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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 13 June 2013

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Exports

1. **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to increase exports. [159352]

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): Our ambition is to double exports to £1 trillion by 2020. This ambition was reflected in the 2012 autumn statement, when UK Trade & Investment was allocated an extra £140 million to enable it to double the number of small and medium-sized enterprises supported from 25,000 to 50,000 by 2015.

Andrew Selous: The Government have made an excellent start, with exports to Brazil up by half and to India by more than half and those to China almost doubled, yet still only one in five SMEs exports. Were we to get that up to one in four, we could wipe out our trade deficit, so what efforts are the Government making to engage with the four out of five SMEs which currently do not export but whose products and services would be attractive to overseas markets?

Vince Cable: My hon. Friend analyses the problem correctly: we have to make a major effort in big emerging markets, which we have neglected in the past. We have identified 20. I have been to the majority of them, leading trade missions, as have my colleagues. With reference to raising awareness, for example, in May, a few weeks ago, we had 80 events across the country identifying 3,600 businesses with interests in emerging markets, and there is a greatly increased tempo of activity in the field through the establishment of chambers.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): What has the Secretary of State learnt from the experience in Germany, where the state-backed investment bank makes export finance one of its priorities and one of its objectives? Does he think there are lessons there for this country that could improve access to export finance to address the problem that he has just set out?

Vince Cable: The Germans do indeed have a very good system of export support and trade finance. They do many of these things well. Partly in response to that,

in the earlier period of this Government I introduced a new range of short-term trade finance products that we had not had before. They are now picking up a substantial amount of interest, and in the Budget the Chancellor announced £1.5 billion for medium-term—three to five-year—export credit guarantees, which are now being implemented.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): In the Secretary of State's assessment, what would be the implications of a Brit EU exit on the export sector?

Vince Cable: I am going to Luxembourg tonight. I hope that by the end of tomorrow we will have to agreed to launch those very important negotiations. This is potentially the biggest trade deal that has been accomplished for many years, and it will have major implications—positive implications—for British exporters, particularly in sectors such as cars.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): The Secretary of State's answer to the very pertinent question posed by the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) smacked of complacency. His response did not mention the fact that figures published last week showed that the value of exports has fallen by 1.3%. The CBI also said last week that the trade figures were "unsatisfactory", with

"still a long way to go. The Government needs to do more to help raise exports to the fast-growing economies."

Does the Minister agree with the CBI's assessment? Is he satisfied with the Government's performance in boosting trade so far or does he think he needs to raise his game?

Vince Cable: The game has been raised very considerably over the past three years but the hon. Gentleman is right. The figures on exports are not great and the reason is simple: half our exports go the European Union, where output is declining. It has a major economic crisis. Exports are growing rapidly to emerging markets. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) cited the figures and I will repeat them: 28% growth in the past year to Russia, 16% to Brazil and 16% to China. That does not suggest that we are not trying.

Consumer Protection

3. **Damian Hinds** (East Hampshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve consumer protection. [159354]

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): Yesterday the Government published our response to the recent consultations on consumer rights and, alongside that, a draft Consumer Rights Bill. This will help consumers and their advocates understand their rights when things go wrong.

Damian Hinds: A constituent of mine paid £20 for the previous day's congestion charge, rather than £12, having found an authentic-looking site at the top of Google's listings. The ownership disclosure was out of sight on the landing page, below the fold. What can be done to protect against such intermediary internet rip-offs?

Vince Cable: As many of us know from our constituency work, there are a large number of consumer rip-offs. The purpose of this legislation is to provide for much stronger redress, particularly in internet trade, which is growing rapidly—we have had the most rapid growth of any country outside Finland—and we must bring consumer legislation up to match it.

Ann McKechin (Glasgow North) (Lab): Glasgow's *Evening Times* reported this week that one in five Glasgow citizens is currently using payday loans to try to meet everyday costs. What measures do the Government propose taking in their new legislation to protect consumers and, in particular, control the rollover of payday loans, which is often the nub causing people to go into serious debt?

Vince Cable: A great deal is happening on the payday loan front. The Office of Fair Trading is coming to the end of its investigation, which will result in action that is appropriate to the competition authority. Responsibility will shortly pass to the Financial Conduct Authority, which has more powers and can be more active in that field. We are looking, in particular, at how we can deal with misleading and dangerous advertising in that area.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): At my surgeries I have met residents who have come to see me because they are anxious about having been ripped off or having been victims of mis-selling. What will the proposals do to help them get their money back?

Vince Cable: They will considerably improve the rights of redress, and there is a whole series of specific measures in the Bill, which will be debated at length, on how to achieve that. When we aggregate all the redress elements, we estimate that it will probably be worth something in the order of £4 billion over 10 years to consumers.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): In June last year the Government announced a crackdown on cowboy builders. The DCLG website states:

“The measures will also ensure that householders have a financial safety net in place... if... self-check installers fail to finish work properly or if they can't be chased through the courts.”

Around 85,000 complaints about cowboy builders are made to the OFT every year. Will the Secretary of State tell the House how many people have benefited from that Government scheme in its first 12 months?

Vince Cable: I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman exactly how many, but I am happy to write to him about that. I launched the scheme and am therefore interested in seeing how successful it has been. Over the years we have all met constituents who have had appalling experiences with rogue builders. The existing system operating through trade standards has not been totally effective. This kind of branding will, we hope, bring more cowboy builders to account.

Car Manufacturing

4. **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the performance of the car manufacturing sector. [159355]

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): The UK automotive industry is in great shape: last year UK car production increased by 9% and car exports exceeded imports by value for the time since 1976. The new automotive investment organisation, which we are announcing today, will build on that strong performance, which has already attracted more than £6 billion in global investment over the past two years.

Neil Carmichael: I thank the Minister for that impressive description of the current state of the British car industry. What measures is he taking to ensure that we have sufficient skills, particularly in engineering, to develop the components industry in the car sector as well as recognising the need to provide new technologies?

Michael Fallon: Addressing the skills challenge and increasing the supply of engineers is critical for the automotive industry and others. It needs attention in schools, where the Department for Education is investing £135 million in science and maths education, and from industry itself. I hope that more car companies will follow Nissan's lead in taking up the employee ownership pilots.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): As a west midlands MP, I join the Minister in welcoming the success of the British car industry, which is a tribute to the industry, its work force and trade unions and his Department under both Administrations. Is it not extraordinary that other Government Departments do not back the British car industry, especially the police, who are buying more and more foreign vehicles? Will he talk with the Home Secretary to get her to back British industry? It might even help her leadership ambitions.

Michael Fallon: They may not need that much help.

The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point about procurement by public authorities. He has been to the Department recently to discuss the matter with me and I have written to him about it.

Gavin Williamson (South Staffordshire) (Con): In South Staffordshire we are seeing the construction of a £500 million new engine plant for Jaguar Land Rover. However, one of the great constraints on the automotive sector is the need for more engineers coming through our university system. What more can the Government do to encourage more engineers to drive forward our wonderful automotive sector?

Michael Fallon: We are encouraging more children to take up science subjects and to study maths earlier and for longer, and to be more aware of the high-value, highly regarded careers that are available in engineering. We are urging companies to open up their premises to more visits from schools, particularly in connection with the See Inside Manufacturing initiative that we are launching again this October.

Prompt Payment Code

5. **Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that small business suppliers are paid promptly by large businesses and by government; and if he will make a statement. [159356]

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): I have written to all the FTSE 350 companies urging them to sign up to the prompt payment code. Signatories must pay their invoices on time to maintain membership. Three quarters of FTSE 100 companies are now signatories, and over 1,400 large companies have signed in total.

Charlie Elphicke: Last year a Federation of Small Businesses report showed that 40% of small businesses had faced problems with payment from Government agencies and quangos. Will the Minister make the prompt payment code mandatory for all public sector organisations and consider budget cuts for persistent offenders?

Michael Fallon: There is now a statutory obligation for all public bodies, including the NHS and local authorities, to pay invoices within 30 days.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister agree that paying small and medium suppliers on time is part of the broader responsibilities of the large company? Will he look at the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, which is making a real difference for small and medium-sized enterprises and their relationships with taxpayer-funded local authorities and health authorities? Will he try to ensure that large companies pay taxes and have a broader responsibility to the community in which they sit?

Michael Fallon: That goes a little wider than the original question, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman. There are large companies sitting on large amounts of cash, and it is not right that smaller businesses in their supply chains should have to wait longer than 30 days to be paid promptly.

Medical Education and Research

6. **Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of his Department's budget for medical education and research. [159357]

The Minister for Universities and Science (Mr David Willetts): The Government are committed to well-funded medical education and research and to maintaining long-term funding in these areas. In 2013-14 we will spend £330 million on health education and £630 million on health research.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Minister for his answer. However, the chair of the Medical Schools Council has said that any move of this budget to the Department of Health poses a significant risk of undermining Britain's leading position in health research and education. Will the Minister confirm that he will resist all attempts at Treasury short-termism and a move of the budget to the Department of Health, as this area is a driver of growth and a global strength for the UK?

Mr Willetts: It is a global strength for the UK, and that is why we have protected the Medical Research Council's budget in real terms. Only last week we had the topping-out ceremony at the Crick institute—the opening of the new laboratory of molecular biology.

On the particular issue that the hon. Lady raises, I cannot do better than to quote the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who said the other day:

“I give you an absolute commitment that I will do nothing that jeopardises that vital basic research that the Medical Research Council undertakes, and I would always make sure that that money is not used for other things.”

We cannot do better than that.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The Government have announced more university training places for medical students and doctors. This is a matter of some urgency given the wave of doctors who are due to come up for retirement and the fact that it takes seven years to train a doctor. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on this?

Mr Willetts: I know that my hon. Friend has a particular interest and expertise in this area. Of course, the number of students who come through for medical training is very carefully planned, taking account of the needs of the NHS for future doctors.

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): I am grateful for the Minister's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), but perhaps I could press him to go further specifically in relation to the potential moving of the Medical Research Council's budget to the Department of Health. He will be aware that the chief executive of the Association of Medical Research Charities has described the proposed move as a “fudge” that will threaten the independence of medical research in this country. Does the Minister still believe in the Haldane principle, and if so, will he commit to keep the Medical Research Council under his Department's control to ensure that it remains free of political interference?

Mr Willetts: I am happy to give the assurance that we are committed to the Haldane principle and it is important that medical research remains subject to it. That is essential for all parts of the science family. I can do no better than repeat the Chancellor's assurance that we will make sure that the money is not used for other things, and that if there is any change the vital, basic research that the MRC carries out is not jeopardised.

Apprentices (SMEs)

7. **Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con):** What steps he is taking to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises take on more apprentices. [159358]

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): We have made it easier and quicker for small businesses to take on apprentices by simplifying the process for employers. We have introduced an apprenticeship grant for employers. The National Apprenticeship Service has a dedicated team to provide bespoke services for small businesses and we are implementing the key recommendations of the Jason Holt review.

Rebecca Harris: I thank the Secretary of State for his reply. I, like many hon. Members, am dedicated to promoting apprenticeships in my constituency, particularly in small and medium-sized businesses, but they are

often very busy and hard to reach, so it is difficult to get across the message about what is available. Ironically, they are often the firms that would most benefit from an apprentice. Will the Secretary of State outline the specific measures available to promote apprenticeships and any support the Department can give hon. Members in doing so?

Vince Cable: May I first anticipate the House's disappointment that I am answering this question, rather than my colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock)? He is being a role model for our policy of shared parental leave and is currently nursing Humphrey Hancock, who was born a few days ago.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) has seen the benefits of the growth of apprenticeships, which is one of the Government's big success stories. The number has grown from 500 at the beginning of this Government to 870 at the latest count. My hon. Friend is right that there are particular obstacles for small business, but companies with fewer than 200 employees already take 80% of all the apprenticeships in the country. We are trying to improve the service. One of the latest developments is the introduction of a website to make it much easier to access the NAS and its services.

Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab): I am sure the whole House will wish Humphrey a speedy recovery! The Opposition are not at all disappointed that the Secretary of State has stepped into the breach. Although his Department has achieved some success on apprentices, the construction industry is still falling behind its own targets. If we are to get the investment programme under way, it is vital to increase it. Will the Secretary of State give that some attention and get cracking with it?

Vince Cable: I will. Indeed, at the beginning of the week I chaired a meeting of the construction industry's council, which we have put together. Its members acknowledged that skills were one of their key constraints, one of the problems being that the construction industry has been through a very deep, cyclical depression, which has had a major knock-on effect on skills. We are now working with it to boost skills, so that the upswing in the industry that we are beginning to see is not impeded by the shortage of key people.

Pubs

8. **John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): What steps he is taking to support pubs. [159360]

14. **George Hollingbery** (Meon Valley) (Con): What steps he is taking to support traditional local pubs. [159368]

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): We are currently consulting on proposals to introduce a statutory code of practice and adjudicator for the pubs sector. The consultation closes tomorrow.

John Glen: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. In assessing the possibility of a code and adjudicator, will he take account of the experience of

my constituents Peter and Sara Strawson of the White Horse in Quidhampton, who, like many others, though accepting the challenges of local competition and changing patterns of consumption, maintain that Enterprise Inns signed them up to a lease on a false prospectus and then, with a combined wet and dry rent footing, made their business completely uneconomic and unsustainable?

Vince Cable: I think we all have such examples of publicans in our constituencies and it was that kind of experience that led to the Select Committee producing four reports on the subject. It also led to our seeking a voluntary code. In view of the lack of progress, we recommended a statutory code, on which we are now consulting. We have had about 6,000 replies, which is a remarkable response. I cannot yet assess the conclusions, but my hon. Friend's example is fairly typical of many.

George Hollingbery: Like too many other landlords in Meon Valley, Angela Ryan, who until recently ran the White Hart pub in South Harting, has lost her battle to continue in business after facing unsustainable rent demands, again from Enterprise Inns. Will the Secretary of State assure me that he will do everything in his power to redress the balance between landlord and owner, so that such SMEs have a reasonable prospect of continuing in business and our rural communities may retain their valued pubs?

Vince Cable: My hon. Friend's example reinforces the general point that I made a moment ago. I cannot pre-judge the outcome of the consultation and we have not yet studied the responses. The Government's overriding objective is to achieve fair treatment for publicans in respect of rent and beer prices. I think that the mechanism that we have proposed will survive scrutiny.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware that there was a huge Fair Deal For Your Local rally in Parliament recently. It was attended by Members from all parts of the House who support Labour's view that a statutory code for pub companies must include a mandatory free-of-tie option to hardwire fairness into the system. Is a fairer distribution of risk and reward an objective of the Government's regulation?

Vince Cable: It is an objective of our regulation to achieve a fair distribution of risk and reward. As I have said, the precise mechanism and whether we proceed with the adjudicator in the way that we have suggested very much depend on how we analyse the consultation. The results will of course be discussed in the House.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): Yesterday's news about Punch Taverns' unsustainable debt and its row with the committee set up by the Association of British Insurers shows that the securitised pubco scam is a disaster not just for local pubs but for the British economy. Will the Secretary of State listen to the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Forum of Private Business, all of which back Fair Deal For Your Local and the obvious solution, which is the market rent-only option?

Vince Cable: We have listened to those three bodies and to many other people, and we are sympathetic to their concern. However, the precise mechanism that is adopted—I am sorry to be repetitive—depends on the results of the consultation.

Small and Micro-businesses

9. **Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help small and micro-businesses grow. [159361]

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): I announced last week that we will extend the exemption from burdensome new regulation to firms with up to 50 staff, and that will continue after 2014. Our growth accelerator scheme has supported more than 6,000 small businesses with high growth potential. We are encouraging more businesses to exploit export opportunities, and UK Trade & Investment is on track to double the number of SMEs it supports to 50,000 by 2015.

Mr Baron: Although I welcome the Government's initiatives to date, given the importance of small and micro-businesses to the economy will Ministers use their influence to push for further tax incentives to encourage growth and employment? After all, cash flow is king for such businesses and history suggests undeniably that financial payback does not take too long to come around.

Michael Fallon: As my hon. Friend knows, the Government are making the tax system in the United Kingdom the most competitive in the G20. In 2011, we reduced the small companies rate to 20%. More than 1 million employers will benefit from the new £2,000 employment allowance from next April and nearly 500,000 employers will pay no employer's national insurance contributions at all from that date.

Royal Mail

10. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What progress he has made on making shares in Royal Mail available to its employees; and if he will make a statement. [159362]

16. **Kris Hopkins** (Keighley) (Con): What progress he has made on making shares in Royal Mail available to its employees; and if he will make a statement. [159370]

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): We are designing an employee share scheme that will honour the commitment made by Parliament in 2011 that 10% of Royal Mail shares should be reserved for employees. We are still considering the details, but it is very much the Government's intention to make the offer attractive to employees, while balancing the overall value for money for the Government and the interests of other stakeholders.

Michael Fabricant: John Lewis, under the inspired leadership of Andy Street, whom I should declare is a friend of mine, is synonymous with quality and service.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that John Lewis, which uses the mutual model, might provide an appropriate model for the privatisation of Royal Mail?

Vince Cable: As the hon. Gentleman will know, we are currently considering the way the privatisation proceeds, and we have committed to Parliament that 10% of shares will go to employees. There are different ways of doing that and we have not prejudged exactly how it will occur. I remind the hon. Gentleman that this is the largest worker share ownership in any privatisation that has occurred, and it will be the largest for several decades.

Kris Hopkins: More than 90% of BT's employees registered to participate in shares when the company was privatised. Does my right hon. Friend agree that everybody in this House, and outside, should encourage as many Royal Mail employees as possible to participate in and benefit from shares from a sale?

Vince Cable: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. We wish to work with employees, and particularly the union that represents them. My colleague the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Michael Fallon), and I have regular conversations with that union, and wish it to be positively engaged with the share sale process.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State tell the House how much will be paid in commission to banks or handling agencies for the sale of those shares to people who are buying things that they actually already own?

Vince Cable: The process will be competitive, as is right, and designed to achieve value for money for the taxpayer. As the right hon. Gentleman will know, it is practice to enclose details of those fees in the prospectus, and he will see that in due course.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I am sure the whole House will wish to join me in congratulating all Royal Mail staff for producing a doubling of profits this year, and we send our best wishes to the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson), for a speedy recovery.

The Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks, who I am surprised is not answering this question, is seen as a fire fighter in Government, but rather than putting out the fire at Royal Mail, he has lit the fuse and put the fire sale signs up. He is, of course, rushing that through to spare the blushes of his Chancellor, who is borrowing £245 billion more than he said in 2010 and is desperate for pre-election cash in the coffers. The Minister signed a letter in 2009 in which he said he was opposed to privatisation, so why are the Government now rushing a sell-off that is opposed by right-wing think-tanks, the unions, the National Federation of SubPostmasters, small businesses, the Liberal Democrats, and people up and down this country who will receive a poorer postal service as a result?

Vince Cable: The Opposition have a strange but perhaps rather revealing idea of speedy decision making. The process of bringing private capital into the Post Office started in 2008 under my Labour predecessor. It

was one of our first pieces of legislation—I introduced it in the House, it was agreed, and we are now following through in an orderly way designed to get good value for the taxpayer and a good outcome for Royal Mail.

High Street Businesses

11. **David Wright** (Telford) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the long-term prospects for high street businesses. [159365]

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): High streets are changing and the Government are committed to helping communities adapt their high streets to those changes. We have taken action following the Portas review by lifting planning restrictions, doubling small business rate relief, and providing towns with a package of support to drive forward their local economy. I look forward to giving evidence to the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee inquiry into retail in due course.

David Wright: High streets obviously need to provide a diverse offer in order to succeed, and the provision of street markets and farmers markets are particularly important to many high streets. There is a significant problem in a number of areas because we cannot get road closure orders to allow such markets to go ahead. What work is the Department doing, together with the Department for Communities and Local Government, to ensure that markets thrive, and what will the Government do to develop a market strategy?

Michael Fallon: I hope that the hon. Gentleman, like other hon. Members, will support his local market. I had the pleasure of supporting Sevenoaks local market last month, and there is an initiative across the country—love your local market—in which I hope he is participating. I will look into the particular point he raises about highway closures.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): In my constituency, a number of businesses in the high street have unfortunately closed. If they go into liquidation, their employees receive pay arrears, holiday pay and notice pay, if necessary from the national insurance fund. If the business just ceases trading and is eventually struck off, its employees do not get pay arrears, holiday pay or notice pay. Will the Minister meet me to discuss that anomaly in the law?

Michael Fallon: I would be happy to do so, but I hope my hon. Friend will not be too gloomy about the state of the high street. He will know that, in the most recent year for which we have figures, some 22,900 store-based retailers opened and 21,000 closed—more stores were set up than were closed.¹

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): Is it not time that we looked at the impact of business rates on the high street, and particularly at the glacial speed of appeals and revaluations?

Michael Fallon: My hon. Friend will know that we have doubled the small business rate relief for the past three and a half years, which has helped more than 500,000 businesses. In the Growth and Infrastructure

Act 2013, we postponed the revaluation to give businesses more certainty—a larger number of them were forecast to lose under the revaluation than would have gained.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the prospects for our high streets would be a lot rosier if local authorities did more to encourage motorists into our town centres by reducing parking charges?

Michael Fallon: I agree with my hon. Friend. We must get the balance right. It is important that local authorities do not freeze trade out of their local high streets. One action we have taken following the Portas review is to encourage local authorities to look at the total local economy and ensure that there are not undue restrictions on encouraging people to come into the high street.

Female Entrepreneurs

12. **Mary Macleod** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Con): What support his Department is providing to female entrepreneurs. [159366]

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): Women play an important role in growing our economy. We commissioned the Women's Business Council to investigate how we can help remove barriers and maximise women's contribution to economic growth. Following its excellent report last week, the Government will publish an action plan this autumn that will improve web-based support for entrepreneurs. We will work with the British Bankers Association to improve women's awareness of the financial support available.

Mary Macleod: If women set up businesses at the same rate as they do in the US, benefits of up to £42 billion could be delivered to the economy. When I recently organised Start-up Challenge seminars for women in my constituency, they were full of excellent, enthusiastic and dynamic women who were keen to be entrepreneurs. What more can we do to stretch out to those women and encourage more of them to be great entrepreneurs for the country?

Michael Fallon: If women were setting up and running new businesses at the same rate as men, we would have an extra 1 million female entrepreneurs in this country. Despite progress in recent years, women remain less likely than men to start a business, so we have more to do.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State has recently made a number of welcome speeches in support of women in engineering, enterprise and the boardroom, but unfortunately, they are not matched by action from his Government. Why, for example, has the number of investments by the Aspire fund, which was set up specifically to support women-led businesses, fallen under his Government to a quarter of what it was under the previous Government?

Michael Fallon: Forty per cent. of start-up loans have been taken up by women, which is an important advance. In the two-month period from 1 March, 12% of FTSE 100 board appointments and 40% of FTSE 250 board appointments were secured by women.

1. [Official Report, 18 June 2013, Vol. 564, c. 3MC.]

Export Week

13. **Christopher Pincher** (Tamworth) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's export week campaign. [159367]

18. **Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's export week campaign. [159372]

The Minister for Universities and Science (Mr David Willetts): Export week was launched by my colleague Lord Green in May and included over 80 events across the UK, attended by more than 3,600 businesses focusing on 20 high-growth markets.

Christopher Pincher: As chairman of the all-party group on Azerbaijan, I attended the Caspian oil and gas conference, where BP announced its further development of the Shah Deniz gas field. What action can the Government take with UK Trade & Investment further to expand British trade with Azerbaijan in order to address the concerns of the governor of Ganja, its second city, that, although German, Dutch and French companies are bidding for major infrastructure contracts there, no British companies are involved?

