensure consistency and to clarify, certainly in my area, what the duty to co-operate actually means. More work needs to be done. He rightly referred to the letter from the Minister to Sir Michael Pitt, which said that green-belt land can be removed in the local plan process only in consultation with local people, and I must say that local people do not want that to happen. If it does happen, it is not because local people want it to happen. They believe in localism and welcomed the Localism Act 2011, but they are not convinced that it is delivering for them. It is better not to have a policy than to have one that goes on to disappointment.

My constituents are not opposed to development. I work every day to bring jobs to my constituency, as I am sure that all hon. Members do, and with those jobs must come housing. In 2007, my constituency was under water due to flooding. People lost their water supplies for three weeks and many people had to live in caravans for over a year. We had such devastation, which was threatened again earlier this year—the Prime Minister came to see the situation—and we do not want houses built in the wrong areas. That is what my constituents would want me to say today.
Local residents’ views should be integral to the planning system. With so much of the community clearly opposing the plan as it stands, I hope that all those involved will seriously consider the significance of the objections. The decisions of Warwick district council and other similar local authorities will have long-term effects. I hope to see a consensual, sustainable solution that will be beneficial for our local community and the needs of all our futures.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his brevity.

10.25 am

Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) on securing this important debate. I must say that I am a little more positive than him about the Government’s planning policy; the issue is more that we have failed to grasp the changes in the policy and to use them in the town halls of this country.

The Government have come a long way towards injecting democracy, kicking and screaming, into the top-down, target-driven planning regime of the previous Government. The Localism Act 2011 and the national planning policy framework combined formed a strong first attack on the problem. They enshrined the importance of community buy-in as a central tenet of strategic and long-term planning, gave back powers to local councils and local communities and ended the top-down targets regime.

That said, it seems that the changes may have taken a little while to sink in at town halls, with many councils initially looking to opt for figures and equations taken from the inflated top-down targets of the regional spatial strategies rather than grasping the nettle and coming up with new approaches to determine housing need. As disappointing as that is, it is at least understandable. Outside council chambers, planning is a multi-million pound industry and developers are able—and more than willing—to outspend taxpayer-funded local councils in legal consultations, planning inquests and court cases, including at Glebelands and Jotmans Farm in my constituency.

With that in mind, it is entirely probable that local council planning departments are unwilling to be innovative and to break the established mould until another council had been successful, for fear of an expensive legal challenge by developers. I also fear that officials, councillors and perhaps even the Planning Inspectorate became quite comfortable with the old defence that, “The Government are forcing this on us; there is nothing we can do.”

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that threats are made to planning committee members—that if they do not approve schemes, they will be challenged by the developers?

Rebecca Harris: Absolutely, I hear that said regularly. The costs of court cases are waved at councillors who are responsible for public funding. It is a permanent threat. On balance and given that backdrop, however, the Government’s planning reforms have fared pretty well, particularly since the superb guidance update and the accompanying letter that the Minister wrote to the chief executive of the Planning Inspectorate earlier this year.

Small districts and boroughs such as Castle Point have traditionally suffered the most in development plans, as their comparatively dense populations create big needs that put immense pressure on infrastructure and the precious little undeveloped green space on urban peripheries—no matter if there are larger districts with a higher ratio of undeveloped green space in urban communities within commuting distance.

If the big unit developers have their way with the green belt in Castle Point, it will be an unmitigated disaster, and not only for the environment—it will just not work. Developers too rarely deliver what they promise. They land bank, speculate on markets and cause distress and uncertainty to local residents, who see large swathes of undeveloped land swallowed up in a development plan only to see it sit there for years until the market is right. That is precisely what happened at the development between The Chase and Kiln road in my constituency, which was included in the last development plan in the 1990s and where construction began in earnest only two years ago.

The updates and clarifications on the NPPF issued by the Minister in February give more weapons to local councils to defend local plans from aggressive developer interest and allow them to be shaped more by engagement with local residents and therefore to achieve popular consent. We need to grasp what the updates offer local communities. They make it clear that the green belt does not have to be sacrificed in local plans and give more scope for local councils to bring forward the smaller and sometimes groty brownfield sites that blight local neighbourhoods for redevelopment instead. That policy direction is well complemented by the Chancellor’s recent announcement, during his speech at Mansion House, that several hundred million pounds will be put in funds to help local councils bring forward brownfield sites.

I have stood in Westminster Hall and the main Chamber on a number of occasions to discuss how small brownfield sites not only are more likely to be realised for development faster, but put less strain on infrastructure. They are more likely to benefit the local economy by using local builders, solicitors and estate agents and by being marketed to local people. I am pleased by the updates brought in by the Minister earlier this year, making it easier for councils to have local plans based on such sites.

I thank the Minister for the strength of the policy updates, but I have a further, specific reason for thanking him. He supported me in my request for a representative from the Planning Inspectorate to visit Castle Point and explain to councillors and officers in blunt terms that they did not have to include undeveloped and locally treasured green belt in their new local plan if they could make, support and explain a case for why they thought it more important to preserve such spaces than to meet their purely statistical housing projections.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) on this fantastic debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) is absolutely right that the policy of public consent for local plans, when it works, can work well. Unfortunately, in Labour-run
Kirklees council, we do not have a local plan; there is not even an emerging local plan. What advice can the Minister give my constituents, who are now seeing a free-for-all? Furthermore, a Lib Dem councillor voted for the Lindley Moor development in the north of Huddersfield, which was completely against residents’ wishes. That was a casting vote, so my constituents are feeling frustrated.

Rebecca Harris: Castle Point council is due to consider the public consultation responses to its emerging local plan and to take account of the policy updates. Although it is purely up to the elected councillors of Castle Point to make decisions on the local plan, I anticipate that much more brownfield than previously anticipated will be proposed for development, which can only be a good thing.

The Government have faced a mammoth task to inject real democracy and a commitment to community engagement into the system. They have shown commitment to the challenge and made significant progress, which should be applauded. Few residents would disagree that we need to build more houses, but only through democratic engagement and buy-in will that happen—and, I believe, happen more quickly—in such a way as to cause the least detriment to existing householders.

10.31 am

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) on securing the debate and on his interesting and thoughtful speech.

The question that we are discussing is not whether we need more houses; clearly we do. The continuing undersupply of houses not only disadvantages young people, who need somewhere to live, and makes houses relatively unaffordable, but is a risk to the economy, as the Governor of the Bank of England has made clear. For all those reasons, we need to preface everything we say with the recognition that more houses are needed.

The question instead is how those houses are to be provided and whether a top-down planning system will be enough to provide them—and in a way that takes the public with it. Perhaps a system based more on incentives would deliver the additional necessary housing.

I want to give one example: that of a small village in my constituency. On the edge of the South Downs national park and in beautiful countryside, it now faces the potential prospect of fracking and airport expansion, on top of the continuing pressure on housing. The parish as a whole has only 458 people, with 226 in the core village itself. For years, the village has seen speculative development applications as a threat and has resisted them.

Recently, however, the village sat down as part of its neighbourhood planning process and decided for itself—overwhelmingly, in a referendum—to provide for 50 new houses. That decision was taken by a village with a total population of 226, because villagers decided that they wanted more affordable houses. The number of new homes was not imposed, given to them or required—they chose it. Local people overwhelmingly endorsed the move.

That powerful process of neighbourhood planning can turn the incentives around, so that instead of local people confronting what they do not want the whole time and resisting development, they instead ask themselves what they do want and what is necessary for their children. The process has been shown to have worked. Kirdford was the second village in West Sussex to have passed a neighbourhood plan; Arundel was the first, but those two were among the earliest neighbourhood plans in the country to have gone through by referendum. That is a testament to that policy, to its power and to the Localism Act, the principles of which I support.

Localism, however, can be undermined. It is undermined when the Planning Inspectorate charges in, exactly as my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) so eloquently described, adhering to an outated set of rules or acting under orders—probably a mix of the two—and decides to impose still higher numbers of houses, or houses in a place that local people have not chosen in their proposed neighbourhood plans. Furthermore, in doing so, the inspectorate completely undermines any local support for the development proposed.

People then ask, “Where is this localism that we were promised?” We were all giving up our time—volunteers in the case of neighbourhood plans drawn up by parish councils—and spending a huge amount of it consulting with local people about where housing should go, winning around public support, but then seeing the whole process undermined, or even blown up, by idiotic decisions from the Planning Inspectorate, rewarding greedy, speculative development applications.

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that many developers simply want to push as many houses on to sites as they can, for their own financial ends and irrespective of what that will mean to the community? Developers do so because they believe that they can get away with it.

Nick Herbert: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I have two suggestions for the Minister. He is listening, and I am grateful that he came through my constituency last week, sweeping past the village of Kirdford, which I have described, in his large ministerial car—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Nick Boles): I have tried to bite my tongue for a long time in the debate, but I feel the need to point out to my right hon. Friend that I was driving my own car, without a driver or a private secretary. I was on my way to Chichester. Furthermore, on the A3 on the way back I had a tyre blow-out; I had to change the tyre myself.

Nick Herbert: The lesson to the Minister is clearly either to take public transport or to be driven around in an enormous ministerial car. Nevertheless, I am grateful
to him for coming to my constituency, then to Chichester, to meet local people and to hear for himself about the problem.

My suggestions are, first, to strengthen the process of neighbourhood planning—to make it easier, not harder, for local communities, to give them more support and to make the process less bureaucratic. Secondly, we should tackle the overweening power of the Planning Inspectorate. The inspectorate is out of control and it is defying localism. People do not want orders from a quango in Bristol. If we are serious about localism, we must deal with that.

The Conservative manifesto stated:

“To give communities greater control over planning, we will abolish the power of planning inspectors to rewrite local plans.”

My hon. Friend the Member for Fylde said that if the Planning Inspectorate was not given new marching orders, hon. Members might decide for themselves that those marching orders should be given. I propose amendments to the Infrastructure Bill to send a clear signal to the Planning Inspectorate that what it is doing is undermining localism and support for local housing, and that that must stop.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): I thank Members for helping us get to the wind-ups on time.

10.39 am

Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) on securing yet another important debate on planning.

The gist of the arguments that have been put forward today is that if we are to get the homes we need, we must have more involvement from the community in making local plans, as housing needs to be delivered in a way that secures consent. I totally agree with that.

I remind hon. Members of just how many homes we need. On current projections we know that we need to build upwards of 200,000 houses per year, but we are achieving a rate that is much lower, with just 112,000 homes completed in the year to March 2014. This year we know that there have been only 117,000 starts in the private sector and 22,000 in the social sector. That is simply not enough to keep up with demand. We have 1.8 million households on council waiting lists. This year the number of housing starts in the affordable rented sector fell to only 16,000, as contrasted with 54,000 in the last year of the Labour Government.

I hope all hon. Members would recognise that there is a significant housing shortage that needs to be addressed. Nevertheless, we all accept that we need more consent in the system. We have heard that from the Minister as well, who has said that he wants

“locally arrived at, co-operative solutions to difficult problems, rather than having top-down Government imposition of solutions,... We all deserve to have our voices heard and we all deserve to be part of that solution.”—[Official Report, 13 May 2014; Vol. 580, c. 243WH.]

The problem for him is that that is not really happening in practice.

I want to take up a number of comments made by Government Members today. The hon. Member for Wycombe was very clear on the need to have public consent and a collaborative democracy. That means more community control over what happens and a more effective system of neighbourhood planning. I was a bit confused about whether he wanted orders from a quango in Bristol or simply not enough to keep up with demand. We have to get rid of local plan making all together. I do not think that would be a sensible way forward, but clearly something needs to be done to make the current system reflect local needs better.

The hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) has had a positive experience of neighbourhood planning, but noted her concern that land banking makes it difficult to secure consent and that local people do not feel that localism is delivering for them. The hon. Member for Colchester (Sir Bob Russell) reminded us of the importance of finding appropriate sites and funding associated infrastructure. That is important in securing consent. The hon. Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) talked about the need to rebalance growth across the country. I could not agree more, given that my north-east constituency desperately needs economic growth.

The hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) said that we need to take on suggestions from local people about which sites are appropriate. I agree that that is necessary if we are going to get the long-term solutions to our housing need that we all want to see. He mentioned difficulties with the planning inspectorate, and was backed up on that point by the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson), who said that a number of decisions by the planning inspector have been inappropriate. I will leave it to the Minister to respond to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury about whether he will do anything to make the planning inspectorate change its mind. The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) said we need ongoing reviews of local plans, which is an interesting suggestion.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) was unusually positive about the current system—she must have given the Minister a moment of light relief in our debate. The right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) asked the key question: how will houses be delivered in a way that takes the public along with the development that is needed? He also stated the importance of putting neighbourhood planning at the heart of the system.

All those points have been backed up by the way in which some constituency issues are finding their way into the media. There have been a number of headlines recently—I am sure that the Minister is aware of them—saying things such as “Planning decisions cast doubt over government’s localism agenda”, “Government ignores local residents’ concerns” and “Ministers ignore concerns over out-of-town retail plans”. My favourite is “Government takes ‘nuclear option’ with new planning laws”—essentially, a criticism of the way that the current system is operating.

Something is going wrong if the Minister is espousing localist credentials but local communities feel that they are being let down and their opinions ignored. There are a couple of reasons for that and a couple of things he could do. We are relying on a plan-led system when so few plans have actually been adopted, and few of those adhere to the NPPF. That puts a huge problem at the heart of the system and means that many inappropriate sites are being put forward for development because local plans are not in place. Also, where neighbourhood plans exist they need to be strengthened, so that more
attention is paid to them and local people feel they have a much greater say over which sites are appropriate. That is what we are trying to get at today.

Lastly, we agree that consent needs to be put at the heart of the planning system, which is why we have set up a commission under Sir Michael Lyons to see how that can be delivered. I hope the Minister pays attention to what that commission says when it reports in September.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): I am sure that there is no truth in the rumour that local residents were putting down tacks in advance of the Minister’s car approaching.

10.46 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Nick Boles): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I am used to facing your inquisition and find my current position a more comfortable one to be in. Although it is more comfortable with respect to you, it is slightly less comfortable with respect to my cherished colleagues, who are familiar faces in debates such as these. They represent their constituents eloquently, passionately and with total conviction.

The difficulty is that in a sense it is of no comfort or consolation to those constituents that although they are suffering from intense problems, others are beginning to be able to make the system work. It is of no consolation to the residents of Fylde to know that in many other parts of the country, because residents there have managed to get a local plan in place, local decisions are being made and adhered to, not overturned by planning inspectors. Nor is it of any consolation to the people of Daws Hill to hear that in other parts of the country there are now 1,000 communities working on neighbourhood plans, nor that there have been 20 referendums on neighbourhood plans, all of which—20 out of 20—have shown the overwhelming support of local people for plans that, as in the community of Kirdford in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert), are for quite significant housing growth. It is of no consolation to people to hear that things may be working elsewhere.

The responsibility for the Government is to create a system that applies to everyone and every area, in which every community and every council knows what its responsibilities are.

Steve Baker: The crucial thing about Daws Hill is that the two developments that bracket it were excluded from the neighbourhood forum. I have every confidence that if those two areas had been included the residents of Daws Hill would have been full and keen participants in the process.

Nick Boles: I fully understand the frustrations of the residents of Daws Hill about that decision. It is unfortunately the case that the council is the duly elected planning authority. It is democratically accountable and therefore it is with the council that the ultimate decision lies on which areas are to be designated.

I believe that every single contribution to the debate started with an acknowledgement of the desperate need for housing. The debate was secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker)—I congratulate him on doing so—and so perhaps he will forgive me if I point out that in Wycombe, which is certainly not untypical in the south of the country, the affordability ratio stands at 9.6 compared with 6.45 nationally. That means, very simply, what the father of four told him: the average price of a house in the lower quartile—the lower quarter of available houses—is 9.6 times the average income in the lower quartile of earnings, so someone who is not particularly well paid would have to spend nearly 10 times their salary to buy a house.

Now, as we know, the Governor of the Bank of England has, entirely responsibly, clarified that mortgages of more than four times income should be rare. We also know that mortgage lenders require a deposit, and the Government have put in place the Help to Buy scheme to make it possible for people to get mortgages on 5% deposits. However, there is simply no way that that gentleman, or many like him, will ever be able to afford to pull together nine or 10 times the average income without huge support from somewhere else. This Government are not willing to stand by while housing and home ownership become the preserve of the rich and those with wealthy parents, and we have to act.

Anne Marie Morris: The Minister is making some good points about the need for housing, but he is making none about the need for local people to have a say about where that housing is. Does he not agree that a community right of appeal, not a third-party right of appeal, might well put the Government on the side of responsible communities?

Nick Boles: If my hon. Friend is a little patient, she will allow me to say how the planning system absolutely gives people the ability to decide where developments should go.

I would like to start by explaining where the concept of objectively assessed need comes from. In every constituency, there are people who would like to buy a house or a flat. They might move several times, because they currently rent, and rental leases are often relatively short. They might not even get on the electoral roll or, indeed, be living in the area where they would ultimately like to buy. Who represents them in this democracy? Who represents them in local residents’ meetings deciding how many houses the community is willing to accept? We need to represent them; that is why a national Government are elected. That is why Governments have a responsibility to tell local councils, “Yes, you should decide where you are going to meet your development needs, but, no, you don’t decide whether you meet them.” We do not allow local councils to say, “We do not want to provide enough school places”—we require them to provide enough places. We do not say to the local national health service, “You decide whether you want to provide enough doctors and hospital beds”—we say, “You have to work out how and where you are going to meet your needs.” It is simply the same with housing. We represent those who do not have a vote in these public meetings and have not voted for the local councillors, perhaps because they do not live in the area yet or are not even of voting age. I take that responsibility very seriously, and I make no apology for that.
Steve Baker: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for mentioning affordability in Wycombe, and I am acutely aware of it, not least because it affects me too. However, it is precisely because I agree with the imperatives he has set out that I think we should move to an incentives-based system that produces consent.

Nick Boles: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point, because it was much the most challenging and stimulating of his very challenging and stimulating speech. I hope he will be pleased that there is a pilot of development benefits, which the Chancellor announced in the Budget, and we are working on exactly how it will work. The idea that it is not just the local council that should receive income and revenue streams from development is controversial in our planning system. The council has traditionally received such income, whether through section 106 agreements or, as happens now, through the community infrastructure levy and the new homes bonus. What has not happened before is that the benefits go directly to householders. That happens in the Netherlands and other parts of continental Europe, and it seems to secure a level of consent that, as hon. Members have eloquently explained, we still do not manage to secure, even with local and neighbourhood plans. That is why the Government are undertaking this pilot, and I would very much welcome my hon. Friend's thoughts about how it should operate, because we are devising it at the moment.

On that subject, we have decided to allocate to neighbourhoods that put in place a neighbourhood plan—I remind my hon. Friend that 1,000 communities are working on them—25%, uncapped, of all revenues from the community infrastructure levy and the new homes bonus. What has not happened before is that the benefits go directly to householders. That happens in the Netherlands and other parts of continental Europe, and it seems to secure a level of consent that, as hon. Members have eloquently explained, we still do not manage to secure, even with local and neighbourhood plans. That is why the Government are undertaking this pilot, and I would very much welcome my hon. Friend's thoughts about how it should operate, because we are devising it at the moment.

Martin Horwood: In my urban constituency, I represent people on the housing waiting list, as well as some of the poorest areas in south-west England. The truth is that, if all the housing planned for the Cheltenham area went ahead, and it was all social housing for rent, people would be able to have three houses each. Massively more housing is being planned for our area than required by natural population growth. The developers have no interest in making it all social housing for rent—that is what Cheltenham borough council is doing in the urban areas, on brownfield sites. However, the developers have said quite explicitly to their investors in the City that they want traditional market housing; they want expensive commuter homes on greenfield sites that are cheap to build. In many areas such as ours, demand is insatiable. House prices are high because we have good jobs and good schools. Our towns have often grown enormously over decades, but that does not bring down house prices.

Nick Boles: I am sure we would have been happy to hear a full speech from the hon. Gentleman, because he has a lot to say in representing his constituents. It is, of course, very much open to him to make such points at the examination in public of the local plan, which I know he has some difficulties with.

I want to conclude by, in a sense, warning hon. Members and, indeed, those they represent to be careful what they wish for as they approach the next election; indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) referred to the simple matter of planning becoming an election issue. I say that because the alternative proposed by the hon. Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods) and the Labour party is dramatically less localist than what we, albeit with problems—one step forward, half a step back—are trying to achieve.

The hon. Lady referred to the review the Labour party has commissioned from Sir Michael Lyons. Let me refer to an article from today's Guardian—I am sure she will agree that The Guardian is a bible of wisdom—which quotes his speech to the Local Government Association conference in Bournemouth yesterday. The article says:

"Speaking to the LGA in Bournemouth, he said a Labour government would not be abandoning the current national planning policy framework that requires councils to make land available, and if anything it would be turning the screw on councils. He said: 'We are breaking eggs to make omelettes. The backlog is so serious here that we have to do everything we can.'

His remarks suggest the National Planning Inspectorate will, if anything, have a bigger role in ensuring houses get built."

The British people have a choice. It is not a choice of whether to meet our housing need and to offer the next generation what I suspect every Member of Parliament in this room enjoys—the ownership of their own home. The choice is whether we try to work with local councils and local communities, giving neighbourhoods incentives to work out what new houses they will build, or whether we allow Ministers in a Labour Government to impose decisions on them. I know which choice I will be making next May.
Health Provision (Sittingbourne and Sheppey)

10.59 am

Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): It is good to see you in the Chair, Mr Betts. I am grateful for this opportunity to highlight a number of concerns I have about the provision of health care in my constituency. I want to cover three main issues: the challenges facing my local clinical commissioning group; the provision of renal services to my constituents; and the difficulty in recruiting GPs in Kent in general and my constituency in particular.

Sittingbourne and Sheppey are covered by the Swale clinical commissioning group, which is the smallest CCG in Kent, if not in the country. Because of the way the management component of its budget is allocated on a per capita basis, its small size puts Swale at a financial disadvantage compared with larger CCGs. That is a huge challenge. The Swale CCG faces a number of other challenges, and to highlight those I will explain something of the demography of Sittingbourne and Sheppey.

The population pattern of NHS Swale CCG is broadly similar to that for the rest of Kent and Medway, but in contrast to other areas it has a slightly larger proportion aged from birth to four; and a 68.1% increase is predicted in the population aged 65-plus, from 2011 to 2031. That includes, in the 85-plus group, an even greater predicted increase of 142.3%, from 2,600 to 6,300. In 2009 it was estimated that only 5.8% of the population in my constituency came from a black or minority ethnic group. However, that proportion has gone up over the past five years. In addition, the proportion of Gypsies and Travellers living in Swale is higher than in many other areas. Those things are all challenges.

In comparison with the population profile of England the NHS Swale CCG area has proportionately fewer people aged 80-plus, at the moment, but more people aged 60 to 69; and proportionately more young people under the age of 19. However, there is also a pattern of outward migration resulting in proportionately smaller age cohorts between the ages of 20 and 44. With the overall ageing of the population and predicted demographic change there will be an increase in the risk factors relating to increased chronic disease and, importantly, multiple morbidities. Life expectancy from birth in Swale is 79.3 years—the lowest among the eight Kent CCGs. That compares with 80.9 years for Kent and Medway as a whole. Within Swale there is a huge 10-year gap between the highest and lowest life expectancy. In some more affluent areas the life expectancy is 84 years, while in our more deprived areas it is just 73.8 years. Indeed, Swale is the third most deprived district in Kent and is ranked 99 out of the 326 districts in England.

As to deprivation at the practice level, none of our GP practices is in the 40% least deprived category, but eight are in the 20% most deprived category. A number of areas in Sittingbourne and Sheppey are in the bottom 20% quintile on the national deprivation scale. That level of deprivation has been identified as contributing to lower life expectancy. The bottom 20% of the population also has a greater prevalence of preventable diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and cancers. In addition, people in long-term deprivation have a higher risk of poor physical and mental health.

Deprivation is also associated with unhealthy behaviour such as higher smoking rates, alcohol misuse and decreased physical exercise. Health and social effects resulting from long-term deprivation including unemployement can last for years, and possibly a lifetime, because of the accumulation, through chronic stress, of factors that trigger the premature onset of chronic diseases. Thus demographic change and relative deprivation are likely to drive an increase in chronic disease, unless primary and secondary preventive measures are systematically put in place.

To add to the long-term challenges, the population of Sittingbourne and Sheppey is growing rapidly. That rise in population, the level of deprivation in my constituency, and the need to address health inequalities, were recognised by NHS England when it set the budgets for 2014-15 and 2015-16. Swale was one of 82 CCGs nationally that received an allocation above the 2.14% basic increase for all CCGs. For 2014-15 we have been allocated a 2.63% increase, compared with the average of 2.59% across Kent and Medway. That increase equates to an extra £3 million, for which we were grateful. However, I do not think that it properly reflects the challenges facing Swale CCG as it tries to square an ever widening circle of health inequality.

Swale CCG is doing its best, and working with other CCGs and health trusts it is implementing a two-year and five-year plan to transform services in the Sittingbourne and Sheppey areas. One of the key areas of work is the implementation of the Better Care Fund, under which money will be transferred from acute care to community care. The vision is to provide better care in the local community, which will reduce the need for hospital treatment. In Swale steps are already under way to transform health care. They include integrated primary care teams, which involve community nurses working with GP practices in partnership approach to improving health care. Integrated discharge teams in Medway Maritime hospital and Darent Valley hospital, which, by the way, are not in my constituency, enable patients to leave hospital sooner by putting the support in place that they need in the community. Work is also being done with our rapid response services to provide support to patients with an acute crisis, to enable them to be managed safely in the community.

Improved dementia services will be helpful. Swale has been allocated two additional dementia nurses, bringing the total to five. They work with GPs and primary care teams to identify the support required by people with dementia. That multi-agency approach is making it possible to provide a more proactive response for people with dementia, and it links in with the enhanced services remit to which GP practices in Swale have signed up for over-75s. Of course the number of over-75s is predicted to rise dramatically in my area, so we will need more resources to cope.

In addition, changes are being planned to primary and community care and a consultation is commencing now on devising a new system for people in Swale and neighbouring areas. That consultation will consider how the out-of-hours service can be better integrated with walk-in centres and minor injury units to provide 24/7 care, with better joined-up care for local people, which
will support a reduction in the number of people attending accident and emergency. Links are being built with the acute hospitals to facilitate that community-based approach.

To transform health care locally Swale and neighbouring CCGs are implementing whole-system change and have recognised that further support is needed to make it successful. Swale CCG would like support for several initiatives to enable the work it is doing to be completed to the highest quality. One of those is significant training and development for all health and social care staff, to help them adapt to the new health landscape and their roles and responsibilities, and support more clinically demanding care. Another is better engagement of all organisations in the health and social care economy, to ensure that they are signed up to the principles and vision of the transformation, and to break the silo mentality of provider organisations.

