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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 4 September 2014**



# House of Commons

*Thursday 4 September 2014*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Energy Security

1. **Mr Tim Yeo** (South Suffolk) (Con): What assessment he has made of the security of the UK's energy supply. [905173]

5. **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What steps he is taking to increase the UK's energy security. [905177]

6. **Stephen Mosley** (City of Chester) (Con): What assessment he has made of the security of the UK's energy supply. [905178]

13. **Joan Walley** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): What steps he is taking to increase the UK's energy security. [905189]

**The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Mr Edward Davey):** We have taken a number of measures to ensure the security of the UK's energy supply, including introducing new electricity system balancing measures. Our recent national gas risk assessment demonstrated that our gas infrastructure is resilient. In the autumn, I will publish the statutory security of supply report for 2014, which will provide a further assessment of our energy security, and set out my response to the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets' recent electricity capacity report. We have also engaged closely with EU and G7 partners on measures to increase the EU's energy security.

**Mr Yeo:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most cost-effective as well as greenest ways to address concerns about security is through greater use of demand-side response, which has been successfully deployed at scale in the United States? Will he undertake to ensure that the treatment of demand-side response providers in the forthcoming capacity market and the transitional arrangements is no less favourable than those available to electricity generators?

**Mr Davey:** I am pleased at the way in which our demand-side measures have been advancing. They are something on which I have placed a lot of stress. I know that my Minister of State appeared before my hon.

Friend's Committee when it was investigating this matter. We certainly want to ensure that we move forward on this and that there is nothing in the way of taking up more demand-side measures.

**Nic Dakin:** Last month, EDF announced that it was temporarily closing four of its nuclear reactors, reducing the UK's nuclear capacity by a quarter. With most of the nuclear fleet being decommissioned by 2023, what steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure maximum use of those assets before that date?

**Mr Davey:** With regards to the two nuclear plants involved, Heysham and Hartlepool, we are taking only precautionary measures to ensure that proper safety and security measures are examined, and I am sure that the whole House will agree that that is the right step. The impact that that will have on our margins over the winter has already been taken account of in National Grid's analysis and procurement plans. On the hon. Gentleman's longer point, the whole energy strategy is designed to ensure that we have the capacity that we need not just for the short and medium term but for the long term. I refer him to the investment report that we published in July, which shows a fantastic record of investment in energy across the piece. Indeed, there have been record levels of investment in energy, especially in low-carbon energy.

**Stephen Mosley:** What action are the Government taking to ensure that gas supplies keep flowing this winter should Russian gas stop flowing to the EU?

**Mr Davey:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. The UK imports very little gas from Russia. We have the most liquid and resilient gas markets in the whole of the European Union, but of course we are not complacent. We have been working at the EU to ensure not only that we check resilience of our gas supplies but that our EU colleagues are able to ensure their energy security. This is an EU measure which is very important for the whole of the European Union.

**Joan Walley:** One of the best things that the Secretary of State can do for continued investment is to bring forward the 2030 decarbonisation target to give long-term certainty to investors.

There is a particular issue with regard to gas and gas storage, which is impacting on ceramic manufacturers. Now that we have a new Minister, who is at the Department of Energy and Climate Change and at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and National Grid has announced that it has brought forward the supplemental balancing reserve tender, which will put even greater pressure on energy suppliers and security this winter, it is absolutely essential that the Secretary of State reconsiders his Department's stance on gas storage. We urgently need a change of policy on extra gas storage.

**Mr Davey:** The hon. Lady knows that we legislated to introduce a decarbonisation target for 2030 in the Energy Act 2013. She also knows that my party strongly supported that.

We looked at gas storage in huge detail to see whether there was a case for Government intervention, but we found that an awful lot of gas storage was being built

with more modern technology, which means that the gas can be produced and brought into the pipeline network much more quickly. We have looked at that matter in detail and we do not intend to review it.

17. [905195] **Mr Peter Lilley** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the problems we are facing illustrate that, despite huge investment, wind and other renewables cannot replace conventional fuels and require additional capacity megawatt for megawatt to meet need when the wind does not blow or the sun does not shine? Will he confirm that the Government's costings for renewables do not take into account the cost of supplying an additional amount of conventional capacity?

**Mr Davey:** We need a mixed approach to energy supply and generation. The Government have always argued that we need renewables, gas and new nuclear and that diversity gives a country extra strength in its security of supply. When we do our analysis we consider all the system costs, not just of renewables but of nuclear and other systems, and no type of electricity generation is without its challenges. For example, in the short term, we have seen fires at two coal plants, Ironbridge and Ferrybridge, that we are having to take into account in our analysis to ensure that our capacity margins are okay over the winter. The mixed approach that we propose is the most secure.

**Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): The future of Thoresby and Kellingley coal mines has now been in limbo for more than five months, which raises concerns about energy security. Both the Business Secretary and the previous Energy Minister, the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Michael Fallon), said that they were not open to supporting or providing state aid, but the new Minister of State has indicated in meetings that he may be open to state aid, so will the Secretary of State clear up once and for all whether the Government will consider providing it?

**Mr Davey:** Important though the issue is, it is not an issue of energy security. Even if those collieries were in any way to be suspended, the energy security of the country would be okay. The Government have worked tirelessly with the different companies involved to do what we can to help them reach a deal that will ensure the future of those pits, and we will continue to do just that.

**Caroline Flint:** It really is important that we have clarity about the future of these mines. It helps no one—not UK Coal, not other potential investors and not the work force and their representatives—for this uncertainty to continue. The Business Secretary and the previous Energy Minister indicated that they were not open to providing state aid, whereas the new Minister has indicated that he may be open to state aid, so will the Secretary of State clarify? Will the Government not support state aid or have they changed their mind?

**Mr Davey:** We consider all options, but the right hon. Lady presents state aid as a “get out of jail free” option when it is not. If the European Commission were presented with the state aid case, it is extremely likely that by the end of the support it would require the

collieries to close. We think that there is an advantage in a commercial approach and that is what our attention is focused on.

### Renewable Energy Investment

2. **Mark Menzies** (Fylde) (Con): What assessment he has made of trends in renewable energy investment since 2010. [905174]

**The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Matthew Hancock):** Since 2010, an average of £7 billion has been invested each year in renewable electricity, compared with £3 billion a year in the previous Parliament.

**Mark Menzies:** May I take this opportunity to welcome my right hon. Friend to his new role? There has been a recent proposal for a tidal gateway across the Ribble estuary that could provide enough electricity for 18,000 homes. Will the Minister update the House on the progress of the project and ensure that environmental considerations will be at the forefront of the proposal?

**Matthew Hancock:** The project is proceeding and I would be very happy to hear more detail about my hon. Friend's position and support for the project. Ensuring that we get renewable investment of all kinds is an important part of our plan to deal with climate change and increase energy security, and that is something on which we are working hard.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): The Minister has just heard an exchange about the question of state aid that specifically referred to him. We met the miners from the three deep-mine pits that are left, Kellingley, Thoresby and Hatfield, which are in peril. I am talking about energy supply, something for which the Minister is responsible. This Government took £700 million out of the miners' pension fund last February and all we want is £70 million of state aid for those three coal pits to exhaust their reserves. Treat us like you do the oil companies when you give them tax breaks in the North sea and let us exploit the reserves in the three remaining pits.

**Matthew Hancock:** I have much to learn from the hon. Gentleman, but that question was not really about renewable energy. Since taking up this post, I have been working hard for a solution to the issues around UK Coal. The Secretary of State set out some of the downsides to a state aid solution. I am prepared to look at all options, but we should be clear that the EU Commission is absolute that it would require a closure of those mines were we to put in place a state aid solution. I come from Nottinghamshire mining stock and I will not take any nonsense from the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): Later this month, I shall be attending a meeting in north Wales to discuss the construction of a tidal lagoon at Colwyn bay—one of several that are planned for the coast of Wales and the north of England. Does my right hon. Friend agree that tidal lagoons have the potential to make an enormous contribution to the energy security of this country, and what is he doing to encourage their development?

**Matthew Hancock:** Yes, tidal has enormous potential. Only last month, at Pentland firth, we saw the roll-out of the biggest tidal array yet. I look forward to working very closely with my right hon. Friend.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his post. I hope he is as energetic in it as he was as Minister for Skills and Enterprise. May I press him on the sustainability issue? Is he aware that the Trillion Fund is a new way of raising money for sustainable energy projects, both in this country and worldwide? It is a very exciting new venture. Vivienne Westwood has just invested £1 million in it. Will the Minister get behind that crowdfunding initiative and give it some support?

**Matthew Hancock:** The hon. Gentleman is very kind; I am grateful for his compliments. I look forward to the opportunity of working positively with Vivienne Westwood on improving our energy supplies and security. We need improvement across the board, and that includes ensuring that we make the most of our indigenous gas supplies. Improving renewables in our country is, of course, about finance as well as technology on the ground. There is a big opportunity, especially as the cost of renewables falls—the cost of solar is pre-eminent in that fall—and we must seize it with both hands.

**Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): Skills, as well as nuclear, are important to pushing forward the renewable energy cause, so does the Minister agree that, as part of the long-term economic plan, the investment by the growth fund in Berkeley for a skills and training centre in green and other energy sources is an excellent way forward?

**Matthew Hancock:** Yes; I know something about that proposal from my previous job. I am of course a great fan of the skills agenda and I am convinced of the need to drive up the quality and quantity of skills in this area. I am also a big fan of the long-term economic plan, so my hon. Friend's question just about hit the nail on the head.

**Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): Onshore wind developments are being held up by huge delays in the planning system. Since 2009, onshore wind projects have taken, on average, an additional four months to receive planning approval. In total, developments are taking more than four years from the point of application to generating electricity—an increase of over a year since 2009. Can the Minister explain why?

**Matthew Hancock:** The easiest way is to say that local people's views are now being taken into account, and I am very glad that they are. It is funny to get such a question from the Labour Front Bench, given that the amount of investment in renewables has doubled in this Parliament—it has doubled on the previous Parliament. At the same time, though, we have strengthened planning rules to allow more control by local people, because the worst way to try to improve the roll-out of renewables, which is important for energy security as well as for climate change, is to ignore the position and the views of local people. That was what happened under the previous Administration and we have changed that.

**Julie Elliott:** That was not an answer to my question, and I have to say that most of the developments started under a Labour Government. The figures reveal shocking delays to vital new energy infrastructure. Delays to onshore wind and the use of recoveries and call-ins, not local people, mean that projects are left languishing for years before they receive an answer. Those delays cost jobs and threaten our energy security. What urgent steps is the Minister taking, and what discussions has he had with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, to sort out this mess?

**Matthew Hancock:** I have discussions with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to ensure that local people's views are taken into account. The hon. Lady says that the extra investments are due to decisions taken under the previous Government, but that is not true. There is an increase in renewables roll-out, but we have to do it taking local people's views into account, because to save the global environment and tackle climate change, we cannot sacrifice our local environment, particularly in beautiful places. Getting that balance right is very important. It was not right before and we have put it right.

### Sustainable Energy

3. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What his Department's policy is on promoting sustainable energy sources; what estimate he has made of future UK generating capacity from such sources; and if he will make a statement. [905175]

**The Minister for Business and Enterprise (Matthew Hancock):** We have a range of measures in place to promote sustainable energy sources, including reforms to the electricity market to support nuclear, renewables and carbon capture and storage. The percentage of electricity generated from renewable sources has doubled from 7% in 2010 to 14% at the end of last year.

**Michael Fabricant:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his answer, but it demonstrates that renewables are not the only way and something we can depend on for electricity supply. I note that generation from nuclear power went down slightly in the first quarter of this year, from 18% to 17.7%. What action is he taking to ensure that nuclear energy expands in the years to come?

**Matthew Hancock:** The whole Department is supporting and driving the first new generation nuclear power stations, which are extremely important for our energy security and the energy mix. Of course a mix is the best way to deliver energy. Renewables are important and are now a material part of our energy supply, but nuclear is zero-carbon energy, too, so we are working hard to land the new generation of nuclear power stations.

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): Is it still Government policy to support energy from waste incineration? There are problems in my constituency, where the biggest incinerator, run by Viridor, is causing problems of emissions, odours and noise. Will he ask his officials to have a look at the situation in Runcorn to see what is going wrong there?

**Matthew Hancock:** There are opportunities in energy from waste, not least because it deals with two problems at once, but we have to make sure we get the details right. I will be happy to look at the case the hon. Gentleman raises.

**Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle) (Con):** The record growth, the record deployment, the record investment in renewables under this coalition Government are hugely to their credit, but there is more that we can do. Solar is a particularly exciting opportunity, as my right hon. Friend says, and we are about to smash through 4 GW of solar deployed under this Government, but we need to do more to unlock the potential of roofs, particularly commercial and industrial roof space. Will he pledge to work with my hon. Friends to continue to tear down the barriers to deployment?

**Matthew Hancock:** Here I am trumpeting this Government's successes in deployment of renewable investment, and there is the man who led the charge. I pay huge tribute to the work my right hon. Friend did—he did an absolutely terrific job. Thanks to his work, 1 million people now live with solar panels on their roof. I think solar is one of the big opportunities. As the price falls and it becomes competitive—potentially grid competitive—in the short to medium term, solar is a big opportunity, even in cloudy old England.

**Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab):** Following on from the exchange with my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott), what assessment has the Minister made of the impact of a brake on wind farm development on land on our burgeoning wind farm manufacturing industry and on companies such as West Coast Energy in my constituency, which create hundreds of jobs specialising in that growth area of the economy?

**Matthew Hancock:** The doubling of investment in renewables under this Government has undoubtedly helped those people, as it has helped many other people to get jobs, which is one of the reasons we are seeing record jobs in this country as part of our long-term economic plan.

**Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con):** The people of north and west Wiltshire strongly support renewable energy, but we are besieged by hundreds of planning applications from London-based commercial operations for solar farms, not on roofs of factories or brownfield sites, but on greenfield sites across the county. Will my right hon. Friend reiterate the strong message that our right hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) previously sent out, which is a strong presumption against the use of agricultural land and a strong presumption in favour of industrial roofs and other places?

**Matthew Hancock:** There are opportunities for solar, where appropriately sited, in many different places on roofs and on land. In fact, land can be combined with agricultural use and solar. One other advantage of solar is that it can effectively be masked from being seen from elsewhere because it is low-rise rather than high-rise. This has to be done sensitively. There is no point in destroying our green and pleasant land in order to save

the global environment. We have to tackle security of supply and climate change in a way that also protects the local environment.

### Onshore Wind Farms

4. **Mr Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con):** What plans he has to change the subsidy regime for onshore wind farms; and if he will make a statement. [905176]

**The Minister for Business and Enterprise (Matthew Hancock):** In future, instead of a fixed level of subsidy, onshore wind will have to bid for support through our new contracts for difference, which will be allocated competitively so that only the best-value projects are supported. The first allocation rounds open in October.

**Mr Bellingham:** Is the Minister aware that Norfolk hosts a large number of offshore wind arrays that command widespread public support, in stark contrast to most—not all—onshore wind farms, which can be very unpopular when they destroy beautiful landscapes? Further to his earlier reply, can he confirm that Norfolk will not have any more onshore wind farms imposed on it in the face of local opposition?

**Matthew Hancock:** As I said, we have given more local control in the planning system, as well as changing the subsidy regime so that onshore wind would have to be competitive, for instance, against solar. As the costs of solar fall, it is increasingly able to compete for that subsidy. This is about getting the best possible value for money out of the subsidy but also ensuring that local people have a say in the planning system. I know some of the sites that my hon. Friend is talking about—indeed, I visited, or rather went past, one of the developments last month—so I know of the local concern in his constituency. We have to make sure that in future local people have more of a say, and we are doing that.

**Mr Andrew Robathan (South Leicestershire) (Con):** We should be very proud of the investment in renewable energy and the progress that has been made over the past four years, making this the greenest Government ever, to coin a phrase. The current policy of reducing the subsidies is absolutely sensible. However, may I gently say that sometimes those who make the most noise are a very vocal minority? My experience in my constituency is that a very few vocal people oppose wind farms whereas most people say, "Actually, not only do we not mind them, we quite like them."

**Matthew Hancock:** Where local people not only do not mind local wind farms but quite like them, and the local council decides that that is their democratic decision, giving them more power over the placement of local turbines is the right approach. This is about making sure that we have support locally.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** Under the planning system there are separate land use categories for houses, industry and retail but there is no separate land use category entitled "energy generation". This is an accident of history, because when electricity was first generated it was done only by the Crown using Crown prerogative. The reason local authorities are struggling

with all the planning applications for wind farms and solar farms is that they do not have this separate land use category. Will the Minister be kind enough to agree to meet me and the Minister responsible for local government to see how that category could be introduced, because it would better facilitate and regulate the flow of planning applications through all the district councils up and down the land?

**Matthew Hancock:** I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend and the relevant Minister from the Department for Communities and Local Government, because of course planning issues are directly for that Department. While there may not be a separate category within the planning rules at one level, there is guidance explaining how the rules should be applied in terms of energy generation and transmission, so we just have to make sure that the details are right.

### Energy Bills

7. **Julie Hilling** (Bolton West) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help households with their energy bills. [905180]

**The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Mr Edward Davey):** Energy bills are a real concern for many households, so we are helping people with them by providing direct financial help, encouraging competition, and supporting energy efficiency measures. Last December, we reviewed Government policy costs and made changes to take an average of £50 a year off a household's bill, and we are making it easier to shop around, switch, and get the best deal. We are also providing direct financial help to the most vulnerable through the warm home discount, which will take £140 directly off the energy bills of more than 2 million of the poorest households this year.

**Julie Hilling:** Gas and electricity prices are falling, but bills are not, and profits for domestic suppliers doubled in the past year. In Bolton West, more than 40,000 households would save £120 from Labour's energy price freeze, so why will the Government not freeze their bills?

**Mr Davey:** We all know that Labour's energy price freeze is a con. We know that the energy companies will put their prices up directly after the freeze, that it will hurt competition and push out the smaller suppliers that are giving people real choice and helping them cut their bills now, and that it will cut investment. Everyone knows that Labour's energy bill freeze is a con and would not work.

**Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): Last year Hyndburn council launched a scheme to deal with hard-to-treat homes, based on the energy companies obligation. In the autumn statement, that funding was withdrawn and all the leaflets had to go in the skip. This summer it launched a scheme with the green deal home improvement fund. All the leaflets were printed, but the goalposts were moved and on the last day before the recess the fund was scrapped, and all the leaflets have gone in the bin. My constituency has tremendous problems with homes that need insulating and renewable energy. What will the Secretary of State do to ensure that that funding reaches my constituents in a constituency that needs it?

**Mr Davey:** This Government have a very good record on energy efficiency and we want to help the hon. Gentleman's constituents and others to cut their bills through energy efficiency. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we made some changes to ECO, and that was in order to take £50 on average off people's bills. I hope he supports that and that he will tell his constituents about that cut in their bills which this Government have delivered.

### Energy Efficiency

8. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What steps he is taking to increase the UK's energy efficiency in comparison to that of other industrialised states. [905181]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd):** The innovation of UK business, underpinned by a range of policy measures, has seen the UK become a world leader on energy efficiency. Since 2006 we have had the least energy-intensive economy in the G7. According to the 2013 energy projections the UK is on track to overachieve against its 2020 European Union energy efficiency targets, while collectively the EU has more work to do.

**Jeremy Lefroy:** Energy-intensive industries, including ceramics, brick and tile-making and steel, have done a huge amount over the past two decades to improve their energy efficiency, yet they face competition from companies both within the EU and elsewhere whose energy costs are subsidised, whether overtly or covertly. Will my hon. Friend set out what the Government are doing to ensure that UK energy-intensive industries are not put at a competitive disadvantage?

**Amber Rudd:** The Government recognise both the challenges that high energy costs represent for industry, particularly energy-intensive industries, and the progress made to improve efficiency across many sectors. That is why in Budget 2014 the Government announced a £500 million-a-year package for support for energy-intensive industries, including compensation for the cost of renewable support schemes and providing relief from the climate change levy, including full exemptions for the metallurgical and mineralogical sectors. Together with the amendments to the carbon price floor, those changes will be worth about £7 billion to businesses in the UK.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): Thanks to the work of Nottingham Energy Partnership and Nottingham city council, many of my constituents want solid wall insulation to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, but the sudden closure of the green deal home improvement fund just a month after it opened means that they cannot afford it and local firms offering to insulate cannot plan future work. The Secretary of State dodged the question, but what is the answer: what went wrong and when will there be some certainty about the future of this scheme?

**Amber Rudd:** I simply do not recognise the hon. Lady's characterisation of the scheme. It has been a great success, and it is because of its success that we had to close it early. More than 20,000 new homes are going to receive energy-efficiency measures and I would hope that the hon. Lady would welcome that.

**Mr Ronnie Campbell** (Blyth Valley) (Lab): When it comes to efficiency, would it not be more effective to allow this country's three remaining deep-pit coal mines to exhaust their reserves, rather than bringing in Russian coal, which Putin could stop tomorrow, and also American coal?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. Of course this country's energy mix must include renewables as well as coal. I think that my hon. Friend has largely answered that question already.

### Wind Farms (Payments)

9. **Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): What steps he is taking to reduce payments to owners of wind farms that are not producing electricity. [905182]

**The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Matthew Hancock):** In 2012 the Government introduced new licence conditions to prevent generators profiting unfairly from transmission constraint. That has enabled National Grid to halve the average amount paid per unit of electricity to wind farms to reduce output. In the medium term, planned network upgrades will reduce further the overall level of constraint costs.

**Graham Stringer:** On one day in August, the Government spent £2.8 million on wind farms that were not producing electricity. "Money for Nothing" might be a good pop lyric, but it is not a good policy for a Government who are short of money. The Minister of State, when he was a Back Bencher, said that payments to wind farms should be drastically cut. Would not reducing these absurd payments to zero be a good start?

**Matthew Hancock:** Constraint payments have been in place for many years, and those for renewable energy are no different from those for other types of energy. They are part of making sure that we have the right amount of power in the grid. The Government have halved the amount paid per unit of electricity, so the hon. Gentleman, rather than harping, should stand up and say, "Congratulations. Can we do some more?"

### Energy Efficiency

10. **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help households improve their energy efficiency. [905184]

16. **Grahame M. Morris** (Easington) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help households improve their energy efficiency. [905194]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd):** Over 750,000 homes were improved under the green deal and ECO between January 2013 and June 2014, and we are on track to meet our target of improving the energy efficiency of 1 million homes by March 2015. A further 20,000 homes could be improved under the green deal home improvement fund, which has a pipeline of work over the coming months. In the longer term, we are providing certainty

for the market through the extension of ECO until 2017 and up to £120 million of funding in each of the next two years for future schemes.

**Mr Betts:** Ministers must be the only people who believe that the green deal has been a great success for either householders or small businesses—small businesses that are suffering cash-flow problems because of the Department's delays in paying for vouchers; small businesses that lost out because they sold customers green deal assessments that could not be completed before the scheme was cancelled; small businesses being offered vouchers on the black market for up to £1,000 for solid wall insulation. When will the Government sort out the problems that they have created for small businesses?

**Amber Rudd:** The Government are very aware of the efforts that small businesses make and want to support them, as we continue to do in every Department. The answer to the question is that, because of the outstanding success of the green deal home improvement fund, we are making every effort to ensure that every voucher is correct. The hon. Gentleman has described a situation that would not be in accordance with the rules of the green deal home improvement fund, and it is for that reason that we must be absolutely certain that every application is correct, because we are looking after taxpayers' money.

**Grahame M. Morris:** Last year the former Minister, the right hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker), said that he would have sleepless nights if fewer than 10,000 people had signed up to the green deal by the end of the year. The latest figures I have seen show that just over 1,800 people have signed up. I welcome the new Minister to her post, but may I inquire how well she is sleeping?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. I am sleeping perfectly well, but I am also enjoying standing up here today. I think that he is referring to the green deal finance plan, rather than the green deal itself. Green deal measures continue to be a great success and people can fund them however they want; some do so through the green deal finance plan, and some do so through other sources.

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): As we have heard, it is now six weeks since the green deal home improvement fund closed overnight without notice, yet we still have not heard an account of what happened from the Government. The Minister might believe that it has been a great success, but the hundreds of people who stand to lose their jobs as a result of this incompetence would probably disagree. When will she be able to tell us just how many of the vouchers that are issued will be redeemed? What is she doing to help consumers get the measures they need? Crucially, if the Government have nothing to hide, does she agree that the Public Accounts Committee should conduct an investigation into this shocking example of Government incompetence?

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Gentleman is a little ahead of himself. We are still looking at the applications. Because of the success of the scheme, we are having to do a detailed review of all the vouchers. It is a little early to



talk about the Public Accounts Committee. I remain confident that the scheme is a great success, that we will look after small businesses and that it will deliver what we intended: the energy efficiencies in consumers' houses that are so important to us all.

### Carbon and Renewables Targets

12. **David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in other EU member states on carbon and renewables targets. [905186]

**The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Mr Edward Davey):** I have engaged extensively with my EU counterparts on the European Commission's proposals for a 2030 climate and energy framework. That has included discussions at the Energy and Environment Councils in March, May, June and July, and several meetings of the green growth group of like-minded EU Ministers, which I established. Throughout the discussions, I have stressed the need for early political agreement on an ambitious, cost-effective and flexible 2030 framework. That is important to unlock investment and to put the EU in a stronger position for the global climate negotiations in 2015.

**David Mowat:** To date, EU targets have focused principally on renewables, not on carbon reduction. The result is that countries such as Holland, Germany and Denmark, which produce more carbon per capita than us, have exceeded their renewables targets. Will the Secretary of State ensure that any future targets that we sign up to are focused on carbon reduction, which is the primary aim, and not on the secondary aim of renewables? That would allow nuclear, carbon capture and storage and gas to play a part in other states.

**Mr Davey:** As my hon. Friend is a huge expert in this area, he will know that the electricity market reforms in this country have been deliberately technology neutral. That will be the case as the market evolves over the next decade and more. This country has therefore not had targets for particular technologies. We want the market to decide on the mix. That is the approach that we have taken in the European negotiations. We have argued for the most ambitious greenhouse gas emissions target of any member state and for it to be technology neutral. I am delighted to report to the House that we are winning that argument.

### European Interconnection

14. **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve interconnections with energy markets in other European countries. [905191]

**The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Mr Edward Davey):** Increasing electricity interconnection is an important part of our policy because it supports our energy objectives. The gas market is already well connected. Last December, I published "More interconnection: improving energy security and lowering bills", which sets out our plans. A new regulatory regime for investment has since been announced. The Government have made a commitment to open our

capacity market to interconnected capacity from 2015 and have supported about 6 GW of projects to benefit from European projects of common interest status.

**Oliver Colvile:** Following the visit to Plymouth of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker), who was enthusiastic about the marine energy park, what discussions has the Secretary of State had with Plymouth city council to ensure that the marine energy park is delivered as part of the Plymouth and south-west peninsula city deal?

**Mr Davey:** I have had no personal discussions with Plymouth city council on that matter. I will ensure that those discussions are taken forward either by the Minister of State or myself. That idea is part of our long-term plan. My hon. Friend is right that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle did a fantastic job on marine parks, not just in the south-west, but elsewhere. That is part of the way in which we want to take forward marine and tidal energy.

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): What progress has the Secretary of State made on the Iceland and Norway interconnectors? Will he produce a report for the House on the potential for securing the supply of substantial amounts of very low-carbon energy into the country through those interconnectors?

**Mr Davey:** The Norway project—the NSN project—is particularly exciting because there is a massive surplus of hydroelectric power that could come through a cable from Norway. Those talks have been really effective. The announcements that Ofgem and the Department have made—particularly that we will allow interconnector capacity to bid into the capacity market from 2015—have been well received in Oslo by the Norwegian authorities. I am confident about that interconnector project. The idea behind IceLink is that we could get a cable from Iceland to Scotland and supply geothermal energy through it. We are waiting to hear from the Icelandic authorities on how they want to take that project forward.

### Fracking

15. **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure the safety of fracking. [905193]

**The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Matthew Hancock):** Shale gas, carefully extracted, offers the potential to improve the security of Britain's energy supplies and create jobs. All onshore projects are subject to scrutiny through the planning system, the Environment Agency and the Health and Safety Executive.

**Ian Lucas:** Many of my constituents are expressing concerns about fracking. If the Minister wants to take the public with him when he is dealing with energy applications, will he agree to Labour's amendments to the Infrastructure Bill to allow baseline assessments so that people's concerns can be assessed?

**Matthew Hancock:** We are looking carefully at all the amendments that have been tabled to the Infrastructure Bill. In several cases, the amendments reiterate what already happens. We want to ensure that we make the

most of Britain's indigenous energy supplies in a way that is safe and secure, creates jobs and will give us better security of supply. We will consider all measures to try to do that.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Given that the UK has been producing nuclear energy safely for nearly 60 years without any major problems, does the Minister agree that, given all the safety regulation we have, there is no reason to believe that this country is not capable of extracting shale gas safely?

**Matthew Hancock:** I agree strongly with my hon. Friend, and that is what we are going to do.

**John Robertson** (Glasgow North West) (Lab): I have not made my mind up on fracking yet, but the information that we get is a bit like the Scottish Government's White Paper—full of words but with no answers. Will the Minister ensure that the people of this country are fully informed about fracking and what is happening with it?

**Matthew Hancock:** Yes. We have an intensive communication plan, and I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman is included in any future communications. I can particularly recommend to him one of the Department for Energy and Climate Change publications, which explains in clear detail exactly what fracking is, how it is safe and the regulatory structure for it. It is important to ensure that we take advantage of this indigenous and secure domestic energy supply, but in a way that is safe and secure.

### Global Climate Agreement

18. **Gavin Shuker** (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to secure a legally binding global climate agreement. [905196]

**The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Mr Edward Davey):** If we are to meet the objective of the convention and avoid dangerous climate change, it is imperative that we secure an international, legally binding agreement, with mitigation commitments for all, in Paris in 2015. To facilitate that, I have pressed our case at a number of international ministerial climate change meetings this year, as well as bilaterally with my counterparts in Governments and with other key actors across the globe, including in China, the US and India. I will, as usual, attend the United Nations framework convention on climate change ministerial conference of parties in December this year, and I will also attend the UN Secretary-General's climate summit in September, which will be the first meeting of leaders focused solely on climate change since 2009. Closer to home, I am continuing to push for EU agreement to an ambitious 2030 emissions reduction target of at least 40%, including by convening the green growth group of Ministers.

**Gavin Shuker:** Climate change will affect the poorest people in the poorest parts of the world. Can the Secretary of State confirm that he is working with officials and Ministers at the Department for International Development, and that the Government are looking to make an announcement about initial capitalisation of the international green climate fund before the Ban Ki-moon summit?

**Mr Davey:** I can certainly confirm that we work across Government—not just my Department and DFID but other Departments as well—to ensure that the international climate finance fund that we announced at the beginning of our time in office is wisely spent, particularly to help the poorest, most vulnerable and most exposed.

On the hon. Gentleman's other question, we will make a capital bid to the green climate fund, but I do not think we will necessarily announce it before the UN Secretary-General's New York summit.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): The Chinese President has just said that he will not attend Ban Ki-moon's summit, which follows Prime Minister Modi of India saying the same. Given the statement that the Environment Ministers of the BASIC countries—Brazil, South Africa, India and China—issued in New Delhi recently, does the Secretary of State share my concern that it looks like countries such as India and China are rowing back from their enthusiasm for pushing for an international climate agreement?

**Mr Davey:** No, I do not. In my visits to Beijing and Delhi I see the reverse. I see the Chinese taking climate change more seriously than they have ever done, not just in what they say at the international table but in the actions they take—massive investment in renewable energy and low-carbon energy such as nuclear—not least because of the impact of air pollution in some of their cities on the eastern border. Equally for India, I think that Prime Minister Modi will be a global leader on this issue.

### Topical Questions

T2. [905164] **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Mr Edward Davey):** I start by paying tribute to my two ministerial colleagues who have moved on. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Michael Fallon) will serve in the Cabinet after his excellent work at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, and I particularly thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) for his astonishing contribution, especially in arguing the case for action on climate change. He will be missed in the House, given that he is not seeking re-election.

I welcome my new colleagues, the Under-Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), and the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock), who have already made an impressive start.

I also bring to the House's attention the investment report I mentioned earlier, which we published in July. It shows the record amounts of energy investment that the coalition Government have achieved, especially in low carbon, and I inform the House that after a review of the fourth carbon budget I have decided to leave it unchanged.

**Oliver Colvile:** When last year I raised the impact of standing charges on those in fuel poverty, my right hon. Friend said that he would keep the issue under review. What assessment has he made of the issue since then?

**Mr Davey:** As my hon. Friend will know, we have published a draft fuel poverty strategy. It sets out a range of measures that we would like to take, not least some ambitious new targets for tackling fuel poverty, and the issue raised by my hon. Friend is part of that. Ofgem's retail market review looked at standing charges and their operation, and that analysis will feed into the consultation on the strategy.

**Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab):** In the early exchanges, a difference of approach seemed to arise out of the support or non-support for Thoresby and Kellingley coal mines. Will the Minister of State clarify whether he is open to a state-aid application, and say what form of assistance he would make available to UK Coal? If a formal application is made, how quickly will the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills decide whether to present the case to the Commission? If that is not the case, will he explain why the £4 million loan has been delayed, and say when he expects that money to reach the mines?

**The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Matthew Hancock):** As the Secretary of State and I have described, the commercial option has the benefit of being under the control of UK Coal, and we are working towards that. It has not been delayed; it is a matter of ensuring that it can be done on a commercial basis. On whether we should go further and look at state aid, as I have said, I have been open to all options but there are some serious downsides, not least that the Commission would require the coal mines to close.

**Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD):** Does my right hon. Friend recognise that consumers in rural areas with no mains gas and predominantly solid wall properties still find it difficult to access help to cut their fuel bills? He has visited such properties in my constituency. Is he still working to help them?

**Mr Davey:** I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's question and he has been a real champion of that issue. When I visited his constituency I saw how some rural properties off gas grid have high energy bills because they cannot use gas. This is very much at the heart of the new thinking in our draft fuel poverty strategy, which is now out to consultation. The Department has stepped up its work on that, and we hope to bring proposals to the House by the end of the year.

T3. [905165] **Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op):** Has the Minister seen the report from scientists in Aberdeen working with Cambridge university about the predicted 80% increase in global greenhouse emissions from the production of food, and particularly our increasing reliance—worldwide, but in this country too—on red meat? Will he talk to his colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about that and say what he will do about it?

**Mr Davey:** It certainly is an interesting report and, along with many other issues, we need to consider it very seriously, although that sector does not constitute a big part of the UK's projected emissions growth. The issue has formed part of the European negotiations. Other European countries are looking to expand their agriculture sectors and this is a big issue for them—a genuine issue. It is part of the wider negotiations, and we have to take it seriously.

**Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle) (Con):** When my right hon. Friend travels to New York later this month for the climate summit, will he tell the strong story that in the UK, thanks to the Climate Change Act 2008, passed under the last Labour Government, and this coalition's hitting of our carbon budgets, coupled with our economy having the strongest growth in the G8, it has been possible to have strong growth and to reduce emissions, and that Britain is continuing to show genuine international green leadership?

**Mr Davey:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Green growth is a reality in the UK. Expanding low carbon is part of the Government's long-term economic plan, and we want to ensure that others focus on that as well. That is why we established the green growth group at the EU and have sponsored the new climate economy study due to be launched later this month, ahead of the UN Secretary-General's summit. That will send a message to Heads of State around the world that it is possible to go green and continue to prosper and develop.

T4. [905166] **Mrs Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab):** Maersk Oil will shortly begin the process of awarding major construction contracts for the exploitation of the Culzean field in the UK sector of the central North sea. Maersk will receive significant tax incentives from the UK Treasury, but what help and support is being given to UK fabricators to ensure that they can reasonably benefit from the development?

**Matthew Hancock:** Having a joined-up strategy so that when there is further development in the UK continental shelf we ensure that the whole supply chain is in a position to benefit is an important part of our long-term economic plan—it was great to hear the Secretary of State talk about our long-term economic plan. It is undoubtedly important that, as has happened over many decades, the whole supply chain in the UK benefits from development and exploitation of our indigenous reserves.

T5. [905167] **Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab):** I would like to press the Secretary of State on answers he gave earlier about support for the remnants of the coal industry. Thousands of coal miners' jobs are hanging by a thread, yet his response was that there were issues about committing to closure, but that is not necessarily a problem as long as those pits are allowed to exhaust their known reserves.

**Mr Davey:** What I have said—and what other Ministers have said—is that the Government have worked incredibly closely not just with the commercial companies involved but with unions and others to help everybody come to a result. I have to tell the House, however, that the coal industry is not nationalised; it is in private hands, and we need to work with the commercial operators.

**David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): Will the Secretary of State update the House on the position regarding state aid clearance on Hinkley Point C?

**Mr Davey:** We are actively involved in discussions with the European Commission on this vital state aid notification and have been meeting it over the summer. Most recently, officials met Vice-President Almunia's team in Brussels yesterday, and I had a report yesterday evening. Those discussions are intense and, I think, very constructive.

T6. [905169] **Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): The Government are supporting the roll-out of smart meters that are not so smart: they cannot communicate with smartphones. When will Ministers rectify this failure of Government policy?

**Matthew Hancock:** Action is under way to ensure we get the best possible energy efficiency from both smart meters and private developments, such as smart thermostats—this summer, I installed a smart thermostat, so I can turn the electricity and heating in my home on and off from my iPhone. Getting the best cost savings for consumers as well as reducing energy demand by enhancing and embracing technology is a vital part of what we are doing.

T8. [905171] **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): With Hull city council yesterday granting final planning permission to Siemens, will the Secretary of State join me in encouraging everyone to take advantage of the new green jobs that will be coming to the city, while deploring the statement that UKIP put out saying it would rather the wind turbine jobs went abroad and the statement of the Hull Green party, which last week told BBC Radio Humberside that it did not rule out boycotting Siemens?

**Mr Davey:** The whole House can unite behind what the hon. Lady has said. First, it is very good news that Hull city council has gone for planning permission. This Government have worked with the council, with Siemens and with others to bring forward this exciting and vital investment, which is a real shot in the arm for the offshore wind supply chain that we are determined to see as a healthy sector in this country. The statements from UKIP that the hon. Lady mentioned are deplorable and, as with almost everything UKIP says, are against this country's economic interests. I am particularly surprised to hear that the Green party would want to boycott a company of the standing of Siemens, which has done so much in this country.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): In this Energy Question Time, we have heard from the Government Front Bench that the Government are giving assistance,

money and help to almost every energy industry in the country—nuclear, commercial operators in the North sea, companies assisting in solar panel investment and all the rest. The only energy industry that is getting no help—it is getting a lot of talk and waffle from Ministers—is the coal industry, and 3,000 jobs are on the line. Do this Government want to allow them to be sacked—a question that has been asked several times by my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint)? We have had enough talk; we want some action. The Government should give some state aid to keep those pits in operation so that the reserves can be exhausted. Get to it!

**Matthew Hancock:** I am delighted to say that I have spent the last two months working hard with UK Coal, meeting the head of the National Union of Mineworkers and the Union of Democratic Mineworkers to ensure that we can come to an arrangement that will help and support coal mining in this country. *[Interruption.]* From that heritage, which I have, we are looking for practical support for coal mining in the UK—instead of the shouting and the waffle from the man opposite.

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State reconsider his decision to exclude households that are renting less than a complete building from his proposals to require landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their properties to at least band E by 2018?

**Mr Davey:** First, let me say how delighted I am that we are consulting on new regulations to require private landlords to improve the energy efficiency of the homes they rent to tenants, which is an important move. I hope that Members of all parties will participate in that consultation. The hon. Gentleman raises an important and serious issue. I hope he will participate in the conversation, which is intended to give people the chance to consider the very issue he raises.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What is the Secretary of State's assessment of the likelihood of coal gasification progressing in areas such as the River Dee in north Wales?

**Mr Davey:** I do not know about the proposal relating to the River Dee in north Wales. Coal gasification is one of the many technologies that we look at in the Department. It is not one at the forefront of our thinking at the moment, but if the right hon. Gentleman would care to write about the specific scheme he mentions, I should be pleased to receive a letter from him.

## Business of the House

10.33 am

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

**The First Secretary of State and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr William Hague)**: The business for next week will be:

**MONDAY 8 SEPTEMBER**—Second Reading of the National Insurance Contributions Bill, followed by a general debate on food fraud. The subject for this debate was recommended by the Backbench Business Committee.

**TUESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER**—Motions relating to the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill, followed by a motion to approve the draft Legislative Reform (Clinical Commissioning Groups) Order. To follow that the Chairman Of Ways And Means has named opposed private business for consideration.

**WEDNESDAY 10 SEPTEMBER**—General debate on Ukraine, the middle east, north Africa and security, followed by a debate on a motion relating to a Select Committee on governance of the House. The subject for this debate was recommended by the Backbench Business Committee.

**THURSDAY 11 SEPTEMBER**—Debate on a motion relating to carbon taxes and energy-intensive industries, followed by a general debate on Gurkha pensions and terms of employment. The subjects for both debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

**FRIDAY 12 SEPTEMBER**—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 13 October will include:

**MONDAY 13 OCTOBER**—Business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 11 September will be:

**THURSDAY 11 SEPTEMBER**—General debate on the political and humanitarian situation in Kashmir.

**Ms Eagle**: May I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business?

The barbaric and disgusting murder of a second US hostage in Syria this week has appalled the world, and reinforced the fact that the threat of ISIL must be dealt with. The Prime Minister is right to say that we should work internationally to build alliances, and also that we need to take strong action against terrorism at home. We will support him in that aim. I welcome the foreign affairs debate announced by the Leader of the House for next Wednesday. Given this fast-moving and dangerous situation, will he assure the House that he will make provision for future foreign policy debates in Government time over the coming period? Does he agree with me that although statements are very welcome, they are no substitute for a debate where all Members can get to the heart of the complexities of these issues?

The Prime Minister confirmed yesterday that he wanted to go ahead with reintroducing relocation powers, despite the Deputy Prime Minister suggesting differently. Will the Leader of the House take this opportunity to clear up the confusion about Government policy by outlining when we can expect strengthened TPIMs—terrorism prevention and investigation measures—to be in place and what legislation he expects will be needed?

NATO meets today in Wales at a time of increasing turmoil in many parts of the world. In these volatile times, the summit must address the urgent security concerns that have emerged in eastern Ukraine and agree an appropriate response in the face of the increasingly belligerent Russian leadership. Will the Leader of the House confirm that the Prime Minister will provide a statement to the House on Monday? Given the rapidly changing context in which NATO is now operating, will the Leader of the House assure us that the Government will make time available for the House to discuss these important matters?

Today, the Government have finally decided to publish the Elliott report following the horsemeat scandal last year. The report was due in spring, and we are now in September. The food industry is the single largest manufacturing sector in the UK, so it is crucial that the Government show urgent leadership and get the response to this right. Does the Leader of the House agree with the report that the Government's misguided decision to carve up the Food Standards Agency, splitting the responsibility for food safety and authenticity, created confusion, which was clearly highlighted in the horsemeat scandal? Will he also arrange for a statement from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs so that she can set out the Government's response to this report?

I see that the Chief Whip is not in his place—yet again. Before the summer recess he lost his first vote, only three days into his new job. Yesterday, only three days into the new Session, he has already had to retreat before he lost another one. He was stuck in the toilet last time—I am not sure that I really want to know what his excuse is this time! Yesterday's European Committee objected to the Government's inadequate plans for protecting British ports, despite three panic-stricken last-minute Government amendments. The sector, which employs more than 100,000 people across the country, including many in my constituency, is under real pressure, but the Transport Secretary's response has been muddled and weak. I understand that a European Commission document relating to the ports strategy has to be considered in this House by early October. Given that that means next week or not at all, will the Leader of the House explain why this has not been tabled for consideration in next week's business—or will he just admit that the Government are all at sea?

May I take this opportunity to welcome hon. Members back to the House after the summer recess? The Prime Minister seems to have enjoyed his holidays—we have all seen a few too many photos of him in Cornwall pretending to be in "Baywatch". The problem with him is that he is less the Hoff and more the Toff.

I have been researching British seaside destinations and I have a suggestion for the Prime Minister's next break: the blue flag, popular, family resort of Clacton-on-Sea. The writ will soon be moved and the by-election will reportedly take place in Essex on 9 October, the Prime Minister's birthday. We can just imagine the birthday party at Conservative central office: half the invite list will be at Nigel's party down the road.

Is it not the case that the Conservative party is becoming ungovernable? It has no strategy on Europe. The Prime Minister has lost an MP to UKIP. A Minister has resigned and nine of the MPs from the 2010 intake are just giving up. The MPs he has left are dialling B for

[Ms Angela Eagle]

Boris. What the Conservative party does not understand is that its chances of winning the next election are sinking faster than Boris Island.

**Mr Hague:** The hon. Lady was right to start her questions by referring to some of the horrific events of recent days and the crimes against humanity that are being committed in Iraq and in Syria. The House's united voice on the matter is very important, as was discussed at Prime Minister's questions yesterday. She has welcomed the holding of a broad foreign policy debate next week. That is an important response to the demand for such a debate. It is important, too, that regular statements are made. There is a need for both those things when there are so many crises in the world. I made perhaps more statements than any Foreign Secretary in history when I was Foreign Secretary. I know that my successor will also want to make regular statements on these huge issues. Whenever it is possible to have a debate as well, so that Members can discuss them in more detail, we will have one, including next week.

On tackling extremism and bringing forward legislation, again the Prime Minister made the position clear at Prime Minister's questions. We will introduce specific and targeted legislation to provide the police with a temporary power to seize a passport at the border. We are clear in principle that we need a targeted and discretionary power to allow us to exclude British nationals from the UK. We will work up proposals on that and discuss them on a cross-party basis. It is important to have as much cross-party unity on this as we possibly can.

It is important to get that legislation right. Over centuries there has been a legitimate debate in this country on where the balance is to be struck between liberty and security. That arises every time there is a threat to our national security. The House of Commons has always had a variety of views on these matters, so we must make every effort to proceed on a cross-party basis. Consistent with acting with sufficient speed, we will try to get the legislation right. That means that it will not be introduced next week; we will be ready to do that at some stage after the conference recess.

The hon. Lady asked whether there would be a statement by the Prime Minister on Monday following the NATO summit. There will be. The Prime Minister is very keen to do that and to inform the House after that summit. There will be time in Wednesday's debate to discuss the situation in Ukraine.

On the Elliott review, a written ministerial statement has been published today by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. There will be a debate on food fraud on Monday on the Floor of the House. The Secretary of State has accepted all the recommendations giving top priority to the needs of consumers, improving laboratory testing capacity and capability, introducing new unannounced audit checks by the food industry and many other measures. They are set out in the written ministerial statement.

The hon. Lady took the Chief Whip to task again, although I was a bit disappointed that it was the same joke about his being in the toilet as seven weeks ago. Recycling has its limits and we would like slightly more

up-to-date—[*Interruption.*] I am all in favour of recycling jokes, but I expect more from the hon. Lady. I am sure that she will be able to deliver that next week.

I cannot go into the Prime Minister's plans for his birthday, but certainly I and many of my hon. Friends will be visiting Clacton in the coming weeks. Our former hon. Friend Douglas Carswell explained in May that the Conservative party's policy on Europe was 100% right. He may be the only person in British history to leave a political party because he was 100% in agreement with it. That is particularly striking as there are many people who sit in this House in their political parties perfectly happily who certainly do not agree 100% with their party's policies; that is true in every party. This is no doubt something he will want to explain to the voters of Clacton, and it will be very interesting to see how he tries to do so.

The shadow Leader of the House accused the Government, or the Conservative party, of having no strategy on Europe. That is a bit rich from a member of a party that was against a referendum before the European constitution came up, then in favour of one and announced one, then against one when it came to actually holding the referendum, then against one on the Lisbon treaty, then against our referendum Act of 2011, but now has accepted it into law, then toyed with the idea of being in favour of a referendum, and has now come out against it. There is absolutely no way we will take any lectures from the Opposition on strategy on Europe.

I would only conclude by saying that after a summer recess in which we have seen strong figures on GDP growth in this country, our world economic ranking for competitiveness now go up four places from where it was left by the last Government on grounds of controlling the fiscal deficit, an excellent reduction in unemployment and a growth in employment figures, a major increase in car registration, and consumer confidence at its highest for a long time, it is rather revealing that there are no requests from those on the Opposition Benches to discuss the economy and the long-term economic plan of the Government.

**Sir George Young** (North West Hampshire) (Con): The House will welcome what my right hon. Friend has just said: that there will be a statement from the Prime Minister on Monday on the NATO summit. Will he confirm that on Wednesday the general debate will run until 7 o'clock? After 7 o'clock, when we move on to the Backbench Business Committee debate, will there be a time limit or it will be open-ended?

**Mr Hague:** Yes, certainly the debate on foreign affairs and security will be able to run until 7 o'clock. That is a full day's debate, and there are many, many issues that hon. and right hon. Members will wish to address, so it will last until 7 pm, provided that that time is taken up. I therefore envisage that the debate requested by the Backbench Business Committee on the governance of the House will take place after that, and between now and then we will bring forward a business of the House motion to facilitate that, and to establish an appropriate time limit on that debate.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House is right in saying we have lots of statements in the House, and they are very useful. I am

very pleased we are going to have a debate on international affairs this coming week, but there is one thing missing. There was a harrowing report to the House on child abuse in one town. We all know that that abuse covered the country, and that there is a much deeper and more worrying problem than any of us thought existed. May we have an early debate so we can look at this in its entirety and reach out to those children who have been abused, raped and put into prostitution and have had no recourse to justice?

**Mr Hague:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very important issue, and hon. Members across the House are extremely conscious of the importance of this. He will recall that the Home Secretary made a statement this week, and, of course, Ministers envisage that there will be a great deal of further discussion in this House about these matters. The Home Secretary has explained that she intends shortly to be able to appoint the chair of the overarching inquiry and then set out the terms of reference. I know she will want to keep the House updated on that. While it is clear that, given the range of matters the House needs to debate next week, I cannot offer a further debate next week on these matters, I have no doubt that over the coming months there will need to be many opportunities to discuss what has happened in Rotherham and may well be happening elsewhere. The Government, like all political parties and Members, are determined that all possible lessons will be learned.

**Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con):** I was concerned that my right hon. Friend did not reply to the shadow Leader of the House on the question of the ports services regulation. The reason I raise this is that there is a grave issue of European scrutiny at stake here. The position is that the ports services regulation is opposed by the trade unions as well as by all 47 port authorities. The matter was referred to the Floor of the House by my European Scrutiny Committee, but the Government declined that request and referred it to a European Standing Committee, which imploded yesterday because documents were not made available to the Committee, and the Chairman rightly adjourned the Committee as a result. That was extremely unusual—indeed, it was almost unprecedented. There are grave scrutiny concerns involved in all this. The real question, when it comes down to it, is this: we have called again today for a debate on the Floor of the House, but the Leader of the House's statement has made it clear that the Government have not made such a debate available. Furthermore, because of the timetabling, the real question is going to be about 8 October. Finally, I would simply say: may we have a debate on the Floor of the House on this matter? How can this regulation be stopped? That is the crucial question.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman is better able than any other hon. or right hon. Member to conduct a debate with himself, which he both opens and closes.

**Mr Hague:** That is undoubtedly true, and my hon. Friend always closes with a conclusion that is forceful and that we can always see coming. He raises an important issue, and I know that the debate in Committee was adjourned because a point of order was raised over whether the appropriate documents had been provided

to its members. The report of the European Scrutiny Committee will be taken seriously by Ministers. My hon. Friend has pointed out that an important policy issue is involved, and I will ensure that my ministerial colleagues have their attention fully drawn to the point that he has raised.

**Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab):** Will the Leader of the House find the time to debate the support that central Government provide to local government? This would enable us to discuss the problem that some of the areas of greatest need, such as Knowsley, are having the most money cut while some of the areas that have the least need, such as West Oxfordshire, are having lesser amounts cut or even, in some cases, having their grants increased. That simply is not fair. We have just been hearing about Rotherham, and it is about time the Government recognised that adult and children's services will be cut as a result of the reductions in expenditure that local government is having to find.

**Mr Hague:** Local government across the country has had to become considerably more efficient in recent years, and local authorities have varied in their effectiveness and ability to bring that about. The right hon. Gentleman will know that there will be questions to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on Monday, which will provide an opportunity to raise these matters on the Floor of the House next week.

**Mr Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con):** The Leader of the House might be aware of a point of order that I raised yesterday. Will he make a statement to update the House on whether anything has happened regarding the letter sent to No. 10—or is it, like a cantankerous maiden aunt, floating around No. 10 with no one actually wanting to go anywhere near it?

**Mr Hague:** Things do not float around in No. 10; I am pleased to say that that is not the way No. 10 operates. The Prime Minister has received a letter this week from you, Mr Speaker—I am sure you will not mind my saying this—in which you asked for the appointment of Carol Mills to be delayed further until a clear way forward on the issue has been agreed. That is the current status of the letter, rather than any floating.

**Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP):** In exactly two weeks' time, we will be voting in the Scottish independence referendum. Next week is the last opportunity that the House has to meet before this momentous and historic occasion, yet there is not one iota of referendum-related business in the agenda for next week. Does this House no longer care about the referendum, or has it looked at the opinion polls and the momentum that is gathering and decided that it just wants to give up?

**Mr Hague:** The hon. Gentleman must know that Members across the House care passionately about this matter, but this is a decision being made by the people of Scotland. The debate is taking place in Scotland, among the people of Scotland and in the Scottish media. The Prime Minister pointed out yesterday how much the people of England, Wales and Northern Ireland want Scotland to remain part of the United Kingdom. That is something about which nearly all of us in this House, with the exception of the nationalist

[Mr Hague]

parties, are clear. But if we were to debate these matters next week in the House of Commons, the hon. Gentleman would no doubt ask why we are debating them when the referendum campaign is taking place in Scotland. I appreciate that he needs to ask a question, but it was not a very logical one.

**Sir Alan Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): I welcome the arrangements that the Leader of the House has announced to ensure that we have a foreign affairs debate, and that we also have a necessary debate after 7pm on what has been described as the way forward in the governance of the House. Can he say at this stage that the Government are not opposed to what the Backbench motion seeks to do?

**Mr Hague:** I will seek to speak in the debate and make my position clear, but let me stress that this is a matter for the House. Indeed you, Mr Speaker, have emphasised the importance of consent and general agreement in the House, so this is very much a matter for the House of Commons. It is important to facilitate such a debate. The Backbench Business Committee particularly asked for additional time, so that this matter could be debated without reducing the time available to discuss all the other matters that hon. Members are seeking to raise. We have gone to some lengths to provide that additional time, and that is the right role for me to play at the moment.

**Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): In the light of the well-informed debate on Monday on mitochondrial DNA, and the agreement between Front-Bench Members and a number of leading speakers on both sides of the House, when will the Government bring forward the necessary regulatory changes to enable the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to supervise work in this field?

**Mr Hague:** That was an important and well-attended debate. I know that many people across the country paid great attention to it and that there was much anticipation of it around the country. The Department of Health will have listened carefully to what was said. I cannot make any announcement at the moment about any proposals, but I will ensure that when they are ready, the hon. Gentleman will be well informed.

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): May we have a debate on university technical colleges so that we can see how Government policy is transforming skills and vocations right across the country? Will my right hon. Friend congratulate Sir Charles Kao UTC in Harlow, which the Prime Minister visited when it was being built? It has just opened this month and will transform opportunities for young people in my constituency.

**Mr Hague:** I am pleased to offer my congratulations to everyone involved in the establishment of the Sir Charles Kao UTC in Harlow. We have now established 17 university technical colleges. I am sure that Harlow will enjoy the same benefits that are already being seen in other towns and cities. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for backing the UTC, and we look forward to the future successes of the students in Harlow, which will be partly due to his efforts.

**Mrs Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): This morning, the Community Security Trust has published its report showing record levels of anti-Semitic hate incidents. The British Jewish community feels under threat as anti-Zionism merges into anti-Semitism following disproportionate criticism of Israel's defensive actions in Gaza. May we have a debate in Government time to discuss this very distressing and disturbing growing phenomenon?

**Mr Hague:** This is also a very important issue and the hon. Lady is quite right to draw attention to it. I cannot offer an additional debate in Government time at the moment, but of course these issues are related to some of the matters that we will discuss in Wednesday's foreign policy debate. We should all be clear that whatever our views about the rights and wrongs of conflicts in the middle east, Israeli action in Gaza, attacks on Israel by Hamas from Gaza or the two-state solution that is necessary in the middle east conflict, it is utterly unacceptable to try to translate that into anti-Semitism in any form. In the United Kingdom, we should stand strongly against that and that is why, whatever our disagreements from time to time with the Government of Israel, we stand by the legitimacy of Israel and stand strongly against anti-Semitism in any form.

**Miss Anne McIntosh** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend and constituency neighbour to his new position. The publication of the Elliott review today is very welcome, and it makes some specific proposals. The general debate on Monday will discuss food fraud in broad terms, and we obviously want to congratulate the Government on accepting all the Elliott proposals, but we need to know the time scale and the specific proposals for when the food crime unit and national lab service will come into effect.

**Mr Hague:** I welcome my hon. Friend's welcome for what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has set out in accepting the recommendations of the Elliott report. As I said, that has been set out in a written ministerial statement but I have no doubt that the Secretary of State will wish to expand on the detail of the implementation in due course. This is the Government's initial and very clear reaction, but of course the Ministers concerned will have to return to the issue and keep the House up to date on that.

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): May we have an urgent debate on the universal Jobmatch website? My constituent, Wendy Perrins, was made redundant in June. She has applied for 29 jobs, some of which are duplicates and some of which have been posted before. Why should our constituents be sanctioned when the website is not fit for purpose and when people are desperately seeking jobs?

**Mr Hague:** I will draw that point to the attention of my colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions. We had questions to that Department on Monday, of course, so there were opportunities to ask about these things then. However, there will be further opportunities and I will draw the hon. Lady's point to the attention of my colleagues.