Mr Willetts: We are absolutely aware of the international export opportunities presented by major infrastructure projects and are strengthening the commercial role of our embassies in key target markets such as Azerbaijan to ensure that we secure a fair share of those contracts.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I attended one of the 80 events, in Derbyshire in the east midlands. There were fewer than 100 people there, and not one from my constituency. UK Trade & Investment has been given additional funding. Will my right hon. Friend explain what it is spending that funding on, and why it is not reaching out? It is all right exporting from the south of the country, but we need to look to the midlands and the north too.

Mr Willetts: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on the importance of reaching out to businesses in her constituency and across the midlands. Indeed, we are trying to strengthen the ability of chambers of commerce located in our key target markets to communicate with small and medium-sized enterprises back home. We are specifically helping smaller companies with the cost of going to their first international trade fair, as not enough of them take that important opportunity. We are seeing the benefits, with exports to target markets up by 49% in Brazil, up 130% in Russia, and up 60% in India.

Green Investment Bank

15. **David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): What types of projects will be eligible for funding from the green investment bank. [159369]

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): The state aid approval obtained in relation to the green investment bank enables it to make investments on commercial terms across the following green sectors: offshore wind; waste processing and recycling and energy from waste; non-domestic energy efficiency; the green

deal; biofuels for transport; biomass power; carbon capture and storage; marine energy; and renewable heat.

David Mowat: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, and I congratulate him on getting the bank operational so quickly. However, he will know that under the terms of the EU state aid clearance a number of low-carbon technologies were excluded, including nuclear supply chain and solar, and that carbon capture and storage was regarded as low priority. Does he have any intention of going back to the EU and asking for the clearance to be amended, so that the bank can more closely follow the purpose set out in the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013?

Vince Cable: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for acknowledging the progress we have made. Our first priority is to ensure that the institution makes good use of the £3 billion of Government capital that is now being deployed alongside private capital. We are making good progress in that respect—something in the order of £700 million has been committed. He raised the matter of a wider scope for the bank. He anticipates the answer; we would have to go back to the European Commission and seek state aid approval. I do not currently have any plans to do that.

Business Bank

17. **Sheila Gilmore** (Edinburgh East) (Lab): What the timetable is for the establishment of the business bank. [159371]

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): The business bank will tackle long-standing market failures in the provision of finance to small and medium-sized businesses. I expect the business bank to be fully operational in 2014, subject to EU state aid approval. Its programmes are being operated from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills as an interim arrangement to help businesses straight away, including the £300 million investment programme launched in April.

Sheila Gilmore: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but in December 2012 he told this House that the business bank was already established. In fact, as he has just said, it is really operating with a re-named group of civil servants from his own Department. What assurance do we have that it will become a bank by 2014, or ever?

Vince Cable: I do not know whether the hon. Lady is suggesting somehow short-circuiting the whole state aid approval process. The last I heard, the Labour party was committed to the rules of the European Union. If it wants to break them, it should perhaps make that explicit. In the meantime, we operate within the rules and that means we have a team of professional people—they are not civil servants; they are from the financial sector—who are doing an admirable job and are already out in the market with a heavily oversubscribed offering which we hope to see deployed very quickly.

Heseltine Review

19. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What discussions he has had on taking forward the recommendations of Lord Heseltine that regeneration funding be devolved to local enterprise partnerships. [159373]

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): I have regular discussions. As our response to Lord Heseltine's report made clear, the Government will be creating a single local growth fund for local enterprise partnerships from April 2015, which will include housing, transport and elements of skills funding. The size and content of the single local growth fund will be confirmed at the spending review.

Diana Johnson: On 18 March, the Treasury accepted Lord Heseltine's proposals on devolving regeneration funding to local enterprise partnerships from 2015, but in late April the Business Secretary briefed journalists that we will not be going down that road. Will the Minister tell us whether the Business Secretary backs the Government's plans to implement Lord Heseltine's recommendations by 2015?

Michael Fallon: My right hon. Friend certainly does so. It is up to local leaders in each local enterprise partnership to identify their growth priorities and to set them out in their local economic strategies, and those growth strategies might well include regeneration. The hon. Lady will know that Humber has the largest enterprise zone in England. It has already had some £50 million of assistance from the regional growth fund and is well placed to exploit the opportunities arising from offshore renewable industries, as I saw when I met the partnership there earlier this year.

Topical Questions

T1. [159378] **Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his Departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): My Department plays a key role in supporting the rebalancing of the economy through business to deliver growth while increasing skills and learning.

Andy McDonald: Given the importance of further education colleges, such as the award-winning and hugely ambitious Middlesbrough college in my constituency, in helping people acquire the skills they need for local job markets, will the Minister explain to the House what work his Department has done to encourage local enterprise partnerships to work more closely with colleges?

The Minister for Universities and Science (Mr David Willetts): The Department has given a clear remit to local enterprise partnerships to work on raising skills in their areas. It is obviously important that they work with further education colleges, and in our legislation in 2011 we removed much of the red tape and regulation that had prevented further education colleges from contributing to that.

T2. [159379] **Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): The Secretary of State is right to say that he cannot comment during the consultation and to urge as many people as possible to take part in the BIS consultation on pubcos by tomorrow, but does he agree that the evidence supplied to him must be accurate and honest? Given that in the past week we have had a dishonest and untruthful statement to MPs and the Select Committee from both the chief executive of Enterprise Inns and the chief executive of the lobbying organisation for pubcos, the British Beer and Pub Association—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will resume his seat. Topical Questions must be brief. The hon. Gentleman has had one opportunity already. There is a lot to get through and there are other colleagues to consider.

Vince Cable: I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend has done on the pubs issue. He has played a significant part in influencing the House's thinking on it. I am sure he appreciates, however, that I would get into difficulty if I started talking about serious people in the industry being dishonest and untruthful. I will not go down that road.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): In the US, small business Saturday takes place immediately after Thanksgiving, on one of its busiest shopping days of the year, and celebrates small businesses' contribution to local economies and encourages people to shop in them. It has proved to be very successful. A grass-roots movement of organisations, including the Federation of Small Businesses, representing hundreds of thousands of small businesses, has formed to make a UK small business Saturday happen later this year. Will the Secretary of State lend his support to this initiative, which aims to give a boost to the country's small businesses?

Vince Cable: I will do whatever I can to boost the cause of small business. I was with the Federation of Small Businesses at the beginning of the week addressing many of those issues. In my earlier answers, I explained what we were doing for small business in respect of trade, apprenticeships and the business bank, and the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Michael Fallon), has talked about deregulation. It is a very wide agenda and we are delivering those aims.

Mr Umunna: One of the things that small businesses find most objectionable is the perceived preferential treatment that they see some large companies getting from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, in contrast to the heavy-handed treatment that small businesses sometimes receive. If HMRC is to clamp down on tax avoidance by large companies, which the Secretary of State says is a Government priority, transparency is key. Under the Companies Act 2006, large companies are obliged to disclose details of foreign subsidiaries to Companies House, but it appears that the latter is not properly enforcing these requirements. In March 2011, the Business Secretary said that he would carry out—

Mr Speaker: Order. What we need is a question, with a question mark—just one sentence. We have a lot to get through.

Mr Umunna: Why has the formal investigation that the Secretary of State promised not taken place?

Vince Cable: It has happened; I have conducted it. The problem is very simple: roughly 4 million accounts are registered with Companies House and scrutinising all of them in detail is difficult. I have asked Companies House—it is now doing this—to ensure that the returns of the top-350 companies are analysed in detail for errors. If there are errors, our experience so far has been that they are very speedily corrected.

T3. [159380] **Andrew Stunell** (Hazel Grove) (LD): Does the Secretary of State welcome Stockport council's fund to assist private businesses in setting up apprenticeship organisations and schemes? Next time he comes to Stockport, will he agree to meet some of them?

Vince Cable: I have visited Stockport on several occasions. It has been an excellent council over the years, and my right hon. Friend works effectively with it and on Stockport's behalf. I always try on my regional visits to meet apprentices and small companies providing them, and I would be happy to do that next time I come to Stockport, which I think will be quite soon.

T6. [159383] **Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): The Secretary of State will have had representations from high energy-intensive users in manufacturing, such as the chemical industry in my constituency, about rising energy prices and energy policy and their impact on its competitiveness. Has he raised those concerns with his colleague the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change?

Vince Cable: The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have quite rightly raised this issue on many occasions. There is an issue of price competitiveness for industries such as steel and aluminium, and we have addressed their concerns. He will know that the Treasury has funded a compensation scheme. We have been through a consultation process. Payments will be made quickly in respect of the European Union emissions trading scheme. The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change has also made a commitment to ensuring that the electricity market review implications do not fall on energy-intensive industries.

T4. [159381] **Zac Goldsmith** (Richmond Park) (Con): It is one thing the Government not following through on their promises to tackle plastic waste in this country, but what on earth was my right hon. Friend doing complaining to the EU about Italy's plans to ban or phase out the use of single-use plastic bags, and why was the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs not even consulted, given that it is one of its policy areas?

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): The Italian proposal would allow for only biodegradable bags, so would discriminate against British businesses that sell similar recyclable or other forms of degradable bag—for example, oxo-degradable plastic bags, with which I am sure my hon. Friend is familiar.

T8. [159386] **Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): If the Secretary of State finds himself before the Star Chamber, will he bear in mind that unemployment in the west midlands is rising and the rate of employment is falling? Will he therefore resist any cuts that further threaten the growth potential of small businesses and research and development across the west midlands region?

Vince Cable: I am frequently in the west midlands; I was in Coventry last week discussing these issues with the local enterprise partnership. My understanding is that there has been rapid growth in private sector employment in the west midlands and many other parts of the country, and, as the hon. Gentleman will have seen from yesterday's figures, unemployment is still falling.

T7. [159384] **Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): The late payment of commercial debt regulations provide for a 60-day payment period, unless agreed and not grossly unfair. Will Ministers consider a longstop date of 90 days to give small businesses certainty?

Michael Fallon: I know that my hon. Friend has continued to raise the case of Mr and Mrs Langstaff in his constituency. The "Insurance: Conduct of Business" rules require insurers to handle claims promptly, and redress is available through the Financial Ombudsman Service if they do not do so. I note that a number of insurance companies have now signed the prompt payment code.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment has the Minister made of the take-up of post-24 advanced learning loans and the potential impact on further education colleges' finances?

Mr Willetts: We are absolutely committed to ensuring that such loans are taken up. We are very much looking forward to ensuring that they help to spread training opportunities for adult learning, to which we have a clear commitment.

Mr John Leech (Manchester, Withington) (LD): I know that my right hon. Friend is aware of the concern about the future of northern museums, including the Museum of Science and Industry. Will BIS Ministers discuss with colleagues in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport how best we can protect the future of our science museums, which are so important in encouraging young people into careers in science?

Mr Willetts: We absolutely understand the importance of science museums and the communication work that they undertake, and of course we recognise their significant role.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): A report from Sheffield Hallam university shows that Merseyside's local economy will lose a staggering £847 million—that is, two years and five months' worth of economic growth—as a result of the Government's cuts to welfare support. What discussions are Ministers having with colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions about the impact on regional growth?

Vince Cable: We do not recognise those numbers. There is a significant resurgence of activity in many successful companies in Merseyside, as there is in the rest of the economy.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): The resurgence of the motor manufacturing industry has had a tremendously positive effect on the supply chain across the west midlands, but further growth in that supply chain is now being challenged by the lack of available skills. Will my right hon. Friend tell me what more he can do to address that pressing problem?

Michael Fallon: This is a pressing problem right across the automotive industry and other engineering industries, and it has to be attacked on a number of fronts, including through more investment by the Department for Education to encourage more children to take up science, maths and technology, and through industry itself getting more involved in the employer ownership pilots and opening up its premises so that people can see the kinds of rewarding career that are now available in manufacturing and engineering.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I am sure the Secretary of State will have noted that, while unemployment fell by 5,000 this week across the UK, it rose in the north-east of England by 4,000 to 131,000. That means that 10.1% of our working population, and 24.9% of our young people, are now unemployed. Will he meet me and other colleagues to discuss how we can alleviate that individual suffering and unleash the potential of the north-east economy?

Vince Cable: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there are particular problems in the north-east of England, but they are far from new. I was in his constituency a few weeks ago when I visited Durham and Tyneside. The great potential of the north-east is that it is a major manufacturing area of the UK with a strong export intensity. If we can achieve the rebalancing of the economy, as we are determined to do, the north-east could be one of the main beneficiaries. I am happy to meet him to talk further about that.

Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): The Government are having a really successful run-up to this year's G8; \$4.5 billion was pledged for global malnutrition last Saturday and there has been a highly successful science summit this week. Will the Science Minister update the House with further details of the science summit?

Mr Willetts: We had an excellent summit of the G8 Science Ministers at the Royal Society yesterday. We agreed that new global challenges such as antibiotic resistance needed to be tackled, and we committed ourselves to the publication of research and data that are publicly funded.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): A delegation from the Confederation of Indian Industry visited the UK this week. What is the Secretary of State doing to support economic partnerships between Britain and India, and how does he envisage their driving growth in the UK?

Vince Cable: The Confederation of Indian Industry was in the Department at the beginning of this week to make the case for the deepening of the relationship, and

that is proceeding well. Unfortunately, we are starting from a low base, as Britain's share in the Indian market is not as great as it could be. The one really big success story is Indian investment in the UK, which is growing rapidly. That includes our largest manufacturing company, Tata, which is highly successful and a very valuable corporate citizen. We are doing all we can to develop that relationship.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Further to the question from the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr Leech), and given the importance that this Government have placed on science, is it the Department's intention to play an important role, in conjunction with Ministers from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, in securing the future of the three northern museums in the Science Museum Group, particularly the National Media museum in Bradford, which is crucial to the local economy in the Bradford district?

Mr Willetts: We understand the importance of those museums. They are the responsibility of DCMS, and that Department is well aware of the significant role that they play, particularly in attracting young people and getting them interested in science and technology.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): Earlier this year, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth) and I decided to use a survey to investigate zero-hours contracts. The Secretary of State has now followed us. Hopefully I can help by asking him whether he will now look into the situation of the 37,000 people on zero-hours contracts whom the Government estimate to be working in the care sector in the north-west.

Vince Cable: We do indeed have anecdotes about abusive practices in that area. We also have a lot of other anecdotes to show that the system works very well for a large number of workers and companies. I am not jumping to any conclusions; I am just trying to gather the facts. I should add that the zero-hours contract system continued under 13 years of the Labour Government and that no Labour Minister thought that there was a problem with that.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): I thank the Minister for Universities and Science for his visit to the university of Worcester last week. Does he agree that the magnificent new library, the Hive, which was delivered in conjunction with local city and county councils, is a shining example of creative collaboration between universities and the local government sector, which other universities should follow?

Mr Willetts: It was an excellent visit, and the initiative for a new joint university and city library was indeed striking. It is an initiative from which other cities across the country can learn.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know of the campaign launched by the Cutlers company, supported by the Sheffield *Star* and

with wide support across the city, concerning the threat posed by the red tape challenge to controls over the use of the name Sheffield. In response to the campaign, the Deputy Prime Minister has indicated that the protected name status for Sheffield will be retained. Is that correct?

Michael Fallon: I will certainly have a look at that. It was a point made to me on Tuesday when I had the pleasure of addressing the stainless steel annual conference and celebrating the 100th anniversary of Harry Brearley, the inventor of stainless steel.

Business of the House

10.30 am

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

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

MONDAY 17 JUNE—Second Reading of the Pensions Bill.

TUESDAY 18 JUNE—Motion to approve a European document relating to the reform of the common agricultural policy, followed by motion to approve a European document relating to enhanced co-operation and a financial transaction tax and documents relating to economic and monetary union, followed by motion to approve a European document relating to the European elections 2014, followed by a general debate on Sudan. The subject for this debate was nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

WEDNESDAY 19 JUNE—I expect my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to update the House following the G8 summit, followed by Opposition day (3rd allotted day). There will be a debate on the topic of the economic and social importance of regional arts and the creative industries, followed by a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 20 JUNE—A general debate on carers, followed by a general debate on the east coast main line franchise. The subjects for these debates were nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

The provisional business for the week commencing 24 June will include:

MONDAY 24 JUNE—Second Reading of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

TUESDAY 25 JUNE—Opposition Day (4th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 26 JUNE—I would like to remind the House that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will make a statement on the spending review, followed by Second Reading of the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Bill, followed by motions relating to the hybrid Bill procedure.

THURSDAY 27 JUNE—Business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 20 June will be:

THURSDAY 20 JUNE—A debate on the sixth report of the Justice Committee on interpreting and translation services and the Applied Language Solutions contract, followed by a debate on the UK contribution to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Ms Eagle: In the light of recent revelations about the Chair of the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change, may I welcome your decision, Mr Speaker, to write to the Chair of the Standards and Privileges Committee? It is surely right for you to ask whether Chairs of Select Committees should have commercial interests in those sectors covered by their Committee—but it is not just MPs who can have an influence on Government.

I understand that on Tuesday evening, the Prime Minister's Australian election guru, Lynton Crosby, addressed the Tory parliamentary party, with the Chief Whip and the Prime Minister in attendance, on his strategy for the general election. He is having a clear influence on Government, but we do not know who Lynton Crosby's corporate clients are. We do know, however, that his company, Crosby Textor, has long lobbied lucratively for big tobacco. We know, too, that plain packaging for cigarettes suddenly disappeared from this year's Queen's Speech, despite strong hints that it would be included. So does the Leader of the House agree with me that for the sake of transparency, lobbyists at the heart of No. 10 should publish their interests and their client lists? We have already had one scandal involving prime ministerial appointments at No. 10; surely we do not need another.

I understand that Government meetings have already taken place to discuss the contents of the lobbying Bill. Labour has been offering cross-party talks to find a solution for three years. Why does the Leader of the House not take up our offer? Will he will arrange for pre-legislative scrutiny, and when can we expect to see the Bill?

At the Coming Year in Parliament conference on Tuesday, the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) jumped the gun by announcing that on 5 July the first private Member's Bill to be discussed would be the EU referendum Bill tabled by the hon. Member for Stockton South (James Wharton). [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I thought they might like that, Mr. Speaker. Normally it is the job of the Member promoting a Bill to decide on the day for Second Reading, but the cat is now well and truly out of the bag. Will the Leader of the House confirm the obvious—that the Bill is actually a Conservative party handout?

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Yes!

Ms Eagle: I thank the hon. Gentleman, but let us see what the Leader of the House says.

Will the Leader of the House also assure me that the hon. Member for Stockton South will at least be consulted on the parliamentary strategy that Conservative party managers will be pursuing in his name? Is not the real purpose of the Bill to persuade the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay and 100 of his colleagues to stop writing letters to the Prime Minister? Does this not show that his party is more concerned with pursuing partisan interests than with pursuing the national interest?

Over the last week, we have seen a bleak picture emerging of an increasingly divided Britain. New figures from Public Health England reveal that thousands more people are dying prematurely in the north than in the south. The shocking variations show that someone living in Manchester is twice as likely to die early as someone living in Wokingham. Moreover, a report published by the TUC this week shows that wages have fallen by nearly 8%. This comes at a time when prices are rising and people are suffering unprecedented cuts in their living standards. The regional differences are shocking, with the north-west and the south-west seeing pay packets shrink by more than 10%. The Chancellor used to say "We're all in this together", but those figures, added to his millionaires' tax cut, make that

statement laughable. Will the Leader of the House schedule a debate on divided Britain, to take place in Government time?

This week, the hon. Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen) added his request for a leadership contest to the growing pile in the 1922 Committee's files. Likening the Tories to passengers in an aeroplane, he said that they could either "do something about" the Prime Minister or

"sit back, watch the in-flight movies and wait for the inevitable."

I have been wondering what movies members of the Cabinet might be watching while waiting for the inevitable to arrive. "Eyes Wide Shut", perhaps? "Clueless"? "Les Misérables"? Or perhaps they have just been instructed to watch "The Wizard of Oz".

Luckily for the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary took the opportunity to lecture him about his "motives and values" last night, and his fellow Bullingdon boy Boris Johnson rushed to undermine him by calling him a "girly swot". As a self-proclaimed "girly swot", I remind the Mayor of London that being called a woman and clever is not an insult. Indeed, is not the truth that if the Prime Minister had a few more "girly swots" in the Cabinet, he would not be in the mess that he is in now?

Mr Lansley: I thank the shadow Leader of the House for her response. Let me begin by echoing her expression of support for your letter to the Chairman of the Standards and Privileges Committee, Mr. Speaker—not least because I think that we in the House of Commons want consideration of the relationship between Members' interests and their responsibilities to proceed on the basis of advice from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and the Standards and Privileges Committee, whose task is to secure those standards in the House. However, I also think it important for all of us in recent weeks to have recognised the importance of understanding not only what the rules say, but the spirit behind those rules. I think that if every Member of Parliament lives by the spirit as well as the letter of the rules, we will avoid what might otherwise be excessive and unduly intrusive rule-making on what Members should and should not do.

The hon. Lady asked me about a number of matters relating to the Conservative party. I remind her that I am here as Leader of the House, and I speak here on behalf of the Government. Lynton Crosby is not in the Government or an adviser to the Government; he is an adviser to the Conservative party, and I am not therefore responsible here for his activities.

We will make announcements in due course on the introduction of the lobbying Bill to reform third-party influence in the political system. As the hon. Lady will know, the aspects of it relating to a register of lobbyists were the subject of earlier scrutiny with the benefit of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee response, which was not wholly supportive of the original proposals. That has given the Government an opportunity to consider these matters further, and that is the basis on which we will make further decisions and bring this Bill forward.

What the hon. Lady said on the EU referendum Bill might have led people to get things slightly wrong. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (James Wharton) is in charge of this Bill, and nobody thinks

otherwise. As far as the business is concerned, I am looking forward on, I think, Wednesday of next week to having full details from the Members in charge of all the private Members' Bills of what their intentions are, including on the timing of the Bills.

The hon. Lady raised a point about Public Health England. The data it has used serve to illustrate the tragic divide in terms of mortality between different parts of the country, and they are, essentially, the same data that we inherited in 2010; there is, effectively, no difference. What is deeply worrying, and what is at the heart of this, is that there is not just a divide between, for example, Manchester and Wokingham; there is also a divide between Manchester and Birmingham. The simple fact is that more can be done in many parts of our country to reduce premature mortality and morbidity.

When I was Secretary of State for Health, we sought to address that through the establishment of Public Health England and especially the transfer of public health resources into the hands of local authorities. The hon. Lady did not welcome the increase in resources for local authorities, relative to those that were previously deployed by primary care trusts, to support public health preventive measures. Putting that money in the hands of local authorities will enable them to make an impact on what we know makes the biggest difference to health, which is lifestyle. It is not just about how much we spend on NHS services, because Wokingham gets the least cash per head from the NHS budget, but it has some of the best morbidity and mortality outcomes. It is also about trying to make sure we change people's lifestyles. On that we are agreed. There are basic things like the social grading of health, relative deprivation, the extent to which people are in work, the extent to which they have good parenting, the quality of education, and the quality of environment. Those are the things that make a difference, and that is, I hope, where our local authorities will use these powers to very good effect.