Finally, the CCG would like support for a more realistic expectation with regard to quick results, because whole-system change will take years to implement and CCGs should not be penalised, as they are under the current system, but incentivised with new payment mechanisms. Realistic expectations about the pace of change should be supported by transition funding to support the changes that are planned, which will take time to implement and embed. That will make it possible to provide support for the development of new services before the old ones are scaled back. Swale CCG is doing its bit, but it needs help.

The second health issue I want to raise relates to renal services, particularly the delivery of dialysis treatment. I have been campaigning for some time for a dialysis satellite unit to be set up in one of my two local community hospitals. I have some very sick patients who must travel to Canterbury, Maidstone or Medway for dialysis treatment. One very elderly patient who needed daily dialysis was so sick by the time she returned home from her treatment that she was unable to visit the renal unit the following day.

I will continue to campaign for a full-scale satellite dialysis unit in my constituency, but in the interim I am discussing with NHS England the installation in one of our local community hospitals of a bank of home dialysis machines that could be used by kidney patients who are suitable for home dialysis but, because they live alone or have insufficient room in their houses, are unable to make use of the service.

I appreciate that setting up a bank of supervised home dialysis machines in a local hospital will not help all renal patients in my constituency, but if only a handful are saved from having to make long and sometimes uncomfortable journeys to a distant hospital, it will be a worthwhile exercise. Local NHS England managers have so far been extremely helpful and are undertaking a feasibility study that I very much hope will prove that such a scheme is feasible. I wanted to raise this matter today not only to put on the record my thanks to those managers for their help, but to urge Ministers to consider making funds available so that similar units can be set up in all acute hospitals that do not have dialysis units.

I would like briefly to highlight my concerns about the difficulty of attracting GPs to our area. One of the problems is that because Sittingbourne and Sheppey is relatively close to London, it is difficult to attract young doctors because many of them prefer to work in the capital rather than to move out to the sticks.

In Sittingbourne and Sheppey, the problem is becoming acute in some areas where practices are short of GPs and struggling to cope with a rising number of patients.

Swale has one of the highest patient headcounts per doctor in the country, and that will be made worse over the next three years because one in three of our GPs is expected to retire during that period. What steps can Government take to ensure that those GPs are replaced so that my constituents will continue to have access to a doctor and that waiting times to see a GP do not continue to rise?

11.12 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson) on securing this debate. He demonstrated his masterly understanding of the health challenges in his area and deep knowledge of and concern for the more deprived parts of his constituency. I thank him for that. His constituents will be grateful to know that he has such a handle on those issues.

Before I respond to some of the particular issues that my hon. Friend highlighted, I want to highlight the excellent work carried out every day by those who work in the NHS, not just in my hon. Friend’s constituency, but in mine and throughout the country. I hope we can always take the opportunity in a health debate to put on the record our thanks to hard-working NHS staff for everything they do in our constituencies.

I turn first to renal policy and particularly my hon. Friend’s local campaign. End-stage renal failure is an irreversible and long-term condition, and he was right to highlight the problems caused by more and more people living with long-term conditions, particularly when combined with other long-term conditions. It results from chronic kidney disease and needs regular dialysis treatment or transplantation.

Since 1 April 2013, NHS England has been responsible for securing high-quality care for dialysis patients as part of its specialised commissioning responsibilities. It has established a clinical reference group specifically for delivery of renal dialysis services, which brings together clinicians, commissioners and public health experts with dialysis patients and carers. It has published service specifications for both home dialysis and hospital and satellite dialysis, which my hon. Friend described. The specifications are important because they define clearly what NHS England expects to be in place for providers to offer safe and effective services. They are there to ensure equity of access in a nationally consistent, high-quality service for patients everywhere.

NHS England has recently consulted on amendments to a range of service specifications, including for renal services and dialysis. Those updated specifications are expected to be published later this year following consultation this autumn. My hon. Friend will take a great interest in that because it is obviously directly relevant to the campaigns in which he is engaged. I know that he has had meetings, and the feedback from NHS England is constructive about the excellent way in which he is engaging with it, and I am glad to hear that.

My hon. Friend mentioned the possibility of a satellite dialysis unit at Sheppey or Sittingbourne community hospital, but I gather that to date it has not been
possible to provide such a unit because there is concern that not enough people in the area need that service. However, he is rightly pressing local NHS officials on that. One issue that comes into the calculation about setting up such a unit is the safe level of staffing to meet patient need, as well as viability and efficiency. Those are important calculations to ensure that any service meets needs.

Gordon Henderson: The point about what I am trying to achieve is that renal services are trying desperately to get more people into home dialysis, because that is an inexpensive way of providing dialysis. All I am suggesting is that when patients cannot have it at home because they live alone, it should be available at the local hospital. I do not believe the cost should be too much of a factor.

Jane Ellison: That is a fair point and one that my hon. Friend has raised in the discussion. NHS England is exploring the possibility of a self-care unit in the area. Such units have been developed in a few places around the country and, as he outlined, those units are particularly useful for people who can get themselves on and off machines or bring carers with them to help because they tend not to be staffed units. It is similar to home dialysis but, as he rightly said, can be used by people whose homes are not suitable for that.

I encourage my hon. Friend to continue the discussions. I met local NHS officials yesterday and encouraged them to continue to keep in regular touch on the matter. I understand that the area director for Kent and Medway will write to my hon. Friend shortly following his recent meeting. I would be happy if he kept me informed of how the discussion goes because I am interested in it.

My hon. Friend rightly highlighted in great detail a particular challenge with local funding. Obviously, the Government have protected the overall health budget for the NHS in England and NHS England in turn has ensured that every clinical commissioning group in England will continue to benefit from stable real-terms funding in the next two years. Reflecting changes in population around the country and better targeting is key. Something that often comes across my desk as public health Minister is the challenge of getting that right where there are pockets of deprivation, particularly around the progress of the pace of change towards the right amount for a particular area.

Gordon Henderson: While the Minister is talking about the funding and the formulas, there is an anomaly, which goes back to the dialysis treatment. The CCG is not responsible for the commissioning of dialysis, so it cannot control where the patients go, but it is responsible for funding the transport of those patients to the hospitals. It seems a bit of an anomaly that the CCG has no control over where the patients go, but is expected to fund the transport. I wonder whether that could be looked at.

Jane Ellison: It is a fair point, and I will ask the NHS team in my hon. Friend’s area to consider that as part of his ongoing discussions with it. As I said, getting the funding formulas right is not a perfect science, but the new formula is more responsive to pockets of deprivation. However, he has highlighted some challenges around smaller CCGs in a fair way.

My hon. Friend also highlighted issues and concerns about GP recruitment, and I know he has raised them before. A number of GPs in Swale are due to retire in the next few years. That is a challenge we see elsewhere in the country, and it has also been reported that Swale has a higher ratio of patients per GP than some other areas, so we recognise that that is a potential challenge. GPs work hard and do a vital job, so we are all concerned about making sure that we have the right number of GPs in our area. At a national level, despite a decrease in headcount, there has been a small increase of 1.2% in...
full-time equivalent GPs since 2012, and the number of
practice nurses and other practice staff has also grown.

My hon. Friend talked about the great public health
challenges, such as co-morbidities, and there are many
things that practice nurses increasingly deliver and their
interventions can be extremely effective.

However, we recognise that the work force need to
grow to meet rising demand. In our mandate to Health
Education England, we have required it to ensure that
50% of trainee doctors enter GP training programmes
by 2016. The Government will also be working with
NHS England, Health Education England and the
professions to consider how we improve recruitment,
retention and return to practice in primary and community
care. That is something that my ministerial colleague,
the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend
the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich
(Dr Poulter), is very closely considering and is engaged
in active discussions on.

I understand that the Kent and Medway area team
from NHS England are working closely with the local
CCGs, GP practices and HEE to improve the overall
recruitment and retention levels of qualified doctors
entering general practice as a specialty. I also understand
that Swale clinical commissioning group has set up the
north Kent education, research and innovation hub,
which met in June and is meeting bi-monthly. The hub
will be looking, at a local level in particular, at what
needs to be done to address expected shortages. That is
right because, with the best will in the world, these
things cannot be solved with a grand plan in the centre.
We also need to address some of the local issues and
some are very granular with regard to what can help to
attract GPs to particular areas. It is right that that is
being done at a local level.

In the few minutes remaining, I want to touch on
proposals for out-patient care, because, again, my hon.
Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey
highlighted the value of early intervention and community
health services, and of keeping people well in their own
homes. In particular, as well as being good for individuals,
that takes pressure off A and Es. We do not want to see
routine conditions presenting in A and E at an acute
stage, so it is really important that we get out-patient
care right.

Proposals in my hon. Friend’s area include consolidating
services into six co-ordinated out-patient clinics from
the current 15 sites. The benefits of that include value
for money from modern facilities and equipment, a
wider choice of appointment times, and a greater ability
to perform enhanced diagnosis—the Government have
made early diagnosis a real priority; far too many
conditions are still being diagnosed at an acute stage in
A and E, so early diagnosis is critical. A greater proportion
of his local population will also be within 20 minutes of
an out-patient appointment, which is important. The
East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust
is working with the NHS Canterbury and Coastal clinical
commissioning group in consultation. A public consultation
on out-patient services was completed in spring this
year. I know that my hon. Friend will have been very
engaged with that and that those proposals have now
been brought forward.

A number of other workstreams are in place to
address the issues that my hon. Friend outlined. I
encourage him to talk with the public health directors
in local authorities. The public health lead now sits in
local authorities, and I am seeing some great innovation
around the country from local authorities and directors
of public health to address some of the really deep-seated
challenges that he outlined. Many of the figures that we
are seeing for public health are going in the right
direction at a population level, but they often mask
what is happening with smaller sub-groups of the
population, for whom the figures are not moving in
such promising directions. That is exactly what my hon.
Friend was describing, so along with all the other
people he is engaging with, I encourage him to make
sure he engages with directors of public health and, in
particular, the local Public Health England teams.

My hon. Friend should ask them what they are seeing
in areas around the country that is really working.
Some of the places I have visited, with similar demographic
challenges and similar public health challenges, are
 piloting interventions that are really effective. One of
the great opportunities of more devolved public health
is that it gives rise to local innovation, and we see that
imaginative approach being brought to bear by people
who really know their populations. However, one slight
challenge is how we identify good and emerging best
practice and ensure that we get it promoted more widely.
I encourage my hon. Friend to ask questions of his
local public health specialists, and in terms of the
population challenges he faces, he should ask about
things that are being piloted elsewhere that might effectively
be brought into his area.

I end by congratulating my hon. Friend again on
being a really effective champion with regard to the
local health challenges his community face. It is great to
see a constituency Member with such a grasp on the
range of challenges. I often respond to debates on the
reconfiguration of bricks and mortar, but understanding
the deep health challenges that a particular population
face, and doing so at a granular level, is also really
important in how we shape services for the future, so I
congratulate him on that. His constituents have a great
champion in Parliament for their health needs. I am
very happy to continue to engage with him, and I
encourage NHS England in his area and his CCGs to
continue the constructive dialogue that they have had—and
continue to have—to provide the best services to his
constituents.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.
Srebrenica Massacre Anniversary

[Dr William McCrea in the Chair]

2.30 pm

Ann Mckechnie (Glasgow North) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Dr McCrea. I very much welcome the opportunity to mark this week’s annual Srebrenica memorial day in the United Kingdom. First, I declare for the record that I visited Bosnia in February as part of a visit arranged and funded by the Remembering Srebrenica charity, which, as the Minister is aware, is supported by the UK Government.

Just over a week ago, we marked the 100th anniversary of the key event that prompted the descent into the outbreak of world war one. It was appropriate that, when we visited Sarajevo, our city tour passed the spot where Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated. That reminded us, first, that Bosnia is a country at the heart of modern European history and, secondly, that it is one that, sadly, has known conflict and strife over a prolonged period, both before and following the momentous events of world war one. The scars of conflict often remain for generations. Our visit was not only about commemorating the dead, but about how we could build a lasting legacy, both in Bosnia and at home, that would work to heal those scars and prevent further conflict.

It is heartening to witness the strong cross-party support, evidenced by the hon. Members present, for the excellent work of Remembering Srebrenica, together with the financial and diplomatic assistance provided by the Government. Last night, along with colleagues, I had the pleasure of attending the memorial event at Lancaster house, at which the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina was present, along with the Mothers of Srebrenica. A similar event is being hosted on Friday this week by the Scottish Government in Edinburgh.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): I am delighted that the hon. Lady secured this debate. It is very heartening to see people across the political parties taking an interest in it. She has highlighted the commemorative event last night at Lancaster house. It was addressed by President Izhetbegovic and attended by Baroness Warsi, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the Minister and many others.

The hon. Lady also highlighted the fact that there will be a commemorative event in Edinburgh this week, hosted by the Scottish Government Minister Humza Yousaf. Does she agree with me that this instance of Governments, politicians and charities such as Remembering Srebrenica, doing tremendous work, is a model? Would it not be helpful for other European countries that have pledged to mark the tragedy in Srebrenica to look at what is happening across the nations, regions, towns, cities and communities of the UK to mark this important date, and to try to follow that model in the years to come?

Ann Mckechnie: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman, who accompanied me on the visit in February. Following the passing of the resolution by the European Union in 2009, and given the problems within Europe—I will touch on those later—it would be very helpful for other countries to look at the good practice being followed across the United Kingdom. I know that the delegation will also be visiting Cardiff and Birmingham as part of its week of visits to see the good work being done by the charitable sector and by central and local government across the country.

Srebrenica’s fate in July 1995 continues to haunt us as the starkest failure in Europe’s history post-world war two. It was not, of course, the only massacre in the long and bloody war, which lasted more than four years, following the collapse of Yugoslavia, but it was by far the largest and most calculated in its planning, its execution and in the subsequent attempts at cover-up.

Following months of constant siege and the failure of the Dutch UN peacekeeping force to safeguard the population, the Bosnian Serb forces took control of the town on 11 July 1995. A day later, on 12 July, women and children were evacuated from the town while Bosnian Serb forces began separating out all men between the ages of 12 and 77 for “interrogation for suspected war crimes”.

The night before, about 15,000 Bosnian Muslim men had attempted to escape from the town and were shelled and shot at as they fled through the mountains. It was basically a walk of terror and death, which for many of them lasted over five days. In the five days after the Bosnian Serb forces overran Srebrenica, more than 7,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were killed. Many of the bodies were buried in hastily dug mass graves, but following the unintended release of US satellite photographs showing the location of a number of the sites, a gruesome and chaotic reburial was organised, scattering body parts in many cases over multiple sites in the heavily wooded hills surrounding the town.

As we discovered on our visit in February to the International Commission on Missing Persons, it was only after the possibility of using DNA technology just over a decade ago, and the taking of tens of thousands of samples from the surviving family members of those who were massacred, that substantial numbers of the victims could be properly identified and interred with the respect and dignity that they deserved.

Nineteen years after the massacre, a number of Bosnian Serb leaders have been indicted for war crimes at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. The two most prominent—Radovan Karadzic, the former President, and Ratko Mladic, the military leader—remain on trial to this day at The Hague.

In February, I travelled to Bosnia with five fellow Scots: the Very Reverend Lorna Hood, who was then moderator of the Church of Scotland; the Church’s director of communications, Seonag MacKinnon; the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson); Sergeant David Hamilton from the Scottish Police Federation; and David Pratt, the foreign affairs editor at the Sunday Herald. We were met with warmth and friendliness at all our meetings, including with the Grand Mufti and the remarkable Mothers of Srebrenica, who have fought so hard to ensure that their dreadful loss does not vanish from our memories. However, there was an overwhelming sense that this was a country and people too long stuck in an uncomfortable limbo, relying on a bare ceasefire agreement that halted the killing but has failed to address the main problems that the country faces. The presidential palace had been firebombed the week before our visit, and protests were continuing, as we witnessed on our visit.
The Dayton agreement was never designed to be a permanent solution. Twenty years later, that agreement has institutionalised the factionalism that over the years has led to the current political impasse. In my role as vice-chair of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which has worked extensively in the region for many years, I am only too aware of how the current overloaded bureaucracy throttles political progress and leaves many in Bosnia giving up hope of finding a better alternative.

Understandably, attention in the European Union during the past few months has focused on the emerging conflict in Ukraine, but I argue that there is a clear need, post the May European Union elections, for a much greater focus on finding a long-term political solution for Bosnia.

Karen Lumley (Redditch) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for securing the debate. Does she agree that it is so important that we keep Bosnia and Herzegovina high on the agenda? Obviously, as chairman of the all-party group for Bosnia and Herzegovina, I have visited it many times, and I visited previously with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. I will visit it again in a couple of weeks with Lady Warsi to do some refurbishment of a rape crisis centre outside Sarajevo. Does the hon. Lady agree that it is important that we keep up these visits and that we make them as often as we can, to ensure that Bosnia is high on the political agenda?

Ann McKechin: I entirely agree. I know that the hon. Lady has done a lot of good work personally in this area, both in her current position and in her work previously with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

When a country comes off our TV screens and out of our newspapers, it is all too easy for us to forget and think that the situation has been solved, but that is not what is happening in this case. I visited Croatia the year before, and the difference in tone and approach that I witnessed in Croatia and Bosnia was stark. That drove home to me the need for us to ensure that this issue is a foreign policy priority.

While I was in Bosnia, I met a senior female member of the Social Democratic party, one of the Labour party’s sister parties. She stressed that the engagement of the international community was vital in creating the necessary momentum and support for change in the political process.

The Westminster Foundation, as the hon. Member for Redditch (Karen Lumley) is aware, has been working to encourage the development of secular political parties, particularly in work with young people and women. I believe that the encouragement of a secular political landscape should still be a key part of the United Kingdom’s contribution.

Angus Robertson: Does the hon. Lady agree with me on another potential benefit, in addition to those she has mentioned, of greater international interest in Bosnia and Herzegovina? I am sure she is as shocked as I am by the repeated voices that one hears from Republika Srpska denying holocaust, appearing to justify ethnic cleansing and opposing the idea of Bosnia and Herzegovina thriving as a state with a place for all peoples and offering a better future for all regardless of their faith or ethnic background. Does she agree that it is important to shine a light on the darker recesses of extreme politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina to ensure that it can move towards a better European future for all in that country?

Ann McKechin: The hon. Gentleman touches on a point that the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina raised in his speech to us last night at Lancaster house. All political parties and leaders in Europe, particularly in this region, are beholden to do what he describes as they address conflicting views. The understandable reaction of the Bosniak population to the threatening tone and manner that has been adopted is one of great concern. It is important that the United Kingdom and other members of the European Union clearly state that such language and tone in the debate are completely unacceptable.

As the hon. Member for Moray is aware, we met the Grand Mufti, who spoke about the long history of links among the country’s faith groups—Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish. However, outside Sarajevo and its main towns, those links are becoming increasingly threadbare, with little direct contact between the different communities. The current structures have encouraged separation. Young people attend separate schools, and they grow up with little or no contact with their Bosniak, Croat or Serbian neighbours. Economic stagnation, overwhelming and corrupt bureaucracy and high unemployment have meant that many have already left. The prospect of European Union membership since the global recession appears even more distant, and the lack of political will to change has led to despair, which we have witnessed in this year’s protests.

Constitutional amendments to break down administrative silos are one thing and an economic plan with outside support is another, but the lack of any proper grass-roots reconciliation process after such a long period is probably the greatest challenge that needs to be addressed if one nation is truly to emerge from the grim civil war. I note that since our visit, there have been a few encouraging signs of communities trying to come together outside the established but separate networks, and I hope that the Minister can give us some indication of how the Government hope to assist that process over the coming weeks and months.

In our conversations with the Mothers of Srebrenica, there was strong criticism of the International Criminal Tribunal. The delay in apprehending key figures, which we all know about, and the length and cost of proceedings, contrasted uneasily with the original claims that justice would be achieved for the victims and their families. The tribunal was the first of its kind, and undoubtedly, the failure, domestically and internationally, adequately to address conflicting views. The understandable reaction of the Bosniak population to the threatening tone and manner that has been adopted is one of great concern. It is important that the United Kingdom and other members of the European Union clearly state that such language and tone in the debate are completely unacceptable.

The Mothers of Srebrenica spoke eloquently about the failure, domestically and internationally, adequately to attend to the equally important need to provide justice locally. Few cases have been taken against those who directly carried out the dreadful murders over many agonising hours or undertook the burials and reburial of the victims. We learned that at least one of the direct participants in the massacres is currently employed at a senior level in the local regional government, which covers the town itself. We were frankly astonished to find that the Serb population is still using a school that was a site of one of the massacres, where many hundreds were killed.
[Ann McKechin]

We all need to learn the lessons about what has happened in Bosnia when we consider our current and future work in post-conflict states. International tribunals will, of course, continue to play an important part in justice, but truth and reconciliation at the grass roots is equally important in giving people permission to move on without disrespect to those who have lost their lives in such dreadful circumstances. Our meeting with the impressive International Commission on Missing Persons, established in 1996 by President Bill Clinton, reinforced the fear that too little attention was being paid to the increasingly open genocide deniers, whom the hon. Member for Moray has mentioned. The ICMP still faces regular challenges by Bosnian and Serbian politicians about the probity of its evidence.

The ICMP maintains the world’s largest DNA laboratory system dedicated exclusively to identifying missing persons. It works worldwide and is currently assisting in parts of the middle east afflicted by conflict. I am sure that its workload will continue to grow, given current events in the region. The focus of much of its work over the past 18 years in the former Yugoslavia has been to produce consistent, incontrovertible evidence to counter those who seek to deny. The ICMP’s record speaks for itself: 70% of the 40,000 missing from the Yugoslavian conflicts, and almost 90% of those reported missing from Srebrenica, have now been accounted for.

As a Glasgow MP, it was a great pleasure to meet Adam Boys, the ICMP’s director of international programmes, who is originally from Glasgow and has worked in Bosnia for many years, together with Dr John Clark, who has been the chief pathologist for the International Criminal Tribunal and who lives a few hundred yards from me in Glasgow. The UK Government have been a consistent and strong supporter of that work from the outset, and I hope that we can be confident that that support will continue.

As the Minister is aware, the charity Remembering Srebrenica is holding a series of events across the United Kingdom this week to commemorate the anniversary, as well as organising visits to Bosnia for young people so that they can become advocates in their local communities. The charity’s work and obvious passion have been rightly commended by many Members, and it has made many friends in Bosnia.

In an age when xenophobia and racism can all too quickly spring up, and where people are regularly urged to retreat behind domestic borders, it is essential that communities throughout the United Kingdom have the opportunity to learn more about the history that surrounded events in Srebrenica and why that history is relevant to their lives. The chair of Remembering Srebrenica, Dr Waqar Azmi, who conducted last night’s commemoration, pointed out:

“If the xenophobic claims of ethnic superiority could prevail amongst white, indigenous people who are assimilated and have lived together for hundreds of years, what chance do ethnic minority communities have in Europe?”

That is a question that we all need to address. It is vital that we do not forget why a country in our own continent fell into such a disastrous and brutal civil war. The sad truth is that the cost of conflict can continue for many decades after the guns stop.

We need to invest politically and financially in a process that embeds reconciliation and provides local as well as international justice. If we have not succeeded so far, we must be determined to keep trying. There are 7,000 men and boys who died in July 1995 deserve nothing less.

2.48 pm

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Ann McKechin) on securing this debate, which is timely in many ways. As she rightly says, we have to remember the circumstances surrounding the events at Srebrenica, and coming as it does 100 years after the events in Bosnia that led to the outbreak of the first world war, the anniversary of those events is particularly timely and ominous.

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): My visit to Srebrenica was probably one of the most moving experiences in my life, and the relative peace and tranquillity of the area belies the horrors that happened there. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the first world war, and we all notice that on the memorial plaques in our own constituencies, the same names appear over and over again. From the list of names on the memorial in Srebrenica, we see just how many people lost a large number of relatives from the same family. Does that not serve to show the real horror that occurred in those few days?

Martin Horwood: That is absolutely true. It is in the nature of genocidal attacks to be targeted at particular communities, and in those communities the losses—not only on a large scale but at the level of individuals and families—can be almost unimaginable. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to point that out.

The events that led to the outbreak of world war one in the Balkans were in many ways characterised by their unpredictability. The emerging, growing Serb state was covertly attempting to destabilise the Austro-Hungarian empire and had calculated that helping assassins to kill Archduke Franz Ferdinand would not precipitate a whole-scale catastrophe for Serbia. That was a miscalculation, and Austria responded by issuing Serbia with an impossible ultimatum. Unexpectedly for Austria, that drew in Russia, which led to the involvement of Germany, France and, ultimately, this country.

The unpredictability of events was part of the July crisis that led to the outbreak of the first world war; what is almost more horrifying about Srebrenica is its very predictability. There was not only the massacre of those few days in July 1995; there had been a siege for years before and people had been starving to death. Ethnic cleansing had been happening in hundreds of villages around the region as part of the strategic attempt to establish a Serb republic. The humanitarian disaster was already looming, even before the massacre, and the international community was well aware of it.

More than two years previously, in April 1993, UN resolution 819 was passed, establishing Srebrenica and its immediate area as a safe haven in the Yugoslav conflict. The people of Srebrenica were assured repeatedly that they were absolutely safe and that the UN troops, with Dutch and French commanders, would stand by them. I know that those commanders have come under intense scrutiny in the subsequent decades, but it was clear that they were trying to secure close air support at
the time of the massacre. On one astonishing occasion, that support was refused because someone had filled in the request on the wrong form.

The implications of the massacre in Srebrenica and the way it was handled by the international community were significant not just for Bosnia but for the United Nations system and the whole international community. I think it was in 1999 that Kofi Annan’s report on the UN’s performance had to accept that, along with the international community as a whole, the UN bore huge responsibility for what happened in Srebrenica. In a way, the ghosts of Srebrenica would haunt the United Nations for many years to come.

After that came the development of the doctrine of the responsibility to protect. It was first and foremost an obligation on sovereign Governments and those in power in various regions to protect their own citizens. The development of the idea of the responsibility to protect gained ground not only because of what happened in Bosnia but because of what happened in Rwanda only about a year before, and because of what subsequently threatened to happen in Kosovo when NATO intervened to try to avoid a further humanitarian disaster. The emergence of the idea of the responsibility to protect—that the international community could not simply stand by and let events happen with such terrible consequences—has helped to shape the whole international system ever since.

It has, however, taken some time for the responsibility to protect to be used explicitly in UN resolutions. It was used in UN resolution 1970 on Libya in February 2011—one of the rare occasions on which there has been consensus in the UN, the political will to act and the knowledge of an emerging humanitarian disaster—and mentioned again in UN resolution 1996 on South Sudan, but those are isolated examples.

It is difficult to achieve the necessary political unanimity, especially now in a Security Council that has become broadly polarised between the western permanent members on one side and China and Russia on the other—they are now much more reluctant to license what they see as western intervention following what they saw as the west going too far in Libya. We must ask ourselves serious questions about whether the international system is still working and about what reforms to the UN system might be needed in order to uphold the responsibility to protect.