**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): At the last business questions, the Leader of the House said that a business of the House committee could not be introduced because there was not consensus. I went back and checked on that. All three main political parties committed to it in their manifestos and it is in that hallowed document, the coalition agreement. The Prime Minister made a speech saying that he wanted to have a business of the House committee. On Tuesday, this House gave leave for a Bill to be brought in to establish a business of the House committee, supported by senior parliamentarians on both sides of the House. Will the Leader of the House introduce such a Bill and, if not, will he explain where the consensus is not?

**Mr Hague:** It is wonderful to hear my hon. Friend cite the coalition agreement as a key document and I look forward to his doing so on many other occasions. He is a strong and consistent advocate in this regard, which I respect very much, including in the ten-minute rule Bill motion to which he spoke. He won leave to introduce his Bill earlier this week, but this is a matter on which a great deal of detail would need to be sorted out and that is where there is a lack of consensus. There would have to be wide agreement across the House including with the Government on the detail of how that would operate and I do not think that consensus exists at the moment.

**Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): Sadly, this week ESCO in my constituency announced the closure of its foundry in Guisborough, with the loss of 65 employees. It is due to close in November and ESCO cited the current economic climate as the primary reason, and it has been operating at less than half capacity for a number of years. One statistic that is quite worrying is the fact that imported non-EU reinforced steel has risen from 4% in 2010 to 44% this year. That is a profound problem for the UK steel industry. Will the Leader of the House use his good offices to help me assist those 65 employees in finding new jobs in the future?

**Mr Hague:** The hon. Gentleman draws attention to an important issue in his constituency. He will have a further opportunity to put his questions to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills next Thursday in the House, so there are opportunities to raise these matters then. I am sure Ministers will be happy to discuss the issue with him. In general, we are witnessing a strong rise in employment across the economy as a whole; that is not to say that there is growth in every business and every sector at the same time. If the Opposition would only stir themselves to call for a wide debate on the economy in one of their Opposition day debates—if they would summon up the courage to do so—it would be possible for Members like him to raise these points in the course of that debate.

**Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): Will the Leader of the House make time for an urgent debate and review of illegal tree-felling? A forest of some 500 trees was destroyed over the summer in Basingstoke, leaving my constituents shocked and fearful of illegal residential development on that site. Fines and criminal sanctions must be sufficient to deter such acts of pure environmental vandalism.

**Mr Hague:** I can very much understand my right hon. Friend raising that issue; it must be of enormous concern to people living in that area. She will gather from the business that I have announced that I cannot offer her a debate on that in the immediate future. However, the Backbench Business Committee has been allocated quite a lot of time, not only next week but in the weeks after the conference recess, and she may like to pursue the matter that way. It is certainly an important issue, which the Government will take a close interest in.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Further to my point of order on Monday, when will the Government be making a statement about the Oakley report into jobseeker's allowance sanctions? Following the death of David Clapson, a diabetic ex-soldier who died after he was sanctioned and his JSA was stopped, will the Government finally commit to holding a comprehensive independent inquiry into all social security sanctions, as requested by his sister, Gill Thompson, and nearly 200,000 people?

**Mr Hague:** I am sure the hon. Lady knows that the Government did make a written statement on the Oakley review. That was made on the day that both the review and the Government response were published—22 July. I know that was the last day before the House rose, but if it had been published during the summer recess or delayed until September, I think hon. Members would have been unhappy about that. As I pointed out, on Monday Members were able to ask questions of the Department for Work and Pensions. I do not think any Member raised that issue with the Secretary of State then, but clearly there will be further parliamentary opportunities to do so.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): May we have a debate on process? As the United Kingdom rightly edges towards targeted air strikes in Iraq, and possibly Syria, would it not make sense to have a debate and a vote before the House rises, rather than possibly having to recall Parliament or keep the long-suffering people of Iraq and Syria suffering until 13 October?

**Mr Hague:** Next week there will be many opportunities for the House to discuss those matters. As I said, the Prime Minister will make a statement on Monday, following the NATO summit in Wales. In addition, there will be the wide-ranging debate on foreign affairs and security on Wednesday—a full day's debate—so it will be possible to air those issues then.

I think our conventions on the process of these matters are pretty well established and understood in the House. Indeed, where there is time to do so we have come to the House for permission—for support—for any plan to take military action, and my hon. Friend knows that no decision has been made about that, so the Government are not proposing to do that at the moment. But it is also clear that in an emergency, or to meet a treaty obligation, or to save life in a dramatic situation such as arose in Libya in 2011, it is possible for the Government to take action and then come to Parliament as soon as possible after that.

**Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The debate next Wednesday on international security should indeed be wide ranging, covering the middle

[Angela Smith]

east, Ukraine and north Africa, because of the NATO summit this weekend, but will the Leader of the House give an assurance that, as time goes on, each one of those troubled regions will get dedicated time for debate, whenever events dictate that that should be the case?

**Mr Hague:** There are only so many parliamentary days between now and Dissolution next year, as the hon. Lady very well understands, but the Government will make every effort to ensure that foreign affairs, at a time of such turbulence and crisis, can be fully debated and that the Government make regular statements. It is also open to the Backbench Business Committee to bring forward, as it sometimes does, foreign policy issues for debate. It is important to use that channel as well, because there will not be enough Government days on the Floor of the House to debate every foreign policy issue on a very regular basis—but we will do our best.

**Mr Rob Wilson** (Reading East) (Con): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made on the role of the head-hunters in the appointment of Carol Mills? There is great concern across the House that either the head-hunters failed to carry out due diligence and report to the panel, or the information reported was ignored by the panel. I think the House is owed a full explanation of what went on and what went wrong.

**Mr Hague:** As I have announced, there will be a debate, requested by the Backbench Business Committee, on governance of the House next Wednesday. In addition, questions can be put to my right hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso), who answers for the House of Commons Commission. The Commission will meet next Monday; I will attend that meeting—the first such meeting that I will have attended as Leader of the House—and of course I will draw the Commission's attention to points raised on the Floor of the House.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): May we debate the Welsh language? The Leader of the House will have seen the American ambassador's effort to speak Welsh on YouTube ahead of the NATO summit in Wales, and President Obama spoke Welsh this morning when he spoke to schoolchildren in Wales—I may say his effort was better than that of the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor as Secretary of State for Wales. Given the right hon. Gentleman's close connections to Wales, would he care to welcome the summit to Wales in the language of heaven?

**Mr Hague:** I strongly welcome the summit to Wales. Before I stepped down as Foreign Secretary, I regularly explained to NATO Foreign Ministers the wonders and attractions of Wales, including a fair bit about the language. I shall be going there myself in a couple of hours, to host the meeting on preventing sexual violence in conflict—a side meeting during the NATO summit—so I will add to that warm welcome. I do not think we need to debate the Welsh language next week. Indeed, in my household, debating the Welsh language is not a very

good idea; adopting the Welsh language is a good idea, and I strongly welcome the efforts of President Obama and many others to do so.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): May we have a statement on progress made on the introduction of the new eligibility rules for community amateur sports clubs? The Government's intention to simplify the procedure is welcome; the problem is that the process has taken so long that clubs such as Lowes Park golf club in my constituency are suffering, because new applications are being held up, pending the finalisation of the new rules.

**Mr Hague:** It may help my hon. Friend if I explain that if a club whose application is currently on hold because it does not meet the current eligibility conditions to be a community amateur sports club is found to meet the new requirements for registration, or only has to make minor changes, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs will be able to backdate registration from the beginning of the accounting period in which the club made its application. I hope that is clear. For registration to be backdated, the club will need to meet all the other conditions of the scheme from the date of its application.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): Yesterday I asked the Prime Minister about the worrying rise in child malnutrition and the links to food poverty, which have been identified by a number of reports. He avoided answering the question, as I think he has whenever I have asked him about food poverty and food banks. May we have an urgent debate on the public health consequences of people not being able to afford to feed their family and what the public health response should be?

**Mr Hague:** Again, I cannot offer an additional debate next week. The Opposition regularly have time available to them to bring forward these issues. The hon. Lady says that the Prime Minister did not answer the question, but he did point out that far fewer people are in relative poverty now than there were at the time of the last general election, including 300,000 fewer children in relative poverty than in 2010. Also, very importantly, there are now 50,000 fewer households stuck in the trap of never having worked. This is how we are addressing poverty, and we are doing so a lot more successfully than the previous Labour Government.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Snibston discovery park and museum in my constituency is currently under threat of closure by Leicestershire county council, despite being a popular local attraction that receives five-star reviews from people who have recently visited it. A number of the friends and supporters of Snibston wish to take over the running of this attraction as an independent trust. May we have a debate on what help and support the Government can give to community, voluntary and independent groups seeking to take over the running of council-held assets?

**Mr Hague:** Although I cannot offer an additional debate at the moment, the Government strongly support this. As my hon. Friend knows, we have introduced a community right to bid to give communities a better chance to buy local assets that they cherish. He will like to know that so far 1,500 assets around the country

have been listed as assets of community value. We are providing £19 million-worth of support for communities to help them to utilise this right to bid. While not knowing the local issues regarding this very important facility, I strongly encourage all those involved to look at how the Government's approach can benefit it.

**Mrs Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): As the Leader of the House is patron of the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign's Yorkshire and Humber Muscle Group and has met members of that group, I am sure he will take an interest in the gaps in neuro-muscular services across the whole of England and the urgent need to improve them. Will he therefore set aside time for a debate on the important issue of delivering the necessary standard of neuro-muscular services across the whole country?

**Mr Hague:** I am a strong supporter of the muscular dystrophy group in Yorkshire, and I am grateful to the hon. Lady for mentioning it. Clearly, she is a very strong campaigner on these important issues as well. I cannot announce any debate additional to those I have already announced for next week, but I will draw the attention of my colleagues in the Department of Health to what she has said and ensure that they write to her about it.

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): We are now nearing the end of the tourism season. As the Leader of the House is aware, Devon, Cornwall and Somerset had a very difficult start to the tourism year. One of the things that went badly wrong is that we were not able to get the message out that very little of Devon, Cornwall and Somerset was underwater and the majority was fine, so the tourists did not come because they felt under threat. We must have a better mechanism, and may we have time to discuss it?

**Mr Hague:** Tourism is a very important part of the economy in Devon and Cornwall. In recent weeks there have been some very good advertisements for it, including the Prime Minister himself being in Cornwall—as well as many other Members of the House, I am sure. My hon. Friend makes this important point very clearly and eloquently. I think it has been a good year for tourism in general so far across the UK, and it is important that all parts of the UK are able to share in that. Again, while I cannot offer a debate in Government time at the moment, there will be other ways, including Adjournment debates and questions, in which he can continue to pursue this, and our colleagues in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will listen carefully to what he says.

**Ian Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): The Leader of the House is aware of the close links that exist between Wales and the Kingdom of Lesotho. Last week, there was an attempted military coup in Lesotho leading to its Prime Minister fleeing the country. Will the Leader of the House have a word with the Foreign Office, because there is a lot of concern in Wales about what is happening in Lesotho, where information is very difficult to secure? May we have a written ministerial statement from the Foreign Office about the latest position?

**Mr Hague:** The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there are important and long-standing links between Wales and Lesotho. I was very concerned, as other

members of the Government and Members of the House will have been, about last week's events. We are strong supporters of constitutional democracy and good governance around Africa, and for a long time Lesotho has been able to claim to be part of that. It is very important that that is upheld and all of us who are friends of that country will want to see that happen. I will certainly pass on to my colleagues at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office the hon. Gentleman's request for a written statement on these matters.

**Mark Menzies** (Fylde) (Con): I congratulate the Leader of the House on his work on preventing sexual violence in conflict. NATO leaders are meeting this week, so will my right hon. Friend, as the Prime Minister's special representative on sexual violence in conflict, assure me that the terrible crime of rape being committed by ISIL will be raised at the NATO conference and that this House can have a debate on the issue?

**Mr Hague:** My hon. Friend raises an immensely important issue, which is a part of the conflict in Iraq and Syria that has not received enough attention so far. Among the crimes against humanity being committed by terrorists associated with ISIL is the enslavement and abuse of women and girls, including murder. I will certainly discuss the issue. I mentioned earlier that this afternoon I will host a side meeting at the NATO summit with the Foreign Ministers of Australia, Jordan and Croatia and the new European Union High Representative on the specific issue of preventing sexual violence in conflict. I know that my colleagues will also want to address it in future debates and statements.

**John Robertson** (Glasgow North West) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman allow a debate in Government time on policing during election and referendum campaigning and voting? The intimidation by the yes campaign north of the border is unlike anything I have ever seen in my time in politics. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Mr Murphy) was attacked not only when he was speaking, but when he was protecting an elderly lady. Freedom of speech is being attacked. Given next year's general election and a possible referendum, when the stakes will be high, we need to look at the issue again and make sure that intimidation—[*Interruption.*] I can hear some coming from beside me now. It happens all the time where I come from and we need to make sure that it does not happen.

**Mr Hague:** The hon. Gentleman raises a disturbing and important point. He is right to point out the importance of free speech, something that all of us in all parties have always been very proud of in the United Kingdom: in an election or referendum campaign, whatever our disagreements, we listen to each other. That is one of the great qualities of the UK compared with many other countries in the world. It is something we should always be proud to uphold. It is disgraceful to see Members of this House—and, indeed, anyone else—heckled and attempts made to drive them out of giving their views on the referendum, so the hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the need to uphold free speech.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): May we have a debate on the scourge of unsolicited automated nuisance phone calls, which have been plaguing my constituents throughout the summer? At best, they are an annoyance; at worst, they are extremely distressing for the elderly, the vulnerable and the isolated. I know that the Government have been taking action on this, but does my right hon. Friend agree that it is now time for an outright ban on these automated nuisance phone calls?

**Mr Hague:** My hon. Friend speaks for many people, including hon. Members, on this issue. The Government are taking measures to address the problem. The “Nuisance Calls Action Plan” was published on 30 March. Over the past two years, regulators have issued penalties totalling nearly £2 million to companies for breaching their rules, and further work is under way to see what more can be done to tackle the issue, as set out in the action plan, so I encourage my hon. Friend to make further representations to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Over the summer, council officers in my constituency have routinely been touting libraries and other public buildings for sale to private organisations, even before the local authority has made decisions over their future. Our libraries in Harrow are certainly community hubs and essential for students to do research, for children to do their homework and for the elderly to use as a normal resource. May we have a debate in Government time on the future of Britain’s libraries as community hubs for the benefit of the whole community rather than the favoured few?

**Mr Hague:** Libraries are indeed very important community hubs. There is no time for a debate next week, but my hon. Friend will have a further opportunity to raise the matter on the Floor of the House during Department for Communities and Local Government questions on Monday.

**Julian Smith** (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): Following the horrors contained in the Jay report, many people across Yorkshire just cannot believe that Rotherham council has today retained control of children’s services. May we have an urgent debate on how quickly the Government can move in and have the Department for Education install an independent trust to look after children in Rotherham?

**Mr Hague:** My hon. Friend is right that there is huge concern across the whole of Yorkshire; I can confirm that as a Yorkshire Member of Parliament and, indeed, as someone who was born in Rotherham. As I indicated earlier, the House will need to return to the matter on many occasions. It is because of such cases that the Home Secretary is establishing an independent panel inquiry. There is the work of the Home Office-led national group to tackle sexual violence against children and vulnerable people. There have also been other announcements concerning Rotherham, for example on urgent Ofsted inspections, so all the Ministers concerned will give urgent and continuing attention to the issue and the House will be able to return to it in due course.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): Last week I had the honour of visiting the home of my constituents Mr and Mrs Thomas to hear from them about their daughter

Laura, a wonderful girl who was tragically killed by a truck whose driver was using a mobile phone at the time. May we have a debate not only on the sentences available for such crimes, which seem far too short, but on how we can join Mrs Thomas, her husband and others who want to talk in schools and elsewhere about the dangers of using mobile devices while driving?

**Mr Hague:** That is a heartbreaking case, and of course it happens all too often in other parts of the country as well. It is important that people understand the great dangers of using mobile phones while driving, and the kind of publicity that my hon. Friend is creating helps raise awareness. On the question of penalties, I will draw what he has said to the attention of hon. Friends in the Ministry of Justice.

**Oliver Colville** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Earlier this year, as my right hon. Friend knows, the railway line at Dawlish was swept away, completely cutting off Plymouth, west Devon and Cornwall from the rest of the country’s rail network. Earlier this summer, Network Rail published a report suggesting five alternative routes. Will my right hon. Friend find time either for the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement, or for us to have a proper debate on the matter, because it is incredibly important to the south-west and to my constituents?

**Mr Hague:** That issue is of massive importance to my hon. Friend’s constituents. As he has said, Network Rail’s study considers alternative options for providing a long-term, resilient route west of Exeter, including re-opening alignments, making the existing route more resilient and maintaining rail connectivity to coastal communities. The Secretary of State will announce his findings on the study shortly, so I ask my hon. Friend to await that announcement.

**Stuart Andrew** (Pudsey) (Con): As a proud Yorkshireman, my right hon. Friend will no doubt have used Leeds Bradford airport on many occasions and noticed how poorly served it is with surface access, compared with other UK international airports. Given that a connectivity study is currently under way, may we have a debate so that we can argue that a new rail link would offer the best solution not only for my constituents, but for passengers using the airport?

**Mr Hague:** As a proud Yorkshireman, I do indeed use Leeds Bradford airport. However, it has not taken me to identify the problem. As my hon. Friend well knows, the area was identified last year as one of the six long-standing road congestion hot spots. The Department for Transport was asked to take forward a study into connectivity to Leeds Bradford international airport. It awarded a contract to a consortium to examine the issue in March this year. The consortium will consider connectivity for public and private transport to see what issues need to be addressed now and in the future. The Government will have to look at the conclusions of that report and announce a way forward. This is an issue that cannot be ignored in the Leeds-Bradford area.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Residents in the Kettering constituency have been horrified to see the latest scenes of serious disorder in Calais, during which 250 migrants tried to storm a number of ferries

to make their way illegally to this country. That comes in the same week in which the Home Office has admitted that it has lost the contact details of 175,000 illegal immigrants who are already here. Under the Dublin convention, we have the ability to send asylum seekers back to the first country through which they entered the European Union. That was confirmed to me by the Home Secretary on the Floor of the House on 28 April. I then tabled a parliamentary question, which showed that last year we sent back only 757 such migrants. May we have an urgent statement from the Home Office and a debate on the Floor of the House about how we can get back control of our borders?

**Mr Hague:** My hon. Friend knows the importance that the Home Secretary attaches to the thorough policing of our borders and the additional efforts that the Government have made. He can be absolutely sure that we will continue to take every possible action. Increasing action has been taken over the past few years to tighten up on these matters. We are concerned about the issues that have been raised in Calais. The Government are in close touch with the French Government about those matters. We will continue to protect our borders, reduce immigration and, in particular, tackle illegal immigration. I will certainly draw the attention of my Home Office colleagues to what he has said today.

## Points of Order

11.32 am

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Following our exchange of pleasantries in points of order yesterday, a number of members of the panel have said to me that Saxton Bampfylde was prevented from coming and speaking to the panel and giving information about Carol Mills. I wonder whether, under those circumstances, you might wish to put the record straight so that the House is not misled. May I ask a further question? Would you be prepared to lift any threat of litigation on Saxton Bampfylde with regard to its confidentiality agreement to enable it to speak freely about this subject publicly?

**Mr Speaker:** In respect of the second point, that is not something to which I have given any thought, and it is a point upon which it would be prudent and sensible to take advice. In respect of the first point that the hon. Gentleman raised, let me reiterate to him that I believe him to be incorrect. The panel, of which I was chair, was briefed about all the applicants for the post of Clerk and chief executive. He is quite wrong to say that there was prevention of Saxton Bampfylde giving information to the panel. The panel made a judgment on the material with which it was provided, including a piece of information that was provided to it on the occasion of the second set of interviews. The panel made its own judgment on the basis of that information and saw no need for a meeting, as, I think, the hon. Gentleman has in mind. There is no question of prevention. The panel made its own judgment and that was perfectly proper.

I reiterate to the hon. Gentleman, who was courteous enough to raise another point with me yesterday, what I said in response to him then: namely, that the individual whose name he bandies around in the House—Carol Mills—was indeed on the original list of proposed interviewees. He put it to me that she had not been. I told him that she had been. I have one slight advantage of him in this matter, which is that I was there and I do know, whereas he was not there and he does not. We will leave it there.

**Michael Fabricant:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** No, no. There is nothing further to that point of order. [*Interruption.*] Order. I simply say, with all due courtesy to the hon. Gentleman, who I am sure is sensitive to the interests and wishes of the House as a whole and to its desire to get on with Back-Bench business, that he has raised his point of order, that I have answered it and that there is nothing further to it. Whatever he thinks, I hope that he will be prepared to observe the normal courtesies that obtain in the House of Commons. That is the end of the matter for today.

**Mr Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Is the point of order on a separate and unrelated matter?

**Mr Burns:** From that of my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) about the head-hunters? Yes, it is.

**Mr Speaker:** Fair enough.

**Mr Burns:** Mr Speaker, given your knowledge, which you have just explained to my hon. Friend, would you be kind enough to tell the House why you and/or the Commission felt that, unlike for the previous two panels that considered a Clerk of the House, the Deputy Speaker—the Chairman of Ways and Means—should not be on the panel but should be replaced by another right hon. Member who, in their role as the Chair of a Select Committee that governs the scrutiny of finance, had a potential conflict of interest?

**Mr Speaker:** I am very happy to answer the right hon. Gentleman, and I am extremely grateful to him for raising this point. There are two responses to him. The first is that in the selection of panels that make judgments of this kind, it is perfectly normal practice to vary the membership from one instance to another. There is nothing disorderly, irregular or particularly surprising about that, and I am sorry if he thinks that there is.

Secondly, I say to the right hon. Gentleman, whom I recall raising the point before about an alleged or perceived conflict of interest in respect of the right hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) on account of her chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee, that I thought when he raised the point before it was a poor point, and it has not improved with time. There is no conflict of interest at all. I also say to the right hon. Gentleman, who I am sure would wish to be consistent in what I will describe as his thesis, that if he wishes to pursue that line of argument, which I believe to be erroneous, he would presumably apply it also to the Chair of the Finance and Services Committee, the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso), in front of whose Committee the Clerk can periodically appear. He did not make that point about the right hon. Gentleman—rightly, because he would have been wrong to do so, and he is similarly wrong to keep making that point in respect of the right hon. Member for Barking.

I think the House will agree that I have set out the matters with crystal clarity, and I have done so a number

of times. I would hope that, having had the point made to them a number of times, people would see it and acknowledge its veracity.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Given that modest pauses seem to be the order of the day, can we have a modest pause in bogus points of order made not, as is usually the case—*[Interruption.]* I did not heckle my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), and I will thank him not to heckle me—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I simply say to the hon. Member for Lichfield: try showing some basic courtesy and manners of a kind that people who attend to our proceedings would wish to hear. He made his point, and it was decisively dealt with by the Chair. I hope he will afford the courtesy to the hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) to raise his point of order without interruption.

**Dr Lewis:** Inasmuch as people who raise bogus points of order seek to shout me down, I shall just continue to make my points that much more clearly.

A modest pause in bogus points of order would be appreciated, given that they are emanating not from people who seem concerned about the wider issue but from people who are rather more concerned to damage the particular occupant of the Chair on any issue that takes their fancy.

May I instead, within the rules of order, ask whether it is possible to set on the record my pleasure, and I hope that of the whole House, at the announcement on the parliamentary website that our late and much missed friend Paul Goggins is to have a memorial prize instituted in his name by the all-party group on poverty and the Webb Memorial Trust? I hope that hon. Members will alert their constituents to this fine memorial to a very fine individual, who is much missed by all of us.

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman in particular for what he has just said about the late Paul Goggins, which I think will command universal assent in the House. He was a remarkable man who pursued his politics on the basis of the issues, not on the basis of personalities.

## Backbench Business

### Sale of Puppies and Kittens

*[Relevant documents: Seventh report from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Session 2012-13, on dog control and welfare, HC 575, and the Government response, HC 1092]*

11.40 am

**Robert Ffello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the e-petition relating to the sale of young puppies and kittens; notes that puppies produced at large-scale commercial breeding establishments, known as puppy farms, and irresponsibly-bred kittens are separated from their mothers too early and often transported long distances, and as a result often suffer serious life-threatening problems including impaired immune systems, poor socialisation, infectious diseases and shorter life spans; calls on the Government to review existing legislation to ensure that it is consistent with its own guidance that prospective owners should always see the puppy or kitten with its mother, and to ban the sale of puppies and kittens from retail centres such as pet shops, garden centres or puppy supermarkets; further notes the support of the Blue Cross, Dog Rescue Federation, Dogs Advisory Council, Dogs Trust, The Kennel Club, RSPCA and others for such a ban; and further calls on the Government and welfare organisations to work together to raise awareness among the public about choosing a dog responsibly from only ethical breeders or by adoption from legitimate rescue organisations, and to consider further steps to end the cruel practice of irresponsible and unethical breeding of puppies and kittens in the UK.

I am delighted to initiate today's debate on an issue that the British public feel very strongly about. More than 110,000 people have called for a ban on the sale of young puppies and kittens without their mother being present, and although I cannot cover all the many issues surrounding this topic—I wish to leave some for colleagues on both sides of the Chamber—I hope at least to explain why so many people believe this issue to be so important.

I thank everybody involved in the Pup Aid campaign, in particular Marc “The Vet” Abraham, Stuart Vernon, Rebecca Weller, the team at Bellenden, Julia Carr at Canine Action UK, Tim Wass, Nicola Howell in my office, CARIAD and Diesel. I am also grateful for the backing of Blue Cross, Dog Rescue Federation, the Dog Advisory Council, Dogs Trust, the Kennel Club, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, Wood Green Animal Shelter, and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. *[Interruption.]* I hear mutters from the Benches beside me at the mention of the word “Diesel”, but—I think this illustrates the issue—until I actually saw the problem for myself, I was oblivious to it. That lies at the heart of the issue: people are caring, considerate, loving individuals, but unfortunately they are oblivious to the problem.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that in the first instance if someone wants to get a dog they should seek a rescue animal? If they really want to get a puppy, they should not go to a pet shop but should seek advice on reputable dealers with puppies.

**Robert Ffello**: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as I can now delete exactly that line from my speech. I could not have put it any better because that is exactly how I put it in my speech.

Several hon. Members rose—

**Robert Ffello**: I will work from left to right.

**Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. Does he agree that the rise of the internet has led us to people buying puppies and kittens online, which are certainly being transported around the country? That is where the problem lies and we need greater regulation.

**Robert Ffello**: I do not think that is the only problem. As I will go on to say, that is one of the problems, but not one I am seeking to address today.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate and for his long-standing contribution to animal welfare in the United Kingdom and throughout the world. Does he agree that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs needs to do far more than it currently does to get together local authorities, pet shop owners, the Dogs Trust and all the charities that he mentioned, so that we can have a collaborative, credible, realistic and achievable outcome to what he wants, rather than just more words from DEFRA?

**Robert Ffello**: Indeed, we do not just want warm words from DEFRA; we need some action.

**Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. The motion calls for a toughening of Government laws in this area. Does he agree that we need publicity to be aimed at those looking to get a puppy or a kitten, to link to responsible breeders? For my dog we approached the head of Standard Poodle Rescue, which is based in my constituency in Rossendale. She interviewed me and my wife three times before she would let us walk out with a puppy. Working with responsible breeders must be publicised, as well as the Government tightening legislation.

**Robert Ffello**: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because, absolutely, this is about ensuring not only that the dog is suitable for the family, but that the family is suitable for the dog. That is important.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman, who of course is from Staffordshire, has secured this debate. It might seem an odd comparison, but we have been very conscious recently of baby Ashya's separation from his parents in Spain. Is not the crux of this issue the separation of young puppies and kittens from their parents at such an early age? Is not that the cruel element?

**Robert Ffello**: It is certainly one of the cruel elements, but as I will elaborate, there are many other cruel elements.

**Bill Wiggin** (North Herefordshire) (Con): It is extremely important after this debate that we get it right, but I am concerned that good people whose bitches have puppies are not demonised like those who exploit puppy trading

[Bill Wiggin]

and abuse the good nature of people who want a dog. Going to a reputable person is probably where the problem lies.

**Robert Ffello:** Going to a reputable person is actually part of the solution. To return to the point made by the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), a responsible, decent breeder who wants to ensure that the right person gets the dog will have invested a lot of time and money into raising those puppies, and they are being undercut by unscrupulous breeders who care nothing for the animals.

**Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con):** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this issue to the House. It matters greatly to the huge number of my constituents who have written in about it. As mentioned, local authorities have powers that they are often reluctant to use and which perhaps they do not even know they have, but this is not just about extending the licensing regime. The regime itself must be flawed, given that there are plenty of breeders whose standards do not meet even the first rung of the ladder, but who nevertheless have licences. The quality of the standard itself also needs to be addressed.

**Robert Ffello:** The hon. Gentleman makes his point very well.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Robert Ffello:** I will not take any more interventions for a moment. I want to make some progress—I am only on the second page of my speech—but I will take further interventions later.

We consider ourselves a nation of animal lovers, where a dog is a man's best friend and a pet cat or dog is part of the family, but every day puppies and kittens are bought from pet shops and garden centres, become ill and all too frequently die as a result of the supply chain from irresponsible breeder to pet shop. I cannot think that a nation of animal lovers would allow this to continue. Are we at risk of becoming a nation of disposable pets?

Those behind today's campaign want to end the cruel and unnecessary practice of puppy farming. We want to work with the Government to find a solution that improves the welfare of puppies and kittens as well as protecting the animals' mothers and, importantly, their prospective owners. Tackling the supply side is difficult, but we can tackle the demand side by looking at where the animals are sold—the hon. Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) touched on this. There are three main routes: the internet, the private dealer and retail outlets.

In time, we need to address the first two, which will be hard, but there is already strong agreement on tackling the third route—high street premises and pet shops, garden centres and dog supermarkets, such as the one in Salford. Puppies and kittens are housed and sold without their mothers, and the presence of such retail outlets encourages impulsive buying, irresponsible breeding and the commoditisation of animals, as well as too often leaving prospective owners with the burden of the life-threatening health and behavioural problems associated

with pet shop puppies. The Government could have an immediate effect, without excessive enforcement costs, by banning the sale of puppies and kittens on high street premises.

Puppy farming, from which third party dealers get most of their puppies and kittens, is the mass, commercial production of puppies for profit and is almost always done without thought for the health, welfare or quality of life of the puppy and its parents—I will refer a lot to puppies, but I mean puppies and kittens. I am doing it for brevity. Very often, puppies are separated from their mothers before the puppy is even four weeks old, usually unvaccinated and insufficiently socialised, and sent long distances across the country, and increasingly across the continent, before being sold.

Despite the Dogs Trust survey showing that 95% of the British public say they would never buy from a puppy farmer, it is clear that many thousands of people have done exactly that each year, without realising it. They simply do not know where the third-party dealer gets the stock from. The breeding dogs are often kept in horrific conditions, with insufficient time given to heal between litters. They are rarely screened for genetic conditions so can pass on problems such as the agonising hip dysplasia or heart disease. Indeed, it is hardly in the interest of these volume breeders to produce animals that will live long lives. When the bitch is no longer able to breed, she is either killed or abandoned, and it is only the lucky ones that find themselves in rehoming animal rescue centres.

This issue is not just about animal welfare, important though that is. Failing to tackle the sale of puppies from third-party dealers leaves potential dog owners exposed. They will be unaware of the puppy's background and unable to see the puppy interacting with its mother. This interaction is vital, as it can help assess the mother's temperament and what it might indicate about the puppy, including the risk of aggressive behaviour and serious temperament problems in later life, as well as the health ramifications of the environment in which the puppy was bred. The owners are left to foot the bill, with treatments for the often fatal parvovirus, for example, which is found in at least one in five dogs bought from a pet shop, costing up to £3,000 to treat. Ethical breeders that fulfil their responsibilities will have invested money and effort, and want to ensure that all their puppies are sold to appropriate homes.

**Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con):** The hon. Gentleman is gracious in giving way and I congratulate him on getting the agreement of the Backbench Business Committee for today's debate. He talks about licensing, and I wholeheartedly support the spirit behind the motion, but MPs should be made aware of the great work done by local councils, such as my South Derbyshire district council, as licensing authorities. They are very good at checking and publicising enforcement issues so that they are well known locally. As MPs, we can all do more to help our local councils with their enforcement powers.

**Robert Ffello:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady. There are indeed some very good local authorities, but even with the best local authorities, a high street pet shop is not the place to buy a puppy.



**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. On his point about animals being used purely to farm puppies, I am sure he will have been to establishments like Battersea dogs home. It is worth while people visiting this home to see bitches that have been over-pupified and the enormous suffering they go through, with hugely expanded nipples. This ongoing suffering graphically brings home what it means for the mother dog as well as for the puppies.

**Robert Ffello:** The hon. Gentleman is right that the treatment of these breeding bitches is unbelievably cruel. It is the lucky ones who get themselves to places such as Battersea.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. I congratulate, too, Marc the Vet who comes from my home city of Brighton and Hove and has done so much on this agenda. Local authorities do very good work, but they are under enormous pressure in respect of their budgets. Does that not make it even more important to ensure that we take national action on the issue? The Government's own advice is that people should not buy a pup without seeing the mother. If that is their advice, does the hon. Gentleman not agree that they should now act on it?

**Robert Ffello:** In a word, yes.

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this important debate and for the clear terms in which he is putting his argument. The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) made a good point in her intervention. Is it not important that local authorities are given not only the powers to regulate this trade properly, but the resources to ensure that they are able to do so?

**Robert Ffello:** Resources are absolutely an issue for local authorities, but the strategy I am outlining will help without requiring additional resources—it simply says that a high street pet shop cannot sell kittens or puppies.

**Alison Seabeck** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Lab): Hundreds of my constituents are grateful for today's debate, so I thank my hon. Friend for securing it. He mentioned the temperaments of puppies and their mothers. Many breeders, particularly of Staffordshire Bull-type dogs, will deliberately remove the puppies sooner in order to instil in them a temperament to suit the purpose they have for them. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is abhorrent?

**Robert Ffello:** This shows the danger in trying to make a very short speech, because a speech on this issue could easily cover several hours. However, my hon. Friend makes an extremely good point.

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab) *rose*—

**Guy Opperman** (Hexham) (Con) *rose*—

**Robert Ffello:** I will come to the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman); I am working my way round to him.

**Derek Twigg:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and on his excellent speech. Many constituents have contacted me about this issue. I would like to see more regulation, but I was struck by one thing when listening to him: is one problem the fact that we are just not getting the information out to people so that they can understand what the situation is and we can prevent this from happening in the first place?

**Robert Ffello:** Information is important, but someone may have the best information in the world and yet happen to be buying a container of goldfish food from the local pet shop with their family and see a cute puppy or a cute kitten—that is when a problem arises and there is an impulse purchase. However, my hon. Friend makes a good point. I will now take the intervention by the hon. Member for Hexham, but I am not going to take further interventions for a short while after that so that I can make some progress.

**Guy Opperman:** I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I congratulate him on securing this debate and support the motion, on behalf of the many constituents who have contacted me. May I make a simple point? The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has gone through the process of traceability for cattle, sheep and other animals, so surely the way forward must ultimately be a register of and traceability for cats and dogs.

**Robert Ffello:** I would certainly like to see more work done on the compulsory microchipping that is going to come in; I would like us to have a proper database rather than just something that floats out into the ether, never gets updated and will just continue to grow and not be used properly. I am hoping that the Minister is listening carefully and will take the message back to DEFRA that the chip is a good thing but the database behind it is the important one.

Let me return to the issue of high street pet shops. The only place most of them can source their puppies and kittens from has to be breeders that put minimal effort into breeding and rearing; there is a “pile 'em high” mentality. In addition to domestic operations, there is a rapidly growing trend of selling puppies brought into the UK from overseas breeders. We hear of breeders in the Irish Republic with 1,000 breeding bitches, which dwarfs the figure for even some of the Welsh breeders—I am sad to say that as I am sitting alongside my Welsh colleagues—who have more than 300. Although regulations are in place to address the import of cats and dogs, I know from my own experience this summer how very easily the pets passport system could be evaded.

I also know from meeting Eurotunnel and ferry companies that they are concerned about the situation and are unhappy that they are, in effect, policing something they do not have the training for and that this is not properly resourced. It simply does not work. Ultimately, the retail end of this chain drives it, with up to 100 high street pet shops in England licensed to sell puppies or kittens on their premises. That is responsible for the

[Robert Flello]

pain and misery of thousands of animals. Although the number of pet shops selling puppies and kittens in the UK is relatively small, there are no signs of a downward trend. My intention, with this motion, is not to vilify pet shops per se, but in almost every case where they sell puppies and kittens they simply cannot meet the specific needs required in this developmental golden period for puppies, in which puppies learn their future emotional template, in order to exhibit normal behaviour patterns and safely adjust to family life. In addition, there are all the health implications to consider.

Clear patterns have been established between early experiences and the development of aggression in dogs. A US study, for example, found that puppies obtained from pet shops were three times more likely to display aggression directed at their owner, and almost twice as likely to show aggression to other dogs they did not know, compared with dogs obtained from a small responsible breeder. By tackling the sale of puppies and kittens in pet shops we can remove the most impulsive means of purchasing, giving prospective owners the chance to research ownership and everything that goes with it. We can protect these prospective owners from the health and behavioural problems associated with pet shop puppies and kittens. We can also take a big step towards curbing irresponsible breeding practices and over-production of puppies and kittens.

**Julie Hilling** (Bolton West) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. As he will know, since the very sad death of Jade Lomas Anderson in my constituency I have done a great deal of work on this issue. Does he agree that we have to continue to talk about the 200,000 people who are seriously injured each year, the 6,000 who are hospitalised and the number of people who are dying because we are not looking after dogs from birth and through their training? Dog welfare is indeed at the heart of this, but it is also about protecting our communities.

**Robert Flello:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention and commend her for the work she has done on the issue. As ever, my thoughts are with the families of all those who have been affected by aggressive dogs, but, as surveys show, people buying from a pet shop are much more at risk. Do not take that risk.

**Richard Harrington** (Watford) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution in securing the debate and for everything that he has said. I fully support the regulation of the supply chain in the way he has described, but we as Members of Parliament can help to educate the purchasing public to be aware of the questions to ask in stores. If the demand were not there and people were buying from reputable breeders, the issue would disappear.

**Robert Flello:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. We want action to be taken, but if we can send one message from today's debate, it is: always ask, "Where's mum?"

**Ian Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): Further to the previous intervention, one role that Members of Parliament can play is to promote cat and dog rescue institutions in

their constituencies, so that people know they do not have to go to pet shops. Voluntary organisations will provide perfectly good and loving pets for most people.

**Robert Flello:** My hon. Friend makes his point and I will just say again, yes, I agree. It could not be simpler: all prospective dog owners should first consider adopting from a reputable rescue shelter. If they specifically want a puppy, it should be sourced from a responsible breeder where puppy and mother will always be seen interacting together.

We believe that powers are already in place to tackle the issue but such is the volume of often old legislation that there is a need for clarification to ensure that loopholes cannot be exploited. The Pet Animals Act 1951 does not require pet shop owners to highlight the provenance of their animals and states only that the local authority "may" inspect a premises. In financially constrained times, it is hardly surprising that such inspections are not a priority.

The Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999 requires third-party dealers selling puppies from licensed breeders to sell them with identification badges or tags, but because the 1999 Act does not form part of the pet shop licence conditions, it is generally not enforced. The 1999 Act enables breeders to sell puppies younger than eight weeks to a third-party dealer. That is beneficial for the breeder, who does not incur the costs of inoculating or caring for the animal, and for the dealer, who pays less for the dog. It certainly is not in the interests of the animal or its potential owner. The Act even provides a bit of a get out of jail free card, saying that as long as reasonable precautions are taken, an offence is not committed.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 largely has not been used, nor has the secondary legislation in place to make it effective. Section 14 of the Act refers to codes of practice and guidance, but there is no liability if they are not observed. I will come back to the Act, which was enabling legislation. Again, we want the Government to "switch it on"—to make it work. The entire system desperately needs overhauling, but in the meantime one clear route to market for the puppy farms can be shut down. We can take a big step towards that today.

The 1951 Act states that a local authority shall have "discretion to withhold a licence on other grounds".

The former Minister of State at DEFRA, the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr Heath), stated in a written answer:

"Conditions can be placed on individual pet shop licences restricting the animals that can be sold."—[*Official Report*, 2 September 2013; Vol. 567, c. 121W.]

That point, however, is contested. We would like the current Minister to clarify on the record what the situation is, given that Pup Aid's own research shows that over half of local authorities are unaware that they are empowered to act to amend licensing conditions and to stop the sale of puppies and kittens.

It is the unanimous position of leading animal welfare organisations that the sale of puppies and kittens from retail premises should be banned. This regulatory change would inflict no additional burden on local authorities and match their own desire to clamp down on irresponsible breeding practices. Indeed, it is consistent with DEFRA's own advice to prospective owners that

“if you are buying a puppy or kitten, you should ask to see it with its mother and the rest of the litter”,

and be satisfied that it is really the mother and not just a dog that has been brought in for show purposes.

**Oliver Colville** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): At a recent meeting I had with the Friends of Wyndham Square in Stonehouse, I heard about the number of people on benefits who end up breeding dogs to try to make some cash. Does the hon. Gentleman think that that should be looked at, too?

**Robert Ffello:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Not only do I think it should be looked at, but I wrote to Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions, and their response was very disappointing. Both of them wrote back and basically said, “Well, if you know of specific cases, report them; otherwise, we won’t do anything.” I think we need to see proper, from-the-top policy having a go through HMRC at those who are not paying tax and through the DWP at those who are not declaring it for other purposes. Let us have a national campaign on that.

Let me reiterate what I would like to hear from the Government today. Will the Minister confirm that local authorities are already empowered to amend licensing conditions and ban outright the sale of puppies and kittens in pet shops? Will he require local authorities to tackle this issue using those existing powers? If those powers are in doubt, then given that section 13 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 on licensing of activities involving animals was explicitly designed to amend the Pet Animals Act 1951, will the Government use those powers to bring forward secondary legislation to address this issue?

Every day, hundreds of healthy, adorable cats and dogs are destroyed while at the same time hundreds of kittens and puppies are born in squalid pain and despair to satisfy the high street shops. Today is the first step of a campaign to show we are a nation of animal lovers. This evil trade must end. Today the Minister can be bold and begin the end of this trade. Thousands of animals’ lives are at stake. Minister, take that step with us, and make that change happen today.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. I remind the House that there is a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches, as there is high demand among Members to take part in this important debate.

12.6 pm

**Miss Anne McIntosh** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) on securing this timely debate.

I refer Members to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee report on dog control and welfare and the Government response to it, and in welcoming the Minister, my hon. Friend for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), to his position, may I add that I hope his views have not changed too much since he contributed to that report? I also support the comment of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South that a review of existing legislation is needed.

In the limited time available, I want to make some brief points. The hon. Gentleman highlighted the role of self-regulation, but I am slightly confused as to why he put so much emphasis on pet shops, because my understanding is that they are the one part of the trade that is pretty much regulated; the evidence we received in our report, which was published together with our recommendations, suggests that the Pet Animals Act 1951 pretty much covers that. Perhaps the Minister will say whether he has had any representations that the Act should be improved or reviewed.

I would also like the Minister to update us on the Government’s response to our report: are the Government working with the Pet Advertising Advisory Group on the issue of sales of pets online, and, in particular, are they supporting the work to develop a voluntary code of practice? If the voluntary code is to succeed, it must have good animal welfare at its heart.

The message from the House today should be that there is a role for self-regulation. Any responsible potential dog or cat owner should not be buying puppies or kittens where the mother is not present. That is so self-evident that I wonder whether we need not to legislate on it but simply to go out and educate the public.

I congratulate all the charities involved. They briefed the Select Committee in the context of our report, and it is important to recognise their work, although the following is not an exhaustive list: Blue Cross in my constituency; Battersea Dogs and Cats Home; the Dogs Trust; the Dog Rescue Federation; the wonderfully and aptly named Four Paws. I also want to pay tribute to those who fund these charities. In doing so, they are taking many stray dogs and cats off our streets.

I am asking the Minister today to tackle the rogue backstreet breeders and the rogue importers who import animals from puppy farms across the European Union. I hope that he will take this opportunity to update the House on internet advertising and on the voluntary code. Each and every one of us must do everything possible to discourage irresponsible dog breeders, and we need to set a lower threshold for licensing breeders.

I would also like to ask the Minister whether his views have changed since he made his positive and welcome contribution to our discussions when adopting our report on dog control and welfare. Does he, for example, still hold to the view that, under the legislation, five litters a year should be the maximum, because a bitch would not be in a good enough state to have any more? That was his personal view at that time, and we benefited from his sterling contribution to our report. Has his view changed since he was with us on the Committee? I remind the House that the Committee’s conclusion was that five litters a year was too many. We recommended that a requirement to breed no more than two litters a year should be written on the face of the licence. Also, we would like to support better publicity for puppy contracts. I commend our report and recommendations to the House—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. The hon. Lady’s time is up.

12.12 pm

**Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): I am pleased to have this opportunity to take part in the debate. I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee

[Meg Munn]

for granting the debate and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) on securing it and on his excellent speech, in which he covered many of the issues. Many of my constituents have urged me to support the debate and to take part in it.

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Many of us are here because of the weight of opinion that our constituents give to this matter, but does my hon. Friend agree that it feels as though we have been here before? I am thinking about the proposals for wild animals in circuses, on which action has still not been forthcoming, and about the badger cull, on which the will of the House has been clearly expressed. Will she urge the Government not only to listen to the debate but to take it seriously, to pay heed to the weight of opinion being expressed by our constituents and to follow this up with some action?

**Meg Munn:** My hon. Friend's early intervention leads me to my next point.

Over the summer, we have rightly been concerned to hear about the terrible human tragedies that are taking place around the world—in the middle east, in Ukraine and in parts of Africa—and some people might ask why animal welfare should have such a high priority and be regarded as so important when so much else is going on in the world. My response is to remind them of William Wilberforce, one of the great humanitarians and a great MP. Coincidentally, I was born 200 years to the day after he was.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Meg Munn:** I will finish my point.

William Wilberforce had his eyes fixed not only on ending slavery and the slave trade but on animal welfare. Along with a number of other people, including MPs, he was a founder of what was then the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. It subsequently became the RSPCA, which has been such a force for good in animal welfare. We should never have to choose one or the other. A civilised society respects not only human welfare and rights but the rights of animals, and we should therefore support the motion today.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Meg Munn:** I want to make some progress.

The issue that brings us here today is that of the profits and money involved in the sale of puppies and kittens. Many of us get our pets from animal welfare organisations or from family, friends or colleagues. That is certainly true of my family. Our current two cats, Polly and Lucy—who will no doubt be delighted to find themselves in *Hansard*—came from Cats Protection. We went through a fairly rigorous process to get them. We had a visit to our home, and we then had to follow the proper processes to ensure their subsequent welfare. That is normal procedure, but it is very different when people buy animals.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): The hon. Lady has shown amazing ingenuity in bringing Iraq, Ukraine and the slave trade into a debate on puppy farming. I entirely support the thrust of her argument. Importantly, we have not yet mentioned rescue dogs and cats; the debate has been all about puppies. I was brought up in a household in which we almost always took on rescue dogs, and we need more people to look at that option rather than simply buying a nice fluffy puppy from a shop.

**Meg Munn:** The hon. Gentleman cannot have heard that point being raised by other hon. Members on both sides of the House, but they have indeed done so. Some of us have always been motivated to go to those organisations first. Indeed, those organisations also have puppies and kittens. I have visited the RSPCA centre in Sheffield, which is housed in a fabulous building and looks after its animals well. It also takes seriously its responsibility for proper aftercare by ensuring that people who take on animals as pets understand what is involved, and it is available to offer advice and support.

I entirely agree that that is a good way to find a pet, but of course not everyone goes down that route, so my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South has been right to secure this debate so that we can discuss the options when money and profit enter the situation. We must always be conscious that, when the profit motive is present, there will be unscrupulous people who work in a different way. As the legislation changes and tries to keep up with the trade, those people will find ever more clever ways of getting round it in order to make a profit.

We need to do a number of things. Raising awareness is enormously important, and this debate will put this story into people's minds. It will appear in newspapers and on the internet, and people will learn what they might unwittingly be involved in when they buy an animal from a pet shop or even from a dealer. They will then be empowered to understand the questions they should ask, and be clearer about what they need to know before they take on the important role of looking after a pet. The Government also need to work harder in this area; I agree with hon. Members who have said that they need to do more. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South has set out how that can be done quickly, and I urge the Government to take this matter forward.

12.18 pm

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye in this important and well-attended cross-party debate. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) for having secured it, and I agree with many of the points he made. I also pay tribute to my constituent, Carol Fowler, who has been campaigning on this issue for many years. Her campaign led to the television documentary "Pedigree Dogs Exposed", which raised such disturbing issues on dog breeding that the BBC temporarily suspended its coverage of Crufts the following year.

First, let me start with puppy farms. We need the Government to introduce strategies for improving conditions on those farms. I pay tribute to the Dog Advisory Council and to Professor Sheila Crispin, who

runs it. The council has made recommendations on regulation and legislation to address the issues and to reduce red tape in relation to the farms. There are poor conditions on puppy farms, and they need to be addressed by the provisions of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which places a duty of care on the person responsible for pet animals. That duty of care must be enforced.

The issues relating to puppy farms have already been rehearsed in this debate, but they are so shocking that they need repeating. There is often a failure to provide veterinary care, including vaccinations and simple health checks. Puppies suffer from lack of exercise, stimulation and socialisation. Breeding establishments are generally unsuitable and not fit for purpose. If puppies do not have suitable exercise, they are much more likely to suffer from problem behaviour.

Puppies are often prematurely taken away from their mothers, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies) said, the mother is often then expected to produce another litter and is left exhausted from repeated breeding.

**Mr Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): I also have a number of constituents who have been campaigning very hard on this issue. Hopefully, they can find common cause with my hon. Friend's constituents. Does he agree that the role of pet shops is crucial, as they should be putting more pressure on the relevant agencies and other bodies?

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I agree, but as the Chair of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh), said, legislation on pet shops is already in place. The thrust of this debate is on new legislation, but I say to the Minister that we should better enforce existing legislation, because then we might all get on a lot better.

Poor puppy farms are responsible for many health problems, including infectious diseases such as parvovirus, internal and external parasites and a range of breed-related and inherited diseases such as heart disease, epilepsy and glaucoma. It is crucial that puppy farms are not only properly licensed, but properly scrutinised—the powers are there to scrutinise them—so that we can root out the ones that operate with inappropriate conditions. As I have said, we need to enforce existing legislation better.

Secondly, the breeding of dogs for specific desirable traits can lead to serious genetic health problems as a result of inbreeding and closed gene pools. The body shape of some dog breeds can also cause immense suffering. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, it is illegal to beat a dog with a stick, but there is nothing to stop a breeder mating dogs to produce offspring that will then suffer from health problems.

Thirdly, I recommend that all breeders adopt puppy contracts, which are produced by the RSPCA, the British Veterinary Association and the Animal Welfare Foundation. Too often, buyers are not aware of the possible genetic problems related to poor welfare and breeding conditions.

Fourthly, the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England, which was set up by this Government, could be in a perfect position to assist with the welfare of dogs. However, its performance to date has not met the desired level. The board should take a more active

interest in the welfare of dogs, which it does not do at the moment. I urge the Government to give it a role in devising light-touch regulation, ideally based on the Dog Advisory Council's recommendations on regulations under the Animal Welfare Act so that we can see active improvement in the welfare of dogs.

The Dog Advisory Council, under Professor Sheila Crispin's chairmanship, was funded entirely through the generosity of patrons, principally the Dogs Trust, the RSPCA, the Blue Cross and the PDSA. It operates with a budget of only £25,000, yet the Government give £225,000 to the Farm Animal Welfare Council. There seems to be a slight imbalance within the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the treatment of farm animals and companion animals. I hope that the Minister will take those facts back to his Department. If nothing else, we are a nation of animal lovers, and we need to take more seriously the welfare of companion animals such as dogs and cats.

Obviously, it is welcome that micro-chipping will be mandatory from April 2016, but I urge the Minister to bring the date forward. We need a comprehensive list of registered dogs as soon as possible, and I see no reason to delay this for another two years. Currently, more than 100,000 dogs are stolen, abandoned or lost each year. If lost, the owner can suffer huge emotional turmoil. If a dog is abandoned, it is a crime. The urgent introduction of micro-chipping will help us to reduce dramatically the numbers of stray dogs on our streets.

**Mr Dominic Raab** (Esher and Walton) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for so generously giving way. I know that time is running short, but I hope that he will get an extra minute as recompense. I agree with him that this is about the enforcement of existing laws. Is not one of the key issues inspection? What we need are random inspections and a zero-tolerance approach where there are clear breaches of the standards already in place.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** My hon. Friend is exactly right. We should enforce existing legislation with random inspections so that the owners and operators of puppy farms do not know when the inspectors are coming. That will hopefully ginger them up to improve their standards.

The Minister will also need to address an amendment made to the Deregulation Bill in Committee which seeks to remove the requirement under the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973 for local authorities, when deciding whether to grant a dog breeding licence, to have regard to the need for dog breeding records to be kept in a prescribed form and to specify licence conditions to secure that objective. The Dog Advisory Council has written to the Cabinet Office and DEFRA Ministers asking them to reconsider the decision to repeal the relevant provisions as a matter of urgency, as not to do so would further undermine the effectiveness of the existing legislation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you have been generous with the time. This is an important debate. I hope the Minister will take away with him the fact that we are a nation of dog lovers. We need to enforce the existing legislation. There is too much cruelty in the dog world in this country.

12.25 pm

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I am extremely grateful to have this opportunity to speak in this important debate. As my inbox attests, it is an extremely important issue for many of my constituents. It is also important to me, as I am the owner of a lovely springer spaniel called Leo. My family adopted him when he was seven months old, and he is now nearly nine.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) and his colleagues for securing this debate and for introducing it so well. I also pay tribute to the members of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee for their report on dog control and welfare.

As any dog lover would agree, the crux of this matter is that we simply cannot see dogs or kittens as commodities. They are not an asset or a piece of capital from which a producer seeks to extract as much financial gain as possible. They are future members of our families, future best friends for our children and future companions for us when our children flee the nest. They are sentient beings, with similar feelings and reactions to us. We would not stand for our children being mistreated in the way that some domestic animals are at birth, as they are ripped apart from their mother and the nurture that she instinctively provides. We would not stand for that because we know how that kind of trauma affects them later in life, whether it is to their personality, their health or both. We all want to encourage more responsible dog ownership. I cannot think of any responsible dog owner who would be happy in the knowledge that their new puppy or kitten, which they thought had been bought from a reputable breeder or at least from a pet shop that deals exclusively with responsible breeders, had actually had such a traumatic start in life.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is right to point out that often the people who purchase these animals do not realise the animal's background or where they have come from. A report by the RSPCA said that breeders in eastern Europe and Ireland were selling so-called handbag dogs—little Chihuahuas that the likes of Paris Hilton carry around in their handbags. The breeders were only charging about £25 each for them, but they were then being sold on for between £800 and £1,500. Obviously, the people who are paying £1,500 for such a dog think they are getting a top-of-the-market dog that has been very well looked after, but that is not the case.

**Mrs Hodgson:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. Often those dogs go on to have terrible health conditions, which then cost the loving owner a fortune in vets' fees, as they have to mitigate against some of those terrible breeding practices that the poor pup suffered in its early life.

Obviously, the breeding and sale of puppies and other animals provides a living, and in some cases a good living. The vast majority of breeders have chosen that as a way of life because they love animals and love the joy that they can bring to the families to whom they go. Many are very particular about ensuring that their puppies go to a good and loving home. I do not want to see the lives of those breeders made more difficult by any change in the law. None the less, I am sure that they

would be the first to agree that we must ensure that the law is strong enough to be able to stamp out the minority of breeders in the country who do not share their high standards of care.

My constituents are particularly concerned when they see puppies for sale in pet shops without their mothers present. I understand that that practice persists in a very small minority of pet shops in the UK—about 2% according to Pet Care Trust. None the less, I agree with my constituents that that practice should be ended completely. It has been pointed out that some councils have successfully eradicated this practice in their areas through their licensing requirements, but, like buying a car, buying a pet involves the kind of purchase that people are prepared to go further afield to make. Indeed, my dog Leo is an Essex boy, and we travelled all the way there to adopt him. Although such actions are welcome, they mean little if all the surrounding councils do not feel able to follow suit. I therefore think it is worth looking at what more can be done at a central Government level to spread best practice across the country.

I do not know what the right balance is in obtaining regulations that are enforceable and effective but that do not represent an onerous duty on local authorities or other agencies or place unnecessary restrictions on the many good, responsible and caring breeders, but it is clear that we are not striking that balance at the moment.

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I am very interested in the hon. Lady's point about regulation. Although there is a role for central Government, does she agree that much more can be done by organisations such as the Local Government Association? The local government sector can collaborate to spread around best practice, which some councils have and others do not. As she rightly observes, this is an issue that runs across the country and it is important that we have the best possible knowledge for sometimes quite hard-pressed local authority enforcement arms.

**Mrs Hodgson:** The hon. Gentleman is quite right and has some expertise in this area. There are councils that have great best practice and it is important that we disseminate and share that.

The other thing I want to mention is public awareness. Often the public are not aware that these issues exist and think when they buy a kitten or puppy, wherever they buy it from, that it will have been taken care of, nurtured and loved in the right way. We need the public to be made more aware of the welfare standards and of the legislation, as that would mean that they could have confidence in the system and could demand that puppies were bred in a fair and just way.

I wholeheartedly support the calls in the motion for a review of the legislation on breeding and sale. I am pleased that my Front-Bench colleagues are committed to undertaking such a review if we form the next Government, but given that the election is eight months away and countless puppies and kittens will be born and sold between now and then, I hope that the Government will listen to the cross-party calls we have heard today and to the thousands of people who signed the petition and will announce that they will instigate a review forthwith.