May I gently thank the hon. Lady for enabling me to announce one of next week's Opposition day debates, and also say that I hope that, for the benefit of the House, the Opposition will give the House a little more notice of such debates? Next week, for example, Members should be able to see on Tuesday's Order Paper what the subjects for debate will be on Wednesday. That was not the case this week, and I hope the Opposition—I say this in the spirit of co-operation that we are often able to enjoy—will in future be able to make that possible.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. As usual at business questions, a great many colleagues are seeking to catch my eye, but I remind the House that after this exchange there is to be a statement by the Economic Secretary on the Royal Bank of Scotland, followed by a debate under the auspices of the Backbench Business Committee on the 10th anniversary of the Iraq war, which is significantly subscribed. Therefore, there is a premium today on brevity from Back and Front Benches alike.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): We are in the middle of a consultation on the draft environmental statement for High Speed 2; the Department for Transport is defending itself in the Court of Appeal

[Mrs Cheryl Gillan]

on HS2; the Information Commissioner has decided that it is in the public interest for the Major Projects Authority's report in detail on HS2 to be published; and there is an adverse National Audit Office report on the financing of aspects of the project. Surely introducing a preparation Bill giving unlimited spending power at this stage is premature. Will the Leader of the House seriously consider rethinking the provisional business on 26 June, and putting off Second Reading of the Bill until we have satisfactory outcomes to those four matters?

Mr Lansley: I know how strongly my right hon. Friend feels, not least on behalf of her constituents, about this matter and I know that she will assiduously examine the legislation as it comes through. I remind her that Second Reading of the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Bill is exactly that: it is about giving parliamentary authority. I believe the official Opposition share the view that such projects should be enabled to go ahead, and the spending authority the Bill provides will enable that to happen. Given the importance that we all attach to HS2 as a project for long-term economic growth in this country, I think it is important that the House proceeds on the basis I have outlined.

Natascha Engel (North East Derbyshire) (Lab): Now that the Backbench Business Committee has reconvened, will the Leader of the House work with us to redesign the e-petitions system, so that it becomes much clearer who is being petitioned and what an e-petition can realistically achieve?

Mr Lansley: I again congratulate the hon. Lady and all the members of the Committee on their re-election, which is a vote of confidence in the Backbench Business Committee. One of the things I hope we can achieve—not least in planning in this Session for subsequent implementation—is a petitions process that builds on the success so far. My predecessor in the Parliament, my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Sir George Young), was able to introduce, through the Government e-petition system, a measure that has dramatically improved the public's perception of how Parliament responds to the issues that matter to them, as evidenced in the 10th audit of engagement published by the Hansard Society. There were negative aspects outlined in that audit, but one of the positive aspects was that more of the public feel that Parliament is debating the issues that matter to them. The hon. Lady is right, however: we have a Government petitions system and some parliamentary scrutiny of that, but I think the public want to know that they are petitioning Parliament, while at the same time engaging an active response from Government, and I hope we can agree that.

Chris Kelly (Dudley South) (Con): The whole country was shocked and appalled at the grotesque and evil murder of Drummer Lee Rigby. May we have a statement on what financial provision is being made by the Ministry of Defence for his widow and son?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend asks a question with which Members across the House will sympathise. I am glad I can assure him that the widow and child of

Drummer Lee Rigby will receive financial support, as do the families of all those who have died in the service of this country. That may include a widow's pension, a bereavement grant, payments via the armed forces compensation scheme, a survivor's guaranteed income payment and child payments. I hope that reassures my hon. Friend and others.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): On 3 July, I will be hosting a dinner at the Birmingham botanical gardens celebrating 60 years of continuous representation by women MPs of Birmingham, Edgbaston—a record not equalled by any other constituency in the country. May we have a debate in Government time on how all the political parties can promote greater participation by women, because we are still far from achieving parity?

Mr Lansley: I am glad that there is to be such an opportunity, and may I say, at the risk of flattering the hon. Lady overmuch, it is not just that Birmingham, Edgbaston has been represented by women but that it has been very ably represented? That will get me in trouble at the next election.

The hon. Lady makes a fair point. The subject has been discussed in business questions before and the shadow Leader of the House has rightly raised it. I hope that there will be opportunities for such a debate. Perhaps the Backbench Business Committee will consider it, if the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) and other Members invite the Committee to do so.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): May we have a debate on the mis-selling of interest rate swap products by the commercial banks and, specifically, on why tailored business loans have not been included in the Financial Standards Authority—now the Financial Conduct Authority—review, despite there being similar products and similar evidence of mis-selling, which has been hugely damaging to small businesses up and down the country?

Mr Lansley: I will, if I may, take the opportunity to talk to my right hon. and hon. Friends at Her Majesty's Treasury about that and, through them, to the Financial Conduct Authority, which, as my hon. Friend says, is undertaking investigations. But it is important for the House to recognise the degree of concern of consumers about this matter, and I hope that I get a decent reply.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): May we have a debate on why demand for food banks has tripled over the past year and on what is likely to happen in this coming year?

Mr Lansley: One of the reasons is that this Government permitted the advertisement of food banks in job centres, something the previous Government did not do. Giving people access to information should not in itself be regarded as wrong.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend resist a futile debate on the subject of Mr Lynton Crosby not only because he is, to anybody who knows him, a man of unimpeachable integrity, but because he is not a Government employee,

not a civil servant, not paid out of public funds, not subject to the ministerial code and not subject to the civil service code, unlike the special advisers appointed by the Labour party who were empowered to give instructions to civil servants, instead of Ministers?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend who, as Chair of the Public Administration Committee, demonstrates that he understands these points extremely well and is able to answer the shadow Leader of the House's point better than I could.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Will the Leader of the House consider a debate on pension contributions in Northern Ireland? It is well known, as per my early-day motion 176, that people in Northern Ireland who were aged 14 and 15 and working between 1947 and 1957 paid national insurance contributions, but that these did not count towards their pension, as this is calculated by taking account of contributions made from the age of 16 upwards.

[That this House recognises that people working in Northern Ireland at ages 14 and 15 between 1947 and 1957 paid national insurance contributions but that these do not count towards their pension as this is calculated by taking into account contributions made from age 16 only; acknowledges that this impacts Northern Ireland disproportionately as the working age in Great Britain changed from 14 to 15 in 1947, 10 years before it was changed in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Government to look at measures to address this discrepancy.]

I have taken this matter up with the Northern Ireland Executive, who say that it is not their responsibility and that it is a matter for the Department for Work and Pensions. There is an issue of equality here that deserves a debate in Parliament.

Mr Lansley: I am interested in the point that the hon. Lady makes and will, of course, ask my hon. Friends at the Department to respond to her. It may also be something that she wishes to raise with them at DWP questions on 1 July. She will understand completely that the Pensions Bill—I have announced the debate on that—includes the creation of the single-tier pension, which will be transformative in terms of people's expectations of a secure income through the state pension in retirement.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend seen my early-day motion 239 regarding the obscene behaviour of Thames Water, which has increased its profits and charged the consumer inflation-busting prices, but does not pay its corporation tax?

[That this House is disappointed that Thames Water, despite having an annual turnover of £1.8 billion, making a £549 million profit and awarding its chief executive a bonus of £274,000 in the last financial year, did not pay any corporation tax due to paying off debts to holding companies; notes that Thames Water increased its customers' bills by 6.7 per cent last year; further notes that Thames Water plans to increase water bills by a further £80 this year to pay for the Thames Tideway Tunnel; believes that Thames Water's 13 million customers should not pay more for water bills to make up for its bad financial management; and calls for Thames Water to pay tax on

the real value of its profits, to stop bonus payouts until then, and for profits to be handed back to consumers for lower prices.]

May we have a statement on that, and will my right hon. Friend lobby the Treasury to introduce a windfall tax on greedy water companies and to pass the money raised back to the consumer?

Mr Lansley: I have seen the early-day motion to which my hon. Friend refers. He knows, as hon. Members will understand, that HMRC is vigilant in ensuring that companies, including Thames Water, pay the taxes that they are legally obliged to pay. In this context, I would add one further point that it is important to bear in mind. The benefits from investment relief and tax relief enjoyed by water and sewerage companies to encourage infrastructure investment are passed on to customers through lower bills via the regulator Ofwat's five-yearly price reviews. Those reviews, if they are also vigilant, can ensure that those benefits do reach consumers.

Mr Dave Watts (St Helens North) (Lab): May we have a debate on loan sharks and the increasing number of payday loan companies that are springing up in our communities, and an explanation of why the Government are failing to control them? Could it be that one of them is bankrolling the Tory party?

Mr Lansley: No, I do not think the hon. Gentleman is right about that at all. The evidence is to the contrary. The Government are serious about this. That is why we announced in March a strong action plan with immediate and longer-term measures relating to evidence of abuse of payday loans, which is not to say that such short-term loans are wrong, but they must not be abusive or harm consumers. One of the things that we therefore wait to find out is whether the Office of Fair Trading intends to refer the matter to the Competition Commission.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Is it possible to have a debate on capping welfare spending? I personally believe that the best way to do it is to cap benefits at the level of the average wage in this country, but it appears that others in the House believe that pensioners should be the ones who are capped. Pensioners in my constituency are very concerned to hear that.

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We must take measures to ensure that we are fair. We have seen in the latest data that people in work, including and perhaps specifically in the private sector, have had very limited increases in their pay. Working-age benefits should therefore reflect such constraint. The Labour party, however, appears determined to allow welfare payments to balloon. The Opposition did not support us on that cap on welfare benefits, and their view appears to be that all the constraint on spending should be borne by pensioners. If they were to abandon the triple lock and do it that way, it would mean a £234 cut in the basic state pension. There are 11.5 million pensioners in this country who will be aghast at the thought that that is the proper policy to pursue.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): On fairness and wages, the Institute for Fiscal Studies confirmed yesterday that post-2010 a significant fall in average real hourly wages has occurred,

[Tom Blenkinsop]

so may we have a statement from the Chancellor on why he thinks that since April 2013 average earnings, including bonuses, have shot up by 5.8% in the financial sector? Maybe the Chancellor could tell us whether this has anything to do with the top rate of tax being cut from 50p to 45p in April.

Mr Lansley: The hon. Gentleman should know that the broadest shoulders are bearing the greatest burden and that in every year of this Parliament the richest people in this country have been paying an increasing proportion of the overall tax burden. He should also know—the Chancellor will, I know, take every opportunity to make this clear—that we are therefore focusing the help that we can give on those with lower incomes, which is why 24 million basic rate taxpayers will be £700 better off next year than they were under Labour, specifically as a result of the measures to increase the personal tax allowance.

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): May we have a debate on the British overseas territories? Quite rightly and reasonably, the Prime Minister wants all the British overseas territories to sign the OECD convention on tax transparency and information. It would be wholly unreasonable for countries such as Bermuda to frustrate this commitment to greater tax transparency. Surely overseas territories cannot claim the privilege of being British and then fail to co-operate on tax evasion.

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend makes an important point, with the G8 summit happening in the days ahead. I hope the Prime Minister will be able to report to the House next Wednesday on that, and I hope he will be able to report on unprecedented co-operation internationally in eliminating tax evasion and reducing abuse and avoidance of tax internationally through international mechanisms. I hope that will include British overseas territories. I know that Bermuda has reiterated, including this morning, its wish to form part of what is an unprecedented international effort to tackle international tax avoidance.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): In a week when we learn that three of the science museums in the north are under threat, may we have a major debate on the overweening, unhealthy dominance of London and the south-east, which is sapping the life-blood out of the other cities and other regions in this country?

Mr Lansley: The hon. Gentleman was here last week and will have heard some of the exchanges on that point. Colleagues on both sides of the House have set out how strongly they feel about the contribution made by some of our national museums, particularly those relating to science and technology, railways and coal mining. Of course, his persuasion and influence no doubt encouraged Opposition Front Benchers to choose the contribution of the creative arts in the regions as the subject for the Opposition day debate next week.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): As we approach the first anniversary of the wonderful London 2012 Olympics, may we have a debate on what more can be done to strengthen the position of sports facilities and playing fields in the planning system? The Hyde

Park Olympic Legacy Group in my constituency is campaigning to retain a field but finding it frustrating, so this is an issue that we should discuss.

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I hope that we are all actively pursuing the sporting legacy. I know that is something that Lord Coe is doing, leading from the Cabinet Office. In my area—I hope that this is true for others—we are working together, through the sports partnerships, to try to maximise the sporting legacy of the Olympics and Paralympics. My hon. Friend raises an interesting point about access to facilities. I think that some of our legislation, including that relating to assets of community value, will make a considerable difference. He will have an opportunity to raise the matter when Ministers from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport answer questions next Thursday.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Recently there have been a number of examples of damaging conflicts between police and crime commissioners and chief constables, the most worrying of which has been in Gwent, where the PCC effectively sacked the chief constable. May we have a debate in Government time on whether it is appropriate for PCCs to involve themselves in operational police matters?

Mr Lansley: I am sorry to hear about the case in Gwent, although I do not know the circumstances and cannot comment on it directly. In my county, I am pleased to say, the police and crime commissioner and the chief constable are working together very effectively. It is clear that that should rest on the chief constable and the police service understanding that the police and crime commissioner has a democratic mandate to set priorities and strategy and allocate resources, and they should respect that. At the same time, police and crime commissioners, like the police authorities that preceded them, should respect the police's responsibility to take charge of operational matters.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): With the sixth fastest household growth rate in the whole country, the borough of Kettering has many new residential developments that have unadopted roads. There is effectively no legal mechanism whereby the local authority can force developers to develop the roads to an adoptable standard. Unless they are adopted, there are no parking controls, no proper street lighting and so on. May we have a statement from the Department for Transport on the legal mechanisms it could make available to local authorities to get roads up to adoptable standards?

Mr Lansley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes an interesting point. In my constituency, which, like his, has had many recent developments, many such roads have been adopted, so it is clear that many authorities are taking up the opportunity that exists. However, I will of course talk with my friends in the Department for Transport to secure a fuller answer for him. If he wishes to raise the matter on behalf of his constituents, Ministers will be here to answer questions on 27 June.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Today the Canadian Prime Minister is addressing hon. Members of both Houses as part of what seems to be a huge state

lobbying effort on behalf of companies, such as Shell, that want to exploit tar sands at any cost and weaken the EU fuel quality directive to create a market for this dirty oil. Since tar sand oil is so incredibly damaging, may we have a debate on the cosy relationship between politicians and the fossil fuel industry, both in the UK and elsewhere?

Mr Lansley: For a moment there I was pleased that the hon. Lady was drawing attention to the presence in the Houses of Parliament of the Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, who will be speaking in an hour or so. I rather regret the way she then went on to speak about Canada. Canada is among our very closest friends and allies in so many ways. The Prime Minister is a distinguished occupant of that post in Canada and I think that we should welcome him wholeheartedly.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): On 17 April, my 18-year-old constituent, Georgina Woodley, sadly lost her brave battle with cancer. Hospice care for those at the beginning of life and at the end of life is extremely good, but her courageous family are now campaigning for better palliative care for teenagers and young adults. May we have a debate about this issue at the earliest convenience?

Mr Lansley: I am sure that the whole House will share my hon. Friend's sadness at the loss of his constituent and express our condolences to her family. Considerable strides have been taken in palliative care, particularly in relation to teenagers. I have met the youngsters at Christie hospital and University College London hospital, which, not least with the support of the Teenage Cancer Trust, have done a tremendous amount to improve the age-appropriate character of care for teenagers with cancer. There is more that we can do, absolutely, especially in support of the hospice movement. I hope that, following up on the Tom Hughes-Hallett report, we can introduce a system where money follows the patient so that the hospices that provide care that would otherwise be provided by the NHS get the support they need to provide the very high-quality personal care that they specialise in.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): Now that we have had a chance to digest the latest report on children's heart surgery and the flawed decision making to which it draws attention, may we have a debate on the quality of decision making in the NHS as a whole? That would give us an opportunity to debate further issues such as the removal of vascular services from Warrington hospital, on very flawed evidence, and the constant pressure for a merger between Warrington and Whiston, which would no doubt take away Warrington's accident and emergency provision.

Mr Lansley: I will not comment on the particular instances that the hon. Lady mentions, though I have been aware of them in the past. The previous Government used to tell us that all these decisions were being made locally, but some of the evidence shows that they were, in effect, being made on a national basis but were not accountable on a national basis. Accountability will now be much clearer. Following what my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary said at the Dispatch Box yesterday, it is clear that in future NHS England will have a responsibility for commissioning these national

specialised services across the country instead of the joint committee of primary care trusts from all over England that did it in the past. That is much clearer and much more straightforward, and I hope that NHS England will demonstrate a greater degree of consistency in decision making as a consequence.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): May we have an urgent debate on the level of bonuses paid to Network Rail bosses? Is it not the case that rail bosses should not be paid large bonuses if they stand in the way of economic progress and also stand in the way of the vital need for a direct rail link from London to Shropshire?

Mr Lansley: Clearly, we are looking for Network Rail management to be appropriately rewarded in relation to their performance. I have nothing against bonuses if they accurately reflect the performance that is part of the contractual requirements. The job of Network Rail's management—I think that they recognise this—is not only about the performance of the railway system as a whole but the many steps they should take through their investment programme to secure economic activity and growth, not least in some of the areas that are currently less well served by the rail network.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): May we have a debate in Government time on the Government's flagship policy, the big society? That will give us an opportunity to discuss the important work done by volunteers as individuals, societies and institutions. It will also give us an opportunity to discuss the astronomical rise in the number of food banks across the country, which is a cost of living issue, and more so than any Government directive. May we have that debate, because this is a stain on David Cameron's Britain?

Mr Lansley: During last week's volunteers week, I saw for myself, as I am sure that many Members will have done, very many examples of fantastic volunteering activity. These are often tough times for charities, and inevitably so, because of the economic circumstances in which we found ourselves at the end of the last decade. I hope that an opportunity for a debate will arise, but I cannot promise one in Government time. The House will consider through the Backbench Business Committee the relative priorities in providing time to debate such matters. Such a debate would enable us to see how the Government's big society initiatives are having a dramatic, positive difference. Last week, for example, the Work and Pensions Secretary led internationally on how social investment can deliver benefits to communities.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): The House will be aware of the implications for farming of the 18 months of extreme bad weather: we expect a poorer harvest, milk production has dipped and there has been a reduction in farm incomes. Will my right hon. Friend allow a debate, preferably in Government time, on the implications for food security and farm incomes of the extreme bad weather?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend is very knowledgeable on these matters and I completely understand her point, not least because my constituency has substantial arable production. I cannot promise a debate at the moment, but I am sure it would not be beyond the bounds

[Mr Lansley]

of possibility to cover some of these matters in next week's debate on the reform of the common agricultural policy.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House ask the Lord Chancellor to come to the House to explain his flawed policy on legal aid? He refuses to meet the chairman of the Criminal Bar Association, the Law Society is threatening legal action, the Lord Chief Justice and the Master of the Rolls are against it, and it undermines the English legal system. We need a statement or a debate in Government time.

Mr Lansley: I sat here with my right hon. and hon. Friends during Justice questions a few days ago when almost exactly the same point was made to them, and I heard them reply and say how often they meet the Criminal Bar Association and others and that they had done so recently. I will, of course, draw their attention to what the hon. Lady has said, but I heard them say that it is not true that they are not discussing this issue with those affected.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): May we have a debate on the current and future prospects for private sector employment? As we know, since 2010, 1.3 million new private sector jobs have been created and total employment stands at just a shade under 30 million. In my constituency unemployment fell by 79 last month and has fallen by 248 in the past 12 months. In addition, two private sector projects are set to create more than 8,000 new jobs over the next three years. All this in a constituency that is already in the top 20 for economic growth in the country.

Mr Speaker: Too long. I ask the hon. Gentleman to exercise a degree of self-restraint. He heard me earlier exhorting colleagues on both sides to be briefer. He should not then indulge himself in a long-winded question. He might have to wait a little longer for his next question than he otherwise would have done.

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend was taken with enthusiasm at the economic performance under this coalition Government. He is right. Many people in many constituencies will be encouraged by private sector employment growth—by the simple fact that three private sector jobs are being created for every one lost in the public sector. To be frank, the Labour party derided us when we said that we could expect that to happen. It was wrong. This bodes well for job creation and, indeed, for wealth creation in the future.

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab): Yesterday the Prime Minister was pressed on the issue of arming the Syrian rebels. He said that he has

“always believed in allowing the House of Commons a say on all these issues.”—[*Official Report*, 12 June 2013; Vol. 564, c. 333.]

However, he was not explicit on whether the House would have a vote. Is the Leader of the House able to guarantee that there will be a vote on any proposal to arm the Syrian rebels?

Mr Lansley: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was at business questions last week, but I was explicit about this. The Prime Minister was very clear and so was I last week.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): May we have a debate on celebrating Yorkshire? It is the 150th anniversary of Yorkshire county cricket club and, yesterday, skipper Andrew Gale scored a century at Lords; the Secretary of State for Health scrapped the flawed review that was to close Yorkshire's children's heart surgery unit; and in my part of Yorkshire employment is up and unemployment down.

Mr Lansley: I am glad to have another opportunity to celebrate Yorkshire. At the invitation of my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams), I had the privilege and pleasure of meeting Geoffrey Boycott at the Yorkshire county cricket club's 150th anniversary celebrations here at the House on Monday. I will enjoy any opportunity to celebrate Yorkshire again in the future.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Since the Government do not bother to monitor how they spend taxpayers' money through the high street innovation fund, may we have a debate in Government time on the effectiveness of the Government's policies on high street renewal and business improvement districts, so that we know whether all areas, including the Lifford business association area in my constituency, are getting a fair deal?

Mr Lansley: The Government are constantly seeking to evaluate the value for money of our expenditure in ways that the previous Government never attempted and we are delivering better value for money. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was in his place during Business, Innovation and Skills questions, but if he was, he would have heard the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Michael Fallon) pointing out that more retail outlets have been opened recently than have been closed. The industry is undergoing substantial structural changes, not least because of the growth of online shopping. It is important for us all to recognise that there will be an inevitable process of adaptation.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): May we have a statement on how the Government have worked to improve transparency, particularly in relation to the use of Government procurement cards?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend raises an important point. When we came to office, we set out to curb the profligate use of taxpayers' money through such expenditure. We must think about how much individuals pay in tax and about how cavalierly that money has been spent, not least under the last Labour Government, through the use of procurement cards. The private office of a single Secretary of State spent hundreds of pounds on dinner in restaurants and on hotels. We have curbed all that. It is important, in so many ways, that we do not go back to the days of the last Labour Government.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): The Prime Minister walked out of the cross-party talks on a press charter, there was nothing in the Queen's Speech on lobbying

and, although we all understand the need for international action on aggressive tax avoidance, there has been no legislative proposal in the UK. In contrast, the French Government have taken action this week to insist that companies that make money in France have to pay tax there. In the interests of a fairer and more transparent society, will the Leader of the House tell us when the Government will bring forward proper measures to tackle those three important areas?

Mr Lansley: I am slightly staggered that the hon. Lady says all those things. I think I am in a different world. She should pay attention to what is happening. The Government have taken unprecedented action to secure international action on tax avoidance and are bringing forward legislation on general anti-avoidance measures. I have announced that we will bring forward legislation to tackle third-party influence on the political system, which will include a statutory register on lobbying. The hon. Lady has to catch up with what is going on.