It is now quite a long time since Srebrenica, and it is beginning to fade into people’s memories; or at least it is outside Bosnia—it is still very real in the minds of people in Bosnia, as Members have said. We must remember Srebrenica, just as we must remember Rwanda and the other occasions on which the international community failed to protect ordinary men, women and children and allowed intolerable massacres to take place.

We must decide how we are going to reform the United Nations, how we are going to bring together the international community to be able to take action, and how we can generate the political will to say that sometimes we do have to take action and there does have to be military intervention. With hindsight, we tend to celebrate the intervention in Kosovo and think of it as justifiable. In generous moments, most people would say that the invasion of Afghanistan—the NATO and allied intervention there—was justified and has established something of a stable state, although there are people who will question that.

However, what I see as a much more freelance action in the invasion of Iraq is clearly much more questionable. That did enormous damage to the ability of the international community to take action, because it was done on a much more unilateral or bilateral basis, principally by President Bush and Prime Minister Blair on our part. That undermined the potential for international action in subsequent international crises and has terminally damaged the reputation of that kind of intervention. In the vote on Syria last summer we saw the shadow of Iraq hanging over the debate to a large extent. The fear of getting embroiled again was still very much alive.

Nevertheless, we must remember the Srebrenicas, the Bosnias and the Rwandas. We have to work out how we can intervene effectively as an international community and learn the lesson of what happened in those dreadful days. When it comes to the situation now developing in Syria and Iraq, the lesson is that although action and mistaken interventions have consequences, so too does inaction. There was inaction in failing to support an effective political settlement in Iraq that did not alienate the Sunni population to the extent that they welcomed ISIS with open arms when it appeared to be liberating them. There was inaction in failing to support the democratic forces in Syria to the point where they were a credible opposition to President Assad and an alternative to the extremist jihadi elements there. Inaction, as well as action, has its consequences.

The ultimate lesson of Srebrenica is that inaction sometimes has terrible consequences. We need to work out the ground rules and the overarching strategy, as well as the international community’s response and the framework for that response. That way, when these events start to develop—not when they are unpredictable like the first world war, but when they can be seen years in advance, developing in front of all our eyes and the glare of the international media—we must be able to take action, or otherwise see more deaths like those at Srebrenica.

In conclusion, I welcome what the hon. Member for Glasgow North said about xenophobia and racism. We are living in difficult economic times, and in such times it is always easy to blame those who speak differently or look different from ourselves. We have seen elements of that in British politics and in politics across Europe in the recent European election campaign, but we must guard against that kind of xenophobia and racism. Ultimately, it is only through tolerance and reconciliation that we can prevent these kinds of disasters from taking place.
Yasmin Qureshi: That is absolutely right. The hon. Gentleman puts it even better than I have. That is the point I am trying to make. It was so obvious what was happening. Everyone knew. I would go as far as to say that people turned a blind eye to what was happening. It was like, “We couldn’t care less about these people.” Exactly the same happened in Rwanda as well, where troops from certain countries also turned a blind eye, and a whole load of massacres took place there.

The world at large needs to know what happened, as do the continent of Europe and people in our country. It is regrettable that it was a few years ago that the European Parliament passed a resolution to say that the anniversary should be appropriately commemorated in all European countries, but only in the last year or two have commemorations taken place. The first commemoration happened last year in Lancaster house, and this is the second year. I organised a book of signatures yesterday in the Members’ Cloak Room, and I am pleased to say that 160 hon. Members signed the book in one day. Obviously, people in this House understand and appreciate the matter.

I know that the Department for Communities and Local Government has been doing some work and has contributed some money to allow such events to happen, but the matter needs to be taken even more seriously. Councils and organisations throughout the United Kingdom need to be aware of it, and we should ensure that people know about it. First, it is a way of recognising what has happened. Secondly, it is a reminder of what can go wrong. After the second world war and the genocide of the Jewish people, we thought that such things could not happen again—certainly not in mainland Europe—only to find, just 19 years ago, that such things did occur again.

Stuart Andrew: Last night at Lancaster house, one of the most striking sentiments I heard was one of the mothers saying, “I am not going to say ‘never again’, because people said that after the second world war, and here we are; we suffered it again.” We all say those words, but they are not good enough, are they? We need far more action.
I declare an interest, although I am sure it is completely irrelevant, because it is not because I am Muslim that I am making this point, and many colleagues and friends have made this point already. At the moment, in our country—I do not think for one minute that it will lead to that sort of level—if we look at media coverage in television, the newspapers and front-page headlines, 99.9% of the coverage is anti-Muslim. A lot of the media publish complete lies on their front pages. For example, there was the Muslim plot to kill the Pope—a complete lie. There was also the story about Muslims wanting Muslim toilets at public expense—a complete lie. It goes on and on.

Independent research carried out by a number of universities has shown that the constant negativity, the made-up stories and the media not telling the truth, or not putting things in context, has given a lot of people a bad understanding of Muslims and their religion. All religions have questions to answer, and there are things in all of them that can be looked at, but concentrating on one group of people and telling lies about them is really wrong.

A recent survey showed that 33% of people think Muslims are not really right for this country, that their religion is not appropriate and that they do not belong here. I feel very offended, because, although I was not born in England, I was brought up here, and this is my country. There are 3 million Muslims out there, but they are all being slated because of the actions of a few.

A lot of people in some parts of this country have never come across a Muslim, a black person or an Asian. Any information they have about a particular religion, group, culture or community will come from what they read in the paper. The images and information they have will be formed by that, as opposed to by meeting people.

In that respect, it is great that we have free speech and a free press, but people should show some responsibility. This hatred perpetuated towards particular groups leads to events such as those in Bosnia or in the second world war. If we look at some of the information and literature put out by the Germans and the Nazis, we see that the words used against the Jewish people were very similar to those being used against Muslim people in this country. In Bosnia and Yugoslavia, a lot of hatred also built up against different groups.

That is why responsibility has to be exercised by not only our media, but our political leaders. Some of them have said things that perpetuate the image of Islam as being somehow inconsistent with the British or the western way of life. That is a wrong narrative, and it needs to be addressed.

I hope I am forgiven for digressing slightly, but it is important to mention this issue, because hatred against a particular group does not just happen overnight. Someone suddenly says, “This, tonight, tomorrow, we are going to kill this lot of people.” Good, decent people are subjected to certain images and ideas, they get caught up in the frenzy of it all and atrocities happen. I am sure some people in Bosnia now think—years later, when they have had time to think about things—“God, what did we do?” People get carried away; the human mind is very susceptible. That is why we have to be careful.

The Government have done some good work on this issue, but I ask the Department to do even more. If the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Prime Minister could be at next year’s holocaust memorial event, that would certainly send some messages.
As we have heard today, 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys lost their lives in a criminal, genocidal frenzy. Women and girls were brutally and systematically raped as an act of war. It is almost impossible to begin to understand what the justification for that could be—I find it completely incomprehensible. These things happened in Europe, just 19 years ago.

Let us remind ourselves a little of the background. In his well considered and measured speech, the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) rightly took us back to UN Security Council resolution 819, which designated the 30 square miles around the town of Srebrenica as a United Nations safe area. The resolution condemned Bosnian Serb attacks on the UN peacekeeping force, their interception of humanitarian assistance convoys and their deliberate actions to force the evacuation of the civilian population. It demanded the immediate withdrawal of Bosnian Serb forces from the area surrounding Srebrenica—a relatively small town—and requested the safe transfer of wounded and sick civilians. It required both sides in the conflict to demilitarise the town, but this they failed to do.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations requested additional military support, which was not forthcoming. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) passionately recounted, the failure of United Nations member states contributed to the inability to maintain the safe area.

Srebrenica fell to Serb forces on 11 July 1995, prompting a stream of refugees to the UN bases at Potocari and Tuzla. A mortar and tank attack on the UN base made it undefendable. By the end of the day, the Bosnian Serbs were in control of the whole area. On arriving, they began to separate off all the men and boys aged between 12 and 77. A column of 15,000 people fled towards the town of Tuzla, but it was pursued and shelled. A thousand of those who were fleeing were killed that day, but over the following 72 hours the captured Muslim men and boys were marched to killing fields for execution.

Nineteen years on, some of those responsible have been brought to trial and held to account for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide; but reconciliation is a complex process that takes place within communities and across generations. It takes time, honesty and determination to achieve it. As I prepared for today’s speech I recalled a similar debate earlier in the year for Holocaust memorial day. I, like many others, remembered how after the second world war we said “Never again,” and set up the United Nations to promote international peace and security; yet we have still witnessed outrageous atrocities around the world.

In the days immediately following the Srebrenica massacres this House met and heard accounts of the events. MPs discussed the role of the United Nations peacekeeping force, the circumstances in which the UN force fled the safe zone it had created around Srebrenica, and what provision was to be made for the thousands who had been displaced and who were in need of urgent help. Srebrenica showed us that the United Nations needs access to effective military capability, and needs to demonstrate willingness to act. Srebrenica was one of six UN safe areas. Those who were gathered in the designated safe haven around Srebrenica had, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South East said, the right to expect that the United Nations would keep them safe.

In 2010, on the 15th anniversary, President Barack Obama said:

“This atrocity galvanized the international community to act to end the slaughter of civilians, and the name Srebrenica has since served as a stark reminder of the need for the world to respond resolutely in the face of evil.”

It is clear, with hindsight, that the international community should have intervened in Bosnia before Srebrenica. We should have been more resolute in our actions, once there, and should have provided the protection we were there to ensure. The Opposition have made clear our support for a strengthened United Nations that can intervene and uphold its commitment to maintaining international peace and security.

On Friday, when we mark Srebrenica memorial day and remember the victims and their families, we must renew the pledge of “Never again,” and renew our commitment to educating the present and future generations, so that history does not continue to repeat itself. I congratulate the Government on their commitment to remembering Srebrenica, and on their focus on fighting the forces that drive genocide. Last year’s funding of £170,000 was a welcome and important step. It established the UK’s first memorial day, created a dedicated online archive, and sent community leaders on visits to Srebrenica. The £800,000 that the Government have pledged for this year and next year, which will be matched by the charity Remembering Srebrenica, will ensure that the project develops and reaches further into our communities. With 750 young people visiting the area to learn the lessons of Srebrenica, we will be better placed to challenge intolerance at home and abroad, and to understand its extreme consequences.

I warmly welcome the work of the charity Remembering Srebrenica, and commend its founder Waqar Asmi’s commitment to creating a cohesive society for everyone. I also commend the charity’s aim of encouraging everyone in our society to learn about the consequences of hate and discrimination. It is critical that we should understand the horror and the legacy of events in July 1995, not just for the renewal of our pledge of “Never again,” but so that we can strengthen our communities to challenge prejudice and division, whatever their nature. All of us in the Chamber today recognise the importance of that work. It is vital to continue to remember such heinous atrocities of deep-seated xenophobic sectarianism. That drives a determination to foster resilient, inclusive and respectful communities here and abroad.

I know from his blog that the Minister has visited Srebrenica and I look forward to hearing the reflections he will no doubt recount in his response, but I want, if I may, to draw on something he said in his piece, about the phrase “ethnic cleansing”, which suddenly became part of everyday news-speak. Those two simple and mundane words express an amoral political intent to cleanse a country or area of human beings: a genocide of communities because of their difference. Yet such simplistic terms cannot possibly convey the true horror of war and genocide. The only true lexicon of war and genocide must be the real stories of the victims and their families, and I will give voice to a couple of those stories now.
One is the tragic story of Hasan Nuhanovich, who survived because he was an interpreter, first for Canadian UN troops and then for the Dutch troops. He describes events of 11 July. The people, mostly women and children but also men and boys, fled the town and arrived at the UN base. Some were allowed in but the gate was then closed and a hole in the fence was sealed. That left about 5,000 to 6,000 people inside the base and 20,000 people outside. He heard the killing, screams and shots, and then the UN base fell to mortar and tank attacks. He says:

“The UN told me to tell the people to start leaving the base in groups of five—they didn’t say anything else.”

The people were hoping and thinking that the UN was in charge and would know what to do, but when they reached the gate they saw Serb soldiers standing there, pushing the men and the boys away from their sisters, wives and children. There was a separation taking place right there outside the gate. People realised at that moment that they were not going to any safe place; the Serbs were going to take them away.

Hasan concluded:

“My family was among the last ones to stay inside. I tried to keep them inside the base for as long as possible. But they were forced. Three UN soldiers came inside with three UN military observers and looked at my family and told me, Hasan, translate to your family, tell them to leave right now.’ I was crying. My brother, who was 19, was sitting on the chair. Of course, my parents knew what was going to happen. But they were behaving in a different way; they actually tried to calm me down—they felt that if I start panicking, I would cause trouble for myself. If their elder son, myself, could remain inside the base, could stay alive, let’s at least try to do that. They knew my brother was going to be killed, they knew they were going to be killed. All the time as they were walked out of the base, my parents told me, ‘Hasan, stay. You can stay. Your brother will be with us; he will be OK.’ I was walking behind them, screaming and saying, ‘I am coming with you.’ But my brother turned around, and he started screaming right at my face: ‘You are not coming with me, you are going to stay inside because you can stay.’ And that was the last time I saw my family.”

Hasan has since discovered what happened to his mother. She killed herself with broken glass rather than submit to rape at a police station.

On the excellent Remembering Srebrenica website, I read the story of another Hasan, who at the age of 19 was part of the column desperately fleeing Bosnian Serb forces on foot, through the woods, away from Srebrenica. His story is terrifying and raw with the horror of the events he witnessed, but at the end he tells us that in 2009 he took a job at the memorial centre and told me, ‘Hasan, translate to your family, tell them to leave right now.’ I was crying. My brother, who was 19, was sitting on the chair. Of course, my parents knew what was going to happen. But they were behaving in a different way; they actually tried to calm me down—they felt that if I start panicking, I would cause trouble for myself. If their elder son, myself, could remain inside the base, could stay alive, let’s at least try to do that. They knew my brother was going to be killed, they knew they were going to be killed. All the time as they were walked out of the base, my parents told me, ‘Hasan, stay. You can stay. Your brother will be with us; he will be OK.’ I was walking behind them, screaming and saying, ‘I am coming with you.’ But my brother turned around, and he started screaming right at my face: ‘You are not coming with me, you are going to stay inside because you can stay.’ And that was the last time I saw my family.”

Those who survived endured the most excruciating and traumatic experiences. Mevludin Orich lay for nine hours in one of the killing fields, playing dead while Serb troops patrolled the blood-soaked field, finishing off anyone who showed signs of life with a pistol shot to the head. He heard an old man plead, “Please don’t do this to us, children, we haven’t done anything to you,” but the old man was also shot.

Lying on top of Orich was his dead cousin, Hars. At one point, Orich saw a Serb soldier walk towards him. The soldier paused to shoot a man in the head, and then continued to walk toward Orich. Orich closed his eyes, but the shot did not come. Close to midnight, the shooting stopped and the Serbs left. Orich managed to shake off his cousin’s body, stand up and head into the forest. To do so, he had to climb over the bodies of the dead and the dying. That type of scarring and traumatising experience is bound to haunt the survivors, their families and their communities for decades, even generations, to come.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): I have been to Srebrenica and Potocari to see at first hand the devastation left by the events of 1995, and I have spoken to many of the women and their children who survived that atrocity. Does the hon. Lady agree that one of the biggest remaining issues for many of the families involved is closure, because there were many situations where the acts were so despicable that the bodies and remains of family members have still not been obtained, and so are unable to be buried in the cemetery in Potocari?

Lyn Brown: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. One of the things that shocked me when considering the idea that reconciliation is happening in Srebrenica in Bosnia and nearby was the lack of detail about where these mass graves are. There might be another 100 mass graves out there. The gentleman I just spoke about—the second Hasan—needs to know where his dad and brother are because he wants to be able to bury them, but he cannot do so. Until such knowledge is out, reconciliation is hard.

I say to the first Hasan that we are listening and that is what today is about. Reconciliation will help to mitigate, to some extent, the trauma and the scars of people in this community, but for many of them what they lived through will be with them forever; it will pass down through generations, as events reverberate.

We can all agree in Westminster Hall today that Srebrenica was a very dark day for Europe, when once more it was consumed by a cloud of deep-seated xenophobic sectarianism, and innocents were yet again brutally murdered and mercilessly slaughtered in the name of nationalism. We have to find a way to rid ourselves of the cancer of intolerance and discrimination, and we must create a United Nations that is capable of fulfilling the noble mandate that it was given. The people of Srebrenica had a right to expect protection; the international community failed them. We must see, we must know and we must remember Srebrenica. And we must learn.

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): I think we all agree that the debate so far has been very moving. I call upon the Minister to respond to it.

3.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Stephen Williams): First, I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), as I often do in these debates. As usual, she delivered her speech powerfully and in an emotionally charged way. I thank her for doing so because this is an occasion when it would be very easy to talk about diplomacy, and the rights and wrongs of what happened 19 years ago and earlier, but it is what happened to the people in those circumstances that counts. I thank her for speaking in the way that she did.
[Stephen Williams]

It is customary on these occasions to thank the initiator of the debate, the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Ann McKechnie), so I do that both in the customary sense and in the sincere sense. I do so not only because I am the Minister responsible for the Government’s work in this sector but because it is something that, as a Minister, I find incredibly moving and powerful, compared with some of the other things that I have to do. In addition, it is an issue that has interested me for a long time.

Both the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) reflected on the events that took place in the 1990s. With the possible exception of yourself, Dr McCrea, none of us who have taken part in this debate were MPs at that time. I was a young councillor—I was in my mid-20s—in Bristol, watching the TV coverage night after night, from the original invasion of Croatia and the bombardment of Vukovar by the Yugoslav national army, as it was at that time. I then saw how events unfolded in Bosnia and then, of course, in Kosovo in 1999. I felt angry and impotent that all this was happening in our European family of nations.

I will not stray into discussing the culpability of any of the troops on the ground, as some colleagues have done; for a start, that is probably beyond my remit. What I will say, however, is that we ought to remind ourselves that troops on the ground—whether they were from the UN or from the nations that were referred to—are responsible to democratic Governments. Perhaps it is the politicians of that era who should have been spoken of in condemnatory language, and I will stray no further than that in going beyond my remit.

The Department for Communities and Local Government gives significant amounts of money—the hon. Member for West Ham mentioned the £970,000 that our community integration budget has put into the Remembering Srebrenica events, both for last year and the next two years—and staff in the Department make a big personal commitment. There is a ministerial commitment as well. Those who were at Lancaster house last night would have heard all three Ministers who have an interest in this issue—the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Baroness Warsi and myself—speak from different perspectives. The three of us do not always agree on everything, but we are committed to this project, both for what it says about Britain in Bosnia—the project is very much appreciated in Bosnia itself—and for the effect that it can have on the next generation of community leaders and politicians in this country.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North opened the debate by mentioning Sarajevo and its resonance this year. When I was in Bosnia in April, I, too, stood on the corner where Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated. The generation of politicians who put together the League of Nations after world war one said, “Never again”; the generation of politicians after 1945 who put together the UN said, “Never again”; and no doubt our predecessors back in the mid to late 1990s said, “Never again.” Well, “never again” does not happen by accident; it happens by tough, grinding diplomacy.

I will stray slightly beyond my remit again, Dr McCrea, to say that, as a passionate Europhile within the Government, I think we sometimes need to remember that it is a major achievement of the European Union that conflict has not broken out among its member states. Moreover, apart from Albania it is the former Yugoslav republics that are still queuing up to join the EU. Of course, Slovenia and Croatia are already in. A couple of years ago, I went on a Westminster Foundation for Democracy visit to Macedonia with the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) to help Macedonia with its preparations to become a member of the EU, and one day—I hope soon—Serbia and Bosnia will join that European family of nations as well. Then, perhaps, “never again” will actually have achieved a diplomatic outcome.

The hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) mentioned commemorating Holocaust memorial day in the UK. She also said, in respect of the second world war, that all the attention tends to be given to the holocaust and asked about what is happening next year. In 2015 it will be both the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz—the hon. Member for West Ham has not been to Auschwitz yet, but I went many years ago, and we will renew the agreement to go together at some point soon, before that anniversary—and the 20th anniversary of events in Srebrenica.

I represent the Government on the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and I assure the hon. Member for Bolton South East that we are thinking carefully about the significance of both those anniversaries and making sure they get all the appropriate attention from the Government, the royal family and—they more important than the politicians or other leaders—the survivors. The survivors of the holocaust are now smaller in number and many of them are quite old and frail, so we need to ensure that it is done in an appropriate setting for them, too.

Let me turn to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and our commemoration of Holocaust memorial day each year. Some of us spoke in the annual debate in January in the main Chamber, and most hon. Members were careful to ensure that we talked about all of the genocides that have taken place, which, with the exception of the holocaust, have sadly all happened in the lifetimes of all hon. Members in this Chamber: the unravelling of Yugoslavia; Rwanda; Dafur; the events taking place in South Sudan, and Cambodia.

Mr Marcus Jones: I agree. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me that we need to disseminate that information, particularly to our schools, to ensure that it is firmly embedded in our education system, so that youngsters learn about these atrocities and can learn from the mistakes of the past?

Stephen Williams: Yes. The hon. Gentleman is inviting me to stray again from my remit, but I have done it once, so let me do so once again, this time into the territory of the Department for Education.

Having visited schools, as I am sure all hon. Members do, I have spoken to history teachers—and to history admissions tutors at universities, in the days when I was the Lib Dem higher education spokesman—who tell me that children do learn about the holocaust and the Nazi period, although perhaps too much. I think they also need to learn about world war one, which is highly relevant over the next four years, and about the other genocides that have taken place in the lifetime of their parents. I am sure that every responsible history teacher and citizenship teacher in the country will ensure that they do so in the next 12 months.
Hon. Members mentioned closure, and the hon. Member for Glasgow North mentioned the important work of the International Commission for Missing Persons. Many powerful memories will stay with me from my visit to Bosnia, and the visit to the ICMP in Tuzla will certainly be one of them. Adam Boys, a Scot, is doing the archaeology of warfare—forensic science—digging up mass graves that contain not whole bodies, but dismembered bodies.

Such was the planned nature of what took place in the mid-1990s, it was not just a massacre; there was an attempt to cover it up by physically separating the bodies with bulldozers—I am being graphic—and scattering the remains over a wide area, deliberately, so that the crime was to some extent physically covered up. The remains of the people were thought at the time impossible to identify. Of course, now, through advances in science, it is possible to identify them. Many people are now getting that closure, but sadly it is often closure from the match of a DNA blood sample—the laboratory in Tuzla has blood samples donated by all surviving relatives who wished to do so, to be matched with a missing male relative—with a piece of a ribcage, the bone of a hand or part of a skull, not to a whole body. However, at least at that point a burial of partial remains can happen and some closure is afforded.

Every day, remains of parts of new bodies are being discovered and individuals are identified. However, there are still thousands of unidentified, unaccounted-for deaths in Bosnia, so the ICMP’s work will need to continue for many years to come.

Ann McKechin: Just on that point, the Minister will be aware, from his visit to the ICMP offices—I also visited and was moved by the warehouse where the remains yet to be identified are still kept—that it is now working in the middle east. It has already been to Libya and, given the events that are occurring as we speak in Syria and Iraq, it is likely that this type of work will be required on an even larger scale. I hope that the Government consider supporting this venture, allowing it to expand, because it will provide in future years the closure that it has provided to the victims in Yugoslavia.

Stephen Williams: That point was forcefully made to me at the time by Adam Boys, but continuing the funding is a matter for other parts of Government. The British Government have been one of the main supporters of the ICMP—that is certainly acknowledged—but sadly its work will probably be needed for many years, not just in the former Yugoslavia, but in other conflict areas.

The hon. Member for West Ham, who leads for the Opposition, mentioned the Remembering Srebrenica project—a £1 million commitment by the Government—and also Dr Wajid Azmi’s Ummah Help charity, which helps to take delegations of young people to Bosnia, specifically to Srebrenica. It is curious that the Department of Communities and Local Government does that, but we do it for two reasons. First, people from all over the world live in our major towns and cities, which, as a Liberal, I celebrate. In my constituency casework there are still refugees, mainly from Kosovo rather than Bosnia, and I am sure that there are people living in West Ham, Bolton and Bristol who are directly touched by what is happening. The effects of other conflicts are felt by families in our country. It is right that we support that reflection and understanding.

Secondly, we ask people who go on these delegations—the plan is to take some 800 people to Bosnia in the next two years—to use that time and apply the lesson of history that they will have learned in Bosnia in their own communities when they return to the UK. The 75 people who have been out on these delegations so far are all now feeding back their pledges about how they are going to make Tower Hamlets, Newham, Luton, Birmingham, Bolton, Blackburn and other places more cohesive and harmonious places to visit. The most obvious thing they are able to do is organise their own Remembering Srebrenica events throughout the country this year, and 16 events are taking place, in addition to the official events in London, Cardiff and Edinburgh that have been mentioned.

On Sunday evening, I attended an amazing event in Luton, which was organised by the five young people who were on my delegation in April. They made their own powerful speeches; two of the mothers, who I will mention shortly, spoke; and Ed Vulliamy, who was an ITN journalist at the time but now writes for The Guardian, gave his perspective as a British witness who was there. That powerful event was followed by an Iftar event, this being Ramadan. Several other events are taking place, including many organised by the police, including the police in Hertfordshire, City of London, Greater Manchester and Northamptonshire.

The practical reason why we are funding the project is so that people can learn the lessons of what so easily can happen. Several Members referred to that. Let us not forget that this is a place where the winter Olympics took place and where, when I was growing up, better-off friends went on holiday. I would still like to go to Dubrovnik on holiday. It was a civilised part of Europe, albeit a Communist dictatorship, where people had co-existed for a long time, and it unravelled very quickly. We must learn the lesson that community cohesion does not happen by accident. It is the responsibility of us all in public life to constantly work at it and nurture it in our constituencies and communities across the country. That is why it is right that a significant amount of British taxpayer’s money goes into that programme—not just to appreciate the lessons of history, but because it has direct practical application in making our country a better place.

The hon. Member for West Ham, my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham and the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), who was with us earlier, mentioned that ugly phrase, “ethnic cleansing”. While the practice had been around for a long time, the phrase came into use during that conflict. We all remember Martin Bell, who compered last night’s events in Lancaster house, speaking about it. It shows how we can use phraseology to obscure an awful practice, and it is right that the hon. Member for West Ham used graphic language to bring to life what actually took place.