12.32 pm

**Roger Williams** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): I, too, pay tribute to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) for bringing this issue to the attention of the House. It has certainly created a huge amount of interest across the country.

As I understand it, the purpose of the debate is to aim to encourage the Government to consider legislation that will make it illegal to sell puppies and kittens in pet shops. Local authorities already have the power to do that if the conditions of the retail outlet are poor, but this would involve an outright ban. I have considerable sympathy for that and urge the Government to consider it.

Such is the demand for cheap pedigree puppies and kittens—and, indeed, for all puppies and kittens—as presents for young people and children that unscrupulous breeders and dealers of pets can make large amounts of money without any consideration for the welfare of the animals. It is said that many of the so-called puppy farms are based in Cardigan and Carmarthenshire, and I know that the Welsh Assembly Government and local authorities in that area are working hard to bring in regulations to ensure that the conditions are suitable for the breeding of animals. It is important that we use cross-border co-operation in dealing with these issues, because many of the animals bred in Wales end up being sold in parts of England.

The subject of today's debate, of course, is puppies and kittens, but yesterday the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs took evidence on the problem of horse welfare. The same concerns were raised about the indiscriminate breeding of horses and ponies, which are expensive to keep and often abandoned when the first enthusiasm to own them disappears and the cost becomes more apparent.

The organisations promoting today's debate make the very good point that conditions for neonatal animals are very important in ensuring that they stay healthy and have sufficient time with their mothers before weaning. Early weaning, which allows the bitches to be bred from again, means that many pups suffer from undernourishment and poor nutrition. I had a case in my constituency of an owner of Great Danes who was not breeding them indiscriminately but with careful consideration for the genetic well-being of the animals and their sale afterwards. Nevertheless, the challenges of maintaining these large animals with a litter of 12 rapidly growing pups proved too much for their management skills and the pups suffered from a number of complaints related to unhygienic conditions. In the end, the RSPCA intervened and removed the pups, which were then kept at considerable cost to the owner. I must emphasise that these were considerate and responsible owners who were not merely interested in money making, but we can imagine the conditions that persist in some puppy farms.

**Stephen Lloyd** (Eastbourne) (LD): Does my hon. Friend's point not emphasise that local authorities not only have an important role to play but must ensure that they played the role of inspecting both puppy and kitten farms?

**Roger Williams:** I absolutely accept my hon. Friend's point. Another point that we should make, however, is that there are considerable limitations on the amount of resources local authorities can use for these purposes.

In Wales, compulsory microchipping is being introduced for dogs from March 2015 and I believe that the same regulations will apply in England in 2016. If we made it compulsory to microchip pups within the first few weeks of their lives, if anything happened to those pups they could be traced back to where they were bred and action could be taken against any breeders who were found to be operating in conditions that were not suitable for those pups. Any pups showing signs of malnutrition or disease could be traced to their place of birth.

I recently attended an event held by the Dogs Trust in the Royal Welsh agricultural show site in Llanellwedd in my constituency, where there was a massive dog show attracting dogs from around the country. The Dogs Trust made the point that microchipping can be done at no cost and I think that, before it becomes compulsory, all responsible dog owners should have their dogs microchipped.

Buying a pup is a very serious business that should not be undertaken lightly. If someone buys a horse, for instance, they employ a vet to examine the animal and ensure that it is fit and healthy. It would be very good if that were replicated during the purchasing of puppies and kittens. I do not want to make pet ownership too over-burdened with regulation and bureaucracy, but, nevertheless, people should be educated about the responsibilities of making such purchases. Pets are very demanding in terms of the time that is necessary to look after them properly, and feeding them and maintaining their health through veterinary care is very expensive. I get a lot of letters from constituents who are very concerned about the costs of veterinary treatment. Tightening up the regulation on the breeding and sale of puppies and kittens is very important and I support that, but I also commend the work that charities do in emphasising the importance of taking decisions on pet ownership very seriously.

12.39 pm

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I wish to associate myself with the comments made by hon. Members from all parts of the House, deploring the barbaric treatment of kittens and puppies that are mass-produced in so-called "farms." Regrettably, there have been many cases in my home county of Carmarthenshire.

This debate, of course, takes place thanks to the 112,000 members of the public who signed an e-petition setting out their concerns. E-petitions were one of the positive reforms introduced in 2011 and offer the public a direct means of engaging with what is discussed in the House. I am glad that we are holding this debate today and hope that Ministers will act on what is said.

As a lover of animals myself, and one who cohabits with a cat, a dog, two rabbits and a fish—not to mention the five horses that my wife owns—I was particularly horrified to learn that puppies and kittens bred in such farms are almost always separated from their mothers too early, are held in appalling conditions and are sold on an unregulated market. Prospective owners are often duped into believing that the mother has been kept with the kittens or puppies, when in fact those selling the animals use fake mothers to pose with the little ones in cages to mask the neglect that those animals have gone through. As a result of the poor

[Jonathan Edwards]

conditions in which they are bred, the animals are likely to suffer from a weakened immune system and a shorter lifespan, and to develop behavioural issues that stem from a lack of trust in their owners.

The UK Government's response to the e-petition to date has been a statement by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which claims that the existing laws and regulations contained in the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999, the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973, the Breeding of Dogs Act 1991 and the Animal Welfare Act 2006 are robust enough to deal with the problem—citing the law that requires dog breeders to obtain licences from the local authority, and stating that it is against the law for “hobby breeders” to cause unnecessary suffering to an animal. It is, however, evident that the current system is not working, and that animals are being exposed to needless suffering.

In Wales, animal welfare is devolved and a matter for the National Assembly and the Welsh Government. In August 2013, the Welsh Government launched a consultation that centred on dog breeding legislation, which asked whether changes should be made to dog-to-staff ratios in kennels—specifically, whether one full-time attendant should be required for every 20 adult dogs, or one part-time attendant for every 10 adult dogs.

The proposed draft Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs)(Wales) Regulations 2013 were brought forward under section 13 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, and sought to repeal the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973 in relation to Wales. The regulations, as drafted, would be enforceable by Welsh local authorities. Under the provisions, local authorities would have to be satisfied, prior to granting a licence, that dogs and their puppies would be kept in acceptable conditions. Those seeking to breed dogs would need to show that they would be providing adequate nutrition, bedding and exercise facilities. The regulations also specifically make mention of the welfare of puppies and provide for a socialisation programme, aimed at ensuring that puppies bred in approved premises are able to socialise with other animals and people, so that they do not go on to develop behavioural problems.

**Kerry McCarthy:** Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that although a lot of the onus of enforcing these regulations and carrying out inspections falls on local authorities, and although trading standards have brought some successful prosecutions, both local authorities and trading standards, especially in my area, are really under pressure? They are really stretched and they do not have the resources to carry out such work. How can we address that?

**Jonathan Edwards:** That is an extremely fair point. Local authorities in Wales are looking at a 4% cut in their budget next year, according to the Welsh Local Government Minister. In Carmarthenshire, my home county, we have a major issue. If we are passing on those added responsibilities, resources need to come to match those responsibilities.

Finally, the regulations stipulate that puppies cannot be sold until they are at least eight weeks old and have been microchipped, as my colleague, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Roger Williams), said. In

December 2013, the Welsh Government brought forward draft legislation and laid out their intention to proceed with the proposed staff-to-adult-dog ratio of 1:20. The Minister said that the introduction of regulations was scheduled for February 2014, although I am not sure what progress has been made since the announcement. Indeed, I would welcome any comments from the UK Government Minister as to what, if any, discussions have taken place with representatives from the devolved Administrations on bringing forward changes to regulations concerning the breeding and farming of animals intended as domestic pets.

Evidently, members of the public feel very strongly about this issue, and I empathise with their concerns. Those who signed the e-petition called for the Government to introduce regulations whereby the selling of kittens and puppies was banned unless their mothers were present. Puppy and kitten farming is an abhorrent practice, which must be stopped. I urge both the Welsh and UK Governments to listen to the public and act on their concerns.

12.44 pm

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): As a dog lover, I shall focus my comments today on dogs. Dogs have a unique bond with us humans. Our two dogs, Boris and Maggie, have a loyalty, a love and a calming nature—and of course there is the comfort that a dog can give you.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): My dogs don't love me.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** That does not surprise me.

When people's dogs or animals need medical attention, they worry about them as they would any other member of the family. Probably for the first and last time, I can say in the House that Boris's bad behaviour improved immensely when I had him castrated. In seriousness, I raise that point because he did have a castration operation when he was younger, and that night he got constant attention because pets are like a member of the family and it is natural to give them that care. When the public buy animals, they should be able to expect that those animals have had a healthy start in life and have been well looked after, and they should have an understanding of where they have come from.

In hindsight, my wife believes that our dog Maggie came from a puppy farm background. When we got her she had health problems and, in the first period of her life, some behavioural problems. We sorted out the health problems with the vet's help and she is very healthy now. Now, at some two years old, her behaviour is very good; she is a very loving and caring animal, but it has taken a lot of love and care and attention from my wife and me to allow her to feel secure, comfortable and not threatened.

How many families would be willing to put that level of love and care into an animal?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Why cannot Conservative Back Benchers be given this same love and care?

**Alec Shelbrooke:** I think that depends which side of the House they are on.



**Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): May I just say for the record that I and my office have received more e-mails and letters on this issue than any other in the past few weeks? I hope that my hon. Friend agrees on the strength of feeling that exists on this issue among our constituents.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because he highlights the reason that we have all had so much communication on this issue. It comes back to my point that puppies, kittens and other animals that we bring into our lives become part of our families. As the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) said, we would not tolerate any harmful behaviour towards a human being in our family; many people feel the same bond with their animals and want to ensure that they are properly looked after.

As I said earlier to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello), if one visits Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, or the Dogs Trust in my constituency, and sees some of the consequences of bad behaviour and terrible care, one cannot help being moved. The Dogs Trust in my constituency does outstanding work but its resources are limited. How many families who were faced with the situation that my wife and I were faced with with our dog Maggie would give up and give their dog away to the Dogs Trust or elsewhere? But let us be under no illusions: the chances are that on many occasions, that dog will be killed—"to put down" or "to destroy" does not have the same impact as "the animal will be killed." That is why we need to ensure that families offering love and care do not find themselves in a position where they simply cannot care for the animal.

Many constituents have raised this issue with me, but they specifically raised an issue about a pet supermarket in Leeds called Dogs4Us. Petitions have been submitted to Leeds city council, asking it to remove the pet supermarket's licence, and the city council has looked into the matter. I went further and did the research and looked at the Dogs4Us website, on which it makes reference to an internet campaign and refutes the allegations. The truth will lie somewhere in the middle. I have no primary evidence that these activities are going on, but I do have a lot of secondary evidence.

That points to a bigger picture: what the public are looking for is faith in the inspection regime and licensing system. If that faith existed, people would believe that local authorities would be able to track down and stop what was going on in puppy farming. I urge the Minister to consider closely the suggestions that the licensing and inspection system be renewed, refreshed and redefined so that the public have faith that poor practices, criminality and downright cruelty can be eradicated.

A dog is loyal, rewarding and life-saving; it promotes a healthy lifestyle through exercise and becomes an integral member of the family. As a dog lover, I have focused on dogs, but I know that cat lovers would say the same about their pets. We must do all we can to eradicate the cruelty and harm that can kill puppies and kittens, and to prevent loving and caring families who go out expecting to bring in a new member of their family ultimately experiencing heartbreak, because of a con at the beginning.

12.51 pm

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), a fellow West Ham United supporter. I congratulate all the colleagues who lobbied for the debate, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello), whom I also congratulate on an excellent speech. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for the opportunity to have this debate, and the dozens of constituents who e-mailed asking me to participate in the debate, particularly Peter and Annie Walker, who I know are following the debate this afternoon. I thank all the animal welfare groups listed in the motion, especially the Dogs Trust, on whose briefing I will rely heavily in my remarks.

I hope to be brief, Madam Deputy Speaker, in view of the number of Members who wish to speak. I have some points to make and a few questions to ask, all of which have, I think, pretty much been raised already. What struck me among the briefings from all the different groups was the similarity and consistency of the points raised. They spoke about the conditions of puppies in breeding establishments; restrictions on the number of litters; consistency of inspectors' visits; easier and clearer enforcement of legislation by local authorities; the publication of the Welsh Government's draft breeding regulations; the use of microchips to track puppies to breeders; the updating of sales legislation to take in the internet; and enforcement and implementation of the pet travel scheme regulations, particularly in relation to illegal imports.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): On that last point, does my hon. Friend think that the changes to the scheme due to come into force later this year are sufficient, or should we take a closer look at this European trade? Is it not one European trade we could do without?

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point, which I was going to comment on later. The Minister kindly afforded a meeting to myself and colleagues, as well as animal welfare groups, to discuss that very issue. We pressed him on the matter; he is clearly concerned about it and the officials were very much on the case. I hope he can give us an update today. DEFRA clearly recognises that there is a problem and has been working on it and making progress, and I seek an assurance from the Minister that that work will continue.

The argument for a ban on pet shop sales was strongly made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South, and I am sure the Minister will respond to that case, but will he also comment on enforcement by local authorities? The hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Heather Wheeler) said that her local authority is very good, but it will be interesting to hear from the Minister whether enforcement is consistent across the piece—it seems to have been suggested that some local authorities are better than others—and what DEFRA and DCLG are doing to make it more consistent. Could the information supplied to breeders be made clearer?

Several of the briefings I received mentioned the Welsh draft breeding regulations. Does DEFRA regard those as helpful? Does it intend to replicate them, or will the Department wait to see whether they are passed

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

in Wales? How helpful will microchipping be? Concern about the database has been registered. Will the Minister respond to questions about unscrupulous or even illegal advertising of puppies and kittens? I understand that DEFRA supported the voluntary scheme from the Pet Advertising Advisory Group; does the Department intend to go further and make that a regulatory requirement?

Finally in this section of my speech, I wanted to ask about illegal imports and the efforts of DEFRA and the Home Office in that regard.

**Robert Neill:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** I am very happy to give way to another West Ham United supporter. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]

**Robert Neill:** I am delighted that we have three in one debate. May I reinforce the hon. Gentleman's point about illegal imports? The problem has affected constituents and indeed a member of my family, who rescued a dog that had been illegally imported. This is a real problem, and there is concern that even well-intentioned local authorities cannot cope with the abuse in their enforcement. We need to tackle it at national level.

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** The hon. Gentleman makes the point very well. I hope the Minister will comment in his closing remarks.

Colleagues scoff about the number of West Ham United supporters who are in the Chamber today. The hon. Member for South Derbyshire is also a West Ham supporter, as is the hon. Gentleman. We are only missing my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson), or we would all be here this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh) mentioned the EFRA Committee report published in February 2013. Recommendations 19, 20 and 21 covered questions of the number of litters, enforcement, internet sales and illegal adverts. Those matters continue to be raised.

**Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way to a supporter of fantastic Gillingham football club. Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern about the Kennel Club's finding that in Kent 18% of individuals bought a pet either via the internet or from an unscrupulous pet shop? Does he agree that more work is needed on the internet angle?

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. As I said, I hope the Minister responds regarding the internet and the voluntary agreement led by the PAAG. Over the years, I have got two dogs from Battersea Dogs and Cats Home; one came second in the Westminster dog of the year competition and one came first. I hope that today's debate will raise the profile of the excellent rescue organisations across the country that will be delighted to hear from constituents of ours who want to look after dogs that have had to be abandoned for some reason, or have not been looked after from the start.

This is an issue of great concern to the animal-loving public, as evidenced by the number of colleagues here and the interest shown by those outside. I look forward to hearing the responses from the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), and from the Minister.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** I call the Gentleman in the Dogs Trust tie, Mr Simon Kirby.

12.59 pm

**Simon Kirby** (Brighton, Kempdown) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am a long-time supporter of Pup Aid and I pay tribute to the work carried out by Marc Abraham and many others outside this place to bring the issue of puppy farms to the attention of the House. I should declare that I am a lover of both dogs and cats, having a large German pointer, two Chihuahuas and a ginger cat called Mango.

Can we imagine what it is like to be a pup born in a filthy and unsanitary puppy farm? Can we imagine being separated too early from mum and brothers and sisters to travel to a pet shop hundreds of miles away, sold en masse and treated as a commodity with little regard to our welfare? Can we imagine what it is like to be four times more likely to be affected by canine parvovirus? Canine parvovirus is a disease that attacks the puppy's nervous system. It causes vomiting and diarrhoea, and can cost thousands of pounds to treat.

**Bob Stewart:** As we are imagining what it is like in those conditions, can we imagine a human child being separated from its mother at six weeks?

**Simon Kirby:** My hon. Friend draws a good parallel. It is important to note that cats and dogs have no voice. Here today, perhaps, we can give them a voice. Dogs and cats are loving creatures, and they need their parents and siblings to interact with.

I think that all of us here today can imagine what these terrible things are like. Hundreds of thousands of people up and down the country can imagine the horrific conditions and the pain they cause. That is why we are here to debate the situation and, I hope, to move nearer to bringing it to an end.

The reasons for the problems are clear and have been outlined very well by other speakers. We should listen to Pup Aid, which has said that everyone should ask, "Where's mum?", insist on seeing a puppy or kitten interacting with its mother, and be aware that the absence of the mother is likely to indicate that the puppy has been bred commercially and is being sold on by a third party.

We should tackle this important issue, as it is supported by the majority of animal charities, welfare organisations and veterinary professionals. There is no justification for selling puppies or kittens in retail outlets. Puppy buyers, who are often unaware of these issues, need to get wise, asking where puppy farmers sell their pups and being aware that corners are often cut. We must urge dog lovers and cat lovers to do their own research before buying, and preferably go to a rescue home or a breeder they know and know they can trust.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful point about the importance of the potential buyer seeing the mother of puppies or kittens. Does he agree that the age of the puppy or kitten is important too, and that ideally it should be eight weeks old before being separated from its mother?

**Simon Kirby:** Absolutely—I agree entirely. We heard earlier that some puppies are separated when as young as four weeks. Puppies need a chance to grow and develop into the characters they will be in later life, and to learn all they can from their mother and interact with their siblings. It is totally unacceptable that they should be separated at that young age.

As well as the points made by Pup Aid and the requirement to see the mother, we should make sure that local authorities continue to be extremely thorough in their checks on breeding establishments. They should not grant licences where breeding establishments even remotely resemble a puppy farm.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman will have heard an earlier intervention about the problems of local authority funding. Does he agree that there must be sufficient public officials to examine how these breeding establishments operate, because without that, this travesty of justice for the animals will continue?

**Simon Kirby:** I take the hon. Gentleman's point on board. There are a number of issues involved. I hope that today we are sending a message to the public to be wise and careful and to think before they shop, and sending a message to the Government to ask, "Can we look again at the legislation? It's not good enough for it to lie on the statute book—it has to be used to stop the trade that we see today." Local authorities have their responsibilities as well, and they have to make difficult decisions, but I would argue that this is an important thing for them to check and keep a grip on.

I would like us, as a House, to send these clear messages: first, we cannot support the sale of puppies and kittens in circumstances where it is not possible for the mother to be with the rest of her litter; secondly, we are aware of the serious and life-threatening animal welfare, public health and financial problems associated with pet shops and retail outlets; thirdly, we confirm that local authorities are already empowered to amend licensing conditions or to ban outright the sale of puppies and kittens in pet shops if they choose to do so; and fourthly, we encourage local authorities to tackle this issue using their existing powers. Those messages would help animal charities and welfare organisations to put their weight behind a public awareness campaign aimed at better educating owners.

It is clear that all our constituents want the Government to act. Let us speak up for the puppies and kittens who have no voice. Let us stop this cruel and unnecessary practice and improve animal welfare. Let us educate people to think before they buy puppies and kittens, and let us all ask, "Where's mum?"

1.5 pm

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) on securing this excellent debate. I will be the third Welsh Member to contribute from across

the parties, showing the strong consensus and feeling that there is about this in Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) mentioned the measures in Wales, which have caused a lot of detailed examination of the issue. I hope that the Minister will take that up and look at it.

Like many others, I am an animal lover. I have had dogs from different sources all my life. I first remember that, long before the internet, my father purchased a puppy from *Exchange and Mart* that came from a long way away in a cardboard box. That was the method that many used. It came on the train and we met it at the station. That dog lived for many, many years and was a healthy dog, and we were very lucky to have it. More recently, for some 12 years I had a sheepdog from the RSPCA. I pay tribute to the RSPCA for the work it does on welfare. I have also recently had a springer spaniel from a rescue centre. Rescue centres do a brilliant job, because if people cannot look after their dog they can take them there. The welfare and traceability of that dog are taken care of from the minute it enters the rescue centre, and that is very important.

A minority of people breed dogs in terrible circumstances. They are still a minority, but the number is growing and it needs to be dealt with. Far too many of these puppy farms are in Wales, I have to say, and that is why Wales is ahead of the game in looking at legislation on how to deal with them. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South eloquently put the case about shops and high street sales, but I want to talk about the puppy farms themselves. Several hon. Members on both sides of the House have asked how we can use legislation and give local authorities the necessary resources. That is a difficult issue and we need to look at it sensibly. We need the Welsh Government, alongside the UK Government, to put forward legislation.

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** What stage are the draft Welsh regulations at? Are they out for consultation, are they being introduced, are they expected, or have they only just been published?

**Albert Owen:** I will refer to that. The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) mentioned the issues that are already being dealt with through the legislation. The draft regulations that I am talking about are the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations 2014, which were begun by the previous Environment Minister in Wales, who is unfortunately no longer in post. They have been published. A consultation and an environmental impact assessment have taken place, and we need to move forward.

In the short time I have, it would be useful if I outlined some of those measures. Like every Member in this House, I am sure, I want all parts of the United Kingdom to have proper regulations and resources in place. I do not want puppy or kitten sales close to the border to be subject to different regulations. We need a UK-wide approach, although I respect the fact that the issues are devolved to different UK Administrations.

Under the Welsh Government's proposed regulations, dog breeders would have to have a licence, which would be regulated by local authorities, although I know there is an issue with resources. This would replace section 1 of the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973 in Wales, and I hope it could also be applied across the United Kingdom. If

[Albert Owen]

a breeder was found not to have the required licence, they could face a custodial sentence, so this is as much about having a deterrent as it is about having actual regulations. Dog breeders are defined as those who have a minimum of three breeding bitches on their premises and who breed three or more litters of puppies over 12 months. All adverts for puppies for sale should be done properly. Those types of regulations would open up transparency so that people would know what they were purchasing. Under the proposals, in order to get a licence the premises must be inspected by the local authority. Resources are needed for that, but it would ensure high standards from the beginning.

This House discusses a lot of issues, and animal welfare is very important. I am very proud of the fact that we introduced the Animal Welfare Act 2006, but it does not go far enough. This debate has given the whole House of Commons an opportunity to come together and listen to what people out there really care about—they care about animal welfare as well as other issues—and to act. I am proud of many of the Backbench Business Committee debates we have had over the past three or four years. It is important that the Government listen to what Members relay on behalf of their constituents, and this excellent debate has raised such issues. We want to find a solution to stop the unethical way in which dogs are being bred, because we all care about our animals.

Finally, a number of TV programmes help raise awareness, which is important, because the British public care. The British Parliament must relay their views and we have done so sufficiently today. I hope the Minister will take them on board and look at the Welsh measures to which I have referred.

1.12 pm

**Paul Burstow** (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): I start by echoing the remarks of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen): this has been a very good debate that has highlighted an issue that so many of our constituents feel so strongly about. I have been overwhelmed by the number of constituents who were determined to make sure I attended this debate; I know that the same is true of other hon. Members, as demonstrated by their presence and contributions.

I thank the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) for his opening remarks and for securing the debate. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee. Like other hon. Members, I am a pet owner. I have a fantastic dog called Indy, who is a Labrador-collie cross: he has the brains of a collie and the appetite of a Labrador, which I am sure hon. Members will agree is a fatal combination. He is also currently courting votes, because he is standing in the Kennel Club election for parliamentary dog of the year—that is the only canvassing I will do on his behalf during this debate.

This debate is really important, because it is about giving the Government an opportunity to set out what they are already doing and to respond to hon. Members' calls on behalf of their constituents to do more. More can be done within the purview of existing legislation and regulation to make a difference to the lives of puppies and kittens and how they are treated, and to

ensure that the public are better informed and able to make better judgments when buying a dog or pet in order to themselves ensure that those animals are being raised to the highest welfare standards. If we were having a discussion about farm animals, we would not tolerate the sorts of things that puppies and kittens often have to put up with as a consequence of the gaps in our regulations.

There can be no justification for the retailing of puppies and kittens through pet shops. Over the years many of my constituents have felt aggrieved that there have not been sufficient powers to deal with such inappropriate sales and the way in which they provide a channel for disreputable dealers to sell their product, as it were. I say "product" because that is how they see it—this is about the commodification of something the public love so much. Surely that needs to be addressed through the licensing system, and I hope the Minister will say what the Government are minded to do to ensure that local authorities are aware of the latitude they have when setting licence conditions for pet shops. Other hon. Members have been right to highlight that, and I am sure that the Government, along with the Local Government Association, could do much more. It is a concern that these dealers and breeders remain in the shadows, unchecked and unregulated, while using shops to retail these pets.

As has been mentioned, the wild west of the internet is being used by unscrupulous breeders and dealers to prey on the public's love of cats and dogs, and to peddle sick and poorly treated puppies and kittens. I hope the Minister will tell us what further steps he intends to take to collaborate with the body responsible for the voluntary arrangements for advertising in this area, in order to satisfy him, hon. Members and our constituents that the code of practice is being followed. If it is not being followed, what further steps could be taken to ensure that the issue is properly addressed?

The Government should be praised for their determination to introduce compulsory chipping, but it will only be useful if it provides for proper traceability in the long run. I hope the Minister will tell us more about that.

**Albert Owen:** The right hon. Gentleman is making an important point about chipping. Of course, the more dogs that are chipped and the more veterinary surgeries that do it, the more people will get it done and the cheaper it will be. Cost and the economies of scale is an issue for some people. Traceability is very important and having licensed puppy farms would enable a trace right back to the source.

**Paul Burstow:** That is absolutely right and I hope that when the Minister responds he will tell us more about how the scheme will be rolled out and how those economies of scale will make it not only a blessing for owners, but a way of properly policing unscrupulous breeders.

Finally, I endorse the strong comments made by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the value of choosing to adopt a rescue dog. It is absolutely the right thing to do. My dog Indy is a re-homed dog who was quite a handful when he arrived. He is a reformed character now, but none the less he does still go for the occasional bit of picnic snaffling in the park. There are

some fantastic charities that make adoption possible. We need to make sure that they are better known and that the public choose to support them more often.

I hope the Government will weigh carefully the representations made by hon. Members. I do not think that the status quo is acceptable; it is certainly not acceptable to many of my constituents when it comes to the welfare of pets. It is essential that the Government take this opportunity to set out their determination to ensure that there are the very highest standards of welfare and protection for pets, particularly puppies and kittens.

1.18 pm

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) for securing this debate, and the 125,000 people who signed the petition. If nothing else, it has enabled MPs to get up and demonstrate how many dogs, cats and goldfish they own, and also to put their names on the historic record—a valuable contribution to our civilisation.

Early in 2009, a network of puppy farms in Wales was exposed. It was horrendous and showed the barbaric treatment of animals. I tabled an early-day motion, which was signed by 75 hon. Members and called for a review of the legislation to ensure that it was effective. At the time and since, we were given various assurances that the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999 and the Animal Welfare Act 2006 were appropriate. I am grateful for the work done by the Select Committee and various campaigning organisations to demonstrate that, although that legislation laid the foundations—I welcomed the 2006 Act and thought it was quite comprehensive—a lot more detail needs to be addressed.

I fully support a number of the proposals that have been made today. I think that reducing the number of litters allowed each year under the licensing regime to two is critical. Beyond that, breeding becomes an industry, and that is the point at which abuses start. Importation is critical. The threshold of five animals per individual is too high, because it enables a large number of animals to be introduced into the country, almost subverting the current legislation. The third issue raised today was the removal of puppies from their mothers after only two, three or four weeks, and I take a fairly strong line on that. I would have a limit of 12 weeks, rather than the proposed eight weeks. I want a harder regime, and I want it to be encompassed in legislation so that it is clear-cut.

Too often in this House we will the objectives without willing the means to achieve them. As has been said a number of times, local authorities do not have the resources invested in this to enable them to undertake the kind of enforcement regime that we expect. It would be wrong simply to castigate those authorities, because in many areas they are struggling to protect children and elderly people with the resources they have. Their resources are stretched. I think that it behoves us now to review in detail the resources available to individual local authorities.

Earlier in the debate an hon. Member talked about the need to inculcate best practice across local authorities, and I agree, but best practice still relies on expert professionals being able to undertake inspections, work

with the RSPCA and the voluntary sector, advise owners—some of this is about advising those involved in the industry on how to raise their standards—and, ultimately, ensure that there is enforcement. Having talked with other Members and local authorities in my area and elsewhere, I understand that those resources are not available.

I would like the Minister to engage in dialogue with local authorities and perhaps survey them on what resources are being devoted to the issue already and how they need to be strengthened. He could then bring the report back to the House so that we can properly undertake our role, which is to set objectives and ensure that a systematic process is in place and that we devote the resources for tackling the problem. That way, I think that we can manage to find a way forward. If we cannot do that, all the pious words and eloquent speeches we have heard will be irrelevant, and we will be back here in another four or five years to talk about more scandals and an excellent legislative regime that is not being implemented at the grass roots, where resources and implementation are vital.

1.22 pm

**Justin Tomlinson** (North Swindon) (Con): It is an absolute pleasure to follow such a powerful speech, which drew on a long track record on this important issue. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello), as other Members have done, for bringing forward such an incredibly important campaign. It has united Members across the Chamber. This has been one of the most positive and constructive debates I have taken part in. I am delighted that the campaign was highlighted in the *Swindon Advertiser*, in which the hon. Gentleman featured. We have all been contacted on social media by a great number of people. Interestingly, my Facebook page with the article on the campaign attracted over 60,000 views and 534 shares, which is 10 times more than for anything I have done before. That is no surprise, as 13 million households in this country have pets.

As Members have been naming their pets, I am delighted to say that my wife champions rescuing dogs—I have almost had to put in place a limit. Susie, our 11-year-old rescue dog, which we found on the Golden Oldies website, recently came second in the Lydiard park best rescue dog competition, which means international fame for her.

The mass commercial production of puppies purely for profit and without care for their welfare or happiness is a serious issue.

**Pat Glass** (North West Durham) (Lab): I sometimes feel that we do not fully understand who the people are who run those places. There is at least one puppy farm in my constituency, and the people who run it are linked to organised crime. Whether it is the exploiting of people or animals, drugs, or crash for cash, those people are willing to exploit anything, including the most vulnerable animals.

**Justin Tomlinson**: I thank the hon. Lady for that important intervention. The evidence shows that 95% of people would not wish to buy from puppy farmers, but over 900,000 people a year inadvertently do so. It is a hidden crime.

**Nicola Blackwood** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): We have heard many important speeches on puppy farms, but I hope that it will also be acknowledged that it equally affects kittens, as the motion states. Having been a cat owner all my life—my current cat is called Naughty Cat—I hope that we can also ask for the regulation to be reviewed to take account of the impact on kittens and that owners are made suitably aware of the issue when seeking to buy a new cat.

**Justin Tomlinson:** I thank my hon. Friend for that important intervention—my cats, Monty and Maggie, will have cheered. They are very proud that they came from properly licensed breeders.

Despite the obvious concerns about animal cruelty, horrific breeding conditions, malnourishment, lack of socialisation, lack of immunisation and de-worming, contracting infectious diseases and puppies being separated from their mothers too early, people unknowingly support puppy farming by purchasing pups from unlicensed breeders, thereby fuelling the puppy farming industry and putting themselves at risk of spending thousands of pounds on a puppy that is doomed to die soon after reaching his or her new home.

We know that one in three purchased pets come through pet shops online, particularly sites such as Gumtree, which was very slow to react to improve standards, or via newspaper adverts. Credit is due to the Pup Aid campaign, set up by Marc Abraham—Marc the vet from television, who is a celebrity—with great support from the Kennel Club, Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, the Blue Cross, Cats Protection, Dogs Rescue Protection and the RSPCA. All the heavyweights from the animal welfare world support this incredibly important campaign.

In summary, we want to see mandatory regulation and licensing for all dog breeders in the UK, rather than just those who breed four or more litters a year, and a ban on pet shops selling puppies. The majority of pet shop puppies come from farms, and there is no reason to allow that to continue. There should be stricter adherence to the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973, which demands that no person may keep a breeding establishment for dogs without a licence granted by the proper authority. The granting of a licence requires inspections of breeding practices and premises by a veterinary surgeon or practitioner and an officer of the authority, giving consumers confidence, as supported by 95% of the British public.

We must also ensure that enforcement is consistent, good and that it happens everywhere, because all too often it is patchy at best. There needs to be strict adherence to the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which Pup Aid believes requires secondary legislation. I would not normally call for regulation, but on a matter of such importance, and with great support from the public, I think that this is one of those times when we can push for it. It would repeal any outdated legislation and could be introduced to prohibit the licensing of pet shops or retail outlets that sell puppies or kittens where the mother is not present. However, regulation alone is inadequate. We also need to ensure that enforcement officers are well trained and supported so that there are more frequent and tighter inspections for breeders, giving consumers confidence that they are getting what they believe they are getting.

In conclusion, we need to end the free-for-all of mass breeding of puppies and kittens that prioritises profit over welfare. The public want action and I and other Members across the House fully support that.

1.28 pm

**Mr Geoffrey Robinson** (Coventry North West) (Lab): I am pleased to be taking part in this debate. Like other Members, I would like first to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello). He and the colleagues who have supported him so well have taken us into a most important debate. Clearly this matter strikes a chord across the country. If I heard my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) correctly, about 125,000 people have now put their names to the e-petition. I am very pleased to say that my family's names are proudly inscribed on it. We are a house of dog lovers. We can boast three Great Danes and a disgracefully overfed Labrador—well, a fat Labrador, which might not be uncommon in other Members' households. My wife has gone to the trouble of rescuing three donkeys—now five—from various distressed situations in Britain and Europe. Their only function seems to be to ensure that we keep a very organic way of gardening under way at home. There are many humorous stories that we could all tell about our experiences of the pets in our families. A love of animals is deep in the psyche of the British people. We would do well to respect that and, more importantly, to respond to it in any way that we can.

I think that we can all agree that pre-eminent among the 125,000 people is Marc Abraham. His Pup Aid programme has touched the consciences of many people throughout our constituencies. One such person in my constituency is Joy Yeates, who has written to me unremittingly on this topic and who wanted to ensure that I was here today to contribute. I am conscious of the time, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I just want to read a short excerpt from the letter that she sent me most recently:

“Puppies need more than a cage, food and drink, as their emotional needs cannot possibly be met in this crucial period of development.”

I am sure that we all utterly agree with that. She continued:

“For that reason, Pup Aid is seeking a ban on the sale of puppies in pet shops where the mother is not present.”

**Mr John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): I just want the hon. Gentleman to know that many people in Wokingham entirely echo his sentiments and those of his constituent. She has put it extremely well.

**Mr Robinson:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It is very welcome, coming as it does from such a distinguished intellectual quarter of the Conservative party. It was up to his usual high intellectual standard.

Joy Yeates then urged me to attend this debate. I am pleased to be here and to give the point of view of those who want practical steps to be taken.

Although he is not present, my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) has been foremost in saying that a huge strength of organisations are in support of us here. There have been

a string of legislative attempts to tackle different aspects of the problem. Those have all been made with the best of intentions. Those of us who took part in the debates on the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 know that. I am pleased to say that I had a role in that. It is not easy to legislate in this area, and I caution against early legislation—certainly primary legislation. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), who will speak for the Opposition today—although there is no party divide on this issue—agrees with me about that entirely.

There is a lot that we could do by looking at the series of legislation and guidance, and at the responsibilities as they are currently defined within local government. We could bring together and simplify the plethora of different and sometimes not wholly complementary sets of guidance and regulations to ensure that we know who is responsible for pursuing each aspect of the problem.

I do not expect the Minister to be able to say much about my next point. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South insisted that he did not want to get distracted by the internet, but we have to face the fact that if we succeed in bringing breeding under control, the internet will become the problem. My experience, in both north Wales and Clacton, was that the breeders were very responsible. Twelve weeks was the minimum period for which the puppies stayed with their mothers, so those were very good breeders. However, if we manage to do all that we are setting out to do, the internet will still be there and it will become ever more attractive as the other sources of puppies and so on are stopped. If the internet is as viral as I expect, in the sense that it attracts so much attention and demand—I hope that it will not be—we will have to find ways of dealing with it. That might mean having some mandatory restrictions on websites. I will leave that with the Minister, as well as the other problems.

I look forward to hearing from the Minister a coherent, clear-cut set of proposals that have been worked on, which will deal with the problem in a practical and sensible way, with minimal additional fuss and bother in terms of paperwork from the Government. I am very pleased to have taken part. Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

1.34 pm

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Obviously, this is an emotive and emotional debate, especially for those of us who have welcomed dogs and cats into our homes and included them almost as members of our family. I will not talk about my own dog because it would be too emotional. Sadly, he has just passed away. However, I will talk about the dog of the former Member for Birmingham Sparkbrook, Lord Hattersley. He has written eloquently of his love for his departed dog, Buster. We all have similar stories to tell. It seems to me that dogs have many of the virtues that us politicians lack—particularly silence and loyalty.

Our sympathy for these animals reflects the comfort and companionship that they provide, particularly for elderly people, in our increasingly atomised society. Therefore, everybody who has spoken believes that we have a duty of care to these creatures and it is no surprise that so many of our constituents have written

to us. They rightly feel strongly about the cruelties that puppies and kittens are forced to undergo in puppy farms, especially being separated far too early from their mothers.

The point that I want to make in this debate is that an extraordinarily wide scope of legislation is available to local authorities and Ministers already. We should be proud of that legacy of legislation in our country, which goes back well over 100 years. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded in 1824 by a group of zealous reformers, including such illustrious Members of this House as William Wilberforce and Richard Martin—both of whom were, incidentally, good high Tories. In its first year, the society managed to bring more than 60 offences to the courts. It was awarded royal patronage by Queen Victoria in 1840. We all know of the vital work of the RSPCA, so it does not need to be underlined. There is already much legislation on the statute book. To name a few, we have the Pet Animals Act 1951, the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973, the Breeding of Dogs Act 1991 and the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999.

No one can deny the inhumane conditions that exist in puppy farms—they have been well listed today—and nobody can deny that more should be done to eliminate them from existence. Through their licensing of pet sellers, local authorities have all the inspection powers they need. When they are not satisfied that suitable welfare conditions exist, they can refuse operating licences.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** I am listening to the thrust of my hon. Friend's speech. He has named the different pieces of legislation. Does he agree that what is needed is a tidying up of the legislation, so that we have specific legislation that can be implemented efficiently and effectively?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** That is a fair point and it leads directly to the last point that I need to make. All too often in this place, when we see abuses continuing, we fly to the temptation to create new legislation. What we need to do is to enforce the existing legislation better and ensure that it is modernised and updated, because it is in place.

**Richard Graham:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful point about the legislation being in place. Does he agree that consumer behaviour is the key to this issue? For example, parents who go with young children to look at puppies will often find themselves in a difficult place emotionally if they decide not to take the puppy that their children want, even if they do so because it is unsuitable, it is too young or there is no mother there. Does he agree that consumer behaviour is one of the things that we need to change?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** That point is absolutely right.

We have to resist the temptation to legislate. I say gently to my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) that I am not sure that it would be wise to stop pet shops selling puppies through legislation in this place. That might be too heavy-handed. We have to be careful that we do not, because of our concern and emotion about these subjects, bring in more legislation that might be unenforceable. We must remember that

[*Sir Edward Leigh*]

enormous numbers of puppies are brought in from without the jurisdiction and from where we have very little control.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) makes an important point. First, we need to enforce the legislation that we already have. Local authorities have the powers. Secondly, we need to proclaim the message that the key to this problem—all the organisations and charities that are involved in this matter agree with him about this—is to inform the consumer. It is the consumer who must make the informed choice, as we did, to go to the dog breeders to see the puppy with the mother. They should not buy a puppy in some halfway location or go to a pet shop. They should do their research and work out whether they have the resources to look after what is a living creature. I hope that we can send that message from the debate, rather than calling for more and more legislation.

**Nicola Blackwood:** Would my hon. Friend like to explain how he would expect consumers to divine hidden illnesses among puppies and kittens that they are trying to buy?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** That is a fair point, but we can send out the message that if people go to a responsible dog breeder rather than buy a puppy off the internet, they are far more likely to acquire a dog that will not have behavioural problems in the future and will have been raised with its mother in a healthy and proper way.

We need to explore how to better enforce existing legislation rather than add to the already deep panoply of laws and regulations. The Government are committed to not increasing regulation unless absolutely necessary. They should consider how they can better help local authorities to work against puppy farms, and Members of all parties, working together, must ensure that we create safe and humane conditions for animals throughout the United Kingdom.

1.41 pm

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate, and I offer my congratulations to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) on his persistent campaigning for stronger regulation of the sale of puppies and kittens. As many hon. Members have said, puppy farming is a horrendous business. Dogs are kept for their whole lives in often small, dark and filthy kennels, and they are used essentially as breeding machines. They have no chance to express their normal behaviours, and many suffer from untreated illnesses. Such farms really are factory farms for dogs. We need to grasp the opportunity to put an end to the barbaric practice of puppy and kitten farming once and for all.

We know that there are some key measures that we could decide to take that would make significant steps towards achieving that. That is why I want to add my voice to the many others asking the Government to take what steps they can today. I add my strong support for the measures set out in the motion, and I want to pay my own tribute to someone a number of hon. Members have mentioned, who has been a real driving force behind the campaign. That is the Pup Aid founder and

Brighton-based vet Marc Abraham. His contribution to ending puppy farming and to animal welfare more generally is hugely impressive, and he has helped to assemble a formidable coalition, about which we have already heard a lot, including Blue Cross, the Dog Rescue Federation, the Dog Advisory Council, the Dogs Trust, the Kennel Club and the RSPCA. Added to that, as we know, the latest figure for the number of people who have signed the petition is about 125,000, so the strength of feeling across the country that we should be doing more to act is clear.

As a rescue dog owner myself—I got that dog from a wonderful RSPCA centre in Brighton—I want to add my voice to those of the many Brighton residents who have taken the time to write to share their concerns about puppy farming, and often to share their photographs, too.

I want to mention a vet whom I have been speaking to. It concerned me that she said that in her experience, the problem is actually becoming significantly worse. In her view, it will not change without some kind of intervention or regulation.

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I share the hon. Lady's concern about puppy farming. Banning puppy sales is one way of tackling the problem, but is that not just the tip of the iceberg? We need to consider the issue of supply, at the core of which is transportation from other jurisdictions. Should we not look at proper enforcement against the cruel transportation of puppies?

**Caroline Lucas:** I certainly agree that we need to do that. My slight concern is that although some hon. Members are asking us to examine other issues, which we certainly should, that should not be at the expense of doing what we can here today. I completely take on board, for example, what the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) said about animals coming from other jurisdictions or via the internet, which may be a harder nut to crack right now. However, that should not mean that we do not act now to take action on pet shops, garden centres and so on. I agree that that will not be a panacea or a silver bullet, but we can do it relatively straightforwardly. We should do it, because we can do it and it will make a difference.

I was speaking about the vet who had raised with me her concerns about pedigree puppy farming in particular, which can result in particularly grim conditions. Genetic problems range from serious breathing difficulties to chronic, lifelong skin allergies to crippling joint problems. The real concern is that some of those problems, such as obstructive airway syndrome, are seen as normal by those who are willing to put looks and fashion before animal welfare. A price tag of more than £1,000 is not uncommon for breeds such as pugs and bulldogs, and the inevitable outcome is more breeding to meet more demand.

That vet explained to me that in some breeds of bulldogs, the majority of bitches cannot give birth naturally and need a caesarean to deliver puppies. She explained that she had come across breeders who were so willing to put their dogs under repeat surgeries, so that they could keep breeding them for as long as it was profitable, that they literally bred the dogs to death.



Of course, some of the responsibility should stop with the consumers who are willing to pay to purchase dogs from puppy farms and bad breeders. That is why I welcome the fact that the motion mentions the importance of raising awareness. However, I believe that many people are simply not aware of the issue. They do not know that if they buy a puppy from a pet shop, it could have come from the type of grim background that we have described, so raising awareness is massively important.

The role of local authorities is also massively important, and I underline again the importance of ensuring that they are properly resourced to carry out the welfare checks that they have the right to do. However, that does not take away from the fact that the Government need to act as well. The vet that I have been referring to says that she does not believe the problem is

“likely to go away anytime soon without some kind of intervention or regulation.”

I believe that there is a case for overwhelming action today. The fact that we cannot do everything does not mean that we should not do anything. I very much hope that the Government will listen to the strength of feeling throughout the House and the country and swiftly take the measures that are within their power.

1.46 pm

**Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): I will keep my remarks brief. I am concerned that a number of people no longer think that owning a dog, or indeed any pet, is a serious long-term commitment. That is shown by one statistic on dog ownership in the UK, which is that according to the RSPCA, one fifth of those who have bought a puppy within the last two years no longer own that dog. The definition of a commodity is

“a marketable item produced to satisfy consumer wants or needs”, but puppy farmers consider only the wants or needs of the consumer. The wants or needs of their marketable item are irrelevant.

Britain is known across the world as a nation of pet lovers, but allowing the battery farming of puppies is cruel to the bitches involved and to their puppies. They are too frequently taken away from their litters far too early, unsocialised, traumatised and have health and temperament problems. With such a poor start in life, it is little wonder that they do not always settle easily into the families who buy them with such great hopes.

Allowing puppies who should become much loved family members to be traded as a commodity means that it is not only the dogs that lose out. People have also lost money, but many will also have lost their faith in dogs. The RSPCA, the Dogs Trust and smaller dog rescue charities such as Friends of the Animals and Bracken’s Dog Rescue on the Isle of Wight, pick up the pieces. All those excellent charities know only too well that puppy farms add to the problems. Too many dogs, many of whom are still young, need good, loving homes, which are harder and harder to find. We should therefore look carefully at reducing the number of litters. Many people think that two a year, rather than five, is the appropriate number to license. Local authorities should prosecute every time they find bad practice in licensed breeding premises.

Sentencing guidelines should make clear that practices typically associated with puppy farming are a serious criminal offence. Someone convicted of cruelty or poor

dog breeding should be barred from holding a licence or working in any dog breeding establishment. Only then will we be able properly to tackle the cruel practices and horrible repercussions of puppy farming.

1.50 pm

**Mr David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): As a member of the Backbench Business Committee I am pleased that we are debating this subject, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Flello) on his speech. I agreed with every word.

In this country we have a wonderful record in animal welfare, in contrast with a number of other countries. If the Minister responds in a positive fashion to what he has heard this afternoon, and to the huge number of representations made by constituents throughout the country, I think our stock will grow further. Before this debate, behind the scenes, I tried to do something about this issue, and I had a meeting with the splendid Lord de Mauley. He listened carefully to everything I said, and at the end of the meeting he suggested that I write a letter. I say to the Minister, in a kind way, that I want him to be brave this afternoon. I want him to tear up the speech drafted for him by civil servants, and—unlike my colleagues who feel that we do not need legislation—I want him to respond in a positive fashion to what he has heard. We all know that on occasion civil servants will say, “No, Minister.”

I had the privilege of serving on the Bill Committee for the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, which amended the Protection of Animals Act 1911. The 1986 Act was groundbreaking at the time and dealt with a huge range of cruelty that was meted out to animals in this country. Since that time there have been many other attempts, and in my rather ham-fisted way I tried to promote the Dogs Bill in 1989, and the Pet Animals (Amendment) Bill in 1990. I therefore say to my colleagues that although I agree that we as Conservatives are against legislation, we need to do a tidying-up exercise.

I want to praise Clarissa Baldwin of the Dogs Trust, Rosemary Smart of the Kennel Club, the wonderful vet Marc Abraham, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan). All those people are judges in the Westminster dog of the year show, and I will be entering—yet again—my two rescued pugs, Botox and Lily. They are somewhat depressed after parading before the judges, year after year, and getting absolutely nowhere. I have now got them into an arranged marriage, so I think the least that they could be awarded would be the prize for best married dogs in the show. I will not mention kittens because I will leave that to my good friend Ann Widdecombe.

I congratulate all organisations that have worked so hard on this issue. The provisions in the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999 are inadequate. The wording of the Act is confusing and leaves too much space for individual interpretation. Producing five litters every year is absolutely ridiculous—two is quite enough. I hope the Minister will respond positively to that.

**Sir Roger Gale** (North Thanet) (Con): My hon. Friend and I came to the House on the same day, and he will recall that since the late Nicholas Ridley abolished the dog licence, there has been resistance by successive Governments to the establishment of a “Swansea for

[Sir Roger Gale]

dogs". The fact of the matter is—the Minister needs to understand this—that unless and until every animal sold is properly registered, vaccinated and documented, and there are proper controls over the breeding and sale of not just dogs but cats as well, the problem will not be solved. The time has come for legislation.

**Mr Amess:** I agree with my hon. Friend. We have stood shoulder to shoulder for more than 30 years, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), and I hope that the Minister will forget his brief and respond positively to all the remarks made this afternoon.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** When pressing the Minister, will my hon. Friend bear in mind that it is all very well our hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh) saying that an amount of self-regulation can be involved—such as insisting on seeing the mother of the animal—but that does not take into account the emotional side and what people feel when they see a puppy? Therefore stronger legislation and restrictions need to be in place.

**Mr Amess:** I agree with my hon. Friend, although I am not sure about his earlier remarks about the castration of his dog. It is crucial that puppies are exposed to extensive social interaction and stimuli during the first 12 to 14 weeks of their lives, but that is more than commercial farmers are willing to provide. As a result, dogs coming from commercial puppy farms are undoubtedly more aggressive, less responsive, and less trainable. Current legislation regulating the operation of pet shops dates back to 1951—a very long time ago. We need to change the legislation, particularly to reflect the impact of the internet, which is the issue that has brought so many colleagues to the House this afternoon. The Pet Animals Act 1951 appears only to address the physical requirements that pet shops need to meet. It takes no account of the mental well-being of a pet being sold, or of dogs that need physical exercise. Clear guidance needs to be provided to local authorities.

I have also been made aware of the growing problem of illegal dog importation to the United Kingdom, and I urge the Secretary of State to examine how the influx of puppies from rabies-endemic eastern European countries can be addressed. I say again to the Minister: be bold, tear up the speech, and do something to stop puppy and kitten farming.

1.56 pm

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a privilege to speak at the end of this debate, because it has been a good debate and all parties have come together. I have the great pleasure of chairing the all-party group on animal welfare, and I believe this is an issue that we all care strongly about.

There are more than 11 million cats in this country, and Blue Cross and Cats Protection take in between 4,000 and 5,000 stray cats and kittens a month. That shows the scale of the problem with not only puppies but kittens. If kittens are taken too early from their mother, not only is that bad for their welfare, but most will probably depart this world for health reasons. We must be clear about that.

It is more important than ever to ensure that we can enforce whatever legislation is in place—I am sure that is what the Minister will speak about this afternoon. It is no good having legislation that we cannot enforce. This is not just an animal welfare problem. When someone chooses a puppy, they are bringing an animal into their household. They may have young children, and that puppy is potentially dangerous and could grow into a dangerous dog. If people do not see the mother of that puppy and the environment in which it has been raised, they will not know what could happen in their family with that puppy.

With the internet, it is becoming much easier to access a puppy, and if someone goes to buy one and their child picks it up and loves it, it is difficult for them to say they are not going to buy it. Not only will the puppy be difficult from a welfare and behavioural point of view, it may be suffering from many diseases. It probably will not have had proper inoculations or been dealt with properly, whether it has come from a badly managed puppy farm or from eastern European countries where, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Mr Amess) mentioned, rabies and other diseases are a problem. We must act on all those issues to protect people from buying the wrong type of puppy or kitten.

I am not against designer dogs such as Cockapoos or Labradoodles, but they are expensive. People decide they want this type of dog, they look on the internet and they see a puppy that is half or a third of the normal price of a Cockapoo or Labradoodle. Naturally, people buy the cheaper puppy, which has probably come in from central or eastern Europe. Therein lies the problem.

I welcome the Government's introduction of microchipping, but we have to make sure that it happens. Will those who breed puppies in their backyards and should not be breeding puppies be the sort of people who will microchip them? No, they will not.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): My hon. Friend is making such a superb speech that I think we need to hear an extra minute, so may I ask him if he is aware of the work of wonderful charities such as Woofability in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope). Such charities train dogs beautifully to do tremendous work for disabled people, such as pulling their socks off, taking the washing out of the washing machine and all sorts of tasks that able-bodied people think nothing of doing, but which are of huge assistance to someone confined to a wheelchair?

**Neil Parish:** My hon. Friend highlights not only that dogs can help people with certain tasks that they are unable to do themselves, but that a dog is a part of the family and an individual's life. For many elderly people, their dog becomes their life, so if they lose a dog and then buy the wrong type of puppy—it might be diseased or have huge behavioural problems—that becomes a serious social issue as well. It is imperative, therefore, that we deal with the situation.

The Minister has many weapons in his armoury already, but there is not enough enforcement. Are we tracking vans coming through the ports of Dover and elsewhere with illegal puppies? Are we checking them? Do we know what is coming in? Are we checking the microchips already in dogs? According to Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and Blue Cross, only a third of

the microchips they see in puppies and dogs are accurate. Not only do puppies need to be properly microchipped, but we need a national database to trace where dogs have come from.

If we ignore this situation, I fear it will get worse. People have got so used to buying clothes, shoes or whatever on the internet that unfortunately they think they can do the same with puppies. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have strongly made the argument that, for goodness sake, when someone buys a puppy, they should make sure they know where it has come from, have seen its mother, have seen where it has been bred and know how the mother behaved, so that they know what they are bringing into their home and can have a successful and loving pet. That is what people in this country believe in. The vast majority of people do a good job, but we have to stamp down hard on the rogues in our society.

2.3 pm

**Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate about the sale of puppies and kittens and the related issues of puppy farming and so on. Before I make my contribution, however, may I, like every other speaker, pay tribute to the Pup Aid campaign and especially to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello), who has led the way in Parliament on this issue and has clearly illustrated today the problems we face in relation to the trade in the breeding and sale of puppies and kittens.

As most colleagues have done today, I also pay tribute to Marc Abraham, the television vet, who has been tireless in his campaigning. I have worked with him closely over the past two years or so and can confirm that he has made a great contribution to this debate. It is impossible to be anything other than impressed by his commitment to the cause of animal welfare. Pup Aid has run a successful campaign, with over 100,000 signatures secured for its e-petition—hence the debate today. This itself is a testimony to the success of the campaign and the importance of the issues it raises, as is the number of right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed this afternoon. We have learned a great deal about colleagues' opinions—and about their pets as well.

The Government's record on the issue is disappointing, but I hope the Minister will take this opportunity to correct that situation and do as the hon. Member for Southend West (Mr Amess) suggested and give us some positive movement. Puppy farming is widely perceived to be more and more of a problem, while the importation of puppies has increased massively in recent years. For example, in 2012 the importation of dogs from Hungary increased on the previous year by more than 450%, and from Romania by more than 1,150%. Coupled with these rises, the number of online sales of puppies and kittens has increased significantly, which must be a major concern to anybody who thinks that animal welfare is important, yet we have seen little response from the Government to this wide range of issues, which includes, of course, the sale of puppies and kittens in retail outlets.

It is worse than that, however, because the Government have also failed properly to get to grips with wider dog welfare issues relating to dog control and responsible

ownership. And although measures such as the prosecution of owners whose dogs attack on private property are welcome—indeed, we pressed for them—it has to be said that the Government dragged their feet and took far too long to get these measures on the statute book.

If we are to respond effectively to problems with the breeding and sale of puppies and kittens, we need to take a comprehensive approach, because the challenges raised by the sale of puppies and kittens in pet shops represent only the tip of the iceberg in terms of concerns about animal welfare standards. As I have made clear, we need to look not just at the issue in the motion, but more broadly at breeding practices, the growing trade in online sales and issues arising out of the misuse of the pet travel scheme—PETS—by commercial puppy breeding interests.

We are committed to doing just that and to working with animal welfare organisations and other stakeholders to review the trade in the breeding and sale of puppies and kittens, as my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) said. The Animal Welfare Act 2006, introduced by the last Labour Government, sets a useful benchmark for such a review, and Labour remains proud of what it achieved with this legislation. Importantly, for the first time it embedded in statute clear standards relating to the welfare of domestic animals. The five tests set out in the Act are now taken as a practical template for animal welfare assessment, and we will use this legislation as the starting point for our review.

Today's debate has given a necessary airing to the growing problem of the irresponsible breeding and sale of puppies and kittens, and many Members have made excellent contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) talked about problems with the importation of commercially bred dogs under PETS, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who also talked about the relationship between the puppy and the mother and the need for the mother to be present at the point of sale. My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson) talked about the emotional needs of puppies and my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) talked about the measures being taken by the Welsh Assembly. We look forward to hearing more about that. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Meg Munn) talked about the trade in the breeding and sale of puppies and kittens and the need for the highest welfare standards.

I want to conclude my remarks by paying tribute to the wider animal welfare movement, which has worked tirelessly to highlight the issues raised today, and indeed has attempted in some instances to establish creative responses to them. The RSPCA, for instance, has campaigned vigorously to draw attention to the abuse of the pets travel scheme, and has also worked hard to establish the case for a review of the current status of the standards applying to the breeding and sale of puppies and kittens. The Dogs Trust has led the way with its campaign for compulsory microchipping, and has played a key role within the Pet Advertising Advisory Group to establish new, higher standards for adverts on websites. May I also take this opportunity to mark, on the record, the outstanding contribution to dog welfare

[Angela Smith]

made by Clarissa Baldwin, the outgoing and long-serving—very long-serving—chief executive of the Dogs Trust?