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): May we have a debate on strengths and weaknesses? Five years ago, unemployment in Tamworth stood at 1,821, which was the highest in a decade. Today, it stands at 1,462, which is the lowest since before the Balls bust. May we discuss the strengths of the present Government's economic handling, the weaknesses of Labour's approach and the dangers of trusting weakness again?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I wish that I could have announced a debate for that purpose, but the pressures on business are such that I could not. Such a debate would have enabled us to compare the record of this Government with that of the previous Government, under whom the national debt doubled and the gross domestic product of the country fell by 6.3%, and who borrowed one pound in every four that they spent and left us with the biggest budget deficit in the developed world. In contrast, the deficit is now down by a third, more than 1.25 million more people are working in the private sector and, last year, employment grew faster in the UK than in any other G7 country. I hope that we have an opportunity to debate that contrast.

David Wright (Telford) (Lab): Returning to the subject of films, people in Shropshire feel like it is groundhog day because the rail service that they had hoped would be provided to the county has been blocked. I associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard), who on this matter, as on many others, is my hon. Friend. May we have a statement from a Minister about the direct rail service from Shropshire to London, because it is important for the local economy and local people really want it?

Mr Lansley: I will, of course, raise the point made by the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard) with my friends in the Department for Transport, and ask them to respond directly to all Shropshire MPs about the rail service to that area.

Tessa Munt (Wells) (LD): The House should congratulate the European Parliament on its vote yesterday to make Governments and companies publish what they pay for

oil, gas, timber and mining extraction in resource-rich countries. Coupled with US laws, it means that transparency standards cover 65% of the world's revenues from those sources, and that may be followed by similar laws in Canada, Switzerland and Australia. Will the Leader of the House urge the Prime Minister not to miss the opportunity to show great leadership of the G8 by ensuring that the UK has an open, public register of company share ownership, so that we can lead the world in rooting out tax evasion, corruption and money laundering?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not expose my ignorance of the precise detail of those measures. I hope that she and all colleagues know that the Prime Minister is determined that at the G8 summit, in addition to promoting trade for economic growth and measures to deal with tax avoidance and evasion, we are also concerned to promote growth and development in the context of much greater transparency. I hope that that issue will be reported positively at the G8.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): In the context of pressure on household incomes, in Harrogate and Knaresborough we are benefiting from the fourth consecutive year of a council tax freeze from the Conservative-run borough council. We benefited disproportionately from the cut in fuel duty; I do not know whether we benefited disproportionately from the cut in beer duty, but I do know that in April, 1,833 people were taken out of paying income tax and a further 36,000 received a tax cut. May we have a debate on the actions being taken to help with the cost of living?

Mr Lansley: I cannot promise a debate immediately but it would be good if we could have one as that would give us the opportunity to reiterate some of the points raised by my hon. Friend, including that 3 million people on low pay will be taken out of income tax altogether by the coalition Government as a result of our changes to the personal tax allowance. The typical motorist will save £40 a year on petrol and diesel, in contrast to what the price would have been under the previous Government and the fuel duty escalator. Not least, we are also helping councils to fund a council tax freeze. Most of us recall that under the previous Labour Government, council tax doubled. We are now coming to the fourth year of this coalition Government, and that is a dramatic contrast in the impact on people's household bills.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): May we have a statement from the Leader of the House on how private Members' Bills work on Friday—especially for Members who are not often present on Friday—pointing out that they are for Members to introduce legislation that the Government are not prepared to introduce? Will he also point out that only one party in this House is prepared to introduce an EU referendum Bill? I am sure that the Bill from my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (James Wharton) will be different from the handout Bill the Conservative party published, and it will probably receive support from some brave Labour Members as well.

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend perhaps invites Members to be in the Chamber for private Members' Bills on Fridays, and it would be jolly good if they were to

[Mr Lansley]

attend for that purpose. On the procedure for private Members' Bills, I will, if I may, await the report by the Procedure Committee, which has been inquiring into the matter. I hope it will soon report on the issue and give us some guidance.

Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con): Following the earlier request from the hon. Member for St Helens North (Mr Watts) for a debate on payday loans, and given the welcome announcement from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister yesterday about easing restrictions on credit unions in the short-term loans market and ongoing Government support for credit unions and the expansion project, may we have a debate that combines how to cut out predatory and excessive cost lenders with how to help the responsible alternative credit unions reach their full potential?

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend makes a good point and in addition to the payday action plan that I referred to in response to an earlier question, it is important—as he says—that the Government have announced they will raise the credit union interest rate cap from 2% to 3%. That should reduce the losses made on loans, increase stability in the sector, and improve consumer access. The Government have also committed up to £38 million in additional investment in credit unions, which should increase access for at least 1 million more people. I hope that will do what my hon. Friend asks in promoting credit unions as an alternative.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): The headmaster of Bishop Wordsworth's school informs me that, by the end of the current spending review period, he will receive £150,000 a year less for sixth-form provision. May we have a statement from the Education Secretary on how he is

enabling excellent schools such as Bishop's to thrive as well as providing funding for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Mr Lansley: I know my hon. Friend has written to Department for Education Ministers—I will encourage them to respond more fully than I can now—but he knows that we have taken steps to protect funding in school budgets with a minimum funding guarantee. Announcements were made only last week, I believe, on further simplifying and protecting schools in the context of the complex structure of school funding we inherited from Labour. I hope we can go further in that regard after the spending review.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): May we have a debate on tax reform? Hon. Members are concerned about the shameless tax avoidance by the likes of Google and Amazon, and, we now learn, by the Labour party. They need to change, but we need to consider what we can do to fix things for the long term.

Mr Lansley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is perfectly obvious that we need to ensure that we actively enforce the current legislation. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has set out to do so. Something like—*[Interruption.]* Thank you. If I am at all disorderly, Mr Speaker will tell me; I do not need the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Thomas Docherty) to do so. HMRC has secured something like £23 billion in total through improved enforcement measures and up to £2 billion in revenue in relation to contentious current issues such as transfer pricing in large companies. My hon. Friend makes an important point. We should not only enforce the law as it is, but look continuously to ensure that it is clear and ensures that everybody makes their contribution. Tax rates can be lower if everybody is under the law and pays the tax they are due to pay and the appropriate level in relation to their activities.

Royal Bank of Scotland

11.27 am

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Sajid Javid): Yesterday, RBS announced that the group chief executive, Stephen Hester, will step down from his position later this year. The decision was taken in the context of moving from the rescue phase to the next phase, and of focusing RBS on becoming a UK bank that provides greater support to the British economy, helping businesses and job creation here, and which can return to the private sector in a way that ensures value for the taxpayer.

As we commend Stephen Hester for the job he has done, it is worth considering how far RBS has come since the onset of the financial crisis. When Stephen Hester took over, the bank was on the edge of collapse with a broken culture, and posed a huge risk to financial stability. It had been bailed out by the British taxpayer at a cost of more than £45 billion. He brought it back from the brink, and since then has worked hard to make RBS a safer and stronger bank that is better able to support its customers.

RBS has changed substantially over the past few years. It exited the asset protection scheme last year, and non-core assets have been run down from about £258 billion in 2008 to £53 billion now; total assets of RBS investment banking operations are down from around £500 billion to £288 billion; short-term borrowing is down by more than £250 billion; its core loan-to-deposit ratio is now below 100%, which means that the core bank is funded entirely by deposits; and the core tier 1 capital ratio has more than doubled. The size and complexity of RBS has been significantly reduced, with a far greater focus on serving its UK customers. Entire business lines have been exited, and there has been a dramatic simplification, rationalisation and de-risking of the bank's business model. That is an impressive list of achievements, and is one of the largest corporate restructurings in history. Stephen Hester has made an important contribution to Britain's recovery from the financial crisis. I am sure that all hon. Members would like to join me in congratulating him on all he has done and achieved during his time at the bank. It is reassuring that he is staying on to ensure a smooth transition to his successor.

RBS has outlined the details of Stephen Hester's leaving package. This is a matter for the RBS board, but I want the House to be fully aware of the terms of this package. At the point of Stephen Hester's departure, and in line with his contractual obligations, he will receive a payment in lieu of notice representing one year's salary and benefits. This amounts to £1.6 million. He will not receive a bonus for 2013. At the board's discretion, Stephen Hester will keep his unvested long-term investment plan, or LTIP, awards. These will be reduced significantly through pro-rating for time of service. These awards are also subject to assessment against published performance conditions at the end of the respective performance period. Following this pro-rating and performance assessment, RBS estimates that the value of the LTIPs would be approximately £3 million at their current share price. In addition, the number of shares that Stephen Hester can receive is capped at 65% of the total, which would be just over £4 million at today's share price. These payments are in line

with his contractual terms, and the share awards will reflect payment for performance up to the point of his departure.

During his five-year term in office, Stephen Hester received one bonus out of a possible five. I also wanted to let the House know that Stephen Hester's leaving package is expected to be worth about one third of the maximum he could have received under the contract that was agreed in 2008 by the previous Government.

RBS is now moving from the rescue phase to the next phase, which involves focusing on becoming a UK bank that provides greater support to the British economy and is prepared for its return to the private sector. The Government have always been clear about wanting RBS to become a more focused retail and commercial bank that is focused on supporting the British economy and has a much smaller international investment banking arm. RBS has already made progress towards this goal.

I expect the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards, which was established last year, to report soon, but let me briefly remind everyone of what the Government have already achieved in the financial sector. First, we have introduced a brand new watchdog with powers to keep our banks safe, so that they do not bring down the economy. In April, the Financial Services Authority was abolished and the Bank of England is now in charge of keeping our financial system safe, with the transfer of responsibility for prudential regulation to a new subsidiary of the Bank, the Prudential Regulation Authority. With the authority that comes from its history and the new powers we have given it, the Bank of England is empowered to protect our financial system. We have also created a strong new conduct regulator, the Financial Conduct Authority, to ensure that London and the UK have the best and most open, transparently policed markets in the world.

Secondly, we are taking legislation through Parliament to introduce a law, following the recommendations of Sir John Vickers and his Commission, that will for the first time ever erect a ring fence around a major retail bank, so that its essential operations will continue even if the whole bank fails. This will protect the high street and the taxpayer from the mistakes of the dealing floor. Following the recommendations of the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards, we will be making further changes on Report to further strengthen the ring-fencing regime and electrify the ring fence.

The third area of the Government's focus has been to engender a change in the culture and ethics of the banking industry itself. As members of the House know, we asked the Parliamentary Commission to look at how to improve the professional standards and culture of the banking sector. As I mentioned, its work is coming to an end and I expect it to report soon.

Fourthly, we will give customers the most powerful weapon of all: choice, which is the most powerful tool we have to improve markets and customer service, reward good companies and penalise poor ones. We have made a start with the sale of Northern Rock to Virgin Money and we are seeing new banks, such as Metro Bank, on our high streets. This year we are taking a huge step towards making it easier for customers to move if they can get a better deal elsewhere. From this September, every customer of every bank in Britain will be able to switch their bank account from their existing bank to another one within seven days. This is real progress.

[Sajid Javid]

We are still mopping up the huge economic mess we inherited from the Labour party. We will not take economic recovery for granted and will continue to deliver our clear plan to deal with the problems that it left behind. *[Interruption.]* I thought that would get them excited, Madam Deputy Speaker. RBS has been brought back from the brink, and now is the time to move on from the rescue phase and focus on RBS being a UK bank that provides greater support to the British economy, a bank that helps businesses here, a bank that helps job creation here and a bank that can return to the private sector in a way that ensures value for money for the taxpayer.

11.35 am

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): The Opposition are very surprised that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has not come to the House of Commons today to respond to growing speculation that he has already decided the fate of the Royal Bank of Scotland. The Government's handling of this matter has already caused widespread concern. Stephen Hester did an important job starting the process of turning RBS around, but clearly there is a long way still to go, as he has said himself, so I want to ask the Minister about the four key points on which we need urgent clarification.

First, on the departure of the chief executive, did Stephen Hester go voluntarily or was he pushed? What role did the Chancellor have in prompting his departure? When did the Chancellor set out to the chairman and the board his desire that Stephen Hester should go and is there now any role for United Kingdom Financial Investments, or has it been circumvented in the discussion on the chief executive's role? Can the Minister explain why they got rid of the current chief executive before finding a successor? Was that really a sensible thing to do? Why have they left such uncertainty? Is the 6% fall in RBS's share price this morning, wiping off nearly £2 billion from the value of the taxpayers' stake, a reflection of this confusion? Can the Minister clarify reports this morning that the chairman of RBS has indicated that he will also leave if and when a new chief executive is found?

Secondly, did the chairman, Sir Philip Hampton, let the cat out of the bag when he admitted to journalists last night that the Chancellor wants a sale by the end of 2014? Sir Philip said:

"The acceleration of considering succession for a CEO role arises largely from the Treasury's determination...where it can be returned to the private sector by the end of 2014".

Will the Minister tell us now what the Chancellor told the chairman and the board? Is it just a coincidence that the end of 2014 would fit neatly into the Chancellor's pre-election political timetable? Should the time scales not be driven by the best interests of the taxpayer and the British economy instead?

Thirdly, are the public wrong to suspect that this generous severance payment for Stephen Hester is just a foretaste of the wider loss that will be made for the taxpayer if they rush headlong into a pre-election fire sale? Given that Stephen Hester said yesterday that he was confident that RBS was capable of being worth more than the £45 billion the taxpayer originally paid, why is the Chancellor rushing to prove him wrong? Stephen Hester told the BBC last night that RBS was

capable of being worth more than what the Government paid for the shares. Does the Minister agree? If not, why not?

Fourthly, can the Minister explain why it is sensible to intervene in the executive management of RBS rather than have an orderly process of repairing the bank and thoroughly considering the full range of future options for this institution—a process that has incredible ramifications for our whole economy? We look forward to the report from the cross-party Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards and any views it might have on this, but rather than this shambolic and uncertain approach, surely we need a clear, methodical process and a detailed exploration of how the shape and structure of RBS can best serve our economy in the longer term.

Finally, why has the Chancellor not come to Parliament to set out what is obviously a change of policy? No disrespect to the Minister, but it is his boss we need to hear from today. Should not the Chancellor set out his plans first to this House and not to the Mansion House?

Sajid Javid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I will start with his final question, if I may. He asked why the Chancellor is not here. That is because I am here; I thought the hon. Gentleman would be pleased to see me. I could well ask him where his boss, the shadow Chancellor, is. If this is such an important issue for the Opposition, the shadow Chancellor might have turned up.

I was also hoping that I might get an apology from the hon. Gentleman and some recognition that the only reason we are here discussing this topic today is the previous Government's failure to regulate our banking system, which led to more than £45 billion of taxpayers' money being injected into bailing out a bank—the world's largest banking bail-out.

Let me turn to the hon. Gentleman's four questions. First, he asked about the sequence or the terms of Stephen Hester's departure. I am pleased to confirm to him that the Chancellor has not been directly involved in meeting with Stephen Hester prior to the announcement—*[Interruption.]* He has not met with Stephen Hester prior to the announcement of his departure on this issue. This is a decision for RBS and its board. They have made the decision jointly with Stephen Hester and come to a voluntary agreement. The chairman of RBS, Sir Philip Hampton, asked to meet the Chancellor last week—at Philip Hampton's request—to inform the Chancellor of the board's decision, and that is what I would expect, given that the shareholder is the majority owner of the bank.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the succession plans and asked whether it would have been better to find a successor in the first place. If he has looked carefully at the plans, he will note that Stephen Hester has agreed to stay on until a successor has been found or, at the very latest, until the end of this year. RBS has already begun its search process. I am confident that it will find a successor in time, but it is reassuring, as I said in my statement, that Stephen Hester is staying on in the meantime to help to smooth the process of finding his successor.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the share price of RBS this morning. He will note that—I think I am right in saying—almost every major bank's share price

is down this morning. The stock market is down in general this morning. I suggest that the change in the RBS share price might also be a reflection of global stock markets, particularly Asian stock markets and markets in Tokyo, which, as it happens, also fell by 6% overnight.

Next the hon. Gentleman asked about the eventual sale of the bank and RBS's comments about preparing the bank for its future return to the private sector. There should be nothing surprising about RBS having an ambition that the bank should be returned to the private sector. That is perfectly reasonable and perfectly normal. As for the Government's plans, we have always made it absolutely clear that we have no target price when we are thinking about the return of RBS. We have no fixed timetable, and that includes the general election. Our major concern is to ensure, as the hon. Gentleman said himself, that when RBS is returned to the private sector, that is done with due regard to getting the best value possible for the taxpayer.

The hon. Gentleman also asked whether the value of the shares had been destroyed. I thought that was a bit rich, coming from him. He forces me to remind the House that when the previous Government carried out their bail-out following their failed policies and paid more than £45 billion for a stake in RBS, they overpaid by £12 billion above the share price. That amount was written off by the taxpayer at that moment, but that is something else for which we have not had an apology.

If I understood the hon. Gentleman's last question correctly, he asked whether the Government had intervened in the decision-making process of the executive management. As I have said, those decisions are rightly made by RBS's board. The Government's shareholding is held through UKFI on an arm's length basis. UKFI represents the interests of the taxpayer on RBS's board. I remind the House that that arm's length arrangement was deliberately set up by the previous Government; we have rightly kept it in place. UKFI reports periodically to the Treasury and provides advice, and we always take that into account when making our own decisions.

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): The early work on RBS's recovery needed an investment banker, and Stephen Hester has done a difficult job extremely well. He deserves all our thanks, and I hope that the whole House agrees with that. Does the Minister agree that, whatever further reforms of RBS are now implemented, arguing about the past—about the past price or about party politics—is not what the country wants to hear or what the economy needs in the months ahead? What we now need, as soon as possible, is an RBS that can fully support the hundreds of thousands of people who are trying to make a living in small businesses up and down the country but who cannot get the support that they need. They need an RBS that is fully functioning for the first time in many years.

Sajid Javid: I thank my hon. Friend, the Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee and of the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards, for his comments. He is absolutely right to praise the work of Stephen Hester and I agree wholeheartedly with his views on what Stephen Hester has achieved in his five years at the bank. Perhaps my hon. Friend had his work with the Parliamentary Commission in mind when he asked his

second question. The approach must be bipartisan and we must keep the interests of RBS and the economy as a whole uppermost in our minds.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): I agree that Stephen Hester did a good job in reducing the size of the bank's balance sheet and beginning to turn the bank around, but that job was not complete at the time of his enforced departure. Will the Minister tell us more about the implications of this timing and strategy for returning the bank to the private sector? May I also tell him that, whatever else the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards has to say about this, if he was looking for a permission slip for a quick sale at a knock-down price, he will be disappointed?

Sajid Javid: It might help the right hon. Gentleman if I tell him that Stephen Hester himself has said in the past 24 hours that, for him, privatisation was the "end of a journey", and that the board was looking for someone who would see it as the beginning of a journey. He has said that, for that reason, he understands the board's decision. This is a voluntary agreement and a mutual decision between Stephen Hester and the board. The RBS board has said in its statement that it is looking forward to having a bank that is more focused on UK business and on the inevitable privatisation process.

Stephen Williams (Bristol West) (LD): A substantial proportion of the Minister's statement dealt with setting out the generous remuneration and exit package that Mr Hester will receive. I am rather more interested in the package that British citizens will receive when the bank is returned to the private sector in order to recompense them for the different ways in which they have paid for the £45 billion bail-out. Will the Minister confirm that UKFI and the Treasury are seriously examining the idea, which I first promoted in March 2011, that all British citizens should be able to profit from the uplift in the share price when the bank is returned to the private sector?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the absolute importance of getting the best value for the taxpayer when RBS is eventually returned to the private sector. There are many ways of doing that, and there is an open public debate on the ideas. At this point, however, it is right for me to say that while I welcome open debate, the Government are looking at the options very carefully, and we will set out a way forward after the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards has issued its final report.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): I thank the Minister for his statement and for early sight of it, and add my thanks to those of others for what Stephen Hester has done so far for the bank. RBS is planning a £175 million investment in the retail bank in Scotland and it also plans to maintain it as a global centre for mobile banking and a global payments hub. When Stephen Hester is replaced and the bank is finally returned to the private sector, will the Minister use whatever influence the Government have to ensure that those investments and those plans are maintained for the sake of jobs both in the bank and in those businesses that depend on the bank for support?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman will be aware from the RBS statement yesterday that one reason why it has taken this step is that it believes, as do the Government, that RBS should become more focused on British business and British jobs. If the hon. Gentleman agrees with me that Scotland should vote next year to stay in Britain, that will certainly help the situation, making sure that when RBS talks about Britain, it is talking about the Britain we know today.

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that Stephen Hester, who happens to be one of my constituents, was given a pretty poisoned chalice by the last Labour Chancellor when Fred Goodwin stepped down and that he has actually done an extremely good job in rescuing RBS and bringing it back from the brink? What I think most of my constituents are concerned about now is whether RBS is going to be a bank for small and medium-sized businesses, a bank for middle England and a bank for market towns such as Banbury and Bicester, helping to get SMEs and the economy moving and going forward.

Sajid Javid: I share the concerns that my hon. Friend has articulated. He will have noticed from my speech that I said RBS under Stephen Hester has made huge progress in becoming focused on lending to British businesses. I am confident that, because of the plans that have been set in place, that will become even more prominent in RBS's strategy.

Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister has said quite a bit about the end of the rescue phase, but absolutely nothing about the strategy for selling RBS back into the private sector. I remind him that the Government own 82% of the shares. There have been persistent rumours in the press about the creation of a good bank/bad bank. Will the Minister confirm or deny whether that is actively being considered, and if it is, how in those circumstances will he continue, as he stated in his statement, to protect the taxpayers' interests?

Sajid Javid: The Chancellor has made it clear in very recent statements that he wants to wait for the report from the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards. It is a very important report, and we as a Government want to listen and take it seriously. After the report is completed, we will set out our plans for how we see the state banking sector going forward.

Mary Macleod (Brentford and Isleworth) (Con): As someone who has worked in ABN AMRO and RBS, I pay real tribute to Stephen Hester, who I think was an outstanding chief executive who took the helm and leadership of RBS at the most difficult time in banking history. I am disappointed that he is leaving and I wish him every success in the future. I want to pay tribute, too, as should the House, to the staff of RBS. As we move towards privatisation, let us focus on looking at competition in the banking sector, which will deliver a much better customer service for us all.

Sajid Javid: That is exactly what I was talking about when I touched on the issue of choice in my statement. The introduction of seven-day switching, which will come into force in September, will help to engender the kind of competition that we want to see.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): The Minister's statement underlined what a shambles this is, and also made it clear that there might not be a new appointment for some time. My specific question is this, however. When my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Chris Leslie) asked about the Chancellor's involvement, the Minister said that the Chancellor had had no direct involvement. May I ask whether he had any indirect involvement? Let me help the Minister to answer that question. Was the Chancellor asked by any member of the ministerial team or by civil servants in Whitehall, or by people in the Royal Bank of Scotland, for his view on whether this was the right decision?

Sajid Javid: As I have said, such decisions are for the board of RBS, which is a commercial organisation. As we all know, however, because it is a commercial organisation in which the state is the majority shareholder, with the state's interests represented through UKFI, when RBS makes a major decision it will inform the Government.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): May I pursue the question asked by the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg)? I am not entirely sure why the Minister made his statement. If this was a completely independent decision, what new Government policy has been announced today?

Sajid Javid: The Government decided that a statement should be made today because the issue is important to the population at large. Given the Government's stake of over 80% in RBS, and given that the last Government pumped in £45 billion, I think it important for the Government to set out their strategy on RBS.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): This time last year, RBS was subject to a major technical problem. As a result, one of its constituent parts, Ulster bank in Northern Ireland, lost some customers, and many customers did not benefit from full transparency. Only recently, I was told by the Financial Conduct Authority that it could not obtain answers. Will privatisation be the next stage in the rescue package?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady has made a good point overall about the importance of RBS's operations in Northern Ireland and also in the Republic, which involve lending to both small businesses and consumers. RBS takes those operations seriously, and I know that it has been thinking carefully about how it can improve them further.