To add some of my own reflections to those of other Members, on my visit we were hosted in Srebrenica itself, by its mayor. He must have been a decade younger than me. He was the only person from his class in school to survive that massacre. Imagine that happening to any of us. We are all of an age where we possibly have school reunions. Imagine if someone’s school reunion was just them; the only person left from their class. That was the experience of the mayor of Srebrenica. The person who looked after him at the time was our guide.
[Stephen Williams]

for the whole visit, Mohammed, who was a couple of
years older than the mayor. He guided the future mayor
up into the mountains. A lot of people survived by
fleeing into the forests and the mountains, pursued,
shelled and shot at by the Bosnian Serb army, trying
desperately to get to the safe haven of Tuzla. Members
will be familiar with those awful scenes at the Potocari
battery factory of people behind barbed wire pleading
to be saved. I am not sure whether it is the same Hasan
as the one mentioned by the hon. Member for West
Ham, but the Hasan who guided us round that battery
factory lost male members of his family. The most
awful thing of all is that he lost his twin brother.

Opposite that battery factory where people sheltered
is the Srebrenica memorial cemetery, where 8,372 marble
obelisks stand as a physical memorial to the men and
boys who were killed. The youngest had not yet entered
his teens and the oldest had not quite entered his 80s,
and there were all ages in between. On the memorial we
saw in Sarajevo, on every single line—it was in alphabetical
order and there were no Stephens to be seen—was the
year 1966, which is the year I was born. In trying to
comprehend the scale of the deaths that took place in a
few short days, those sorts of things bring it home.

What really brought it home to me, and the most
powerful memory of all—this remarkable group of
people has been mentioned by several Members—was
the Mothers of Srebrenica, a group of women of all
ages who have dedicated themselves to ensuring that the
rest of Europe never forgets what happened in their
homeland. While they are called the Mothers of Srebrenica,
they are widows and people who have lost a brother, a
nephew, a father or a grandfather. The scale of male
bereavement is all-embracing. Some lost 40 or 50 male
members of their family. I have quite a small immediate
family; others might have larger families. Imagine someone
losing just about every male relative they know—that
brings home how they have suffered. The hon. Member
for West Ham was right to point out that some of these
people have suffered not only with their bereavement,
but with the physical and sexual abuse that they had
from the Bosnian Serb army that murdered their menfolk.

How do we get something from this issue? That is
what we should reflect on. The Government are putting
investment into the visits, so that all the young people,
police and other community leaders going to Bosnia
can come back to Britain, having learnt the lessons. I
will end my speech the same way I ended my speech in
Lancaster house last night. Learning the lessons of
history, thinking about what a reasonable parliamentary
occasion this has been and going to the events are all
very well, but none of that counts for anything unless
we all pledge, just as we are asking the young people to
pledge on these visits, to look at how we can make all
our constituencies better places. That is my challenge
to myself, to Members and to everyone else.

3.56 pm
Sitting suspended.

Humanitarian Situation (Iraq)

4.12 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to
be here under your chairmanship, Dr McCrea. I am
grateful for the debate, because it is timely, and I am glad
that the Minister is present.

I care very much about Iraq. I have been involved
with it since the late 1970s, when I met some Iraqi
students who had left Basra and Baghdad for Cardiff.
They opened my eyes to the brutality of the regime of
Saddam Hussein and I campaigned against its abuses—first
through an organisation called CADRI, the Campaign
against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq.
Many Members of this House were members, as well as
exiled Iraqis such as Hoshyar Zebari, who is now the
Foreign Minister of Iraq, and Latif Rashid, a former
water Minister.

In the late 1990s, I was involved in setting up an
organisation called INDICT, which campaigned for
Saddam and other leading members of the regime to be
prosecuted for war crimes, crimes against humanity and
genocide through an international tribunal set up by the
United Nations. Later, we campaigned for prosecutions
to take place in individual countries that had an
international jurisdiction with respect to war crimes
and crimes against humanity, but that did not happen,
despite our best efforts. I went to many countries and
we interviewed many Iraqis in exile, but only one country
almost went through with the process, and that was
Belgium. At the last minute, however, the Belgian Parliament
changed the rules of the game.

The evidence collected by INDICT of the crimes that
had taken place and of the direct involvement of certain
members of the regime was subsequently used in the
war crimes trials in Baghdad, some of the sessions of
which I attended. Over a number of years, as the special
envoy on human rights in Iraq for both Tony Blair and
my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and
Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), I went to Iraq about 26 times
in all, and at times when it was quite difficult, but I have
many friends there. The idea was to help the Iraqis after
30 years of a brutal regime; we tried to explain the
niceties of human rights and what they meant in practice.

I still have friends in Iraq. I was last there 18 months
ago, when there was a stand-off between the peshmerga
of the Kurdish regional Government in Kirkuk and
Mr Maliki’s Iraqi forces. They did not actually clash,
but it was certainly a stand-off.

I also meet people from the Iraqi Parliament regularly
at the Inter-Parliamentary Union; I always look out for
them and we spend some time together. The women in
particular need to be commended for their bravery. I
will not name anyone, but one woman doctor is a
Member of Parliament and she has stayed in Baghdad
the whole time. She still practises as a doctor, but she is
also active as a politician. Since the start of the recent
conflict, she has been sending me messages regularly
about their concerns in Iraq. I pay tribute to the bravery
of such politicians, because it cannot be easy always to
be surrounded by about 30 bodyguards—one MP has
about that number, which illustrates how dangerous
and difficult the situation is.

Since January this year, the surge in violence between
armed groups and Government forces has resulted in an
estimated 1.2 million internally displaced people in
Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on bringing the issue to us for consideration. The Christians in Iraq are under particularly serious pressure. They are centred around Mosul and the plains of Nineveh, but the takeover by ISIS has had a detrimental impact on them and they are threatened, because of their religious views, with crucifixion, beheadings, bomb attacks, beatings and loss of property. Does she agree that we must always ensure that religious persecution stops and that religious freedom wins?

Ann Clwyd: Certainly. In fact, the last time I was in the Kurdish area, about 18 months ago, I went to a conference of all minority religions—there are not only Christians, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, but many other religious groups as well. The conference was supposed to bring them all together. I also met various groups individually, some of which wanted to set up territories of their own, although I think that they have been persuaded that that is not a good idea. We need to ensure safety for all the minorities of Iraq.

The attention of the world is focused on the terrorist group called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, known as ISIS or ISIL. Inside Iraq, however, the group is only one part of a larger revolt that has been years in the making. Although there is some co-ordination between ISIL and other Sunni groups fighting in northern Iraq, ISIL is only part of the revolt. Anger against Nouri al-Maliki and the behaviour of the Iraqi Government has been building for almost eight years.

The Maliki Government reneged on their promises to build an inclusive Government with the Sunnis and went after moderate Sunni leaders as soon as American forces in the town of Hawijah during what had been a part of the escalating Sunni-Shi’a tit-for-tat violence in cities—including Falluja and Madain—have been threatened, because of their religious views, with crucifixion, beheadings, bomb attacks, beatings and loss of property. Does she agree that we must always ensure that religious persecution stops and that religious freedom wins?

Ann Clwyd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. I was partly instrumental in setting up the no-fly zone: I visited Kurdistan when I was shadow International Development Secretary, and then came back and spoke to John Major about what I had seen—Kurds fleeing over the mountains from helicopter gunships and so on. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman took part in the no-fly zone.

The numbers are horrific. The armed conflict in Iraq has spread from Anbar to Mosul and into parts of central Iraq. With sectarian clashes growing, already nearly half a million Iraqi citizens have been displaced from Anbar province. The ISIL takeover of Mosul and large areas of northern Iraq, perhaps half a million refugees fled from Mosul, many of whom took refuge in areas controlled by the Kurds. There are reports that many are now returning to Mosul because they feel that they have no other choice and that the city is relatively calm at this moment.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this debate and commend everything she has done by way of her engagement with Iraq over the years, which I greatly respect. I agree with her about the importance of engaging others in the region, but faced with the humanitarian catastrophe that looms and given the suspicion of Governments, including external Governments, is there a particular role for non-governmental organisations, including those from Britain? How far will they be able to get effective relief to people in the very difficult circumstances of the conflict on the ground?

Ann Clwyd: That is the challenge. I have no easy answers. I was about to spell out those challenges, in fact. One is access for humanitarian organisations to people in need—we know how difficult that has been in Syria, for example. There is also the scale of need in reaching all those requiring assistance. I will be highlighting both those issues as I go along.

Humanitarian organisations’ access to people in need continues to be a significant problem due to the multiplicity of actors. On one side, it involves liaising with the Iraqi armed forces—especially the security forces—Shi’a militia and the Kurdish peshmerga. On the other side, it involves armed opposition groups including Ba’athists, tribal militias and members of the former regime and military, along with ISIL. In addition, there may also be forces from other states such as Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia to liaise with.
Access for humanitarian agencies to areas of Iraq under ISIL control is difficult. Humanitarian organisations have limited dialogue with ISIL because of a lack of familiarity with its chain of command, and so often have to get authorisation from different leaders and groups to ensure safe access. So far deliberate obstruction does not appear to be the problem; it is more the time that needs to be taken to establish proper channels of communication, particularly with extremist rebel groups and actors. There are, however, established contact points with the Sunni tribes already, which is helping with gaining access.

Thousands of displaced Iraqi civilians are stranded at checkpoints separating the areas controlled by the Kurdish regional Government and the rest of Iraq. At first, civilians who fled the ISIL controlled areas were being allowed to enter Iraqi Kurdistan, but in recent weeks and days, access has been severely restricted by the KRG. Some of those who fled are seeking refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan while others want to travel southwards to the capital and beyond. The former are mostly Sunni Muslims who fear air strikes by Government forces and their allies, as well as the possibility of further brutality by ISIL. The latter are mostly Shi'a Muslims from the Turkmen and Shabak communities who are trying to flee southwards to Government-controlled areas of Iraq where the majority of the population is Shi’a and where they feel there is no risk of an Islamic State takeover.

With the withdrawal of the Iraqi army from northern Iraq, the KRG have gained control of the disputed oil-rich town of Kirkuk and other areas. In recent days they have announced plans for a referendum on independence—a move fiercely opposed by the Iraqi central Government. Regardless of the political wrangling between Baghdad and Erbil, it is absolutely imperative that civilians displaced by the conflict are granted refuge in and safe passage through KRG-controlled areas. I ask the Minister, what representations are being made in that regard? What assistance has been and will be offered to the Kurdish regional Government to help them respond to the needs of the displaced in areas under their control?

Although Iraqi and international political discourse both seem largely out of step with the rapidly changing reality on the ground, the sectarian dimension of the conflict is becoming more marked by the day and Iraq’s diverse communities are struggling to grapple with the new reality. They increasingly wonder where and how they can be safe.

For example, in both Turkmen and Shabak communities there is now division among Shi’a and Sunnis. Turkmen Shi’a are trying to flee to the Shi’a stronghold in the south, but the Turkmen Sunni are not even contemplating going there: they are staying put in the north, terrified of Government air strikes against areas controlled by ISIL.

A woman whose relatives—two young children and their parents—were killed in an air strike in Tal Afar on 22 June stated:

“We are not with ISIL, but when the government bombs ISIL we are in the middle and when we get killed nobody cares.”

One man, a father of eight who had just driven nearly seven hours from Sinjar, taking a long detour to avoid Mosul and his home town of Tal Afar—both now under ISIL control—told Amnesty International:

“We do not want to stay in Kurdistan; we just want to pass through to get to the road southbound to Baghdad and on to Najaf in the south”.

Many Shi’a Turkmen and Shabak civilians have alleged that their Sunni neighbours are co-operating with the Islamic State, while Sunni Turkmen and Shabak have accused Shi’a members of their community of being linked to pro-Government armed Shi’a militias. No general evidence is provided to support such polarising narratives, but perception can be as important as reality, poisoning relations between communities and adding fuel to an already inflamed situation.

Minorities in Iraq, including Christians, Yazidis and others, feel particularly vulnerable, and rightly so. The Islamic State referred to its Yazidi hostages as “devil worshippers” in one of its recent videos. That and the abduction of two Christian nuns in Mosul on 28 June are just two examples of a string of recent incidents targeting minority groups. Members of Iraq’s majority communities do not feel safe either. Indeed, most of those killed and displaced in this conflict were from the Shi’a and Sunni majority communities, who happened to be a minority in a particular place at a particular time.

Increasing speculation about a possible three-way split of Iraq into Shi’a, Sunni and Kurdish states or entities is raising serious concerns about the further massive population displacement that is likely to ensue. Minorities are very concerned about whether, if that came to fruition, their communities would have a future in Iraq. Iraqi leaders and would-be leaders and their backers in the international community must act responsibly and work towards finding solutions to the current crisis that will ensure that members of all communities are protected and their rights respected.

The recent wave of fighting has also led to many people being detained by the Iraqi security forces and armed groups. It is becoming very difficult to track detainees as areas of control fluctuate and detainees are often moved. Amnesty International has recently spoken to released detainees from the Yazidi community who were captured by ISIL, as well as to family members of those still held by the group. At least 24 Iraqi border guards and soldiers were captured by ISIL last month in north-west Iraq. Some were released later, but the rest are being held by ISIL across the border in north-east Syria. The captives are among scores of minorities who have been targeted in a spree of sectarian detentions and abductions carried out by ISIL in recent weeks.

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): Order. I gently urge the right hon. Lady to bring her comments to a conclusion as the Minister has only nine minutes in which to respond.

Ann Clwyd: I will attempt to do so, Dr McCrea, as soon as I can. I am obviously not very good at timing myself. I have several questions that I am sure the Minister will be able to answer.

A recent Guardian report states that ISIL has been looting antiquities from the region and selling them in the international marketplace. That happened previously after 2003 when many of Iraq’s antiquities were looted; I understand that many of Syria’s antiquities have also gone. Some $36 million of antiquities, up to 8,000 years
old, were allegedly taken from the al-Nabuk area alone. Given that the UK is an important antiquities market and to stop funding for terrorist organisations and impeding Iraqis of their heritage, should the Government not ensure that “blood antiquities”, like blood diamonds from conflict zones, are not sold here?

Many families are in need of water, food and shelter, and want to feel safe. I hope that the international community will react with generosity, as it normally does, when the UN asks for funds. I know that the UN does not have enough money—it never does—for such things, but this situation is urgent because people are already dying and the situation may get worse.

4.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Lynne Featherstone): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr McCrea. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) on securing this important debate, and I acknowledge her deep and long-serving experience and wisdom in the matter. It is quite something, and I learned several things from her speech.

I will give a short introduction and then immediately answer some of the points the right hon. Lady raised. Lady raised. With so little time left, I will not get through everything I wanted to say.

As we have heard, on 8 June in Iraq’s northern province of Ninewah, heavy fighting between the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Iraqi security forces led to casualties and mass displacement among the civilian population. The UN estimates that 650,000 people have been displaced, not including an estimated 500,000 people who had fled previous fighting in Anbar province. Some are in hotels and some have been temporarily housed in tented settlements, but most are staying with families. All want to go home. As fighting continues and access to some areas is incredibly challenging, it is difficult to know how many people are affected, but we know that the mass displacement and long-term disruption to the lives of millions that we have already seen in Syria are now affecting Iraq.

I want briefly to say what the Department for International Development has done. I am pleased to be able to say that the UK was the first country to send a team on the ground, deploying three DFID experts, to Erbil in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. The team’s rapid assessment from the field meant we were able to announce on 13 June, three days after the capture of Mosul, an initial £3 million of support to displaced people. That included £2 million via the rapid response facility mechanism to non-governmental organisations in the region—the right hon. Lady asked about NGOs—to provide clean water and sanitation, essential medicine, women-friendly hygiene kits, basic household items, and a further £1 million for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to establish camps and provide dedicated protection teams to identify and assist vulnerable people, including women and girls. The right hon. Lady knows of my interest in women and girls and their protection.

The Prime Minister has since pledged an additional £2 million of emergency humanitarian relief to help the tens of thousands of ordinary Iraqis in serious need. This second package of support will provide emergency medicines, including polio and measles vaccines, food and basic shelter to women, men and children affected by the crisis. It will also enable aid agencies on the ground to track and help those who have been separated while fleeing. That funding is in addition to the £292 million that DFID has allocated to support refugees fleeing from Syria. Some of that support had been in Iraq, and now Iraq itself faces a humanitarian crisis.

The right hon. Lady asked some specific questions. In terms of the politics, the walkout of Sunni and Kurdish representatives from the new Parliament last week was extremely worrying. The Iraqi Government must urgently demonstrate unity and co-operation, but I am sad to say that I see no sign of that. Political unity is the single most important factor that will counter the threat from ISIL, bring about an end to the conflict and stop the worsening humanitarian situation. It is essential that all parties involved in the political process reach the necessary decisions and compromises to form a broad-based, inclusive and representative Government who respond to the need of all Iraq’s different communities.

Humanitarian access is a major problem in areas that are controlled by ISIL. However, our humanitarian partners and the International Committee of the Red Cross inform us that some aid, including vital medical assistance and the provision of clean water, is getting through. Humanitarian actors are adjusting their programmes as the conflict continues to evolve, but it is very challenging and clearly we are not reaching everyone.

In terms of what else we are doing and representations, the UK Government are undertaking considerable political and diplomatic efforts to stabilise the region and to promote unity among those who support a democratic Iraqi state. In the KRG areas that the right hon. Lady asked about, we are working closely with the British consulate in Erbil and engaging directly with the Kurdish Government. We will provide a technical expert to the Kurdish Government to help them plan and manage the response to those who are displaced in the KRG.

On minority groups, our field team have met displaced minority groups, particularly those who have fled Mosul. As the right hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned, Christians and Turkmens are concerned about their safety and are likely to settle more permanently in the Kurdish areas, and our support will reach those people.

I was going to say quite a lot about women and girls, but I think time will run out on us. Going forward, one thing I did not raise—because I am skipping parts of my speech to get to the end—is that the Saudi Government have given $500 million to the appeal, so it is a fully funded appeal. Although it is very positive that thanks to Saudi generosity, the UN appeal is now fully funded, needs related to the displacement and interruption of critical services in Iraq will not be resolved quickly, even though we have a fully funded appeal. We will continue to work with humanitarian partners to ameliorate the suffering of those Iraqi women, men and children enduring terrible hardship on a daily basis. In addition to financial support from DFID, we are also providing technical assistance to support the UN and the Kurdish Regional Government effectively to co-ordinate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the affected populations.
As well as addressing the short-term humanitarian needs, we are undertaking a great deal of effort on political support to help resolve the crisis and promoting political unity among those who support a democratic Iraqi state—

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): Order. We now move to the final debate on caste discrimination, which Mr Adam Holloway will be leading. I just mention to Members that the sitting will conclude at 5.12 pm.

Mr Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dr McCrea, and I thank the Minister for allowing me to ruin her afternoon. I am sure she had other things that she would have preferred to be doing.

Why are we having this debate? I went to the Brandon street gurdwara in Gravesend a few months ago, and I was amazed by the strength of feeling over a petition on caste discrimination. Since then, I have been around the country with my hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), who is the Prime Minister's diaspora champion, and I visited Leicester, Southall and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller). I did not realise that quite so many people in the UK suffer because of “traditional”—if that is the right word—caste systems originating in south Asia.

According to a survey on one of these castes, published by the Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance, 58% of Dalits—that is to say the untouchables, the Chamaris, or whatever else people want to call them—believe they face discrimination because of their caste. Much more interestingly, 80% believe that the police would not understand caste discrimination if it was reported to them. Some Dalits are being ignored for promotion. They are victims of humiliation or harassment and sometimes they face being fired.

So is there a form of hidden apartheid within our shores? After some brave and necessary moves by our Home Secretary to outlaw such things as forced marriage, can we really continue to excuse ourselves for not putting people who practice this casteism on the wrong side of the law?

There has been a timeline to this. In November 2009, the Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance published its report, “Hidden Apartheid—Voice of the Community”, highlighting lower-caste experiences of caste discrimination. Between April 2009 and April 2010, during parliamentary debates on the Equality Bill, Dalit organisations sought to persuade parliamentarians to include caste as a new protected characteristic.

On 1 October 2010, the Equality Act 2010 came into force. The caste power found in section 9(5)(a) of the Act allows amendment by ministerial order “to provide for caste to be an aspect of race”.

In December 2010—I am halfway through these dates now, by the way—an independent research report asked for by the last Government was published by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research. It suggested that caste discrimination and harassment were falling outside the Act. The coalition Government are still considering that report.

In August 2011, Amardeep and Vijay Begraj, a married couple—he had been working in a solicitor's firm as a manager, and she had been working as a solicitor—came before the courts. The argument was that he, and I think she, as well, had been fired because their union, being from different castes, had not been approved of. The Home Secretary then publicly considered whether to add the caste system to the equality law.
Mark Reckless (Rochester and Strood) (Con): Many of my constituents attend the gurdwara in Gravesend to which my hon. Friend referred, but more still are members of the Ravidassia community in Strood.

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): Order. Two Members are standing.

Mr Holloway: I was so interested in what my hon. Friend was saying—that is what happened there. I am sorry, Dr McCrea.

Mark Reckless: My understanding was that the Government had given a commitment that it would bring in this order, so why has it not happened?

Mr Holloway: The Government will tell us in a moment, which is part of the reason why I have called this debate.

On 1 March, the Minister present made a statement. She announced that the Government were thinking of taking an educational approach to this and would use Talk for a Change. However, the NIESR criticised that, saying that it only raises awareness and does not assist people being discriminated against by their employer, nor by such things as day care centres.

The Government then asked the Equality and Human Rights Commission to review and make recommendations. In April 2013, the Minister was asked to sign the ministerial order and on 29 July, the Government published their caste discrimination legislation timetable. It will run up to and beyond the 2015 general election. On 5 February, the Begraj tribunal was abandoned, because the judge recused herself when she was told by a third party that a witness in the case had had their home smashed up by an unknown group. On 28 February, the EHRC published its two reports on the matter and called on the Government to add in the necessary protections on caste.

Let me just give a brief outline of caste in the UK. According to the 2011 census, about 4.5 million in this country are of south Asian origin. Of those, about 20% are from the untouchables, the Chamars, the Dalit community—I think it is about 860,000 people.

What is the Hindu caste system? Who are these 1 million Dalits in the UK and where do they fit in? Imagine a pyramid and at the very top, there are the gods, and then there are four castes. The top caste, the elite, are the Brahmins; these are the people who traditionally were the priests. Then there are the Kshatriyas; they are just below the Brahmins and were traditionally the warriors and the kings. Below them, there are the Vaishyas, who were the merchants and the farmers. Below them, at the bottom, there are the Shudras, who were the servants. Below even them, by this narrative, right at the very bottom—sometimes not even included in pretty pyramids like the one I have here in my notes—are the Dalits. They are known to some as the handlers of filth, or the untouchables.

This really is happening in the UK. After lunch, we were looking on Twitter. People can have a look themselves. They should look for “Brahmin for life”, “Jat for life” and “that it only raises awareness and does not assist people being discriminated against by their employer, nor by such things as day care centres.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): I am very pleased that my hon. Friend called for this debate. Does he share my concern at what I would characterise as the nonchalant, “Who cares?” ignorance of discrimination being pursued by the current Government’s policy in this regard? Somehow they believe that the discrimination that he has just spoken about will magically end at the workplace—that somehow because there is discrimination protection outside, we do not need to have any protections inside the workplace. Does he not think that that is nonchalant?

Mr Holloway: I will come on to that, and I know that the work that the Minister is doing also applies to it.

There has been recent court action. There was the successful case of Tirkey v. Chandok, in which the claim for caste discrimination was allowed. However, these are just what I think are called first instance decisions and are not binding. According to Swan Turton Solicitors, there was a conflicting ruling in an earlier case, Naveed v. Aslam, in which the tribunal rejected any claims for caste discrimination. It was stated that the reason was that the Government still had not exercised their power to amend section 9(5)(a) of the 2010 Act.

The simple fact is that at present, if a person in the UK is harassed because of their caste in places of employment or education or where they receive public services such as health and social care, there is no legislation in place to protect them. Let us not overstate this, but in the past few weeks I have repeatedly come upon people who have said, for example, that they feel like they are looked down on by members of what would be traditional castes. People have told me of their disapproval of inter-caste marriage. I have heard anecdotes about some people not having had the choice of marrying the person whom they would like to marry. I have even heard about people who have not felt welcome at certain places of worship.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I know that he is very well respected in the south Asian community in his constituency, which neighbours mine. Will he comment on what I have found? I do not know whether my experience is similar to his own. I am talking about just how shocking the caste system and discrimination within it can be. We see classism existing in every community, but this goes way beyond that to create a great deal of friction between different groups of people. Most concerns come from within those communities themselves.

Mr Holloway: That is a great point. What my hon. Friend is talking about is the fact that in our areas we have a lot of Sikhs, and of course among the central tenets of the Sikh faith are tolerance, equality and so on. I know that the Sikhs, certainly on our shared patch, are working on it, but this occurs far more widely across the south Asian communities in our country.
Solidarity Network, Meena Varma, I have been to the House of Lords. Together with the director of the Dalit chair of which is Bishop Harries, a Member of the all-party group for Dalits, the time. I am very grateful for that.

In the area of health, the Anti Caste Discrimination Alliance reported a few cases. One related to an elderly woman who was being looked after. Her carer, who was from a “higher” caste, found an icon indicating that the person she was looking after was from a lower caste, and the son of the bedbound woman found that his mother had not been washed for a number of days. We have had examples of physiotherapists refusing to treat people of lower caste. In the area of marriage, we have heard of the Begraj case. We have heard of people feeling unable to marry outside their caste.

What could legislation do? It could send the message that castes have never existed in Britain and really should not. It would protect people in workplaces, schools, hospitals and so on.

The Government’s commitment on these issues has been welcomed by victims of caste discrimination and forms just one part of the wider reforms being put forward. The Home Secretary has outlawed forced marriages, which are, as she rightly put it, “a tragedy for each and every victim.”

Female genital mutilation is also illegal in this country. I am not sure, therefore, that we can necessarily use the argument that we might upset certain people in the south Asian community.

I forewarned the Minister of these three questions. First, the Government have published a timetable for caste discrimination legislation. Why does it run up to and beyond the 2015 general election? Secondly, will the Government involve the relevant groups and communities in their preparation of the public consultation document? It would be very good to see the involvement of some of those groups in that consultation. Finally, in plain English, when will the consultation document be published; does the Minister expect any further delays?

Dr William McCrea (in the Chair): The Minister will start her winding-up speech at the latest at two minutes past 5. She will have 10 minutes in which to wind up the debate.

4.56 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I will be very brief so that the Minister will have plenty of time to reply. First, I pay enormous tribute to the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr Holloway) for securing this debate and for the way in which he has spoken on this subject today and for his willingness to grant me a few minutes of his time. I am very grateful for that.

I am one of the trustees of the Dalit Solidarity Network and a member of the all-party group for Dalits, the chair of which is Mr Harries, a Member of the House of Lords. Together with the director of the Dalit Solidarity Network, Meena Varma, I have been to the United Nations in Geneva to raise issues of Dalit discrimination in India and many other places, but also, clearly, in this country.

I will briefly put on the record the enormity of the situation. Around the world, 260 million people are Dalits — scheduled castes. They suffer grievous discrimination, terrible poverty, appalling levels of crime committed against them and, in most of India and Nepal and other places, appalling standards of living. Every week, 13 Dalit people in India are murdered. Five Dalit homes are repossessed every week. Three women are raped every day. Eleven Dalits are beaten every day. A crime is committed against Dalit people every 11 minutes in India.