Finally, I pay tribute to the Kennel Club, which 10 years ago developed an assured breeder scheme that now has 8,000 members. The case for a comprehensive review of standards in the breeding and sale of puppies and kittens is clear—it must be a review that will have at its heart the welfare of these animals. They deserve nothing less, and as a society that prides itself on our attitudes towards animal welfare, we must not let them down.

2.11 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello), who I know has been a long-standing campaigner on these issues. I am sure he will recall, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh) said, that I pursued these issues when I was a member of the Select Committee. It would be remiss of me of not to mention Mono, my now deceased pet dog. He was a rescue dog from the RSPCA who, like many others, was a wonderfully dedicated friend, albeit with some behavioural issues.

Let me deal first with some of the issues on which the Government have made progress—tackling irresponsible owners, for example. We have increased the penalty for serious dog attacks and have made it an offence to have a dog attack on private land. We have tightened the law, too, when it comes to dog attacks on guide dogs, and we have introduced compulsory chipping. I recognise, however, that today's theme has been about a different issue—the welfare of puppies. I have always been clear that we must look after the welfare of puppies and ensure that they are properly socialised. As many hon. Members have mentioned, that is crucial for the behaviour of the dogs as they grow up and mature.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Mr Amess) asked me to tear up my script and speak from the heart. I can confirm that I never asked for a script in the first place. I scribbled some notes of what Members said, and I want to use the available time to deal with as many points as I can.

On pet passports, I can confirm that a new EU regulation is tightening the rules of the EU pet passport scheme. From December this year, it will no longer be possible for a dog under 12 weeks to be vaccinated prior to transportation under the scheme. There is then a three-week period throughout which the puppy must remain in residence before it can be moved. In practice, that means that from December this year, no puppy or dog can be lawfully transported to this country under the pet passport scheme unless it is at least 15 weeks old.

Many hon. Members rightly raised the issue of the internet. The biggest concerns put to us by the animal welfare charities related not so much to the problem of puppy farms as to that of backstreet breeders that are completely unregulated and unlicensed. In many cases, the people involved are not the right people to be breeding dogs at all, and in the worst cases, they maltreat

the puppies deliberately to make them violent by giving them violent traits—the so-called “status dogs”. That is a major concern, which is why at the end of last year, my noble Friend Lord de Mauley brought together a group in connection with the Pet Advertising Advisory Group to put in place a voluntary code, which has been running since the beginning of the year. I can tell hon. Members today that, since that code was put in place, 100,000 adverts have been removed from the internet. I pay tribute to the work done by the internet companies that acted so responsibly and by all the volunteers who took part in monitoring the internet for that purpose. Given the scale of the problem, I hope hon. Members will understand that making further progress on the internet continues to be our main priority.

Let me touch on the contentious issue of the five-litter threshold, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton, the Chairman of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. She is right. When I sat on the Committee, we highlighted some concerns about the five-litter threshold being too high. Hon. Members who follow what has happened will know that the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999 states that anyone carrying on a business of breeding and selling puppies must have a licence, irrespective of the number of litters. However, a second clause, always intended as an anti-avoidance clause, said that irrespective of who owns the puppies on a particular premise, a licence is compulsory if there are more than five litters. That was to prevent people from claiming that some of dogs belonged to their brothers, sisters, father or whoever.

Over the last few years, however, or since the legislation was introduced, it has been apparent that local authorities have taken the five-litter threshold to be the one to work towards. It became something of a mystery, which we managed to solve last night. The reason is that in 1999 when the Act was put in place under the last Government, the Home Office sent out a circular indicating for local authorities that in most situations five litters should be taken as the threshold to use.

**Miss McIntosh:** Will the Minister give way?

**George Eustice:** Let me finish the point. Since that time, it would be fair to say—from all the representations made during today's debate and from the recommendations of the Select Committee—that this is the wrong way to interpret the legislation. Those carrying on a business of breeding and selling dogs should be required to have a licence. I can confirm that we will write to local authorities to provide new clarity through new guidance so that they can interpret the Act in the spirit intended by the House today.

Pet shops are a key item of today's debate. It is important to recognise that only about 2% of pet shops sell cats and dogs—around 70 in total—and they are already regulated and licensed. They are regulated under the Pet Animals Act 1951. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South asked me to clarify whether local authorities have the additional power to place restrictions on which animals can be sold at a licensed pet shop establishment. I can confirm that they do have that power. He asked, too, about the issue of ambiguity and contestability in that context. Let me clarify that the intention of the provision is for local authorities to judge on a case-by-case basis whether a particular premise is suitable for a

particular animal to be sold. It is not necessary for local authorities to change the law; it is for them to have considerable discretion in making a judgment about whether it is appropriate for certain animals to be sold on the authority's premises.

The hon. Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson) made the important point that much can be done within the existing regulations. I agree. In January this year, along with the RSPCA, the Dogs Trust and many other charities and organisations, we contributed to some model licence conditions that were made available to all local authorities and were published by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. These included 50 pages of recommendations about the sorts of conditions that should be included in a licence for dog-breeding premises. There were strict provisions on the need for social interaction with humans, which should apply for the whole day if the buyers were present all the time.

In addition, in September 2013 we published the model conditions for pet vending, which also set out strict conditions for pet shops about the need for interaction with staff and humans. It is specifically recommended that at least four times a day a human should spend at least 20 minutes with the puppies on sale. We have already put in place important guidance on these issues.

I would like to conclude by saying that we have had a really important debate. I, too, have received many hundreds of letters on the issue and it is clearly of great importance to the country. We have 8 million dogs in this country and we are a nation of animal lovers.

**John McDonnell:** Before the Minister concludes, will he respond on the issue of local authority resources, which was raised by several Members?

**George Eustice:** All I can say on that issue is that the internet will make it easier for some local authorities to identify where they have a problem. One thing we have done in the new code, agreed with the Pet Advertising Advisory Group, is provide that where a licence is held it must be advertised, and where it is not held contact details should be advertised. That gives local authorities a ready way to identify where they have the most serious problems.

In conclusion, we have had a good and important debate. The Government are committed to improving animal welfare, as I am personally. I hope that my comments today will help reassure the House that the Government are doing a considerable amount to move this item forward.

2.20 pm

**Robert Flello:** First, I congratulate all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in today's debate on the important contribution they have made to moving this issue forward. I hope that the weight of feeling we have heard expressed in this Chamber sends a clear message—I think the Minister has heard it—that more needs to be done now. I welcome the clarification that local authorities can act where they feel it is inappropriate for pet shops to sell puppies and kittens. If I heard

correctly, they can use the powers under the 1951 Act, if they decide to do so, to stop that. May I urge him to write to those local authorities, perhaps in conjunction with the Department for Communities and Local Government, to point out to them that they have that ability?

Let me use the 1951 Act to highlight something. A number of right hon. and hon. Members have said that the legislation is fine and that this is just a matter of enforcement, but the legislation is not fine. The 1951 Act does not talk about socialisation—the guidance might, but the Act does not require socialisation. It also does not make provision in respect of emotional needs, although the guidance mentions a total of 80 minutes a day. The Act does not talk about those things, and it does not deal with puppies and kittens being taken from their mums at four weeks—certainly earlier than eight weeks—or with the question, “Where's mum?” One message I want to get across is, “If that genuinely is not the mum of the litter of kittens or puppies, do not touch it with a bargepole. Think very carefully about where you are doing your shopping.”

The debate has covered a wide spectrum of issues: irresponsible breeders, microchipping, the internet, foreign imports, the requirements of legislation and the requirements of enforcement. I know from my conversations with Labour's Front-Bench team, and with a host of the charities that have been talked about today, that there is a willingness to work with the Government and alongside DEFRA to get this right and get it sorted.

Finally, may I close by paying tribute to the fantastic work done by Marc and Pup Aid and to all the charities that have been cited today? This is the start; this is the foot in the door. We need to do a lot more for the sake of all the puppies and kittens—and their mothers—that are leading horrendous lives and being raised in the most cruel conditions. Although this is just the start and there is much more to do, I thank everyone for today's debate and I thank the Backbench Business Committee. I look forward to pestering it in future for yet more debates on this issue, although I hope I will not need them because the Minister will hear what we have said and make sure that we work further together.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the e-petition relating to the sale of young puppies and kittens; notes that puppies produced at large-scale commercial breeding establishments, known as puppy farms, and irresponsibly-bred kittens are separated from their mothers too early and often transported long distances, and as a result often suffer serious life-threatening problems including impaired immune systems, poor socialisation, infectious diseases and shorter life spans; calls on the Government to review existing legislation to ensure that it is consistent with its own guidance that prospective owners should always see the puppy or kitten with its mother, and to ban the sale of puppies and kittens from retail centres such as pet shops, garden centres or puppy supermarkets; further notes the support of the Blue Cross, Dog Rescue Federation, Dogs Advisory Council, Dogs Trust, The Kennel Club, RSPCA and others for such a ban; and further calls on the Government and welfare organisations to work together to raise awareness among the public about choosing a dog responsibly from only ethical breeders or by adoption from legitimate rescue organisations, and to consider further steps to end the cruel practice of irresponsible and unethical breeding of puppies and kittens in the UK.

## Non-league Football

**Mr Speaker:** For the benefit of the House, I remind colleagues that after the proposer has finished his speech there is a limit of five minutes on each Back-Bench speech. There is also an informal hope or expectation that the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) will be able to confine his remarks to approximately 10 minutes, but I am in his hands.

2.25 pm

**Jesse Norman** (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I shall endeavour to comply with that informal guidance.

First, may I thank all those who have supported this important debate on the future of non-league football? I thank the Backbench Business Committee and colleagues across the House today for taking part and for other work they have done on football issues. I also thank the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport; Supporters Direct, which has provided tremendous additional help; and, above all, the Hereford United Supporters Trust, the Hereford United Independent Supporters Association, the dozens of Herefordians who have shared their feelings and views with me, and the thousands more who have poured their passion and commitment into the local game in Herefordshire over many years.

You do not have to be a football supporter to know how important this game is to the people of Great Britain. Every week during the season hundreds of thousands of people turn out to watch premiership and football league games, and millions more watch at home or catch up with the highlights. Football is the lifeblood of many of our towns and cities: it is what parents and kids do on a Saturday afternoon; and it is the subject of endless banter and gossip during the week. But the premiership and the football league are just the glamour at the top. There is huge activity below the surface, in non-league and grass-roots football. It is very easy to forget the significance of those parts of the game, and the roles those clubs play in the community and their importance in seeding the players and supporters of tomorrow.

That carries with it a crucial point: football clubs are not purely private organisations. They are not merely the private playthings of their owners—they are public as well. What gives the clubs their life and energy, even in the premiership, is the passion and love of their fans. I am talking about supporters who turn out every week, who yell their heads off at the match, who make the trek to away games and who buy the season tickets and the merchandise. So it is entirely appropriate that Parliament should take an interest in football and, specifically today, in non-league football: how it is funded, regulated and managed, balancing private interests with the public interest.

In large part I have called this debate to focus public attention on what has happened at Hereford United, which has been the result of a disastrous catalogue of mismanagement and poor regulation. We will come to that, but first I want to look to the good. In Herefordshire, despite many competing sports and other outdoor activities, the high cost of coaching and a shortage of access to good pitches, the non-league and grass-roots game is flourishing. We have 42 grass-roots senior football teams,

some 150 junior teams, a schools league and midweek leisure games. Every weekend during the season about 2,000 youngsters between the ages of nine and 16 turn out in teams such as Ross Juniors in Ross-on-Wye and Pegasus Juniors in Hereford. Over the summer some 78 girls took part in girls week football, and I had the privilege of barbecuing several hundredweight of sausages for the different nationalities' teams in the first-ever Herefordshire world cup in July.

The issue of finance is a very important one, and I know colleagues will have a lot to say about it—indeed, it deserves a separate debate in its own right. But it is important to recognise the £1.4 million in Premier League, Football Association and Government grants that has been given to grass-roots football in Herefordshire since 2000 and the further £240,000 that has been received from the Football Stadium Improvement Fund, which is funded entirely by the Premier League. As always, however, what really matters is community spirit and local organisation. I pay tribute to Jim Lambert and the Herefordshire Football Association, whose president is a distinguished former Member of this House, my predecessor but one, Sir Colin Shepherd. I also pay a special tribute to all those who play in these teams, to the families who support them and to the volunteers who give up their time to referee games and organise the league. Many of those people have supported and nurtured football in Herefordshire for generations.

Much of that good news has been cast into the shadows by events at Hereford United, which have been a catastrophe for the club, for the city, for the county and for Bulls fans everywhere. This debate has special significance for Herefordians, because the terrible truth is that our club, my club, Hereford United—the club of Ronnie Radford and what has been described as the most famous goal in FA Cup history, against Newcastle United; the goal that launched the career of John Motson—with its famous tradition and international name, in the year of its 90th anniversary, is likely to go into insolvency next Monday, with a court judgment on its outstanding debts.

How did that occur? How has a club that was solvent and competitive three years ago suddenly found itself on the brink of annihilation? It is a long and tortuous saga, which I will not recount here, but let me tell the House that Hereford United stand as a case study in mismanagement and poor regulation, of a kind all too prevalent in lower league and non-league football.

In 2008-09 Hereford United were playing in league one against teams such as Leicester City, now in the premier league, and Leeds United, currently in the championship. They were relegated to league two in 2009 and to the football conference in 2012. That is when the financial problems began to bite. Their share of rights income dropped from £750,000 a year to a tiny £50,000. That was offset by a parachute payment of £215,000, much less even than one year's drop in rights income, much of which will have been returned to clubs in the league and to the FA itself.

The 2013-14 season was beset by financial crises but the fans rallied, funds were raised to see off the threat of a series of winding-up petitions and Hereford United secured an astonishing last-gasp 2-1 victory over Aldershot, thus narrowly managing to avoid relegation. However,

in June, Mr Thomas Agombar became the 57% owner of Hereford United. When he arrived at the club, he reassured staff that

“all payments and wages due to themselves, players and football creditors would be paid in full this week, subject to Conference status”.

Despite those promises and the deadline for payment being extended three times, Hereford United failed to pay their football creditors and failed to post the bond as required under conference rules. They were then expelled from the conference on 10 June 2014. That created, indeed reinforced, the strong impression locally that Mr Agombar was less interested in football than in taking over leases to the Edgar Street ground and using them for commercial development. We now know he met repeatedly with Herefordshire council, which to its credit has taken no steps to allow him use of the leases.

There was also immediate local concern about the suitability of Mr Agombar to own a football club, not least because he has convictions for conspiracy to steal and theft. Furthermore, two other directors appeared likely to fail the FA's owners and directors test. One, Mr Philip Gambrell, was subject to an individual voluntary arrangement and another, Mr Thomas Agombar Jr, had been banned by Essex County FA.

I wrote to the Football Association in early June, asking it to consider whether Mr Agombar met the requirements of the owners and directors fit and proper test. However, perhaps because of the World cup, it was difficult to get a rapid response from the FA, despite the answer being vital to Hereford United's survival. Indeed it was not until 4 August, some six weeks later, that the FA finally confirmed to me that Mr Agombar Sr had failed the test, along with Mr Agombar Jr and Mr Gambrell. Even then, despite my repeated requests and warning of the reputational risks to the FA itself, the FA refused publicly to announce the results of the test. It pleaded confidentiality, although the club was even then in negotiations over a company voluntary agreement, with Mr Gambrell's name on the CVA document. It took until 12 August for news that Mr Agombar and those two other directors had failed the test to be made public. I must tell the House that the FA has still not made a statement on the matter. Not only that: the Southern League accepted Hereford United as a member in mid-June, despite the fact that it is supposed to abide by FA rules and that Mr Agombar had not passed, and as it proved would never pass, the fit and proper test.

This whole fiasco raises very serious issues about governance and the need for greater transparency; about funding and financial fair play; about the negative effects of the football creditors rule; and about the importance of supporters' trusts. I would encourage the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport to revisit in the next Parliament its 2011 report on football governance to reconsider some of the issues.

Today I want to focus on the FA's fit and proper test and how that was administered. How could it be right for the FA to refuse to publish the results, which were clearly material to a proceeding in court? The creditors should have been immediately informed, so that they could judge the CVA in that light. Some of those were football creditors, to whom the FA arguably owed a special duty of care. I can see no reason why the FA should not be able to make public in a timely fashion whether an individual submitted the relevant form for

the owners and directors test; and whether, if they have, they passed the test. After all, this is the practice in the parallel case of financial services and, although that industry is no poster child for good regulation—goodness knows that is true—its approach has been proven to deter some very dodgy individuals from seeking senior positions.

Moreover, how can people who buy shares in football clubs be able to register their directorship with Companies House when they have not passed the test? Surely people who would be likely to fail the test should not be allowed even to get to that stage. The FA, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and Companies House should work much more closely to identify potentially unsuitable club shareholders, owners and directors as soon as they appear.

**Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab):** I have listened closely to the hon. Gentleman's excellent speech. Wrexham has had similar experiences, and the club has gone through a very difficult period. I am interested in what he has said, and he has come to the nub of the matter. Regulation must precede ownership. The key decision on whether someone is a fit and proper person must be made by the FA before it sanctions any transfer in ownership. For the life of me, I cannot understand why that does not happen.

**Jesse Norman:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. He makes a proposal that has been scouted before but needs to be examined more closely. There is a tie-in to a wider question: should there be a licensing regime for clubs? That is worth exploring.

**Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con):** My hon. Friend is doing a fantastic job in laying out this sad story of mismanagement. Does he agree that the FA's failure lets down not just football but the people we all represent, the people who go to watch football every week, the people who really care? It is they who have been most bitterly let down. Some of them work for the club and will not receive the money they are owed.

**Jesse Norman:** As my hon. Friend knows, it is likely that many of the creditors, including football creditors, at Hereford United will never be paid. He raises a serious issue. I am not by any means critical of the FA as such; I think that many of the things it does are good. There is a specific issue in relation to the owners and directors test that I want to focus on. Serious concerns exist in that regard.

**Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab):** The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful case. Mr Peter Kneale, company secretary of Prescott Cables in my constituency, has contacted me to make three suggestions. I would be interested in the hon. Gentleman's response to them. The first is that admission to non-league matches below conference level should be exempt from VAT. The second is that non-league clubs could automatically be given exemption from the business rate. The third is that the Government look at giving greater flexibility to the community amateur sports clubs scheme to help clubs. Does he think, as I do, that those are sensible suggestions?

**Jesse Norman:** That is a formidable array of questions. May I respond briefly? As a member of the Treasury Committee, I am a bit leery of exemptions from VAT

[*Jesse Norman*]

because I know how hard it is to recover those funds elsewhere and the precedent that they tend to set. On the issue of business rates, this is a local issue and councils should be encouraged to look closely at questions as they specifically arise. On the final issue, anything that the Government can do to support and enhance community ownership of supporter-led clubs would be valuable. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for making that point.

As I have said, the FA, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and Companies House should work much more closely to identify potentially unsuitable club shareholders, owners and directors as soon as they appear. Incredible as it sounds, as we debate today, Mr Andrew Lonsdale, a long-time associate of Mr Agombar, is the current chairman of Hereford United, despite a criminal conviction in 2008 and despite being disqualified at Companies House from 2006 to 2012. That raises in the starkest possible form the question, how on earth have the football authorities allowed such a person to be a club chairman?

Will the Minister write to the FA asking it to demand answers to those questions, and in particular to demand early completion—or pre-registration, as the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) mentioned—by potential owners and directors of the fit and proper test and rapid publication thereafter, so that we all know who has put up for it and who has passed or failed?

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): As a Newcastle and a Gateshead fan, I remember those ventures in the past with some pain, I am afraid to say. Because of the lack of oversight and transparency that the hon. Gentleman is in essence saying the FA has demonstrated, does he not think the FA itself is guilty of what it often accuses others of doing: bringing the game into disrepute by its lack of oversight of football management?

**Jesse Norman** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I think there was an expectation or hope that we can start the last debate no later than 4 o'clock. We are all enjoying the informative and learned speech of the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire and he will continue it until he has concluded, but I should just point out that there are 11 hon. Members who also wish to contribute.

**Jesse Norman:** I am very grateful to you, Mr Speaker, and I am about to wind up, but I am also grateful for the intervention and I can only sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's pain, still felt in many parts of Newcastle, as a result of that great goal. I think there is a degree of truth in his question. It is a balanced judgment, and if I may, I will leave it there.

Will the Minister write to the Football Association and other relevant authorities, requesting that they investigate the rules which may have been contravened by Hereford United and its owners and directors recently, and in particular how Hereford United was allowed entry into the Southern League without Mr Agombar passing the owner and directors test and despite its failure to pay its football creditors, and whether Mr Andrew Lonsdale's continued role as club chairman is in contravention of existing rules?

Hereford United's motto is "Our greatest glory lies not in never having fallen, but in rising when we fall." The situation there has been a tragedy for everyone who loves the club, but there might be some small comfort for fans if it now leads to genuine and sustained improvements in the non-league game.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches starts now.

2.42 pm

**John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): I am sure the FA is listening in and I have a few suggestions for it. The first point is that it cannot fill Wembley—it could not last night and Mr Roy Hodgson says it cannot be filled for all the England qualifiers—yet I have a load of kids in my constituency who have never been to a major sporting event of any kind. I am prepared to provide the buses and raise the money to enable them to do that, if the FA will give me the tickets, and I will fill Wembley on my own, every time, with kids from Bassetlaw, including kids who play for Worksop Town. I am prepared to do that for all the England qualifiers, and, indeed, any other major sporting event that needs some noise, passion and support.

We have 600 kids who play for Worksop Town alone, and those kids—boys and girls—say to me, "I'll wear the shirt of my town." Well, if we think the situation is bad in Hereford, I can say that the situation at Worksop Town is worse, because we cannot even go insolvent. At Worksop Town, the owner announced just before the start of the football season that he was putting no more money in. The directors—including the chairman, whom he appointed—immediately put the club into football abeyance; they said, "We're not going to play any more, anywhere, ever." There were some quick interventions, but they also wrote a letter withdrawing from the league. So without the fans or anyone else having a say, Worksop Town goes down a league, and when I go to the FA, it says, "Well, it's too late; the letter's gone in." I say, "Well, what's the fear?" and the FA says, "The owner won't put any money in. The owner owns all the shares in the club."

So I look at the club accounts. They show that Worksop Town's assets are worth £669, because the previous owner somehow managed to get rid of the ground, so the club owns no ground; it owns nothing despite having been there since 1861. Yet with a turnover of £101,000, the new owner is apparently owed half a million pounds. He owns the club, however; he took it over. He decided, I think, that he was going to put some money in, and it is down in the accounts as administrative expenses. Last year, on a turnover of £101,000, there were admin expenses of £223,000, and the same the year before. That is down to an unnamed creditor, and I think that is Mr Jason Clark, the owner. I think he decided, "I'll put money in, but I'll put it in as a loan," and then he said, "I'm not putting any more in, but I want someone to buy the club off me." But the club has no assets—yet there are all these kids wanting to play, and go up and play for the full team.

Some are doing so, because we have managed to do a few little deals on the side, using the supporters trust. We have sorted a bit out. We have got support from the



community. Mr Lee Westwood has put in some sponsorship, and Mr Bruce Dickinson of Iron Maiden has put his hand in his pocket as a Worksop lad, and Mr Graham Taylor, former England manager, and many supporters have put in, but they are having to put into the supporters trust because they cannot put into the club, because the club owes money, because the owner has decided to put in money that no one asked him to lend but he put it in as a loan.

What can the FA do about that? The answer is, at the moment, it can do nothing. It ought to be feasible in that situation for us to set up a new club, with the players and the managers and the supporters in support, and for the FA to recognise that club, and for that club to play in the same league. I am sure then, with helpful council support and support from private business and the rest—there is plenty of good will—we can build a new ground as we built the old one with the help of the fans. I am confident of that. Therefore, those 600 kids can aspire again, and we can have what we want in the town, which is everyone being proud of the name of the club and all those kids and people in the community being able to play. That is the kind of change that is needed in football.

If a party wants an idea for its manifesto, I suggest that in football the youth side and the stadium should be separated out from the semi-professional side. We should not be giving Government money or any other money if that can be siphoned off by an owner.

**Ian Mearns:** In future where clubs find themselves without a ground to play in, if the stadium still exists might we be able to find some mechanism for getting the supporters trust to be allowed to recognise and register the ground and stadium as an asset of community value?

**John Mann:** Absolutely, and we have got a community interest company and if we had a stadium, it would be in the CIC—and when we have a stadium, it will be in. I am sure I can get a stadium built; I am confident of that, but it will be owned by a CIC, and who will play at it? The owner will have a veto, because the FA will let the owner have a veto. We could set up an alternative club, but it has to start right down at the bottom. That is nonsense.

These rules will be simple to sort out, and we should use the leverage of any money that goes in—state money of whatever form, whether grant money or Football Foundation money via the Premier League and the rest of them, or whether section 106 agreements, which is one way in which we can develop a stadium with relative ease in Worksop over the next couple of years. Those guarantees need to be there, but the FA rules need to ensure that if we do this, we can ring fence it. That should be for all clubs, and, by the way, this is not just about the FA, because if we are dealing with the FA, I can get to the FA. But if we are dealing with the blazers running these leagues, with the power to decide who is in and who is out, we cannot even get to find out who they are, never mind get to meet them.

That is the problem with football. It is a great challenge, but I believe there are solutions there, and obvious ones if people are prepared to act. The whole country would be behind that kind of action.

2.48 pm

**Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con):** This is an incredibly important debate, because it is really important that non-league football should survive. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) on securing the debate. My knowledge of non-league football goes back to about 1973, when I started watching Buxton, and I wear my Buxton football club tie today with pride. I remember when Buxton won the Cheshire league, and I was a member of the committee that ran the club in the early 1990s. I used to travel to home and away matches.

The thing about non-league football is that it binds communities; it binds towns and areas together. When we used to go to watch Buxton, we used to travel up to Morecambe in the north-west. I can see the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) in his place, and I can also remember many a famous victory at Bower Fold. I remember an auspicious 3-2 win in which I still reckon that the guys behind the goal got the penalty that won the match, but that is another story.

It was about the community. We used to go to matches, and we used to go into the bar beforehand and talk to the opposing supporters. We used to sit there and chew the fat about the good of non-league football and about how our team was better and their team was worse. It was a day out and it bound the community together. I remember the non-league football annual guide coming out at the beginning of each year, and I would buy my copy and tick off the grounds that I had been to. And people might think I am sad, but I always used to have season ticket No. 1 at Buxton. That is the kind of thing that non-league football does to people.

I recently went with my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson)—who I believe is wearing his Swindon Supermarine tie today—to watch that team play, and I was very much reminded of Buxton. I shall also talk about Glossop North End in a moment. This is about local people working together for the good of the community and the good of the club. We see people rolling the ground and marking the pitch. Some of the white lines might not be very straight, but the work gets done, and it is done by local volunteers.

I look at non-league football today and I worry. I remember the day when Goole Town came to play Buxton, and they had Tony Currie playing for them. He looked like he had had a few more curries by then, but it was still Tony Currie. Even then, he had fantastic ball control. I think he still has—I do not know if he is watching this.

**Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con):** I am sure that Tony Currie will be very grateful to my hon. Friend for that. He was an example of a player coming down from the higher leagues to play in non-league football. I remember watching Goole Town, freezing my toes off, as a youngster. We had a player called Tony Galvin—does my hon. Friend remember him?—who was sold to Tottenham Hotspur for £5,000. That was a huge amount of money for Goole Town. On a more serious point, does my hon. Friend feel that the obsession on the part of the larger clubs to import players from abroad denies that revenue to non-league clubs and denies their players the opportunity to get into the professional league?

**Andrew Bingham:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. He talks about freezing his toes off. He should try watching Buxton in February, playing on the highest football ground in England. He would freeze more than his toes off, I can assure him. The point he makes is absolutely right. We sold Ally Pickering to Rotherham—I think the fee was about £16,000—and Rotherham then sold him on to Coventry City, for which Buxton received a fee. That brought extra capital into the club. My hon. Friend is right: we now have what Alan Sugar used to call the Carlos Kickaballs coming into the premier league, plugging the gap through which footballers used to go up the pyramid, as well as coming down it. I am afraid that the days of old professionals playing at non-league football clubs are gone, and that is very sad.

**Jesse Norman:** I wonder, in view of the comments about my hon. Friend's toes, whether we are in fact re-enacting Monty Python's "Four Yorkshiremen" sketch.

**Andrew Bingham:** I can assure my hon. Friend that it was pure luxury!

We also had cup runs. I mentioned Glossop North End, who got to the final of the FA Vase in 2009. That gripped the town of Glossop. There was a train that went from Glossop, with seven or nine carriages. We got on the train at Glossop and—for those whose geography is pretty good—we got to Manchester after about two hours. Then we had to come all the way down to Wembley. The sense of occasion on that train was fantastic. At the time, I was a member of High Peak borough council. It was the first time I had been to the new Wembley stadium and, regrettably, there were not quite as many people there as there were last night, although we were not far short. Afterwards, we decided to organise an open-top bus parade for the team, even though they had not won the trophy. I remember that the streets were lined with people, and there was a fantastic community spirit. We just do not get that with the glitz and glory of the premier league.

For those who cannot sleep tonight, if they read my profile on any website they will see that I prefer football at non-league level because it is the glory game, the people's game—call it what you will. That is what football is about. Whether it be Glossop North End or Buxton or New Mills in my constituency, it is all about the proper game of football. The premier league has its place and it does a great job, but I prefer non-league football because of what it does for communities. We hear a lot about local activism and people helping each other. My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) has just walked into the Chamber; he has been to Buxton with me, and I am sure he remembers it with fondness.

**Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con)** *indicated dissent.*

**Andrew Bingham:** My hon. Friend shakes his head, but it is the people's game, the glory game. It is about the lads and the dads. It does not cost a father and his son £100 to go and watch a match. They can go to a match and have their Bovril and their pie and peas at half time. Anyone who watched non-league football knew that the best pies were at Frickley Athletic, and that Horwich RMI was the place to go for hotpot. We knew all those things; that was what football was all about.

That is why it is crucial that non-league football should survive. As the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) said, it gives young lads who want to play football a chance to rise to their level, and they might make it. They might be another Ally Pickering who goes on to play first division or premier league football. They can play football at their level, and they can play it for love. People can also watch non-league football for love, and they can afford to do so.

The contrast with premiership football is huge. We hear of premiership footballers earning £300,000 a week, but we need to get more money down to the non-league clubs to help support them. I heard the earlier comments about VAT and community amateur sports clubs. In my days on the committee in Buxton, I remember having to wrestle with the vagaries of the tax system and all the rest of it. Many people who are involved in non-league football, particularly lower down the pyramid, are doing it for the love of the game. If we can make it easier for them to run these clubs, it is better for the communities and better for the game.

I know which non-leagues teams I have watched. I can pretty much name the Cheshire league winning side of 1973—apart from a couple whom I am not sure about. It is in the blood; people find it stays with them. They still look for their local team's results. It is different with premiership footballers. I notice when Chelsea are doing well because there are a lot of Chelsea shirts about. I am a Manchester City fan and have been for a long time. There are a lot more City fans now than there were when they were playing in the old third division. Non-league football always stays with its fans, which is why its future is incredibly important.

Before I sit down, let me just mention football for people of a more senior age. The Minister will no doubt say this, but only this week we had a walking football match here in London between the Glossop Gentlemen and the Parliamentarians. Again, it is something that gets people involved in the game and pulls communities together. Non-league football is incredibly important and we must do all we can to support it both for us and our constituents. I hope, in a few years' time, to be able to stand up and remind the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde how, once again, Buxton have given Stalybridge Celtic a good thrashing.

2.56 pm

**Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab):** Let me congratulate the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) on his thoughtful and passionate speech, especially with regard to the club that he supports. It is great that we are having this debate, because non-league football is important to our country and our communities—indeed the point about the importance of community involvement has been made. Of course non-league football gives so much pleasure around the country to hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of people.

I am fortunate because Halton has two clubs—Runcorn Linnets FC and Runcorn Town—both of which are doing very well and are in the premier division of the North West Counties League. Runcorn Linnets were formed in 2006 by fans of what was then the defunct Runcorn football club. I can remember the joy on the faces of the fans and the chairman, Derek Greenwood, on the day it was reformed.

Non-league football has existed in Runcorn since 1918. I am pleased to say that Runcorn Linnets FC now have a brand-new stadium, which was the result of a combination of efforts from the supporters, the chairman and his committee, the borough council, which played a pivotal role, and the local Members of Parliament who supported it. I was there on the opening day to see the inaugural match. Up to 1,000 people actually watched the game that day. We are really proud to have two teams in that league.

Runcorn Town is the other team—I am trying to be as even-handed as possible here, as we have two teams in Halton—and they were formed in 1967 under the name of Mond Rangers. They were a well-known and famous football club in the area. Ahead of the 2005-06 season, they changed their name to Runcorn Town and improved their facilities. Their club site is at the popular Pavilions Club in Runcorn. Again, the supporters play a pivotal role in its success, and I am pleased that the club has done so well since it became Runcorn Town.

Currently, both clubs are in the top half of the league, with Runcorn Linnets at the top and Runcorn Town seventh. The matches between them are always interesting and competitive, often bringing in crowds of more than 500 plus. There is good support in the town for both clubs, and I am really proud to see them doing so well. Those clubs play an important role in our communities, and will continue to go from strength to strength. I hope to see more and more local people going along to support them.

It is difficult for such clubs, because Halton is between Manchester and Liverpool so we have four of the biggest clubs in the country, Liverpool, Everton, Manchester United and Manchester City, which means that it is always difficult to attract supporters. However, the clubs in Halton are doing that and I think that big clubs should do more to support the smaller clubs through marketing and helping them to get more supporters. It is always a struggle for the clubs that are sandwiched between these massive world-famous clubs and we must take note of that.

As I come from Widnes, on the other side the river—I am very proud to represent both Widnes and Runcorn—I should mention briefly that although it is a rugby league town, of course, football has been played there at an amateur level for many years and is very popular. In fact, a Widnes club has even been formed as part of the Widnes Vikings sports brand. I hope that it does well, too.

I am very proud of the two Runcorn clubs in particular. Football is such an important part of the community in Halton and many young people and adults play the game. As we know, it is one of the most popular sports around. I have been written to by Dave Bettley of Runcorn Linnets FC, who is the trust secretary. He raises some important points about the role of supporters' trusts, which, as we all know, are very important, about the tax and revenue system—we know about that from our earlier discussions about VAT exemptions, business rates and what help can be given when clubs get into trouble—about the football creditors rule, about the financial viability of football clubs and about the transparency of club ownership, which has been mentioned by a number of hon. Members today.

This is been an important debate and I am glad to have been able to raise the issues and explain the importance of the clubs in my community. I am sure the debate will add to our understanding.

3.1 pm

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): The main focus of my contribution to the debate will be to highlight the importance of a football club to the local community, where it can achieve much more than just entertaining the fans every couple of weeks. This debate shows clearly that just because a team is not in the football league does not mean that it cannot contribute greatly to the local community. I am a Grimsby Town supporter, and they are temporarily residing in the conference—but, as I say, that is only temporary.

Grimsby are unusual in that they always play away from home, as their ground is in Cleethorpes. I share with thousands of others concern about what happens at Blundell Park each week. It is not just important to football supporters; the local club is part of the local identity. It is tribal, although we might still support other teams. When I was a schoolboy, Tottenham were the team and I can still reel off the team that won the double in 1961—Brown, Baker, Henry, and so on.

My close association with the Mariners, as they are known, began long before my father started taking me to the match. Indeed, my first home at 11 Fuller street in Cleethorpes was about 200 yards from the goal at the Osmond stand at the Cleethorpes end, so I could hear the cheers and groans from the terraces. Long before my father got home and—in those pre-local radio days—before “Out of the Blue”, the famous theme tune for “Sports Report”, came out of the ether to herald the first reading of the classified football results, I would know by the cheers who had won.

It is a matter of regret that my first public appearance after my election in May 2010 was at the game against Burton Albion, which resulted in Grimsby Town dropping out of the football league and into the conference. That followed a proud history in which the Mariners managed to reach fifth in the old first division in the 1930s and appearances at Wembley at which they won such august trophies as the Auto Windscreens trophy. We had a number of semi-final appearances, one of which was against Wolves. At that game on 25 March 1939, we set a ground attendance record at Old Trafford that, I am pleased to say, still stands; for the aficionados, it was 76,962. Sadly, because of an injury to our goalkeeper we let Wolves slip five goals past us but, other than that, I am sure that it was a great day out for those who were fortunate enough to be there.

Like the majority of clubs at different levels, Grimsby's survival has depended over the years on a number of generous individuals but surely the important thing is that they keep faith with their local fans. Grimsby is their club. The club's role in the community is of major significance. The Grimsby Town sports and education trust is a registered charity and among the projects it delivers is one with the National Citizen Service. I was fortunate, last Thursday evening, to be a speaker and to present certificates at this year's graduation ceremony. The mayor of North East Lincolnshire, another of the speakers, drew attention to the fact that we often hear the promotion of the big society, but the NCS not only

[*Martin Vickers*]

seeks to address a range of social problems concerning young people, but influences their attitudes to civil and civic society. The young people last Thursday evening were a credit to their families and the local community. Could that have happened without the involvement of the football club? Of course, but the club is an attraction, particularly for youngsters, especially when players become involved. Credit should go to Shaun Pearson, the player-ambassador, who was present last Thursday evening.

It is an added bonus to have a league club, but it is important that what goes on in the community around the club is recognised. Grimsby Town tell me about an anomaly, which I shall shortly be writing to the Minister about. My understanding is that there is currently an automatic core payment to the community departments of football clubs, to the tune of £30,000. At the time Grimsby left the football league, that was £24,000, with a 50% reduction for the first year only. That parachute payment is then lost, so that the funding to community departments ceases immediately the club leaves the football league. There are funds available for specific projects, but it does suggest a degree of injustice when a community department, the work of which can have a significant off-field positive impact on its parent club's catchment area, is penalised—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Dawn Primarolo):**  
Order.

3.6 pm

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I am delighted to be able to speak in today's debate, coming as it does just two days before non-league day. I add my tribute to the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) for securing the debate and for his speech. I am proud to have three non-league teams in my constituency—a number that very few Members can boast. I hope to be able to raise some of their concerns today, but I also want to provide some background to them, as they are all proud clubs whose story deserves to be told.

First there is Hyde FC, formerly known as Hyde United. Hyde are fresh from a two-year spell at non-league football's highest level, after winning the conference north in 2012, playing the type of attractive, pass-and-move football that the World cup-winning Spain side would have been proud of. However, it is fair to say that times have become slightly tougher recently, with only one win in our last 48 games. It could be worse, though, as the team hold the record for the highest defeat in an English competitive match—a 26-0 thrashing by Preston North End way back in 1887. It is worth remembering, though, that Preston were probably the best side in the world at that time. The club have also recently become something of a Twitter sensation, with almost 45,000 followers, which has helped them crowdfund £10,000 for much-needed work on their social club. I am sure that good times are again just around the corner.

There is also Stalybridge Celtic, an ex-league club back in the 1920s, who play at the impressive and idyllic Bower Fold stadium, nestled in the foothills of the Pennines, with a stand named after one of my predecessors, Lord Pendry. That is also where I took my daughter to watch her first ever live game of football—an important

moment in any child's life, I am sure Members will agree. She calls Bower Fold the Stalybridge Wembley, which I rather like.

Finally, there is Mossley FC, slightly lower down the football pyramid than Hyde and Stalybridge, but up and coming, with their ground, Seel Park, offering a truly stunning backdrop, and under the astute stewardship of Lloyd Morrison and non-league legend Peter Band.

Today I want to raise several issues on behalf of those clubs. Unsurprisingly, money is a real cause for concern at that level, with many clubs constantly struggling to survive. We heard at the start of the debate about the plight of Hereford United and the problems that they have been facing; unfortunately, we hear that story all too often in non-league football.

Given that we have just seen a transfer window where in excess of £800 million was spent, it is fair to say that non-league clubs feel forgotten, that the money does not trickle down to the grass roots of the game, and that those at the top all too often come across as being too focused on themselves. That was no more apparent than in the ludicrous proposals for the A and B teams of premier league clubs to play in the lower leagues—something that would kill non-league football. I should have thought that would have been obvious to anyone who was aware of the lower leagues. Clubs are going bust at that level, while premier league clubs pay millions of pounds in wages and rake in lucrative sponsorship deals from around the world. A player can be on in excess of £100,000—perhaps £200,000 or £300,000—a week in wages, while the local non-league club down the road is struggling to survive and relies on a dedicated army of volunteers to get by. How can the balance between those two things be right?

Another issue is travelling, especially by northern teams, particularly at steps 1 and 2 of the league. Travelling to mid-week matches on the other side of the country can be a logistical and financial nightmare for semi-professional teams; greater consideration is needed. Travelling distances can also hinder clubs' progression, as the costs involved put them off taking promotion, even if they have earned it, as often happens in the northern league.

As we have heard today, non-league clubs are also important parts of their local community. That is certainly true of the teams in my constituency. Stalybridge Celtic, for example, have a dedicated community development officer to ensure that this is at the forefront of their priorities. That work is often underestimated. I think the true worth of every non-league football club to the community is vast and, frankly, cannot be measured. More recognition is due to non-league clubs for that work.

People asked me to raise other issues, including the possibility of a salary cap such as operates in the football league, which would be linked to a percentage of turnover.

I am delighted that we have this debate today. I hope that non-league day on Saturday is a success around the country, not least with victories for Hyde, Stalybridge Celtic and Mossley. I also hope that the footballing authorities pay more attention to the plight of non-league clubs, and at the very least recognise the valuable work they do in their communities. Non-league football may not be seen as the glamorous end of football, but it is real football, it is the grass roots and it keeps the game alive. Without it, football would lose its soul.

3.11 pm

**Mark Garnier** (Wyre Forest) (Con): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) on bringing this important debate to the House. Clearly a great number of hon. Members on both sides are enthusiastic football supporters and know a great deal about the subject. I am not one of them. I have to confess that I am not the most enthusiastic football supporter in the country, and I think that any constituent who sees an MP trying to “ham it up” will see through them straight away, so I do not pretend that I am the world’s leading expert. Instead, I rely on my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), a son of Kidderminster who keeps me in touch with the Kidderminster Harriers, the leading team in my constituency, alongside Bewdley Town football club and Stourport Swifts—I too have three non-league football clubs in my constituency.

In the years I have been involved in Wyre Forest as a parliamentary candidate and as the local MP, I has been my sad duty—albeit one I relish each time it comes about—to work with successive chairmen to raise funds to try to save the Kidderminster Harriers football club. It is, I am afraid, one of the great problems of the smaller, lower league football clubs that most of them, despite enormous support from supporters and fans who give personal contributions, are, broadly speaking, ultimately supported by the patronage of private individuals. Most recently, the Kidderminster Harriers were got on to a sound financial footing through the incredibly hard work done by one such individual, Mark Serrell, and his wife, and through quite substantial personal financial sacrifice.

As we heard from the previous speaker, there is an awful lot of money in the broader football economy—probably enough money to keep the whole thing going, were it not for the huge amount of leakage at the top end, where a great deal of money seeps out of the football economy into the pockets of star players. They are probably worth it, but at the end of the day even an investment banker might blush at £300,000 a week in salary. The sport needs the non-league clubs to bring on the players of the future, and that is why more should be done to support them. At the moment, because of the complex interconnectedness in the football economy, people such as Mark Serrell of the Kidderminster Harriers are, in effect, subsidising Wayne Rooney’s salary.

It is important to recognise the huge contribution that clubs such as the Harriers make to their communities, and I will go through in detail some of the stuff they do. Kidderminster Harriers run a number of community and charitable activities. The club’s community scheme has football courses for children aged between five and 14 during the school holidays—an incredibly important time when they are not being supervised. They are held not just in Kidderminster, but across the entire county and in neighbouring south Shropshire and south Staffordshire. Malvern, Worcester, Bromsgrove, Droitwich, Cleobury Mortimer and Kinver—all benefit from the Kidderminster Harriers.

The football academy, which is run in association with Birmingham Metropolitan college, holds trials for players aged between 16 and 18. Importantly, this enables potential Harriers stars of the future to combine football

training with a range of full-time courses at Birmingham Metropolitan college. We all know the importance of having a plan B, especially when one is in sport.

The Harriers have recently been recruiting teenagers to a five-a-side indoor football team that will play against larger league clubs in the midlands. Aggborough stadium occasionally hosts charity fun days. The club’s official charity partner for this season is Prostate Cancer UK. It linked up with the charity at the start of the new campaign in August, with the players posing in special “Men United” shirts during the traditional team picture. The use of Aggborough stadium is also available for other events. It is right that any organisation with assets to sweat should do that as much as possible, but it is encouraging that Kidderminster Harriers lets the community use its stadium. On 27 August, Aggborough hosted an international match between England Under-17s and Czech Republic Under-17s.

We have heard that the “fit and proper” test is incredibly important, and a great deal has been said about that. Two issues are worth looking at. First, there is inadequate distribution of money throughout the entire football economy, and the Football Association needs to deal with that. I call on the Minister to use her substantial powers of persuasion to help it to come to the right decision and conclusion.

**David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): My hon. Friend raises a very important point. The Football Association has a surplus of about £80 million per annum, which basically comes from the England team. That money is given 50% to the grass roots and 50% to the professional game. There is absolutely no reason why it should not all go to the grass roots. Front Benchers on both sides of the House should be applying pressure on that. It would result in an additional £40 million for Hereford, Worksop, Kidderminster and Warrington.

**Mark Garnier:** I entirely agree. It is absolutely right that we should be pushing as much money as we possibly can down to the non-league football clubs.

Secondly, as we have heard, the Government can probably do a little more to help these football clubs directly. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire that we should not go round handing out VAT breaks to them. However, given the great amount of charitable and community activity going on within some of them, there is a case to be made for having charitable or quasi-charitable status for the element of the club that is giving back to the community. The Government could do a great deal of work in looking to provide such help so that clubs benefit, as other charities do, from a reduction in business rates. Furthermore, there could be help for the businesses outside in the community that support the clubs through donations whereby they get tax breaks on those donations.

This has been a very interesting debate. I am learning a great deal about football, having, as I said, come from a very low base to start with. It is important that we support these clubs. Many football supporters recognise that they are fantastic, enthusiastic centres of the community, but people like me who are not supporters, but work with our communities, also recognise absolutely that the work they do is incredibly cohesive in a town. Even if one hates football, one has to recognise the value of the game in supporting the community.

3.18 pm

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I want to follow on from what the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) said. We are debating three issues: first, his point about resources; secondly, regulation, particularly with regard to the openness and transparency of the operational boards; and thirdly, the right to community representation on the boards of football clubs.

I am honorary vice-president of Hayes & Yeading United. I was honorary vice-president of Hayes football club, as it was formerly, and I have supported it for 35 years. Hayes has been a successful club over the years. We produced Cyrille Regis, Les Ferdinand and Jason Roberts. In fact, the chair of the FA, Greg Dyke, is a Hayes boy. We had a successful track record but, like many non-league clubs, we ran into financial difficulties because, as is particularly the case for a London non-league club, the pull of the premiership and other teams is enormous, and maintaining a supporter base is extremely difficult. We tried to reduce costs by finding alternative sites and so on. We looked to sell our ground and to purchase from the local council, Hillingdon, the football stadium within half a mile of our club site that it was going to close and sell off, but it refused to sell it to us. It was right next to a local school. We were looking to take over the ground, set up a football academy, work with the local school and act as a community resource, but Hillingdon council was too greedy and refused to sell us the site. In fact, it refused to enter into a partnership.

Hayes sold their ground and merged with Yeading, and I became the honorary president of Hayes & Yeading United. Unfortunately, however, even the income from the sale of the ground was not enough to cover their debts. We were looking to move to the Yeading site, but there was not sufficient money to finish off the work we had done on that ground, so we are now nomads. We played at Woking's ground last year, and I spent more time on the M25 than actually watching matches. We are now at Maidenhead and are desperately trying to raise funds to finish off the Yeading site.

We should pay tribute to all the volunteers out there who have kept non-league football going—they work so hard. We have all come here with our traumas and we have all gone through various experiences where not everything has been completely open and transparent, but people work hard to help these clubs survive.

Hayes produced two England players—Cyrille Regis and Les Ferdinand—as the result of a youth policy. They worked with youngsters, gave them basic training and the opportunity to play—getting that opportunity is difficult for many at semi-professional level—and brought on grass-roots football, which I think produced good national teams in the past. The reason our national team has problems at the moment is that a lot of grass-roots football has been undermined. The cost of pitches in my area is pricing out local teams. The local non-league clubs represent not just the grass roots but the heart of football and its development. That is why they need more support.

I agree with the hon. Member for Wyre Forest: the economy is wrong. There needs to be a redistribution of wealth to grass-roots football and an honest discussion with the FA and the premiership about a proper levy

beyond what currently exists, to enable more grass-roots investment in terms of not only pitches but revenue support.

Secondly, Hereford is a good example of the problems we have had. Only a few years ago, Hayes came fifth in the conference. Then we were relegated to conference south, and we got relegated last year but survived only because other clubs went into administration, which is was an horrendous experience. We need openness and transparency on how club boards operate, so that people can be aware of the financial situation and how it is being managed.

Thirdly, the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) mentioned the supporters trust. If a grant is given from the FA or the premiership, it should be linked to automatic supporter representation on boards, because that will gain not just openness and transparency but community control of the clubs.

There are simple solutions to tackle some of the key issues facing non-league football. I agree with everybody else: this is about not just football but community spirit. It is at the heart of community life in many of our constituencies.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Dawn Primarolo):** Order. We are very short of time for this debate, which needs to finish at 4 o'clock and to accommodate all those who still wish to participate I am going to reduce the time limit for Back-Bench speeches to four minutes. The Minister and the shadow Minister have also agreed to reduce their time, so we are sharing the burden. Each Back Bencher has four minutes from now, and I hope that interventions will be less frequent—although I am sure they will be relevant—in order to help us stay on time.

3.23 pm

**Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) for securing this excellent debate. I remember visiting that great club Hereford United in January 1990 for an FA cup fourth-round match in front of 13,770 people. I also remember going to a football match in 1975 in which Tony Currie played for Sheffield United; on that day they lost 5-1 in front of 61,000 people.

Weaver Vale is blessed with several football clubs. The hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) mentioned Runcorn Linnets, which is an excellent example of a community coming together to start a new football club. It is very well run and very well supported. We also have Witton Albion, which was formed in 1887 and is a very popular club. We also have a new club called 1874 Northwich FC, which was formed by supporters of Northwich Victoria football club, which, unfortunately, does not play in the town anymore. Indeed, it no longer plays in the county. It suffered a similar fate to Hereford United.

As the father of two young boys, and as a touchline dad, my proudest moment at the weekend is seeing my sons put on their football boots and run on to the pitch, although I am a little concerned that my younger son's nickname is "Cruncher Evans". I want to talk briefly

about the recent decline in the number of regular players. There are now 250,000 fewer participants in grass-roots football than there were only a year ago. The figures show that there is a real need to engage with grass-roots football to help support organisations, supporters and players. In my experience, it comes down to mums and dads organising the participation of younger players.

Having said that, I am proud that the Government have invested £80 million in football facilities over the past year via Sport England and are working jointly with the FA and the premier league. The Government are also committing £100 million for the Football Foundation to continue delivering higher-quality facilities. I remember visiting the excellent facilities in the constituency of the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds)—all I can say is that we in Cheshire are very envious. In addition, Sport England will be investing £1.6 million to create a grass-roots city of football, an innovative trial looking at new ways of encouraging people to play the game, including casual and small-sided matches.

I want to pay tribute to Sport Cheshire and to Cheshire FA. Sport Cheshire's excellent chief executive, Anne Boyd, works tirelessly to encourage young people to take up sport, not just football. I am impressed by the number of girls who are taking up the sport.

In conclusion, the Government can play a role, but I believe that communities also need to come together. It is down to mums and dads, working with local authorities. There is still an awful lot to do, but I believe that, by working together, we can secure an optimistic future for grass-roots and non-league football.

3.27 pm

**Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): Like many other Members, I am saddened by the struggles faced by non-league football. I am particularly saddened by the loss of Great Harwood Town FC, which no longer exists. That is symptomatic of the troubles faced by many non-league football clubs and of the decline in participation. There is a challenge. Although most of today's debate has focused on the semi-professional level, I would like to make three quick points about the challenges faced by grass-roots football.

First, there is a huge challenge to increase the level of participation. When I played, my local combination had four divisions, but now it has two. Participation is severely hampered by the number of people who are attracted to premier league football or other forms of entertainment. Those clubs are essentially the feeders for the semi-professional clubs that are picked for Sunday leagues and out of the combination. If non-league football at the semi-professional level is to survive and thrive, the tier below is just as important.

Secondly, I think that participation is about health, community and all the other aspects that Members have mentioned, which is why we should be encouraging people to get involved. There is a big challenge facing senior football at the grass-roots level. The amount of senior football played is threadbare. In constituencies like mine, it is really important that people engage in some form of recreational activity, and football is a great participatory sport. I think that people should be more involved, particularly those who are getting on in

years and might think that they are past their prime. There should still be a game out there for them, but sadly, there often is not.

Thirdly, I want to mention the state of recreation grounds. We need to look at how grass-roots football is funded, right down at a basic level. With the demise of teams and the reduction in the number of players, some of our recreation grounds are becoming tired and unused, and they need investment. I believe that there are many people out there who would respond to that need and who would like to see clubs thrive. Whinney Hill football club has taken over a recreation ground and it now has several teams, including junior teams and female teams. It has invested in the recreation ground, partly through public funding and grants and partly through its own initiative. That club and that recreation ground are thriving. We should look at that model and put more investment into our recreation grounds, rather than letting them wither away as unused pieces of land that are not particularly attractive.

3.30 pm

**Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I join other colleagues in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) on securing this debate.

I am saddened by the plight of Hereford United. I grew up and went to school in Herefordshire. Nearly 30 years ago, in January 1985, I remember seeing the Hereford United of Chris Price and Stewart Phillips draw 1-1 with the Arsenal of Charlie Nicholas, Kenny Sansom and Viv Anderson. In 1990, the famous Manchester United FA cup run, which brought Alex Ferguson his first trophy, very nearly ended in the fourth round at Hereford United on what Alex Ferguson rightly called in his autobiography a "pudding of a pitch". Even the bull that is traditionally brought out for cup ties before the kick-off at Hereford United was glad to get off the pitch. The romance of the FA cup—the romance of non-league and league football—is what makes football in this country so special. To see Hereford United go through what it has gone through is a tragedy born out of poor management and poor oversight by the Football Association and other football bodies.

Non-league football in my constituency has had its ups and downs. Folkestone Invicta has had recent financial problems. Those have been resolved. I pay tribute to the work of the former chairman, Mark Jenner, and his team in stabilising the club's finances. I have met officials at the club to talk about what they could do. They now have the club on a secure footing and are clearing the debts. I am grateful to the Football Association, which had a meeting with the club to discuss how it can access funds to carry out essential ground maintenance. It has entered into a proper lease agreement with Shepway district council and the future of the club looks much more sound than it did a year or two ago.

That club had a bonus when something happened that again shows the romance of non-league football. A young player, Johan ter Horst, was brought up in Folkestone and Hythe and started playing football on Saturday mornings with the juniors at Folkestone. He started in the under-13s team and then, at the end of last season, was sold to Hull City in the premier league. The club will get a financial reward directly from the transfer

[*Damian Collins*]

and, depending on how the young player's career develops in the premier league, may get more money in the future. That is an example of how the trickle-down effect can work.

For many football clubs, sustaining themselves is the greatest challenge they face. Other Members have asked whether more financial support could be given through tax breaks to community sports clubs, just as such opportunities exist for amateur sporting clubs in the community. Although non-league football clubs pay some of their players part-time wages, they are very low and the costs of running the club are often very high. They are basically not-for-profit organisations that do a great deal not only to entertain the people who watch the clubs play, but to support grass-roots sport in their communities. There should be some special recognition of that. If there could be incentives for the community ownership of clubs, such as a more sound financial model or tax breaks, we should champion them.

In the brief amount of time that is available, I want to pick up on what my hon. Friend said about the fit and proper person test. It is failing time and time again. It is failing because that is what football wants to happen. It is within the power of football to devise a more rigorous test and impose it more rigorously, but it consistently fails to do so. Football will change only through external pressure that it cannot resist; it never changes voluntarily. I was proud to serve on the Culture, Media and Sport Committee in 2011 when we produced a report that made a series of recommendations on football governance. Most of those have been ignored by football bodies and more has to be done to put pressure on them. The hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) secured a debate in the House earlier this week on the plight of Coventry City. Again, that is a failure of ownership. There has to be intervention by the Football Association to impose a proper owners and directors test and to sanction clubs and owners when they fail to comply. I agree with my hon. Friend that that information should be made available to the creditors of the club and the fans.

3.34 pm

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate. I want to raise the plight of Salisbury City football club, the oldest and biggest club in my constituency, which is in dire straits, and its experience over the past few months.

I have two suggested improvements in governance that could help. The first is about prize money. I believe that there needs to be a reallocation of prize money from the FA cup to the FA trophy and FA vase. It is ludicrous that at the moment, small clubs can find themselves in the third or fourth round of those competitions, yet the cost of travel to an away match outweighs the money that they will gain from winning.

The second suggestion is about the fit and proper person test, which is not fit for purpose and needs to change urgently. As I speak, the ownership of Salisbury City football club is in dispute in the courts and the club's very existence is threatened. Its fans are bereft and feel badly let down. It is a far cry from just a few months ago, when I saw Salisbury win 3-1 in the last

home match of the season to finish in 11th place in the conference south. The then chairman decided that he could not continue to look after the club and devised a plan with a local businessman, Mark Winter, to transfer ownership. Mr Winter put up £70,000, but he needed a business partner. He was introduced to Mr Outail Medi Nader Touzar, who appeared to have a great deal of enthusiasm for the club as an investor. He had previously been presented to Reading and had been publicly linked to a consortium bidding to take over Crystal Palace.