Richard Harrington (Watford) (Con): Given Stephen Hester's excellent career—he had previously spent two years at Abbey National and four years at British Land—and given that he has remained in such an important and high-pressure job for five years, it seems to me entirely reasonable for him to leave after completing the first phase of a major restructuring process, and to hand the business on to a chief executive who is more experienced in long-term matters.

Sajid Javid: As always, my hon. Friend has made a very good point. I agree with him that Stephen Hester has done a commendable job. Five years is a perfectly normal period for anyone to remain as chief executive

of a major corporation, and that sentiment was reflected in Stephen Hester's own comments since the announcement of his departure.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister answer one really important question about this very major change? Two banks ran into difficulties, RBS and HBOS—many of my constituents worked for HBOS—but those two banks were not run into the buffers by politicians; they were run into ruin by the group of unscrupulous, immoral bankers who ran the companies, and it was not politicians but auditors and those in the accountancy profession who never flagged that up. Let us get the record straight. Let us be honest with the British people. Let us also be honest and say “You have just sacked this banker for your own purposes.”

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is right about being honest, of course, and in the interests of honesty, it is important to point something out. Since he seems to have suggested that the previous Government played no role in the failure of RBS and that it was just a failure of poor banking, let me remind him of what the then shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley), said in 1997 when the then Government planned to change the regulatory system. He said:

“The process of setting up the FSA may cause regulators to take their eye off the ball, while spivs and crooks have a field day.”—[Official Report, 11 November 1997; Vol. 300, c. 732.]

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): While RBS has clearly had a turbulent past and taxpayers rightly want their money back, is not the really important point that RBS has gone from a bust bank under the last Government to a normal bank now, and that it has actually made a profit of over £800 million in the first three months of this year, and that business lending is up in the first quarter to over £13 billion, almost £8 billion of which was to small businesses?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. RBS has ended what I referred to as the rescue phase. Stephen Hester successfully brought the bank back from the brink and has started to refocus it, and the new strategy that RBS has set out will focus it even more on lending to UK businesses and households?

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The decisions made about RBS's future represent a huge impact on the public finances, so where is the Chancellor?

Sajid Javid: I answered that question earlier.

Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): May I add to the tributes to Stephen Hester? He was very responsive to MPs' letters and he was also very good at briefing Members of Parliament. May I also pay tribute to RBS staff, however, who across the country and worldwide have been working in very difficult circumstances, and may I urge the Minister to make sure that in this transition period towards privatisation a lot of focus is put on them?

Sajid Javid: I agree. We have talked about Stephen Hester and the role he has played in bringing the bank back from the brink, but that would not have been

possible without the dedicated staff that RBS has had, and we must never forget the contribution they have made in repairing the bank.

Mr Dave Watts (St Helens North) (Lab): It is clear from the Minister's statement that the Chancellor has sacked the chief executive. Can the Minister assure the House that there is no gagging clause in the chief executive's contract when he leaves with his package of £5 million that will stop him setting out his own views on when RBS should be sold?

Sajid Javid: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was listening to the statement I made. If he was, he would realise that the RBS board made this decision.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): As the Minister knows, I think the sooner the Government get out of the banking business, the better. There has been a lot of discussion today about the price at which they should do that. What has the Minister been able to discover about the due diligence that was done on the price the Government paid to buy RBS shares in the first place?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend raises a good point, and it is actually quite easy to find out—although I do not think the previous Government wanted to advertise it, and nor do I think the current Opposition want us to continue highlighting it—that when RBS was bailed out, the then Government overpaid by over £12 billion and wrote that off at that time. They did the same in the interventions in Lloyds bank and Northern Rock, and, as we know, all this was a direct result of the previous Government's failure to regulate our banking and financial system properly.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The Minister referred in his statement to the regulatory role of the new Prudential Regulation Authority. What mechanisms have the Government and the Bank of England put in place to ensure that the PRA does not suffer from the “revolving door” disease, which afflicted its predecessor, the FSA?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman raises a good point. That was a problem at the previous regulator, the FSA. When the PRA was set up, its head, Andrew Bailey, prioritised the issue, making sure that he hires the best people and that they are rewarded accordingly, to make sure they can do a good job in looking after the interests of the taxpayer.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): Given that the taxpayer had to buy the bank and, shamefully, was forced to overpay by £12 billion, may I urge the Minister not only to privatise it as soon as possible, but to consider people's shares, so that the taxpayers who paid for it have something to show for it?

Sajid Javid: I remind my hon. Friend of something I said earlier, which is that we are looking at future plans for the state-owned banking sector but think it prudent to wait for the report from the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards; however, I will take his representation on board.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): One can tell when this Government have something to hide: the Chancellor runs for cover and a junior Minister is sent out to make a statement and deny absolutely everything—rather unconvincingly, if I may say so. Does the Economic Secretary not understand that my constituents are still spitting with fury about the fact that they are paying the price for the mistakes made by bankers? If the dash for cash, which he has been touting around the Committee Rooms and the City of London for the past few weeks, goes ahead, yet again, bankers will make more money, brokers will make more money, and the taxpayer will lose out.

Sajid Javid: If I remember correctly, the hon. Gentleman was a member of the previous Government, not just a Government Back Bencher, so he was involved in decision making and presumably supported the action that the then Government took on banking regulation. I wonder whether he held those views back in 2007, just before the collapse of the British banking system, when the then Chancellor said in his Mansion House speech:

“I congratulate you Lord Mayor and the City of London on these remarkable achievements, an era that history will record as the beginning of a new golden age for the City of London.”

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will the Economic Secretary reconfirm that Stephen Hester’s exit package, while undoubtedly generous, is just one third of the amount that he could have got under the contract signed by the last Labour Government? Also, given that Her Majesty’s Government hold, on behalf of all our constituents, 80% of the bank, will he ensure that the terms of the contract for the new chief executive reflect Stephen Hester’s actual remuneration and not the theoretical remuneration put in place by the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown)?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I can confirm that, under the terms to which the previous Government signed up in 2008, when Stephen Hester was appointed, his exit package could have been three times greater. That again highlights the Labour party’s utter confusion on this issue.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Minister spoke of the importance of RBS becoming a bank that provides greater support to the British economy. I could not agree more, but rather than flog it off, would not a more effective way to achieve that aim be to maintain the bank in the public sector and to direct investment into projects that will genuinely benefit the public and the economy—into small businesses, affordable housing and home insulation—which will also create hundreds of thousands of local jobs?

Sajid Javid: Respectfully, I have to disagree with the hon. Lady. I think the Government have no long-term role in owning any part of the banking sector.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Last but not least, I call Geraint Davies.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): This announcement has already helped to wipe £2 billion off taxpayer-held share value, so will the Economic Secretary consider a staged sale of RBS, in chunks, to maximise the return? Will he also consider keeping a residual shareholding, to maintain influence so that the ambition we all share can be met that RBS continues to focus on small and medium-sized enterprises, rather than runs off, as it has before, in ways that are not in the interests of the British economy?

Sajid Javid: First, the hon. Gentleman should know that share prices go up and down, often with the general direction of the market. If he is really concerned about shareholder value, presumably he was against all the changes that the Government he supported made during their time in office, which led to the true destruction of taxpayers’ money. The Government believe that the strategy RBS has set out and made clear yesterday—a bank that is more focused on the UK economy and working with British business, with a smaller investment bank—is the right one, as is the strategy of getting a CEO who can see that process through for the next few years. We think that that will lead to value creation.

Point of Order

12.9 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for taking this short point of order; I do not want to delay the main debate. It is a question of the accuracy of the record for the public and for Parliament, and I am indebted to Brian Simpson MEP, an agriculture spokesman, for unearthing the facts. On a matter as vital and sensitive as bovine TB, and related issues, it is important that we deal with the evidence and the facts.

The UK Government's position has been that field trials for the cattle vaccination in the UK are prohibited under EU law, thus preventing the development of a cattle vaccine in the UK. However, recent statements from the Commission for the Environment and Rural Affairs Committee report published on 5 June show that clearly this is not the case. Field trials can be allowed without a need to amend existing EU legislation if certain criteria are put in place. Moreover, according to the Govt's statements, the Government were told last year to come forward with a programme for the field trials. However, nothing has yet been published. Finally, even though the Secretary of State has made clear that this will take 10 years, the Commission has said that that is indicative only and that the timetable could be compressed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, can you give me advice as to how we can set the record straight and get clarity on such an important issue for farmers and the rural community?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): I agree that this is an important issue but I must tell the hon. Gentleman something that I think he already knows: that is not really a point of order but a point of debate. He has got his points clearly on the record today and I am sure that he will find other parliamentary opportunities to explore them. It is not a matter for the chair and it does not require a ruling.

Backbench Business

Iraq War (10th Anniversary)

12.11 pm

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

That this House has considered the matter of the tenth anniversary of the Iraq War.

I would like to thank the Backbench Business Committee for enabling me to secure this debate, which has the support of colleagues across the House. It gives us a chance to reflect not only on the Iraq war but on Parliament's role in that war. It is a debate that I believe our constituents would expect us to hold as we pass the 10th anniversary of the US-led invasion.

All of us will have in mind today the 179 members of our armed forces who have lost their lives in this conflict. I pay tribute to them and to their bravery, and my sympathy goes out to their families for their terrible loss. Other service personnel have suffered physical and mental trauma as a result of the war which, for many, will be with them for the rest of their lives. We also have in mind the many hundreds of thousands of Iraqi men, women and children who were killed during the war or who have died since in military operations, bombings, acts of terrorism or through sickness and disease.

Possible estimates of the number of Iraqis killed in the invasion and occupation of Iraq vary wildly. A *Lancet* survey between March 2003 and June 2006 pointed to over 650,000 excess deaths, while an Opinion Research Business survey put deaths as a result of the conflict at over 1 million up to 2007. The Iraq Body Count, or IBC—an independent US-UK group—reports 112,976 documented civilian casualties and points out that further analysis of the WikiLeaks Iraq war logs may add 12,000 civilian deaths to that number. The IBC has always said that its number is an undercount because proper records have not been kept by the coalition forces, a fact that tells its own story.

Whatever the true number, there is no dispute that there has been a grave civilian price, one that continues to be paid and threatens to get worse. For most of us today, this 10th anniversary of the invasion is largely history, but for the people of Iraq it is a state of continuing war. Iraqis are being hit by almost daily attacks, with tensions growing between the Shi'a Muslim majority and the minority Sunnis, raising fears of a return to the worst level of sectarian violence. Just this week we have seen harrowing reports of at least seven people killed in a single day in a wave of bombings and attacks in central and northern Iraq. Last month was the bloodiest since June 2008, with over 1,000 Iraqi civilians and security officials killed, according to the UN.

It is a grim understatement to say that the Iraqi people do not have security. There are deep concerns about human rights, massive corruption, unemployment and miserable basic services, such as electricity and water supplies. But even if Iraq finds a way out of its current difficulties, as we all fervently hope it will, there is the legacy of the last 10 years of warfare and terrorism as well. Part of that legacy is the deeply disturbing cases being taken to our High Court, involving more than

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1,000 killings and acts of torture committed in Iraq by UK forces. We must have public scrutiny of the systemic issues arising from these cases and look to reform the training and oversight of our armed forces.

What of our own country? Do we feel more secure? Is the terrorist threat diminished because of those 10 years of bloodshed and chaos? In fact, the contrary is true. According to the former head of MI5, Eliza Manningham-Buller, the Iraqi invasion increased the terror threat in Britain, radicalising a generation of young British Muslims and substantially increasing the risk of a terrorist atrocity on UK soil. A major unprovoked attack without UN authorisation took place with dire consequences. These terrible and deeply troubling outcomes add real substance to the argument that this was the biggest foreign policy failure of recent times.

As an individual, I opposed the war in Iraq because it was my view that the burden of justification for undertaking a major unprovoked attack had not been met. I joined the anti-war protest in February 2003, which saw between 1 million and 2 million people marching in London, the biggest political demonstration in history. In successive polls by different and reputable agencies, around two thirds of British citizens say the Iraq war was a mistake.

Ultimately, Parliament was responsible for that decision to go to war. It was MPs in this House who questioned, debated and voted on the decision, both on 26 February and 18 March 2003. But if this war was a mistake, what should Parliament do now? If it were a public body—a school, perhaps, or a hospital or local authority—we would expect an admission that things had gone wrong and a pledge to learn the lessons so that it could not happen again. That, I believe, is at the heart of today's debate. Not a blame game or resignations; not heads on platters or humble pie; not a chorus of "I told you so." What I want to focus on specifically is the role of Parliament. How was it that, with some very honourable exceptions, parliamentary scrutiny failed? How was it that the intelligence could be so misinterpreted and misused? How was it that facts clearly in the public domain were ignored or dismissed?

These are not academic questions. Their relevance and consequences are all too real today. We cannot simply leave them to others to answer. The Hutton inquiry and the Butler inquiry had their own terms of reference. Hutton's remit was the death of Dr David Kelly; Butler's was a panel, handpicked by Tony Blair, that was insufficiently independent and held far too many hearings in private. Shamefully, we still await the results of the Chilcot panel fully five years after it was established, while battles continue over declassifying material. I know of at least one freedom of information battle that is still being had with the Foreign Office; the sticking point is not national security, but national embarrassment.

All of these processes can play a useful part in revealing some of the truth of what happened in the lead-up to the war and beyond. But it is not the job of these men, however eminent or well intentioned, to stand in judgment on Parliament. Parliament is sovereign, and must remain sovereign even when it comes to considering its own failures and necessary reforms. As parliamentarians in 2013, we can and must ask, and answer, whether sufficient evidence was available in the

public domain to allow Government Back Benchers and Opposition MPs to both question and oppose the Government's case for war in 2003.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I have always found that hindsight in politics is a great thing and makes things a lot easier. The hon. Lady should look at the evidence that came not from the Government or the security services, but from Hans Blix in his final report. I had the honour of meeting him in New York the night before his final report was published and he clearly said to me and to Bruce George—a right hon. Gentleman at the time—not that Saddam did not have weapons of mass destruction, but that he needed more time, with full co-operation, to determine whether Saddam did.

Caroline Lucas: I can only ask why, then, did we not give Hans Blix more time? I, too, have met Hans Blix and I, too, have heard him say that were the weapons inspectors given more time, they could have established the answer without the bloody war that happened.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady recall that the weapons inspectors were not allowed to go back to Iraq because of the decision of the British and US Governments in January 2003?

Caroline Lucas: I absolutely recall that and I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. It was in the interests of this country for the weapons inspectors not to go back into Iraq so that the Government could make that case.

Mr Kevan Jones: Last night, I looked at the notebook that I had at the time. [*Interruption.*] No, it is in my own handwriting. What it said is not that Hans Blix needed more time, but that he needed more time if he was going to get full co-operation from Saddam, and at that time he clearly was not.

Caroline Lucas: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman and I will come to other quotes from Hans Blix, who made it clear that to a great extent Saddam Hussein was co-operating and that with more time we could have avoided the war.

We as parliamentarians have the role and the job of scrutinising the available evidence that was in the public domain. I entirely take the point that hindsight is a wonderful thing. The point I want to make is that plenty of information was in the public domain.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady not only on securing this debate, but on the manner in which she is presenting the case. Following on from what the former loyal Minister of the previous Government in the Ministry of Defence said, it is not a question of the benefit of hindsight. Many Members of the House, both on the Opposition Benches and, in some honourable cases, on the Government Benches, scrutinised the evidence at that time and came to the conclusion that it was unwise in those circumstances to proceed with engaging in military action in Iraq.

Caroline Lucas: I am particularly grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention because I will shortly pay tribute to those hon. Members who did stand up in

this place, who did scrutinise and who did ask the right questions. The fact that they came to the conclusions that they did demonstrates that the evidence was there. Unfortunately, there was a will not to look at some of it.

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): Before the hon. Lady goes on, may I say in respect of Mr Hans Blix—I have made this point outside the House—that there is a profound disconnection between what he is saying now and what he said at the time? What he said at the time, and he repeated it in a book in 2004, was that he thought that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction and posed a threat. I know of no provenance whatsoever for the claim that the inspectors were prevented from continuing their work in Iraq by either the US or the UK in January 2003.

Moreover, the final reports from Hans Blix complained about a lack of co-operation, the inability of inspectors to interview scientists from Iraq inside or outside Iraq, and the continuing intimidation. The final report that he made, which I had to force him to publish, on 7 March 2003, catalogued in 29 chapters of 170 pages the unanswered questions that Mr Blix thought Saddam had to answer, even at that stage, about all the chemical and biological weaponry that had been known about in the past and which Saddam had failed to explain. That is where Blix was at the time. My last point is this—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): No. Will the right hon. Gentleman please sit down? I am trying to be very tolerant to facilitate the debate but there are lots of Members who want to participate, and making a speech on an intervention, however important the point, is not acceptable. Therefore the right hon. Gentleman will have to wait to make the rest of his points.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) for his intervention. Obviously, he has a great deal of information from that time.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady also acknowledge that there was a huge amount of foresight on the part of people who were opposed to the war, not entirely on the existence of weapons? Many nations have weapons of mass destruction. What was totally implausible was the suggestion that Saddam Hussein would use those weapons against America and against the United Kingdom in a way that would be suicidal and guarantee own defeat. We know what the reasons for the war were, and they were in the mind of George Bush.

Caroline Lucas: I welcome that intervention. We need to recognise that a threat is made up of the capability to use weapons and also the intention to use them. What Hans Blix made very clear at that point was that there was not, as far as he could see, any intention to use them. What he wanted to find out was what else there was.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Caroline Lucas: I will give way shortly. Let me make a little more progress.

I keep coming back to the importance of MPs—ourselves—scrutinising the decision-making process that took place at the time. In that context, I was surprised and disappointed when, back in March this year, the Foreign Secretary, for whom I have a great deal of respect, wrote what was intended, I think, to be a confidential letter to members of his party, telling senior members of the Government that they should not be drawn on the controversial issues that drew the UK into the Iraq war. They should, he suggested, wait until Chilcot had reported, but that of course might not be until the next election—who knows? We are still waiting after five years, and in any case, Chilcot does not have a monopoly on the issue, and I doubt whether he or his team would want one.

I turn now to what went wrong. There is plenty of evidence that shows that the case for war set out by the Blair Administration in 2003 was deeply flawed. Intelligence was misused, concerns expressed by experts were suppressed, and the legal and political position was misrepresented. From this arises the belief among many journalists and members of the public as well as Members of this House that they were misled into supporting the war in Iraq. In fact, when one reads the documents and listens to the testimony, it is hardly far-fetched to call it a conspiracy.

In brief, Tony Blair decided to join the US in invading Iraq and removing Saddam Hussein. He knew that the British people and their representatives were dubious about the wisdom of this, to say the least, so he used every opportunity to twist the evidence to isolate his critics and encourage his supporters. Britain was indeed spun into war. This is the foundation of the familiar position that many former war supporters now take. Often they will say, “If I had known then what I know now, I would not have supported the war”, but is that enough? Does that really explain what happened?

Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): In 2005 I went out to Iraq. Then, even senior military officers were questioning the legality of their being there and having gone in. So it is not simply a matter of us doubting it. They were unsure of the legal position as well.

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It would really help me to chair the debate if Members made brief interventions and stayed on their feet while they were doing so. I know the hon. Lady is being very generous in giving way under some considerable pressure, but I am sure she will bear in mind the length of time that she is speaking and the others wishing to participate.

Caroline Lucas: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I was saying that many people will say that if they had known then what they know now, they would not have supported the war, and I said that that was not an adequate justification, precisely because of those Members of Parliament who were not taken in by the spin. Members of Parliament could have known then much of what they know now. A vast amount of the evidence available now was in the public domain then. We know this because of those hon. Members who did see through the lies and the deceptions, who asked the right questions,

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who trawled through the documents, who stood up in Parliament and said that the war was based on a false prospectus, and many of those hon. Members are in the Chamber today.

Let me give an example of three others, starting with an hon. Member who is no longer in the Chamber, the former Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak, Lynne Jones. She saw that Tony Blair and the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) made the misrepresentation of the French position a centrepiece of their efforts to win the vote on 18 March 2003. As one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, France had the power to veto a second UN resolution. In an interview on 10 March 2003 President Chirac indicated that, as things stood, France would use its veto in the unlikely event that a second resolution authorising military action got the necessary majority of nine members of the Security Council.

I quote from the transcript of the interview. Chirac says:

“My position is that, regardless of the circumstances, France will vote ‘no’ because she considers this evening that there are no grounds for waging war in order to achieve the goal we have set ourselves, i.e. to disarm Iraq.”

But by selectively quoting the words “regardless of the circumstances” when describing the French position on authorisation of the use of force, proponents of the war blamed France for blocking military action against Iraq, no matter what evidence emerged of a breach of resolution 1441. Tony Blair even included the selective and misleading quote in the motion in support of military action that was put to the House on 18 March 2003. [Interruption.] I want to finish this section. The importance of the inclusion of this misrepresentation in the motion was huge. Some MPs have stated that it alone changed their minds on whether or not to vote to go to war.

Giving evidence to the Chilcot inquiry, the right hon. Member for Blackburn suggested that President Chirac’s use of the phrase “this evening” did not describe the French position on the evening of the interview, thereby indicating that this could change in the future, but was simply an introduction to what he was going to say that evening. He put that argument to the panel by specifically stating the order of Chirac’s phrasing, down to where a comma is used. However, the transcript shows that he did not give the phrasing in the right order. The phrase “this evening” came after “regardless of the circumstances”, but he said that it came first, changing the meaning of Chirac’s words to suit the argument. The right hon. Gentleman said:

‘I know there has been some textual analysis of the use by President Chirac of the word “Le soir”, but I watched him say this and I took this as no more than saying, “This evening”, comma, and then he announces, “France will, whatever the circumstances”, he says, right?’

Well, that was not right. In fact, the transcript shows that Chirac explicitly ruled in the possibility that military action might be needed, stating in the same interview that if the weapons inspector reported after more time that they were unable to do their job, war would be inevitable. To quote directly, he said:

“But in that case, of course, regrettably, the war would become inevitable. It isn’t today.”

The French position, then, was that progress was being made on the weapons inspections and that France was therefore opposed to replacing the existing inspections process with an ultimatum that would lead to war in a few days’ time. The phrase “regardless of the circumstances” was not helpful, and it was unfortunate that Chirac used those words, as they were easily taken out of context. However, that does not detract from the responsibility of those, including Tony Blair and the right hon. Member for Blackburn, who—I argue—misinterpreted, and continued to misinterpret, President Chirac’s interview of 10 March in order to blame France for the failure to obtain a second UN resolution. The reason that it was not possible to obtain UN authorisation for the use of force is that there was no evidence showing Iraq to be an active and growing threat; it was not because of French intransigence, as UK Ministers said.

Hansard shows that Lynne Jones was ridiculed when she tried to raise the misrepresentation of Chirac’s interview in the House, but the fact that she raised it shows that there were hon. Members who bothered to get the transcript of what was actually said before the vote and that it was not necessary to accept the interpretation being given by the Government at face value. It was not a detail; President Chirac’s words were placed at the heart of the motion that Parliament debated and voted on.

Mr Kevan Jones: I got on well with the former Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak, who was a very good Member of Parliament, but I think that the hon. Lady is reading far too much into this in order to support her conspiracy theory speech. On the same visit to New York, I also met the French ambassador to the UN, and it was quite clear that there was no way the French would vote for a resolution that endorsed action, and they were working with the Germans, who took the same position. It is not the case that the French were somehow up for negotiation.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but the point is the issue of when they were going to accept intervention—

Mr Jones: They never were.