The Ambedkar constitution is an excellent document. Dr Ambedkar was himself a Dalit. It absolutely outlaws discrimination and has some provision for protected employment for people of the scheduled castes. It is a very effective document, but raising these matters with the Indian Government or the Indian high commission is extremely difficult; they are quite resistant to having good discussions about it.

As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, discrimination also exists in this country. There are roughly 1 million Dalit people in Britain. As a result of both the case that he brought up, which was one that we raised in Geneva at the UN Human Rights Council, and the debates that took place in advance of the Equality Act 2010, we are in a situation in which we are relying on the Government now to introduce regulation to put it on the face of the law in this country that it would be illegal to discriminate on the basis of caste.

In getting to this position, the Government of the day in 2010, the then Labour Government, with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) as the Minister leading on the Bill, accepted an amendment put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) that required the Government to undertake research on caste discrimination in this country. That research demonstrated clearly that there is serious discrimination, and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination said, in terms, that the British Government had an obligation to introduce the legislation. The Minister, I am sure, will tell us that consultations are taking place. Finally, I agree with consultations; everything should be consulted on, but there should be a limit to the time in which that is done. I am very disappointed that, at the moment, the introduction of the regulation will take us past the end of this Parliament and into the next Parliament. I would like to see something done in this Parliament and I hope that the Minister will give us good news on that.

My final point is that it is never popular to stand up for people who have been grievously discriminated against. I am really pleased with the way in which a number of Members have raised the matter today. Discrimination is wrong in any circumstances and against anybody, and people should be treated with dignity and respect. Our purpose today is to get into British law that clear declaration; at the same time, that will give us the moral authority to talk to others about it. I hope that the Minister will agree to introduce regulations quickly. Above all, I hope she will agree to attend a meeting with the members of the all-party group, which I am sure others could also attend, so that we can have a longer discussion about the matter. The time has come to act and not delay.
5 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities (Mrs Helen Grant): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Dr McCrea. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr Holloway) for securing the debate, and I thank other hon. Members who made important contributions.

The Government have always said that there is no place for unlawful discrimination or prejudice in society. That applies to caste-related issues as much as it does to race, religion or belief. My hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) drew attention to instances of caste hostility and prejudice in our society, and I would like to make it clear how much the Government sympathise with people in such situations. The experience of such antagonism and exclusion from one’s own community must be incredibly distressing. My hon. Friend and others have urged the Government to press on with introducing legislation to make caste discrimination unlawful, and that is exactly what we are trying to do.

Many hon. Members will recall caste being debated during deliberations on the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill last year. It was the will of Parliament that a duty be imposed to make caste an aspect of race for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010, and we are well aware of that duty. However, we are also aware that during parliamentary debate on this matter, speakers from all the main parties acknowledged that caste was a particularly sensitive and complex area. Some have suggested that caste legislation should be easy to introduce, but that is simply not the case. There are a number of complexities, and there is no general consensus on caste in the UK, even among communities that are most affected by it. Some have campaigned long and hard for the introduction of specific caste-related legislation, but others—who are equally well informed—do not believe that caste discrimination exists and consider that legislation is, therefore, unnecessary. That does not negate the duty on the Government and the votes in Parliament last year, but it means that we need to prepare a consultation document which, as far as possible, commands the confidence of the relevant groups.

In July 2013, we set out our timetable leading up to the introduction of caste legislation. The process was thorough and detailed, and it was designed to ensure that future legislation was fit and proper. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has been helpful in taking the initiative forward. To start the process, the EHRC commissioned some independent research into identifying a possible definition of caste. The research was also to consider which of the current exceptions for race would apply equally to caste, and to identify whether any new caste-specific exceptions should be included in legislation. The research was intended to inform the contents of the Government consultation that was due to be issued in spring 2014. However, although the EHRC duly published its initial research reports in February 2014, two issues arose earlier this year that have had significant implications for the public consultation.

The first was the unanimous agreement that whatever we did, we did not want to entrench people’s identification with a specific caste within society. That is why a review clause was included in the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 to allow for future consideration of any caste provisions to make sure that they remain appropriate and necessary. That clause cannot be exercised until at least five years after the Act comes into force, which it did in May 2013. The EHRC had originally intended to commission a second research phase that would establish much-needed baseline data that could be used as a starting point for consideration of whether caste legislation was doing its job and stopping unlawful discrimination. Unfortunately, on further consideration the EHRC felt that that research would not be possible and that it might be intrusive and ruin good relations in communities. We have discussed those problems with the EHRC and we are now deciding how best to establish baseline data. We are conducting a feasibility study on the matter.

Richard Fuller: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Grant: I am sorry, but I have no time and I have got a lot to talk about, so I will push on.

The second issue concerned a recent employment tribunal case, Tirkey v Chandok, in which the tribunal found that caste already had legislative protection because it is inherently an aspect of the ethnic origins provision of race in the Equality Act. I want to make it clear that the finding of a single employment tribunal does not set any legally binding precedents for other tribunals. However, the decision opens up concerns that have been debated in Parliament about the extent to which the Government must recognise links between domestic equality law and our international obligations, the relationships between those obligations and future provisions covering caste discrimination, and how such provisions might be framed.

We believe that we need to address those two developments—the Tirkey case and the lack of baseline data—as thoroughly as possible for the purpose of the public consultation. We need to assess the feasibility of any further research into caste discrimination, given the limited success that previous researchers have had in producing clear, generally accepted evidence. We also need to assess the consequences if higher courts were to take the view that caste discrimination is already unlawful under the Equality Act, which might call into question the use of further, specific provision. That is why we have announced that the consultation will have to be put back until the autumn.

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My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham has asked me to deal with three questions, which I will go into in a little detail although not in the order that he mentioned them. He asked whether the Government would involve the relevant groups and communities in the preparation of the public consultation document. Many groups have recently had the opportunity to take part in the research commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which was published in the “Caste in Britain” reports. The Government have studied those carefully. I also look forward to the groups responding to the consultation and commenting on our proposals.

Richard Fuller: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Grant: No, I will not; I have got very little time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham asked me to confirm when I expected the consultation document to be published, and whether I expected any further delays. We anticipate that the consultation will happen later in the autumn. I am as anxious as he is to get on with it, and I do not expect any further delays.
Mrs Grant

The final question my hon. Friend asked was about why the timetable goes beyond the general election in May 2015. We set the timetable purely and simply because we felt that that was a sensible amount of time in which to do the job properly. It is a complicated and sensitive matter and we have to be careful. At the end of the day, we want to get it right. The process includes two full public consultations followed by debates on an affirmative order; it will take some time to do that exercise correctly.

I accept that the delay will disappoint certain Members, and others, but our duty to the public is to ensure that any legislation that the Government introduce meets the mandate given to us by Parliament. In this case, we need to ensure that legislation would provide thorough and proper protection for all those who need it and that the ongoing need for and merits of that legislation can be thoroughly and properly evaluated. To do that properly may take a while, but it is essential to get the detail of such important matters right. I hope that hon. Members present, and others, will have the patience to wait until we are able to consult fully later on this year.

Richard Fuller: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Grant: Yes, I will now, and with pleasure.

Richard Fuller: I am very grateful. If I may, I would like to ask my hon. Friend the Minister a direct question. She has talked through many reasons for delay; if the issue was discrimination based on gender or race, would she personally be as comfortable about the arguments for delay that she has presented today for those suffering discrimination based on caste?

Mrs Grant: All I can say is that I believe that any form of discrimination is absolutely unacceptable and I will seek to deal with it as quickly and effectively as possible. That relates to caste, colour, race or any form of discrimination, because it is abhorrent and I know how much hurt and damage it can cause.

Question put and agreed to.

5.11 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Written Statements  
Wednesday 9 July 2014  

TREASURY  
Chair of the National Audit Office (Appointment)  

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Andrea Leadsom): I am today pleased to announce, on behalf of the Prime Minister, that, following a selection process, the Lord Bichard KCB is the successful nominee for appointment as the next Chair of the National Audit Office, to succeed Professor Sir Andrew Likierman at the end of his term, from 1 January 2015.

In accordance with the Budget Responsibility and National Audit Act 2011, Her Majesty the Queen by Letters Patent appoints the Chair of the National Audit Office. Her Majesty’s power is exercisable on an address of the House of Commons. The Prime Minister will, with the agreement of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts, on a date to be arranged, move a motion of this House that an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that Her Majesty will appoint the Lord Bichard KCB to the Office of Chair of the National Audit Office.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS  
Eighth Statement of New Regulation  

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): The Government are today publishing the eighth statement of new regulation. This statement reports on regulations within the scope of the “one-in, two-out rule” which are expected to come into force between 1 July and 31 December 2014. The eighth statement shows that the sum total of Government deregulation from January 2011 to June 2014 is reducing the net annual cost to business by around £1.5 billion.

The statement also reports on over 150 red tape challenge measures expected to come into force. These include the scrapping of around 50 pieces of redundant legislation, the introduction of over 100 regulatory reforms and EU measures which are implemented by UK regulations.

In parallel, Departments are each publishing a summary of the regulations they intend to introduce.

I am placing copies of the statement in the Libraries of both Houses.

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 14 July in Brussels. The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), will represent the UK.

There are both agriculture and fisheries items on this month’s agenda.

The Italian presidency will outline its work programme for the next six months.

On agriculture, there will be a policy debate on organic farming and further discussion of Council conclusions on the future of the dairy sector, which may be adopted.

On fisheries, there will be a presentation by the Commission on a consultation on fishing opportunities for 2015 followed by an exchange of views.

There are currently two any other business items:

Fisheries protocols with Morocco and Mauritania
Food control and food fraud.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE  
Historical Role of UK Companies in Supplying Dual Use Chemicals to Syria  

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague): Following Syria’s accession to the chemical weapons convention (CWC) last year, and as part of the process to eliminate its chemical weapons (CW) programme, Syria provided a confidential declaration to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which lists a number of states from which it obtained supplies of goods used in its CW programme.

The information in Syria’s declaration is classified under the terms of the CWC. However, I wish to inform the House that a review of our own files suggests that there were a number of exports of chemicals to Syria by UK companies between 1983 and 1986 which were likely to have been diverted for use in the Syrian programme.

These exports were:

- several hundred tonnes of the chemical dimethyl phosphite (DMP) in 1983 and a further export of several hundred tonnes in 1985;
- several hundred tonnes of trimethyl phosphate (TMP) in 1986;
- a smaller quantity of hydrogen fluoride (HF) in 1986 through a third country.

All these chemicals have legitimate uses, for example in the manufacture of plastics and pharmaceuticals. However, they can also be used in the production of sarin. DMP and TMP can also be used for the production of the nerve agent VX. That is why the export of such goods is strictly prohibited under the UK export regime introduced since the 1980s and progressively strengthened.

From the information we hold, we judge it likely that these chemical exports by UK companies were subsequently used by Syria in their programmes to produce nerve agents, including sarin.

Some of the companies involved no longer exist. Furthermore, some of the chemicals in question may have been sourced by a UK chemical trader, rather than produced in the UK.

The review of our records also confirmed an export of ventilation fans by a UK company to Syria in 2003. The fans were not controlled goods. Following an enquiry by the exporter, officials considered the export under licensing procedures, and insufficient grounds for refusal were found. Syria appears to have diverted these fans for use in a chemical weapons facility.

In the early 1980s, the exported chemicals were not subject to any international or UK export controls.

However, knowledge of these exports, and growing concerns that Iraq under Saddam Hussein was developing a chemical weapons capability, helped prompt the introduction of tighter controls, both in the UK and internationally.
The export of goods (control) order was amended to control DMP in July 1985, and TMP and HF in June 1986. There has been a complete overhaul of export control legislation, policy and practice since the 1980s, designed to ensure that such exports could not happen today. The UK operates a robust export control regime, and takes international obligations on this issue very seriously.

Key instruments and legislation include:

- The chemical weapons convention. The Chemical Weapons Act 1996 implements the provisions of the convention which imposes specific controls on the transfer of certain chemicals including DMP and TMP.
- The development of the Australia Group, of which the UK was an original member in 1985. As a matter of routine, all changes to the Australia Group control lists are reflected in UK national export controls. It controls trade in HF as well as DMP and TMP.
- The Export Control Act 2002. Replacing legislation passed in 1939, the current legislation provides for controls on the export and brokering of listed goods and technologies, in addition to controls on unlisted items where it is believed they may be intended for use in weapons of mass destruction programmes.

Furthermore, the EU has developed EU-wide controls on the export of dual-use goods, including chemicals. Our ability to control exports is underpinned by the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, adopted by the UK in 2000 and updated in March 2014. The criteria set a clear basis for the assessment of export licences. This is undertaken on a case-by-case basis taking account of all available information.

Today, the UK is playing its full part in the international effort to eliminate Syria’s programme. As the House is already aware, the UK is accepting 150 tonnes of B precursors from the Syrian chemical stockpile for destruction. I can today also inform the House that in addition to those chemicals, a further 50 tonnes of the industrial chemicals hydrogen chloride and hydrogen fluoride will also be destroyed in specialised commercial facilities in the UK. We expect the ship transporting all these chemicals to arrive in the UK next week. The Members of Parliament in whose constituencies destruction will take place have been informed.

Overseas Territories: Economic and Environmental Development

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mark Simmonds): I would like to inform the House of three important developments that will benefit the British overseas territories and British overseas territories citizens. This Government set out, in our 2012 White Paper, a vision for the overseas territories to be vibrant and flourishing communities. We established a joint ministerial council, bringing together UK Ministers and territory leaders and representatives, to drive forward implementation of our strategy.

I am delighted that from 9 June 2014 the European Union has agreed visa-free travel to the Schengen area for British nationals who are not citizens of the United Kingdom (this includes British overseas territory citizens, British subjects, British overseas citizens, and British protected persons). This decision will enable nearly 300,000 British nationals from the territories to travel freely on British overseas territories citizen passports in 30 countries in Europe. British overseas territories citizens can already visit the UK without visas. Most British overseas territories citizens are also British citizens. The EU’s decision reflects the successful conclusion of three years of negotiations involving the UK Government, territory Governments and the European Commission.

I am also pleased to inform you that United Kingdom Trade and Investment (UKTI) has made arrangements to provide their overseas market introduction service (OMIS) to companies located in the overseas territories from June 2014. This service is chargeable and assists companies to access the right international contacts or partners, find the best way to do business in a market and help to penetrate new markets. UKTI experts can also advise on local conditions including competitors, regulations and accessing and influencing decision makers.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that the third round of the Overseas Territories Environment and Climate Fund, known as Darwin Plus, was launched on 22 May. This initiative currently supports 29 projects in the territories to a value of approximately £4 million. In all of this, the UK Government remain committed to the development of strong and sustainable local economies, with flourishing communities, and setting world standards in our stewardship of the extraordinary natural environments in the overseas territories.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Child Sexual Abuse Inquiry

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): In my statement to the House on 7 July I announced that I was establishing an independent inquiry panel of experts in the law and child protection to consider whether public bodies—and other, non-state, institutions—have taken seriously their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse. I undertook to report back when the inquiry panel chairman and terms of reference for the review have been agreed. I wish to inform the House that I have now appointed the right hon. Baroness Butler-Sloss GBE to chair the independent inquiry panel. Baroness Butler-Sloss brings with her many years of experience in the field of child protection and law, and I am confident that she will deliver the thorough, robust and independent review that I have promised.

To ensure that the terms of reference for the inquiry are sufficient to deliver the robust review which is required I have asked that Lady Butler-Sloss agree the final terms of reference with the full panel, when appointed. The inquiry will begin its work as soon as possible after the appointment of other members of the panel and I shall provide a further update in due course.

JUSTICE

Presumption of Death Act 2013

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): My noble Friend the Minister of State for Civil Justice and Legal Policy, Lord Faulks, has today made the following written ministerial statement:

I am pleased to announce that I have made a commencement order, “The Presumption of Death Act 2013 (Commencement and Transitional and Saving Provision) Order 2014”, bringing the remaining provisions of the Presumption of Death Act 2013 into force on 1 October 2014.
Mr Willetts: The Intellectual Property Office worked with the British Library Business and IP Centre (BIPC) to develop a national blueprint that other libraries can use to develop a business and IP service in key UK cities. A programme to initially embed the blueprint into Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool and Sheffield was launched in July 2013. It is too early to provide impact data for the whole network, but data for the BIPC London and BIPC Newcastle, based on user feedback, shows that:

- Almost 50% of users increased their awareness of the importance of intellectual property
- Over 40% were helped to develop their ideas
- Over 40% were able to understand their customers and markets better
- Almost a third acquired new skills through workshops
- Close to a quarter were helped to write their business plan
- Over 20% were helped to protect and exploit their novel ideas/designs

In total, the two centres helped to create approximately 2,800 businesses and have further created approximately 3,500 additional jobs in new and existing businesses.

Dr Offord: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment his Department has made of the contribution to the economy of the British Library’s Business & IP Centre national network.

Mr Willetts: The Intellectual Property Office worked with the British Library Business and IP Centre (BIPC) to develop a national blueprint that other libraries can use to develop a business and IP service in key UK cities. A programme to initially embed the blueprint into Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool and Sheffield was launched in July 2013. It is too early to provide impact data for the whole network, but data for the BIPC London and BIPC Newcastle shows that since they opened these two centres have helped to create approximately 2800 businesses and 3500 jobs in new and existing businesses.
Business: Cybercrime

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what support and protection the Government provides to UK businesses experiencing cyber attacks.

Mr Willetts: The UK Cyber Security Strategy, published in November 2011, sets out how the UK will support economic prosperity, protect national security and safeguard the public’s way of life by building a more trusted and resilient digital environment. A £860 million National Cyber Security programme is in place to 2016 to deliver the objectives of the strategy. These objectives include making the UK one of the most secure places in the world to do business in cyberspace, and making the UK more resilient to cyber attack and better able to protect our interests in cyberspace.

Government is working closely with industry to address the threat and impact of cyber attacks. These measures include:

- Creating a National Computer Emergency Response Team, CERT UK which works closely with industry, Government and academia to enhance UK cyber resilience. It provides support to Critical National Infrastructure companies to handle cyber security incidents. The Cyber Security Information Sharing Partnership (CISP), part of CERT UK, enables companies to share information and intelligence on cyber security threats.
- The creation of a Government approved list of Cyber Incident ‘Clean Up’ companies which can help companies respond effectively to incidents and get them up and running as soon as possible.
- Advice and guidance resources including the ‘10 Steps to Cyber Security’ guidance, the CyberStreetwise behaviour change campaign: www.cyberstreetwise.com
- The Government-backed and industry approved Cyber Essentials scheme, which enables businesses to certify themselves against core technical cyber requirements and implement a basic level of cyber hygiene against cyber threats.
- Practical support for small businesses with the Cyber Security Innovation Vouchers Scheme to enable individual businesses to receive £5,000 to increase their cyber security.
- Support for industry initiatives such as Nominet’s ‘Cyber Assist’ pilot service for small and medium-sized enterprises experiencing cyber attacks.

Civil Servants: Codes of Practice

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many (a) internal and (b) external complaints have been received by his Department about alleged breaches of the Civil Service Code of Conduct since 2010; and what steps his Department has taken in response to each such complaint.

Jo Swinson: There have been no internal or external complaints about alleged breaches of the Civil Service Code of Conduct received by the Departmental Complaints Officer since 2010.

Foreign Investment in UK

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he is taking to encourage foreign direct investment from member states of the Commonwealth.

Michael Fallon: UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) has operations in 39 Commonwealth countries.

During the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, UKTI, the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise and the Commonwealth Business Council are delivering a business conference for 200 Commonwealth business leaders.

The UK Government is also organising a British Business House during the Games, which will highlight to Commonwealth businesses the benefits of investing in the UK.

Regular ministerial visits and trade missions to Commonwealth countries are used to promote the UK’s competitive business environment and opportunities in the UK for foreign direct investment.

Higher Education: Libraries

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the value of publishing the average total debt of individuals subject to individual voluntary arrangements.

Mr Willetts: Higher education institutions are independent, autonomous bodies. As such, they are responsible for their own procurement policies and the transparency of their processes. Universities are able to draw upon the Higher Education Procurement Academy, a sector-led initiative to improve expertise and capacity in UK university procurement.

Individual Voluntary Arrangements

Stella Creasy: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he is taking to improve the protection of intellectual property in the UK; and if he will make a statement.

Jo Swinson: Individual voluntary arrangements (IVAs) are supervised by licensed insolvency practitioners, who are required to notify the Insolvency Service of the registration of new IVAs, the name, date of birth and address of the individual, and the date of completion or termination of the IVA. They are not required to provide information on the amount of debt, so it is not possible to publish such information.

Intellectual Property

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he is taking to protect all Intellectual Property rights and has taken a number of steps recently to help rights holders protect and enforce their intellectual property. These include funding a dedicated police IP Crime Unit within the City of London police; making the intentional copying of registered designs a criminal offence; and introducing reforms to the Intellectual Property Enterprise Court, including the introduction of a ‘small claims track’ to help businesses gain access to justice at proportional cost to what is at stake.
Intellectual Property: Brighton

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he has taken to encourage the development of intellectual property in (a) Brighton, Kemptown and (b) Brighton and Hove; and if he will make a statement. [203870]

Mr Willetts: The Intellectual Property Office (IPO) provides support and information on how to make the most of all forms of intellectual property (IP) to businesses on a national basis. In 2013 the IPO launched IP for Business, a set of online training tools and advice to help businesses understand IP and how it can be used within a business to generate revenue. The IPO also funds 300 IP audits, targeted through partners at high growth businesses across the UK. Over the last year the IPO has spoken to 18000 people through seminars, workshops and events; since October 2013, 276 businesses have benefited from face-to-face information and support from the IPO at seven events in the Brighton area—including Brighton, Lewes, Crawley and Bognor Regis. In addition, the IPO has a national consumer’s campaign focusing on awareness raising and encouraging respect of IP.

Manufacturing Industries

Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of manufacturing activity in (a) Coventry, (b) the West Midlands and (c) England in each of the last four years; and what assessment he has made of future capacity in that sector. [203598]

Mr Ainsworth: The following table lists the contribution of manufacturing to employment and gross value added (GVA) for the West Midlands and England and to employment for Coventry. Estimates of GVA are not collected in sufficient detail to report on manufacturing in Coventry. GVA figures for 2012 by region are not yet available. Data on future capacity are not available from official sources, but the Foresight report into the future of manufacturing, published in October 2013, concluded that manufacturing is set to enter a dynamic new phase, driven by rapid changes in technology, new ways of doing business, global competition and potential volatility around the price and availability of resources. It makes recommendations for government and industry to ensure that the UK manufacturing sector is able to compete and thrive in this new world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross values added</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coventry (£ million)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W Midlands (£ million)</td>
<td>11,769</td>
<td>12,869</td>
<td>13,520</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England (£ million)</td>
<td>94,204</td>
<td>98,938</td>
<td>100,603</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coventry (Thousand)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W Midlands (Thousand)</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Regional National Accounts and Business Registers Employment Survey (both ONS)

New Businesses: Technology

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he is taking to encourage technology-based start-ups to develop in towns and cities outside London. [203868]

Mr Willetts: The Information Economy Strategy published in June 2013 sets out the Government’s plans to help digital technology-based businesses start up and thrive throughout the UK.

This Department is supporting Tech City UK’s work with the UK Tech Cluster Alliance network. A key role of the Alliance which currently contains 13 clusters located throughout the UK, is to promote and facilitate connections and identify common barriers to growth.

CABINET OFFICE

Administration of Justice

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will discuss with (a) the Secretary of State for Justice and (b) the Secretary of State for the Home Department the implications for his policies on delivery of public services by private companies of the findings of the Howard League for Penal Reform report, Corporate Crime? A dossier on the failure of privatisation in the criminal justice system, published in May 2014; and if he will make a statement. [204052]

Mr Maude: As was the case under previous Administrations details of internal discussions are not normally disclosed.

Civil Servants: Recruitment

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how many civil servants employed through the analytical graduate fast track schemes between June 2004 and June 2014 were educated at (a) private and (b) state schools; [203805]

(2) how many civil servants employed through the Human Resources graduate fast track scheme between 1 June 2004 and 1 June 2014 were educated at (a) private and (b) state schools; [203800]

(3) how many civil servants employed through the Technology in Business graduate fast track scheme between 1 June 2004 and 1 June 2014 were educated at (a) private and (b) state schools; [203801]

(4) how many civil servants employed through the generalist graduate fast track schemes between 1 June 2004 and 1 June 2014 were educated at (a) private and (b) state schools; [203802]
(5) how many civil servants employed through the European graduate fast track scheme between 1 June 2004 and 1 June 2014 were educated at (a) private and (b) state schools.

Mr Maude: This data was not requested under previous governments, nor indeed prior to 2013. Details of Fast Stream employees will be published in due course.

Cybercrime

Yvonne Fovargue: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office with reference to the answer of 30 April 2014, Official Report, column 811, on cybercrime, whether the £860 million includes the £650 million in his Department’s report The UK Cyber Security Strategy: Protecting and Promoting the UK in a Digital Age published in November 2011; and how much funding from the National Cyber Security Strategy has been allocated to the Ministry of Defence.

Mr Maude: The figure given includes the £650 million funding the National Cyber Security programme established in response to the UK Cyber Security Strategy.

The initial £650 million was allocated in the 2010 spending review and a further £210 million was allocated until 2016 by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), following the 2013 Spending Review. MOD were allocated £59.5 million of funding until April 2014.

Government Departments: Procurement

Stephen Timms: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what guidance he gives to Departments on the publication of business cases for major projects.

Mr Maude: Relevant information is publically available at:


Government Digital Service

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion of GDS technical employees are female.

Mr Hurd: All staff employed by the Government Digital Service (GDS) have a mixture of both technical and digital skills. Around 66% of GDS staff are male. The Government is committed to increasing the number of girls and young women studying STEM subjects at schools and university, and wants to ensure that we attract more of the very best people into jobs in technical and digital fields.

The civil service recruits and retains staff on merit.

Security: Northern Ireland

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what guidance his Department provides to officials in the Northern Ireland Executive on personal security.

Mr Maude: Cabinet Office provides security guidance to all departments. As was the case under successive administrations, we do not comment on the specifics of that advice.

Training

John Woodcock: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what professional development courses are made available to staff of his Department; and what the cost to the public purse is of each such course.

Mr Maude: Cabinet Office accesses professional development through Civil Service Learning.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Private Rented Housing: Smoke Alarms

Mr Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many and what proportion of the respondents to his Department’s Review of Property conditions in the Private Rented Sector issued in February 2014 supported the mandatory installation of smoke alarms in privately rented housing.

[R]

Kris Hopkins: DCLG published a discussion document earlier this year, which invited views on what more could be done to improve property conditions in the private rented sector. Responses are now being considered and we will publish our response along with a summary of the views submitted later this summer.