Mr Touzar's credentials seemed sound. He was presented as a potential chairman and was waved through the owners and directors test without a murmur of dissent. However, the reality was that this man was not fit to be involved in the running of a football club. He said that he would bring huge wealth to the club—promises witnessed by several people but unfortunately never put in writing or subjected to official scrutiny. It was no more than a handshake behind closed doors. His cash did not arrive, and he started behaving rather oddly. He was sleeping in the stadium, removing season ticket cash from the safe and making outlandish claims about foreign signings at a time when the club was barred from registering players. He claimed to have sold shares to other foreign investors, but to this day he declines to name them. Rumours therefore started that he had not had any money in the first place. Mr Winter, the original fan-investor, sought to replace Mr Touzar with another consortium of people who were prepared to invest. However, when they went to the authorities they were met with resistance at every moment, because technically Mr Touzar was still the owner.

Salisbury's experience highlights the fact that the current fit and proper person test is a rubber-stamping exercise that makes a mockery of the FA. It freely admits that it is a tick-box exercise, not a subjective, full assessment of whether a prospective owner would be good for football. I feel that what is needed is a Disclosure and Barring Service-type check specifically aimed at potential football directors. The verification of claims and means, the taking up of references from previous business associates, proof of assets and basic oversight of business plans is surely not too much to ask.

At every level, football requires more careful financial handling and astute management. My impression is that the FA and the regulatory bodies turn a blind eye because fans want to see their club continue to operate, but my club has nowhere to play this season. Mr Touzar is still not being dealt with, and it is outrageous.

3.38 pm

**Paul Uppal** (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) on securing the debate. He told a tale of woe about local football, as did the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann). It saddened me to hear both their stories.

It is with some sadness that I mention that three members of my staff are Baggies fans. When I put my name down for the debate, they said, "Well, you don't seem to have much prospect at Wolves this season." It has been a tough few years, but this season has started off quite well. This weekend will be the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the building of Molineux stadium, so I thought a contribution to the debate would be apt.



I want to highlight two non-league football teams whose work at grass-roots level in Wolverhampton and the black country I have seen—Punjabi Wolves and Sporting Khalsa. I have seen much of the fabulous work that they do by affiliating with local gurdwaras and the Sikh community in general.

In the three minutes I have left I cannot wholly encapsulate the full spirit of Punjabi Wolves, but I think that this small anecdote, which is an old story of Punjab United—the initial club from which Punjabi Wolves were formed—will probably encapsulate the general spirit. I am told this story is true as I have spoken to people who were apparently on the coach at the time.

The team was playing a match down in Southall and I think they had narrowly squeaked a 3-2 victory. They were celebrating with the opposite side in a pub in Southall, and the evening went on and it was getting quite late—I think they had reached the 11th hour. One member of the team said, “Look, do we really want to go all the way back to Wolverhampton?” At which point another player suggested, “Don’t worry, my auntie lives round the corner. There is no problem, we can go round and knock on the door.” This was the early 1970s, and times were very different.

At about 11.30 pm, the team knocked on the door. They got auntie out of bed, and she woke up and made about 15 burley young blokes roti, chapatti, curries and all sorts of things. They had a good night—festivities apparently went on until 3 am. They woke up at about 7 o’clock as some of the boys had to get back to work. They were chatting among themselves, and the individual whom I know came downstairs, joined them, and they had a hearty breakfast. At that point auntie walked in and he looked at her and she looked at him. He said, “Boys, we need to drink up fairly quickly.” They said, “Why?”, and he said, “Because it’s not my auntie’s house.” They then had to go round the corner and drive all the way back, but I think that spirit of hospitality really encapsulates the whole well-meaningness of Punjabi Wolves—I am not sure whether that spirit is Punjabi or comes from Wolves, but it is a far gone time.

I digress. On a more serious point, much has been made about the fit and proper person test for football management, but I occasionally still play football with a couple of my friends—we play five-a-side whenever we can—and we often talk about football as it is one thing I really enjoy. To be candid to fellow Members, sometimes when we stand up and ask a decent question at Prime Minister’s questions, other Members will come up to us and say, “Well done,” but that is as nothing to having a good match of five-a-side and scoring a goal. Afterwards, we have a pint with our friends and talk about it, and of course we embellish it, but it is a wonderful feeling.

When we compare that feeling with the news we have had this week—some of the boys I play with are United fans, and I have been speaking to them—when players are getting £300,000 a week, it is a far cry from the class of ’92 when Butt, Giggs, Beckham, Neville and Scholes all came together. Could we really have that in today’s modern football game? It seems an unlikely dream.

The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) mentioned young players coming forward at grass-roots level. My son plays football at grass-roots

level. He is 17 and invariably plays on the right. When he gets the ball, the advice given to him is invariably, “Hoof it up. Kick it forward”, but he wants to take time with the ball and enjoy it. Without investment in the grounds where people can enjoy possession and play football, we will not cement the foundation for the future of our English team.

3.42 pm

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): This has been an informative and enjoyable debate. Although he has not spoken, I am pleased to see the hon. and learned Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) in his place, because he and I made our own contributions to non-league football back in the early ’80s when we ran Pembroke House youth club football team. His administration skills are legendary.

**Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): The hon. Gentleman was, of course, a fantastic coach, and we were the best team down the Old Kent road. Does he agree that what youth football does for they youngsters who play for the teams—instilling of a bit of discipline and team spirit and so on—improves their lives? Those youngsters did not end up being Giggs or anyone like that, but they have all gone on to very satisfactory futures.

**Clive Efford:** They have indeed, and I am still in touch with some of them. Youth football certainly makes a significant contribution, as many hon. Members have said in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman). This is a timely debate because it comes a couple of days before national non-league day. In this period the premier league and many football league clubs are not playing; it is an opportunity for people to support non-league sides, which we encourage them to do.

National non-league day has had a significant impact on attendance over the past couple of years. Vanarama, which—surprisingly enough—sells vans, has said that it will contribute 10p for every fan who attends a conference game this week. If the number gets above 50,000, it will double its £10,000 contribution to Prostate Cancer UK. If that does not make people go out and support their non-league side, I do not know what will. Sadly, I cannot accept the invitation from Cray Valley in my own constituency this week because I will be in central London speaking to and welcoming the Darlo Mums, who are marching down from Jarrow to save our NHS. However, I wish Cray Valley all the best against Rochester on Saturday.

The hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire raised some important issues and was right to highlight the problems at Hereford United. He reminded us of the spirit of Ronnie Radford and they way that John Motson burst on to our television screens in that famous victory against Newcastle. That such a club should be brought to its knees and face extinction because of poor management is a tragedy. The hon. Gentleman also highlighted how the Football Association and the leagues have got to get their act together in deciding who is a fit and proper person to run a club. My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) made the important point that there should be registration before ownership. We need to sharpen up that process because too many

[Clive Efford]

people are gaining ownership of clubs before it is completed, and that is having devastating consequences for football clubs.

Many hon. Members spoke about the importance of football in their local communities—so many that in this short time I cannot mention everyone. I, too, think it important that the premier league and the FA better support football at the lower levels. When £835 million can be spent in the transfer market, but clubs such as Salisbury City, Hereford and others can nearly go out of existence over relatively tiny sums of money, there is something seriously wrong at the heart of our game and we need to do more.

I do not think we need another division below the football league. When resources and finances are so thinly spread at that level, it does not make sense to add another division and spread them even more thinly. The document put forward by the FA and Greg Dyke recommends strategic loan agreements. I would like those examined in more detail to see if more formal arrangements can be built up between lower league clubs and clubs that enjoy the riches at the higher levels so that investment can be made not just in players on loan, but in facilities, sending coaches down, training coaches and advising clubs on physio, diet and all the sorts of things that improve the game. With such investment at the lower level, we could increase the pool of talent there, and if we can increase the number of players enjoying the best facilities at the lower end of our national game, perhaps those diamonds in the rough will come through and benefit the elite game.

Many hon. Members have spoken about how community spirit is touched by football. There are few public bodies, organisations or businesses that touch our communities like football does. It has been at the forefront of tackling many social issues, such as racism and many forms of prejudice. I would challenge anyone to find another sport that has had a greater impact than football. It has had its problems, and still has problems that need to be addressed, but it makes a huge contribution and a big difference to our communities. It is absolutely vital. The hon. and learned Member for North East Hertfordshire said that football can change the lives of young people, and we have all seen fine examples of that in our communities.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the impact football has had in their constituencies. I wish I could have gone into that in more detail. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Paul Uppal) came up with the ultimate anecdote of community spirit, while the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans) referred to being a touchline dad and to “Cruncher Evans”. Perhaps we should bear a thought for the players who might come across “Cruncher” in future, as well as wishing him the best for his future footballing career.

Football is vital to our local communities. We have a very rich sport, but unfortunately not enough of the resources at the highest level of the game reach down to the lower levels. Only a very small amount of that money getting down to the non-league level could make a huge difference not just to those clubs, but to the contribution they make to their local communities and to the production of fine footballers for future generations.

I hope that the people who operate at the top of the game are listening to today’s debate, because hon. Members have done a fine job in representing football fans and bringing attention to the issues that need to be addressed if we are to save our game for the future.

3.50 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mrs Helen Grant):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) for securing the debate. The recent developments at Hereford and other non-league clubs make it timely to consider the challenges they face and the support offered now and in the future. The financial sustainability of football clubs, especially in non-league football, is an important topic that appears to be at the root of many of the issues clubs face today. I know that the Football Association’s governance and regulation divisions are aware of the pressures clubs are under, and they continue to look at what improvements could be made to support clubs directly or indirectly and to assess how regulation and the structures around it can be improved.

Over recent years, many changes have been made to non-league football and the regulatory environment in which clubs operate. While the rules might seem quite interventionist to some, the encouragement of regular reporting has certainly seen clubs at this level generally becoming more financially stable.

Many hon. Members have spoken with great passion about their local clubs and their loyal fans. I want to respond to as many points and questions put to me as possible. I have little time, so I am going to have to gallop through, but I shall do my best.

My hon. Friends the Members for Hereford and South Herefordshire and for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier), the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) and others spoke about close working relationships, the effectiveness of the owners and directors test and transparency, while the football creditors rule was also raised. I can confirm that there are ongoing concerns about relationships, the test and the efficacy of the rules. I would be happy to ask the FA, which I meet on a regular basis and am seeing this week, to review and look again at the owners and directors test to see whether any sharpening improvements could be made. I would also be happy to see whether any additional powers would help, such as those conferred on Ofcom, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) in a debate earlier this week about Coventry City football club.

On the narrowing or abolition of the football creditors rule, there is no plan to legislate. The industry is taking the steps that need to be made. I hope that the financial fair play rules in the leagues and the financial sustainability requirements imposed in non-league football will reduce the dependency on the creditors rule, which is in any case used relatively infrequently.

The hon. Members for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds), who I know has had to leave, spoke about financial support from the premier and other leagues trickling down. My view is that the redistribution of income is a matter for the premier league and the FA. It is not a matter for the Government, but we would, of

course, support and encourage any measure that strengthens the financial sustainability of clubs at all levels.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) spoke of Grimsby Town, its place in the local community and its role as a local partner for delivering the National Citizen Service, which sounds very interesting indeed. He has asked me on a number of occasions to visit him in Cleethorpes and perhaps watch a Grimsby Town game, and I will certainly look into that. I am delighted that Grimsby Town are playing such a key role in the community, which is further evidence of how much more these clubs provide, well beyond football.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) also referred to the owners and directors test as an inadequate rubber-stamping exercise that is making a mockery of the FA—I am sure it is listening. Clearly, Salisbury City have had a very difficult summer, and I understand his frustration and that of supporters. However, the ODT is not a rubber-stamping exercise; it does set out disqualification criteria that prevent certain individuals from taking control of football clubs, and I assure him and the House that not all prospective owners are able to pass that test. As I have said, I will ask the FA to review the working of the ODT and see whether more can be done to protect clubs from these various challenges. He also referred to money for the FA Vase and FA Trophy competitions. Again, I repeat that redistribution is not a matter for government; it is a matter for the Football League, the Premier League and the FA, but the Government would certainly support any measure to improve the financial sustainability of football.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) and the right hon. Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) raised the issue of charitable or quasi-charitable status for non-league clubs. I can tell them that we want sports to get as much benefit as they possibly can, so that they can drive participation and thriving community sport. We are working with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and with sports on reviewing community amateur sports clubs, and I will of course make sure that the issue of non-league football clubs is raised.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mrs Grant:** I will give way later if I have any time left, but I must cover a couple of matters first. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) spoke with great passion about falling attendances at games. I cannot promise that the FA will take him up on his offer in relation to Wembley, but, as other hon. Members have mentioned, we do have a non-league day coming up this weekend. I encourage all hon. Members to visit their local club and enjoy everything that is on offer.

Lastly, I wish to discuss one potentially strong safeguard, which has been mentioned by many Members: better

engagement with supporters. There are many good examples of supporters engaging with their local clubs, some of which can be found at AFC Wimbledon, Brentford and Exeter City, but there is more to do. With that in mind, I have accepted Supporters Direct's proposal for an expert group of supporters, which will include representatives from across football. I hope that the group will examine, among other things, the barriers to supporter ownership and what more can be done to increase engagement with supporters.

**David Mowat** *rose*—

**Mrs Grant:** I really am out of time, because I want to leave a few minutes for my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire to speak.

In conclusion, I do not want us to lose sight of the exciting opportunities for non-league football to generate and maintain both interest and participation in the sport as a whole. It is with that in mind that I will continue to work with the football authorities on providing a supportive environment for them to prosper in the future.

3.59 pm

**Jesse Norman:** I would like to thank all colleagues from across the House for taking part in a cracking debate that has shown the House of Commons at its best; it has been full of wisdom, insight, passion and good humour. I know that the Minister has not failed to note the enormous passion and the strong feelings expressed about the ODT, and I am glad that she has committed to asking the FA to review it.

To bookend my earlier remarks about Hereford United, we have one shining example of a great community football club in Hereford: Westfields football club, founded 48 years ago, after England won the World cup. It was the grassiest of grass-roots clubs then, run by a team of people, one of whom was a 16-year-old goalkeeper and is now the chief executive, Andrew Morris. I wish we had more such clubs.

The football pyramid does not work at the moment. We know that. In the early 1990s, when Hereford United were last at risk, Graham Turner, the revered former manager, wrote to all members of the premiership asking them to send a side to help to boost Hereford United's gate. Only one premiership manager replied: Alex Ferguson, who sent a team including Ryan Giggs. That made a huge difference. That is what we should be seeing a lot more of across the premier league today.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the future of non-league football.

## Achievement Gap in Reading

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Dawn Primarolo):** I remind hon. Members that this debate will conclude at 5 pm precisely. I have had indications from four Members that they wish to speak. In order to leave enough time for the mover of the motion, the shadow Minister and the Minister, I am asking Back Benchers to try to keep their remarks to approximately five minutes. I am not going to set a time limit at the moment. I ask Members to be on their best behaviour.

4.1 pm

**Annette Brooke (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the achievement gap in reading between poorer children and their better-off peers.

I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for selecting this issue for debate today and I hope that we have the opportunity to explore the important issues of child poverty, inter-generational poverty and social mobility.

In January, I along with many other parliamentarians attended a reception hosted by Save the Children called “Change the Story”. We learnt about its partnership with a charity called Beanstalk to deliver the reading programme Born to Read. I am a parliamentary champion for Save the Children and I was fascinated to learn about its involvement in a major reading programme that aims to reach 23,000 children by the end of 2018.

At the reception, we heard from Lauren Child, author of the “Charlie and Lola” books, who said what a marvellous ambition it was to get everybody reading. She stressed how important it is for children to enjoy reading for the opportunity it presents to delve into other worlds and expand their imagination. The former Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), also spoke, focusing on social mobility and how important it is for disadvantaged children to learn to read well. I want to explore both those important perspectives.

In the UK today, one in every four children leaves primary school without being able to read well, meaning 130,000 children each year start secondary school already behind, with consequences for their later life chances. Of those children, a disproportionately large number are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Of children on free school meals—on the definition as we knew it before this week’s move to free school meals for all infants—the proportion leaving primary school who do not read well rises drastically to a shocking 40%.

Inevitably, not being able to read well affects a child’s life across a range of outcomes and limits chances of success. Not reading well not only shuts children out of further learning but means they are less likely to read outside of school and therefore will miss out on all the benefits associated with the joy of reading. For children from poorer backgrounds, there is a profound impact on the likelihood of their ever catching up.

This is not a new problem. Despite persistent efforts from successive Governments, the number of children reaching secondary school age without a firm grasp of this crucial skill is still far too high. Progress has been made, there are examples of excellent schemes and major initiatives have been introduced, but there is

undoubtedly much more to do. There is overwhelming evidence that not being able to read well has implications not only for an individual child’s well-being and success, but also for our society and economic prosperity. Children who have fallen behind at 11 are less likely to secure good qualifications by the time they finish their education, thus impacting on their ability to get a high-paying job or gain career advancement. For children from disadvantaged backgrounds, this means it is less likely that they will have the means to pull themselves out of disadvantage and break intergenerational cycles of poverty.

Low literacy has been associated with both truancy and exclusion. Those with poor reading and communication skills are more at risk of offending and it is well documented that a high proportion of the prison population have difficulties in reading.

Beyond the individual human costs, the economic costs of this wasted talent means lower prosperity for the country as a whole. If the UK had in recent decades closed the achievement gap at 11, this would have led to a more skilled work force and higher economic growth: according to a recent report by Save the Children, GDP in 2013 would have been around £20 billion or 1% higher; by 2030, it would be around £30 billion or 1.8% higher.

The achievement gap between the poorest children and their better-off peers is consistent with achievement in reading. Children born into poorer families are significantly more likely to have fallen behind in reading by the age of 11. Some 40% of poor children are not reading well compared with 25% of their better-off peers. Within that, some disadvantaged groups are faring less well at age 11 than others. Boys, and particularly low-income, white boys, are the most likely group to be falling behind when it comes to reading. We need to make sure that all children have a fair start in life.

Early years are, of course, crucial. The foundations for early language and literacy are laid in the early years, before children start formal school. I would like to give credit to Bookstart, which is fantastic for issuing books at such an early stage. A child from a disadvantaged background is likely to have a more limited vocabulary than other children before even starting pre-school. The implementation of the Bercow report did lead to many important changes, including support for early language development, but I would like to see a further review on progress made on this aspect.

I welcome the expansion of nursery places to two-year-olds and the introduction of an early-years premium from April 2015. This specifically aims to close the gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers by providing funding to early-years providers to help them raise the quality of their provision. In time I would like to see this at a higher level. Going to a high quality pre-school plus an effective primary school has an enormous effect, balancing out differences by family background, so we must focus on quality as well as quantity of provision and on well-trained professionals.

I strongly believe that early education has to be right for the individual child and based on a clear understanding of child development. Trying to “hothouse” young children can be counter-productive and put them off learning for life, especially if they see themselves as failing simply because they are not as mature as their peers. Personally, I see much to support in the Save Childhood Movement’s “too much, too soon” campaign, which believes that

children in England are starting formal learning too early, that the value of their creative and expressive play is being undermined, and that learning dispositions and later academic achievement may be affected. I believe that such views should not be dismissed lightly and we should be making sure we have the right balance in our early years programmes to enhance long-term learning.

As well as improving outcomes at 11, we have to lay the foundations for effective secondary school learning. Nevertheless, I certainly support the view that there should be a greater focus on early language development in the pre-school years.

I am concerned about summer-borns, some of whom are simply not ready to start formal school at barely four years of age. I welcome the movement that the Department for Education has made on this issue with new guidance, but I know there are parents still battling schools and local authorities simply to exercise parental choice. I have had parents contact me from across the country whose children could not cope with formal school at such an early stage; imagine feeling a failure at just four years of age.

Of course, some children will be developmentally ready to read at an earlier stage than others. I believe all children should be viewed as individuals whatever their backgrounds, and supported in their learning in an appropriate way to achieve their full potential. There is a positively reinforcing cycle between reading enjoyment and reading skill. We learn to read, then read to learn. The enjoyment of reading is associated not only with better reading skills but with better skills in other areas, such as maths. Research for the National Literacy Trust suggests a positive relationship between reading frequency, reading enjoyment and attainment.

I know that the Minister was keen to introduce phonics as the main reading scheme in schools, and there is widespread support for that as a technical approach. It is also important, however, that teachers should be able to use their professionalism to develop each child's reading. Alongside phonics, we must have programmes to support reading for enjoyment. I asked an oral question on such programmes recently, and the summer reading challenge was given as the answer. It is a great scheme, and I am sure that this year's Mythical Maze gave many children a great deal of pleasure, but we must ensure that we have schemes that reach all children. I wonder how many children have never, or only rarely, visited a public library.

There is a wide range of organisations that work to promote reading skills and reading for pleasure for children, young people and adults, but more needs to be done by all, including voluntary organisations, business, families and Government, to promote the joy of reading. Good schools make an enormous difference, especially to children from more disadvantaged backgrounds. It is undeniable that poverty can make it harder for children to do well, but a good school can be transformational.

There now needs to be increased support for schools and teachers to do even more to help the poorest children. Policies such as the pupil premium are making a real difference, as was demonstrated in the July 2014 Ofsted report, "The pupil premium: an update". The Minister for Schools, my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws), has made it clear that schools should not rely on their brightest pupils to score well in

inspections and league tables. He has said that they must focus relentlessly on closing the achievement gap by making full use of the pupil premium.

The role of parents and carers in supporting their child's reading in the home is crucial, but many parents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, do not understand how best to support their child in developing early literacy and reading habits. Poor families generally have fewer books in the home, and parents with weak literacy skills often lack the confidence to read stories with their children. We must ensure that parents and carers are able to do the best for their children. This means not only ensuring that the right tools and information are available but acting to reduce the poverty that makes it harder for parents to support their children's learning in the home. I have seen the pupil premium used to support family learning schemes, and I have been impressed to see parents and children learning together.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way—I find it difficult not to refer to her as my right hon. Friend. Does she agree that there should be a role for Ofsted in assessing the efficacy of the pupil premium? Does she think that the chief inspector should take on that role?

**Annette Brooke:** I believe that Ofsted took on that role in its recent report. It has proved important to have those Ofsted inspections because, although it is right in principle to tell head teachers to spend the money in the way they think best, concerns were expressed in the first year that the pupil premium was being sidelined into other schemes rather than being used to support the learning of disadvantaged children. It is therefore important to have a separate section in the Ofsted report on how the pupil premium is being used, and the latest report shows that that is becoming effective. We have seen examples of governors getting really involved in tracking the use of the money and the outcomes for the children. We need that kind of whole-school involvement to ensure that we are properly tracking the progress of disadvantaged children.

The United Kingdom remains a highly unequal country. The poorer outcomes in key skills such as reading and spoken language that are experienced by children at the lower end of the income distribution scale contribute to unequal opportunities to do well in life. If we were to make progress in tackling this educational inequality, we would help to level the playing field so that every child had the opportunity to succeed. That matters for all of us. There is already some fantastic work going on in and out of schools across the country. This Government launched their social mobility strategy in 2011 with the aim of ensuring that everyone has a fair opportunity to fulfil their potential regardless of the circumstances of their birth. The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission was established at the same time, but its reports continue to show how much more there is to do.

On Monday, a new report will be launched by a wide coalition of organisations, including Save the Children, Beanstalk, the National Association of Head Teachers, Bookstart, Teach First and many others. It is called, "Read on, get on: how reading can help children escape

[Annette Brooke]

poverty.” I understand that it has many calls for actions and pledges from all political parties. Please read the report.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Dawn Primarolo):** Order. We have four Back-Bench Members who wish to participate, plus the shadow Minister and Minister. I will set a time limit of six minutes on Back-Bench contributions. Of course if there are interventions and there is added time, it may be necessary to reduce the time limit, but I hope not. That leaves a reasonable time, hopefully, for the right hon. Lady to respond at the end of the debate. There is a six-minute time limit from now on.

4.16 pm

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Annette Brooke) on securing this debate and thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting it. I pay tribute to the work that the right hon. Lady has done on this matter throughout her time in this House, including the questions that she has raised as parliamentary champion for Save the Children. The Save the Children report “Too Young to Fail”, which she referred to at the beginning of her speech, is very powerful and reminds us of the scale of the challenge that we still face. The report says that by the time children are seven, nearly 80% of the later differences in GCSE results between better-off and poorer children have already been determined.

Two years ago, in 2012, one in seven of seven-year-olds—approximately 76,000 pupils across the country—was still not reaching the expected level in reading. As the right hon. Lady explained so powerfully, children from the poorest backgrounds are much more likely than their better-off peers to fall behind with their reading. As she said, this is not just an immediate challenge for education, but something that stores up problems later on. I am talking about the risks of crime, economic failure and behaviour issues later on in education.

Studies show that almost one in 10 of the 14-year-olds who had been very poor readers at the end of primary school became persistent truants compared with an average figure of around 2%. We know from Ofsted and others that the group that now face the biggest challenges in literacy are white British children, particularly boys but also girls, and that is part of the challenge that we need to face.

I welcome what the right hon. Lady said about poverty and about the difference that good and outstanding schools make. I am proud of the schools in my constituency that buck the trend and deliver the best results in English and mathematics at age 11. That shows that with the right ethos and approach and high standards of teaching and learning in our schools, we can make a difference.

When Joe Anderson took over the leadership of Liverpool city council after the 2010 local elections, he invited my right hon. Friend Baroness Estelle Morris, the former Secretary of State, to lead a cross-party commission on the future of education in Liverpool.

Between 2000 and 2010, Liverpool’s results at both 11 and 16 improved dramatically. Estelle’s report has been entitled “From Better to Best”, making the point that although progress has been made, there is still a lot more that we need to do in Liverpool. One of her recommendations was that Liverpool should become the foremost reading city in the country and that schools and their partners should give priority to reading so that no child, if capable, would leave primary school unable to read. Out of Baroness Morris’s report, we have the “City of Readers” campaign, run jointly by the mayor, Liverpool city council, the Liverpool learning partnership, which brings together schools and other educationists across the city, and the Reader Organisation. The campaign seeks to fulfil the goal of making Liverpool the foremost reading city in the country.

The aim is partly to promote reading for pleasure for residents of all ages across the city but also to focus on the achievement gap that is at the heart of the debate today. There are many initiatives, none of which involves charges for parents or children, and the idea is to have wide access for the community as a whole. For example, this summer Liverpool had the “Book It!” summer school, devised for children who need support with reading to help them make the transition from primary to secondary school. That was a free summer school for local children, supported by the local authority and the Liverpool learning partnership.

There has been a big emphasis on using existing cultural events in the city to promote reading. The “Giant Spectacular” in Newsham park in my constituency earlier in the summer gave such an opportunity, with a focus on readings from Roald Dahl as well as of love letters from the first world war. The recent Liverpool international music festival held beach reads, encouraging families to enjoy reading together. Readers in residence schemes have been put in place whereby a reader from the fantastic Reader Organisation spends two months in schools reading with selected pupils who need extra support and devising groups to promote reading for pleasure. Many schools have been involved, including a number from my constituency, such as Holly Lodge, Mab Lane, Dovecot primary and Our Lady and St Philomena’s primary. There has been a focus on continuing professional development, in particular promoting reading for pleasure, and Liverpool has risen to the challenge of targeting those adults whose life opportunities are held back by illiteracy.

At the heart of that is social justice, and as the right hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole said, this is not a new problem. If we can crack it and get it right, we will make a real difference to the life chances of many children and, in particular, children in some of the communities that I represent who often face great challenges from poverty and deprivation. Reading for social justice, reading for pleasure and reading as a crucial part of our economic future as a country—I hope Liverpool will have something to teach the rest of the country by being the city of reading.

4.22 pm

**Mr Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): It is a great pleasure to take part in the debate and I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Annette Brooke) for securing it and giving such a powerful and morally charged

opening address. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), the former shadow Secretary of State, and I congratulate him on his speech and him and his noble Friend Baroness Morris on their efforts in Liverpool. That is just the kind of sustained focus that can enrich people's lives and make a serious contribution to the economic success of the area. I also want to thank the Backbench Business Committee for choosing this issue for Members to discuss.

As has been mentioned, white working class children fare particularly badly. A central finding of the Select Committee on Education's recent report "Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children", published in June, was that

"the attainment 'gap' between those children eligible for free school meals and the remainder is wider for white British...children than for"

any other major ethnic group. Although, as has been said, boys perform worse than girls in any ethnicity or group, poor white children—that is probably a fairer expression than "working class"—both boys and girls have the lowest level of achievement in this country. That is something I want to highlight to the House today.

My Committee heard that the gap is visible as early as age five. For white British children, who are the lowest-performing ethnic group in early years, the attainment gap already stands at 24% by that age. By the age of five, their future trajectory has been established. The gap then widens to 32.2% at key stage 4. Although the proportion of white British children on free school meals achieving the key stage 4 benchmark has almost doubled over the past seven years, it is still only around half as high as the number of non-free-school-meals white British children who succeed by that measure. That disparity is far too wide.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole set out, the foundations of that learning are the ability to read and getting that right in the early years. Too many children from disadvantaged homes are being failed—allowed to progress through school without the skills that they need to secure good jobs. By comparison, the achievement gaps for children of Indian, Bangladeshi and black African ethnicities have all shrunk. The free-school-meals performance gap for Indian children closed by almost 7% between 2006 and 2013, whereas for white British children it hardly altered. Those statistics show that improvement is none the less possible, but the challenge of assisting disadvantaged white children still requires serious attention.

The Government deserve credit. The Secretary of State and her predecessor have made it a mission to roll back what was termed

"the soft bigotry of low expectations".

They have enabled schools to lengthen the school day. One of the strongest features of the previous Secretary of State was a stubborn refusal to accept that being born poor should mean that a child will fail at school. Efforts are being made on a number of fronts to challenge that. That is why the curriculum and accountability systems have been altered. There has been encouragement of the study of the more rigorous subjects through the English baccalaureate, because those more rigorous subjects were seen as having greater value; they acted as

keys to other opportunity, and if they were closed off to the children of poorer families, they would close off opportunity.

I had concerns about the way in which the English baccalaureate was introduced, and whether it really would benefit the most disadvantaged young people, because I thought the most telling feature of our Committee's report on the EBacc years ago was a graph that showed that despite a big drop in the number of young people from poorer families sitting the EBacc subjects, the number passing them had not altered a great deal. The fear was that although the intentions were sound, pushing lots of children into courses that they were not going to pass would do them little good.

However, the data that I have obtained from the Department show that as the proportion of free-school-meals pupils who were entered for the English baccalaureate doubled, from 9% to 18%, between 2011-12 and 2012-13, thanks to then Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr Gibb)—properly returned to the Front Bench, I have to say—and his colleagues, so the proportion achieving the qualification rose from 5% to 9%. There has been an increase in quantity without a collapse in the percentage achieving a qualification. The introduction of the pupil premium and its extension to early years education are also important measures.

I have less than a minute to go, so I shall put aside my notes. Although we have frequently mentioned this, it deserves to be reiterated again and again that closing the gap is not just an educational question; it is not just that it is ridiculous that some children, just because their families are poor, should end up doing badly at school. It does not have to be that way, because we know that in other countries it is not that way. There is always a gap: if a child comes from a disadvantaged home, the likelihood is—not individually, but statistically—that there will be a gap, but it is greater in this country than in many others. We need to close it. Why do we need to close it? Obviously for educational reasons, but, as has been said, there is an economic impact. The figures, which are probably rather conservative, show that the impact of providing people with a higher-quality education is immense. In the couple of seconds I have left, I reiterate the importance of quality teachers and ensuring that they are distributed where they are most needed, and getting incentives right for them.

4.28 pm

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): My apologies, Madam Deputy Speaker, for my slightly late arrival. When the annunciator screen suddenly changes, it is quite a trek to get here on time from the fifth floor of Portcullis House. I also apologise to the right hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Annette Brooke), who brilliantly achieved getting this debate.

I do not want to repeat what other people have said, so I shall rattle through some of my pet theories. Four of us in the Chamber served together on the Children, Schools and Families Committee; we know each other well. This terrible gap in achievement starts very young, and too often we are not honest with parents about what happens in the antenatal and perinatal period. Fetal alcohol syndrome is well known: a pattern of mental and physical deficiencies caused by drinking

[Mr Barry Sheerman]

while pregnant, it is seen physically in stunted growth, small head circumference, skin folds at the corner of the eye, small eye openings, short nose and thin upper lip, and mentally in damage to the central nervous system and brain that can lead to the loss of fine motor skills, hearing loss and poor hand-eye co-ordination. Smoking and drug taking during pregnancy also have an effect. That is relevant to the achievement gap because all the evidence shows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have parents who drank or smoked during pregnancy. We need better education and support for parents of all backgrounds, and we have to be absolutely blunt with our constituents—be honest about what damage is done before a child is even born.

As has already been said, early years stimulation is important. Many of us learnt at the knee of Professor Kathy Sylva, of Jesus college, Oxford. She guided me around primary schools, which I knew little about. She taught me how to read a primary school and a classroom. She took us to Denmark and showed us how having highly motivated, well-paid and well-trained people in early years is absolutely brilliant, and when people are low paid, not trained and lacking in the relevant skills, they do not make the difference to children's lives that they should do. Good, well-trained, well-paid staff—it is not rocket science. People say it is expensive, but if they can do it in Denmark, why can we not do it here?

I will finish on something that still bugs me from my days as Chair of the Children, Schools and Families Committee—something on which the present Chair of the Education Committee and I disagreed in those days. I am very worried that we do not know where a number of children in our country are or what stimulation and schooling they are getting. I am really worried about home schooling. In my constituency and others, I find a lax attitude to home schooling, and the ease with which people can say a child is being home schooled is dangerous territory. When it was confined to a small number of middle-class families who thought their child might be bullied at school and needed that home support, it was perhaps something we could tolerate, but I always thought that we ought to know where every child is in this country—

**Mr Graham Stuart:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Sheerman:** I will not, because I have only six minutes. I always thought that we ought to know where every child is in this country, how it is being supported, how it is being stimulated and how it is being treated. I am increasingly concerned about the large number of children now being home schooled. Their number is growing rapidly.

I am also worried that people from a strong faith background are choosing to use home schooling. I see it going on in my own community and know it is going on in other communities. I have a lot of evidence that the home school is not genuinely in the home, and the children are ending up in scruffy little back rooms being taught in a way that I do not approve of. I believe that we should know what children are being taught and how they are being taught.

**Mr Stuart:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Sheerman:** I will, very briefly.

**Mr Stuart:** I think the hon. Gentleman will get an extra minute if he is lucky. May I say to him that I do not believe he does have an evidence base of any sort for these slurs against home-educating families up and down the country? Why do we not seek a point of agreement that what we should do is try to establish a better evidence base about what is happening in home schooling? If we did that, we could talk on the basis of evidence, rather than slur and anecdote.

**Mr Sheerman:** When the hon. Gentleman and I were on the Select Committee looking at this subject we disagreed, and we will continue to do so. The increasing evidence of the larger number of home schooled children is a worry in any society. This week, we had a statement on what was happening to children in one town. I believe we have a duty as parliamentarians to know where every child is, what the curriculum is and what the qualifications are of the people looking after them.

I do not want to make this too party political, but one of the things that we know worked with disadvantaged children was good Sure Start programmes and good children's centres that were available to support those who did not even have much of a home environment—who did not even have the English language at home, where the television was on in a foreign language—and went to school ill prepared to start learning. Those children's centres were based on evidence and research by people such as Kathy Sylva and Naomi Eisenstadt. Where they are well staffed and well resourced, they make a magnificent difference to the lives of children in the very deprived communities we are talking about. My research shows that about a third have closed down since 2010, and many are under-resourced and do not have the facilities they used to have.

Any Government elected at the next election have to go back to the concept of children's centres and Sure Start. They were not perfect and can be improved—everything can be improved—but I want to see little children in those children's centres, run by highly qualified, highly motivated, well-paid people. When I first became Chairman of the Select Committee, I used to go to schools before the introduction of the minimum wage, and people said, "It's terrible. The minimum wage will ruin early years care because we are only paying £1 an hour." I believe that with the minimum wage, the transformation of early years education is halfway there, and we want to go the rest of the distance.

4.36 pm

**Simon Wright** (Norwich South) (LD): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this debate and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Annette Brooke) on securing it.

We must do everything we can for those who are struggling to read to ensure that every child has a chance to get on in life. This week, standard assessment tests data showed that 78% of children began secondary school with a good level 4b in reading. That is a welcome increase on last year's 75%, but it still means that one in five children—over 100,000 in total—are not starting secondary



school as good readers. These children, who are disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds, are at risk of being left behind and turned off from learning, and more likely to be limited in their education, training and employment opportunities later in life.

Closing the attainment gap with disadvantaged children and giving every child the chance to succeed is precisely why Liberal Democrats in government have prioritised the pupil premium, which is now providing an extra £2.5 billion to support disadvantaged children. This is enabling schools across the country to provide the additional help they need to narrow the attainment gap. Through the important work of the Education Endowment Foundation, head teachers can identify the most evidence-based interventions.

Before applying interventions to improve reading, it is vital that schools diagnose effectively the underlying issues, which could be related to comprehension, decoding words, or retention skills. Interventions that improve reading come in many forms, and several could have a measurable benefit, but a key question for heads is which interventions will provide the greatest impact based on the diagnosed need of the child. The skills of teachers in understanding the child's needs and applying the most effective response should be developed within an effective programme of continuous professional development. Providing already experienced teachers with the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills can only improve their ability to offer the most effective support at the right time for an individual child based on the evidence of what works.

**Mike Thornton** (Eastleigh) (LD): There seems to have been an obsession lately with the belief that only one method of teaching reading is suitable for all children, in the form of phonics. Does my hon. Friend agree that in fact different children react differently—better and worse—to different forms of reading, and that we should leave it up to the head teacher and the teachers under his aegis to decide which is the best method rather than dictate it from Westminster?

**Simon Wright:** Phonics provides an important way in which teachers can go about teaching, but it is only one part of the strategy. Ultimately, it is developing and fostering a love of reading that will help children to continue to enjoy life as a reader.

Those interventions must start earlier than at school, and, because early intervention is so crucial, from next year the early years pupil premium will provide £300 for every disadvantaged three and four-year-old. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole, I believe it should be increased and extended in future years. Helping children during the first stages of development helps them to gain the foundation of good language skills, which are essential in developing a curiosity that progresses to reading.

The importance of a high-quality early education sector cannot be overstated, led by professionals with the training and experience to know how best to help those in difficulty, and working with the parents to encourage support at home. That is why Liberal Democrats support raising the status of teaching professionals in early years settings and the introduction of early years teachers, and why we opposed relaxing child care ratios.

I have spoken mainly of interventions at school and early years settings, but getting children reading well is a challenge that necessitates efforts from all places—not just schools and early years settings, but, crucially, parents and wider communities. It is only through sustained and joined-up efforts by organisations and individuals that we will help every child to become a good reader. However much value we add through high-quality school and pre-school provision, support from family and the home environment, particularly in the early years, can make an even greater difference to children's cognitive development. The earlier parents become involved in supporting their children's literacy, the greater the impact will be. According to the National Literacy Trust, even at age 16 parental interest in a child's reading is the single greatest prediction of achievement.

Yesterday I met Save the Children to discuss its ongoing work in that area, as mentioned by my right hon. Friend. It has shown how families and communities can contribute to the development of good readers through its Families and Schools Together programme and the Born to Read partnership programme, which links trained volunteers to struggling readers.

In my own county of Norfolk, more than 10,000 children take part every year in the summer reading challenge at local libraries. That helps to prevent the summer dip in literacy skills, which is particularly damaging for disadvantaged children. It also encourages families to read with their children and create an inspiring home-learning environment.

This year Norfolk launched the Raising Readers campaign, which aims to bring the wider community on board. Backed by the *Eastern Daily Press*, one element of the campaign is to encourage business and voluntary groups to give staff two hours' unpaid leave a month to visit schools and read with children. I was delighted to visit the Kid Ease nursery in my constituency a couple of weeks ago, during which I read to and with three and four-year-olds.

A range of measures, including the pupil premium, the expansion of free early years education and changes to school accountability measures, will make a difference to many young lives and narrow the unacceptable attainment gap holding back social mobility in this country. However, we require society as a whole to mobilise to address the challenge at hand and work together with parents and schools so that we can look forward to a time when every child will finish primary school as a good reader and go on to enjoy a lifetime of reading.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Dawn Primarolo):** May I ask the Front Benchers to share the remaining time between them?

4.43 pm

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): May I thank the Backbench Business Committee for choosing this debate and congratulate the right hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Annette Brooke) on securing it? I must confess that I had not realised that she was right honourable. I know that a very high percentage of Lib Dems have been knighted, received damehoods or been made right honourable, but in her case it is thoroughly

[Kevin Brennan]

deserved for the work she has done over many years in this House and her commitment to children's issues, particularly that under discussion.

I also congratulate all the other speakers, including my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), who is my former boss, the Chair of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), who is a former Chair of the Committee, and the hon. Member for Norwich South (Simon Wright). They will forgive me if I do not discuss their contributions—as I was going to do—given the time available.

There are a number of points to make about the achievement gap in reading between poorer children and their better-off peers. First, it is a real problem. As the right hon. Lady said, current Government statistics show that one child in every four leaves primary school unable to read well, which means that each year 130,000 children are already behind when they start secondary school. Of those, a disproportionately large number are from disadvantaged backgrounds; the proportion who leave primary school unable to read well rises to 40% for children on free school meals. We know that it is a real problem, so it is right that we are debating it today and that we will continue to do so.

Secondly, it is not a new problem. Successive Governments have made efforts to close the achievement gap. The previous Labour Government made extensive investment, politically and financially, starting with the literacy hour and progressing to schemes such as Every Child a Reader. I could cite evidence of the success of those programmes, including from the Institute for Public Policy Research's 2012 report, "A long division: Closing the attainment gap in England's secondary schools", which clearly showed that the attainment gap between the richest and poorest students narrowed between 2003 and 2011. Despite that, we know that poorer children are still much more likely to have fallen behind in reading by age 11 than their better-off peers.

Thirdly, the issue really matters. Being behind in reading at age 11 has a massive impact on an individual's life chances, but it also has a massive impact on the country as a whole. More people who are out of work or on low pay are functionally illiterate—one in four in both instances. More pupils who are excluded from school lack literacy skills. More young offenders and prisoners are poor readers. The list goes on. We can reasonably extrapolate from those statistics and observations that at the macro level crime is higher and economic growth is lower as a result.

Fourthly, this issue has become party political. In my opinion, it should not be. I am not trying to blame anyone in particular for that phenomenon; we are all politicians and we all have to make our case in order to win power and govern in what we believe to be the country's best interests. That is the trade we are in and, in my view, it is an honourable one. However, as a former school teacher from a working-class background, I hope that it is possible to reach a consensus on a longer-term approach to making progress on closing the achievement gap in reading.

Of course, many of the root causes of the problem lie outside the immediate influence of school. Many parents are poor readers, as we know from the statistics, and

they are therefore not in a strong position to help their children at home, even when well motivated to do so. Fifthly, therefore, this issue is not just about schools. We need to develop policies to support parents and families outside schools, especially in the early years. We are concerned about the overall impact of Government policies, whether in relation to Sure Start, as was mentioned earlier, or financial support to poorer families. Whatever the level of spending available to any Government, we ought to be able to agree on the types of policies beyond school that will help to tackle the problem.

I noticed a press release today from the Sutton Trust pointing out new analysis showing that parents from the richest fifth of households are four times more likely to pay for extra classes outside school for their children than those from the poorest fifth. I think that we should certainly look at the policy implications for supporting initiatives to give extra support, outside school or at the end of school, to pupils from poorer backgrounds. There are quite a few good initiatives out there for that, and the pupil premium might be a good way of supporting them.

Sixthly, we should make every effort, as politicians, to evaluate what works, including in schools. That is why Opposition Front Benchers welcomed the setting up of the Education Endowment Foundation, which the hon. Member for Norwich South (Simon Wright) referred to. It gives us the opportunity to start doing what so many people tell us they want us to do in education, whatever political party we belong to: to set longer-term policies.

**The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb)** *rose*—

**Kevin Brennan:** Does the Minister want me to give way?

**Mr Gibb:** I was hoping that the hon. Gentleman would come to the end of his remarks, because I want to allow my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Annette Brooke) to speak as well.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Dawn Primarolo):** Order. I will be the one to decide that. The maths is that you have eight minutes each and there will then be a minute for the right hon. Lady.

**Kevin Brennan:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was attempting to split the time as per your instructions. I do not have too far to go. I was about to try to bring a note of consensus to the debate before I was, if not rudely interrupted, certainly interrupted.

If we achieve such longer-term policies, they will bring the quiet revolution that we need, which will last and succeed, rather than a noisy revolution that is doomed not to last. One feature of the most successful jurisdictions in education, which is rarely mentioned, is the stability of their policies. Those policies are based on evidential consensus, rather than on faddish policy making. What matters in teaching children to read is what works.

Over a long period, politicians have spent too much time telling teachers how to do things and not enough time telling them what we want to be achieved and

letting them use their initiative, innovation and skill to achieve it. That point relates to the importance of training, the quality of teachers, which has been mentioned, and continuing professional development. The quality of teaching is what will make the biggest contribution to tackling the reading gap in schools. I will conclude my remarks on that point to give the Minister and the mover of the motion time to finish the debate.

4.51 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb):** I thank the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) for that and apologise for intervening earlier.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Annette Brooke) for securing this debate on what is, in everyone's view, the most important issue in education. It has been a very good and well-informed debate.

It cannot be acceptable that in 2014, almost 18,000 boys aged 11 cannot read any better than a seven-year-old, nor that in 2013, one in five pupils on free school meals did not achieve the expected standard in reading at key stage 1. As the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) said in an excellent contribution, poor reading can lead to behavioural problems, with one in 10 14-year-olds who are poor readers becoming persistent truants, compared with just 2% of other children.

Nothing in education is more important than making sure that every child can read. To paraphrase my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole, if you don't learn to read, you can't read to learn. Of course, our concern about reading standards should not simply be about the utilitarian benefits of reading. In and of itself, reading is one of life's great joys. No child should be denied the chance to experience that joy for themselves, no matter where they live or what their background. She spoke about delving into other worlds. That is a good phrase to show why reading is so wonderful. We want all children to become fluent and enthusiastic readers. We want them to have the solid grounding in the systematic synthetic phonics that they need to decode the words on the page; the knowledge and appreciation to understand what they are reading; and the enthusiasm and experience to develop a lifelong love of books.

As was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman)—I call him my hon. Friend because of our years of service together during his chairmanship of the Select Committee—these issues start very early. For some children, they start even before they are born. Research shows that nothing is more fundamental to a child's later outcomes than early language development. It is the key to mastering communication and literacy later on. Of course, a huge part of that development depends on parents reading, singing and talking to their children. The early years sector also has a crucial role to play, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole said. We know that high-quality early education from the age of two has a lasting impact on children's development.

Nowhere is the need to get children off to a flying start more pressing than for disadvantaged children. As my right hon. Friend pointed out, there is an 18-month

vocabulary gap between children on low incomes and children on high incomes when they arrive at school. If that is left unchecked, they continue to slip further and further behind. That is why, from this September, we are giving some 260,000 of the country's most disadvantaged two-year-olds 570 hours of funded early education. That is double the number of children who were eligible last year.

Early years education has to be of a high quality. As my right hon. Friend said, quality is as important as quantity when it comes to early years education. We are also introducing reforms to the national curriculum, which come into force today, giving ever higher importance to reading and literacy.

Of course, all of that depends on children mastering the essential skill of decoding in the first place. As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Simon Wright) said, it is right that we should base our practice on what the evidence says works. International evidence shows that the systematic teaching of phonics is the most effective way to teach children to read. It helps all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, become fluent readers.

We are absolutely committed to ensuring that the high-quality teaching of phonics in primary schools continues, which is why we have introduced the light-touch phonics check. In the pilot in 2011, 32% of children in the 300 schools involved passed that check. In 2012 that rose to 58%, and last year it had risen to 69% of all pupils meeting the expected standard. That was a significant rise, but just 56% of pupils on free school meals met that standard compared with 72% of other pupils—there was a 17 percentage point gap, which we need to close. Some local authorities, such as Newham, did extremely well in that check, with 76% of pupils passing, but others did not achieve so well, including some in affluent areas. I was encouraged by the initiative to improve reading in Liverpool that the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby described. I am sure that we will see a significant rise in Liverpool's phonics check results as the years go by. We want to ensure that all children are secure in their basic phonic reading skills.

One point on which I did not agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole was the starting date of formal education. There is no evidence that it is damaging. The Cambridge review of primary education in 2010 found no clear relationship between starting age and reading achievement, but some studies have found a small and temporary advantage to younger starting ages. My view is that delaying the start of formal education and the teaching of reading would widen the attainment gap, as children from more affluent and educated homes would learn to read at home and other children would not. That gap would continue to grow exponentially once they started their education. In fact, the majority of parents are happy for their child to begin school in the September following their fourth birthday. As we know, and as my right hon. Friend pointed out, children develop at different rates, particularly in the early years, and it is to be expected that some parents will feel that their child is simply not ready to start school when they are four. To allow for that, the admissions code makes it clear that parents can request that their child attends part-time or that their entry is delayed until they reach the point of compulsory education.

[Mr Nick Gibb]

The Government's overall plan for education is to raise academic standards, make every local school a good school and significantly improve standards of behaviour in our schools. We want to close the attainment gap between those from poorer and wealthier backgrounds, not just in reading but across all academic subjects. However, reading represents the foundation of education, and we need all young people to be reading fluently and with increasing speed by the time they reach key stage 2. We need them to read voraciously throughout primary school, so that they not only become accomplished readers but develop the habit of reading for long stretches of time. That is how we can ensure that every young person achieves their full potential to be as well educated as their ability will allow. That means that they can benefit from all the opportunities that this country has to offer.

4.58 pm

**Annette Brooke:** I thank all the Members who have contributed to the debate. We have achieved quite a lot in our limited time—perhaps we can get a high score for that. What pleases me most is that we have established that the issue matters, and that we all concur that an individual's joy of reading is crucial, along with the other social and economic outcomes that we all want to see. Reading is so important that we need to look at the evidence and put as much emphasis as we possibly can on giving every child the best start in life.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the achievement gap in reading between poorer children and their better-off peers.

## Wanstead Hospital

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(Mel Stride.)

4.59 pm

**John Cryer** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): I wish to thank Mr Speaker for granting this debate on the closure of Wanstead hospital in Redbridge in north-east London in my constituency.

Wanstead hospital has not existed as a full general hospital since it closed in 1986. It is where my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) was born 62 years ago—it is his birthday today, so I wanted to mention it. Hon. Members will have noticed all the bunting hung outside to celebrate that event, and he is happy for me to point it out. What remains of Wanstead hospital are two intermediate care wards called Heronwood and Galleon. The care is usually provided to elderly people who have perhaps been ill or in hospital and are not well enough to go home, and they need intermediate care before they can return to their homes.

This issue affects not only the London borough of Redbridge but three London boroughs: Redbridge, Barking and Dagenham, and Havering. It stretches from the boundary of Redbridge in the west to the boundary between Havering and Essex in the east—a huge swathe of north-east London. The plan is to take the three boroughs, cut all the intermediate care beds—there are currently 104—and reduce them to 40 beds located at King George hospital in Ilford. Apart from anything else, that is six miles from Wanstead so it is a long way for people in my constituency, many of whom are elderly, to travel. The facility in Dagenham at Grays Court is being closed, and the biggest facility is Wanstead hospital, which has 48 intermediate care beds over the two wards. We have already lost 35 beds in St George's hospital—not to be confused with King George hospital—which is in Hornchurch in Havering and is an old RAF hospital. Those beds were lost last year and the plan is now to concentrate all the intermediate care beds in one place in Ilford at King George hospital.

The ongoing consultation has been produced and launched by an obscure and unaccountable group led by chief officer Conor Burke and the chairman, Dr Mehta. This group is not a clinical commissioning group; it has an overall strategic planning role above the CCG. Conor Burke and Dr Mehta are accountable to a small board that is made up of representatives of the three CCGs from those boroughs—hardly a shining example of democratic accountability.

It is basically a deeply flawed consultation. I was told by Conor Burke and Dr Mehta on 13 June that they might possibly be engaging in a consultation that would lead eventually to the closure of what remains of Wanstead hospital and those two wards. They did not volunteer that information; they said that there might possibly be a consultation only because I asked what the future contained for Wanstead hospital. They did not say that it was closing at that point, but that there might be a consultation. I asked three times for an assurance—which I received—that I would be informed as soon as the decision to consult on the future of Wanstead and the other facilities was made. I was not told about that decision. I found out about it only on 18 July when I received a letter with a consultation document stating

that the consultation was already under way. If they treat elected representatives like that, God knows how they treat members of the public. It calls their track record into question.

The consultation document has not been made widely available, and I receive e-mail after e-mail saying that it is difficult to get hold of it or access online. It is not in the libraries, GP surgeries or community centres—at least not the ones that I or anybody I know frequent. The document sets out a series of options, and then states, “This is the option we want.” It is clearly pushing respondents in a particular direction. That is not a clear, fair or neutral consultation. They are saying, “We’ll set out a few options for you, but this is the one we want, and if you respond, we want you to support this option.” That is clearly what the consultation document says, as anyone will see, if they can actually get hold of it. Only a couple of hours ago, I received an e-mail from a constituent I know quite well who told me about her difficulty—she is an articulate, intelligent person—getting hold of the consultation document and then responding online.

Another great difficulty, and a point that has been met with another rebuff, was the request to extend the consultation deadline. The consultation started in July and will end on 1 October, but there has been call after call to extend it until 31 October, because most of the current consultation period falls in the holidays and most people do not know it is happening. I have met scores of people in Wanstead and elsewhere, even people who have used the facilities, who do not know the consultation is up and running. One of the richest ironies of the process is that the newly elected health scrutiny committee on Redbridge council—all people elected on 22 May—clearly requested an extension to 31 October, but so far the health tsars in north-east London have said it is not necessary.

The plan put forward by the senior health managers was to create two teams. The community treatment team, which provides care in people’s own homes—I have nothing against that, but I think we need the intermediate care beds as well—is not available after 10 pm, and the intensive rehabilitation team stops at 8 pm. It is promised that the CTT will respond to any call within two hours, but if someone needs help at 3 o’clock in the morning, when both teams are off duty, they will need to call the out-of-hours service or the emergency services, which I think is inadequate for a lot of people in need of intermediate care.

Both teams are up and running and seem to have done a good job. The reaction from the public who have received their care has been very positive—I cannot dispute that. However, we now see a proposal to introduce massive changes to intermediate care across a huge swathe of north-east London, including three of the biggest London boroughs—Havering is the second-biggest and Redbridge is one of the biggest—based on very little evidence. There have only been intermediate care beds at King George for a year, and the beds lost at St George’s in Hornchurch were cut only last year, in 2013, yet we now face a huge cut in bed numbers and their concentration in a facility that has only been run for a year, with two relatively new community-based teams, both based at King George hospital. The system is just not tried and tested. In my view and that of most of the people I represent—in my experience—we are

not in a position to say the system will work, yet those beds will be lost, and once beds are lost, they are rarely got back.

The health tsars tell me that the beds are not being used. I dispute that. For one thing, last winter, which was very mild, 75 out of the 104 intermediate care beds were used. That is a relatively low number, but, as I say, it was a mild winter. If this or next winter is very cold and harsh and intermediate care beds are needed, we will only have 40 located at King George, rather than what we used to have, which was three far more accessible facilities across the three boroughs. I am being told stories off the record—nobody has gone on the record—by NHS staff and constituents that people are being turned away from Wanstead hospital and sent to King George in Ilford in order, I can only imagine, to massage the figures. I am also told by doctors and nurses who work for the health service that it is quite difficult to get into Wanstead hospital. Again, that will bring down the bed occupancy figures, adding grist to the mill of the senior health managers who are keen on getting bed occupancy down, so that they have a perfect justification for closing Grays Court and Wanstead hospitals and putting 40 beds in the King George hospital.

The Minister will be acutely aware, I imagine, of the difficulties experienced by local hospitals, by which I mean general hospitals. Queen’s hospital in Romford has faced enormous difficulties, as I am sure she will be aware. Capacity at Queen’s was forced down because the Care Quality Commission felt that the hospital was not capable of dealing with the relevant number of people—particularly in maternity, but in other areas, too. Whipps Cross hospital in my constituency has also had significant problems, receiving a series of very critical reports from the CQC.

King George hospital, where the intermediate beds are planned to be located, has been under threat of closure for years. It is only because of the stalwart efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South and others in campaigning to keep the hospital open that it is still there. It could close at some point in the future. Against that background, with all those problems in the acute trusts across north-east London, it seems to me that taking out all the intermediate care beds with huge cuts and putting in 40 beds in Ilford at the King George is, at best, a foolhardy decision.

Let me make one more point about the consultation—the lack of accountability. The whole process, in my view, has been deeply flawed. Perhaps the greatest talking point among my constituents is the pig-headed refusal to extend the deadline to the consultation until the end of October, which seems a fairly modest sort of request. The demand for it was overwhelming and the scrutiny committee elected on 22 May called for the extension, yet the senior health managers in north-east London seem absolutely determined to refuse that relatively modest request.

Why are these senior managers so unwilling to respond to public opinion? It is because they do not have to respond to public opinion. The two people responsible for this exercise were not elected. I am not saying that there was a glorious era when everybody running the NHS was elected—such an era never existed—but these two people were certainly not elected and they are not particularly accountable. If they are at all, it is to a fairly obscure board, indirectly appointed. That has

[John Cryer]

resulted in a process that provides a pretty disgraceful example of sweeping aside the wishes of local people, local councillors and locally elected representatives, and saying, “We know best. If only all these daft people would leave us alone and let us get on with it, we can make all the decisions and run the health service efficiently.”

I do not say this as a party political point, but I do not think the national health service was set up for the convenience of well paid senior managers whose wages are paid by the taxpayers I represent. The NHS was set up by Nye Bevan after the second world war in order to provide care for everybody. In future, we should move to a position whereby the people who use the NHS and run it at the sharp end should be far more involved in decisions about how to provide care that will always be free at the point of need. There has to be a change. This exercise has brought home to me just how unaccountable so many senior NHS managers are. If they are unaccountable, they will not care what the people who use the facilities for which they are responsible think. Their lack of accountability has to change in the long term.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Dawn Primarolo):** I call the Minister.