Caroline Lucas: Well, I have seen the evidence from Chilcot and the way it was treated when it came to the Chilcot inquiry, and I think that it is perfectly plain that Chirac’s intervention was deliberate misinterpreted. The words were taken in the wrong order and made to mean something different. [Interruption.] We can trade our beliefs across the Chamber, but the bottom line is that there was evidence out there that would have led Members to suspect that what they were being told at that point was not necessarily the case.

Mr Straw: First, the transcript, and indeed the video, were available to all Members on both sides of the House, so they could make their own judgments on it, and the vast majority made the judgment that we made about what had happened. Secondly, what we were seeking in the second UN resolution was not war, but peace—I was desperate for it—by an ultimatum that included six tests, which were drafted by Hans Blix, by the way, and they were tests that Saddam could easily have passed had he wished to do so.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but I will move on.

I want to talk about the former Member for Livingston, Robin Cook. Reading his resignation speech makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, because it is all there: the reasons why the war was unnecessary and unjustified, the critique of the Government's position and the exposure of the misinformation and deceit. It was delivered with eloquence and with the authority and credibility of a former Foreign Secretary and member of the 2003 Cabinet. Yet his warnings were heeded only by the 23% of MPs who voted to oppose the war. How could that happen?

The right hon. Member for Blackburn said earlier that the transcript of what Chirac had said was in the public domain, and that is precisely my point. Given that the evidence was there, how is it that more MPs did not come to a different conclusion? The answer, which I will make in greater detail later in my speech, is that they were whipped massively through a system in this House that means they give up their responsibility to make their own decisions. My point is that that kind of whipping on a vote of such importance and conscience is not the right way forward.

There are many potential explanations for why Robin Cook's warnings were heeded by so few, but most come down to the idea that Members perhaps trusted the view that there was a subplot to the invasion that the Government could not be open about, that perhaps the Government knew much more about the risk Saddam posed to the UK than they were able to say, and that perhaps the conditions were right for establishing Iraq as a democratic, pro-western state. In some cases, Members were taken to one side and given off-the-record briefings.

But I think that the answer is much more simple: too many Members put loyalty to their leader and to their party above their own judgment. They swallowed their private doubts, accepted what they were told and voted accordingly. That misplaced trust crossed party lines. It is deeply regrettable that the tradition of loyalty meant that hon. Members such as Robin Cook were not heard. It is also regrettable that the Tory leadership supported the war so unquestioningly. Perhaps there was a feeling that that level of deceit was simply inconceivable when it came to an issue as serious as war. Yet now we know that it was not.

Returning to the "If I had known then what I know now" defence and looking to the future, we can perhaps conclude thus: no Member of this House should ever take on trust the case for war. They must listen to all sides with open minds, even to the refuseniks and the usual suspects in case this time they might just be on to something. They must look at the sources themselves and ask themselves and their leaders the tough questions: is there an alternative, and what if it goes wrong? There is plenty more evidence of the fact that there was material in the public domain that should have enabled more hon. Members to make a more informed decision.

Jeremy Corbyn: Does the hon. Lady not agree, then, that one lesson we can learn, and perhaps agree on in this debate, is the need for a war powers Act that would mean Parliament must be consulted and must vote specifically on any military action undertaken on our behalf?

Caroline Lucas: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, because that is exactly the point I want to make. There should be a mandatory vote of this House on issues as important as going to war. Moreover, and critically—this is the burden of what I am saying today—that vote must be a free vote based on conscience. We cannot allow ourselves to be taken along by the rhetoric of party leaders or to be bullied by party whipping and therefore, in a sense, to abrogate our responsibility to make our own decisions.

Mr Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The hon. Lady mentioned the Conservative party. I was there and know what was going on in the party. The atmosphere was very relaxed. Although there was whipping, we were allowed to vote against it. Someone resigned from the Whips Office but immediately rejoined. I voted against it. We formed a judgment. I am afraid that most of my colleagues believed the Prime Minister and took the view that Iraq was a threat, but no pressure was put on Conservative MPs.

Caroline Lucas: Clearly I do not have the inside information that the hon. Gentleman has, but I have heard many a different story told elsewhere.

In conclusion, I said at the start of my speech that the justification for the debate is that Parliament must accept that it made a mistake in 2003 and set out how it will prevent such a mistake from happening again. I believe that it comes down to the acceptance of one principle: there must be a limit to party loyalty, and even of loyalty to the leader of a party. Loyalty is in some way an admirable quality. There are times when it is right to bite one's tongue, go along with the majority, set aside one's opinions and accept the judgment and experience of others. But there are also limits. Committing our country to war, asking our young men and women to fight and accepting that men, women and children will die in our name must be beyond the sway of party loyalty.

I would like to see the end of the royal prerogative on war and the establishment of a constitutional convention that votes on war are not subject to party whipping. I know that some Members might dismiss that suggestion, but it is a serious one and I urge hon. Members to consider it carefully. Of course informal whipping would have taken place anyway, but it would have been different. Taking away the formal obligation to vote according to the party line would have pushed more hon. Members to look at the evidence for themselves and vote accordingly. It would have given their constituents more power and leverage and put more responsibility on the shoulders of each Member. Scrutiny would not have been dulled by loyalty in the same way.

Like the issues of capital punishment and abortion, committing troops to war is a matter of conscience, and MPs should be, at least formally, free from the heavy hand of the Whips. This principle is relevant now as we grapple with the terrible situation that is unfolding in Syria. Members should demand not just a vote on whether we arm the rebels but a genuinely free vote. If Iraq teaches us one thing, it is that if MPs are to vote on grave matters of conflict, for that vote to be meaningful it must be the view of their own conscience, not their party's line. As individual constituency MPs, many of us have constituents who have died in Iraq—who have

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lost relatives there. It is no answer to them to say that on a serious matter like this we did not challenge the case and satisfy ourselves that war was justified and unavoidable.

In future, when we are faced with a decision about whether to go to war, we simply cannot have a situation where the Government of the day tell the story and we take what they say on trust. MPs have to do the work themselves. In any future vote, we and our successors must establish, to our own satisfaction and on evidence that we have seen and heard ourselves, that the case for war has been made. Three lines on a Whips sheet are not enough.

12.40 pm

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on securing it.

It has been 10 years since we invaded Iraq, yet the experience still casts a long shadow, and lessons from the period are still relevant today. Perhaps the most important lesson is that the war threw into stark relief the importance of basing our foreign policy decisions on firm evidence. The intelligence on Saddam Hussein's WMD and his links with al-Qaeda, which was used to varying degrees as justification and a pretext for hostilities, was infamously described by Tony Blair as "extensive, detailed and authoritative". In reality, it was anything but. We now know that we went to war on a false premise; there were no WMD. The British intelligence community failed to approach the Iraqi material with its customary thoroughness and consequently allowed space for the Government to mould the evidence to suit their purposes, with disastrous results. Indeed, sections of the intelligence community became the mouthpiece of Government rather than their ears and eyes, and that must never be allowed to happen again.

We learnt only after the event the extent to which No. 10 and Foreign and Commonwealth Office spin doctors were on the inside of the drafting process for the September 2002 dossier and strongly influenced it. The then chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, John Scarlett, was in regular touch with Alastair Campbell. A unit within the FCO, the communications information centre, promoted the case for war. This resulted in possibilities becoming probabilities and indications becoming judgments. One spin doctor wrote the first full draft of the dossier, at John Scarlett's invitation, a full day before John Scarlett produced his own first full draft. This evidence has come out only subsequently, often having to be extracted like teeth from the Government through freedom of information requests and other means.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I agree with the points that the hon. Gentleman is making. Is not the biggest criticism of this whole sorry episode that having made the decision to go to war, the Government spent more time falsifying information to make the case for it than planning for the subsequent occupation, which has been a complete catastrophe?

Mr Baron: I certainly think that the post-war reconstruction was a shambles that led to a serious civil war and many casualties.

I have highlighted the detail with regard to the role of spin doctors and the FCO in the drafting of the dossier because that detail is important. When Tony Blair recalled Parliament, we were encouraged to believe that the dossier accurately reflected the assessments of the intelligence community. We now know that this was inaccurate. The dossier upgraded or exaggerated assessments made by the JIC, while intellectual ownership of the dossier did not reside with the JIC alone. Indeed, the final dossier was not even approved by the whole JIC. Yet that September we were led to believe that the account was that of the intelligence community, and that was a false impression.

Andrew George: The hon. Gentleman is making a very important point. Parliament needs to be reassured that we can get back to evidence-based policy making rather than policy-based evidence making, which appears to be the direction in which the civil servants went. We need an independent civil service that is capable of independently providing politically neutral evidence on which Parliament can assess these matters.

Mr Baron: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. For many of us, the lesson from all this is that we must be wary of Government spin when we are addressing foreign policy issues, in particular; instead, we must focus on the evidence.

Bringing this up to speed, I suggest that in the case of Iran, for example, no intelligence service, whether American, British, Israeli or any other, has yet been able to publicly produce any hard evidence, as opposed to circumstantial evidence, that the Iranian leadership has decided to build a nuclear weapon or is taking that course. Nevertheless, that has not prevented our policy makers from painting a very different picture, and tensions are running unnecessarily high as a result.

The Iraq war is also a reminder that interventions often produce unintended consequences that can turn out to be counter-productive to our interests. A woefully inadequate post-war reconstruction ushered in a vicious civil war, as other Members have outlined. Studies estimate that many hundreds of thousands died in Iraq as a result of the invasion. In fact, Iraq became a honeypot for extremists worldwide. In a bitter irony, al-Qaeda only gained a foothold in Iraq after Saddam's downfall and then proved difficult to eradicate. Minorities suffered as well. The Iraqi Christian communities, resident for centuries, have suffered immeasurably in the wake of the invasion.

Mr Leigh: I have since visited the Christian communities and heard the harrowing tales of what has happened to them. Is not what happened in Iraq a lesson for future action in Syria?

Mr Baron: My hon. Friend and I are very like-minded on this. We have a very bad track record of considering the consequences of our actions in relation to minorities within these countries. Syria is a good example, in the case not only of the Christians but of the Alawites.

Today, Iraq looks into the abyss because of economic failure, sectarian violence and political turmoil and corruption. Prime Minister al-Maliki, having centralised power, is a tentative supporter, to say the least, of President Assad, and a new wave of sectarian unrest

seems imminent. That is one example of how unintended consequences can come back and bite us when we do not think these things through carefully.

Furthermore, there is little doubt that the removal of Saddam Hussein fundamentally altered the regional balance of power. We tend to forget in this House that we supported Saddam Hussein in Iraq's attack on Iran. At that time, there was an approximate balance of power in the region. In effect, by taking Iraq out of the equation we ourselves created a regional superpower in the shape of Iran, the consequences of which we are still living with today.

I also suggest to the House that the invasion ignored the lessons of history. Interventions have a tendency to support, reinforce or have an embedding effect on the existing regimes. Looking back at history, communism, for example, has survived longest in those countries where the west has intervened militarily, such as China, Vietnam, Cuba and Korea. Meanwhile, the neo-con dream of establishing a sort of liberal democracy in Iraq lies in tatters. Democracy is taking root in north Africa, in regions where the west has put in very little support, not in Iraq or Afghanistan, where the cost to the west, particularly to this country, has been very high in terms of lives and treasure.

Meanwhile, as we have heard, our intervention has radicalised elements of the Muslim world against us, not only in regions of the middle east, but on the streets of this country. Scandals such as Abu Ghraib reinforce this alienation. As has been mentioned, Dame Manningham-Buller, the former head of MI5, said that the invasion "increased the terrorist threat" and

"spurred some British Muslims to turn to terror."

We are still living with the consequences of this radicalisation, as very sad recent news has highlighted.

One scratches around for positives from this period. Perhaps there are a few. If al-Qaeda was one of the reasons for the invasion, it is now abundantly clear that the Iraq war was a 19th-century colonial-style solution to a 21st-century terrorist threat. There is no point invading countries if we are chasing extremists and terrorists. Instead, our efforts against international terrorism must be much more nimble and nuanced. They must reflect the flexibility of the terrorist threat itself, focusing on intelligence and operations, supporting friendly Governments in their anti-terrorist endeavours and applying properly resourced special forces. Indeed, there are encouraging signs that we have learned lessons from that period. We must also better focus international aid on the poverty and grievances that al-Qaeda and others have all too readily fastened upon in the past.

Perhaps—I am coming to an end—there is a more general lesson to be learned. We failed at the time to carry the international community with us, and in doing so I would suggest that we lost the moral high ground. The view adopted by the US and the UK at the time was that might is right. This sets a dangerous precedent. The coming decades will see the emergence of at least regional superpowers—or even global superpowers—that might be eager to flex their muscles. Our invasion of Iraq will make condemnation of any future aggression by others less effective. The invasion showed international law to be no guarantee of sovereignty or, indeed, security. This in itself may have encouraged some countries to seek other guarantees.

If there is a positive, it is perhaps that this war may have served to lay to rest, once and for all, the view that the British electorate would instinctively support politicians advocating intervention or war. I would suggest that Blair was never trusted thereafter. As our Prime Minister considers possible responses to Syria, he would be wise to reflect on that. In conclusion, let us hope that these lessons have been learned, for the sake of future generations.

12.53 pm

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, both Front Benchers and all hon. and right hon. Members that I will not be able to be here for the winding-up speeches.

I begin with a caveat over the word "anniversary." In my lexicon an anniversary is something to be celebrated. There is nothing to be celebrated about the Iraq war, the most disastrous foreign policy certainly in my lifetime and possibly in the history of this country.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on obtaining this debate and I heartily agree with many things she said. I have another caveat, however, in that I think she is much too harsh on Members of this House and, indeed, the electorate. Whether individuals supported or opposed the Iraq war, it is not the case that it was not a central topic of discussion, not only in this Chamber, but throughout the whole Palace and certainly throughout the whole country. I think she was a little unfair in a similar way to that in which my Government's spokesman, rather more unfairly, dubbed all those who were opposed to the idea of a war in Iraq—this is just one example—as knee-jerk anti-Americans. There was also enormous pressure from the press that this war should go ahead, but it is not true that we did not examine, read or question the evidence on a cross-party basis. It was the major topic of discussion.

I do not want to rerun the arguments about all the dodgy dossiers and half-truths, which are now well and truly in the public domain, as they should be for what was undoubtedly a most immoral and possibly illegal war that, as the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) has detailed cogently, is still continuing.

I endorse the point made by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion about how important Parliament is in such situations and how totally its powers can be wiped away by the Standing Orders and mores of this place. I agree entirely that that should change. If there is anything positive to be taken out of the morass of the Iraq war, it is surely the lesson that we must never, ever go down that road again.

My current concern is for both the present and, partially, the future. Syria could so easily become yet another disaster for this country's foreign policy. I pay tribute to the Prime Minister, although I would have liked him to have been more categorical on the possibility of arming one of the sides in what is essentially a civil war, which would be a total and unmitigated disaster. To give President Obama his due, despite his pronouncements about drawing lines in the sand—such statements are all too easily made by politicians, statesmen and powers—and even though the red line that he defined has apparently been crossed, perhaps in a minor way, with the use, we are told, of sarin in Syria, there is clearly no move on the part of the United States to engage its troops and weaponry in Syria, which is to be

[Glenda Jackson]

welcomed. It is a scandal and an absolute disgrace that Russia, one of the permanent members of the Security Council, is completely abdicating her responsibilities in relation to this war, but that does not relieve us in this Chamber, in this country, from accepting the realities of the desperate tragedies that we created by going into a benighted war.

I have had occasion to say in this Chamber and will say again that if we are going to spend money on armaments, that would be another complete and unmitigated disaster. There is a desperate, overwhelming need for even more humanitarian aid to support those countries on the borders of Syria that are carrying the biggest burden, including Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, all of which have a major part to play in that part of the world. We should be supporting them, not opting for sides.

My major concern, in concert with the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay, is what I perceive to be a movement to try at some point to encourage the western powers or other allies to engage in a similar conflict in Iran on the basis, as far as I can see, having read the evidence, of an entirely spurious argument that Iran is not only desperate to make a nuclear weapon, but even more anxious to use it. That is totally off the wall, if one reads the existing evidence.

I have sketched out some of the lessons that we must learn from the gross intrusion that was the Iraq war—that living example of how power can corrupt absolutely. We have learned that if a great power attacks a smaller power, it will win. Desperate and terrible though the results of that are, the true tragedy is that nobody ever sat down and asked seriously, “How are we going to win the peace?” That is the most overwhelming lesson. However, the same thing is happening with regard to Syria. If we arm one side in that civil war, what will we do when the bullets run out—although they never will—and when the bombs stop falling?

We pay lip service to the diplomatic way of solving such problems, but we do not push it to the extent that we should. I remember clearly the news, on the day before the Iraq war turned to shock and awe, that 52 British ambassadors had written a letter to the Government saying, to paraphrase, “Don’t do it.” Not only this country, but all western nations, have a wealth of experience of the middle east. It has always been a tinderbox. At the moment, it is more than a tinderbox. What is happening in Syria to absolutely innocent civilians is utterly untenable. We can surely do better than we are doing.

For me, that is the screaming message that comes out of the disaster of the Iraq war. It is desperately easy to kill, to wound, to maim, to destroy, but how does one rebuild? It is the responsibility of those who take such decisions to have a plan for how peace, prosperity, justice and democracy can be established or restored. I have yet to read a detailed plan anywhere or by anyone as to how western nations that intrude upon other nations, as we did in Iraq, will do that. That is the most important step forward for the 21st century.

Desperate enmities have been created. The Iraq war was not the exclusive cause of those, but it was certainly a major player. As the hon. Members for Basildon and Billericay and for Brighton, Pavilion have said, those enmities are being played out on our streets by a minority

of people, but we have also unleashed that horror on the world. It is our bound and duty—this House has an important part to play in this—to say that if anybody goes down that ridiculous—no, that is to make it much too banal—that desperate road, there must be a terminus at the end of the road that will produce, without any qualm whatever, the supposed desired result. That has not been brought about in Iraq, even though we were told that that was the main reason why the major power and its little assistant went into that war.

I say again, if any value has come from that disastrous foreign policy, it has to be that we have learned how never, ever to do it again.

1.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mark Simmonds): I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on securing this debate and on her passionate introduction, in which she put on the record her strong views. Clearly, there is still significance and passions are still aroused 10 years on.

I also congratulate the other two hon. Members who have spoken, my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) and the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Glenda Jackson). I agree strongly with my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay about the importance of removing the fundamentals that give support to al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations. He will be well aware that the United Kingdom has done that not just in Iraq, but in other conflict states, with a particular focus at the moment on Somalia and Mali.

More broadly, the United Kingdom has contributed directly towards reconstruction in Iraq. We have helped to provide vaccinations for millions of children, improve access to safe water for more than 1 million people in southern Iraq and provide additional electricity equivalent to that used by a city the size of Leeds. We have also trained tens of thousands of teachers and approximately 20,000 policemen and women.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn was right to point out that this matter was a significant part of the lives of those of us who were Members of Parliament in 2003, and that it exercised both ourselves and our constituents. I would suggest that it was almost the only point of debate at the point in time when the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) and others were deciding what they should do.

As the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion set out in her opening speech, the decision to go to war in 2003 was one of the key foreign policy decisions of the last decade. As I have said, I and other Members who were in the House at the time will remember it for ever. However, it is important to state at the outset that the policy of this Government is not to comment on the decision to go to war ahead of the report of the Chilcot inquiry. I will therefore not do so here, but will look at the future of Iraq and the UK’s relationship with Iraq.

Caroline Lucas: I am grateful to the Minister for his reference to the Chilcot inquiry. Can he advise us when we might expect to see the report and whether he is aware of machinations in the background on issues of declassification that are holding it up?

Mark Simmonds: If the hon. Lady will be patient, I will give the House an update on the Chilcot inquiry.

The decision to go to war has had long-lasting implications not only for Iraq, but for the region, the United Kingdom, our allies and international relations more broadly. Those implications are not necessarily yet clear, but they will be debated for many years to come. There were also more immediate implications. One hundred and seventy-nine British armed forces and Ministry of Defence personnel lost their lives in Iraq, as did a number of British civilians. We must also never forget the loss of life suffered by the Iraqi people. It is right that now, 10 years on from the start of the war, we remember all of them. We must also remember those who were wounded in the war and those who lost loved ones.

Mr Leigh: Those of us who opposed the war are often told, “If you’d had your way, Saddam would still be there.” Surely we are entitled to say that so would hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis, because they would still be alive.

Mark Simmonds: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes. I say to him that the tragic loss of life, wherever it occurs, needs to be remembered. We must also bear in mind the huge disparities between the estimations of the number of Iraqi civilians who lost their lives. There needs to be better analysis of that. It must also be said that the vast majority of Iraqi civilians who lost their lives did so in terrorist incidents, not in military action.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Minister must be aware of the massive refugee problem that the war created. There are still 450,000 Iraqi refugees living in Jordan. Palestinian refugees who went to Iraq from the Gulf states were expelled from Iraq after the invasion. The refugee crisis in the region is enormous as a result of that war and the Syrian war. Does he have any comment to make on that?

Mark Simmonds: The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the plight of refugees and displaced people. He will be aware of the significant contribution that the Department for International Development makes to support displaced people’s camps. The only long-term solution is to create stability and security in the middle east to enable people to return to the countries from which they originated.

Paul Flynn: Will the Minister give way?

Mark Simmonds: If I may move on, I want to make a few comments about the Chilcot inquiry because it has been one of the consistent themes in the speeches of Members so far and I am sure that other Members will comment on it as well. It is vital that we learn the lessons of the conflict. That, of course, is the fundamental and primary remit of Sir John Chilcot’s Iraq inquiry.

Mr Baron: Will the Minister give way?

Mark Simmonds: I want to make a little progress and then I will give way.

The inquiry is a complex and substantial task and it is considering an eight-year period. When he set up the inquiry, the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), described its scope as “unprecedented”, and Sir John has said that its final report is likely to exceed 1 million words.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion asked when the process will be completed and the report published, and the short answer is that it is up to Sir John and his team. The inquiry is independent of the Government, although I assure the hon. Lady and other hon. Members that the Government are co-operating fully with it. Indeed, the Foreign Office alone has made some 30,000 documents available, which gives a further idea of the scale of the work. Those doing the inquiry have indicated that they intend to begin what is called the “criticism phase” of their work this summer. That will give individuals who may face criticism in the report the chance to make representations to the inquiry. Thereafter, the inquiry and Sir John will have to assimilate those representations into the final report. I do not have a definitive time scale for when that final report will be published, but it is essential that Sir John Chilcot and his colleagues do that work in a thorough and professional way.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): That is absolutely right and it is important that John Chilcot gets all the information required for the report. He will have seen the remarks by David Owen that hint at collusion by Tony Blair and the Prime Minister’s office to ensure that private correspondence between George Bush and Tony Blair will not be available to the inquiry. Can the Minister say that that will now be made available and that we will be able to see the private correspondence between Tony Blair and George Bush?

Mark Simmonds: Let me be clear with the hon. Gentleman. The debate about the private correspondence between Tony Blair and George Bush, and the Cabinet minutes from the time, concerns their public publication. The Chilcot inquiry has seen both sets of documents, which I hope goes some way to assuage the hon. Gentleman’s concerns.