Religious Freedom

Mr Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what contact his officials have had with the European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief in the last 12 months.

Mr Maude: The Government is taking steps to ensure that the religious freedom of all citizens is protected. My right hon. and noble Friend has also convened meetings of international leaders to generate practical steps to promote freedom of religion and belief, and to fight religious intolerance within our societies. In the UK she chairs a Sub Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief, made up of human rights advocates, academics and civil society leaders, ensuring that government takes a well informed and inclusive approach to promoting and protecting this human right.
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Apprentices

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many apprentices have been employed by contractors and sub-contractors to his Department in each year since 2010-11; and what proportion they make up of the workforce of those contractors and sub-contractors. [203859]

Mrs Grant: DCMS does not hold such information for contractors and sub-contractors.

European Union: Cultural Heritage

Mr Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funding the UK has contributed to the European Parliament’s House of European History Project to date. [203567]

Mr Vaizey: The UK Government has not provided any direct support for this project but the House of European History Project is funded by the wider European Parliament budget.

Mass Media: EU Grants and Loans

Mr Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which media organisations in the UK have received funding from the European Parliament to promote coverage of EU-level decision-making in the last three years. [203566]

Mr Vaizey: Information published by the European Parliament indicates that no UK media organisations received funding in 2011, 2012 or 2013.

Members: Correspondence

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans his Department has to increase the number of replies sent electronically to letters from hon. Members. [203524]

Mrs Grant: The Department routinely sends e-mail replies to correspondence from hon. Members unless we are specifically requested to reply by post.

Mobile Phones: Hertfordshire

Bill Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport with reference to the decision not to proceed with a mast at Fownhope, if he will include the lack of mobile network coverage in that area in any future discussion he has with network operators. [203627]

Mr Vaizey: Mobile coverage in the UK as a whole is amongst the best in Europe but we aspire to better. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), has been discussing with Ofcom and the mobile network operators what more can be done improve coverage. No firm decisions have been taken yet on the most effective methods of extending coverage.

Tourist Attractions

Andrew Bridgen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assistance his Department gives to community groups who wish to take over the running of museums and tourist attractions. [203559]

Mr Vaizey: DCMS does not give direct assistance to community groups who wish to take over the running of museums and tourist attractions. However advice may be sought through bodies including Arts Council England and the Association of Independent Museums, alongside local Destination Organisations. My Department will liaise with the Department for Communities and Local Government, Cabinet Office and the Big Lottery Fund to see where further community support might be appropriate.

DEFENCE

Clyde Naval Base

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for International Security Strategy approved the proposals to limit contractor liability at HMNB Clyde to £100,000 despite the objection by the hon. Member for Newport West. [203416]

Dr Murrison: Having considered the objection raised I decided to proceed with the Treasury Minute on Contingent Liability as this work is an essential enabler in allowing the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to deliver its projects and estate maintenance requirements on estates where nuclear assets are sited.

It is the MOD’s intent to limit the contractor’s liability at Her Majesty’s Naval Base Clyde to £100,000. Since no commercial contractor could reasonably be expected to assume total liabilities or to be able to insure against them, such a liability can only be borne by the state.

Defence: Procurement

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with reference to the £72.3 billion allocated in the Defence and Equipment Plan 2013 supporting existing in-service equipment, how much of that allocation is devoted to (a) nuclear propulsion and (b) nuclear weapons. [202640]

Mr Dunne: Of the £72.3 billion referred to in the 2013 Equipment Plan we plan to allocate to the support of in-service equipment over the next decade, £1.6 billion is for nuclear propulsion and £13.0 billion for maintaining the Trident Strategic Weapons System, including costs associated with the nuclear warhead.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

A14: Kettering

Mr Hollobone: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to encourage the funding for and implementation of the strategic economic plans
submitted by the Northamptonshire LEP and the South East Midlands LEP (a) generally and (b) in regard to junction 10A on the A14 near Kettering.

Greg Clark: I am pleased to say that Northamptonshire LEP has secured £67.3 million and the South East Midlands LEP £79.3 million from the local growth fund. As part of these deals we have agreed that the Department for Transport will work with local partners to develop the detailed business case and design work for the proposed junction 10a on the A14 at Kettering. This will help ensure local partners can put forward a strong business case for funding.

The support secured through the Growth Deals is in addition to the £15 million which the Communities Secretary announced last week to enable the delivery of 1750 new homes in East Kettering.

Elections: Fraud

Simon Hart: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what checks are in place to ensure that multiple property owners do not vote twice in European or general elections on the same date as local or council elections; how many people have been charged with attempting to vote twice in the last three such elections; and how many fines have been issued as a result of those charges.

Greg Clark: It is illegal for an individual who is registered in more than one local authority area to vote more than once at a European parliamentary or general election; however electors are not prevented from voting in local government elections in those areas.

The presiding officer at a polling station may ask any elector if they have already voted at an election, and may withhold a ballot paper from an elector if they do not answer the question satisfactorily. The electoral register is marked to record the issuing of ballot papers to individuals at polling stations, and similarly a list is maintained of returned postal votes. These records can be derived.

The Government does not collect or hold data on electoral fraud.

EDUCATION

Special Educational Needs

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the answer of 23 June 2014, Official Report, column 297W, which provided the gross average salary of full-time regular qualified teachers in service in local authority maintained schools in cash terms and real terms for York local authority, in each March, 1997 to 2009 and November 2010 to November 2011.

The gross average salary of full-time regular qualified teachers in service in publicly funded schools in cash terms and real terms for York local authority, in November 2012 is £36,300 in both cash and real terms (rounded to the nearest £100). 2013 figures will be available in late July 2014. Publicly-funded schools include both local authority maintained schools and academies. The source of this information is the November 2012 School Workforce Census.

Real terms figures were calculated from HMT GDP deflators, financial year, published on 1 April 2014 at the following web link:


Unemployment: Young People

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of young people not in employment, education or training in each of the last five years were women.

Matthew Hancock: National statistics on the proportion and number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in England are published online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/participation-in-education-training-and-employment-age-16-to-18

This includes tables showing the numbers of young people NEET by gender from which the gender balance can be derived.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Electoral Register

Chris Ruane: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission, how many and what proportion of people were deleted from the electoral register after the second year of non-response to electoral canvass in the 10 local authorities with the (a) greatest and (b) smallest decreases; and what parliamentary constituencies are covered by such local authorities.

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that the requested data are presented in the following table. These data are for Great Britain and therefore excludes Northern Ireland.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local authority</th>
<th>Number of deletions (from November 2013 register) following second year of non-response</th>
<th>Deletions (from November 2013 register) following second year of non-response (percentage of register)</th>
<th>Decrease (December 2012 to February/March 2014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leeds</td>
<td>28,190</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>-24,177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>-20,243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornwall</td>
<td>16,541</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>-13,273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newham</td>
<td>2,491</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-13,183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northampton</td>
<td>2,659</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>-11,851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shropshire</td>
<td>3,360</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>-11,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnet</td>
<td>2,422</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-11,255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maidstone</td>
<td>10,498</td>
<td>8.7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durham</td>
<td>1,191</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>-6,683</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taunton Deane</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Staffordshire Moorlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>North West Leicestershire</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Newcastle-Under-Lyme</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Tunbridge Wells</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>-22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following constituencies are covered by these areas:

- East Ham
- West Ham
- Elmet and Rothwell
- Leeds Central
- Leeds East
- Leeds North East
- Leeds North West
- Leeds West
- Morley and Outwood
- Pudsey
- Birmingham Edgbaston
- Birmingham, Erdington
- Birmingham, Hall Green
- Birmingham, Hodge Hill
- Birmingham, Ladywood
- Birmingham Northfield
- Birmingham, Perry Barr
- Birmingham Selly Oak
- Birmingham, Yardley
- Sutton Coldfield
- Camborne and Redruth
- North Cornwall
- South East Cornwall
- St Ives (includes the Isles of Scilly)
- Truro and Falmouth
- Northampton North
- Northampton South
- South Northamptonshire
- Ludlow
- North Shropshire
- Shrewsbury and Atcham
- The Wrekin
- Chipping Barnet
- Finchley and Golders Green
- Hendon
- Faversham and Mid Kent
- Maidstone and The Weald
- Taunton Deane
- Bishop Auckland
- City of Durham
- Easington
- North Durham
- North West Durham
- Sedgfield
- East Worthing and Shoreham
- Staffordshire Moorlands
- Stone
- North West Leicestershire
- Brighton, Kemptown
- Lewes
- The Cotswolds
- Harborough
- Newcastle-under-Lyme
- Staffordshire Moorlands
- Stoke-on-Trent North
- Stone
- Orkney and Shetland
- Surrey Heath
- Maidstone and The Weald
- Tunbridge Wells

Chris Ruane: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission, which local authorities have failed standard 3 door-to-door canvassing more than once and (a) have and (b) have not applied for additional central Government funding for electoral registration.
Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that the electoral registration officers (EROs) for the authorities set out in the following list have not met standard 3 in more than one year:

- Brentwood
- Broxbourne
- Castle Point
- East Devon
- East Dorset
- East Hampshire
- East Hertfordshire
- Epping Forest
- Great Yarmouth
- Gwynedd
- Hyndburn
- Lancaster
- Maldon
- Merthyr Tydfil
- Mid Devon
- Mid Sussex
- North Devon
- North Dorset
- North Lanarkshire
- North Warwickshire
- Powys
- Rhondda, Cynon, Taff
- Sedgemoor
- Solihull
- South Lanarkshire
- Taunton Deane
- The Vale of Glamorgan
- Torridge
- Uttlesford
- Warwick
- West Devon
- West Oxfordshire
- West Somerset.

The Electoral Commission informs me that it does not hold information on applications made for central Government funding for electoral registration. The Cabinet Office is responsible for managing this process.

Chris Ruane: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission, what the postal vote matching rates were during the data matching dry run in each (a) local authority area and (b) constituency in the UK.

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that the data for local authorities is available on its website here:


The Commission does not hold the data in a way that is broken down by constituency.

Chris Ruane: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission if the Electoral Commission will conduct research into the use of data matching of local and national databases to better identify people who are entitled to register to vote but who are not registered.

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that the Cabinet Office has previously conducted several pilots on this topic and the Commission has evaluated them. The full evaluation reports are available on the Commission’s website here:

http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/electoral-registration-research

The Cabinet Office plans a further pilot for early 2015 and the Commission intends to evaluate this as well.

Chris Ruane: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission, what number and percentage of electors were added to the electoral register as a result of the implementation of standard three door to door canvassing in each constituent part and region of the UK in each of the last 10 years.

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that they do not hold the data requested. The data collected annually from EROs is household-level data rather than elector level data, reflecting the household nature of the annual canvass.

The data collected includes the number of household canvass returns made via different response methods— including personal canvasser, and this is available for each year from 2008 on their website.

Chris Ruane: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission if the Electoral Commission will make it their policy to gather information on registration levels on an annual basis.

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that they collect from every ERO, and publish, annual electoral registration statistics covering a range of topics including the number of electors on the registers, response rates to the annual canvass, numbers of additions and deletions on the registers and levels of carry forward.

This data collection will be more frequent during the transition to individual electoral registration (IER).

The Commission further informs me that they report periodically on the overall levels of accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers. Such studies are costly to conduct and it is not therefore feasible to conduct them annually. There are two such studies planned as part of the Commission’s approach to monitoring the implementation of IER.

Chris Ruane: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission what estimate the Electoral Commission makes of how many registered electors move house and (a) re-register and (b) fail to re-register to vote each year.

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that they collect from every ERO, and publish, annual electoral registration statistics covering a range of topics including the number of electors on the registers, response rates to the annual canvass, numbers of additions and deletions on the registers and levels of carry forward.

This data collection will be more frequent during the transition to individual electoral registration (IER).

The Commission further informs me that they report periodically on the overall levels of accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers. Such studies are costly to conduct and it is not therefore feasible to conduct them annually. There are two such studies planned as part of the Commission’s approach to monitoring the implementation of IER.
Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that it intends to provide information on this in its report which uses census data to assess the completeness and accuracy of the registers. This is due to be published in July.

Chris Ruane: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission, what estimate the Electoral Commission has made of the number of local authorities who conducted a dry run in data matching and did not repeat this to the Electoral Commission.

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that it has not made any estimate of the number of electoral registration officers (EROs) who did not undertake local data matching trials following the dry run of confirmation in 2013. 139 EROs reported results to the Commission but there are likely to have been other EROs who carried out some activities but did not report it to the Commission.

The Commission further informs me that it did ask EROs, on a separate survey, whether local data matching would be important during the live run of confirmation and 91% said that it would.

The Commission therefore expects more EROs to conduct local data matching for the live run of confirmation than reported on results following the dry run.

The Commission, working with Cabinet Office, will be collecting data from all EROs after the live run of the confirmation process which will demonstrate levels of usage of local data in practice. This data will be published on the Commission’s website.

Polling Stations: Schools

Oliver Colvile: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission, if the Electoral Commission will take steps to ensure that schools are only used as polling stations as a last resort, in order to minimise disruption to pupils’ education.

Mr Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that the Returning Officer (RO) at an election is responsible for deciding which polling stations will be used for the poll. The Electoral Commission issues guidance to ROs to support them in reaching decisions on the selection of venues for polling stations. Electoral legislation provides that ROs can require a room in publicly-funded schools for use as a polling station and can use these rooms free of charge.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Apprentices

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many apprentices have been employed by contractors and sub-contractors to his Department in each year since 2010-11; and what proportion such apprentices make up of the workforce of those contractors and sub-contractors.

Gregory Barker: The Department of Energy and Climate Change does not maintain records of apprentices employed by our contractors and sub-contractors.

Energy Companies Obligation

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many households (a) in fuel poverty, (b) not in fuel poverty and (c) in total have received measures under the energy company obligation to date; and what the average cost per household under the scheme was.

Gregory Barker: Estimating the number of fuel poor households helped through the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) would require us to know the equivalised household income and modelled energy bill of every household receiving support through the scheme.

However, we anticipate a large number of fuel poor households have been assisted under ECO. This is because there is a strong correlation between the characteristics of fuel poor households and the eligibility criteria for help under ECO Affordable Warmth and the Carbon Saving Communities Obligation. Further, the policy’s design provides incentives for support to be delivered to those facing the highest energy bills when such households are on low incomes, there is a high chance they will be fuel poor.

We publish regular data on the number of households support by ECO, under each part of the scheme, as well as the number and type of measures delivered. We also publish data on the costs of measures under ECO. All of this data is available at:


The Department will be publishing a final assessment of the impact of the ECO policy to accompany the forthcoming response to the Government’s consultation on “The Future of the Energy Company Obligation”.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change when his Department’s plans to publish its response to the consultation on the future of the energy company obligation.

Gregory Barker: The Department aims to publish the Government response to the consultation very shortly.

Energy: Prices

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to the answer of 11 February 2014, Official Report, column 595W, on energy: prices, at which meetings with (a) EDF; (b) E-on, (c) Npower and (d) Scottish Power he asked them to pass on the savings from changes to green levies to customers on fixed-price deals.

Michael Fallon: The Government has met with EdF Energy, EON, Npower and Scottish Power on several occasions at both ministerial and official level. A number of issues are discussed at such meetings including the impacts of the proposed changes to the Energy Company Obligation.
Fuel Poverty

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change when his Department will publish its fuel poverty strategy.


Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to the answer of 19 June 2014, Official Report, column 1252, on energy markets (competition), what estimate he has made of the level of fuel poverty under the low income high costs indicator in each year between 1997 and 2010.

Gregory Barker: The number of fuel poor households in England under the Low Income High Costs (LIHC) indicator of fuel poverty are available for the following years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Fuel poor households (million)</th>
<th>Percentage of households fuel poor</th>
<th>Year on year percentage change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>-6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>-3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>-4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (1) how many households are forecast to be lifted from fuel poverty under the energy company obligation in each year between 2013 and 2017; (2) how many households (a) in fuel poverty and (b) not in fuel poverty and (c) in total he expects to receive assistance under the energy company obligation in each year between 2013 and 2017.

Gregory Barker: The Department’s latest assessment of the impact of the energy company obligation (ECO) on fuel poverty is set out in “The Future of the Energy Company Obligation: Assessment of Impacts” published in March 2014. This is available at:


Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps his Department is taking to reduce levels of fuel poverty in (a) Coventry, (b) Coventry North East constituency and (c) England.

Gregory Barker: The latest research, with households that had an assessment between January and March 2014, found that the majority of households said they did not pay for their Green Deal assessment because the average cost of a Green Deal assessment.

Green Deal Scheme

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much funding has been (a) allocated and (b) spent on the Green Deal cashback incentive scheme to date.

Gregory Barker: Up to £125 million was allocated to the Green Deal Cashback scheme and the Green Deal Home Improvement Fund (GDHIF).

At the end of May 20141 over £10 million had been allocated to customers, of which £6.4 million had been paid in cashback payments following installation of 13,001 measures.

At the end of June 2014, the GDHIF had allocated £18 million.

1 DECC statistics on Green Deal and ECO are published monthly at:


Figures to the end of June will be published in the next monthly release on 22 July.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much funding has been (a) allocated and (b) spent on the Home Improvement Fund (GDHIF) to date.

Gregory Barker: The Department’s latest assessment of the impact of the energy company obligation (ECO) on fuel poverty is set out in “The Future of the Energy Company Obligation: Assessment of Impacts” published in March 2014. This is available at:


...
assessor company did not charge a fee. For those that paid for an assessment, the (mean) average cost was £157.

Housing: Energy

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what financial support his Department has planned to allocate to (a) the Green Deal and (b) other domestic energy efficiency programmes for expenditure in (i) 2014-15, (ii) 2015-16, (iii) 2016-17 and (iv) any subsequent years. [203369]

Gregory Barker: All domestic energy efficiency initiatives are included within the overall Green Deal programme.

As part of the Autumn Statement in December 2013, the Government announced that £540 million will be made available to support energy efficiency improvements over the next three years, of which £450 million will support domestic installation of energy efficiency measures. £150 million has been allocated in 2014-15.

All further budget allocations will be made during the forthcoming Spending Review and DECC business planning exercises.

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what financial support his Department allocated to (a) the Green Deal and (b) other domestic energy efficiency programmes in (i) 2011-12, (ii) 2012-13 and (iii) 2013-14. [203369]

Gregory Barker: All domestic energy efficiency initiatives are included within the overall Green Deal programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Allocated £ million</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>71.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>200.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Members: Correspondence

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change if he will estimate the total number of ministerial replies from his Department to hon. Members in a parliamentary session; and what proportion of ministerial replies from his Department to hon. Members in a parliamentary session; and what proportion of such replies are sent (a) by letter, (b) by email. [203303]

Gregory Barker: Based on the last parliamentary session, we estimate that 6,960 ministerial replies are sent out from the Department of Energy and Climate Change to hon. Members. The time taken to establish what proportion of such replies are sent by (a) letter, or (b) email, would involve filtering down more specifically, and this would involve significant manual sifting of individual correspondence items and thus entail a disproportionate cost. However, we estimate that 98% of replies are sent by letter, as we only reply to ministerial letters by e-mail on request from hon. Members, and we are rarely asked to do so.

Renewable Energy

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change with reference to the answer of 17 June 2013, Official Report, column 461W, on renewable energy, UIN 159722, if he will place in the Library a copy of the list of projects recorded on the renewable energy planning database since 1 January 2010 with the potential to generate 20MW or more cross-referenced with information provided by developers. [203340]

Gregory Barker: I am placing in the Libraries of the House a copy of the list of projects, as requested.

Renewables Obligation

Chris Heaton-Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what ex-ante assessment and evaluations his Department made of the effectiveness of the Renewables Obligation Certificates scheme during the period of its implementation. [202980]

Gregory Barker: The Renewables Obligation (RO) has been reviewed and updated several times since it was introduced in 2002. The scheme underwent a major reform in 2009 to bring forward more renewable generation through the introduction of banded support for different technologies and to increase the scheme’s effectiveness. The reforms were set out in the ‘Government Response to the Statutory Consultation on the Renewables Obligation Order 2009’ published by DECC in December 2008. A copy can be found on the National Archives web page: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090203212240/http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file49342.pdf

The RO has been very effective in supporting the deployment of new renewable generation. By the end of 2013, renewables represented 14.9% of all UK electricity generation, 82% of which was contributed by stations accredited under the RO.

DECC implemented revised RO support levels in April 2013 following a comprehensive review. The new support levels, which apply until the RO closes to new capacity at the end of March 2017, will ensure that the scheme continues to drive an increase in renewable electricity deployment while delivering value for money for consumers. The relevant documents are available on the gov.uk web site:


Wind Power: North Yorkshire

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many onshore wind turbines there were in North Yorkshire in each year since 2008-09. [202651]

Gregory Barker: The number of onshore wind turbines that have become fully operational in North Yorkshire in the years since the start of 2008 are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Date fully operational</th>
<th>Number of wind turbines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>22 April 2008</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4 October 2010</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1 January 2011</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Renewable Energy Planning Database, May 2014
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Apprentices

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many apprentices have been employed by contractors and sub-contractors to his Department in each year since 2010–11; and what proportion of the total workforce of such contractors is made up by apprentices. [204063]

Dan Rogerson: The information requested is not held by the Department.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment he has made of the role of outdoor-reared pigs in transmission of bovine TB; and if he will make a statement. [204078]

George Eustice: The veterinary risk assessment on pigs has recently been reviewed. We intend to publish this in a forthcoming consultation package on TB in non-bovine farmed and companion animals.

Senior Civil Servants

John Woodcock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many senior civil servants appointed to positions in his Department since 2010 were previously (a) political appointees within that Department and (b) employed by a political party. [204324]

Dan Rogerson: We do not collate this information centrally and to do so would incur disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

EU Immigration

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with reference to his Department’s announcement of 20 February 2014, on funding for the International Organization for Migration Greece Assistance for the Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Returnees project, from which budgets the Government’s contribution will be funded; how that funding will be spent; what assistance will be provided to the victims of human trafficking from EU countries being supported through that project; what reintegration assistance will be provided to the 75 returning migrants; and if he will make a statement. [204079]

Mr Lidington: Her Majesty’s Government Returns and Reintegration Fund is financing the project. The funding will be used to return to their countries of origin migrants who might otherwise travel on to the UK illegally and thereby impose significantly greater costs on UK taxpayers. The funding will include ticket costs for repatriated migrants and small resettlement grants. 75 of the most vulnerable migrants will have support such as training or in finding work as part of their reintegration. Victims of trafficking from EU countries are eligible to receive funding for transportation to their country of origin.

Recruitment

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many civil servants employed by his Department’s graduate fast track scheme between 1 June 2004 and 1 June 2014 were educated at (a) private and (b) state schools. [204051]

Hugh Robertson: This information is not held centrally. It could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

South Sudan

Sir Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to prevent violence against women in the conflict-affected states of South Sudan. [203766]

Mark Simmonds: The United Kingdom is working to prevent violence against women in South Sudan in a number of ways. First, the UK, with the US and Norway (the Troika), is an active member of the peace talks in Addis Ababa and is supporting regional efforts to address the crisis. Secondly, we are supporting the work of the African Union’s Commission of Inquiry that will investigate allegations of violence and abuse to ensure accountability. Third, the UK is one of the leading humanitarian donors contributing, around £94 million to date, that will help protect the most vulnerable, especially women and girls. And fourth, and crucially in this regard, South Sudan is a country for engagement for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s (FCO) Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. The Government signed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, and attended the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, and attended the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in London on 10-13 June. We will continue to engage the South Sudan Government on how to take this initiative forward.

USA

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the report of the Stimson Task Force on US drone policy, published on 28 June 2014; and if he will make a statement. [R] [204042]

Hugh Robertson: We have seen the report and are studying it. We expect all states to observe the requirements of international law in their use of remotely piloted air systems, as with other military platforms.

HEALTH

Arthritis

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make an assessment of how much arthritis has cost the UK economy in each year since 2010. [204051]

Norman Lamb: The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence clinical guidelines on osteoarthritis (CG177) and rheumatoid arthritis (CG79) both provide estimates of total costs of these conditions.
In the osteoarthritis guideline the costs are presented as follows:

“In 1999-2000, 36 million working days were lost due to osteoarthritis alone, at an estimated cost of £3.2 billion in lost production. At the same time, £43 million was spent on community services and £215 million were spent on social services due to osteoarthritis. In 2000, over 44,000 hip replacements and over 35,000 knee replacements were performed at a cost of £405 million.”

In the rheumatoid arthritis guideline the costs are presented as follows:

“Approximately one third of patients cease work because of the disease within two years of onset, and this prevalence increases thereafter. The total costs of RA in the UK, including indirect costs and work related disability, have been estimated at between £3.8 billion and £4.75 billion per year.”

**Autism**

*Mrs Gillan:* To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department plans to take to improve the diagnostic pathway for adults with autism in the autism statutory guidance. [203616]

*Norman Lamb:* A key action from Think Autism, the update to the 2010 Adult Autism Strategy for England, was that NHS England would help to drive up quality in autism diagnostic services. We intend that the forthcoming revised statutory guidance will continue to include the importance of having access to a diagnostic pathway and improving the quality of services for adults with autism.

**Children: Autism**

*Simon Kirby:* To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate how many autistic children there were in the most recent five year period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [203875]

*Norman Lamb:* The Department for Education collects data on children’s special educational needs. The following table shows those children in schools in the last five years whose primary need was autistic spectrum disorder. These figures will not include pre-school children with autism, children with autism who have a different primary special educational need, or those not in receipt of special educational support. The Special Needs and Autism Project which studied prevalence of disorders of the autism spectrum in children in South Thames reported in 2006 that prevalence of all autistic spectrum disorders was 116.1 per 10,000 (or 1.161%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>51,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>56,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>61,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>66,195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>70,780</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The new arrangements for joint commissioning for children and young people with special educational needs and disability, to be introduced from September, provide an effective framework for clinical commissioning groups and local authorities to work together on single, co-ordinated assessments to meet the needs of children with autism and other special educational needs, focusing on the outcomes which make a difference to the child and their families.

**Contraceptives**

*David Simpson:* To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when his Department last conducted a review of evidence concerning the long-term health effects of emergency hormonal contraception; what evidence that review took into account; and if he will commission another such review; [204000]

(2) if he will make an assessment of the effects of the use of emergency hormonal contraception on the rate of abortion in women aged under 25; and if he will make a statement. [204001]

*Jane Ellison:* The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency keeps the safety of all medicines, including emergency hormonal contraception, under continuous review.

**Diabetes**

*Keith Vaz:* To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change there has been in the level of funding for diabetes research since 1 January 2012. [203555]

*Dr Poulter:* Expenditure by the Department’s National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) on diabetes research is shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>£ million</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total spend in future years by the NIHR on diabetes research depends on the volume and quality of scientific activity. The usual practice of the NIHR is not to ring-fence funds for expenditure on particular topics: research proposals in all areas compete for the funding available. The NIHR welcomes funding applications for research into any aspect of human health, including diabetes. These applications are subject to peer review and judged in open competition, with awards being made on the basis of the importance of the topic to patients and the national health service, value for money and scientific quality.