5.14 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison):** Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker—Madam Deputy Speaker, I apologise.

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): It has been a long day.

**Jane Ellison:** Yes, it has.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer) on securing this debate on issues that are clearly of great importance to him and his constituents. Before I try to address some of the issues he has raised—I have listened carefully to what he has said, and if there are issues to which I cannot respond now, I will certainly take them up with NHS London—I would like to put on the record my thanks to all those who work in the NHS, not only in his constituency but right across the service, for their dedication to providing first-class services to his and all our constituents.

As the hon. Gentleman is aware and as he described in his speech, Wanstead hospital closed in 1986 so the services that are the subject of this debate are provided from the Heronwood and Galleon unit on the site of the former hospital. As he said, it houses 48 rehabilitation beds in two wards, and it is one of three community rehabilitation units providing intermediate care for people in the three boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge and Havering. The two other units are located at Grays Court in Dagenham and the Foxglove ward at King George hospital. The proposal put forward by the clinical commissioning groups for the three boroughs is to centralise these services at King George hospital, and that is the subject we are addressing this evening.

As the hon. Gentleman described, the three local CCGs outlined five possible options for the future of intermediate care services in the document issued on

9 July. I understand what he says about the preferred option steering people, but we would also probably be critical if local health leaders did not tell us what their preferred option was. I suspect we would want them at least to tell us what their thinking was in order to guide the public and be transparent. The proposals are currently the subject of a full 12-week public consultation. I understand that he has recently met Redbridge CCG and has expressed his concern, as he has done again tonight in the House, about the current length of the consultation, asking for an extension. That is being considered by the CCGs and I have asked that they respond to him as soon as possible after this debate, having given that further consideration and heard the strength of his feeling on the subject.

On support for the proposals, I know that in June, as partners on the local integrated care coalition, the three local authorities all agreed the content of the intermediate care pre-consultation business case. That includes the case for service change and the proposal for the local CCGs to go to public consultation. Subsequently, the three local CCG governing bodies all agreed to go to consultation and to consult on the preferred option, which we have described. I also understand that the Havering health and wellbeing board is very supportive of the proposals, urging the CCGs to get on with the proposed changes more quickly. Discussions are to be held next week with the health and wellbeing boards for Redbridge and Barking and Dagenham.

The head of nursing at the Partnership of East London Co-operatives has described the proposals in positive terms, and a number of positive comments have been made about the innovative ideas on home care, which the hon. Gentleman has been fair to describe as positive and good for his constituents. I know that in Redbridge the CCG is continuing to engage with community groups, some of which he has alluded to, in order to explain the proposals in more detail, and that is quite right. I was concerned when he said that members of the public locally are not clear about what is happening and do not feel that they are in the know, because these processes should always have at their heart the desire to convey what is being proposed to the public in order that they can comment meaningfully on them.

Under the preferred option, the overall number of rehabilitation beds provided would reduce from 104 to 40, with the capacity to increase to 61 should the need arise. On the face of it, that does sound like a very significant reduction, and I can understand why the hon. Gentleman and other local people may be concerned when they hear those figures. Local people needing intermediate care have generally been cared for in beds at community rehabilitation units, which means that the number of intermediate care beds across his area is relatively high compared with many other areas. However, I am advised—he made mention of this in his speech—that many of those beds are not being used because there is insufficient demand. The latest bed figures for August show that 49 intermediate care beds—47% of the total capacity—were unused across the area for that month. I note that he disputes those figures, and he makes a fair point about the waxing and waning of demand across the year. I would certainly hope that the local clinicians and managers who put these plans together would take into account those shifts in demand across the year.

The CCGs have also heard from the public that people want to be cared for and supported in their own homes wherever possible. That is a consistent message we get from the public across a range of health services. Keeping people at home helps them to stay independent for longer, and they recover just as well, and in some cases better and more quickly, at home. That is why the CCGs are developing a model of care where people are cared for and supported in their own homes, not in hospital. That model has been developed by clinicians, with, properly, input from patients and carers. However, patients who need a community bed will still be able to get one. The CCGs believe that concentrating all the rehabilitation beds on one site is the best way to develop high-quality care for the hon. Gentleman's constituents and other patients who need to stay in a rehab unit.

Clinicians locally believe that that is the safest way to provide care and the best way to provide care of consistent quality. Concentrating the service on one site would enable staff to maintain their practice standards and share expertise more easily. The hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that the CCGs have been trialling two new services—the community treatment team and the intensive rehabilitation service. The community treatment team provides short-term intensive care and support so that people can be cared for in their own home, rather than in hospital. That is something that my constituents, his and other Members' constituents say all the time: they would much prefer to do that. The intensive rehabilitation service provides support, such as physiotherapy, for people in their own homes and further reduces the need for patients to stay in community beds.

Figures for the last seven months are very encouraging. They show that nearly all patients supported by the community treatment team—90%—do not go on to be admitted to hospital. There are important issues to consider such as knock-on effects and the sustainability of local health services. The intensive rehabilitation service is similarly successful, with 90% of patients able to recover at home without needing to go to hospital.

Before the trial of the new services, patients waited an average of five days to access bed-based care. Since the trial, patients are able to access community beds or the intensive rehabilitation service in less than two days on average. Most people who need the community treatment team are contacted within two hours. We should pay tribute to the innovation that has taken place and to some excellent local service delivery.

I understand that patient satisfaction ratings for both the new services have been consistently high across the three boroughs since the trials began. The results of the latest satisfaction survey, published in June, were taken from patients recently discharged from the community treatment team, and it is good to hear patients being positive about their experience. In Redbridge, patient satisfaction with the service scored an overall average of 9.5 out of 10; 94% of patients and relatives said they would be “extremely likely” to recommend the community treatment team service to family and friends—the new family and friends test is being introduced across the NHS and is a good measure of what people really think of the service—and 100% of community treatment team patients were responded to within two hours.

Most of the patients surveyed felt that they either would have attended A and E or would have been admitted to hospital if that service had not been available, which goes to my point about the sustainability of local acute services. Since the trial started, 7,600 patients have been seen by those two new services, 1,000 from Redbridge. Only 1,300 patients would have been seen in a “beds only” service. Therefore, we can see service change bringing great quality of service to the hon. Gentleman's constituents and others in the area.

Demand for rehabilitation beds has further reduced during the trial of the new services as more people are being cared for at home. I am advised that, during July, 46 of the available 104 beds were unused, as I have mentioned.

The Government are clear that reconfiguration of front-line health services is a matter that should be led by the local NHS. It is best placed to know the needs of local people and it knows how to deliver them. Putting the patient first is central to that, although it always concerns me when hon. Members bring to the House their worries that consultation and transparency have not been as good as they could be. I note the hon. Gentleman's points, as will local health leaders, with concern. I know that they have met him on a number of occasions. I am sure that we will meet him again to take up those points, but at the heart of reconfiguration is the all-important issue of putting patients first and delivering a better service for all patients. The NHS in London, as elsewhere, has to constantly evaluate the way in which services can best be tailored to meet the needs of local people and improve standards of patient care.

I recognise that proposals for service change inevitably arouse public concern, and that is why it is important that we get consultation processes as good as they possibly can be. It is absolutely the role of hon. Members to express those concerns, to hold all of us who are involved to account, to engage with local clinical and operations leaders and to test the NHS's response to those concerns.

I know that the hon. Gentleman has both corresponded and met with senior staff from the local NHS, and I have met with local health leaders, and I hope the response he received from the chief officer of Redbridge clinical commissioning group has gone at least some way towards addressing his concerns about the proposed reconfiguration of intermediate care services. The consultation on the proposals is open until at least 1 October and, as I said earlier, an extension is being considered. I undertake after this debate to further draw to the attention of local health leaders the strength of feeling the hon. Gentleman has expressed tonight about the need for more time for him and his constituents, but I urge him to participate and to make his constituents' views known during the course of that consultation, as he has done tonight in the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.25 pm

*House adjourned.*





# Westminster Hall

*Thursday 4 September 2014*

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

## BACKBENCH BUSINESS

### Stamp Duty (Housing Market)

*Motion made, and Question proposed.* That the sitting be now adjourned.—(*Harriett Baldwin.*)

1.30 pm

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. This debate is broad, and I am sure that there will be various takes on stamp duty. I wanted it to be broad because people will have different views on what we should be doing about stamp duty, which is incurred by many constituents throughout the country.

Stamp duty land tax first appeared in its current form in 2003, and it is interesting to note that it has not been debated outside its legislative context since then. It was debated briefly in 2006, when the zero-rate threshold was raised from £120,000 to £125,000, but other than that the House has not debated it, yet stamp duty has been putting increasing pressure on home buyers since then.

I am sure that the public find it odd that such a burdensome tax affecting that most British of ideals—home ownership—has not been properly examined by Members in the House. As a Conservative, I am proud to say that I believe we are the party of home ownership. Indeed, it was under Margaret Thatcher in 1980 that we encouraged people to believe that owning their own homes gave them a stake in society and their community, aspiration and a belief that they and their families could get on. I am sure that many people in your constituency, Mr Betts, have aspired to own their own homes and taken up the right to buy introduced in 1980.

It is depressing to realise that, in constituencies such as mine, not a single property will be left below the 1% threshold. Even a tiny one-bedroom flat—an ordinary flat, not in a chichi area—will cost £170,000. I am concerned that by allowing so many people to be sucked into paying ever-higher rates of tax despite the fact that earnings have either risen only modestly or been frozen, such as in public sector jobs, we are denying our families of the future the chance to own their own homes. In 1980, we believed in encouraging families at all income levels to own their own home, and I hope that we have not moved away from that ideal.

Labour introduced the tax in 2003, but I believe that we should move away from politics on this matter, as the tax now sucks in many constituencies represented by Labour Members. Many of them are on the payroll, like Government Members, and will not be able to discuss the matter in this debate, but they know who they are. A quick look on Rightmove, Zoopla or similar sites will show how many constituencies—often ones with areas of multiple deprivation—have hugely expensive house prices. They are victims of what I like to call bracket creep.

The House might be interested to hear a few figures from Zoopla, showing how the tax hits huge numbers of people across the political divide. In Rutland, Leicestershire, the average house price is £319,000. In Witney, Oxfordshire, it is £324,000. In Twickenham, it is £653,000; in Bath, £355,000; in Cheltenham, £304,000; in Southwark, £653,000; in Bethnal Green, £447,000. I hope that I have demonstrated in that snapshot that the issue affects all parties and areas across the country. The Chancellor might be interested to know that the average house price in his constituency of Tatton is £640,000, with a stamp duty liability of £25,600.

As MP for St Albans, I am regularly told tales of woe by home buyers there. When I asked my local estate agents at Collinson Hall what effect they believed the stamp duty land tax was having on the housing market, some of the things that they said were shocking. To quote their e-mail to me:

“I do, however, believe that the real lack of supply of properties in St Albans between £650,000 and £1 million is due to the majority of local people who in earlier times would have been looking to sell in this price range and buy upwards in the market deciding to extend their own property instead of moving, due to the moving costs including SDLT of around 6%. This scarcity is in turn having a direct impact on prices increasing.”

People’s lack of willingness to move and their decision to stay put, rather than be clobbered with the duty, is resulting in a sclerosis in the market.

Shockingly, Collinson Hall went on to say that

“we find that more buyers use stamp duty as a negotiating tool to drive an asking price down, and we do have to be extremely careful when pricing a property that would be close to a stamp duty threshold. For example, if we feel a property is likely to be worth £265,000, the conversation would likely be, ‘You are definitely going to get £250,000 because of the change in stamp duty, but if you price it at £275,000-£280,000’—

thus inflating the price—

“‘you may get someone that feels it is priced enough over the threshold to justify paying the extra stamp duty.’”

That is bizarre. I cannot believe that we should price houses to move them away from certain thresholds so that in the end people feel, “Well, they’re never going to accept the lower figure, so I’ll pay it.” It is having an effect on the market in areas such as mine.

According to the TaxPayers Alliance, by 2017-18, 87% of homes in St Albans will be in the 3% band or higher. If we believe that the levy was introduced to clobber those who are more affluent, I cannot accept that 87% of all homes in my constituency will catch those people. I have areas of multiple deprivation in my constituency, as I am sure do other colleagues here, and people there are being hit just as hard trying to stay in the area close to their families.

It is getting harder and harder for public sector workers to afford living in higher-priced areas such as my constituency. They are priced out by high house values and doubly clobbered by having to pay stamp duty. A tax that I believe was originally designed for wealthy home buyers now brings so much money into the Treasury that—I say this to the Minister—it is now seen as an untouchable cash cow, too big and too lucrative to be tinkered with.

Collection of stamp duty in its current form enshrines inequality, denies fair access to home ownership and taxes aspiration. It is discriminatory, targeting certain areas of the country regardless of ability to pay. That

[Mrs Anne Main]

cannot be fair. Ordinary families are being clobbered the most by the tax. To give an example of how the middle-class postcode tax, as I call it, works, here are three starting salaries for public sector workers: a nurse is paid just over £21,000, a teacher just over £22,000 and a police officer just over £23,000. Those are certainly not riches beyond avarice, but many in the public sector in my constituency and others like it earn such salaries.

If such people are trying to save for their first home, they have a mountain to climb. While they wait to get their finances in place, they will face, according to Zoopla, a crippling average home rental in the south and east of £1,765 a month. They will have to shell out an awful lot of their modest salaries just to live in the area that they serve by working in the public sector. If they are not paying rent, they may be squatting like overgrown cuckoos in their parents' home, while they pile as much money as possible into their savings pot or piggy bank to get on the housing ladder. If they are young graduates, 9% of their income will already have been sliced directly out of their salary through the tax system to pay for any student loans. They face a housing market that has risen by 27% over the past five years, according to the Office for National Statistics. House prices are zooming out of reach. They will have to scrape together a deposit and fees. Then, if they happen to be a victim of the postcode tax, they will have to save for stamp duty on top of everything else.

The reason why it is a postcode tax is that—as will become apparent if hon. Members go to property websites—in some postcodes, hardly anyone pays any tax to the Chancellor, not even 1% tax on a modest three-bedroom semi-detached house. In other areas, such as mine, the same house has a huge 3% tax bill attached to it. Houses of £500,000 and under are not mansions. They are ordinary family homes for many of us. That is why we must tackle the bands to banish the unfairness of bracket creep.

Take the middle figure among our public sector employees, a young teacher with a salary of just over £22,000. That salary would go a lot further, for example, in Droitwich, a pleasant spa town in the midlands where the average house price is £203,000—well under the 3% limit with a tax duty of just over £2,000. In St Albans, the same house would cost an average of £475,000. According to the latest figures, it would incur a whopping £13,701 in tax.

People working in our public sector, aspiring to achieve the same things, are, in certain areas, having to put a large amount aside to pay tax—and for what? What are they getting that that teacher in Droitwich does not get? They have the same salaries, same job, same hopes and dreams of their own home and, hopefully, a family; but in areas such as mine, there is a massive financial hill to climb, and people are finding themselves unable to access the housing market, no matter how hard they work or save, and doomed, at best, to squeeze into tiny spaces unsuitable for family living.

Is it any wonder that, according to MoneySuperMarket, people are aged 36 before they can expect to get on the property ladder in the south and east? That is nearly middle-aged. By 36 most of us feel that we should have achieved things with our lives. We are sitting on a time bomb. A whole generation will, according to the Office

for National Statistics, have their first child when they are 30—before the age at which they can expect to be on the housing ladder—and probably be divorced by 40, possibly due to the pressures of trying to get on the housing ladder, having spent their entire adult lives, or at least the most productive part of their adult lives, unable to put a roof over their own heads and battling financial stresses. That is not the mark of a caring or fair society. I do not believe that that was intended when stamp duty land tax was originally thought of. It is a stealth tax, because people are unaware of exactly how much they are going to pay until they find the house that they want to buy. It is not a tax that allows anyone to figure the amount of savings into paying it. It is variable.

This is a timely debate, as the major parties are now furiously refining their policies, which will later appear in manifestos, and then we will have a chance to thrash things out. It was interesting to see that in a speech in “Total Politics”—it was pointed out to me—the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), prior to the Labour party's manifesto being made, gave a commitment to get rid of stamp duty land tax for all houses under £250,000. Sadly, that did not make it into his manifesto, or into ours. I should like to know the Labour party's view of whether there should be movement in the bands.

It is time to give some helpful suggestions to the Chancellor before his autumn statement and tease out from the Labour party what commitments it would like to make to the British public, because as I said earlier, this affects everyone; it does not matter whether people are in a Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrat constituency.

We have a duty to help the next generation get on the ladder to owning their own home. The Government have recognised this. On 30 April, during Prime Minister's questions, I asked him about considering stamp duty thresholds and helping young people get on the housing ladder. He said that he was

“very happy to look at the issues that she raises, but the weapon that we have used to try to help young people who do not have rich parents but who can afford mortgage payments is Help to Buy”.—[*Official Report*, 30 April 2014; Vol. 579, c. 828.]

I agree with the Prime Minister that home ownership should not be about the bank of mum and dad, but in constituencies such as mine, it is about the bank of mum and dad. In many ordinary families, parents do not raid the savings account or the trust fund, but will often downsize to release equity.

It is ironic that in constituencies such as mine parents who trade down to release equity to help their children will usually pay stamp duty on their smaller property as well, and then hand over money to help pay the stamp duty on the son or daughter's purchase. Taxed on the way up and taxed on the way down.

Although the Help to Buy scheme is a valuable tool that works in some parts of the country, as has been shown by statistics, the areas where it does work are those with lower-priced houses. It is not well taken up in areas with high-value house prices, such as mine. In the two years between March 2012 and 2014, only seven people have used the Help to Buy New Buy scheme in St Albans. No one has just used the Help to Buy scheme. Why? If a buyer cannot scrape together a big enough deposit to qualify for the Help to Buy scheme,

how on earth are they going to save to pay the tax associated with it as well? The Chancellor is helping giving with one hand and taking back with the other. That is so unfair. If a young person qualifies for the Help to Buy scheme, where are they getting the money from for the tax due on a high-value property? It cannot be rolled up into their mortgage, so it is the bank of mum and dad again? I think that it would have to be; either that or, hopefully, somebody will lend it to them from another source. Therefore, we are pushing people more into debt.

We must not try to tinker with the Help to Buy scheme, because it will not remain in place in perpetuity for first-time buyers, and it certainly does not help people who are downsizing. Unless we tackle stamp duty, it will be an ever-increasing obstacle to property ownership. The Homeowners Alliance points out that stamp duty has risen 7.1 times faster than inflation, 6.5 times faster than average earnings and 4.6 times faster than house prices. Stamp duty is proving a significant barrier to first-time buyers getting on to the property ladder and slowing existing homeowners' progress up the ladder. The average stamp duty bill is now the equivalent of 11 weeks' wages—for what?

Too many constituents of all ages, whether they are moving up or down the ladder, point out the unfairness of being taxed multiple times in high-value areas such as the south and the east. People are taxed if a couple splits up and one has to buy the other out if they want a property; taxed if a divorcing couple have to buy two less expensive properties in areas like mine—they will still pay stamp duty—further diminishing their ability to stay in the area, which is perhaps where their children go to school; taxed if a separated single father tries to buy to stay near his children; taxed if they are elderly and want to downsize to help supplement funds for personal care. Taxed on the way up and taxed on the way down.

Stamp duty land tax is a strong contender for the worst-designed tax, because the relevant rate applies to the full sale price. Transactions of very similar value are discouraged to completely different degrees and there are enormous incentives to keep prices just below the thresholds, as Collinson's estate agents have pointed out. The Government should move away from this slab structure and tackle the unfairness of paying stamp duty on ordinary homes below £500,000. Overhauling stamp duty, as my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab) said today in *The Daily Telegraph*, would fuel growth and increase wider tax receipts, and, above all, it would be fair and increase property ownership for those we say we would like to help.

These artificial ceilings distort the market. Builders tell me that home owners put off doing improvements to homes—I had an e-mail to that effect—that are at threshold level. What would be the point of making those improvements if no money would ever be recouped? Sellers come up with creative wheezes to stay just below the threshold. Such a ceiling reduces labour mobility, because people are discouraged from moving to where suitable jobs are available. Data from the Land Registry show bunching below stamp duty thresholds.

Let me mention a St Albans house move example that could so easily be an example from Cheltenham or Tatton. On average, a person moves four times in their lifetime. In St Albans and many other areas, particularly

in the south and east, this could be their property journey: first home, a small flat, average price just over £262,463 and purchase price incurring 3% tax of £7,873; second home, a small terrace, average price of £393,543 but more than £11,806 tax due; third home, a modest family detached, £759,191 and now paying more than £30,000 tax; and when the family flies the nest, hopefully when deposits have been saved up, Mr and Mrs Average in St Albans downsize to their fourth home, a modest semi-detached at £492,802, paying nearly £15,000 in tax. Of course, that family could have moved many more times. Nevertheless, during those four moves, they will have a stamp duty spend of more than £64,000. The average wage is only £37,000 in St Albans, and obviously a lot less for younger people, so that is nearly two years' pay just to be able to move house, on top of all the fees.

According to a Lloyds survey of my constituency, people in St Albans pay 34% of their disposable income on their mortgage payment, compared with the 28% average. Although stamp duty hits London and the south-east particularly hard, analysis of the data shows that it is a huge burden on the entire country. The key findings of this research are that in 2012-13, more than £4 billion was paid by home buyers in stamp duty, of which £3.6 billion was paid at a rate of 3% or more, which shows that a significant number—indeed, the majority—of homes are coming into this 3% bracket. We should not be clobbering people just because we can. I think that tax should be fair and proportionate and should not suck ever more people of modest means into its remit.

If a tax has a negative impact on society, as Members of Parliament, we should tackle it. It too easy to say, "There is a black hole. Let's fill it." I read in the paper yesterday that Mr Speaker has decided to spend £100,000 more in his budget. We spend a lot of money in the House moving the furniture around and decorating things that seem perfectly fine to me. We waste money, left, right and centre, in Departments, on ministerial cars, and so on, and even, I would say, giving free school meals that we cannot afford or do need to give to children in areas such as mine, for example. We can look at other budgets. Why are we clobbering young people trying to own their own home? It is not fair; it is too simplistic and too easy; and the desperate aspiration to get on the housing ladder means that people will have to stump up somehow, if they wish to do it.

It is obvious that the first two brackets are catching significant numbers of ordinary people, many of whom can least afford it. I call on the Minister—I am pleased to see him here—to go back to the Chancellor, persuaded of the case that we should get rid of this unfair postcode tax on thousands of ordinary families with homes worth less than £500,000. They are being stamped on by the Treasury, and it is just not fair.

1.50 pm

**Mr Dominic Raab** (Esher and Walton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts, I think for the first time. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) on securing this important debate with her characteristic tenacity. I can only reinforce the compelling arguments she has made, which I am sure will be conveyed to the Chancellor through Treasury Ministers and Parliamentary Private Secretaries. I hope that that will result in further action on this important issue.

[Mr Dominic Raab]

I start on the key point of principle of economics: a well functioning housing market should enable people to engage in mutually beneficial transactions and make efficient use of existing housing stock. We know that we have a problem with the supply of housing stock, which is all the more reason to make the best use of the stock we have. I pay tribute to the coalition for its efforts to increase the overall housing supply and, in particular, the supply of affordable housing.

What does that principle mean for the average person? A family in a small house should be able to move to a larger one, if they need to or if they have a growing family, or because of a promotion from working harder. Older couples should not be forgotten. They want to be free to downsize when and how they want, not least to free up cash for other needs. They might want to go travelling, if they are in good health. They might want or need to use the money for care, or they might want to realise some of the value from their assets and free up some money from them. We should not be creaming money off people with those real social needs. The key point is that stamp duty is a poorly designed tax that undercuts that type of social mobility in both directions.

Further to what my hon. Friend said, I have all sorts of horror stories from my constituency, where we feel the disproportionate burden of stamp duty. Some families in Elmbridge are on very high incomes, but overall, looking beyond the small minority who are doing incredibly well and are very affluent, the truth is—I see this day to day, week to week and month to month—that it is no land of milk and honey. The vast majority are hard-working people on low and middle incomes. We also have pockets of acute deprivation and, in particular, as I alluded to, elderly deprivation. For many residents, their home is a nest egg that has been built up after years of saving. They may be asset-rich in statistical terms, but they are income-poor. They might want to downsize or need to release the cash for income or the cost of care, and stamp duty has an utterly arbitrary impact on them.

As my hon. Friend said, many key workers in local public services simply find it unaffordable to live locally, and stamp duty exacerbates that problem. Above all, I want to take time to speak out as a voice for the many people in low and middle-income households. They are working hard and facing high cost of living pressures, of which affordable housing is a major factor. As of the second quarter of last year, the median house price in Elmbridge was £445,000. That does not buy a mansion. Typically, it fetches a nice, but relatively modest-sized, two-bedroom home. According to market data, a family in a small home looking to buy a larger one would face a bill of £13,000 on the average two-bedroom property and a bill of £23,000 on the average three-bedroom home.

**Mrs Main:** Is my hon. Friend as concerned as I am about families growing up in cramped environments? What space is there for children to study? There is a direct correlation between people living in cramped conditions and achievement in life. If we are not allowing people to move up, that could be part of the problem.

**Mr Raab:** My hon. Friend has made a typically astute point. The problem has a social impact as well as an economic one. Let us remember that stamp duty

costs are on top of the tax on income, the money that families scrape together for a deposit, the legal fees, which are increasingly high, and the money for a survey. The cumulative bill in my constituency is staggering. To give a sense of the big picture, for 2012-13, residents in my constituency paid £56 million to the Exchequer in stamp duty on residential property. That is more than the total paid in the whole of the north-east of England. I am not trying to set off some sort of north-south divide, but at some point in the debate on the redistribution of wealth, there needs to be some recognition that it is not just the uber-wealthy and the super rich who are paying the burden; it is middle England, the middle classes and those on relatively low and middling incomes.

The amount of stamp duty paid in my constituency is equivalent to a third of the figure for the entirety of Scotland. Frankly, in constituencies such as mine, stamp duty feels like an assault by the taxman on hard-working, middle-income savers, who are precisely the people we should be incentivising, not walloping—I would have said “clobbering”, but my hon. Friend has used that word. Of course, Esher and Walton is just one example of the geographic unevenness of stamp duty. London accounted for 41% of residential stamp duty last year, with the south-east accounting for a further 22%. England as a whole accounts for 94% of UK stamp duty. The tax clearly has an arbitrary effect in different areas of Britain.

More broadly, the tax is not economically efficient. If we look at the raw economics—I know my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) and the Minister care deeply about economic efficiency—we see that it is an inefficient tax. Stamp duty on residential property distorts the whole structure of the housing market. My hon. Friend the Member for St Albans has mentioned the slab structure, under which the relevant rates apply to the full sale price, not just the part above the relevant threshold. That creates huge cliff edges. A £1 increase in the price of a home, from just under £250,000 to just over, triggers an extra tax liability of £5,000. The cliff edges have been shown to harm both home owners and would-be buyers. After all, why would someone put an offer in for a property at £255,000, when for the extra £5,000 in bricks and mortar, they would pay more in stamp duty? They would not—no one does, and the data from all the estate agents bear that out.

Data on the distribution of transactions show that most buyers are simply unable or unwilling to meet asking prices just above the £250,000 threshold, because of the extra £5,000 penalty in stamp duty. As a result, the property experts London Central Portfolio, together with the Cass business school, has estimated that 13,800 home owners a year are being forced to reduce the asking price of their house to get under a stamp duty threshold. Other would-be sellers are either unable or unwilling to reduce their prices to below the nearest threshold. That causes bottlenecks in the market and a drought of available properties in certain price ranges in certain areas, until market prices rise far enough to justify the additional stamp duty, which takes a while. That deters buyers and sellers and reduces labour mobility, as my hon. Friend pointed out, because people are discouraged from moving to where suitable jobs are available, which damages the economy as a whole. It is little wonder, therefore, that the Institute for Fiscal Studies has described stamp duty as “a strong contender for the UK’s worst designed tax”,

with a “perverse” and “absurd” structure. The director of the IFS argued earlier this year that in the modern era of broadly-based taxation, the case for maintaining stamp duty is “very weak indeed”.

However, it is not just the economic distortions and inefficiencies that we should care about. Frankly, Government Members have perhaps been a bit too defensive about coming out and saying squarely, as my hon. Friend has, that this is socially unfair and wrong. That is illustrated by the data from my constituency and the impact of the 1% rate, let alone the 3% rate. Take a family—a two-salary couple who both earn £15,000 a year—who are mortgaged to the hilt to buy a property. The usual limit, which is strictly enforced, is debt at four times joint salary. They have scraped together the money for a 10% deposit, and that way they can buy a property at £150,000. Why should they pay £1,500 extra in tax at that point? It is just a penalty. It might seem like a small percentage of the price of the property, but for families on tight margins, working hard, it is utterly punitive.

When the additional 3% and 4% rates were introduced in 2000, they were designed to target the wealthiest, and had the original threshold for the 3% rate risen in line with house price inflation, it would be levied only on properties worth £1.3 million or more today. In 2000, 391,000 homes were exempt from stamp duty. Today, that number has almost halved. That is the level, scope and scale of the fiscal drag we are discussing. The average UK house price in 2000 was around £110,000, which is well below the 3% threshold, but the average price today, according to the Office for National Statistics, is £265,000, which is well over the 3% rate, landing middle-income home buyers with a bill of some £8,000. If we are really in the business of supporting and encouraging savers, how on earth can we justify such a penalty? Sales in the 3% band covering homes worth between £250,000 and £500,000 increased from 8% as a proportion of total sales in 2003 to 19% in 2013. According to London Central Portfolio and the Cass business school, revenue from the 3% band has almost tripled since 2000, rising from £724 million to close to £2 billion this year.

Such a fiscal drag is not only a serious problem in its own right, but should also serve as the starkest of warnings to anyone in any party who is tempted by a mansion tax, as proposed by Labour and the Liberal Democrats. That is perhaps why no Labour Back Benchers are here to justify either the stealth tax implemented by the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), or their current proposals.

**Mrs Main:** I am pleased that my hon. Friend mentions the mansion tax, because there has been much rhetoric about it catching only the wealthiest. I completely agree with him that people felt that the 3% stamp duty threshold was not for them and only for the wealthiest, but in areas such as mine and his, it will soon become a mansion tax for the ordinary and not the wealthy.

**Mr Raab:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When the Liberal Democrats originally started discussing a mansion tax, it was to be levied on homes worth £1 million, and when everyone complained about fiscal drag, stamp duty and the like, it was increased to £2 million. What is

most interesting is that if the Liberal Democrats use that extra money for the perfectly laudable objective of increasing the personal tax allowance still further, there is a black hole of something like £6 billion in their spending plans, so they would have to increase the net of their mansion tax. The lesson from stamp duty that the Labour party has offered us, which the Liberal Democrats ignore and which Conservatives must take on board, is that what starts out as a tax on the rich always ends up—I will use the word my hon. Friend used—clobbering the middle classes. That is the stark reality that we must guard against.

Stamp duty should be abolished for homes under £500,000 and the remaining thresholds should be indexed to house price inflation in primary legislation. It would be a dynamic tax cut that would probably—it can never be guaranteed—raise additional revenue. I set out in a report for the Centre for Policy Studies how we could fund the change up front by cutting back on the waste mentioned by my hon. Friend. Extra revenue could be raised while a major economic and social issue is dealt with.

Stamp duty has morphed into a vindictive stealth tax on aspirational Britain. It distorts the housing market. It warps labour mobility. It penalises savers. It wallops those on relatively low and middle incomes. The case for reform is overwhelming.

2.4 pm

**Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con):** It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Betts, and to follow two superb speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for St Albans (Mrs Main) and for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab), both of whom have made points with which I agree completely; I will do my best not to duplicate the message that they have delivered, partly because I will not deliver it as well as they have. I will be interested to hear a thorough response from not only the Minister, but also the Opposition Front-Bench spokeswoman, because many questions have been asked about matters such as the mansion tax and the central issue of stamp duty.

We have a housing crisis in this country. No one argues with that. Home ownership is in historic decline, falling to the lowest levels since 1988. That matters if one cares about social harmony and stability and if one believes it important that people should have a stake in society. It could not be more important. We clearly need more homes, a big issue debated in the House on many occasions, and people need better access to finance, another massive issue that has already taken up a lot of time in the past four years that I have been an MP. I will not dwell on those issues today, however, because we have in front of us a simple but radical tool that, as my hon. Friends have pointed out, could make an immediate difference—the difference between affordability and unaffordability for a whole swathe of people.

The problems that have been highlighted are particularly acute in London, where the average first home price is some £330,000—squarely within the 3% stamp duty band, adding thousands of pounds to the bill. My constituency covers Richmond and north Kingston, but according to the latest figures for Richmond borough, 96% of homes are likely to be in the 3% band by 2017-18. It is worth repeating that of the total £4.7 billion

[Zac Goldsmith]

stamp duty yield in England, almost half is paid by those living in Greater London. Stamp duty could therefore fairly be described as a tax on London. Unsurprisingly, young people in London find it almost impossible to get a foot on the property ladder as a result. The surge in property prices means that the number of households paying stamp duty has more than doubled over the past decade. It is particularly punitive for first-time buyers, who are denied access to home ownership.

Rather than repeat all the excellent remarks that have been made, I am going to get straight to the point. I strongly support the campaign to reform stamp duty. We should absolutely abolish stamp duty for first-time buyers. I would set the threshold at £500,000, but there is a debate to be had about where it should be. It is worth remembering that in 2007 the Chancellor pledged to scrap stamp duty for first-time buyers up to a level of £250,000. The stamp-duty holiday was tried for a couple of years and ended in 2012. It is worth reminding the Chancellor that it was an important pledge at the time and is probably more important now than when it was initially made. He ought to revisit it, but more bullishly this time. We could form a consensus, certainly on this side of the House, at a threshold of some £500,000 for first-time buyers.

We should change how stamp duty works and move away from the brutal, nonsensical cliff-edge system that distorts the market, and we could form a consensus around that. We need to move towards a progressive system in which the increased rate from one band to the next applies only to the difference between the two bands. The current system makes absolutely no sense at all.

All that could mean a loss of revenue to the Treasury, but I doubt that. It would stimulate activity and have a positive impact. If it led to a decline in Treasury income, we could adjust rates for foreign buyers of UK properties and apply capital gains tax even to their primary residences, because the evidence suggests that overseas investors in bricks and mortar are having an impact on the housing market, particularly in London.

At the end of the day, we want people to get on the housing ladder, and the current stamp duty regime inhibits that. It inhibits something that every single person in the House would support. With minimal effort, the Chancellor could make the world of difference for countless aspiring home owners. I strongly urge him to do so.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** Order. Before I call Marcus Jones, I thank him for the indication that he may have to leave this debate for PPS duties in the Chamber if the next debate there starts before we finish here.

2.9 pm

**Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con):** Thank you, Mr Betts, for that latitude.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) on securing an extremely important debate. I come to it as one of the many Members, particularly

Conservative Members, who have worked in the real world before coming to the House; I used to act for people buying and selling residential properties. I have conducted thousands of residential conveyancing transactions, so I have seen at first hand the effect of stamp duty and some of the challenges that it can cause.

Back in the '90s, the stamp duty level was £30,000, although it was quickly doubled to £60,000 by the Conservative Government of the time. I remember, however, a long period under the Labour Government when the rate was held at £60,000, and right up until 2003 virtually every single transaction was subject to stamp duty. We are getting back to that point now, even in the type of area that I represent in the midlands, where house prices are below the average. When stamp duty was first introduced, it was not envisaged as catching people buying at the bottom end of the market, as it now seems to be. Stamp duty does not affect only the south-east and London. I understand why Members representing those areas, where it is an issue, are present, but it is something that affects the whole country.

I am going to make a few points about how stamp duty is calculated. First, there is the slab rate; as we all know, if people buy a property at £250,000, they have to pay £2,500 in stamp duty for the privilege of that transaction. If they purchase a property for £250,001, the stamp duty goes from £2,500 to £7,500—a massive leap. As my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab) said, that causes a huge market distortion, particularly for people who are selling properties valued by estate agents at £255,000, £265,000, £270,000 or even £275,000. In such cases, most buyers will say, “That’s fine, but I don’t want to pay £8,000 or £9,000 in stamp duty, so I do not want to pay £270,000 for your property. I want to buy it for £250,000, because the stamp duty is far lower.”

There is also a problem for many second-time movers. At one time, many of them would have been able to take mortgages with a loan-to-value ratio such that they could afford to finance the stamp duty out of the overall transaction, putting it into their mortgage. People might think that that is a good or a bad thing, to put a tax debt over 25 years or whatever the mortgage term is, but that is what a lot of people did to accommodate it. Over the past years, however, with the tightening of mortgage lending, lenders have decided that they no longer want to see that happen, which has made things difficult for second-time movers.

Another thing caused by stamp duty has been, traditionally, the move by some people to commit tax avoidance—on the part of some, even tax evasion. For obvious reasons, I always discouraged people from doing that; in some cases, I said that I would not act for those trying to commit tax evasion. I have heard of all sorts of ideas—carpets and curtains for a couple of thousand pounds being the obvious trick to avoid stamp duty.

I have even heard of someone saying, “This is the price, then x amount on top, and I will throw in a second-hand car.” That type of practice is what people talk about as a way to get around our slab rate system. I do not condone it and I would never do that for people; I hate to think that others have conducted such transactions. When people are buying property and paying stamp duty, we must always remember that it is their personal liability and not that of the adviser advising them.

**Mrs Main:** One of the worst cases that I have heard is of people selling properties with planning permission for a large extension, so that they do not then pay stamp duty on the builder building the extension, but simply on the property that they have bought. That is the most outrageous case that I have heard recently.

**Mr Jones:** That can also happen.

We need to look at the slab rate again and to consider the distorting effect that it has on the market and the difficulties that it causes people, whether buying or selling—for people who want to sell because they want to downsize, or people who want to sell because they want to move on. That is one of the reasons why some of the suggestions that I have heard over the years to charge stamp duty to the seller would also be completely inappropriate and unacceptable; it would place a massive burden on those trying to sell the investment that they have often worked for over many years.

I make a final plea to Ministers. If they are ever minded to make any changes to how stamp duty is charged or to its rates, will they be extremely careful about how they do it? Back in the dark days of the great Labour recession in 2008, following pressure from the Conservative party, the then Prime Minister and Chancellor decided to create a stamp duty holiday. They announced it with great fanfare in the press and on the media, but it was probably six or seven weeks before the policy was implemented.

I can tell hon. Members that a flat property market was depressed further, because people did not want to conduct transactions between when that announcement was made and when the measure came in, because that would not make financial sense and they could save money. I implore Ministers to make any changes carefully and to consider the implications for the overall housing market, which is extremely important to our economy. The housing market is now on the move, which is part of the reason why our services sector in this country is doing so well.

I ask Ministers to consider the issue extremely carefully. It affects not only the south-east or London, but all parts of the country in differing ways. It creates massive distortion, because of the slab rate. I ask the Minister to consider it carefully not only in reply to the debate, but in his work on our party manifesto.

**Mr John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con) *rose—*

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** Order. I say to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr Redwood) that it is slightly unconventional to come into the Chamber halfway through the debate; as he is aware, other people have spoken and a debate is normally about exchanging views and listening to other people. On this occasion, however, we have plenty of time and I will still call him.

2.17 pm

**Mr John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): I am grateful, Mr Betts, and I give my apologies to you and to the Chamber, but my constituents also wanted me to make it clear that Wokingham supported the puppies motion in the main Chamber. I felt that I had to do that first, before coming to debate the important issue of stamp duty. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for

St Albans (Mrs Main), who proposed it as a subject for debate. I supported her, so it would have been wrong not to attend and pledge my support.

I have three main reasons to advance for why the Government should do something to reduce the imposition of individual stamp duty on property transactions. First, the existing stamp duty regime has an adverse impact on home ownership, which the Government should wish to promote. Secondly, the regime does not optimise the revenues; we could get more revenue out of stamp duty if we had lower and different rates. Thirdly, it distorts the housing market adversely, meaning that many people are deterred from buying and selling and from obtaining the kind of housing that they most need or want by the extra charges that the Government have imposed on this most essential of goods and services.

I strongly support the Government in their wish to see home ownership promoted. As they are well aware, however, in many parts of the country house prices are high relative to incomes and have been rising in recent months as a result of the Government's success in stimulating credit, transactions and activity in the economy again.

Although we welcome the general growth and that upwards movement, as well as the fact that some extra houses are now being built, the Government must be aware that housing is extremely expensive for many people who wish to get on the first rung of the housing ladder or who would like to trade up from a smaller house to a location where they can accommodate their children and make a good family home for them.

One reason for that expense is that many people now face paying stamp duty on quite modest homes. Such people are often not rich but are having to pay substantial sums—many thousands of pounds—to the Government for the privilege of getting their first home or moving to a home that is more suited to their needs. I would hope that the Government would want to find a way of easing the burden on people who wish to buy their first home or the right home for their family, particularly if that can be done without having much or any adverse impact on revenues.

My second reason is that if we look at the pattern of stamp duties, we see that the Government have not got total revenues back to their level prior to the crash, yet we now have extra higher rates in the system. We should ask whether the rates are now acting as a kind of deterrent to people undertaking transactions, particularly at the top end of the market, leading to revenues being depressed. We need to bear in mind that in the most expensive parts of the country—indeed, in large areas of the country—house prices are now at or higher than their level before the crash. Stamp duty on shares is now also reflecting the fact that share prices are back at new highs thanks to the success of the general economic policy. There is a case for saying that we would get more transactions if we had a different structure of rates or, in some cases, lower rates, and that there would be a volume offset to the obvious loss on individual transactions.

The third reason is the damage being done to the general market. I know quite a few people who would like to move down the housing ladder—their families have left home and they could do with a smaller place—but the total costs of the transaction put them off. The fact that the buyer has to pay a large stamp duty on the

[Mr John Redwood]

house they are going to buy might be a further deterrent to the transaction taking place at all, because that will affect market prices.

We can see an obvious market distortion because the Government have inherited and lived with the slab-rate approach to stamp duty taxation. If someone moves from trying to buy a flat or house at £125,000 to trying to buy one at £125,001, they suddenly have to pay £1,250 in tax, whereas they pay none when the price is £1 lower. At the £250,000 threshold, there is a sudden slab increase of £5,000 in extra tax if the flat or house someone is trying to buy goes up from £250,000 to £250,001, and at the £500,000 threshold there is a £5,000 increase if the price goes up by £1. In practice, people will not try to sell properties at £250,000 plus a little bit or at £500,000 and a little bit, because the huge increase in tax incurred when that threshold is crossed makes that unrealistic.

We therefore now have zombie price ranges in the marketplace, in which there are very few or no transactions. People hold fire: if they have a property worth £250,000, and the market is rising, they think, "Well, I'll wait until it is worth £275,000 or £300,000. I won't sell now because it will be very difficult to sell at £255,000: everyone will want to knock me down by £5,000 or so, to avoid the big increase in stamp duty." We are creating a distortion, which is another reason why there are parts of the market in which people are much more reluctant to bring their properties to the market at all, because the stamp duty is getting in the way of proper price formation.

What could be the answer to all those problems? I do not like taxes very much at all, as the Minister knows, but I know that our constituents want good schools and good hospitals, and that those cost money; I also know that we are still borrowing too much as a country. The Minister therefore has a problem and needs to maintain revenues from a variety of sources. We need a system that still enables him to collect revenue from property—that is the situation he inherited and that is the current need—but we also need one that is more likely to produce a bit more revenue while easing some of the burdens.

My first suggestion, then, is that we taper the tax rather than having a slab rate. If we put in a taper, it would make homes more affordable at £125,000 to £150,000 and at £250,000 to £300,000. The market would start to clear again in those quite popular price ranges, which are currently being restricted or removed all together. That would also help with extra transactions.

That is how I would start off. The Minister will doubtless have some figures from his Treasury model claiming that that would produce too big a revenue loss. He will also know, however, that the Treasury has always been wildly pessimistic about any kind of Laffer effect on taxation and that the policy of cutting top-rate income tax from 50% to 45% has produced a massive surge of revenue. There was obviously no loss there, but in fact quite a big increase. Conversely, we know that moving the capital gains tax rate up from 18% to 28% has done a lot of damage to revenues and did not produce the expected increase.

The same could be true of stamp duty. We need to experiment. The Minister could try the idea at one or other of the thresholds, rather than the whole lot, if he

is really nervous and cannot get the Treasury numbers changed, but we need to find out. I think I will be right. I would start at the lowest end, because that is where most people are affected and where affordability is the biggest issue of all. I urge the Minister to do that. We need more home ownership, which means having a lower and a different profile of tax, and better market clearing so that people can buy and sell and have the property they want of the size they want, which will also help. I urge him to do it for the revenue as well.

2.26 pm

**Shabana Mahmood** (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) on securing this important debate. She was right that the matter of stamp duty has not been debated very much from a principled position; we have had a number of debates in proceedings on Finance Bills about technical changes that the Government have introduced to stamp duty, particularly on the annual tax on enveloped dwellings, but we have only rarely discussed the issue in the manner that we have today. Her securing of this debate has allowed some important issues to be raised.

The hon. Lady said that she hoped that we could move away from politics. I am not sure about that, as taxation and tax issues are perhaps politics in its purest form, but I accept her point about partisanship in our approach to this debate. People across the country, in constituencies of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Members alike, are all affected in various ways by stamp duty and the rising cost of housing. Her argument about the impact in London and the south-east on people on more modest incomes was particularly well made.

The hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab) and other Members discussed the slab structure that is a particularly problematic feature of this tax. Many commentators have called for reform of that structure. He also raised our mansion tax policy, so I hope you will forgive me, Mr Betts, if I take a moment to clarify the details of our proposals.

I make no apology for our policy to levy a mansion tax on properties worth £2 million or more. Let me be clear: only properties worth over £2 million would be affected by our proposals and that limit would be raised each year, either in line with the overall rate of inflation or—and there is a strong case for this—in line with the rise in house prices, to make sure that more modest properties were not brought into the scope of the tax.

**Mr Raab:** I thank the hon. Lady for that clarification, although there are serious questions about the amount of revenue that a Labour Government would be able to raise. Will the indexation be linked to local house prices or overall house prices? Although the threshold for the tax would rise superficially, there would still be a real risk of the arbitrary geographical unevenness that hon. Members have talked about.

**Shabana Mahmood:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I have received submissions from various experts on the matter and we are looking at it very closely. We are clear about our start position. We do not want more modest properties to be brought into



the mansion tax regime, and we are looking carefully at the details of our ultimate policy to ensure that that does not happen. I have had conversations with people about the issue, but I cannot tell him today what we will ultimately be able to take forward.

**Mrs Main:** For clarification, before the hon. Lady moved on to her mansion tax, she mentioned the slab structure, which was introduced by a Labour Government. Do the Opposition have any plans in their manifesto to tackle the slab structure at the same time as introducing the mansion tax? I am sure that she has received representations on that.

**Shabana Mahmood:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention. She is right. I have received representations about the slab structure, as, I am sure, has the Minister. It is one feature of stamp duty that causes particular consternation, as we have heard from all hon. Members who have spoken in the debate today. I cannot make a manifesto commitment today, but I will make it clear later in my speech that we are alive to the issues raised today and that we are looking at them carefully.

I was pleased that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr Redwood) made a customary reference to the Laffer curve. I feel that these debates are not quite what they should be if there is not at least one reference to the Laffer curve. I was pleased that he was able to make that point.

I acknowledge the passionate views of hon. Members in this debate. There has been a vigorous campaign on the issue. I suspect that many hon. Members are less concerned about what I have to say about Labour policy and more concerned about what the Minister might do ahead of the autumn statement on 3 December. We saw a similar vigorous campaign ahead of the Budget earlier this year. In the lead up to that Budget, the expectation was that there might be a doubling of the threshold to £250,000 and the introduction of a stamp duty tax credit system, but the Government did not ultimately go down that path. I suspect we are seeing a similar build-up of lobbying for the Government to do something in the autumn statement.

**Mr Raab:** Does the hon. Lady agree with the comments by the deputy Labour leader that the middle classes should pay more tax, and is that something that will feed into Labour policies on the mansion tax and stamp duty?

**Shabana Mahmood:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I think the point that the deputy leader was making was about progressive taxation and the argument that those who are wealthier should pay more. That is the thinking behind our mansion tax policy. His Government have presided over more people being brought into the 40p tax band, for example, and he could ask his Minister about that today.

Stamp duty is a matter of growing concern to the public and a significant burden on people wanting to buy a new home, particularly first-time buyers. I acknowledge the strength of feeling among hon. Members and throughout the country, but I am not in a position to make a spending commitment via this debate. Stamp duty brings in a large and growing amount of revenue,

and any policy change in this area would have to be fully funded. Our start point as an incoming Labour Government in 2015 would be the current Government's spending plans for 2015-16 and any change to that spending round would have to be fully funded. That has been the thinking behind the policies we have unveiled. They are all fully funded and primarily involve switching from one area of spend to another to deal with some of our child care priorities and other measures.

The difficult financial position that an incoming Labour Government in 2015 would inherit means that we would have to make some difficult choices. Given that, our focus has been wider reform of the housing market and how it might stimulate greater home ownership. In particular, the problem of housing supply has become acute in the past few years and is causing many problems, such as people having to rely on the bank of mum and dad and home ownership occurring much later in life. The hon. Member for St Albans made a point about that, and it is true.

We are seeing the biggest housing crisis in a generation and we are not building even half the homes we need to keep up with demand. The shortage of decent homes has much wider social and economic costs and we heard about some of those relating to inflexibility in the labour market, as well as the impact on people in overcrowded homes and the impact on children's health and educational outcomes.

What can we do to build more homes? That must be the centre point of getting more sense and fairness into our housing market. We supported the Help to Buy scheme, but we would have preferred a scheme that focused more on first-time buyers. Our policy shows that the Government have simply not understood that boosting demand without boosting supply risks putting prices out of reach of the very families and young people we particularly want to help to get on the housing ladder. That is why we have committed ourselves to building 200,000 homes a year by 2020. That is probably not enough, and we should build many more than that, but it is an ambitious start point. We currently have a housing commission, led by Sir Michael Lyons, which is looking at a detailed road map, so that we may be able to deliver our vision.

**Mrs Main:** Does the hon. Lady share my concern about the Help to Buy scheme? It has proved to be a good scheme in the north by helping people, but has not worked in the south because people must save the stamp duty as well as being helped with the mortgage deposit? We cannot get past that with the current Help to Buy scheme. Stamp duty is the barrier, especially in the south, no matter how many houses are built.

**Shabana Mahmood:** I take on board the hon. Lady's point. She is certainly right about the interplay between the Help to Buy policy and the burden that remains with stamp duty. As I have said, in constrained financial circumstances, difficult choices must be made and we have preferred at this stage to look at how we might do the one central thing that we know can reform the housing market and get more homes within the reach of more people: build more homes. That must be the start point, and that is the key issue with the Help to Buy scheme. It is not a bad policy and we should be helping people to buy homes, but we must boost supply, and we are failing to do that at the moment.

**Zac Goldsmith:** Every Government whom I have heard discussing this issue and every party in opposition have promised to build endless new homes, but how will the hon. Lady's party, if it achieves government, deliver those new homes? What will make her future Government different from previous ones?

**Shabana Mahmood:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. We have made it clear that that is a central commitment of our party. We acknowledge that we simply did not build enough homes when we were in government. No Government for 20-odd years have built enough homes. We recognise that without boosting supply we will simply not have fairness and sense in our housing market. That is why we set up the Lyons commission. We want to ensure that we have a detailed road map. We will unveil it in our manifesto ahead of the general election and it will show exactly how we will realise our ambition in government.

**Mrs Main:** I fail to see how, in a high land value area, any Government can promise to build at expensive house prices. It is simply impossible without making the whole market collapse around it. Perhaps the hon. Lady will explain.

**Shabana Mahmood:** I disagree with the hon. Lady. I think that it is right to set targets and ambitions, and it is right that we look to such experts to help us to get to that position. We are looking partly at the expense of land and the housing market in different parts of the country. We will discuss those issues in greater detail as we get closer to producing our manifesto.

**Mr Raab:** I understand the shadow Minister's caution, but she slated the coalition's record even though if we compare the average number of affordable homes built each year, we see that it was some 31,000 under Labour and it jumped to 48,000 under the coalition. She slated that record, despite its being so much better than Labour's, yet when asked a number of times what a Labour Government would do to spur the supply of housing, there is absolutely nothing that can be said within a year of an election. Does she understand that that totally undermines her criticism of the current Government's supply-side record, but also any confidence that anyone could have that a Labour Government would make any difference in this area?

**Shabana Mahmood:** I make this point about the last Labour Government as well as the current Government. No Government have built anywhere near enough homes to ensure that supply keeps up with demand. That is why we are in this position with the housing market. I cannot pre-empt some of the proposals under discussion in the Lyons commission, but I am sure that we will return to the debate when we unveil what our road map towards the pledge of 200,000 homes a year looks like.

As I have said, given the very constrained financial circumstances and the difficult choices that have to be made, we have focused our energies on measures to increase supply. We did also put forward to the Government back in 2012—I am sure that the Minister remembers—a proposal for the Government to implement immediately. It was about using the sums raised by the sale of the 4G spectrum towards getting more homes built and towards a stamp duty holiday of two years for first-time buyers.

That measure could have been taken forward by the Government. It might not have helped the constituency of the hon. Member for St Albans, but it would have helped first-time buyers looking at properties below the £250,000 threshold.

Changing the thresholds and providing holidays was something that we looked at and implemented towards the end of our term in office as we sought to stimulate the market post the financial crash. These are issues that we have considered, in the context of a stamp duty holiday for first-time buyers, in this Parliament. They are issues that we continue to receive representations on and continue to look at very closely. As I have said, I am not in a position to make any commitments today, but I suspect that the commitment that Government Members are looking for is from the Minister, who may or may not indulge them when he responds.

2.42 pm

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) on securing the debate and putting forward her case with such tenacity, if I may borrow that word from my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr Raab). I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Esher and Walton, for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) and for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr Redwood) for their contributions to the debate.

I also thank the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood) for her remarks. She said that she thought that the hon. Members present would be more looking to me, as a Minister, to outline possible thoughts for the autumn statement than expecting her to say anything about Labour party policy in this matter. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends would not expect me to outline any announcements for the autumn statement, but I suspect that they did not expect to get much from the shadow Minister, either.

Ensuring that there is good-quality, affordable housing for all and an effective housing market is an important priority for this Government. As my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans said in her opening remarks, home ownership is very important to us. It is very important to the Government and the Conservative party. I entirely endorse and share her views about the importance of ensuring that as many people as possible have the opportunity to own their own homes.

Although I understand the concerns raised today that stamp duty is putting people off moving and preventing people from getting on the housing ladder, the fundamental point is about the high cost of property. Removing or reducing stamp duty land tax will not by itself address the fundamental issues. I will deal with SDLT and the various points that have been raised, but as other right hon. and hon. Members have acknowledged, we have to look at the housing market as a whole; in particular, it is worth highlighting the steps that the Government are taking to increase housing supply. Those measures, combined with support for home buyers, are, we believe, the right way to address this issue. That is why we have introduced a range of measures to get

Britain building again, to fix the broken housing market and to help hard-working people to get the home that they want.

We are supporting home buyers, including through the Help to Buy scheme—a major package of measures to increase the supply of low-deposit mortgages for creditworthy households. We are also increasing housing supply through schemes such as the £474 million local infrastructure fund, the £19.5 billion of public and private investment in the affordable rented sector and the £1 billion Build to Rent scheme to support the growth of the private rented sector, because we believe that those matters are important.

**Mrs Main:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Gauke:** I will, of course, deal with stamp duty land tax in a moment if my hon. Friend wants—

**Mrs Main:** My point is about the Help to Buy scheme. Has the Minister done any analysis of the situation in areas such as mine, where, over two years, only seven people have availed themselves of the Help to Buy scheme? Has he considered that that could be because people still simply cannot afford to use the scheme?

**Mr Gauke:** Undoubtedly, the vast majority of those who have made use of the Help to Buy scheme have been at the lower end of the market in terms of house prices and have generally not been in London and the south-east—the greater south-east, if she will forgive a fellow Hertfordshire Member of Parliament for using that phrase. That, however, was the intention of the Help to Buy scheme—for it not to be focused at the top end of the market and more expensive homes.

I acknowledge my hon. Friend's point that much of the activity has been away from areas such as London and the home counties, but that is not something that we are necessarily ashamed of. However, I will deal with her fundamental argument. I know the point that she is making—that stamp duty land tax has prevented use of Help to Buy in some parts of the country.

Let me return to the issue of the housing market. We are maintaining stability in the housing market by keeping interest rates low and supporting improvements to the mortgage market—and that is working. The number of first-time buyers is at a six-year high, mortgage approvals are up 8% on last year and repossessions are at their lowest level since 2007. More than 150,000 households have been helped to buy or reserve property since spring 2010 through Government-backed schemes. That includes nearly 50,000 supported through our Help to Buy schemes.

Housing supply is up. Almost 480,000 new homes have been delivered since April 2010. Starts on new homes in the past year totalled 137,780—up by 22% on the previous year and the highest annual total since 2007. The construction sector has been growing for 16 consecutive months and is currently experiencing the sharpest rise in house building orders since 2003, while companies are taking on new workers at the fastest rate since 1997. A growing pipeline of new projects is also emerging from the reformed planning system. Last year, successful applications for major housing schemes were up 23% and planning permissions were granted for 216,000 new homes.

The Government remain committed to improving the housing market, and that will remain a vital part of our long-term economic plan. That is why at the last Budget we introduced programmes including the £525 million builders finance fund and a £6 billion extension for the Help to Buy equity loan scheme, to run until 2020. We also announced our plans for an urban development corporation to deliver a garden city at Ebbsfleet and deliver up to 15,000 new homes.