Paul Flynn: The inquiry is already two years late given the date it originally promised to report and, as the Minister says, it is an important report. Had the United Kingdom not joined the war, Saddam would still have been removed and the war would have gone on because our support was not needed. The crucial point—I do not know whether the Minister has confirmed this—seems to be what Bush and Blair cooked up in 2002, because the decision to take the United Kingdom into the war was probably taken then. That is the essential point—not why the war took place, but why the United Kingdom was dragged into it by Tony Blair.

Mark Simmonds: That is part of Sir John Chilcot’s remit, and we must wait for the report to come out before the UK Government will comment on that.

Mr Baron: Is my hon. Friend at least able to accept that we went to war on a false premise and there were no weapons of mass destruction?

Mark Simmonds: No, I am not prepared to comment on that. As I said, the current Government will not comment on the process that led to participation in the Iraq conflict until after the Chilcot report has been published.

Andrew George: Even if the Government are not prepared to concede that point, does my hon. Friend agree that the issue raises questions about the capacity of Parliament to scrutinise the evidence? Even if we accept the evidence from the time at face value—although a lot of us were very sceptical of it—the only thing it concluded was that Saddam had the ability of potentially reaching UK assets in Cyprus within 45 minutes, and that was all. Was that really sufficient evidence for Parliament to decide that we should go to war?

Mark Simmonds: Those are all matters that Sir John Chilcot will be looking at, and I am sure my hon. Friend would prefer there to be an independent inquiry looking at what happened, rather than a Government inquiry. We have made a conscious decision not to comment on the decision to go to war until the inquiry has reported, but as I have said, I recognise that it was a decision of huge significance.

Mr Baron: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mark Simmonds: I want to make a little progress and I will be happy to give way later. We must not get into a position of prejudging the inquiry's conclusions, but I am sure that—quite rightly—that will not prevent other Members of the House from having a full and frank debate as they put their views on the record this afternoon. I would also find it helpful to hear the views of Members on where Iraq might be in 10 years' time, as well as reanalysing events that took place a decade ago. We should look forwards as well as backwards.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion rightly set out some of the enormous challenges that Iraq still faces. Most visible and acute is the terrorist violence that continues to kill all too many people all too regularly, and I discussed that when I visited Baghdad in January—indeed, when I was in Baghdad a series of car bombs went off. In the past three months we have sadly seen an increase in such attacks, and the UN estimates that more than 1,000 people—mostly civilians—lost their lives in May alone. We continue to condemn utterly such acts, and almost all the Iraqi people believe that such violence has no place in their country's future.

There are other longer term difficulties, and many fundamental political issues remain unresolved with no settled agreement on how power is to be shared. Ethnic and sectarian divisions remain, often exacerbated by those elsewhere in the region—particularly in Syria, as others have mentioned. Over the past six months, those factors have led to protests in west Iraq, and to disputes between Iraq's political leaders that have prevented them from taking the decisions the country needs. That political deadlock holds back Iraq's stability, and in turn its development. As has been rightly pointed out, public services and standards of living in much of Iraq remain poor, and corruption and bureaucracy are also problems that must be faced. As we consistently point out, Iraq's human rights record remains a source of

concern, from the Government's increasing use of the death penalty to the recent removal of licences from some media stations.

Mr Baron: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. He is being generous, which is to his commendation. May I take him back to the Chilcot inquiry? Probably like a lot of other Members, I have submitted evidence to that inquiry and we wait to hear its results. One thing Chilcot cannot do, however, is manufacture WMDs from his report. Given that the main pretext for war was WMDs, will the Minister at least accept the prima facie case that we went to war on a false premise because there were no WMDs?

Mark Simmonds: My hon. Friend makes the same intervention as five minutes ago. It may be that the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) wants to contribute to the debate and address that point, but I am not going to.

Paul Flynn *rose*—

Mark Simmonds: I will make a little progress but I will be happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman a little later if he still insists.

My point is that the challenges Iraq faces are not the whole story. Although the level of violence is unacceptably high, it is noticeably lower than at its peak during the very dark days of 2006-07. Life across much of Iraq, particularly in the south and the Kurdistan region, is peaceful for most people most of the time. Three democratic national elections have been held since 2005 with another due next year, and in April, 8,000 candidates contested provincial elections across most of the country. Two further provinces will vote next week, and the rest in September.

Iraq's economy has been transformed. According to the World Bank, its GDP has increased from approximately \$19 billion in 2002 to roughly \$116 billion in 2011. It is now forecast by the IMF to grow by 8% in each of the next five years. That growth will hopefully turn Iraq into one of the success stories of the next decade, and mean that people no longer see it as a post-conflict state, but as a key emerging economy.

The International Energy Agency world economic outlook predicts that Iraq will be responsible for nearly half the increase in global oil production over the coming decades, and its production could double by 2020. The hydrocarbons potential represents a huge opportunity to drive economic growth for the good of the maximum number of Iraqi people, if used responsibly and properly.

Paul Flynn: We went to Iraq to defend ourselves against non-existent weapons of mass destruction. We are now being prepared to go to war in Iran to protect ourselves against non-existent Iranian long-range missiles carrying non-existent Iranian nuclear bombs. The Minister cannot postpone the Government's responsibility and say that we must wait for the Chilcot report, which will be produced this year, next year, some time or never. They must take a decision on Iran, possibly in the near future. Should we not be informed of the truth of what we did in 2003?

Mark Simmonds: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that he will not tempt me away from the well considered Government line on the Chilcot inquiry. I will not get into the details of the decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003. His point on Iran has been made by other hon. Members. I acknowledge and respect his perspective and views, but the international community has serious concerns about Iran's nuclear programme. The Government continue to believe that the twin-track process of pressure and engagement offers the best hope of resolving the Iranian nuclear issue. We are not advocating military action against Iran, but all options should remain on the table.

To return to the positive side of Iraq, the Iraqi Government's task is to build on that progress and make the most of the opportunities, ensuring that Iraq's economy is booming, and that that translates into a better life for normal people throughout the country. Improving the country's security, which has been fully under Iraqi control for 18 months, is vital, but the Iraqi Prime Minister and other political leaders need to find an inclusive political process to resolve the underlying tensions that, I acknowledge, remain, and therefore to reduce the space within which the extremists operate. In that context, I welcome the holding of last Sunday's Cabinet meeting in Irbil, which I hope sends a signal of serious intent to improve relations between the Federal Government and that of the Kurdistan region.

No doubt many hon. Members will want to raise Iraq's relations with the region. Increasingly, Iraq has been making progress on rebuilding its relationships with countries that were once adversaries. I was particularly pleased to note that the Kuwaiti Prime Minister met Prime Minister Maliki in Baghdad only yesterday. That is another sign of the increasing warmth of relations in the region.

The UK will continue to support Iraq as it faces those challenges. Indeed, the relationship between our countries is increasingly strong. That is true at the Government level. Four UK Ministers including myself have visited Iraq in the past nine months. We visited not only Baghdad, but Irbil and Basra—my right hon. Friend Lord Green, the Minister for Trade and Investment, visited Basra. We have relationships in the Defence Ministries—a meeting took place in London only this morning. I can assure the House that UK Ministers press the Iraqi Government and Ministers on a range of issues, including their plans to improve security.

Our relationship is strongly increasing on a commercial level. Exports were up significantly, and not only in the hydrocarbon sector. There are opportunities in sectors such as education, health care, infrastructure and financial services. The UK Government are doing what we can to help. For example, when the Foreign Secretary was in Iraq in September, he agreed we should set up a UK-Iraq ministerial trade council, which was launched in February by my colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), who has responsibility for the middle east.

We have opened a new visa application centre in Baghdad, and encouraged Iraqi Airways to schedule direct flights from London to Baghdad for the first time in more than two decades, which it has done. All of that will help to cement the closer ties between the UK and Iraq at individual level. Hon. Members will be aware of

the large and significant Iraqi diaspora in the UK. Iraqi students are keen to study here, and we are even beginning to see British tourists return to the Kurdistan region.

Many other hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall draw my remarks to a conclusion. I hope those links continue to strengthen. It is right for us to look forward to the future of Iraq even as we look back on the events of 10 years ago. As I have said, the Government have not come to a conclusion and will not comment until we see Sir John Chilcot's inquiry.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, to maintain internal security, which is vital to restoring the Iraq economy and keeping civil peace, we need to ensure that external actors in the region do not participate in stirring up ethnic conflict within Iraq?

Mark Simmonds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to make that point. When I was in Baghdad in January, there was significant concern across the political spectrum and the religious divides in Iraq about Syria, and about the potential spillover into Iraq. It is right that the international community, and the British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, focus on using all the levers they have to try to find a lasting political solution to the challenges in Syria.

Iraq is undoubtedly a country of great potential, with an economy that is expanding at 8%, but it has challenges. The UK wants to assist in resolving those challenges for the benefit of the maximum number of Iraqi people in the minimum time scale.

1.25 pm

Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing this important debate. She spoke powerfully and with great eloquence and passion. The hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Glenda Jackson) have said, essentially, that we need to learn profound lessons from the decisions made at the time of the Iraq vote 10 years ago and what has happened since. It is clear that the events and considerations of the Iraq vote set the context for the House's current foreign affairs discussions on, for example, Syria and Iran. In that respect, at least one lesson has been learned.

I pay tribute to all those who died in the conflict in Iraq, remembering in particular those 179 British troops, who have been mentioned, who died in the service of their country. They served in profoundly difficult and dangerous circumstances, and we owe them a profound debt of gratitude.

The discussion has touched on the various and profound issues relating to the vote back in March 2003, and hon. Members have referred to the Chilcot inquiry. I am grateful to the Minister for the update he has provided today. We will consider the outcome of the inquiry very closely.

Jeremy Corbyn: My hon. Friend will have heard earlier interventions on the need for a war crimes Act in this country. The vote on Iraq was unprecedented, but the royal prerogative prevails, so the Prime Minister

[Jeremy Corbyn]

could take the country to war without a parliamentary vote. Does my hon. Friend believe it is now time for a war powers Act?

Ian Lucas: One often forgotten point is that the vote was unprecedented. The then Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), who is behind me keeping an eye on me, deserve great credit for that. There was intense debate up to 2003, and the vote was important.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman did not vote for the Iraq war. What part of the case for war did he not agree with? Several people said there was a solid case, but what made him vote against war?

Ian Lucas: The hon. Gentleman has beaten me to my next paragraph—I was about to mention my position in respect of the March 2003 vote, which I remember very well indeed. The Minister said that little else was in the minds of Members of Parliament at the time, and there was certainly little else in my mind. I made the decision to cast my vote against the Labour Government, the first of only two occasions when I have done that—I was right the other time, too—and I will explain why.

In 2003, I sat through the entire debate on the Back Benches, but was not called. It was only in 2006 that I had the opportunity to speak and explain why I had made my decision. I had an advantage then, because the weapons inspector Hans Blix had spoken following the end of the Iraq war. He said—this is very important—that in March 2003 his belief was that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. I believed, and still believe, that the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, also believed that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. It was on that basis that those who voted in favour of the war made their decision.

My decision was not made on the basis that I opposed any intervention, but that the weapons inspectors needed more time. I looked at all the evidence, thought long and hard, and decided that it was right and appropriate for me to vote against the war. I do not regret that decision and I never have. It is important to recognise that 139 Labour MPs made the same decision. Some suggestions that MPs were sent down the wrong path by representations made at the time could be put in a misleading way. Many of us made the decision on the basis of all the evidence we had at the time, and we made the correct decision.

Paul Flynn: I recall those days of great turmoil well. Does my hon. Friend think it is a matter of regret for this House that the three Committees we had to oversee these matters—the Intelligence and Security Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Defence Committee—were cheerleaders for the war and did not act with the kind of independent scrutiny that they perhaps should have?

Ian Lucas: I cannot pass judgment on the work of the Committees, because I have not looked in great detail at the position they took at the time. I am sure that the vast proportion of hon. Members will have made their decision honestly and in the way that they thought was right.

We know that the decision was important not just to Members of this House, but to an enormous number of people outside. It had a profound impact on British politics. As the Leader of the Opposition has said, the war led to a fundamental loss of trust in the Labour party, and it is right that the Labour party should acknowledge that. Those who knocked on doors in the subsequent general election were made well aware of that, which is one of the great qualities of our democracy.

Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend not just on the position he took 10 years ago, but on the way he is presenting his case today. A number of Labour MPs took the same decision. Indeed, if it had not been for the votes of the Conservative party and others, the motion would not have been carried. Has he given consideration to the suggestion that votes on war should be matters of conscience, and not be whipped?

Ian Lucas: The 2003 vote was whipped and I still did what I thought was right. Members of Parliament should always do what they think is right.

Mr Straw: May I echo the point made by my hon. Friend and by the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr Leigh) that it was a whipped vote in name only? The vote was perfectly open. Given the extent of the rebellion on both sides, people were able to make their own judgments. Inside the Government, there was a clear expectation that anybody taking the Queen's shilling would vote with the recommendation of the Cabinet, but it was open to Ministers to resign—two did, very honourably. Others chose to stay.

Ian Lucas: I think that votes on important matters in this House always have consequences. This vote had consequences for those MPs who did not support the Government on that particular occasion.

Paul Flynn: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Ian Lucas: May I make a little progress? I think I am getting stuck.

Regardless of individual positions taken by Members across the House at the time of the invasion, all of us agree that 10 years on we need to reflect on the consequences of the conflict and on the procedures that led to the vote, and to draw important lessons for the future.

As I touched on earlier, the Iraq war casts a long shadow over the House, setting the context for debates on foreign policy and, in particular, current debates on the middle east. Ten years on, the effect of the intervention on Iraq itself is that the negatives still outweigh the positives. There has been a protracted period of internal conflict within Iraq. As the Minister said, terrorist attacks continue, with people killed in Baghdad only this week.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I commend the hon. Gentleman for the tone he is adopting. It is refreshing to hear such personal thoughts from the Front Bench. I am concerned about what we did once the decision was made and we took responsibility for Basra. My concern, which I put to Clare Short, was why a diktat had gone around the Department for International

Development to say that the war was illegal and that the Department should not have any involvement or take any responsibility. Does he agree that that put huge pressure on our armed forces, who created an umbrella of security but were unable to progress with governance and reconstruction?

Ian Lucas: The position of the troops following the war was one of the issues that weighed on my mind. It is always important to pay tribute to our troops. Following the vote, we asked them to serve and it was important that we supported both them and Iraq, so that it could develop and rebuild. The tragedy is that that did not happen. We need to focus on that issue and learn from it.

The massive instability in the middle east currently is caused partly by the Arab awakening and the response to it, but also by the perceived increased reluctance of the west to get involved in the region. I believe that the roots of that reluctance are the events in Iraq in 2003. There are, however, some positives. It is right to acknowledge that Saddam Hussein and his sons are no longer in power. None of us in this House mourn the passing of that dictatorship. That was brought home to me this week. I returned last night from a visit to the Iraqi region of Kurdistan, as a guest of the regional Government. It was my first visit to Iraq. In Barzan, I met victims of Saddam Hussein, including women who had lost husbands, their faces still etched with grief 30 years on. There is no doubt in the minds of Kurds—the victims of Halabja and the Anfal—that the 2003 intervention was justified. I also visited the Domiz refugee camp, where the Kurdistan regional government, working with UNHCR, has provided refuge to 150,000 fleeing Syrians, mainly Syrian Kurds. For someone who voted against the Iraq war, this was an important visit.

We must all today accept that foreign policy is made in the long shadow of the Iraq war—that cannot be denied—but it should inform, not paralyse policy. Intervention took place in Libya, authorised by the UN, backed by the UK Government and supported by the Labour Opposition. The consequences there are still unfolding, only serving to confirm the lesson of Iraq: that winning a military victory in the short term is merely the start of any process of building a stable and functioning democracy. Ten years on from the Iraq war, I saw earlier this week that in parts of Iraq we have the beginnings of a new democracy. Prime Minister Maliki visited Erbil on Sunday, as the Minister said, to work through issues and disputes that have arisen between the different parts of Iraq. A political process is going on to resolve those difficulties, and that is progress, but there are still massive challenges in Iraq and we must not overstate the progress made.

The international community is most effective when it works collectively, through the UN, to take necessary action. I hope and pray that the next decade will be defined by the kind of international co-operation that was regrettably absent in Iraq.

1.42 pm

Rory Stewart (Penrith and The Border) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing this debate, and it is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas), who made an extremely moving speech.

I was not in the House for the 2003 vote, and I certainly do not want to focus on it today; I am far from sure that I would have made the right decision. In fact, I think I would have been on the wrong side in 2003. It was not until I was stuck in Iraq in 2003 that I saw what a mess it was. I want to reflect briefly, therefore, on the lessons we might be able to draw, not so much from the decision to intervene, but from the questions about how we got stuck there and why we find it so difficult to acknowledge our failure.

The starting point for any discussion of Iraq has to be an acknowledgment that it was a failure and a scandal. However we look at the costs and benefits of what happened there, it was probably the worst British foreign policy decision since the Boer war or the first Anglo-Afghan war of 1839. Never have the British Government made a worse decision. By that, I do not mean that had I been in the House I would have voted differently. In fact, I suspect that I would have voted in favour of the war, wrongly. I hope, however, that this is an opportunity to reflect on what Parliament is, what the Foreign Office is, what the military is and how Britain as a whole—or at least the British policy establishment—could get something so wrong.

This matters because there are many similarities between what we did in Iraq and what we are doing in Afghanistan, and many similarities between those things and what we occasionally think of doing in Mali or Syria. At the base of the problem is our refusal to acknowledge failure, to acknowledge just what a catastrophe it was, and the House's refusal to acknowledge how bewildering it was, how little we know and how complicated countries such as Iraq are. Sitting in Iraq for 18 months from the middle of 2003 to 2005, I found myself facing, in a small provincial town called al-Amara, 52 new political parties, many of them swarming across the border from Iran and many of them armed.

Nobody in the Foreign Office or the military, and certainly nobody in the House, would have been able to distinguish between Hizb-e-Dawa, Harakat-Dawa, Majlis Ahla, Hezbollah—which turned out in the Iraqi context to consist of two men with a briefcase—or any of the other Shi'a Islamist groups that emerged. None of us in the British policy machine predicted in January 2005 that 90% of the votes in the south of Iraq would go to only three Shi'a Islamist parties. Everybody in the foreign policy machine then predicted that it would be different at the end of 2005, and we were all wrong again. Why were we wrong? We were wrong because we did not have the right relationship between politicians, diplomats, soldiers and the local reality of these countries. We have not got it right yet.

We have not got it right because it is not realistic today—as it was not realistic at the time of the Boer war or the first Anglo-Afghan war—to expect people in Parliament to be experts on the internal politics of Iraq. What really began to go wrong after the invasion, beyond the decision about WMD, was all to do with micro-relationships in Nasiriyah and al-Amara and in the relationships between the different grand ayatollahs in Najaf. These are not things that anyone in the Chamber, however well briefed, can pretend to understand or judge. Instead, we have to rely on the military, the Foreign Office and the intelligence agencies, and there the problem starts. The problem starts because the entire structure of our organisations—their incentives,

[Rory Stewart]

their promotions, their recruitment, how they interact with policy makers, politicians and Ministers—does not help us ever to acknowledge failure. In fact, these institutions are designed to trap us in these countries.

Careers are made by people going out for short tours. I remind the House and those in the Foreign Office that the initial tours in Iraq were for six weeks, extended to three months, then to six months. The idea—that people living in heavily defended compounds, moving around in armoured vehicles, generally unable to speak a word of any local language, unable to interact with an Iraqi for more than half an hour or an hour at a time, except if surrounded by heavily armed men and operating through translators, could really get a sense of whether Iraq was stabilising or what, to use the Minister's words, Iraq would be like in 10 years—was of course misleading. The advice and challenge that they could provide to the Government, therefore, was not good enough.

It is not good enough that not a single senior British diplomat formally recorded on paper their opposition to what was happening in Iraq. Many of those who were inside the system now say that they made private comments, that they were worried, but nobody, from the political director downwards, formally objected on paper to the Prime Minister.

Laura Sandys (South Thanet) (Con): Was that not compounded even further by the American Administration, where if someone questioned what was going on, either strategically or tactically, they were sent back to the states, their future career very much in question?

Rory Stewart: That is a very good point, and perhaps it is a way for me to wrap up my analysis of the Foreign Office. Of course, this is not a uniquely American problem. Within any British civil service Department, there is no great incentive to admit failure. When I look back at the reports I wrote stuck in al-Amara and Nasiriyah, I find it extraordinary how every week, I claimed great success. Every week, I would write, "We've hired another 300 people into the police. We've held a new sub-district election. I've just created 3,000 jobs. We've just refurbished another set of clinics and schools." To read report after report, week after week, it looks as if the whole thing is getting better and better. In retrospect, I know differently, of course. When I began, I could go into the bazaar to get an ice cream, but by the end, I was stuck in my compound with 140 rocket and mortar-propelled grenades flying at the compound, and we had to abandon it and retreat back to a military base, essentially surrendering Nasiriyah, a city of 600,000 people, to the insurgents.

The situation is not helped by the way we talk about it in Britain today. We do not really think very much about Iraq. We do not think very much about what exactly Iraq is doing with Iran or Syria at the moment, why exactly Iraq got involved in dubious banking transactions to bust sanctions on behalf of the Iranian Government or why exactly our great ally, al-Maliki, appears to have been allowing trans-shipment of weapons from Iran into Syria. Why do we not think about these things? It is because we are not very serious. At some level, this country is no longer being as serious as it should be about foreign policy. Our newspapers are not

writing enough about Iraq. The Foreign Office is not thinking enough about the failure. The military is not thinking enough about these things. Unless we acknowledge that something went wrong in Iraq and that something went deeply wrong in Afghanistan, we will get ourselves stuck again.

What do we do about it? We need to reform. It cannot be business as usual. We cannot just go around pretending it was all fine. We cannot simply blame Blair and Bush.

Pete Wishart: Is not the reason for us going to war in Iraq actually quite simple? Prime Minister Tony Blair had some perverse obligation to George Bush, and that is why we went in.

Rory Stewart: The hon. Gentleman has raised exactly the point that we need to talk about. We believe that somehow it is all the fault of Blair and Bush—this is the myth that has entered the national consciousness. My experience as someone inside the system is that we have to look much more deeply at ourselves. We need to look at the Foreign Office, the military, the intelligence services and Parliament. These people, Blair and Bush, do not operate in a vacuum; they operate in a culture that did not challenge and shape the debate sufficiently. It is not realistic for Blair or Bush to know deeply about these situations and it is simply a constitutional convention, of course, that the people who make the decision are the Blairs and the Bushes. However, if we look at what got us trapped on the ground in Iraq—at why, for example, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) found it difficult to get out of Iraq or why President Obama found it difficult to say no to the surge—it is because these people are part of a much bigger system.

The reform of that system is threefold. First, we need radically to reform the way in which the Foreign Office operates. The Foreign Secretary has begun; we need to go much further, thinking all the time about the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan. We need to focus on people with deep linguistic and cultural expertise. We need to ensure that we change all the bureaucratic mechanisms. The core competency framework for promotion in the Foreign Office needs to be changed. The amount that people are paid for learning languages in the Foreign Office needs to be changed. The posting lengths need to be changed. The security conditions for the Foreign Office need to be changed, because unless we begin to understand deeply and rigorously what is happening on the ground, it is difficult to challenge the Blairs and the Bushes.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making such a powerful speech, but when it comes to whether it is right or wrong to blame Bush and Blair, I think he is being a little too generous in his assessment of them. He is giving the impression that they were sitting waiting to hear what the evidence was, when it seems clear—certainly in the case of Bush and maybe in the case of Blair—that they had already made up their minds. They already had an agenda.