*Keith Vaz:* To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many diabetics have missed routine health checks since 1 January 2014. [203575]

*Jane Ellison:* People diagnosed with diabetes should receive the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence key processes of care as part of their management provided in primary care. However, information is not collected centrally on the number of patients who do not attend these appointments.

**General Dental Council**

*Toby Perkins:* To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect of plans by the General Dental Council to increase the Annual...
Retention Fee by 64 per cent on the ability of the NHS to attract new dentists from all sectors of society.

[203883]

**Dr Poulter:** No assessment has been made of the effect on the ability of the national health service to attract new dentists as a result of the General Dental Council's (GDC) proposal to increase the annual retention fee.

The GDC is an independent body and it is therefore for the GDC to determine the level of the annual fee it charges for registration. The proposed fee increase is subject to public consultation where the GDC’s case will be scrutinised. The Department does not usually contribute to such consultations but all professional regulators, including the GDC, are aware of the Department’s position on registration fees. In February 2011, the Government published ‘Enabling Excellence’, which states that we would not expect registration fees to increase beyond their current levels, unless there is a clear and robust business case that any increase is essential to ensure the exercise of statutory duties.

**Health Professions: York**

**Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many (a) GPs, (b) nurses, (c) other clinical staff and (d) staff in total were employed in GP surgeries in the City of York in 1996-97 and in each year since.

[202895]

**Dr Poulter:** The data is not available in the format requested. Data for 2002-12 are provided for North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust and 2013 data for the Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group, where the City of York now sits. The data has been placed in the Library.

The two geographical areas are not comparable hence the break in the data between 2012 and 2013. No information is available for the geographical area requested prior to 2002. Data was first reported at primary care trust level in 2002.

**Health: Business**

**Mr Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to request reports from those signed up to the Responsibility Deal for Public Health who have yet to submit reports.

[203969]

**Jane Ellison:** Departmental officials remind partners, by both telephone and e-mail, to submit their annual updates. Officials liaise directly with the Responsibility Deal partners to request the return of updates, giving clarification and any necessary support where required.

**Members: Correspondence**

**Simon Kirby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to increase the number of replies sent electronically to letters from hon. Members.

[203529]

**Dr Poulter:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr Maude), on 7 July 2014, *Official Report*, columns 5-6W.

**Mental Health Services**

**Paul Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of adults (a) on the Care Programme Approach receiving secondary mental health services and (b) receiving secondary mental health services but who were not on the Care Programme Approach in (i) England, (ii) each mental health trust area (iii) each primary care trust area and (iv) each local authority area were in employment in 2013-14.

[203600]

**Norman Lamb:** The information has been placed in the Library.

**Mental Illness**

**Gloria De Piero:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in (a) Ashfield constituency, (b) Nottinghamshire and (c) England and Wales have been treated for a mental health problem in each of the last five years.

[203965]

**Norman Lamb:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the following tables. We are unable to provide data for Wales as the Mental Health Minimum Dataset and the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) dataset only cover England.

**Table 1: Number of people in contact with secondary mental health services, 2011-12 to 2013-14**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of people¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England Total</td>
<td>1,607,153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottinghamshire Total</td>
<td>30,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5EM Nottingham City Primary Care Trust (PCT)</td>
<td>10,986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5N8 Nottinghamshire County Teaching PCT</td>
<td>19,953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04K NHS Nottingham City CCG</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04L NHS Nottingham North and East CCG</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04M NHS Nottingham West CCG</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12V Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Commissioning Hub</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E07000170 Ashfield Local Authority Total</td>
<td>3,839</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ People are counted only once during the year at their highest level of care; these categories are exclusive.

² For 2013-14 all figures (except England totals) have been rounded to the nearest five to prevent the disclosure of identifiable information.

*Data source: Mental Health Minimum Dataset (MHMDS) annual files, 2011/12 to 2013-14*
Table 2: Number of referrals entering treatment1 in the year by Clinical Commissioning Group2 (CCG), 2012-133

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CCG</th>
<th>Number of referrals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England Total</td>
<td>434,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottinghamshire Total</td>
<td>4,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04K NHS Nottingham City CCG</td>
<td>2,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04L NHS Nottingham North And East CCG</td>
<td>1,581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04M NHS Nottingham West CCG</td>
<td>890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12V Derbyshire And Nottinghamshire Commissioning Hub</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 In order to enter treatment a referral must have a first treatment appointment (an appointment with a therapy type recorded) in the year.
2 CCG is based on GP Practice. Where the GP Practice is not recorded, or cannot be assigned to a CCG, the referral is categorised as ‘Unknown’.
3 As this is the first year of reporting from the IAPT dataset, only those referrals received in the year are included. Referrals that predate this point are not included in the figures.

Data source:
IAPT Annual data 2012-13

Ovarian Cancer

Naomi Long: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department has put in place to ensure that people with ovarian cancer and their families are aware of the right to request BRCA1/2 testing at the point of diagnosis; and what steps his Department is taking to encourage greater uptake of BRCA1/2 gene testing.

[203562]

Jane Ellison: Current National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines recommend offering genetic testing to people with a 10% likelihood of carrying a BRCA1/2 mutation.

NHS England is seeking the advice of its specialised gynaecology Clinical Reference Group in order to inform its policy on this matter.

Ovarian Hyperstimulation Syndrome

Mrs Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many (a) non-patient egg donors and (b) egg-share donors were admitted to hospital for ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome in each year since 2009.

[203642]

Jane Ellison: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) has advised that licensed fertility clinics are only required to report instances of ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS) to the authority that require a hospital admission with a severe grading, although in practice clinics often report moderate OHSS as well. The HFEA does not, therefore, hold definitive data on the number of women admitted to hospital with OHSS, including non-patient egg donors and egg-share donors.

Information on the number of cases of OHSS reported to the HFEA, that were assessed as moderate or severe, was given in my written answer to the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Jim Dobbin), on 24 June 2014, Official Report, columns 156-57W.

Skin: North West

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many (a) adults and (b) children in (i) the North West, (ii) Lancashire and (iii) East Lancashire contacted their GP because of a skin condition in each of the last five years.

[203940]

Norman Lamb: The information requested is not collected.

Winterborne View Hospital

Margot James: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which facilities patients of Winterborne View were transferred on that hospital’s closure; and in which facilities those patients are now.

[203622]

Norman Lamb: When Winterborne View Hospital was closed, the remaining patients were transferred to a variety of learning disability care provision. The range of provision included medium and low secure hospitals; NHS Assessment and Treatment facilities; independent hospitals that offer rehabilitation; and specialist residential homes that care for people with challenging behaviour.

As at 1 July 2014, of the 48 individuals who, at some point, were patients at Winterborne View Hospital, 10 people are still in hospital; 20 people are living in a residential home; five people are living in supported living accommodation and 12 people have their own tenancy. One person passed away in 2013, who had moved into a residential home.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Air Travel

John Woodcock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what occasions each Minister within her Department has taken domestic flights on official business since May 2010.

[204297]

Karen Bradley: Details of all overseas ministerial travel are passed to the Cabinet Office on a quarterly basis and are subsequently placed on the Gov.uk website: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/home-office-ministers-hospitality-data

Apprentices

Robert Halfon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many apprentices have been employed by contractors and sub-contractors to her Department in each year since 2010-11; and what proportion of the total workforce of such contractors is made up by apprentices.

[204066]

Karen Bradley: Information is not held centrally and to obtain the data would incur disproportionate cost.

Cannabis

David Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cannabis factories have been discovered and abolished in the last three years.

[203968]
Norman Baker: The latest National Policing Commercial Cannabis Cultivation Problem Profile, published in 2012, includes statistics on the identification of cannabis farms across the UK. The main finding of the report is that there was a significant rise in the identification of cannabis farms in 2011/12, from 6866 in 2009/10, to 7660 cannabis farms in 2011/12. The document can be found at: http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/crime/2012/20120430CBACCoCP.pdf

The Government works closely with the police to support the policing of illegal cannabis cultivation. The police response to tackle commercial cannabis cultivation includes proactive operations to identify and close down these farms and disrupt the organised crime groups behind them. The police also work to improve their knowledge and understanding of the trade through activity-led intelligence gathering.

Entry Clearances: Syria

Sir Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether requests from Syria for visitor visas are dealt with on merit on a case-by-case basis, and if she will make a statement.

Karen Bradley: All visa applications made by Syrian nationals are considered on a case by case basis, on their merits, in accordance with the immigration rules.

Firearms: Licensing

Diana Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she plans to bring forward proposals for reform of the firearms licensing fees system.

Norman Baker: This matter remains under consideration.

In parallel, work continues on improving the efficiency of the process including the introduction of an online system (eCommerce) which will be piloted in the autumn and rolled out next year.

Fixed Penalties

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics her Department holds on the use of fixed penalty notices in each local authority area.

Damian Green: The Home Office does not hold information on the use of fixed penalty notices (FPNs) in each local authority area.

The Department manages the PentiP system that police forces use to record offences committed where the offence would be suitable for disposal via FPN. Whilst the system provides an opportunity for a local authority area to be recorded, this is not mandatory, so it is unlikely that a full national breakdown is held.

HM Passport Office: Belfast

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passport applications have been processed by the passport office in Belfast in each year since 2010.

James Brokenshire: The following table shows the number of passports processed by the Passport Office in Belfast.

Knives: Clacton

Mr Carswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions she has had with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex on incidents involving knives in Clacton and the potential effect of stop and search guidelines.

Damian Green: There have been no specific discussions with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex on incidents involving knives in Clacton.

The Best Use of Stop and Search scheme was announced by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), on 30 April 2014, and the intention is to launch the scheme in the summer. The scheme aims to achieve greater transparency and community involvement in the use of stop and search by the police and support a more intelligence-led approach leading to better outcomes, particularly improving the stop and search to arrest ratio.

Only 9% of the 1.2 million stop and searches that took place in 2011-12 led to an arrest. The adoption of an intelligence-led approach to stop and search by the Metropolitan police in January 2012 coincided with a fall of a third in the number of recorded stop and searches taking place between 2011-12 and 2012-13, while the proportion of resultant arrests increased from 8% to 12%. Meanwhile in the same period, offences recorded by the Metropolitan police involving knives or sharp instruments fell by 20%.

Members: Correspondence

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she intends to reply to the letter to her dated 27 May 2014 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regards to Mr M Nissar.

Karen Bradley: A letter was sent to the right hon. Member on 9 June 2014.

Nazi War Crimes

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people since 1984 have been (a) charged with and (b) convicted of being a member of the SS in the Second World War.

Norman Baker: The Ministry of Justice Court Proceedings Database holds information on defendants proceeded against, found guilty and sentenced for criminal offences in England and Wales. However, it is not possible from this centrally held data to identify those who...
charged with and convicted of being members of individual organisations. This detailed information is not reported to Justice Statistics Analytical Services due to their size and complexity.

Passports

Pamela Nash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passport renewals for residents in (a) Airdrie and Shotts constituency, (b) Lanarkshire, (c) Scotland and (d) the UK have been completed within a three week turnaround time from receipt in each year since 2009.

James Brokenshire: Her Majesty’s Passport Office (HMPO) does not store information at constituency level and the cost of extracting the information requested would be disproportionate. Information on passport processing performance can be found in HMPO’s annual report and accounts, via the following links.

2009-10:

2010-11:

2011-12:

2012-13:

Policy

Mr O’Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what monetary value her Department assigns to the Value of Preventing a Fatality calculation in the Library a copy of the advice and business case she has received on the use of water cannon in mainland UK.

James Brokenshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passport renewals for residents in (a) Airdrie and Shotts constituency, (b) Lanarkshire, (c) Scotland and (d) the UK have been completed within a three week turnaround time from receipt in each year since 2009.

James Brokenshire: Her Majesty’s Passport Office (HMPO) does not store information at constituency level and the cost of extracting the information requested would be disproportionate. Information on passport processing performance can be found in HMPO’s annual report and accounts, via the following links.

2009-10:

2010-11:

2011-12:

2012-13:

Riot Control Weapons

Sarah Teather: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she intends to make a decision on the request to authorise water cannon for use by the police in England and Wales; and if she will place in the Library a copy of the advice and business case she has received on the use of water cannon in mainland UK.

Valuation of Life and Health Inter-departmental Group

Mr O’Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what measures of the value of life and health were included in the evidence submitted as part of her Department’s work with the Inter-departmental Group for the Valuation of Life and Health review;

(2) what monetary thresholds were applied to the cost-per-quality adjusted life year quoted in the evidence submitted as part of her Department’s work with the Inter-departmental Group for the Valuation of Life and Health review in 2008.

Norman Baker: The most recent update to the Home Office’s estimates of the costs of crime prior to the Department’s submission to the Inter-departmental Group for the Valuation of Life and Health review in 2008 was the 2005 publication. The monetary value per quality-adjusted life year used in the 2005 report was £80,620 in 2003 prices.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Developing Countries: Malnutrition

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department has spent specifically to reduce the number of malnourished children in the developing world; and which 10 countries are the largest recipients of such funding.

Lyne Featherstone: Between 2010 and 2012 DFID spent a total of £740 million (US$1.27 billion) on nutrition programmes of which £86 million (US$148 million) was spent on nutrition-specific programmes. The 10 largest recipients of nutrition specific spend were: India, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Yemen, Zambia, Ghana, Tanzania, Bangladesh and Nepal. Full details and analysis are available in the independent Development Initiatives’ Report “DFID’s aid spending for nutrition: 2010 to 2012” which is published on its website.

Development Aid

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which 10 countries will receive the highest amount of UK aid in the post-2015 development framework; and how much each such country will receive.

Justine Greening: Budget needs will be assessed in light of the post-2015 framework and according to country need.

India

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how UK aid money to India was allocated in (a) 2012, (b) 2013 and (c) 2014.

South Sudan

Sir Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to ensure fair and efficient distribution of international aid in South Sudan.

[203765]

Lynne Featherstone: DFID is working with aid and humanitarian partners to ensure that the aid being delivered is done so on the basis of need and prioritisation, to ensure the requirements of the most vulnerable are being met, and all accessible areas are being served.

Yemen

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much of the aid given by the UK to Yemen is spent on (a) food, (b) education, (c) housing, (d) healthcare and (e) employment.

[203570]

Mr Duncan: The UK Government provided £81.3 million in bilateral aid to Yemen in 2013-14. Precise data is not available for the breakdown requested, but support included approximately: £8.0 million in cash or vouchers to address food insecurity; £15.2 million towards education; £0.2 million to provide emergency shelter; £21.0 million towards health; and £4.0 million towards employment.

The total also includes £7.5 million in contributions to pooled humanitarian funds for which we are awaiting final detailed data, but which included expenditure on cash and vouchers to address food insecurity, shelter, health, and employment.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much of the aid given by the UK has gone to Yemen since 1 January 2012, and what comparative assessment she has made of the level of such spending in other EU countries.

[203573]

Mr Duncan: The UK Government has provided over £172 million in bilateral aid to Yemen since January 2012. DFID does not hold data for the amount spent in this period for other European donors. However, the latest pledge and disbursement data collated by the Government of Yemen for the period April 2012 to December 2013 is shown in the following table. The period to which the UK’s pledge applies to extends to March 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Donor</th>
<th>Pledged (million USD)</th>
<th>Disbursed (million USD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>215.4</td>
<td>119.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>157.6</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>200.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

JUSTICE

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many people were found guilty in a magistrates’ court, consequent upon non-payment or contesting of a fixed penalty notice, for failure to produce waste documents in each local authority area in each of the last three years; and what the total value was of fines levied for such offences in each area in each such year;

[203984]

(2) how many people were found guilty in a magistrates’ court, consequent upon non-payment or contesting of a fixed penalty notice, for depositing litter in each local authority area in each of the last three years; and what the total value was of fines levied for such offences in each area in each such year;

[203985]

(3) how many people were found guilty in a magistrates’ court, consequent upon non-payment or contesting of a fixed penalty notice, for failure to remove dog faeces, in each local authority area in each of the last three years; and what the total value was of fines levied for such offences in each area in each such year;

[203986]

(4) how many people were found guilty in a magistrates’ court, consequent upon non-payment or contesting of a fixed penalty notice, for smoking in a smoke-free place, in each local authority area in each of the last three years; and what the total value was of fines levied for such offences in each area in each such year;

[203987]

(5) how many people were found guilty in a magistrates’ court, consequent upon non-payment or contesting of a fixed penalty notice, for fly posting, in each local authority area in each of the last three years; and what the total value was of fines levied for such offences in each area in each such year;

[203988]

(6) how many people were found guilty in a magistrates’ court, consequent upon non-payment or contesting of a fixed penalty notice, for unauthorised distribution of printed matter, in each local authority area in each of the last three years; and what the total value was of fines levied for such offences in each area in each such year;

[203989]

(7) how many people were found guilty in a magistrates’ court, consequent upon non-payment or contesting of a fixed penalty notice, for failure to comply with a waste receptacles notice, in each local authority area in each of the last three years; and what the total value was of fines levied for such offences in each area in each such year;

[203990]

(8) how many people were found guilty in a magistrates’ court, consequent upon non-payment or contesting of a fixed penalty notice, for failure to produce authority to transport waste, in each local authority area in each of the last three years; and what the total value was of fines levied for such offences in each area in each such year;

[203991]

(9) how many people were found guilty in a magistrates’ court, consequent upon non-payment or contesting of a fixed penalty notice for failure to comply with a street litter clearing notice, in each local authority area in each of the last three years; and what the total value was of fines levied for such offences in each area in each such year;

[203992]
(10) how many people were found guilty in a magistrates’ court, consequent upon non-payment or contesting of a fixed penalty notice for graffiti, in each local authority area in each of the last three years; and what the total value was of fines levied for such offences in each local authority area in each such year; [203993]

(11) how many people were found guilty in a magistrates’ court, consequent upon non-payment or contesting of a fixed penalty notice for repairing vehicles on the road, in each local authority area in each of the last three years; and what the total value was of fines levied for such offences in each local authority area in each such year; [203994]

(12) how many people were found guilty in a magistrates’ court, consequent upon non-payment or contesting of a fixed penalty notice for abandonment of a vehicle, in each local authority area in each of the last three years; and what the total value was of fines levied for such offences in each local authority area in each such year. [203995]

**Jeremy Wright:** Information held centrally by the Ministry of Justice on the Court Proceedings Database does not include the circumstances behind each case beyond the description provided in the statute. It is not possible to separately identify from this centrally held information whether a fixed penalty notice was contested or whether it was not paid and proceedings for non-payment commenced.

**Members: Correspondence**

**Simon Kirby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans his Department has to increase the number of people found guilty in a magistrates’ court, consequent upon non-payment or contesting of a fixed penalty notice for graffiti, sexual assault or robbery, by months in England and Wales, 2010-2013.

**Jeremy Wright:** I refer my hon. Friend to PQ 203285, responded to by the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr Maude), on 7 July 2014, *Official Report*, column 6W.

**Police Cautions**

**Jenny Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many cautions have been issued for offences of (a) murder, (b) rape, (c) sexual assault, (d) robbery and (e) burglary in (i) each year between 2010 and 2013 and (ii) each month since January 2013. [203136]

**Damian Green:** The number of offenders (including young people) cautioned, for offences of rape, sexual assault, robbery and burglary, by months in England and Wales from 2010 to 2013 (latest available) can be viewed in the table. There were no cautions administered for murder.

Simple cautions (previously police cautions) are a non-statutory disposal available to the police to dispose of any offence committed by an adult and designed for dealing with low level, mainly first time offending. The Government does not believe that cautions are appropriate for serious offences. We issued new guidelines on 14 November 2014 following a detailed review of how cautions were being used by police forces, and are strengthening the law to prevent cautions being used for serious offences.

The Ministry of Justice issues guidance on the process to be followed by the police and the CPS when they are administering simple cautions for adult offenders. This guidance states that the use of a simple caution for indictable only offences, such as rape, should only be given following authorisation by the CPS. These will be cases where there were exceptional circumstances which would mean that it was not in the public interest to prosecute.

The overall number of simple cautions issued has halved since 2007. The cautioning rate, that is, the number of offenders cautioned as a percentage of offenders who were either cautioned or convicted, in 2013 was 20%; this has declined from a peak of 31% in 2007.

1. The Government is clear that serious offences should always be brought to court and to ensure that there is increased public confidence in the justice system last year announced limits on the use of simple cautions. These changes restrict the use of cautions for indictable only offences and certain serious either way offences unless there are exceptional circumstances and a senior police officer, as well as the CPS for certain cases, has agreed that a caution should be administered.

The MOJ guidance on Adult Simple Cautions was amended in November last year to reflect these changes, and we are currently legislating in the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill to place statutory restrictions around their use.

### Offenders cautioned for selected offences, by month, England and Wales, 2010-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offences</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>Apr</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Jun</th>
<th>Jul</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010 Murder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual assault</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>3,484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (all)</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>4,273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 Murder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual assault</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape 5</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The cautions statistics relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When an offender has been cautioned for two or more offences at the same time the principal offence is the more serious offence.
2 From 1 June 2000 the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 came into force nationally and removed the use of cautions for persons under 18 and replaced them with reprimands and warnings. These figures have been included in the totals.
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 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 Sexual Offences Act 2003, s2, s3, s6, s7
5 Sexual Offences Act 2003, s1, s5
6 Theft Act 1968, s.9, S.9(1)(a), S.9(1)(b), S.9 (1)(a) or (b), S.10
7 Theft Act 1968, S.8

Source: Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice

Prison Accommodation: Wales

**Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what recent assessment he has made of levels of occupancy in prisons in Wales. [904678]

**Jeremy Wright:** Individual prison population and capacity information for every prison in England and Wales is published monthly on the Ministry of Justice website at:


Prisons are not expected to operate above their operational capacity and ensuring that this capacity is set to reflect the provision of safe and decent accommodation and the operation of suitable regimes ensures that levels of crowding in prisons are carefully managed.

Sensible measures have been taken to ensure that we have sufficient capacity to deal with any temporary increases in population. These include creating additional places in prisons in a safe and decent way and ensuring that prisons reflect the needs of the current population.

We will end this Parliament with more adult male prison places than we inherited, more hours of work in prisons than we inherited, more education for young detainees than we inherited and a more modern, cost effective prison estate than we inherited.

Prisons: Alcoholic Drinks

**Jenny Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many times prison officers confiscated illegally brewed alcohol in each prison in England and Wales in each month in 2013. [203774]

**Jeremy Wright:** The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) has in place a comprehensive range of security measures and searching techniques to detect items of contraband including alcohol and to prevent smuggling into prisons. In addition we use specially trained dogs to detect illicit alcohol.

NOMS does not centrally record as a separate category the number of occasions on which alcohol is confiscated in prisons and could not provide the information without incurring disproportionate cost.

Racially Aggravated Offences: Lancashire

**Mark Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many convictions for each type of racially-aggravated offence under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 were prosecuted at each magistrates’ and crown court in Lancashire in 2013. [202488]

**Damian Green:** The number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates court and found guilty at all courts in Lancashire police force area, for racially and
religiously aggravated offences under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 for 2013 (latest available) can be viewed in the following table.

The custody rate has increased since 2010 for racially and religiously aggravated offences in both the magistrates court and at the crown court.

The description of the offences within the statute is “racially or religiously” aggravated and we are unable to disaggregate between the two. The specific circumstances of each case cannot be identified from centrally collected statistics unless specified in statute.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Court type</th>
<th>Offence</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Proceeded against</th>
<th>Found guilty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magistrates' court</td>
<td>Racially/religiously aggravated offences</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crown court</td>
<td>Racially/religiously aggravated offences</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*“__” - Nil

1 The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

2 Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

3 Offences used
29(1)(a) Racially or religiously aggravated malicious wounding or grievous bodily harm
29(1)(b) Racially or religiously aggravated assault occasioning actual bodily harm
29(1)(c) Racially or religiously aggravated common assault/beating
31(1)(b) Racially or religiously aggravated intentional harassment alarm or distress—words/writing
31(1)(c) Racially or religiously aggravated harassment alarm or distress
32(1)(a) Racially or religiously aggravated fear or provocation of violence
30(1) and (2) Racially or religiously aggravated criminal damage

Source: Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice

**Staff**

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many officials in his Department are currently employed to work on the sentence calculation helplines.

**Jeremy Wright:** The Department employs two officials whose principal function is to answer queries on the sentence calculation helpline. The main purpose of the helpline is to provide advice to prison establishments as to the correct way to calculate the key release dates for sentences in complex cases. It also provides advice to courts, probation, the public, solicitors and other Government Departments on the effect of the legislation governing release on key sentence dates.

In the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, the Government made changes to the release and recall provisions in order to simplify the previous, often incomprehensible and complex legislation, making it easier for sentencers and prison staff to administer, and the public to understand the sentence.
Pentonville
Peterborough
Portland
Preston
Prescoed
Rochester
Stoke Heath
Styal
Swansea
Swinfen Hall
Thameside
Thorn Cross
Wandsworth
Winchester
Woodhill
Wormwood Scrubs

* On 13 March 2014 the Government announced that single use young adult YOIs Littlehey and Lancaster Farms would change function to adult use only.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Recruitment

**Gloria De Piero:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civil servants employed through the Northern Ireland graduate fast track scheme between 1 June 2004 and 1 June 2014 were educated at (a) private and (b) state schools. [203799]

**Mrs Villiers:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr Maude), today.

### Terrorism

**Kate Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the people who are known to have received the Royal Prerogative of Mercy by Letters Patent or under any other authority, in the last 20 years; and if she will make a statement. [199280]

**Mrs Villiers:** Since 1997, no Letters Patent have been issued in Northern Ireland in relation to the Royal Prerogative of Mercy (RPM). Where the RPM was used in this period by the previous Government, it was effected by means of a Royal Warrant.

As the hon. Member is aware, my Department is responsible for the assessment of my Department is that to release the names of individuals granted the RPM years ago would not be appropriate, given the time that has passed since the RPM was last used and the potential legal issues this would raise. There are of course means by which names of RPM recipients become public, including in the course of legal proceedings, which is a matter for the courts.

## TRANSPORT

### Aviation: Exhaust Emissions

**Fabian Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what records are kept of the concentrations of identified toxic chemicals in a fume event in each of the principal classes of civil aviation airliners operating within the UK; and if he will make a statement; [203644]

(2) whether any UK agencies or Departments conduct or have conducted research into the long-term consequences of repeated exposure of air crews to low levels of toxic fumes within civil aviation aircraft; and if he will make a statement; [203645]

(3) what discussions he or Ministers in his Department have had with (a) airlines and (b) organisations about fume events in UK airlines; and if he will take steps to improve the monitoring of the air quality in UK airliners; [203645]

(4) how many fume events were recorded in (a) UK civil aviation aircraft and (b) other aircraft using UK airports operating within the UK in the last 12 months; and which agency is responsible for recording these events. [203646]

**Mr Goodwill:** In the period 1 June 2013 to 31 May 2014, from over a million passenger and cargo flights the Civil Aviation Authority received 309 reports of 'contaminated air' from UK operators under the Mandatory Occurrence Reporting Scheme. Incidents involving non-UK operators would be reported to the relevant national authority and we do not have data on the number of occurrences involving non-UK operators.