In June, we announced that £400 million would be made available to support 20 housing zones to provide new homes on brownfield land. We remain on track to deliver 170,000 new affordable homes in the four years to March 2015, and a further 165,000 between 2015 and 2018. That will constitute the fastest rate of affordable house building for 20 years, a record that well withstands comparison with that of our predecessors. We must remember that the housing market, like the rest of the economy, is recovering after having suffered a severe downturn following the financial crisis, but we have taken measures to ensure that it is moving in the right direction. That is important to today's debate, which is about ensuring that there are opportunities for people to own their own home.

I recognise that stamp duty land tax is an important issue, and my constituency, like that of my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans, experiences many of the issues that have been raised. The Government, however, remain committed as a priority to tackling our record deficit. SDLT is an important source of Government revenue; it raises several billion pounds each year to help pay for the essential services that the Government provide and support, and to reduce the deficit.

In 2013-14, SDLT raised £9.3 billion, a substantial sum—money that we need. I appreciate the argument that we have to ensure that taxes bring in the requisite revenue, and that it is perfectly possible for a tax rate to be too high and above the optimum level. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham and I have often argued in the House of Commons Chamber in favour of the reduction of the top rate of income tax from 50p to 45p, which is a good example. I am not convinced, however, that the case is as strong in this context and that reductions in SDLT would pay for themselves.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Albans made the case for increasing the SDLT threshold to £500,000. On a static analysis, if we were to do that for 2015-16, the cost would be £4.2 billion. That static analysis does not take into account the behavioural response, but I do not believe that the behavioural impact of increasing the SDLT threshold to £500,000 would substantially reduce that cost. We should bear in mind that that is a substantial amount of money, especially at a time when we have to be careful with the public finances.

It is also worth pointing out that the majority of the revenue comes from those who buy the most expensive homes: 52% of SDLT residential yield comes from properties bought for more than £500,000, despite the fact that such properties represent only 6% of transactions. A third of all residential transactions do not involve the payment of any SDLT, which is a higher proportion than in 2007, when that figure was 29%.

**Mrs Main** *rose*—

**Mr Gauke:** I recognise that that is not a third of transactions in Hertfordshire, which I suspect is the point that my hon. Friend is itching to make. In 2013, a further 42% paid the 1% rate, which meant that 75% of all residential property transactions resulted in the payment of less than £2,500. Even the proportion of residential transactions involving the 3% rate has remained broadly stable. In 2007, 18% of transactions were affected by the 3% rate; in 2013, the figure was 19%. I argue that SDLT is progressive, because those who purchase higher-value property pay a higher share of tax.

We must also consider who ultimately bears the burden of SDLT. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood referred to the Labour party's policy announcement of an SDLT holiday for first-time buyers. We implemented such a policy for properties worth up to £250,000 from March 2010 until March 2012. HMRC analysis of the impact of that relief indicated that the majority of the saving was incorporated into higher property prices, which made the relief largely ineffective and poor value for money; what buyers did not pay in stamp duty, they paid in higher property prices.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton made the point that the situation can be complicated by the fact that it is easier to get a mortgage that covers the purchase price rather than one that covers the purchase price and the SDLT, but we must bear in mind that the impact of changes in SDLT can result in benefits to the seller, rather than to the buyer.

**Shabana Mahmood:** On a point of clarification, I should say that my point about a stamp duty holiday concerned a proposal that we made in 2012 about the sale of the 4G spectrum. I acknowledge that the Government proceeded with our proposal in March 2010 for a stamp duty holiday.

**Mr Gauke:** I am grateful for that clarification. If I maligned the hon. Lady, I will certainly withdraw those remarks.

Nearly everybody who contributed to the debate mentioned the fact that SDLT has a slab structure rather than a slice structure. I will make two points in response to that. If we wanted to raise the same level of revenue under a different structure, it would be necessary to increase the applicable rates. That would not mean that people would pay more, but it would mean that rates would increase. We would need to think about that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton spoke from his experience of life before he entered the House about difficulties that arose in terms of reforms to stamp duty and their impact on the housing market. Before changing the slab system, which predates 2003—in fact, it goes back to the 17th century—we would have to think carefully about the potential impact on the housing market.

**Zac Goldsmith:** Is that work being done by the Treasury? Is the Treasury looking at how one might go about removing the slab or cliff-edge system and shifting towards a progressive system?

**Mr Gauke:** The Treasury keeps all taxes under review. If we look at the subject historically, there have always been challenges associated with reforming SDLT, because to do so can result in disruption to the housing market.

I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans. We will continue to ensure that we take every step necessary to increase the supply of good quality, affordable homes. As hon. Members might expect, we will continue to keep all taxes under review. Any decisions on future changes will be taken as part of the annual Budget process and in the context of the public finances. Having the opportunity to debate these matters has been beneficial to the House.

**Mr Raab:** I thank the Minister for giving way and for what he has outlined. I hope the Treasury will keep stamp duty under review, not just because of the situation and the snapshot we have now, but because of the risks of further fiscal drag. The average median property price in London and in my constituency will soon go through the 4% rate. There is also the impact of interest rates on those with mortgages at very fine margins. As a Government and as a party, we ought to put more cash into people's pockets and leverage them off a reliance on increasing amounts of debt. Stamp duty is constantly under review, but I ask the Treasury to think about what is coming forward as well as the situation as it currently stands.

**Mr Gauke:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As a Government we have a proud record of ensuring the economic stability of this country, of putting in place the conditions for growth, and of addressing the challenges we face. The generation now seeking to get on the housing ladder faces perhaps greater challenges than earlier generations faced. Essentially, it is very important we ensure we have the supply of new homes to address that, but we want to ensure we have in place the right tax and spending policies to enable people to achieve home ownership. That is a long-standing and proud tradition of our party, and one that we continue to hold as extremely valuable.

With those remarks, Mr Betts, I thank you and hon. Members for our debate this afternoon.

*Question put and agreed to.*

3.1 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Thursday 4 September 2014

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Elliott Review

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** Today Professor Chris Elliott has published his independent review into the integrity and assurance of food supply networks to ensure that consumers have confidence in the food they buy. The final report and the Government's response are available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications> and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

#### *The review*

Professor Elliott's final report sets out a systems approach to improve the food supply chain. As last February's horsemeat fraud incident demonstrated, it is vital that we move towards a more open culture that allows consumers to understand where their food comes from and encourages industry to take more responsibility. We are determined to take action against food fraudsters.

#### *Recommendations*

I welcome Professor Elliott's report and would like to thank him for his important work in this area. I accept all of his recommendations, many of which we are already implementing:

Giving top priority to the needs of consumers in relation to food safety and food crime prevention, including through targeted testing, intelligence gathering and surveys

A zero tolerance approach to food fraud including by the development of whistleblowing and reporting of food crime

A shared focus by Government and industry on intelligence gathering and sharing

Improving laboratory testing capacity and capability to ensure a standardised approach for testing for food authenticity

Introducing new unannounced audit checks by the food industry to protect businesses and their customers

Government support for the integrity and assurance of food supply networks through the creation of a national food safety and food crime committee

Leadership and co-ordination of effective investigations through the creation of a new food crime unit

Ensuring mechanisms are in place for serious food safety and or food crime incident management by implementing the recommendations of the troop report.

#### *Action to date*

Food and farming is the UK's largest manufacturing sector, contributing £96 billion to the economy and employing almost 4 million people. That is why we are taking action to ensure that British food remains world leading and to give consumers absolute confidence in what they are buying.

As well as maintaining confidence at home, it is also vital for the reputation of our exports. This reputation is helping us to expand trade internationally through

the export action plan, opening up new markets in China and the US and increasing exports of UK food and drink by 7% since 2010.

This Government are committed to helping consumers know what they are buying. We are giving them more power by improving labelling to make it easier for them to understand where their food comes from. Consumers are increasingly choosing British food, with an increase of about 10% in the amount of British beef on sale in UK retailers.

Through our plan for public procurement we are making it easier for food procurers to make decisions about the locality, authenticity and traceability of their food, enabling schools and hospitals to provide their pupils and patients with high- quality British food. This will also boost UK farming by opening up £400 million of potential new business.

From this month, practical cookery and food education is compulsory in the new national curriculum up until the age of 14. This will empower the consumers of the future, giving children a better understanding of where their food comes from and why it is important that we know what is in our food.

#### *Forthcoming action*

Professor Elliott's report states there is a lack of direct evidence of food crime in the UK but that we should not be complacent if we want consumers to be confident in the food that they buy. That is why we intend to act immediately with the Food Standards Agency to establish a food crime unit by the end of the year. In the first instance the unit will focus on developing the evidence and intelligence picture so that we better understand the risks. The unit will be trialled for two years after which we will review progress and likely future needs.

The report recognises that we have some of the most robust food safety controls in the world and that we are working closely with public analyst laboratories to achieve more effective and efficient working in scientific services to support food standards. We have also provided an additional £2 million this year to support local authority sampling and testing to help protect consumers.

Professor Elliott has also highlighted the role that the food industry needs to play in the gathering and sharing of intelligence. We will build on what Professor Elliott has already achieved by helping to facilitate discussions across the industry and we will work with businesses to remove the duplication in the current industry-driven audit system while ensuring consumers remain protected.

Finally, to oversee the delivery of these recommendations I am establishing a cross-government group on food integrity and food crime. This group will build the better collaboration identified as being necessary between the departments with an interest in food integrity, surveillance and crime.

#### *Industry action*

I have had assurances from industry and Professor Elliott that food businesses are already implementing many of the report's recommendations. The current industry focus on developing shorter supply chains is an important contribution to having a more resilient food supply chain. Since February 2013 industry and Government

have reported over 55,000 tests on processed beef products, with no horsemeat found since April 2013. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the action being taken to assure supply chains and protect consumers.

Protecting the integrity of our food and empowering consumers is central to this Government's vision of a competitive, resilient and growing UK food supply chain.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Chief Surveillance Commissioner (Annual Report)

**The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron):** I have today laid before both Houses copies of the latest annual report from the Chief Surveillance Commissioner appointed by me to keep under review public authority use of covert surveillance, covert human intelligence sources and property interference. The commissioner provides statutory oversight to ensure that public authorities use correctly and lawfully the relevant provisions of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 and the Police Act 1997.

The use of covert techniques, including the deployment of undercover officers, is an important weapon in the fight against terrorism and other serious and organised crime including the trafficking of drugs and firearms and child abuse. In using the powers available under the legislation, law enforcement officers play a crucial role in keeping all of us safe. The use of these techniques has been instrumental in securing convictions for very serious offences.

However, it is appropriate that such techniques are properly regulated to ensure they are applied lawfully. The Office of Surveillance Commissioners play a key role in providing independent scrutiny in this area. The commissioners are all retired senior members of the judiciary and bring their experience to bear in this most sensitive of areas. I want to thank Sir Christopher and his colleagues for maintaining the independent, external checks on public authority use of covert techniques.

The report from the Chief Surveillance Commissioner shows that in the vast majority of cases covert techniques are being used effectively, when it is necessary and proportionate to do so. The report notes a small number of errors reported to the commissioner. The number represents a tiny proportion of the total number of authorisations, and a decrease on the previous year. The chief commissioner found nothing to suggest wilful misconduct.

# Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 4 September 2014

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Administrative Scheme for the “On the Runs” Independent Review

**Kate Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland with reference to paragraph 2.58 of the report of the Hallett Review, whether the individual x has been prosecuted; and if she will make a statement. [206671]

**Mrs Villiers:** The decision whether or not to prosecute an individual is a matter for the independent prosecuting authorities.

**Lady Hermon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the (a) accommodation, (b) travel, (c) staffing and (d) other costs of the Hallett Inquiry into the on-the-runs administrative scheme were. [207796]

**Mrs Villiers:** Officials are currently finalising the total cost of the review. A summary breakdown will be published when it is available.

**Lady Hermon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) which recommendations of the Hallett Report, published on 17 July 2014, into the on-the-runs administrative scheme she plans to implement; and if she will make a statement; [207797]

(2) what assessment she has made of the progress being made by the Police Service of Northern Ireland’s Operation Red Field to review the 228 on-the-runs who received administrative comfort letters; and if she will make a statement; [207794]

(3) what recent steps her Department has taken in response to the Hallett Report, published on 17 July 2014, into the on-the-runs administrative scheme; and if she will make a statement. [207798]

**Mrs Villiers:** As I said in my statement of 17 July following publication of the Hallett Report, the Government accepts the report and all its recommendations in full.

The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) has set up an OTR Policy Oversight Board, chaired by the NIO Permanent Secretary, to ensure that follow-up action is taken to implement the recommendations in full. The Board brings together representatives from all interested parties to ensure that the response to the Hallett report is fully co-ordinated.

I will keep Parliament abreast of developments as appropriate.

### Telephone Services

**Valerie Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under what timetable her Department plans to phase out use of telephone lines with the prefix (a)

0845, 0844 and 0843 in accordance with the Cabinet Office guidance on customer service lines published in December 2013 and (b) 03 and 08, where 03 is the primary number under a dual numbering system. [207290]

**Mrs Villiers:** My Department does not use any of the prefixes listed for its customer service lines.

### Television

**Mr Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much her Department spent on the purchase of televisions in (a) 2013 and (b) 2014 to date. [207222]

**Mrs Villiers:** My Department spent £3,543.20 on new televisions in 2013 when the Northern Ireland Office moved from Millbank to new offices at 1 Horse Guards Road. This move will deliver a saving to the taxpayer in the region of £1 million per year.

There has been no expenditure on the purchase of televisions in 2014 to date.

### Warm Home Discount Scheme

**Ms Ritchie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on extending the Warm Homes Discount Scheme to Northern Ireland. [207152]

**Mrs Villiers:** Energy matters in Northern Ireland are devolved and are the responsibility of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland.

Although the responsibility for issues in this area are devolved, the Government is playing its part to address the problems we know people are encountering in Northern Ireland as a result of fuel prices. Notably, the Chancellor has frozen fuel duty for the remainder of the Parliament. Since home heating oil heats 68% of homes in Northern Ireland compared to 4% in Great Britain this has a very significant impact.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Corruption

**Sir Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Attorney-General how many self-reports from companies have been made under (a) the Bribery Act 2010 and (b) other corruption legislation in the last 12 months. [207305]

**The Solicitor-General:** Self-reports are not necessarily made relating to specific legislation, and it is for the prosecutor to determine the relevant legislation in each case when considering charging.

Further, given the small number and seriousness of cases investigated by SFO, it would not be desirable to provide a breakdown of this data because of the need to protect individuals and the risk of prejudicing investigations.

### Metropolitan Police

**Helen Goodman:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will seek a review of the Crown Prosecution Service’s decision not to prosecute the Metropolitan Police officers accused of starting sexual relationships with environmental activists. [207399]

**The Solicitor-General:** The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) will review any cases referred to it by the police in accordance with the two stage test that is set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors. Where there is sufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of conviction and it is in the public interest, such cases will be prosecuted.

The CPS has been working with officers conducting the Operation Herne investigation into the conduct of a number of officers.

On 21 August 2014 the Crown Prosecution Service issued a statement containing the reasons it gave for not prosecuting officers considered under Operation Aubusson, a subset of Operation Herne which is available at:

[http://www.cps.gov.uk/news/latest\\_news/charging\\_decision\\_concerning\\_mps\\_special\\_demonstration\\_squad/](http://www.cps.gov.uk/news/latest_news/charging_decision_concerning_mps_special_demonstration_squad/)

Since that date one person has requested that the case be re-reviewed under the Victims' Right to Review scheme and that process is under way.

### Television

**Mr Bradshaw:** To ask the Attorney-General how much the Law Officers' Departments spent on the purchase of televisions in (a) 2013 and (b) 2014 to date. [207208]

**The Solicitor-General:** The Serious Fraud Office spent £450 on televisions in 2013-14, and £1,272 in 2014-15 as at 31 August.

The Crown Prosecution Service does not collect this information centrally. To obtain it would require local area managers to review all paper procurement records which would incur a disproportionate cost.

The remaining Law Officers' Departments have not incurred any such expenditure during the past two years.

## TRANSPORT

### A47

**Stephen Barclay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria were used in choosing the 10 schemes for work on the A47 which would be subject to further feasibility work by the Highways Agency. [207751]

**Mr Hayes:** The Department's A47 Corridor feasibility study has reviewed evidence to identify the current and future problems and issues along the corridor. In considering potential investment proposals the study focused on the sections of the route that currently experience the most severe problems or where problems are predicted to be exacerbated due to planned development and growth.

A range of possible interventions to address the identified problems were assessed in terms of their deliverability and the extent to which they would meet a number of objectives for the corridor, including the extent to which they would support economic growth, help improve capacity, address resilience and safety, and the degree to which impacts on the surrounding natural environment and landscape could be minimised. The better performing interventions identified are to be further assessed in terms of affordability, deliverability and value for money.

## Biofuels

**Richard Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the eligibility criteria and terms of reference for his Department's competition for £25 million of capital funding for advanced biofuel plants in the UK will be announced. [207606]

**Mr Goodwill:** A feasibility study into the design of the £25 million Advanced Biofuels Demonstration Competition has been completed, further work is underway to test the business case and plan the delivery of the competition. Further details, including the competition eligibility criteria, will be published together with the feasibility study report on the Government's website later this year, with the competition running during 2015.

## Highways Agency

**Stephen Barclay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport with reference to the National Audit Office report entitled, Maintaining strategic infrastructure roads, HC169, published on 6 June 2014, how many IT systems the Highways Agency and its contractors plan to use for its integrated asset management system by May 2015. [207784]

**Mr Hayes:** By May 2015 the Agency/contractors will be using 11 systems:

The Integrated Asset Management Information System (IAM IS) solution:

five maintenance contractors will be live on the IAM IS Routine Maintenance/Customer Enquiry modules; and the IAM IS Pavements module (including network occupancy for booking road space for maintenance and the new network model) will have been rolled out to all maintenance contractors. This replaces the existing HA Pavements Management System and Schedule of Road Works.

Seven maintenance contractors will continue (until contract renewal) to use their own routine maintenance systems. It is expected that the final maintenance area will go-live in June 2016.

Three legacy databases for Structures (planned implementation July 2015), Drainage and Geotechnical (planned implementation April 2016).

**Stephen Barclay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by what date the Highways Agency plans to have a fully populated and integrated asset management system with 100 per cent coverage of its contractors. [207792]

**Mr Hayes:** The Highways Agency plans to have a fully populated and integrated asset management system in place by the end of 2017-18.

## Large Goods Vehicles

**Richard Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with his counterparts in HM Treasury about likely effects of the proposed methanol excise duty reduction to incentivise the increased use of methanol as a replacement for diesel in HGVs on (a) the wider fuel market and (b) the wider vehicle market. [207607]



**Mr Goodwill:** Officials from the Department for Transport and Her Majesty's Treasury are in regular contact on the development of proposals to change the duty rate for methanol.

These changes will provide businesses with the tax certainty they need to invest in alternatively fuelled commercial vehicles and improve air quality. The reduced rate will apply to methanol composed of 95% pure methanol, and 5% water.

Draft legislation will be published at the autumn statement for further consultation, including with representatives from the fuel industry and motor manufacturers.

### Motorways: Closures

**Richard Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motorway lanes were closed by the Highways Agency in each year for which figures are available. [207612]

**Mr Hayes:** I regret that this data can be produced only at disproportionate cost.

### Pedestrian Crossings

**Luciana Berger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department plans to increase the time for pedestrians to cross on signalised crossings. [207788]

**Mr Goodwill:** Local councils are responsible for setting pedestrian crossing timings with reference to the Department for Transport's guidance walking speed of 1.2 metres per second given in Local Transport Note 1/95: 'The Assessment of Pedestrian Crossings', Local Transport Note 2/95: 'The Design of Pedestrian Crossings', and Traffic Advisory Leaflet 5/05: 'Pedestrian Facilities at Signal-controlled Junctions'.

The Department recommends that where a crossing may be used by a large number of older people or those with mobility issues, for example outside residential care homes, this should be taken into account when setting timings.

The Department expects to bring the successor to the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions, which will include all pedestrian crossing types, into force in 2015 and once that is complete will consider the need to update existing guidance.

**Sir Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will assess the potential merits of lowering the assumed walking speed of 1.2 metres per second used for calculating crossing times for pedestrians; and if he will publish the findings of that assessment. [207789]

**Mr Goodwill:** Local councils are responsible for setting pedestrian crossing timings with reference to the Department for Transport's guidance walking speed of 1.2 metres per second given in Local Transport Note 1/95: 'The Assessment of Pedestrian Crossings', Local Transport Note 2/95: 'The Design of Pedestrian Crossings', and Traffic Advisory Leaflet 5/05: 'Pedestrian Facilities at Signal-controlled Junctions'.

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The Department expects to bring the successor to the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions, which will include all pedestrian crossing types, into force in 2015 and once that is complete will consider the need to update existing guidance.

### Rail North

**Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information and estimates his Department gave to Rail North in respect of (a) passenger numbers on existing services, (b) the spending envelope for the new franchise, (c) changes in staff numbers required and (d) stations closures or transfer of control of those stations to local authorities. [206718]

**Claire Perry:** The Department and Rail North are working collaboratively in accordance with the "Partnership Principles," which includes "full and open disclosure between parties subject to any confidentiality obligations which apply." As such Rail North was provided with all of the information necessary for the creation of the consultation document. This included known passenger numbers on existing services and financial information from the Department's Long Term Forecast for both franchises. As stated in the consultation, the Department is not considering line or station closures for these competitions. Staffing levels are a matter for the train operators and estimates have not been made regarding them.

**Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many representatives of each local authority are in Rail North; and what the name is of each such representative; [206720]

(2) which councillors from North East Lincolnshire and Northern Lincolnshire councils were represented in the preparation of Rail North's consultation paper on the TransPennine and Northern Rail franchises; and whether such councils were consulted by Rail North before it issued the document. [206719]

**Claire Perry:** Rail North's represents 30 local transport authorities in the north of England. Its constitution, including the specific make up of its membership, and decision making process are a matter for them. The Department worked with the Rail North group on the development of the consultation paper and the views of individual councillors were not presented or sought as part of this process.

### Railway Signals

**Bill Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funding he is making available to improve the reliability of rail signalling. [206844]

**Claire Perry:** This is a matter for Network Rail and the independent Office of Rail Regulation. Network Rail is required to manage its network, including its signalling assets, in a safe, reliable and efficient manner. It must deliver the level of overall performance over

each five-year funding period specified by the Office of Rail Regulation, following receipt of the Government's high level strategic outputs and the amount of national funding available.

The Office of Rail Regulation's Final Determination sets out the funding that Network Rail will receive over Control Period 5 (1 April 2014 to 31 March 2019), including funding for the efficient maintenance and renewal of its signalling assets.

### Road Traffic

**Richard Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the average

number of vehicles on an average day on (a) the strategic road network and (b) local roads in the most recent year for which figures are available. [207585]

**Mr Goodwill:** The table below includes the annual average daily flow for the strategic road network, local authority managed major roads and minor roads in England for 2013.

*Department for Transport statistics*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport/series/road-traffic-statistics>

*Motor vehicle flow by road class and road management, England, 2013, annual average daily flow<sup>1</sup>*

Highways Agency (HA) managed roads			Local authority (LA) managed roads			Vehicles a day	
Motorways	'A' roads	All HA roads	Major roads	Minor roads	All LA roads	All Roads	
82,500	31,200	52,800	13,300	1,500	2,600	3,800	

<sup>1</sup> The calculation for the annual average daily flow is estimated by dividing the annual traffic estimate by the road length.

Source:

DFT National Road Traffic Survey. Last updated: June 2014. The figures in this table are National Statistics.

### Roads: Repairs and Maintenance

**Stephen Barclay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) with reference to the National Audit Office report entitled, Maintaining strategic infrastructure roads, HC169, published on 6 June 2014, what assessment his Department has made of the effect on local highways of local authorities not implementing guidance from the highways of maintenance efficiency programme; [207783]

(2) which local highways authorities have not completed an asset management plan. [207791]

**Mr Goodwill:** The Department for Transport continues to work closely with the all parts of the sector to help spread best practice in highways asset management, including through the Highways Maintenance Efficiency. It is recommended that local highway authorities have an asset management strategy in place to ensure the efficient delivery of highway maintenance service for which they are responsible.

The development of highways asset management plans and strategies is entirely a matter for each local highway authority. As the National Audit Office report highlighted many authorities are currently at different stages of implementing such plans. The Department does not, therefore, hold comprehensive data on how many authorities have up to date asset management plans in place.

### Rolling Stock: North East

**Mr Iain Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that Pacer trains operating on services in the North East are replaced rather than modified; and if he will make a statement. [207642]

**Claire Perry:** As stated in the consultation document for the next Northern and TransPennine Express franchises, The Department will require bidders

"to include plans, either in their core proposition or as an option, which would enable the withdrawal of all Pacer units from Northern services."

Beyond this the Department does not intend to specify rolling stock solutions for either the TransPennine or Northern franchises.

### Shipping

**Katy Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what (a) domestic and (b) European regulations are deemed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to have superseded the Merchant Shipping (Emergency Equipment Lockers for Ro/Ro Passenger Ships) Regulations 1988. [207648]

**Mr Hayes:** No domestic or European regulations have specifically superseded the Merchant Shipping (Emergency Equipment Lockers for Ro/Ro Passenger Ships) Regulations 1988.

Levels of safety on ships now are higher than they were in 1988 because of the introduction of a number of regulations since then. These include the International Safety Management Code—an international standard for the safe management and operation of ships; SOLAS 90—an international standard for passenger ship stability; and the Stockholm agreement—an international agreement on stability requirements for Ro/Ro Passenger ships.

In addition there have been improvements in the requirements for training of ships' officers and crew: The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers.

### Shipping: Safety

**Katy Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) annual budget for promoting seafarer safety to ship owners operating in the UK was in each year since 2009-10; and what the MCA's budget for such work is in 2015-16. [207105]

**Mr Hayes:** The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's activities for each financial and operating year are set out in its published Business Plans. These set out the

Agency's total budget for the delivery of its work, including efforts to promote the safety of seafarers.

However no specific budgetary allocation has been or will be earmarked for this activity.

## DEFENCE

### Armed Forces: Housing

**Caroline Dinenege:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department will review regulations to allow unmarried partners with children to live together in service family accommodation. [207076]

**Anna Soubry:** The New Employment Model programme aims to examine how we might strike a better balance between the requirements of service and the demands placed on service personnel and their families, adjusting where necessary to promote greater stability in service life while continuing to recognise the impact of mobility.

This programme includes the future accommodation project which is addressing single and family accommodation, with the aim to balance the future needs of the service with the aspirations of service personnel for affordable and good quality housing. Within the future accommodation project the Ministry of Defence is reviewing entitlement for service families' accommodation to better suit modern 21st century families. This review includes considering the eligibility for service personnel in long-term relationships.

### BAE Systems

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the Commercial Principles Agreement signed with BAE MNS. [207785]

**Mr Dunne:** I am withholding the information as its disclosure would prejudice the commercial interests of the Department and because it relates to the formulation of government policy.

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether under the Commercial Principles Agreement signed with BAE MNS the public purse bears any cost of future rationalisation of UK warship building. [207786]

**Mr Dunne:** Under Government accounting conventions, it is normal for provision to be made for some redundancy costs to be met at customer expense. Such liabilities do not stem from the Commercial Principles Agreement, but from the conventions laid down in the "Yellow Book", the Government Profit Formula and its Associated Arrangements, which covers single source procurement.

As these conventions currently stand, the Ministry of Defence could be liable for any reasonable and appropriate costs that are attributable to single source warship procurement in the event of future rationalisation.

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with reference to the answer of 18 November 2013, *Official Report*, column 697, what the value was of the outstanding key industrial capacity notice received by BAE MNS. [207787]

**Mr Dunne:** No payment value had been calculated for the Key Industrial Capability (KIC) notice when the Commercial Principles Agreement was signed in November 2013. Under the terms of this agreement, BAE Systems agreed to waive any outstanding claims for KIC payments.

## Cyprus

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the protected status of every designated nature conservation area in Akrotiri Sovereign Base Area will be maintained following the agreement between the UK and Republic of Cyprus in January 2014 to open the Sovereign Base Area to development. [207717]

**Mr Francois:** The Sovereign Base Areas Administration (SBAA) and the Government of the Republic of Cyprus published guidelines for the designation of planning zones and the preparation of planning policy for the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia (SBAs) on 16 July 2014. These draft guidelines are now subject to consultation until the end of October 2014. It is proposed that the SBAA Policy Statement will underpin planning and development in the SBAs, ensuring this is carried out in a controlled manner and that designated special areas of protection and conservation are maintained appropriately.

**Andrew Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department plans to ensure that any consultation run by the government of the Republic of Cyprus with regard to development of the Akrotiri Sovereign Base Area will include consultation with civil society. [207718]

**Mr Francois:** The Sovereign Base Areas Administration (SBAA) and the Government of the Republic of Cyprus are holding a joint consultation process for the designation of planning zones and preparation of planning policy for the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia (SBAs). Public meetings with representatives of the relevant local communities were held on 16 July 2014, when the formal joint consultation process commenced. The draft proposals for the designation of planning zones and planning policy in the SBAs have been provided to all SBA communities and to various interested Non Government Organisations. The relevant documents can be accessed on the SBAA website, together with accompanying maps providing guidance on current land use and constraints, including existing and proposed special areas of protection and conservation.

## Departmental Records

**Bridget Phillipson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of JSP 411-Defence Records Management Policy and Procedures, versions 4.3 and 4.2. [207302]

**Anna Soubry:** Copies of JSP 411, Defence Records Management Policy and Procedures, version 4.3 and 4.2 have been placed in the Library of the House.

## Electronic Warfare

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the status is of the Cyber Reserve. [207634]

**Mr Brazier:** Recruitment for the Joint Cyber Unit (Reserve) began in October 2013. The Cyber Reserve will provide support to the Joint Cyber Unit (Corsham), the Joint Cyber Unit (Cheltenham), and tri-service Information Assurance units. Interest in joining the Cyber Reserve has been extremely positive, both in terms of the quality and quantity of applications received. A number of Cyber Reservist applicants have been selected and are now going through single service recruiting processes, with many more being invited to interview. The first Cyber Reserve induction courses have taken place and these individuals will now move onto specific workplace induction and training. The next two years will see the Cyber Reserve fully operational.

#### EU Law

**Mr Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many new EU directives and regulations have been transposed into UK law by his Department since May 2010. [207256]

**Mr Brazier:** The Ministry of Defence has transposed three EU directives into UK law since 2010: the EU Defence and Security Procurement Directive (2009/81/EC); the EU Directive on the Right to Interpretation and Translation in Criminal Proceedings (2010/64/EU); and the EU Directive on the Right to Information in Criminal Proceedings (2012/13/EU).

#### Medical Equipment

**Bridget Phillipson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 19 June 2014, *Official Report*, column 728W, on medical equipment, how the equipment referred to in that note was disposed of; how much was raised from any re-sale; and which such equipment was donated. [207408]

**Mr Dunne:** Information on the disposal of the items listed in Defence Instruction Notice 2014DIN04-053 and declared obsolete over the last 10 years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

#### RAF Waddington

**Dr Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment his Department has made of the effect of the RAF Air Show at RAF Waddington on (a) the public profile of the RAF, (b) public interest in the RAF and (c) money raised for RAF charities; and what plans he has for the future of the air show at RAF Waddington. [207015]

**Mr Francois:** The RAF Waddington International Air Show is the RAF's largest official Air Show and aims to raise awareness of the RAF and its activities and to raise money for charity. It has attracted an average attendance of 130,000 for the two day event over the past five years. Since 1995, £3.3 million has been raised and donated to charities.

The 2015 Air Show has been cancelled due to essential work due to be carried out on the RAF Waddington runway.

The RAF is reviewing Air Show commitments from 2016 onwards. The results of this review will be announced in due course.

#### Reserve Forces

**Oliver Colvile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he has made in establishing Pals reservists regiments as part of Army 2020. [207368]

**Mr Brazier:** The Army is not directly seeking to recreate 'Pals' regiments under Army 2020. Pals regiments were historic First World War formations mainly raised through the efforts of local authorities, industrialists or committees of private citizens and were composed of men who lived in a particular city or district, or who shared a common social or occupational background.

Army units, both Regular and Reserve, remain a key part of UK society and their local communities. Many continue to have a natural affinity to a particular part of the country in their recruiting. We encourage all serving Reservists to 'bring a friend' along to training. Significant work has gone into ensuring that there is an effective regional footprint of Army Reserve units under Army 2020. This, coupled with a strong recognition of the benefits of local and regional recruiting activity, alongside a wider national profile for the Army Reserve are key parts of the growth and investment in the Reserve Forces under Army 2020.

The Reserve Forces and Cadets Associations continue to play an important role in maintaining and developing that profile.

#### Reserve Forces: Warrington

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people in Warrington have joined the reserve forces as a result of the Government's recent advertising campaign. [207618]

**Mr Brazier:** The Volunteer Reserve Forces are continuously recruiting and numbers joining are not normally attributed to particular advertising campaigns. In the 12 months ending 31 July 2014, approximately 10 people joined Reserve Units in Warrington.

Source:

Defence Statistics. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.

#### Travel

**Bridget Phillipson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 18 June 2014, *Official Report*, column 637W, on travel, how much was paid to staff in receipt of the excess fares allowance in each year since 2007-08. [207411]

**Anna Soubry:** The following table shows how much was paid to staff in receipt of excess fares allowance (EFA) in each year since 2007-08:

Financial year	Total amount of EFA paid (£)
2007-08	7,519,701
2008-09	8,547,614
2009-10	7,728,579
2010-11	8,122,913
2011-12	8,376,180
2012-13	6,793,270
2013-14	5,702,607

### Veterans UK

**Luciana Berger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what checks and balances he has put in place to ensure that Veterans UK is accountable to his Department; [207033]

(2) what checks and balances he put in place to ensure that the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency was accountable to his Department. [207038]

**Anna Soubry:** Veterans UK and the former Service Personnel and Veterans Agency are part of Defence Business Services (DBS) and form part of the Ministry of Defence (MOD). DBS is responsible and accountable to the MOD Permanent Under Secretary and Ministers who are answerable to Parliament.

### War Pensions

**Mr Kevan Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average length of time taken to process settlements for the War Pensions Scheme has been in each year since 2010. [206082]

**Anna Soubry:** The average length of time taken to process claims under the War Pensions Scheme in each year since 2010 has been:

	<i>Working days</i>
2010-11	39
2011-12	51
2012-13	82
2013-14	110
2014-15 (year to 31 July)	102

In the majority of cases deadlines for progressing cases are met. The War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Schemes are jointly resourced and administered. The impact of the implementation of the Boyce Review on the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (Cm 7798, published February 2010) and its subsequent publicity campaign, combined with an increase in the number of applications for War Disablement Pension (linked to more people with pre-April 2005 service reaching the end of their engagement), led to delays in processing prospective claims.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Business: Human Rights

**Kerry McCarthy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which trade associations or sector groupings of companies have developed guidance on human rights and due diligence over the last year; and what steps his Department is taking to support such initiatives. [207616]

**Mr Lidington:** There is no central repository in the UK that captures sector specific guidance on business and human rights. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills continues to work with bodies including Business in the Community, the Ethical Trading Initiative and the British Retail Consortium on guidance for their

respective members, drawing on the “Good Business: Implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights”.

### Climate Change

**Kerry McCarthy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department has spent on climate change-related diplomacy in each of the last five years; and what funding has been allocated for future climate change-related diplomacy. [207615]

**James Duddridge:** The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)’s Total Direct Expenditure on ‘Climate Change/Low Carbon Economy/Energy Security’ over the last 5 years are as follows:

	£
2009-10	28,796,697
2010-11	25,892,831
2011-12	21,926,636
2012-13	18,958,265
2013-14	15,823,777

These figures include Prosperity Fund project spend and salaries. The figures exclude management, support and indirect costs/overheads.

The reduction in spend has occurred within the context of the wider Government and FCO budgetary reductions necessitated by the biggest budget deficit in the UK’s peacetime history inherited from the previous Administration. We have been able to target our climate change spending where the FCO can have the most impact.

Climate change and energy/resource security remain high-level foreign policy priorities. Precise budgetary allocations for future years are dependent on the overall FCO budgetary allocation from Her Majesty’s Treasury and for 2015-16 onwards relate to the next Comprehensive Spending Review Period.

**Kerry McCarthy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff in (a) his Department in the UK and (b) British embassies and high commissions overseas work on climate change-related diplomacy; and what projections he has made of the future staffing requirements for such work. [207617]

**James Duddridge:** The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) currently has 20 staff who work full time in London on climate change. This includes the Foreign Secretary’s Special Representative on Climate Change. We have the full time equivalent of 70 staff dedicated to climate change and energy work across our overseas network. In addition, as climate and energy priorities demand, we have around a further 80 overseas staff who are also regularly engaged on climate diplomacy.

Climate change and energy/resource security remain high-level foreign policy priorities for the FCO and we keep resourcing arrangements under constant review.

### Conflict Resolution: Females

**Bridget Phillipson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 4 June 2014, *Official Report*, column 726-8W, on Conflict Resolution: Females, if he will place in the Library copies of the minutes of the inter-departmental meetings referenced in that answer. [207409]

**James Duddridge:** Officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office regularly meet their counterparts from the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence to discuss the women, peace and security agenda. The Secretaries of State from these three Departments launched the UK's third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security at the Ending Sexual Violence Summit in June.

Successive Governments have not disclosed minutes of internal meetings which inform the development of Government Policy as it undermines the 'private space' needed to allow officials to have free and frank discussions, and advise Ministers on policy options.

#### Diego Garcia

**Charlotte Leslie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what payments the Government would accrue from extending the lease for use of Diego Garcia by the United States for a further 20 years. [207605]

**James Duddridge:** There is no lease of Diego Garcia to the United States military under which a rent is charged. The use of the British Indian Ocean Territory (including Diego Garcia) is regulated by a series of bilateral agreements between the UK and US covering a period of fifty years. I expect my officials to begin substantive discussions with US colleagues about post-2016 arrangements later this year, as the conclusions from the feasibility study on resettlement of Chagosians begin to become clear.

**Charlotte Leslie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the potential security benefits of the UK's ability to use Diego Garcia as a military base after the current lease for use of that territory by the US has expired. [207610]

**James Duddridge:** The 2012 White Paper, 'The Overseas Territories-Security, Success & Sustainability' made clear the strategic importance of our Overseas Territories, which give Britain a global strategic reach in support of our international objectives. The US Base on Diego Garcia represents a vital part of the Anglo-American defence relationship, remains a significant strategic asset for the UK and has previously been used for UK military operations.

#### Occupied Territories

**Mr Godsiff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the UK plans to take in response to Israel's announcement that it will appropriate nearly 1,000 acres of Palestinian land in the Etzion settlement. [207603]

**Mr Ellwood:** The Government has made it clear that it deplores the Israeli Government's expropriation of 988 acres of land around the settlement of Etzion near Bethlehem. It is a particularly ill-judged decision at a time when the priority should be to build on the ceasefire in Gaza. We believe it will do serious damage to Israel's standing in the international community.

The Government's position on settlements is clear: they are illegal under international law, present an obstacle to peace and take us further away from a two state solution at a time when negotiations to achieve this objective urgently need to be resumed.

We have strongly urged the Government of Israel to reverse this decision.

### CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

#### Broadband

**Richard Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps can be taken to provide broadband services to residential properties in major cities where (a) commercial internet providers have deemed the street cabinets serving that commercially unviable and (b) the local authority is restricted in its ability to use public funds to build broadband networks in contravention of state aid regulations. [207611]

**Mr Vaizey:** The Government is investing up to £150 million in the SuperConnected Cities Programme to support UK cities to develop the digital infrastructure capability required to remain internationally competitive.

In addition there has also been a substantial increase in planned commercial infrastructure investment in urban areas, including BT committing an additional £50 million to their commercial roll-out; Virgin Media investing to improve its superfast footprint by 100,000 premises; and a range of other providers making investments in cities such as York, Coventry and Peterborough. These investments will benefit both businesses and domestic households. There is also the ongoing roll-out of 4G which will make a significant impact on connectivity in urban locations.

The Government is also working to drive down costs of network delivery and has amended the planning regulations and Electronic Communications code, supported the European directive on measures to reduce broadband deployment costs, and has a universal basic broadband commitment to ensure minimum service levels.

When Government reviews outstanding coverage issues in urban locations after the closure of the SME voucher initiative in March 2015, we will be better placed to identify the most challenging areas and to consider the most appropriate and effective method of intervention at that time.

#### Broadband: Northern Ireland

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that internet broadband operators do not default in their contractual duty to deliver telecommunication services in Northern Ireland; [207755]

(2) if he will increase the penalties available to be levied against internet broadband operators who fail in their contractual duty to provide telecommunication broadband service to customers in Northern Ireland.

[207757]

**Mr Vaizey:** The Government does not license, monitor, or levy penalties on communications providers operations in the UK. The UK, through Ofcom, operates a general authorisation regime that requires communications providers (including internet broadband providers operating in Northern Ireland) to meet a range of general and specific conditions that entitle them to operate in the sector. Communications providers are also required to abide by consumer protection law. In instances, where there is dispute concerning a company fulfilling its contractual duties, consumers can seek independent resolution through one of the Ofcom accredited schemes (CISAS, or the ombudsman services) of which all communications providers must be a member. Ofcom holds enforcement powers with respect to both the general authorisation regime and consumer protection law and can take action should it consider it appropriate to. There is no evidence that the enforcement regime is proving ineffective and requires amending.

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make representations to service providers regarding poor broadband coverage in rural areas of Northern Ireland.

[207756]

**Mr Vaizey:** The Northern Ireland Assembly has lead responsibility for the provision of broadband delivery in Northern Ireland and has been allocated £11.64 million to support the delivery of broadband improvements.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Agricultural Products: Russia

**Ms Ritchie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assistance she plans to offer farmers and businesses affected by sanctions on Russia which apply to agricultural products from the EU;

[207722]

(2) what assessment she has made of the potential effect of sanctions on Russia on the UK agriculture industry.

[207721]

**George Eustice:** The UK has been monitoring the situation closely since the ban came into effect on 7 August.

In the UK, the ban will affect approximately £39 million of agricultural produce—this is 0.2% of UK's total food, feed and drink exports for 2013 at £18.9 billion. UK producers may face lower prices in some products as producers sell what was originally intended for Russia on the EU market. Some UK businesses had goods in transit, including dairy, poultry and fish consignments, which were turned away. Our investigations show very limited market impact caused by the ban with stable prices for most products.

We recognise that the ban will have an impact on some businesses, particularly the pelagic sector of the Scottish fishing industry. At a UK level, exports of fish (mainly frozen mackerel) to Russia were approximately

£18 million in 2013. That was 1% of UK total fish and seafood exports and 8% of frozen fish exports but 18% of UK mackerel exports.

The cheese industry, which exported about £5.8 million to Russia (1.3% of UK's total exports) may be affected. Northern Ireland exported almost £3 million worth of food (mainly dairy) to Russia in 2013-14.

The UK's produce is world class and our priority is to minimise the potential impact of the totally unjustified Russian ban by working with trade associations and industry in identifying alternative markets. We encourage our growers to find other outlets such as processing, and to utilise existing EU Producer Organisation promotion funds.

The European Commission has now announced support measures for EU farmers and growers: €125 million worth of aid for fruit and vegetable producers and €10-20 million for dairy farmers to pay for the temporary storage of butter, cheese and skimmed milk powder. Both schemes will be available within the UK. On 3 September, the Commission also announced an additional €30 million for EU Promotions to help the industry find other markets for products that might otherwise have been exported to Russia.

We are working with the Scottish Government, the European Commission and pelagic industry to develop new and emerging markets.

### Agriculture: Greenhouse Gas Emissions

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the UK is taking to monitor the effect of the UK food industry on greenhouse gas emissions.

[207747]

**Dan Rogerson:** The Food Statistics Pocketbook 2013:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/food-statistics-pocketbook>

contains a chapter on environmental statistics, including greenhouse gas emissions. Around 176 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent greenhouse gases (mt CO<sub>2</sub>e) were emitted within the UK from domestic agri-food sector activity in 2011. This excludes emissions from non-fertiliser pre-farm gate production, food packaging, food waste and land use change; the largest contributor is net trade in food and drink, estimated at 61 mt CO<sub>2</sub>e. The UK farming and fishing sector was the second largest contributor, accounting for 55.1 mt CO<sub>2</sub>e.

### Food Supply Networks Review

**Ms Ritchie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to publish the review led by Professor Elliott into the food system and food contamination.

[207532]

**George Eustice:** The report has been published today (4 September 2014).

### Insects

**Kerry McCarthy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth of 14 May 2014, *Official Report*, column 614W, on insects, when the Government is likely to publish its final National Pollinator Strategy.

[207613]

**Dan Rogerson:** The National Pollinator Strategy is planned for publication this autumn. This enables us to consider its content in light of the findings of the Environmental Audit Committee's report on the Strategy, which was published in July.

### Meat

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government is taking to educate the public about the (a) health and (b) environmental effects of eating high amounts of red meat. [207746]

**George Eustice:** The Government provides tips and information on healthy eating through the Live Well pages of NHS Choices website and through promotional material on the "eatwell" plate, to educate the public on eating meat as part of a healthy balanced diet.

As depicted in the "eatwell" plate, the Government recommends eating some meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein as part of a healthy balanced diet.

In response to one of the Green Food Project's recommendations in 2012, DEFRA initiated a debate about sustainable food consumption. The Sustainable Consumption report from the group of interested organisations which came together to work on this project, published in July 2013, included eight principles of a healthy and sustainable diet. These are being reviewed by the Global Food Security Programme and will be published as part of its Insight series in due course.

## EDUCATION

### Children in Care

**Ian Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps her Department is taking to tackle the damaging effects of moving in and out of care for looked-after children. [207514]

**Mr Timpson:** Permanence is achieved through a successful return home, however, we know far too many children re-enter care. The Government is seeking to address this through a better understanding of data, undertaking research to improve practice and strengthening the statutory framework where necessary.

In September 2013 the Government published the 'Improving Permanence for looked-after children' data pack<sup>1</sup>, which encourages local authorities to consider their own systems and processes for returning children home and to improving their rate of success.

In 2013 the Department for Education consulted on a range of proposals to improve permanence for looked-after children. Departmental officials have convened a meeting of the relevant expert group on 9 September to discuss these issues and the Government's formal response will be published later this year.

The Government has commissioned the National Children's Bureau and the Centre for Child and Family Research at Loughborough University to deliver an action research project. The project is working with frontline practitioners and families to support improved practice in returning children home.

This project is complemented by research we have commissioned from the NSPCC and the University of Bristol. Their approach is 'top down', working with senior practitioners to implement a specific model of support for children returning home, developed and tested by NSPCC. This research will build on earlier work by NSPCC and includes a focus on implementation science, identifying savings and efficiencies, and developing a practice model that can be used by local authorities without the need for specialist support from the NSPCC.

Both these research projects will report in 2015.

<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-permanence-for-looked-after-children-data-pack](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-permanence-for-looked-after-children-data-pack)

### Children's Centres

**Lyn Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what steps she is taking to ensure that children's centres receive live birth data from local authorities;

[207114]

(2) whether local authorities require parental consent in order to share live birth data with Sure Start children's centres;

[207115]

(3) how many local authorities share live birth data with children's centres in their areas. [207116]

**Mr Gyimah:** The Department for Education's Sure Start children's centres statutory guidance says that health services and local authorities should share information (such as live birth data and data on families with children under five who have recently moved into the area) with children's centres on a regular basis.

Local authorities and commissioners of health services should consider developing local partnership agreements or protocols to enable effective sharing of live birth data, whilst ensuring compliance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and other relevant legal provisions.

Birth registration data are in the public domain, and therefore explicit consent is not required for the sharing of live birth data between health and local authorities and between local authorities and Sure Start children's centres.

The Department does not hold data relating to local authority practice with regards to live birth data.

### Educational Psychology

**Steve McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the average waiting times for students referred to educational psychologists were in each region of England in each of the last five years.

[207388]

**Mr Timpson:** The Department for Education does not collect information on waiting times for students referred to educational psychologists.

The Government does however recognise the vital role that Educational Psychologists play in supporting children and young people with special educational needs (SEN). That is why we have retained their statutory role in the new SEN and disability system and have increased investment in educational psychology training which includes providing £5.5 million per year to support 132 new training positions, up from 120.



The reforms to the SEN and disability system will ensure pupils' needs are quickly identified and where appropriate specialist support put in place quickly.

### Female Genital Mutilation

**Steve McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many cases of female genital mutilation have been reported by teachers and staff in school in the latest period for which figures are available; [207194]

(2) whether her Department offers guidance to teachers and staff on addressing cases of female genital mutilation amongst female students. [207195]

**Mr Timpson:** In April 2014, the Department for Education published the 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' guidance that provided schools with updated information regarding the safeguarding of pupils. The guidance contains information about female genital mutilation as well as a link to other, more detailed multi-agency guidelines. The Secretary of State for Education wrote to all schools in April to draw their attention to the guidance. In addition, the summer term e-mail to all schools reminded them of the need to be particularly vigilant because of the heightened risk during the summer holiday. Schools will be reminded of the guidance again in our 'Need to Know' e-mail early in the autumn term.

The Department commissioned the Personal Social Health and Economic Association to produce briefing for schools on FGM and this was published over the summer<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> [www.psheassociation.org.uk/resources\\_search\\_details.aspx?Resourceid=536&Keyword=fgm&SubjectID=0&LevelID=0&ResourceTypeID=3&SuggestedUseID=0](http://www.psheassociation.org.uk/resources_search_details.aspx?Resourceid=536&Keyword=fgm&SubjectID=0&LevelID=0&ResourceTypeID=3&SuggestedUseID=0)

Information on the number of cases of female genital mutilation reported by teachers and staff in schools is not collected by the Department. Any reports would be collated by individual local authorities under local safeguarding children arrangements.

### Home Education

**Mr Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made of the performance in external examinations of home schooled children at Key Stage (a) 2, (b) 3 and (c) 4 in the most recent academic year for which figures are available. [207744]

**Mr Gibb:** The requested information is not held by the Department for Education. Therefore, no assessment has been made.

### Offences against Children: Rotherham

**Steve McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps she plans to take to implement the recommendations made by the Independent Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham from 1997 to 2013. [207396]

**Mr Timpson:** Following publication of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham, I wrote to Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council on 28 August<sup>1</sup>. I asked the Council to provide urgent reassurance about how they are responding to the issues identified in the report in respect of current social work practice. The Council will report to me by 12 September.

It has also been agreed with Her Majesty's Chief Inspector that Rotherham will be the subject of an early inspection of its child protection and looked after children's services. The Department for Education will not hesitate to take further action if necessary to ensure children are safe.

The specific recommendation for the Department in Professor Jay's report pertains to the issue of redactions from Serious Case Reviews (SCRs). Our statutory guidance, Working Together 2013, is clear that SCRs should not be written in such a way as to harm the welfare of any child and that will continue to be the case. Redactions in SCRs make them harder to understand and important lessons from them harder to learn, and should only be used where necessary.

<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-edward-timpson-to-rotherham-borough-council](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-edward-timpson-to-rotherham-borough-council)

### Performing Arts: Children

**Graham Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what discussions she has had with amateur theatre and arts groups on proposed changes to the Child Performance Regulations on performance hours and breaks. [207600]

**Mr Timpson:** The Department for Education ran a public consultation this summer, from 23 June to 29 August, on proposed changes to the Child Performance Regulations. We first announced our intention to do so last December, during the passage of the Children and Families Bill (now Act) 2014.

The consultation was open to all those with an interest, including the amateur sector. A full consultation report will be published later this year.

**Graham Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what consideration she has given to regulating smaller amateur theatre and arts groups under a separate class under the Child Performance Regulations. [207601]

**Mr Timpson:** The child performance licensing system is designed to provide a check that suitable arrangements are made to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children when they take part in performances, and that their education does not suffer when they do. This principle applies regardless of whether the performances are put on by amateur or professional organisations.

We therefore have no plans to introduce differential licensing arrangements for different types or sizes of organisation. We are, however, planning to remove some unnecessary and outdated restrictions and have recently consulted on other options to improve flexibility, but without reducing any of the important safeguards. We expect the resulting changes to benefit all types of organisation involved in child performances and, of course, the children themselves.

**Graham Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made of the effect of matron licence fees on participation in theatre and arts groups. [207602]

**Mr Timpson:** The Department for Education has made no assessment of the effect of local authority fees for licensing of matrons (otherwise referred to as chaperones) on participation in theatre and arts groups.

### Pupil Referral Units

**Steve McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many times children have been transferred to a pupil referral unit for behavioural problems in each of the last five years. [207363]

**Mr Gibb:** The requested information on the number of pupils entering pupil referral units because of behavioural problems is not held by the Department for Education.

Information on the total number of pupils enrolled in pupil referral units in the last five years is available in the "Schools, pupils and their characteristics: January 2014" Statistical First Release (table 2a), which is published online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2014>

### Special Educational Needs

**Steve McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make it her Department's policy to collate and record the numbers of special educational needs co-ordinators in maintained and independent schools. [207096]

**Mr Timpson:** The Department for Education has no plans to collate or record the number of special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) in schools. All state funded mainstream schools in England are already under legal duties to appoint a qualified teacher as a SENCO. School governing bodies or proprietors are responsible for ensuring their schools meet this requirement under the Children and Families Act 2014. Further guidance is set out in the new Code of Practice which came in to effect on 1 September.

**Steve McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education to what additional vetting procedures special educational needs co-ordinators are subject. [207098]

**Mr Timpson:** Schools are responsible for ensuring appropriate vetting procedures are carried out for their workforce, this includes special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs).

In addition, mainstream schools must ensure that there is a qualified teacher designated as SENCO for the school. All newly appointed SENCO must be a qualified teacher and, where they have not previously been the SENCO at that or any other relevant school for a total period of more than twelve months, they must achieve a National Award in Special Educational Needs Coordination within three years of appointment. Further guidance is set out in the new 0-25 special educational needs Code of Practice which came into force on 1 September.

**Steve McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the answer of 1 July 2014, *Official Report*, column 551W, on pupils: disadvantaged, from which experts and organisations her Department received representations when drafting the 0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (a) in general and (b) on its recommendation that the SENCO, headteacher and governing body or proprietor

of a school should consider their strategic approach to meeting special educational needs in the context of the total resources available to the school, including any resources targeted at particular groups, such as the Pupil Premium. [207430]

**Mr Timpson:** The individuals and organisations who responded to the consultations on the draft Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice are listed in the Government's response to the consultations, which also summarises the key points made by respondents.

This information can be found at:

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/319071/SEND\\_code\\_of\\_practice\\_0\\_to\\_25\\_years\\_response.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/319071/SEND_code_of_practice_0_to_25_years_response.pdf)

### Teachers: Recruitment

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the answer of 3 July 2014, *Official Report*, column 761W, if she will discuss the potential merits of introducing an appeals process for where there are technical problems with the skills test for prospective teachers. [207781]

**Mr Laws:** There is a process for raising concerns where there are technical difficulties or exceptional circumstances at the time of taking the test; although this is not called an appeals process, it functions in the same way. Candidates who experience issues with their tests are directed to make the invigilator and test centre aware at the time or to contact the skills tests helpline, currently managed by the contractor Pearson VUE, either by telephone or e-mail. The first stage of the process is conducted by the contractor. Pearson VUE deals with each enquiry by investigating the nature of the concern raised and asking candidates to provide additional evidence where appropriate. In dealing with inquiries, Pearson VUE may contact the test centre, obtain statements from staff or review CCTV footage as necessary to fully investigate and respond to inquiries.

While appeals are dealt with by Pearson VUE in the first instance, the Department for Education retains the right of final decision on all appeals. The process for dealing with appeals is kept under constant review and is being refined as the service migrates from Pearson VUE to learndirect.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will discuss options for how to respond to technical problems with the skills test for prospective teachers other than annulling and re-siting the test with Learndirect. [207782]

**Mr Laws:** When it is determined that technical issues affected a test, the outcome is annulled and the candidate is allowed a free resit. It is not possible to change the mark awarded for a test, since the score the candidate would have achieved had they not experienced the technical issue cannot be determined. It would, therefore, be inappropriate to change the outcome, for example from fail to pass, without such evidence. Where an appeal is successful, the only option available is to allow the candidate a further attempt at the relevant skills test.

### Television

**Mr Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much her Department spent on the purchase of televisions in (a) 2013 and (b) 2014 to date. [207212]

**Mr Gibb:** The Department for Education has spent £518 on televisions in 2014. A further amount of £9,100 was spent on seven screens as part of the Sanctuary Buildings refresh also in 2014. These are primarily used as A/V screens to display presentations and other information during meetings.

The Department spent nothing in 2013 on televisions.

## TREASURY

### Aggregates Levy: Northern Ireland

**Ms Ritchie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions his Department has held with European Commission officials on the Aggregate Credit Levy scheme. [207470]

**Priti Patel:** Officials have been in regular discussions with the European Commission in regards to their decision on the aggregates credit levy scheme. Further to this on 7 August 2014, the European Commission released a short summary of their decision on the investigation in to the compatibility of the scheme with State Aid guidelines. Their decision finds that the aid met the Environmental Aid Guidelines. The full, detailed, decision will be published once commercially sensitive information has been redacted.

### Fracking: Taxation

**Eric Ollerenshaw:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of potential tax revenue to the Exchequer from shale gas and oil products in each region and constituent part of the UK. [207431]

**Priti Patel:** Reports by the British Geological Survey's clearly demonstrate the potential for shale gas in the UK. Shale gas has the potential to increase our energy security, generate growth and support thousands of jobs, and the Government is doing everything it can to support the safe and sustainable development of shale gas. This is why we introduced the onshore allowance, to incentivise investment in onshore oil and gas projects and kick-start exploration. Last year, the industry also announced that local communities would receive £100,000 when a test well is fracked – and a further 1% of revenues if shale gas is discovered.

More work is needed to determine the extent of the gas that can be technically and commercially recovered. While there is clearly potential for shale gas to provide substantial revenue to the Exchequer in the future, no forecasts have been produced on the scale or timing of the revenue.

### Insurance

**Ms Ritchie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions he has met representatives of the insurance industry in the last 12 months; and what was discussed at those meetings. [207150]

**Andrea Leadsom:** Treasury Ministers and officials routinely meet with a wide range of stakeholders as part of the process of policy development.

Details of ministerial and Permanent Secretary meetings with external organisations on departmental business are published on a quarterly basis and are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmt-ministers-meetings-hospitality-gifts-and-overseas-travel>

### Textiles

**Mr Ward:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fiscal steps his Department is taking to boost textile manufacturing in the UK. [207526]

**Priti Patel:** This Government is committed to strong and sustainable growth that is balanced across the economy. Manufacturing, including textile manufacturing, is a vital part of this. Textile manufacturing has received direct support from the Government; including awarding £12.8 million of grant funding to the Textiles Growth Programme through the Regional Growth Fund, which is being used to support capital investment, training, and research and development in the textile industry.

Textile manufacturing, and indeed all manufacturing, in the UK is also being supported by various measures announced in the most recent Budget. This includes increasing the annual investment allowance to £500,000 until 31 December 2015, raising the rate of the R&D tax credit payable to loss making SMEs to 14.5%, and the package of measures to reduce manufacturers' energy bills and improve UK competitiveness.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### International Assistance

**Simon Kirby:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in the negotiations towards achieving a post-2015 set of millennium development goals; and if she will make a statement. [207140]

**Justine Greening:** The United Nations Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) issued its final report on 28 July 2014. The report proposed 17 goals and 169 targets. It reflects many of the UK priorities for the post-2015 agenda including on poverty eradication, gender, sustainable development and open societies and open economies.

The next step will be for the United Nations Secretary General to deliver his Synthesis Report in the autumn in preparation for intergovernmental negotiations in January 2015. The final post-2015 agenda will be agreed upon at a summit in September 2015.

### Iraq and Syria

**Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much the UK has allocated to be spent in 2014-15 on humanitarian aid to the victims of conflict in (a) Syria and (b) Iraq; what steps her Department is taking to deliver humanitarian aid to victims in Iraq; what further steps she is planning to assist (i) people in Iraq and (ii) Iraqi refugees in

neighbouring countries; what plans she has to increase UK humanitarian aid to Iraqi victims of conflict; and if she will make a statement. [207665]

**Justine Greening:** In response to the Syria crisis the UK has allocated £600 million to date for humanitarian aid to victims of the conflict. Total allocations for 2014-15 will depend on decisions to be taken on the basis of evolving needs. In Iraq, the UK has allocated £23 million of humanitarian aid for 2014-15.

In Iraq, DFID support has included airdrops of assistance onto Mount Sinjar and in the Iraqi town of Amerli. The UK has also chartered cargo flights in order to deliver aid supplies for displaced people in the Dahuk region. £12.5 million of DFID's funding is being delivered through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and NGO partners to provide basic life-saving assistance, including food, shelter, water, sanitation and medical care.

### Overseas Aid

**Simon Kirby:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps the UK is taking to end aid dependency in countries which receive UK aid; and if she will make a statement. [207088]

**Justine Greening:** The UK Government is working to eradicate poverty and end aid dependency through faster economic development, which helps poorer countries achieve a secure, self-financed and timely exit from poverty through creating jobs for individuals and generating taxes for governments to invest in key sectors such as health and education. To achieve this vision, we are putting in place a coherent framework to address the key constraints to economic development and support the main drivers of inclusive and sustained economic growth.

### Philippines

**Simon Kirby:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department has taken to help the Philippines recover and build resilience after Typhoon Haiyan. [207138]

**Justine Greening:** Following the devastation wrought by Typhoon Haiyan last November, DFID committed funding of £77 million for the humanitarian response and early recovery activities. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), the UK independent aid watchdog, reviewed DFID's response and found it exemplary.

In addition, the UK is making a £5 million investment through a multi-donor trust fund with the Asian Development Bank to build urban resilience in 25 cities in six countries including the Philippines. This will allow them to plan for and invest in measures, such as flood protection and drainage systems, to help in the event of future extreme weather events.

### Syria

**Simon Kirby:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation in Syria. [207135]

**Justine Greening:** The humanitarian crisis in Syria has reached catastrophic proportions. The UN estimates that 10.8 million people are in dire need of humanitarian aid within Syria. At least 6.5 million people in Syria have been forced to flee their homes to other areas of the country and there are now 3 million refugees in the region. The UN reports that July 2014 was the deadliest month in Syria since the start of the conflict in March 2011, with over 1,000 reported civilian deaths.

### Ukraine

**Simon Kirby:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to provide humanitarian assistance in Eastern Ukraine; and if she will make a statement. [207090]

**Justine Greening:** The UK has committed £1.4 million of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine this financial year, which includes £1 million following the recently launched UN Preliminary Response Plan.

## JUSTICE

### Independent Monitoring Boards

**Steve Rotheram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many staff are employed by the Secretariat of the Independent Monitoring Board; [207790]

(2) how many staff of the Secretariat of the Independent Monitoring Board have previously been employed by the police. [207726]

**Andrew Selous:** The Secretariat for the Independent Monitoring Boards employs 14 staff, all full-time. One member of staff has previously been employed by the police.

### King Richard III

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what recent progress his Department has made on the burial of the remains of King Richard III. [207745]

**Simon Hughes:** On 7 August the University of Leicester announced on behalf of Leicester Cathedral that the remains will be laid to rest in the Cathedral on 26 March 2015. The Ministry of Justice has no further role in the matter.

### National Offender Management Service

**Mr Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much the National Offender Management Service spent on subsidising its retail canteen service contract in each year since 2010. [207330]

**Andrew Selous:** The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) does not subsidise its retail canteen service contract.

### Open Prisons

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many and what proportion of prisoners who were liable for deportation (*a*) applied for and (*b*) were refused Category D prison status in each of the last five years. [204755]

**Andrew Selous:** Prisoners liable to any type of enforcement proceedings are risk assessed very carefully to ensure they are suitable for open conditions. On 13 August 2014 we amended the Prison and YOI Rules so that prisoners who have a Deportation Order served against them and have exhausted their rights of appeal from within the UK can no longer be moved to open conditions or considered for temporary release.

Prisoners who have not yet been served with a Deportation Order, but are being considered by the Home Office for removal from the UK, are now subject to a more rigorous assessment before being considered for open conditions or temporary release to ensure that they are of very low risk of absconding.

To provide information on the number and proportion of prisoners who were liable for deportation and had applied for, and were refused Category D/open conditions status in each of the last five years, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many indeterminate sentenced prisoners were held in open prisons in the years ending 31 March (*a*) 2012, (*b*) 2013 and (*c*) 2014. [206954]

**Andrew Selous:** The number of indeterminate sentenced prisoners held in open prisons in England and Wales, for financial years 2012-14, can be found in table 1.

A life sentence is mandatory on conviction for murder. Under a life sentence, and an indeterminate sentence for public protection (IPP), the court determines the minimum period to be served in prison for the purposes of punishment and deterrence. Prisoners serving these indeterminate sentences have no automatic right to be released. If released they are subject to recall for the rest of their life or, in the case of an offender serving an IPP, for at least 10 years. Public protection is the priority and the release of indeterminate sentence prisoners once they have served their minimum term is entirely a matter for the Parole Board.

Progression to open conditions is never automatic and only follows a satisfactory assessment of risk, generally involving the independent Parole Board in the case of prisoners serving indeterminate sentences.

The Parole Board may recommend such prisoners for open conditions if, for example: they have successfully completed any offending behaviour programmes identified in their sentence plan as essential to the risk reduction process; their behaviour in custody is such that it is considered that a move is appropriate; and their risks are manageable in open conditions.

Once allocated to open prison, prisoners continue to be monitored and are returned to closed prison immediately if there are any concerns about their suitability for low security conditions.

Open prisons have been used since 1936, because they are the most effective means of ensuring that prisoners are suitably risk-assessed before they are released into

the community under appropriate licence conditions. When a prisoner moves to the less rigid structure of open conditions an assessment can be made in a relatively safe environment of how the prisoner will adapt to increasing responsibility. For many prisoners, in particular those such as life sentence prisoners, who have spent a considerable amount of time in custody; these are essential components for successful reintegration in the community and therefore an important factor in protecting the public.

### Prisoners' Release

**Mr Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people sentenced to life for murder in each year since 2004 were released from prison at the time of the minimum period imposed by the courts. [206714]

**Mike Penning:** A life sentence is mandatory on conviction for murder. Under a life sentence, the court determines the minimum period to be served in prison for the purposes of punishment and deterrence. Once that period has been served it is for the Parole Board to determine if and when the offender may be released from prison on life licence and subject to recall for the rest of their life. Public protection is the priority and the Board will take into account a range of factors when assessing whether an offender's risk is reduced sufficiently for him or her to be released.

In order to provide data relating to released life sentenced offenders in each year since 2004 would involve manually examining prisoner records.

Reliable centrally held electronic information on life sentenced prisoners released from custody is only available from 2011 onwards. Prior to this date the required individual record information was only kept in paper files for offender management purposes. It would therefore be at a disproportionate cost to search through these files to identify those prisoners sentenced for murder who were released after serving a minimum period of imprisonment imposed by the courts prior to 2011.

The latest available information on the number of released life sentenced offenders is publicly available under "Offender Management" at the following website address:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2014>

### Prisoners' Transfers

**Mr Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many determinate sentence prisoners with more than two years to serve to their earliest release date were moved to open prisons in (*a*) 2013-14, (*b*) 2012-13 and (*c*) 2011-12. [207334]

**Andrew Selous:** Determinate sentence prisoners are not allocated to open prisons with more than two years to serve to their expected release date.

Categorisation and allocation to open prison is never an automatic progression. Public protection is foremost in the decision making process. Only prisoners who have successfully completed offending behaviour essential to their risk reduction and whose risks are manageable in conditions of low security will be allowed to an open prison.

### Prisoners: Per Capita Costs

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the average direct resource expenditure cost per prisoner in (a) male young offenders institutions and (b) male adult prisons was for the latest period for which figures are available. [206956]

**Andrew Selous:** The Department routinely publishes average costs per prisoner and prison place, based on actual net resource expenditure for each private and public sector prison and in summary form for the whole of the prison estate in England and Wales on an annual basis after the end of each financial year. This includes a breakdown of these costs by prison category and individual prison within each category.

The most recently published figures are for financial year 2012-13 which give an annual Direct cost per prisoner of £38,990 for male young offenders institutions (YOI) and £24,541 for male adult prisons for public and private prisons. This is the latest information available. Prisons are classified according to their major use as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013. YOIs include those with major use offenders up to age 21; adult prisons are those with major use over age 21.

Direct costs are those accounted for at each prison cost centre and exclude expenditure met at regional or national level.

The information for financial year 2012-13 is available in the Cost per Place and Prisoner and Supplementary Information files on the Department's website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-and-probation-trusts-performance-statistics-201213>

Figures for 2013-14 are due to be published alongside the Management Information Addendums to the NOMS Annual Report and Accounts in October 2014.

Continuing to reduce prison unit costs is one of the key targets for the Department. Between 2009/10 and 2012/13 prison unit costs (based on Overall prison costs) have reduced in real terms by 16% per place and 13% per prisoner. The Department is committed to delivering prison changes designed to modernise the prison estate and further reduce prison costs.

### Reoffenders: Staffordshire

**Gavin Williamson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many repeat offenders in (a) South Staffordshire constituency, (b) Staffordshire and (c) Wolverhampton were cautioned or sentenced for recordable offences in each of the last five years; and how many and what proportion of total offences were attributable to such offenders in that period; [207309]

(2) how many repeat juvenile offenders in (a) South Staffordshire constituency, (b) Staffordshire and (c) Wolverhampton were cautioned or sentenced for recordable offences in each of the last five years; and how many and what proportion of total offences were attributable to such offenders in that period. [207310]

**Andrew Selous:** The Ministry of Justice's extract of the Police National Computer (PNC), which is used for analyses of offenders' criminal histories, only holds information on cautions and convictions given for recordable offences. The information held on MoJ's

extract of the PNC will only allow a breakdown by police force area. To provide you with information at a lower level than this as requested, we would need to contact all courts and police forces in the South Staffordshire constituency, and in the Staffordshire and Wolverhampton areas which could be done only at a disproportionate cost.

The Ministry of Justice can provide information on repeat offenders only by police force area. Staffordshire police force area would include Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent local authorities, and the West Midlands police force area would include Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton local authorities.

### CABINET OFFICE

#### Honours

**Dr Julian Lewis:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what arrangements his Department has put in place for the public recognition of acts of heroism by private citizens; if he will make it his policy to apply these to the women who confronted the killers of Fusilier Lee Rigby and who sought to help the attacked soldier; and if he will make a statement. [206872]

**Mr Newmark:** Civilian gallantry awards were introduced in 1940 for acts of heroism and great gallantry other than in the face of the enemy. The majority of recommendations are made through official channels (for example from the Emergency Services) and all cases are judged on their individual merit.

#### ICT

**Chi Onwurah:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what restrictions there are on where G Cloud suppliers should locate their data centres; and what guidance his Department provides to those suppliers on location of their data centres. [207632]

**Mr Maude:** G-Cloud suppliers are not restricted on data centre locations. Any off-shoring of Government information must gain permission of the Government Senior Information Risk Owner (G-SIRO)-prior to May 2010 only the permission of the departmental Senior Information Responsible Officer was required. Off-shoring of personal information must be compliant with the Data Protection Act.

A range of guidance on cloud services, including data centre locations, is available for suppliers on GOV.UK and from the Government's National Technical Authority for Information Assurance (CESG).

#### Members: Correspondence

**Lisa Nandy:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) when the Prime Minister intends to reply to the letter sent to him of 25 July 2014 from the hon. Member for Wigan; [207663]

(2) when the hon. Member for Wigan will receive a reply to her letter to the Cabinet Secretary of 25 July 2014. [207664]

**Mr Maude:** The Prime Minister's Office is an integral part of the Cabinet Office.

The Cabinet Secretary responded to the hon. Member today.

## ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

### Energy Security

**Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps he is taking to increase the UK's energy security. [905197]

**Mr Davey:** We have taken a number of measures to ensure the security of the UK's energy supply. I have introduced new electricity system balancing measures. Our recent national gas risk assessment demonstrated that our gas infrastructure is resilient.

In the autumn I will publish the Statutory Security of Supply Report for 2014. This provides a further assessment of our energy security and sets out my response to Ofgem's recent electricity capacity report.

We also engage closely with EU and G7 partners on measures to increase the EU's energy security.

### Climate Change

**Pat Glass:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps he is taking to secure a legally-binding global climate agreement. [905190]

**Mr Davey:** If we are to meet the objective of the Convention and avoid dangerous climate change, it is imperative that we secure an international, legally binding agreement with mitigation commitments for all in Paris in 2015.

To facilitate this I have pressed our case at a number of international ministerial climate change meetings this year, as well as bilaterally with my counterparts in governments and with other key actors across the globe—including China, the US and India—at incoming and outgoing visits. I will, as usual, attend the UNFCCC Ministerial Conference of Parties in December this year, and will also attend the UN Secretary General's climate summit in September; the first meeting of leaders focused solely on climate change since 2009.

Closer to home I am continuing to push for EU agreement to an ambitious 2030 emissions reduction target of at least 40%, including through convening the Green Growth Group of Ministers.

### Energy: Prices

**Karl Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps he is taking to help households with their energy bills. [905192]

**Mr Davey:** We are helping households with their energy bills by providing direct financial help, encouraging competition and supporting energy efficiency measures.

Last December, we reviewed Government policy costs and made changes to take an average of £50 a year off a household's bill and we are making it easier to shop around, switch and get the best deal.

We are also providing direct financial help to the most vulnerable through the warm home discount, which will take £140 off the energy bills of over two million of the poorest households this year.

### Fuel Poverty

**Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (1) with reference to Table 12 of the Final impact assessment of the future of the Energy Company Obligation, published by his Department on 22 July 2014, how many households are forecast to be lifted from fuel poverty under the Energy Company Obligation (a) in each year between 2013 and 2017 and (b) in total between 2013 and 2017; [207749]

(2) with reference to Table 12 of the Final impact assessment on the future of the Energy Company Obligation, published by his Department on 22 July 2014, by which process he calculated the change in aggregate fuel poverty gap; [207748]

(3) with reference to Table 12 of the Final impact assessment of the future of the Energy Company Obligation, published by his Department on 22 July 2014, what estimate he has made of the change in the (a) aggregate fuel poverty gap and (b) average individual fuel poverty gap under the Energy Company Obligation in (i) each year between 2013 and 2017 and (ii) in total between 2013 and 2017; [207750]

(4) with reference to Table 12 of the Final impact assessment on the future of the Energy Company Obligation, published by his Department on 22 July 2014, by which process he calculated the change in the number of households in fuel poverty. [207758]

**Amber Rudd:** The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) delivers vital measures that make a real and long term difference to fuel poor households. By the end of June 2014 ECO had delivered over 520,000 measures to over 435,000 low income and vulnerable households, reducing their energy costs and risk of being in fuel poverty both now and for years to come.

Estimates published in the final Impact Assessment for the future of the Energy Company Obligation show that against a baseline with no policy in place between April 2015 and March 2017, the policy would drive an estimated reduction in the number of fuel poor households in England of around 10,000 while resulting in a nominal increase in the aggregate fuel poverty gap of around 1%. While uncertain, it is anticipated that there would be a similarly nominal increase in the average fuel poverty gap of around 1%.

These estimates reflect that in the short-run the policy generates costs for energy consumers—including the fuel poor—in order to fund long-term improvements in energy efficiency. The short run costs across all households can mask the benefits of improved energy efficiency. For those expected to receive measures from April 2015 onwards, their aggregate fuel poverty gap is expected to be an estimated £22 million lower by 2017, but partially offset in the short-run by the costs of the policy.

All estimates of the fuel poverty impacts of ECO have been conducted following the methodology published in Section Four of the Analytical Annex to *Fuel Poverty: a Framework for Future Action* published in July 2013.<sup>1</sup> This same approach is used for producing projections

of fuel poverty in the annual National Statistics report.<sup>2</sup> Projecting policy impacts on levels of fuel poverty is inherently uncertain and requires a range of assumptions to be made. As a result, a detailed assessment of the impact of the policy in each individual year of the scheme on fuel poverty has not been carried out. Such an assessment would be extremely difficult because of a number of uncertainties in the calculation, such as: which households take-up which measures; changes in the level and distribution of incomes across households; changes to the housing stock independent of ECO; and, also, changes to energy prices, including as a result of the policy. These uncertainties make estimates at the aggregate level more appropriate as opposed to trying to pin-point specific impacts in any one year.

<sup>1</sup> Available at:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/211137/fuel\\_poverty\\_strategic\\_framework\\_analytical\\_annex.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/211137/fuel_poverty_strategic_framework_analytical_annex.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> For the latest report see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/annual-fuel-poverty-statistics-report-2014>

### Green Deal Scheme

**Graham Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps he is taking to refund people who paid for a Green Deal assessment prior to the exhaustion of the fund. [207445]

**Amber Rudd:** The Green Deal Home Improvement Fund (GDHIF) shut to new applications on July 24. A contribution towards the cost of a Green Deal Assessment Report was only available to customers who made a successful application to the Fund, and who went on to install measures as a result.

Assessments are the most popular part of Green Deal—by the end of July 2014 over 300,000 Green Deal Assessments were undertaken. Assessments provide a tailored picture of the first steps people can take to be more energy efficient and potentially reduce their bills—they are not just for GDHIF.

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### Greenhouse Gas Emissions

**Dr Offord:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the UK's performance towards the targets in the Kyoto protocol on emission reduction targets between 2008 and 2012. [205988]

**Amber Rudd:** The UK has a target for the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol to reduce its emissions by an average 12.5% below base year levels over the five-year period 2008 to 2012.

### Thermal Insulation

**Jonathan Reynolds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate he has made of the number of homes in flood risk areas covered by the Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency 25 Year Insurance-backed warranty. [207172]

**Amber Rudd:** The CIGA (Cavity Insulation Guarantee Agency) 25 Year Insurance-backed warranty covers defects in material or workmanship in connection with the installation of the cavity wall insulation; the guarantee does not cover the effects of flooding. Recourse for the homeowner following the effects of flooding would usually be through buildings insurance and will of course depend upon the terms of individual agreements.

### Tidal Power: North West

**Mark Menzies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps are being taken by his Department to invest in tidal energy development in north-west England. [207512]

**Amber Rudd:** The Department recognises the potential for tidal energy in the UK and remains committed to explore the options of harnessing this resource.

Tidal energy developments are currently supported by Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCs) until 2017. Thereafter they will be supported by Contract for Difference (CfD) under the Electricity Market Reform.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Attendance Allowance

**Stephen Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if his Department will take steps to work with HM Treasury to ensure that, where future savings in the attendance allowance budget result from greater numbers of care home residents starting to qualify for local authority-funded care, those savings could be used to help local authorities with their wider responsibilities to meet care and support needs. [207196]

**Mr Harper:** We will continue to work with HM Treasury and the Department of Health to consider any impacts that the Care Act 2014 may have on benefits.

### Carer's Allowance

**John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the adequacy of information available to carers about (a) the existence of carer's allowance and (b) the rules on who is able to claim it. [207622]

**Mr Harper:** Information and advice about entitlement to carer's allowance is available from a range of outlets including Jobcentre Plus offices, the Government website ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)), local authorities, Citizens Advice, public libraries, health clinics, doctors' surgeries and health visitors. Advice can also be sought from voluntary



organisations such as Carers UK. In addition to this the carer's allowance unit have a regular out reach programme for the caring community.

**Dan Jarvis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will increase the carer's allowance so that it is equal to the national minimum wage. [207723]

**Mr Harper:** The primary purpose of Carer's Allowance is to provide a measure of financial support for people who give up the opportunity of full-time employment. It was never intended to be a carer's wage nor a payment for the services of caring, and is therefore not comparable with the National Minimum Wage.

The Government recognises that carers play an indispensable role in looking after friends or family members who need support. That is why we have continued to uprate the level of Carer's Allowance by the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

**Dan Jarvis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate his Department has made of the number of people currently claiming carer's allowance who care for more than one person. [207724]

**Mr Harper:** Administrative data shows that there are 664,610 people in receipt of a Carer's Allowance payment. This data does not provide details of how many people are being cared for.

Family Resources Survey (FRS) data shows that between 8% and 16% of Carer's Allowance recipients care for more than one person.

**Dan Jarvis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate his Department has made of the number of people claiming carer's allowance in (a) Barnsley Central constituency, (b) Yorkshire and the Humber and (c) the UK in each year since May 2010. [207725]

**Mr Harper:** The number of people claiming carer's allowance in Barnsley Central constituency, Yorkshire and the Humber and Great Britain, in each year since May 2010 is shown in the table:

Date	Barnsley Central constituency	Yorkshire and the Humber Region	Great Britain
May-10	1,070	51,970	536,900
May-11	1,130	54,050	569,240
May-12	1,170	56,590	603,770
May-13	1,270	59,810	640,520
Feb-14	1,360	62,420	664,610

Source:  
DWP 100% WPLS.

### Employment and Support Allowance

**Katy Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people received a reduced rate of employment and support allowance as a result of receiving a pension income of more than £85 in 2013-14; [207181]

(2) how many people received a reduced rate of incapacity benefit as a result of receiving a pension income of more than £85 in 2013-14. [207182]

**Mr Harper:** The information requested to answer the above two questions is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

**Ian Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with (a) individuals and (b) organisations on employment and support allowance and eligibility for free dental care, eye care and prescriptions. [207505]

**Mr Harper:** DWP is aware of the importance of these benefits and the vital support they provide to people on low incomes and how they are highly valued by the individuals that receive them. However, decisions on free dental care, eye care and prescriptions, including their eligibility criteria and verification, are the responsibility of the Departments and devolved Administrations who deliver them.

**Ian Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps his Department has taken to assist employment and support allowance claimants with medical costs including dental care, eye care and prescriptions. [207506]

**Mr Harper:** DWP is aware of the importance of these benefits and the vital support they provide to people on low incomes and how they are highly valued by the individuals that receive them. However, decisions on free dental care, eye care and prescriptions, including their eligibility criteria and verification, are the responsibility of the Departments and devolved Administrations who deliver them.

**Ian Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether his Department has taken steps to inform people moving to contribution-based employment and support allowance that they may no longer be entitled to free dental care, eye care and prescriptions. [207507]

**Mr Harper:** People entitled to contribution-based employment and support allowance are not automatically exempt from health charges. However, people entitled to income-related employment and support allowance are exempt from many health charges.

The entitlement criteria for certain passported benefits, including free dental care, eye care and prescriptions, are the responsibility of other Government Departments and the devolved Administrations.

**Ian Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of people who have been moved to contribution-based employment and support allowance (ESA) from a combination of incapacity benefit and income support since ESA was introduced. [207511]

**Mr Harper:** The information as requested is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

### Employment Schemes

**Stephen Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the budget is for the Help to Work scheme in 2014-15. [207719]

**Esther McVey:** The Department does not publish annual budgetary information for its employment programmes. It was, however, announced on the Autumn Statement 2013 that the Government would invest £700 million over 4 years in the Help to Work scheme.

### Employment Schemes: Young People

**Stephen Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many youth contract wage incentives had been (a) applied for and (b) paid by 6 August 2014. [207720]

**Esther McVey:** Information on the Wage Incentive is routinely published as part of the Youth Contract Official Statistics. The number of forms issued to employers and payments made can be found in the attached statistics:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-contract-official-statistics-august-2014--2>

**Stephen Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what consultation was undertaken by his Department before it stopped youth contract wage incentives. [207727]

**Esther McVey:** The economy is recovering. The UK has witnessed the biggest annual drop in youth unemployment since records began and the youth claimant count has fallen for each of the past 32 months. In addition, compared to a year ago, there are 136,200 fewer young people on JSA. Added to that, the average number of vacancies available at any one time has increased by 119,000 on the year, to reach over 650,000.

Therefore, after careful consideration, at a meeting of the Growth and Enterprise Committee, we agreed to keep the same financial support and reallocate funds to focus on the hardest to help youth groups who are still finding it difficult to take up vacancies. This includes providing additional Jobcentre Plus support for those who are not in education, employment or training (NEETS) in areas of high youth unemployment and areas with the highest concentration of young claimants from Black and Ethnic Minority Groups.

### Jobseeker's Allowance

**Charlotte Leslie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in (a) the UK, (b) the South West and (c) Bristol North West constituency are unemployed but unable to claim jobseeker's allowance because they are deemed to have a sufficient level of personal savings. [207604]

**Esther McVey:** The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Universal Credit

**Mr Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much expenditure his Department allocated to universal credit (a) between April 2013 and May 2014 and (b) to date. [207112]

**Mr Harper:** Expenditure on universal credit in 2013-14 was £186 million. Expenditure on the programme prior to this is contained within the NAO Report—Universal Credit: Early progress, HC 621, published on 5 September 2013.

## HEALTH

### Air Pollution

**Andrew Gwynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will replace his Department's guidance HM 03 on heating and ventilation of health sector buildings with updated guidance which include requirements to (a) reduce dangerous airborne particles and harmful gases that match or exceed those in European standard BS:EN13779 and (b) reduce the transmission of airborne infections. [207761]

**Dr Poulter:** The Department's extant guidance document, Health Technical Memorandum (HTM) 03-01: Specialised ventilation for healthcare premises sets out guidance for minimum standards with respect to ventilation strategy with healthcare premises. HTM 03-01 was published just prior to the publication of BS EN 13779:2007. This will be updated to reflect current standards when it is reviewed. HTM 03-01 forms part of the list of guidance currently under consideration for review.

Healthcare premises will currently utilise the guidance provided within HTM 03-01 to assist in the determination of indoor air quality standards. The hospital will select the relevant primary and secondary filtration dependent upon the air quality of the local environment and upon the requirements of the clinical area that is served by the air-handling unit in question to ensure the safety of patients and staff. HTM 03-01 (paragraph 4.132) acknowledges that in areas of higher atmospheric pollution higher standards of filtration may be required. A copy of HTM 03-01 has already been placed in the Library and is available from the gov.uk website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-specialised-ventilation-for-healthcare-premises-parts-a-and-b>

### Childbirth

**Jim Dobbin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of changes in the survival rate of babies born before 24 weeks gestation; and if he will make a statement. [207752]

**Dr Poulter:** The latest data published by the Office for National Statistics in October 2013 shows that very few live births occur before 24 weeks gestation. Infant mortality rates for babies born this early remain extremely high. For babies born in 2011, 1 in 1,000 of live births occurred at less than 24 weeks; the infant mortality rate for these babies was 894.7 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Data from the Epicure series of studies of survival and later health among babies and young people who were born at extremely low gestations found there was no difference in the ongoing illnesses or complications affecting surviving babies born between 22 and 25 weeks gestation in 1995 and 2006. High levels of disability were present at 6 years of age in surviving children born

before 24 weeks, including cerebral palsy, low cognitive scores, mobility problems, blindness or profound hearing loss.

### Congenital Myasthenic Syndrome

**Jim Shannon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the British Medical Association on the prescribing of salbutamol to treat congenital myasthenia. [206798]

**George Freeman:** Ministers have had no such discussions.

Salbutamol is not licensed for the treatment of congenital myasthenia. Doctors can prescribe a medicine outside the terms of its licence if this best meets the clinical need of an individual patient and on condition that they retain full clinical responsibility for that patient.

### Diabetes

**Mr Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were (a) diagnosed with and (b) living with diabetes in (i) Torbay constituency and (ii) England in each of the last five years. [206783]

**Jane Ellison:** Public Health England do not routinely present diabetes data by parliamentary constituency. It has produced estimates of the total number of adults with diabetes (diagnosed and undiagnosed). Across England it was estimated that there were 3,141,622 adults with diabetes (diagnosed and undiagnosed) in 2012. The estimates for 2013 and 2014 were 3,211,368 and 3,279,925 respectively. It was estimated that in Torbay Unitary Authority the total number of adults with diabetes (diagnosed and undiagnosed) was 9,589 in 2012, 9,773 in 2013 and 9,947 in 2014.

The Quality and Outcomes Framework provides data on the total number of adults aged 17 years and older who have diagnosed diabetes. This showed that in 2012 there were 2,566,436 adults with diagnosed diabetes in England. By 2013 this had increased to 2,703,044. It is not possible to provide local data for consistent areas for recent years. In 2013 there were 14,485 adults with diagnosed diabetes in South Devon and Torbay Clinical Commissioning Group. However, this covers a larger area than Torbay Unitary Authority.

The National Cardiovascular Intelligence Network will be publishing cardiovascular disease profiles by clinical commissioning group in August 2014 which will include a chapter about diabetes. These will bring together a number of key indicators about diabetes.

**Jim Shannon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to enable contact lenses that can monitor blood sugar level to be made available to diabetics on the NHS. [206795]

**Jane Ellison:** There are no smart contact lenses currently licensed for use in the United Kingdom for the monitoring of blood sugar level in people with diabetes. Before a marketing authorisation—or licence—can be granted for a medical device, an application needs to be made, supported by data demonstrating that its quality, safety and efficacy are satisfactory and that the risk to benefit profile is favourable for the proposed treatment.

However, we are very interested in the development of smart contact lens technology and whether, in the future, it may have potentially beneficial applications within the national health service for people with diabetes.

### Eyesight: Surgery

**Jim Shannon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make eye implants available on the NHS to treat blindness. [206800]

**Dr Poulter:** Clinical commissioning groups are responsible for commissioning health care services to meet the needs of their local populations.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has published technology appraisal guidance recommending fluocinolone acetonide intravitreal implants (TA301, November 2013) for treating chronic diabetic macular oedema in certain circumstances and dexamethasone intravitreal implants (TA229, July 2011) for the treatment of macular oedema secondary to retinal vein occlusion, subject to certain clinical criteria.

There is a legal requirement on the National Health Service to provide funding for treatments and drugs recommended by NICE technology appraisal guidance where clinicians wish to use them.

NICE has also issued a number of pieces of interventional procedures guidance on eye implants, including:

- Implantation of miniature lens systems for advanced age-related macular degeneration (AMD) (IPG272, August 2008);
- corneal implants for keratoconus (IPG227, July 2007);
- Corneal implants for the correction of refractive error (IPG225, July 2007);
- Implantation of accommodating intraocular lenses for cataract (IPG209, February 2007); and
- Intraocular lens insertion for correction of refractive error, with preservation of the natural lens (IPG289, February 2009).

Where positive NICE technology appraisal guidance does not exist, it is for NHS commissioners to make funding decisions based on an assessment of the available evidence.

The guidance referred to above can be found at:

<http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance>

### Fats: Imports

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what system his Department has put in place to carry out sample checks on imported fat; and what assessment he has made of the risks of imported fat being passed off as a meat product. [206747]

**Jane Ellison:** We have been advised by the Food Standards Agency that in accordance with European Union legislation, all consignments of meat, imported into the United Kingdom (UK) must be presented for official controls at designated Border Inspection Posts (BIPs) in the UK. All consignments must undergo documentary and identity checks to ensure they are the products attested in the required animal and public health certificate accompanying each consignment. In addition, 20% of all meat, including offal, and products of the bovine, ovine, caprine, porcine and equine species, passing through the BIP, must undergo a physical check, which may include a laboratory test. This rate is increased

to 50% for poultry, rabbit and game meat. We have no reports of imported fat being presented as meat products from these controls.

### Health Services: Lancashire

**Mark Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding his Department provided to (a) Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and (b) Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust in each of the last six years. [206732]

**Jane Ellison:** National Health Service trusts and foundation trusts do not receive the majority of their funding directly from the Department. They are semi-autonomous organisations whose income derives from the provision of services to NHS England and clinical commissioning groups.

The Department did however provide public dividend capital to both organisations in 2013-14 to support a number of centrally-led initiatives, shown in the following table:

	<i>Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust</i>	<i>Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust</i>
		£000
Dementia care	1,014	-
Improving birth environments	754	-
Nursing and technology fund	162	358
Improving maternity care settings	52	-
Integrated digital care fund	-	403
Total	1,982	761

The Department additionally provided public dividend capital in previous years as set out in the following table. The purpose of these allocations was not collected centrally prior to 2013-14.

	<i>Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust</i>	<i>Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust</i>
		£000
2012-13	-	624
2011-12	-	-
2010-11	-	900
2009-10	-	-
2008-09	3,888	-
Total	3,888	1,524

### Health Visitors

**Luciana Berger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish timescales and guidance on how local authorities and clinical commissioning groups should work together to meet their respective duties in relation to the provision of health visitors. [207793]

**Dr Poulter:** From 1 October 2015, the Government intends that local authorities take over responsibility from NHS England, for commissioning public health services for children aged naught to five, including health visiting services.

The Department is working collaboratively with its partners locally and nationally on the transfer of commissioning responsibilities. At local level, NHS England's area teams, as the local commissioners (not clinical commissioning groups), and local authorities are working to develop plans, including timescales, for a smooth and effective transfer of the commissioning role.

The Government will mandate the delivery of the key child assessment elements of the Health Child Programme which are led by health visitors, health care professionals and their teams. This will allow for the service to be shaped locally, while ensuring there is universal coverage of the assessments in the context of a national, standard format (or specification) for the services, and hence that families can be confident they will receive health visiting support.

The Department and its partners use a range of measures that support this transition and convey associated timescales and guidance. In particular, the service specification, "Public Health Functions to be exercised by NHS England", published in November 2013, sets out expectations for the commissioning and provision of services and how area teams can work with local authorities ahead of the transfer of commissioning responsibilities in 2015.

Other mechanisms such as the forthcoming programme of regional naught to five years commissioning transfer events, organised in conjunction with the Local Government Association, provide the means for local staff and key stakeholders to further develop their understanding of working together in respect of future arrangements for the provision of health visitor services.

### Homeopathy

**Jim Shannon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the availability of homeopathy on the NHS. [206797]

**Jane Ellison:** No assessment has been made of the availability of homeopathy on the national health service.

It is the responsibility of local NHS organisations to make decisions on the commissioning and funding of any healthcare treatments for NHS patients, such as homeopathy, taking account of issues to do with safety, clinical and cost-effectiveness and the availability of suitably qualified/regulated practitioners.

### Macular Degeneration

**Jim Shannon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people had age-related macular degeneration in the UK in each of the last five years. [206799]

**Dr Poulter:** The Department does not collect data on the number of people with age-related macular degeneration.

The Health and Social Care Information Centre has provided the following table. This shows the number of finished admission episodes (FAEs), for England, where the primary diagnosis was 'degeneration of the macular and posterior pole'.

	FAE
2012-13	77,559
2011-12	69,826
2010-11	66,195
2009-10	52,418
2008-09	34,203

*Notes:*

1. A finished admission episode is the first period of in-patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. FAEs are counted against the year or month in which the admission episode finishes. Admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the period.

2. There is no specific code with the Hospital Episodes Statistics to be able to separately identify patients diagnosed with 'Age related macular degeneration'. Information is, therefore, provided for 'degeneration of macula and posterior pole'. This includes patients who have been diagnosed with Angioid streaks, Cyst, Drusen (degeneration) of macula, Hole, Puckering, Kuhnt-Junius degeneration, Senile macular degeneration (atrophic) (exudative), Toxic maculopathy.

*Source:*

Hospital Episode Statistics, Health and Social Care Information Centre

### Medicine: Teachers

**Mr Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has plans to create a nationally agreed structure for medical teachers. [207155]

**Dr Poulter:** The General Medical Council (GMC) has established a phased process for implementing arrangements for recognising trainers in medical training. All trainers in four specific roles will be fully recognised by 31 July 2016.

The arrangements relate to:

- named educational supervisors in postgraduate training;
- named clinical supervisors in postgraduate training;
- lead coordinators of undergraduate training at each local education provider; and
- doctors responsible for overseeing students' educational progress for each medical school.

The GMC will use their existing standards for postgraduate training set out in "The Trainee Doctor" and for undergraduate education in "Tomorrow's Doctors", and seven areas originally set out by the Academy of Medical Educators to provide a structure:

- ensuring safe and effective patient care through training;
- establishing and maintaining an environment for learning;
- teaching and facilitating learning;
- enhancing learning through assessment;
- supporting and monitoring educational progress;
- guiding personal and professional development; and
- continuing professional development as an educator.

### Mental Health Services

**Luciana Berger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have had to wait more than 28 days for Improving Access to Psychological Therapies services in each of the last six years. [207753]

**Norman Lamb:** Current data from the Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme shows that the majority of people wait for 28 days or less from referral to treatment.

The Health and Social Care Information Centre does not hold the data requested for the past six years.

The IAPT dataset has data for 2012-13 and 2013-14, these data are not directly comparable as the 2012-13 dataset only shows referrals after April 2012. The 2013-14 dataset shows quarterly data. The Annual Report for 2013-14 is not yet available, this is due to be published later in September.

*Number of referrals that waited more than 28 days from referral received date to date of first treatment<sup>1</sup>, England*

	Referrals
2012-13	159,272
2013-14	
Quarter 1	65,986
Quarter 2	69,442
Quarter 3	62,361
Quarter 4	75,000

<sup>1</sup> Where date of first treatment is within the reporting period. The first treatment appointment is defined as the first appointment in which a therapy type was recorded as being provided.

*Data source:*

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) Dataset

### Neuroblastoma

**Katy Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to support research into neuroblastoma. [207129]

**George Freeman:** The Department's National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) is supporting neuroblastoma research through NIHR biomedical research centres, the NIHR clinical research facility at the Royal Marsden Hospital, Experimental Cancer Medicine Centres (funded jointly with Cancer Research UK) and the NIHR Clinical Research Network. A study of re-purposing of 13-cis-retinoic acid for use in treating children with neuroblastoma has recently been approved for funding through the Health Innovation Challenge Fund. This is a fund jointly supported by the Department and the Wellcome Trust.

### NHS: Drugs

**Mark Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision is available to allow NHS patients to access specialised medication and drugs only available in the US. [206731]

**George Freeman:** The Human Medicines Regulations 2012 as amended contain provisions for the import of unlicensed medicinal products to meet the special clinical needs of particular patients. The importer (who must hold a licence for that purpose) must notify the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) that such importation is taking place. The MHRA may object to the importation if there is a known safety or quality issue with the product, or if an equivalent United Kingdom-licensed product is available.

Such products are used on the direct personal responsibility of the prescriber, who would retain clinical responsibility for the patient while prescribing the product in question.

In primary care, prescribers are allowed to prescribe any product, including any unlicensed product, which they consider to be a medicine necessary for the treatment of their patients under the national health service, as long as that product is not included in schedules 1 or 2 to the NHS (General Medical Services Contract) Regulations 2004 and that the prescriber is prepared to justify any challenges to their prescribing by the relevant commissioning organisation.

When a patient is being treated by a hospital the consultant can arrange for the supply of any product, even one not normally available on NHS prescription,

provided the relevant commissioning organisation or NHS trust agrees to supply it at NHS expense.

### NHS: Finance

**Charlotte Leslie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much and what proportion of the NHS budget has been spent on (a) management pay, (b) outside consultants and (c) restructuring in each year since 2009. [207609]

**Dr Poulter:** The information requested is set out in the following table. The cumulative savings in administration costs arising from the reforms over the period 2010-11 to 2014-15 are expected to free up at least £6.4 billion for patient care.

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Total NHS budget (£ million) <sup>1</sup>	89,401	94,017	98,419	109,418	102,844	105,221	109,774
Managers' pay (£ million) <sup>2</sup>	2,333	2,479	2,783	2,800	2,639	2,629	2,545
Managers' pay as proportion of total NHS budget (percentage)	2.6	2.6	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.3
Outside consultants (£ million) <sup>3</sup>	440.7	650.7	636.9	468.3	473.2	607.2	584.7
Outside consultants as proportion of total NHS budget (percentage)	0.49	0.69	0.65	0.43	0.46	0.58	0.53
Re-structuring (£ million) <sup>4</sup>	—	—	—	199.4	263.6	632.8	220.1
Re-structuring as proportion of total NHS budget (percentage)	—	—	—	0.18	0.26	0.6	0.2

#### Notes:

1. Includes DH, arm's length bodies and national health service organisations. Please note that NHS expenditure has been reported using differing accounting procedures over time so years may not be directly comparable. There was a change in accounting procedure for departmental expenditure in 2009-10 from full resource accounting to clear line of sight where certain non-cash items were removed from departmental budgets. This should be taken into account when comparing expenditure across differing time periods.
2. Includes managers and very senior managers in NHS organisations and arm's length bodies. Excludes DH and primary care. Figures prior to 2008-09 taken from a different data set and adjusted to allow a more reliable comparison with the latest data.
3. The figures provided are disclosed as expenditure on "consultancy services" in the administration and programme costs notes in the Department's Annual Report and Accounts. The figures are for the Departmental group, as defined at the end of the 2013-14 financial year. Figures prior to 2007-08 not available.
4. Figures for re-structuring relate only to the costs of implementing the Health and Social Care Act.

### NHS: Staff

**Gordon Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS staff were employed on administrative tasks in (a) 2010 and (b) 2014; and what proportion of the total NHS wage bill they represented in each year. [207369]

**Dr Poulter:** The provisional monthly national health service hospital and community health service workforce statistics, published by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) show that in May 2010 the proportion of NHS staff in England employed on administrative tasks was 24.0% and in May 2014 the proportion was 22.2%. The majority of NHS staff will perform some administrative tasks but these figures are based on administrative and clerical staff working in central functions; hotel, property and estates; scientific, therapeutic and technical support; clinical support and some ambulance service support staff; as well as managers and senior managers. It includes clerical staff such as those working as medical secretaries and medical records clerks but excludes those who deal directly with patients, such as ward receptionists.

The HSCIC publishes data only on NHS earnings, not on the NHS pay bill. The answer is based on earnings rather than the total pay bill.

In May 2010 the proportion of NHS administrative staff earnings to all NHS staff earnings was 20.0% and in May 2014 the proportion was 18.8%.

### NHS: Training

**Andrew Bridgen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken to ensure that NHS staff can access training and development on providing care with dignity and respect. [207200]

**Dr Poulter:** The Government has mandated Health Education England (HEE) to provide national leadership on education, training and work force development in the national health service. HEE will work with health care stakeholders to influence training curricula as appropriate.

Health care providers have a duty to invest in the training and education of new staff. Employers should support health care professionals to prioritise the quality of care, be compassionate, safety-conscious and genuinely listen to their patients.

Local Education Training Boards provide the forum for securing the development of the whole health work force and have a role in ensuring employers remain committed to continuing professional development.

### Prescription Drugs: Misuse

**Eric Ollerenshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken since 2009 to review policy on addiction to prescription medication; and what the total identifiable costs have been of this review process. [206669]

**Jane Ellison:** The Department has been reviewing policy on addiction to prescription medicine over this period, and the Government's Drug Strategy, published in December 2010, highlights our commitment to reduce dependence on prescription and over the counter medicines.

In 2009, the Department identified a lack of information on this important subject. The Department commissioned a literature review from the National Addiction Centre and a report from the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA) which interrogated data on specialist treatment and surveyed local commissioners and specialist treatment providers. These reports were peer reviewed and published in May 2011. The cost to the Department for the National Addiction Centre literature review was £9,750 and the cost for the NTA review was £80,000.

The reports informed the discussions of roundtable meetings of expert stakeholders which were convened by the Minister for Public Health to agree action to tackle addiction to medicines. The roundtable produced a consensus statement, endorsed by the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and other organisations which was published in January 2013. The only direct cost to the Department concerning the roundtables, and other meetings, was £1,928.09 in travel expenses for non-departmental staff.

Other Departmental costs associated with reviewing policy on addiction to prescription medicine are not separately identifiable.

Public Health England (PHE) organised a seminar in February 2013 to improve the commissioning of services to treat addiction to medicine, and following the seminar, in June 2013 published a guide for the national health service and local authorities on commissioning treatment for dependence on prescription and over-the-counter medicines.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency published in March 2013 a learning module on benzodiazepines which includes advice for prescribers on preventing and treating dependence on these medicines.

In July 2014, with the approval of the Department and the devolved Administrations, PHE launched a public consultation on whether there should be an update to the 2007 United Kingdom clinical guidelines on drug misuse and dependence. The guidelines include advice on treating dependence on benzodiazepines.

### Radiotherapy

**Tessa Munt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 21 July 2014, *Official Report*, column 1007W, on radiotherapy, when data relating to individual funding requests per indication for

radiotherapy treatment made to NHS England and the number of such requests refused will be available from NHS England. [206964]

**George Freeman:** NHS England has advised us that it is aiming to complete its work on improving data collection for individual funding requests later this year. This will include information on requests received for radiotherapy treatments.

### Smoking

**David T. C. Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many serious health events have been recorded per thousand (a) e-cigarette users, (b) users of nicotine replacement therapies and (c) users of the Champix form of varenicline in the last year. [206979]

**Jane Ellison:** Reports of 'suspected' adverse drug reactions (ADRs) are collected by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and Commission for Human Medicines through the spontaneous reporting scheme; the Yellow Card Scheme. The scheme collects ADR reports from across the whole United Kingdom and includes all medicines, including those from prescriptions, over-the-counter or general retail sales. Reports are also received for herbal medicines and other unlicensed medicines.

There is unknown and a variable level of under-reporting to the Yellow Card Scheme meaning that data collected cannot be used to calculate incidence, as such we cannot provide the number of serious health events per thousand. We are unable to calculate this incidence because neither the total number of reactions occurring in the population, nor the number of patients using the drug is known.

The following table shows the total number of serious UK spontaneous 'suspected' ADR reports received by the MHRA between 23 July 2013 and 22 July 2014 broken down for E-Cigarettes, Nicotine Replacement Therapies (excluding E-Cigarettes) and Varenicline:

	<i>Total Serious Reports</i>
Varenicline	297
Nicotine Replacement therapy	75
E-Cigarettes	5

### Tobacco: Packaging

**Mr Charles Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if his Department will conduct a consultation, separate to that carried out by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills on the potential effect of standardised packaging of tobacco on the Government's long-term economic plan; [206715]

(2) when his Department plans to conduct its consultation on the potential effect of standardised packaging of tobacco on the small retail sector; and if he will make a statement; [206716]

(3) if his Department will conduct a consultation on the potential effect of standardised packaging of tobacco on down-trading to cheaper products. [206788]

**Jane Ellison:** The Government has not yet made a final decision on whether to introduce standardised packaging for tobacco products. We held a United

Kingdom-wide consultation on introducing regulations for standardised packaging of tobacco products, which ran from 26 June to 7 August. The consultation asked for new and relevant information that would help in assessing the wider impact of plain packaging, including economic and other considerations.

The consultation included draft regulations so it is clear how requirements for standardised packaging would work in practice. Alongside the consultation, we have also published an updated consultation-stage Impact Assessment. The consultation asked respondents for further evidence or information which would improve the assumptions or estimates made in the Impact Assessment.

The Government does not intend to run any further consultations with regard to standardised packaging.

**Mr Charles Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Government will await the outcome of the ongoing WTO trading dispute concerning Australia before making a final decision on standardised packaging of tobacco. [206717]

**Jane Ellison:** The Government has not yet made a final decision on whether to introduce standardised packaging for tobacco products. We held a United Kingdom-wide consultation on introducing regulations for standardised packaging of tobacco products, which ran from 26 June to 7 August. The consultation asked for new and relevant information that would help in assessing the wider impact of plain packaging.

We do not believe it is necessary to wait the outcomes of existing disputes and legal cases involving the Commonwealth of Australia before coming to a final decision.

**Mr Charles Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with his counterpart in New Zealand on the standardising of tobacco packaging. [206787]

**Jane Ellison:** Health Ministers have not had any specific discussions about standardised packaging of tobacco with Ministers from New Zealand.

Departmental officials occasionally receive updates from the New Zealand Ministry of Health regarding plans in that country for the introduction of requirements for standardised packaging.

## BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

### Defence Growth Partnership

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what companies will have representation on the Steering Committee of the Defence Growth Partnership. [206781]

**Matthew Hancock:** Companies currently represented on the Steering Committee are Airbus Group, Atkins, Babcock, BAE Systems, Cobham, Finmeccanica, General Dynamics, Hewlett Packard, Lockheed Martin, Marshall, MBDA, QinetiQ, Raytheon, Rolls Royce, Serco, Thales. The trade association, ADS, is also a member and

represents the interests of the wider defence sector. SME representation is currently being reviewed by the DGP. The Department for Business Innovation and Skills and the Ministry of Defence are also represented on the Committee.

### EU External Trade: USA

**Jim Sheridan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what his policy is on mutually-recognised standards in financial services as part of negotiations on the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. [206894]

**Matthew Hancock:** The Government wants to use the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) to encourage financial regulators from the EU and the USA, as hosts of the largest financial centres in the world, to work with each other and agree consistently high standards in the future. Establishing closer and more effective regulatory cooperation between the world's two largest financial centres is essential. By working together to agree more consistent rules, the EU and the USA can eliminate the opportunities for regulatory arbitrage and encourage other jurisdictions to follow suit. Closer dialogues also mean that emerging risks can be spotted and addressed together.

**Jim Sheridan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) in how many meetings in the last year between financial sector professionals and Ministers or senior officials in his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206895]

(2) in how many meetings in the last year between financial sector professionals and Ministers or senior officials of his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206880]

(3) in how many meetings in the last year between agricultural sector professionals and Ministers or senior officials of his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206881]

(4) in how many meetings in the last year between pharmaceutical sector professionals and Ministers or senior officials of his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206882]

(5) in how many meetings in the last year between chemical sector professionals and Ministers or senior officials of his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206883]

(6) in how many meetings in the last year between manufacturing sector professionals and Ministers or senior officials of his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206884]

(7) in how many meetings in the last year between energy sector professionals and Ministers or senior officials of his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206885]

(8) in how many meetings in the last year between insurance sector professionals and Ministers or senior



officials of his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206886]

(9) in how many meetings in the last year between financial sector professionals and himself or senior officials in 10 Downing Street the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206887]

(10) in how many meetings in the last year between agricultural sector professionals and himself or senior officials in 10 Downing Street the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206888]

(11) in how many meetings in the last year between pharmaceutical sector professionals and himself or senior officials in 10 Downing Street the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206889]

(12) in how many meetings in the last year between chemical sector professionals and himself or senior officials in 10 Downing Street the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206890]

(13) in how many meetings in the last year between manufacturing sector professionals and himself or senior officials in 10 Downing Street the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206891]

(14) in how many meetings in the last year between energy sector professionals and himself or senior officials in 10 Downing Street the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206892]

(15) in how many meetings in the last year between insurance sector professionals and himself or senior officials in 10 Downing Street the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206893]

(16) in how many meetings in the last year between agricultural sector professionals and Ministers or senior officials in his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206896]

(17) in how many meetings in the last year between pharmaceutical sector professionals and Ministers or senior officials in his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206897]

(18) in how many meetings in the last year between chemical sector professionals and Ministers or senior officials in his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206898]

(19) in how many meetings in the last year between manufacturing sector professionals and Ministers or senior officials in his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206899]

(20) in how many meetings in the last year between energy sector professionals and Ministers or senior officials in his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206900]

(21) in how many meetings in the last year between insurance sector professionals and Ministers or senior

officials in his Department the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership has been discussed; [206901]

(22) what recent discussions he has had with trades unions on the inclusion of an investor state dispute settlement mechanism in the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement; [206913]

(23) what recent discussions he has had with consumer groups on the inclusion of an investor state dispute settlement mechanism in the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement; [206914]

(24) what recent discussions he has had with health campaigners on the inclusion of an investor state dispute settlement mechanism in the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement; [206915]

(25) what recent discussions he has had with environmental campaigners on the inclusion of an investor state dispute settlement mechanism in the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement. [206916]

**Matthew Hancock:** Details of meetings held by Ministers and Permanent Secretaries with external organisations are published quarterly and can be found at Gov.uk.

Information requested in respect of other officials' meetings is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

**Jim Sheridan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) which existing regulations will not be part of the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement; [206921]

(2) whether negotiators are discussing (a) the harmonisation of standards between the EU and US and (b) mutual recognition of standards between the EU and US in the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations. [206922]

**Matthew Hancock:** One of the main aims of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is to reduce unnecessary regulatory differences between the EU and the USA to encourage greater trade, particularly by SMEs who find overcoming regulatory differences to be a significant barrier to exporting. Both the EU and the USA have been clear that this will not come through lowering levels of consumer and other protections, and where this is not possible regulatory differences will not be eliminated. Reducing regulatory differences could be achieved through various methods such as mutual recognition of regulations, mutual recognition of conformity assessments, use of international standards, and alignment of future regulations. Over half of the projected benefits from TTIP are projected to come from this greater regulatory coherence.

**Jim Sheridan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will give hon. Members access to the draft text of the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations. [206925]

**Matthew Hancock:** The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations are yet to reach a stage where there are stable and complete draft texts. As such, it is too early for these texts to be shared. However, a final draft agreement will be subject to ratification by each member state of the EU, as well as

the EU itself. As part of this process Parliament will receive the complete draft text of the agreement in good time and have an opportunity to scrutinise it through debates in both Houses.

In addition, the Government will continue to keep Parliament up to date throughout the TTIP negotiations. The agreement has been debated in both Houses and been subject to a Committee inquiry in the House of Lords and reviewed by the European Scrutiny Committee of the House of Commons. My noble Friend, Lord Livingston of Parkhead will continue to write to the European Scrutiny Committee chairs of both Houses and the chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on EU-US Trade and Investment after each negotiating round to update them, and the Government can arrange for further detailed briefings to interested hon. Members.

#### Nuclear Fusion

**Mr Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what contribution the UK is making to the development of fusion technology; and if he will make a statement. [905183]

**Greg Clark:** The UK Atomic Energy Authority manages the UK's fusion research programme at the Culham Centre for Fusion Energy, funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, and operates JET, the European fusion research facility, under a €285 million contract from the European Commission. The Authority is now building on the expertise in engineering and technology from fusion research to make Culham a centre of excellence for fusion technology, in collaboration with UK academia and industry, and in support of the international ITER next-step fusion project currently under construction in France.

New fusion technology facilities at Culham are planned in the areas of nuclear materials and remote handling and robotics to support fusion and other related technologies and are working towards the EU design of a DEMO (prototype) fusion power station.

#### Royal Mail

**Mr Umunna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assurances the Government sought from (a) its financial adviser and (b) the syndicate of banks in advance of the privatisation of Royal Mail. [206785]

**Matthew Hancock:** The Government's financial adviser and the syndicate of banks providing professional services to support the preparation and delivery of the Royal Mail share sale were procured through competitive tendering processes. Advisers procured in this way provide assurance that they will deliver the services commissioned through the terms and conditions of their contractual engagement.

#### Television

**Mr Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much his Department spent on the purchase of televisions in (a) 2013 and (b) 2014 to date. [207207]

**Jo Swinson:** During 2013 four televisions were purchased by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) at a total cost of £2,363.83.

2014 to date, BIS has not purchased any televisions.

#### UK Defence Solution Centre

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the annual budget of the UK Defence Solution Centre will be in each of the next five years. [206779]

**Matthew Hancock:** Industry and Government are jointly funding the UK Defence Solutions Centre with a mix of cash and resource contributions equivalent to £2.8 million this year for the start up phase, with £3.8 million in each of the subsequent three years.

#### UK Defence Solutions Centre

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much each company in the defence industry will provide to the UK Defence Solutions Centre; and how much each such company will receive in single source Ministry of Defence contracts in each of the next three years. [206782]

**Matthew Hancock:** Overall funding for the DGP is split equally between Government and industry. For the Defence Solutions Centre, the key 16 companies on the Steering Committee are providing resources equivalent to £8 million, split equally between them.

With regard to how much each such company will receive in single source Ministry of Defence contracts in each of the next three years, this information is not held centrally and could be gathered only at disproportionate cost.

#### UK Trade and Investment Defence and Security Organisation

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills in which overseas markets the UK Trade & Investment Defence and Security Organisation will set up joint teams. [206780]

**Matthew Hancock:** A new UKTI DSO Industry Liaison Board will determine the overseas markets that would benefit from additional Industry resource working more closely with Government and where joint teams overseas will be established. The Board will meet for the first time in the autumn.

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