The majority of incidents of contaminated air are brief, lasting for periods of a few seconds to a few minutes. No records of chemical concentrations are kept as there is no equipment currently available which could be installed on aircraft and capture this information.
The Department has completed four research studies into cabin air, which involved close cooperation with airlines to facilitate the research. The main study was published by Cranfield university in May 2011, and concluded there was no evidence for pollutants occurring in cabin air at levels exceeding available health and safety standards and guidelines.

The Department has also engaged with the Committee on Toxicty, which considered the Department's four published reports during 2013. The Committee concluded that there is no evidence that fume events are causing ill health in passengers or crew and, as a result, there are no plans to change the monitoring of air quality in UK carriers.

Aviation: Northern Ireland

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent steps his Department has taken to support regional air links with Northern Ireland.

[203621]

Mr Goodwill: Northern Ireland is well-connected by air to London with over 18,000 flights per year between the two Belfast airports and the five main London airports, carrying over two million passengers. The Belfast airports also maintain good connections with other UK airports—Belfast International Airport has connections to fourteen domestic destinations, and Belfast City Airport to eighteen.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) announced in this year's Budget that funding to maintain existing air connectivity to London—first announced in the 2013 Spending Round last June—will increase from £10 million to £20 million per year. It will be expanded to include provision for start-up aid for new air routes from UK regional airports—including those in Northern Ireland and the other devolved administrations—which handle fewer than five million passengers per year.

The devolved administration in Northern Ireland, or a regional body in Northern Ireland, may apply for access to the funding for regional air connectivity to maintain an air link from a Northern Ireland airport to London, where there is an existing link may be lost, and where the case for a Public Service Obligation has been made.

The Department for Transport is working with the Treasury to develop guidance that will clarify how the Government will ordinarily expect to interpret the European Union State aid guidelines on start-up aid for new air routes, and explain how the funding process will operate across the UK. The Department for Transport expects to publish this guidance in the autumn.

Driving Instruction

Gordon Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans his Department has to make the Fleet Driver Trainer register mandatory for paid vocational driver training; (2) what plans his Department has to introduce mandatory regulation of B+E driving instructors.

[203836]

Stephen Hammond: The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) consulted recently on proposals to modernise and, as far as possible, reduce any potential burden that the current regulatory framework could place on approved driving instructors (ADI); it will publish the response to consultation shortly.

The consultation's proposals were designed to reduce the regulatory burden on small businesses, therefore, the consultation document proposed that DVSA would not mandate the voluntary fleet driver trainer register.

The pass rate for the B+E practical test is 67%, one of the highest pass rates for any category of test; unlike learner drivers people seeking B+E instruction must already hold a full category B driving licence. Most BE instruction is already carried out by vocational trainers who are competent to provide this service given their expertise in delivering training in category C vehicles and CE. Therefore, DVSA currently has no plans to extend the regulation of paid driving instruction in a motor car to BE training; neither does it have plans to extend the regulatory framework for ADIs to cover paid vocational driver training.

First Transpennine Express and Northern Rail

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether rolling stock to be delivered to Northern Rail and TransPennine Express over the next six years will be configured to allow the option of retaining the operational role of the guard.

[203919]

Stephen Hammond: A public consultation exercise is being conducted which will inform the franchise specifications. The consultation can be found at:


No decisions have yet been made. However we expect it will be for the winning bidders of the Northern and TransPennine Express franchise competitions to decide what rolling stock to use and whether to configure this rolling stock to allow for retaining the operational role of the guard.

Members: Correspondence

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans his Department has to increase the number of replies sent electronically to letters from hon. Members.

[203535]

Stephen Hammond: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr Maude), on 7 July 2014, Official Report, columns 5-6W.

Police: Ports

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the extent to which chief officers of territorial police forces have used the Marine Navigation Act 2013 to permit port constables to act outside their port area for policing purposes connected with the port constable’s police area.

[203891]
Stephen Hammond: Of the six English port police forces, able to use the Marine Navigation Act, the port police forces for Bristol, Dover and Teesport have sought and received the consent of the chief constable of the relevant territorial police force to exercise certain powers outside their port area, while a fourth, Liverpool port police, is currently seeking it.

Policy

Mr O’Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport at what level his Department values the reduction of risk of death per fatal casualty prevented; and if he will give an example of policy intervention where this evaluation was made. [203615]

Mr Goodwill: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 7 July 2014, Official Report, column 167WJ.

The value of a prevented fatality is used in the appraisal for every infrastructure investment business case. It is also used in the impact assessments for relevant policy interventions. For example, the impact assessment on the new drug driving offence takes account of the value of preventing a fatality in assessing the overall impact of the offence. The latest impact assessment can be found at:


Railways: Brighton

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has considered funding in the 2019 to 2024 spending review for the Brighton Mainline 2; and if he will make a statement. [203873]

Stephen Hammond: The Department has not yet begun the process of formally considering options for funding during railway Control Period 6 (2019 to 2024). When this process formally commences in 2015, it will likely identify a range of potential options for investment, some of which may include elements of the wide ranging proposals, collectively known as “Brighton Main Line 2”.

Rescue Services: Stornoway

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre at Stornoway was staffed at below risk-assessed levels in June 2014. [204100]

Stephen Hammond: During June 2014 Stornoway Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) was staffed below risk assessed levels on 25 occasions out of 60 shifts.

Where there are specific issues at a MRCC Her Majesty’s Coastguard is using the current long established pairing arrangements between MRCCs. This enables each MRCC to be connected to at least one other MRCC which is available to provide mutual support.

Rescue Services: Stornoway

Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre, Stornoway has permanent radio access to the radio network covering the Clyde, Arran and the Ayrshire coast. [204102]

Stephen Hammond: The radio sites covering the Clyde, Arran and Ayrshire coast were transferred to Belfast Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) when Clyde MRCC closed in December 2012.

As part of the pairing ‘infrastructure’ there is a fixed link between Belfast and Stornoway MRCC which enables Coastguards at Stornoway MRCC to have permanent radio access to the entire Belfast MRCC radio estate (or vice versa). In addition the MRCCs at Aberdeen or Shetland can ‘dial in’ to provide further support if required.

Roads: Hampshire

Damian Hinds: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the three most recent (a) traffic counts, (b) speed measurements and (c) weight-of-vehicles measurements are from the B3006 Selborne Road between the A31 at Alton and the A3 Ham Barn roundabout. [203829]

Mr Goodwill: The Department’s estimates the average annual daily flow, measured in the number of vehicles a day, for a selection of minor roads each year including the B3006 near Stairs Hill Farmhouse.

Figures for the last three years are in the following table.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>7,107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>7,826</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Estimates of average speeds and weight-of-vehicle measurements for the B3006 are not held centrally.
Mr Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many contraventions of the regulations under Part 5 of the Equality Act 2010 preventing differential pay rates for seafarers from countries in the European Economic Area have been investigated by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency since 1 August 2011; and what the (a) outcome and (b) flag of each vessel was in each such investigation; [203768]

(2) what enforcement activity the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has undertaken of the regulations under Part 5 of the Equality Act 2010 to prevent differential pay rates for seafarers from countries in the European Economic Area since 1 August 2011;[203769]

(3) what activities the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has undertaken among employers in the (a) UK, (b) European and (c) international shipping industry to ensure compliance with the regulations under Part 5 of the Equality Act 2010 to prevent differential pay rates for seafarers from countries in the European Economic Area since 1 August 2011;[203771]

(4) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the enforcement of the regulations under Part 5 of the Equality Act 2010 to prevent differential pay rates for seafarers from countries in the European Economic Area on vessels registered under Category 1 and Category 2 Red Ensign Group registries. [203773]

Stephen Hammond: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is not responsible for the enforcement of regulations made under Part 5 of the Equality Act 2010, and has therefore not undertaken any enforcement or investigations, or any activity to ensure compliance with or assess the effectiveness of these regulations. This is a matter for the Government Equality Office.

The Department for Transport is undertaking a review of the regulations in conjunction with other Government Departments, trade associations and union representatives. This will include looking at whether the regulations are achieving their objectives—including those relevant to differential pay.

Mr Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what awareness activities the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has undertaken among (a) UK shipowners, (b) owners of UK flagged vessels and (c) the European shipping industry on regulations under Part 5 of the Equality Act 2010 to prevent differential pay rates for seafarers from countries in the European Economic Area since 1 August 2011. [203770]

Stephen Hammond: Part 6 of the Equality Act 2010 is not a responsibility of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and it has not undertaken awareness activities since 1 August 2011.

The Agency has, however, used its UK Ship Register newsletter, in 2009 and early in 2011, to draw attention generally to the provisions of the Equality Act.

Mr Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent estimate he has made of the number of vessels that have de-flagged from the Red Ensign Group where the shipowner cited the regulations under Part 5 of the Equality Act 2010 to prevent differential pay rates for seafarers from countries in the European Economic Area as the motivating factor in each year since 1 August 2011. [203772]

Stephen Hammond: Since 1 August 2011, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) is aware that two vessels have left the UK Ship Register where their owners have cited the reason for leaving as being the Equality Act.

Information relating to details of the other registers in the Red Ensign Group is not available to the MCA.

Shipping: Exhaust Emissions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with his French counterpart on the effect of the EU Sulphur Directive on (a) the shipping industry, (b) jobs and (c) the environment; and what the outcome of the conversations has been. [203939]

Stephen Hammond: In the last 18 months, there have been several meetings between officials from the Department for Transport and their French counterparts to consider the effect of the EU directive on sulphur content of marine fuels on the shipping industry, jobs and the environment. One of these meetings was a quadripartite meeting between UK and French officials and representatives of the UK Chamber of Shipping and its counterpart, the Armateurs de France.

As a result of these discussions, the Governments of the UK and France have supported applications to secure EU finance under the trans-European network (TEN-T) programme, and affordable capital through the European Investment Bank, on the part of shipowners and ports which wish to invest in green technologies. We have also obtained an assurance from the European Commission that it will meet individual ferry operators who wish to discuss their ‘route to compliance’ strategy.

TREASURY

Banks

Mr Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish a list of each application for the change of control of a bank made in the last four years; [204057]

(2) when his Department last conducted a review of the process of granting authorisation for (a) banks and (b) insurance companies; [204059]

(3) where each company seeking authorisation as a bank was located when the application was made in each of the last four years; and when each such application was determined. [204070]

Andrea Leadsom: The publication of details and statistics on new bank authorisations, and changes of control are matters for the independent financial regulators: the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) and Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

The PRA and FCA published a Review of the authorisation process as part of ‘A review of requirements for firms entering into or expanding in the banking
The PRA published its Annual Report and Accounts 2014 in June, which included details of the number of banks and insurance firms authorised between 1 April 2013 and 28 February 2014. The PRA has committed to publish authorisation statistics on an annual basis.

Children: Day Care

Lucy Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he plans to take to ensure that parents use their tax-free childcare accounts to pay for childcare; and what additional costs such checks will place on HM Revenue and Customs.

Nicky Morgan: Parents’ payments from their Tax-Free Childcare accounts will only go to registered childcare providers. HMRC will investigate in the exceptional circumstances where it suspects the payments were not used for childcare. The Childcare Payments Bill sets out HMRC’s proposed compliance powers.

The administration costs of the scheme will be settled once the scheme’s design has been finalised.

Consumers: Protection

Stella Creasy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on (a) consumers and (b) endorsement of consumer protection law of the hand-over of investigations from the Office of Fair Trading to the Financial Conduct Authority.

Andrea Leadsom: The Government has fundamentally reformed regulation of the consumer credit market. The transfer of regulatory responsibility for consumer credit from the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) took effect in April. The FCA has stronger powers and is far better equipped to protect consumers than the OFT.

The Government has ensured that the FCA has inherited the OFT’s powers (both criminal and regulatory) in relation to misconduct which occurred before 1 April 2014, as well as considerably strengthening the FCA’s powers in relation to misconduct which occurs under the new regulatory regime.

The FCA has the same powers as the OFT had to investigate and prosecute offences under the Consumer Credit Act 1974. The FCA has also inherited the OFT’s power to fine, although the OFT’s power to fine under the Consumer Credit Act was limited to fining a firm for breaches of a requirement imposed by the OFT (and the maximum penalty in this regard was £50,000). The Government has already strengthened the new regime by giving the FCA the ability to impose unlimited fines for breaches of regulatory requirements that take place after 1 April 2014.

Economic Growth

Mr Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent estimate he has made of the level of growth in the UK economy in (a) 2014 and (b) 2015; and what change in the level of public sector employment he anticipates will take place in each region and constituent part of the UK in that time.

Nicky Morgan: The OBR is responsible for producing independent economic and fiscal forecasts of the UK economy. The OBR’s most recent forecast (published at Budget 2014) is for UK GDP to grow by 2.7% this year and 2.3% in 2015.

The OBR forecast general Government employment will fall by 0.1 million in 2014 and 2015. This is more than offset by increases in market sector employment of 0.5 million in 2014 and 0.3 million in 2015.

Financial Institutions

Mr Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the role of private equity in providing capital to the (a) banking sector and (b) insurance sector.

Andrea Leadsom: This question has been passed on to the Presidential Regulation Authority (PRA). The PRA will reply to directly to my hon. Friend by letter. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Members: Correspondence

Simon Kirby: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans his Department has to increase the number of replies sent electronically to letters from hon. Members.

Andrea Leadsom: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr Maude), on 7 July 2014, Official Report, column 5W.

Motor Vehicles: Insurance

Hilary Benn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he plans to bring forward proposals to help the insurance industry to reduce the cost of car insurance for newly qualified drivers.

Andrea Leadsom: The Government is committed to seeking ways to bring down the costs of car insurance for young drivers. Ministers recently held a roundtable for the insurance industry, at which it was agreed that the Government would commission new research into how telematics can change the behaviour and attitudes of learner drivers.

The Government is also in the process of undertaking some focus groups with parents, young people and employers to get a better understanding of the issues from their perspective. We will publish the findings of the research and focus groups in due course.

Revenue and Customs

Katy Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost to the public purse was of the Building Our Future workshops held for all HM Revenue and Customs staff.
Mr Gauke: 'Building our Future' is HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC’s) vision for how it will serve its customers in the future, which it is currently presenting and discussing with its entire workforce. HMRC wants its employees to influence how the Department is transforming to be a more effective, efficient and customer-focused organisation. The events started in May and will run until August 2014 and aim to bring together employees from different teams across the Department.

The final costs will be published on-line as part of the Government’s commitment to transparency.

Katy Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of flexible resourcing within HM Revenue and Customs in terms of lost yield from staff being moved away from their normal duties to assist with call handling during the tax credit peak.

Mr Gauke: Call handling supports compliance at the first point of contact by helping customers to get it right first time.

HMRC has committed to delivering £24.5 billion of compliance yield in 2014-15—that commitment remains unchanged.

Revenue and Customs: Irvine

Katy Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the tax yield generated by compliance officers working in Irvine tax office in 2013-14; (2) what the (a) total operating cost and (b) staffing cost other than for staff not engaged in compliance work of Irvine tax office was in 2013-14.

Mr Gauke: The information requested is not available.

WALES

NATO Summit

12. Oliver Colvile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many senior civil servants appointed to positions in his Department since 2010 were previously (a) political appointees within that Department and (b) employed by a political party.

Stephen Crabb: None.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Apprentices

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Ministers for Women and Equalities how many apprentices the Department has accepted as part of the Civil Service Fast Track Apprenticeship Scheme; and how many were (a) women and (b) men in each year since the scheme started.

Mrs Grant: The Department does not currently have any apprentices from the Civil Service Fast Track Apprenticeship Scheme. We have however taken part in the Summer Diversity Internship Programme and offer placements to individuals on the various Fast Stream schemes. These schemes are managed centrally by Cabinet Office and Civil Service Resourcing.

Mental Health Services: LGBT People

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Ministers for Women and Equalities what discussions the Government Equalities Office has had with LGBT mental health service providers in the last year.

Mrs Grant: Ministers and officials from the Government Equalities Office regularly meet a broad range of LGB&T stakeholders, including mental health providers and other organisations with an interest in this area, to discuss key issues and priorities for the sector. Topics raised include the mental health needs of LGB&T individuals, areas of discrimination and issues with service provision.

In the last year, officials have met with organisations with an interest in this area including: the Albert Kennedy Trust, Bi Community News, Bisexual Index, BiUK, Broken Rainbow, GALOP, GIRES, METRO Centre, PACE, Press for Change, Stonewall, Stonewall Housing, The Lesbian and Gay Foundation (LGF), The LGBT Consortium, and The National LGB&T Partnership. The LGBT Consortium, the National LGB&T Partnership and BiUK are umbrella organisations who raise issues on behalf of their wider membership. Officials also sit on the Parliamentary Forum on Gender Identity where mental health issues are regularly raised. Officials have also had meetings with NHS England and Public Health England at which they have discussed mental health issues.

In the last year, the Minister for Sport, Tourism and Equalities met representatives from the Lesbian and Gay Foundation, LGB&T Consortium, PACE Health, Stonewall, Broken Rainbow, the METRO Centre, and BiUK on 10 October 2013; and representatives from GIRES, Gendered Intelligence and the Gender Identity Clinic in Hammersmith on 15 October 2013.

Senior Civil Servants

John Woodcock: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many senior civil servants appointed to positions in his Department since 2010 were previously (a) political appointees within that Department and (b) employed by a political party.

[204334]

Stephen Crabb: Nothing.
On 12 June 2014 the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport visited Birmingham LGBT Centre which hosts mental health services. The Secretary of State also met leading LG&B&T representatives on 30 June 2014 including Stonewall, Lesbian and Gay Foundation, LG&B&T Consortium, GIERES, and Gendered Intelligence. Health issues were discussed at all events.

Written Questions: Government Responses

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Ministers for Women and Equalities what proportion of named day written questions were answered within the prescribed period in each year since 2010. [203815]

Mrs Grant: Since joining DCMS in September 2012, as part of a machinery of government move, the Government Equalities Office has answered the following proportion of its Named Day parliamentary questions within the prescribed period:

- 2012 (September 2012 to Dec 2012) 0% (of those late 55% were answered within one day of the prescribed period)
- 2013 (January 2013 to December 2013) 46% (of those late 22% were answered within one day of the prescribed period)
- 2014 (January 2014 to Date) 83% (of those late 50% were answered within one day of the prescribed period)

The Department does not hold figures for previous years.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Civil Servants: Codes of Practice

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many (a) internal and (b) external complaints have been received by his Department about alleged breaches of the Civil Service Code of Conduct since 2010; and what actions his Department has taken in response to each such complaint. [203959]

Mike Penning: The requirements of the Civil Service Code are incorporated within the Department’s Standards of Behaviour Policy which sets out the Department’s high expectations of employees. Breaches of the Civil Service Code are not specifically identified; the Department records disciplinary incidents under its Standards of Behaviour policy.

Employment Schemes: Disability

Jesse Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the proposed funding model for residential training colleges will be announced. [203587]

Mike Penning: Decisions around the future of DWP commissioned residential training college provision is still subject to internal departmental governance. We expect to be in a position to clarify this shortly.

New Enterprise Allowance

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people who received the new enterprise allowance have since reclaimed (a) jobseeker’s allowance, (b) income support as a lone parent and (c) employment and support allowance; and how many of these were (i) women and (ii) men. [203806]

Esther McVey: The Department has made an assessment of the number of new enterprise allowance participants returning to any out-of-work benefit in the following published analysis. This suggests that 78% of people who started drawing the new enterprise allowance remained off benefit continuously for 12 months.


The analysis is not available by type of benefit or by gender.

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what targets there are on increasing the number of women receiving the new enterprise allowance; and what progress has been made on these targets in the last year. [203807]

Esther McVey: There are no formal targets in place for increasing the number of women who participate in the New Enterprise Allowance scheme. Latest statistics show that since the launch of NEA in 2011 to the end of March 2014, there were 46,000 allowance claims, of which 15,720 were from women. The weekly allowance is payable when the participant closes their claim to benefits and commences trading. The rate of take up of NEA by women is approximately one third of the total. This is consistent with the proportion of women claiming jobseeker’s allowance (the benefit claimed by the majority of NEA participants), demonstrating the success of the scheme in attracting all groups to access this support.

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of the recipients of the new enterprise allowance who previously claimed (a) access to work benefits, (b) disability living allowance and (c) incapacity benefit were (i) male and (ii) female. [203822]

Esther McVey: The numbers of recipients of new enterprise allowance financial support for whom we have a record of at least one claim for access to work, disability living allowance, incapacity benefit or employment support allowance are shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEA participants with at least one previous claim for access to work (ATW), disability living allowance (DLA), incapacity benefit (IB) and/or employment support allowance (ESA) by gender</th>
<th>ATW</th>
<th>DLA</th>
<th>ESA/IB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>8,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>12,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes:
1. Figures rounded to nearest 100. Totals may not sum due to rounding
2. Figures include all claims for ATW and ESA and all live claims since 28 June 1999 for IB and DLA.
3. Claimants are counted for each of the benefits they have claimed previously, e.g. someone who has claimed DLA and IB is counted in both columns.
4. Claimants who have previously claimed both ESA and IB are only counted once in the ESA/IB column.
5. DLA can be claimed at the same time as NEA. Figures include NEA participants whose DLA claim continues whilst also receiving NEA financial support.
6. Access to work is available to NEA participants. Figures for ATW include those who claimed ATW support within six months of starting NEA financial support.

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many (a) women’s and (b) men’s business plans which were approved received a weekly allowance for 26 weeks of a total of £1,274 as part of the new enterprise allowance. [203824]

Esther McVey: The information is not held centrally. We estimate that developing an appropriate methodology and quality assuring the analysis would exceed disproportionate cost limits. [203827]

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many (a) women and (b) men are recipients of the new enterprise allowance. [203828]

Esther McVey: Official Statistics on the numbers of new enterprise allowance mentoring starts and financial support starts are published quarterly and can be accessed via the following link:

These statistics include a breakdown of starts by gender.

Gloria De Piero: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many single parents have set up businesses using the new enterprise allowance scheme; and of these, what proportion are female. [203830]

Esther McVey: Data on the number of applications for new enterprise allowance is not available.

Lucy Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people whose main disability is cystic fibrosis are in receipt of the daily living award for personal independence payment at the (a) standard and (b) enhanced rate; (2) how many people whose main disability is cystic fibrosis are in receipt of the daily living award for personal independence payment at the (a) standard and (b) enhanced rate. [203885]

Mike Penning: The information requested to the level of detail asked for is not currently available. We intend to publish more detailed data on medical conditions in the future.

Information on the numbers of successful new claimants is available against a range of conditions, including respiratory conditions which will include those who have cystic fibrosis. The 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:

Procurement

Rachel Reeves: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of his Department’s procurement expenditure was awarded to small and medium-sized enterprises in (a) direct procurement and (b) indirect procurement spend in (i) 2010, (ii) 2011, (iii) 2012 and (iv) 2013; and what the projected proportion is for (A) 2014, (B) 2015 and (C) 2016. [203787]

Mike Penning: The information requested is best provided in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of total DWP spend with SME’s</th>
<th>Direct SME spend</th>
<th>Indirect SME spend</th>
<th>Total SME spend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>14.99</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>16.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12*</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>17.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012-13**</td>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>8.90</td>
<td>16.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>11.28</td>
<td>15.48</td>
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Note: Percentage figures have been rounded to 2 decimal places

Targets for percentage total spend with SME’s

<table>
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<th>Spend (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
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<td>2015-16</td>
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<td>2016-17</td>
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</table>

With around 78% of the Department’s contract expenditure due to be re-tendered in the next 4 years, the Department will undertake a number of activities designed to encourage SME’s to engage with our procurement exercises.

Universal Credit: Domestic Violence

Mike Kane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make an assessment of the risk of a link between the introduction of universal credit and levels of domestic violence. [203595]
Esther McVey: No such assessment is planned. There are safeguards in place in universal credit to ensure that we have the ability to split payments between partners in cases of domestic violence, allowing each claimant to receive a separate payment.

Work Programme

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects the independent evaluation of the Work programme to be published.

Esther McVey: Findings from the final stages of the Work programme evaluation will be published once the evaluation is complete, currently expected to be at the end of 2014.

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to improve the performance of the Work programme for people over 50 years of age; and if he will make a statement.

Esther McVey: The Work programme is continuing to offer tailored support to people over 50 and providers are continuing to design support based on each individual need.

Work programme performance has been improving. Providers are improving their own performance, in part driven by the Department’s performance management regime.
Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 9 July 2014

HOME DEPARTMENT

Offences Against Children: Internet

Andrea Leadsom: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps she is taking to work with police forces across the country to protect children from online sexual exploitation.

Letter of correction from Norman Baker:

An error has been identified in the written answer given to the hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) on 7 April 2014.

The full answer given was as follows:

Norman Baker: The Government is committed to preventing online child abuse. Details of the Government plans to strengthen the protection of children from online sexual exploitation were published last summer in the Action Plan of the National Group to tackle Sexual Violence Against Children and Vulnerable People. Copies will be placed in the House Library and can be found at the following link: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/230443/Sexual_Violence_against_Children_and_Vulnerable_People.pdf

The Child Exploitation Online Protection Command of the National Crime Agency (NCA-CEOP) is the UK’s national law enforcement agency committed to preventing and tackling the sexual abuse of children both online and offline. In 2012/13, NCA-CEOP safeguarded and protected 560 children, an increase of 41% on the previous year.

The correct answer should have been:

Norman Baker: The Government is committed to preventing online child abuse. Details of the Government plans to strengthen the protection of children from online sexual exploitation were published last summer in the Action Plan of the National Group to tackle Sexual Violence Against Children and Vulnerable People. Copies will be placed in the House Library and can be found at the following link: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/230443/Sexual_Violence_against_Children_and_Vulnerable_People.pdf

The Child Exploitation Online Protection Command of the National Crime Agency (NCA-CEOP) is the UK’s national law enforcement agency committed to preventing and tackling the sexual abuse of children both online and offline. In 2012/13, NCA-CEOP safeguarded and protected 790 children, an increase of 85% on the previous year.

The NCA-CEOP Command works closely with all 43 police forces in England and Wales, Police Scotland and PSNI.

In January 2013, the police created a National Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan which sought to improve the police response to all forms of CSE both online and offline. Each force has now completed a benchmarking exercise, allowing them to understand and improve their capability to deal with CSE.

HMIC are close to completing an inspection into the policing of online sexual exploitation and should be publishing their findings in the near future. This will help us identify best practice and also where the service needs to improve to deal with the proliferation of indecent images on the internet and grooming.

The correct answer should have been:
### ORAL ANSWERS

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### WRITTEN ANSWERS

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