Rory Stewart: I am sure that much of that is true. I am not here to defend that decision—it was a terrible, catastrophic decision—but I think it is dangerous to put

the whole blame simply on Blair and Bush, because the implication is that if we do not have Blair and Bush around, we will never get in these messes again. We will get in these messes again because we have not created the proper Government policy structures required to think these things through—not just to avoid the decision to invade, but above all to get out more rapidly once we have made a bad decision.

Military reforms—you have very kindly given me some time, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I do not have enough to talk about this today—involve accepting that the military have too much power in the policy debate. That is not the military's fault: they are filling a vacuum. The military feel that the Foreign Office is not taking the lead and that somebody needs to do something. I saw that all the time on the ground in Iraq. I remember a major-general saying to me, "The diplomats and aid workers aren't doing anything, so we"—the military—"need to take those things over," but that is not the military's job. It is extremely dangerous, because it puts generals in positions where they make optimistic predictions about their capacity to sort things out, albeit without a detailed understanding of the politics or the reality of those aspects of governance or diplomacy.

We in Parliament need to look at ourselves—it is on this that we need to conclude. The hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) was exactly right to ask us to look hard at how the Select Committee on Defence, the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Intelligence and Security Committee got this wrong. What reforms have we introduced to those Committees to ensure that we do not get it wrong again? How do we as Members of Parliament operate in a very complicated world? It is not realistic for any of us in this Chamber to understand exactly what the difference is between Harakat-Dawa, Hizb-e-Dawa and Hizb-e-Dawa Islamiya. Everybody is learning desperately from briefs, trying to sound plausible, but there are 200 nations in the world. Ministers are busy. Politicians are busy; they are worrying about their constituents. They are not deep experts on these issues. We therefore need to create a system that we can rely on in the Foreign Office, the military and the intelligence services. We in Parliament need to know how to question those people, how to listen to them and how to promote people who disagree with us. We need in Parliament to learn how to look at which civil servants got it wrong and hold them accountable, rather than promoting, as we did, almost everybody who was implicated in the Iraq decisions.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD) *rose*—

Rory Stewart: I am coming to the end.

Finally, we need above all to learn—I feel, as a new Member of Parliament, and with all deference to this House—a lesson of humility.

1.56 pm

Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I am very pleased that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) has been able to secure today's debate. It is timely, obviously, and it is important that we should have plenty of time to talk about this issue, even 10 years down the line. She made a fine and impassioned speech and set the tone for the debate.

I do not always see eye to eye with the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas), who speaks for the Labour party, but I must say that he made a very fine speech. It was a balanced speech, it came from the heart and it was refreshing to hear such a speech from the Front Bench. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), who speaks with great knowledge about things diplomatic and military. They are things that I know very little about—I will place that on the record now, lest it becomes too obvious later on.

Paul Flynn: Does the hon. Gentleman follow the significant point made by the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) about the unimportance of being right on these decisions? Those who sided with error saw their careers flourish, while those who were right and objected to their Ministries saw their careers wither.

Mr Llwyd: That is absolutely right, obviously. That is a feature of the system that we are all embroiled in at the moment, imperfect—greatly imperfect—as it is.

I want to start by quoting something that was said recently:

"I let Parliament have the final say on me decision to go to war. I made statements, answered questions, took part in debates. But in the end there was a decision that had to be made: on the basis of the information available, to decide whether to join the US coalition and remove Saddam; or to stay out. I decided we should be in. The job of the Prime Minister is to make such decisions based on what he believes is in the interests of the country."

Those words are taken from the end of former Prime Minister Blair's statement to the Chilcot inquiry—an inquiry that, as we have heard, has so far failed to report, despite almost exactly four years having passed since it was first announced in this place by the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown). As I shall briefly outline today, I have reservations about the Chilcot inquiry, which I suspect was as flawed and compromised from the outset as the then Government's decision to go to war.

Let me nail one other myth. The Liberal Democrats are very pleased to go around saying that they were the only party to vote against. We voted against, the Scottish National party voted against and many Members of other parties voted against. We were described as jellyheads and all kinds of things.

Martin Horwood: I do not recall us often saying that we were the only party to vote in that way. I am happy to acknowledge publicly the support of Plaid Cymru and the other parties that stood alongside the Liberal Democrats in the Chamber in opposing the war. Is not the truth that the most chilling words were those of Tony Blair in the recent BBC documentary, when he said that he had reflected that it was time to remake the middle east? Did not the combination of that kind of messianic leadership and the enormous momentum towards war mean that no amount of political or even expert diplomatic advice would have changed their minds?

Mr Llwyd: I am very pleased to agree with the hon. Gentleman. He has made a good input into the record.

Between 2002 and 2003, my then Plaid Cymru colleagues Adam Price and Simon Thomas and my hon. Friend the Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams), along with

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our colleagues in the SNP, were unanimous in our opposition to the incursion into Iraq and, on 18 March 2003, we voted against the invasion. We did not believe then, and nor have we ever believed, that the dossiers produced by the then Government displayed any credible threat from Saddam Hussein's regime. In the words of Mr Blair that I quoted a moment ago, the former Prime Minister said that he had let Parliament have the final say on whether we should go to war, but the motion on which Parliament voted asserted:

"That this House...recognises that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and"—
crucially—

"long range missiles, and its continuing non-compliance with Security Council Resolutions, pose a threat to international peace and security".—[*Official Report*, 18 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 760.]

The motion was flawed in several regards, so we were meant to vote on a flawed motion in any event, quite apart from the fact that the evidence did not stack up to create a credible or immediate threat from Saddam's regime. Thus the basis on which Mr Blair led Parliament to decide was a false premise. The jury is still out on the extent to which Mr Blair and the Cabinet knew that the claims were counterfeit.

On the day after the House voted for the invasion, the Prime Minister said:

"We want to ensure that any post-conflict authority in Iraq is endorsed and authorised by a new United Nations resolution".—[*Official Report*, 19 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 932.]

There were of course those of us who argued even then that the Government were not acting under the endorsement of an existing UN Security Council resolution, because as Sir Jeremy Greenstock admitted, there was no automaticity in resolution 1441 and our incursion into Iraq was therefore illegal under international law.

On 24 November 2004, an impeachment motion was tabled in the name of myself, the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Sir Edward Garnier), Douglas Hogg QC and the First Minister of Scotland. The motion had been supported, in writing or otherwise, by 24 Members of this House, but it was never called for debate. However, the Impeach Blair campaign had the support of the Stop the War Coalition, the Green party, Frederick Forsyth, Terry Jones, Brian Eno, the late Harold Pinter, the late Corin Redgrave, the late Jimmy Reid and, last but by no means least, the late—alas—Iain Banks.

With hindsight, and following debates on this topic, that one sentence of Mr Blair's seems almost to override all else: he had decided that "we should be in". He had made that decision without a second UN resolution, when most of the world was against the incursion. He had decided that the UK would lend its support to President Bush's war on terror, whatever the cost. Let us be realistic; Bush had the might to do this in short order in any event. He wanted a cloak of legitimacy, and that is how he lured Tony Blair in to support him—and at what a cost it has proven to be.

Today, Iraq is the state fifth most at risk of terrorism in the world, and the eighth most corrupt. It is a country marred by car bombs and corruption. Under the Shi'a Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, power is divided along ethnic lines. Economically and physically,

the country has been all but destroyed. In a poll published in September 2011, 42% of Iraqis said that they were worse off as a result of the invasion, compared with only 30% who thought themselves in some way better off.

The war has arguably resulted in the other members of the so-called axis of evil, Iran and North Korea, obtaining nuclear weapons, and the risk of terrorism at home has definitely increased. We have heard quotes from Eliza Manningham-Buller and others on that subject. There is no basis for claiming that al-Qaeda had a real presence in Iraq before 2003, but the war itself has established one. The human cost has also been devastating. Between March 2003 and the end of UK operations in May 2011, 179 UK armed forces personnel died as a consequence of operations in Iraq. Of those, 136 were killed in combat. I join other Members across the House in paying tribute to them. Whatever foreign policy decisions are arrived at in this place, they always do their best and carry out their duties bravely. I respect them for that. The question of whether the war was lawful or otherwise is our problem.

Jeremy Corbyn: I accept everything that the right hon. Gentleman is saying, but does he not agree that there also needs to be some reflection on the treatment of prisoners in Abu Ghraib and elsewhere, and on the many atrocities that were perpetrated on ordinary Iraqi people by occupying troops in that country?

Mr Llwyd: Absolutely; the hon. Gentleman is quite right. He also voted against the war and took part in the debates at the time. We have not even touched on that important subject in today's debate, but I hope that, if he catches the Deputy Speaker's eye, he will develop that theme. It is vital that it should be brought into the debate.

According to the Iraq Body Count project, an unofficial survey of Iraqi civilian casualties, between 113,000 and 123,000 civilians have died as a result of violence in Iraq since March 2003. According to the same source, 883 civilians died in May 2013—the highest number of civilian deaths in any month since April 2008. That is the ugly legacy of this war.

Let me tell the House that it gives me no satisfaction whatever to stand here today and say that we who voted against the motion were proved right. The damage to Iraq, has, as they say, already been done. However, many unanswered questions remain about our descent into war in the spring of 2003. I want to quote from the words spoken by the then Member for Blaenau Gwent, Llew Smith, who said:

"We...need to know whether Ministers simply proved to be very bad judges of geopolitics, stubbornly refusing to listen to the millions who marched against the war...or—worse—deliberately distorted the evidence, cherry-picked the details that suited their case for invading Iraq, and pressed the Attorney-General to provide an opinion that endorsed a political decision already taken two years earlier to invade Iraq and overthrow Saddam."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 2004; Vol. 418, c. 1426.]

Personally, I have little doubt that the evidence was indeed distorted, as the decision to go to war had already been made months, if not years, before a motion was ever put before the House. I saw proof of this dating from 2002, and I will return to that point later if I may.

On 9 March 2004, I opened a debate calling for the advice of the Attorney-General on the legality of the war in Iraq to be published in full. I said during that debate that Treasury counsel would have received instructions when they were advising the Attorney-General, and that, had counsel been ill informed or misled in those instructions, the advice would have been flawed ab initio. I said that it was of the utmost importance to establish whether the instructions given by the Attorney-General contained reference to the now infamous 45-minute claim. Had these instructions contained such references and had counsel accepted them as valid, the whole basis of that advice would obviously have been flawed. I made it clear in the debate that the ministerial code holds no bar on publishing such advice. In fact, the code states:

“Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.”

I argued at the time and I argue now that it is in the wider public interest on going to war that disclosure should be made, for heaven’s sake. What is more, I set out the precedents for publishing the advice of the Attorney-General—including, for example, the Belfast riots and the Archer-Shee cases. I cited the opinions of five distinguished international lawyers who each had differing views about whether the war in Iraq had been legal, but who were unanimously in favour of publishing in full the advice of the Attorney-General. One of these, James Crawford, who was then—and still is, I believe—professor of international law at Cambridge, observed:

“If the war was conducted in private, there would be every case for hiding the advice. If it’s going to be fought with public funds, in public and expending the lives of members of the public, then it should be published”.

Another, Lord Archer, QC, said that the Attorney-General’s arguments constituted

“the most important legal opinion given in the last quarter of a century.”

To this day, however, that advice has remained unpublished.

Interestingly, that debate was tabled by us in Plaid Cymru and our friends in the Scottish National party. What I think was then a joint group of nine secured a vote of about 285, as I recall, so there clearly was some concern around, and I am pleased that we brought the matter to the fore.

As I have outlined before, in 2002 I was sent documents from an unknown source which put me in no doubt whatever that Mr Blair had been determined to go to war with Iraq from the very outset. The documents had with them a note saying that they were top secret documents, some British and others appearing to emanate from other intelligence sources—American, I believe. The documents showed me that as early as 2001-02, discussions were being held about toppling Saddam, in which mention was made of the term “regime change”—which we all know is unlawful in international law.

Soon after I received the memorandums, my then colleague, Adam Price, and I were visited by two senior police officers from a special section of the Metropolitan police. I did not have the documents in my personal possession at the time, so I was unable to surrender them to those police officers. When the Chilcot inquiry was established in 2009, however, I decided to hand over

the documents. I searched for them, found them and handed them over to the inquiry. I took them down to Victoria street and handed them over to the secretary of the inquiry, Ms Margaret Aldred.

Several months went by without my receiving any response to my submission. Nine months later, following a number of unanswered letters, I was finally granted the courtesy of a reply. As a result of this treatment, I had my misgivings about the secretariat of the inquiry, which I set out in full during a Westminster Hall debate on the issue on 25 January 2011.

Suffice it to say here that I discovered that Ms Aldred, the gatekeeper for the inquiry, who had previously acted as the Cabinet’s deputy head of foreign and defence policy secretariat, was put forward for her new role, in which she would inquire into the actions taken in that same foreign and defence policy, by the Cabinet Secretary himself, Sir Gus O’Donnell. The potential conflict of interest was breathtaking. I discovered that in her previous role, Ms Aldred had regularly chaired the Iraq senior officials group. Let us not forget either that it was the Cabinet Office, for which Ms Aldred had worked previously, that drew up plans for regime change and that it was the Cabinet Office and the Joint Intelligence Committee and its staff that produced the “dodgy dossier”. Her hands were hardly clean for that particular job. Thanks to the detective work of Dr Chris Lamb and others, we further discovered that this appointment had not followed the procedures set out in the civil service code and was neither open nor indeed transparent. I countered that her appointment to this role obviously made it questionable whether the inquiry was a Cabinet Office subsidiary. In the continued absence of the Chilcot inquiry’s report into the war, I am unable to comment further on this issue. But let us not hold our breath, folks.

Mr Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): By way of a parallel and supporting point for the case that the right hon. Gentleman has just made, when I was a Back-Bench Member of the Education Committee in the last Parliament, there was an independent inquiry led by Lord Sutherland. I found out that the personal secretary to the permanent secretary at the Department for Education was one of the tiny number who made up this “independent inquiry” team. In fact, when we looked at the report in Word, we could see who authored certain parts of it. It was frightening to discover that the author of the section that exculpated the Department from all responsibility for the SATs fiasco was none other than the former personal secretary to the permanent secretary at that Department.

Mr Llwyd: There we are—another unhappy coincidence. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, which shows that this kind of conduct may be prevalent in this place. Clearly, going back to what was said by the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border, we need to look more into the procedures of this place and to challenge them; otherwise, we might be in throes of a similar disastrous position again. There is a still a catalogue of unanswered questions.

In a memorandum from Mr Blair to his chief of staff, Jonathan Powell, dated 17 March 2002, which was unpublished until the Chilcot inquiry, Mr Blair says of the problems in Iraq:

“The immediate WMD problems don’t seem obviously worse than three years ago. So we have to re-order our story and message.”

[Mr Llwyd]

Why, then, did he tell Parliament mere months later that Iraq's WMD programme was growing? The re-ordering to which Mr Blair referred in his memo was his decision to focus on Saddam's monstrous nature. He went on to say:

"A political philosophy that does care about other nations—eg. Kosovo, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone—and is prepared to change regimes on the merits, should be gung-ho on Saddam."

There can be little wonder, then, why Hans Blix was denied the further two months he had requested to continue his weapons inspection in Iraq. His testimony would not have been necessary.

I noticed that when we began this debate, the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) was firing off interventions at a rapid rate at my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion. If his points were so valid and so worthy of consideration, it is a shame that he did not stand his ground and make a speech, as we are all doing.

Mr Blair began this same memo to his chief of staff by saying:

"I do not have a proper worked-out strategy on how we would do it...I will need a meeting on this with military folk."

"It", we can surmise, refers to military action. Mr Blair had evidently decided, even in March 2002, that "we should be in"—despite the fact that, as I have said, regime change is unlawful under article 2, paragraph 4 of the United Nations charter.

What is all the more deplorable is the fact that Mr Blair's deception in the run-up to the vote in March 2003 had disastrous consequences for post-invasion Iraq. Military plans were not constructed properly because they were not properly discussed. In his evidence to Chilcot, Mr Blair admitted that only 14 of the 28 meetings he held with key figures to discuss the possibility of war were in fact minuted. The most compelling documents, of course, have not been made public. The still classified material includes the exchanges between the former Prime Minister and President Bush.

In March 2005, I visited Iraq, going to Baghdad and Basra. During the visit, which was arranged by the Foreign Office, I had the opportunity to meet local politicians and women's groups as well as national politicians and trade unionists in Baghdad. It was obvious that while there had been great efforts to plan for war, there had been little or no effort to plan for the peace. There were open sewers and people were complaining—I presume that the Foreign Office approved of our meeting these people. They were saying openly that they used to have electricity, running water and a decent sewerage system, but that they had nothing of that kind now. I am led to believe that, in many instances, that remains the position. We have left the country in a terrible state.

We met several senior military officers. It is interesting that they were prepared to confide to someone like me, who could hardly be described as a renowned establishment figure, their concern about the lawfulness of their being in Iraq in the first place. They were greatly concerned about whether the war was legal. I gave them my opinion, for what it was worth, but I also told them "You are doing your duty, as you are trained to do. Any question of illegality is not on your desk, but on the desks of people like me—the politicians back at home—so

please do not divert your attention to that and put yourselves in harm's way." However, I respect the fact that they were asking those questions then; it demonstrates the feelings that were around at the time.

Saddam, as we knew, would be overthrown in days, or weeks at the most. The Americans could have done it themselves. The only plan for peace was to allow some limited western-funded repair of the Iraqi infrastructure to be carried out by American companies in which the neo-cons advising Bush had considerable financial interests. There is no interest now in returning Iraq to anything resembling a 21st-century country. Shame on them!

In February, Caroline Hawley, the BBC's Baghdad correspondent between 2003 and 2005, wrote this in the *New Statesman* about her recent return to Iraq:

"Iraq remains a troubled place. During my recent visit, I saw little of its restored oil wealth being spent on badly needed social services. The nation, collectively traumatised, has only three child psychiatrists. The ubiquitous checkpoints and blast walls fail to stop...many bombers. Iraqis complain of rampant corruption. Nouri al-Maliki's Shia-dominated government is seen as increasingly autocratic and its relations with the country's Sunnis continue to sour. That Iraqis now seem to be fighting on both sides of Syria's war...doesn't bode well."

As we teeter on the brink of entering yet another conflict in the middle east, I urge the Prime Minister and his Cabinet to learn from the obvious mistakes of our recent history. Mr Blair decided that we should go in; the history books will be the judge of why.

2.22 pm

Laura Sandys (South Thanet) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) and my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), who secured the debate. I am very pleased to be participating in it. I also pay tribute to those on both Front Benches, who gave us an evocative, and also reflective, perspective on the war. I agree that this is not an anniversary but an analysis—an analysis that is crucial for the future of foreign policy, for people's trust in Government, and for the institutions surrounding the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development.

I pay tribute to our soldiers, and also to the civilians in Iraq who have lost their lives. I was pretty horrified by the fact that, for the first couple of years, the Americans in particular seemed to have no interest in counting the civilian casualties. It struck me as extraordinary that we, who had entered the country on behalf of the civilians of Iraq as, in many respects, their advocate against their authoritarian leader, did not pay enough attention to what was happening even to count the number of those civilians who had lost their lives.

I became involved in Iraq in 1993, just after the ejection of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. My responsibility was to travel around the capitals of Europe highlighting Saddam's human rights abuses. Halabja has been mentioned; I was there, showing videos of people's suffering. I was in and out of Kurdish police stations where the police showed videos of torture to their prisoners before embarking on torture themselves. This was a brutal, disgusting regime. Saddam Hussein's authoritarianism ran through the veins, and created fear in every single household in Iraq.

Jeremy Corbyn: The hon. Lady is right to highlight Iraq's appalling human rights record during that period, but will she reflect on the fact that Britain was selling arms to Iraq throughout it? Even after Halabja, Britain took part in the Baghdad arms fair of 1989, and continued to supply weapons right up to the start of the Gulf war.

Laura Sandys: That is evidently true. I am in no doubt about our relationship with Saddam Hussein, or about our relationships with many leaders around the world. Those relationships involve big ethical issues. What I am highlighting is human rights abuse, the brutalisation of a country by a man and his family, and the fact that such a small group of people were able to hold Iraq in so much fear.

It was against that backdrop that I was explicitly, and very vocally, opposed to our invasion of Iraq. I do not claim to be a great expert on Iraq like my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), but I had a little more insight into Iraq—its dynamics, and the interrelationship between the different communities there—than most people, and I felt at that time that the debate was extremely superficial. It was group-think. It was very binary. It was us and them. It was evil people and good people. As can be seen throughout the international foreign affairs perspective, the “cowboys and Indians” analogy works very poorly except for those who are sitting on the very outside.

I was a member of the Conservative party at the time, although not a member of the House of Commons, and I recall the cacophony. Does anyone remember how many times Richard Perle came over and appeared on television shrieking with fear and anticipation of our untimely demise? There were the neo-cons, and there were some colleagues who adopted quite a shrill tone. I was very concerned about the war and I wanted us to get rid of Saddam Hussein, but to do so by means of other mechanisms. I wanted Iraqi solutions to the Saddam Hussein problem. However, I found myself being accused of being anti-war, accused of being a pacifist, and accused of walking away from trouble. Well, those who know me are aware that it is unusual for me to be seen to be walking away from trouble.

The question of weapons of mass destruction was a fascinating aspect of the situation. Many Members have explained the whole issue of Hans Blix and the inspectors; however, those who, at the time, kept saying “But Saddam Hussein is not standing up and saying he has no weapons of mass destruction” did not understand enough about the regime itself. None of them understood the position that Saddam was in. At that moment, just before the war, he was extremely weakened—weakened internally. The republican guard had started to create a fair amount of tension in his regime, although the special republican guard was still on his side.

Saddam Hussein—the man of terror, the man of weapons of mass destruction—could not stand up and say “I do not have these weapons.” We were asking him to do something that would have constituted, in a sense, the disarming of every element of authority that he had. We were asking him to do something that he was not going to do, although many of us knew—and I worked with military intelligence during the war—that the weapons did not exist, or at least had an extremely limited capacity.

Ian Lucas: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, first for giving way, secondly for her kind comments, and, thirdly, for making a powerful case for the importance of an Opposition holding a Government to account in relation to events in the middle east. Is that not a very important lesson for this Government?

Laura Sandys: Opposition on an issue such as this can come from all sorts of different directions.

It was frightening to see how the group-think had emerged and how, for example, the issue of 45 minutes to London arose. Do we remember that claim? The *Evening Standard* front page was in many ways a motivation, a call to action, and I was told by friends, colleagues and people who I would say are less than colleagues, “Laura, your position in being against the war is putting families in London at risk.” The debate became really quite vicious. It was not friendly, and it was not constructive in respect of understanding Iraq per se and—I say this having worked in the defence sector myself, and having worked in academia in the defence sector—understanding the potential and the possibilities of ballistic missiles.

What was fascinating about that whole 45-minutes-to-London claim is that No. 10 said afterwards, “Oh, we didn't endorse that leak, wherever it came from,” but did they question it or contest it, saying to the *Evening Standard* and the other newspapers, “This actually is wrong”? That was an omission that allowed untruths to permeate the debate and created a very toxic environment, in which, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, an opposition needed to thrive.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Lady is absolutely correct about the untruths and all the other issues she has raised, but how come they were so easily accepted by the Opposition? The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who was then Leader of the Opposition, was probably more enthusiastic about this war than Tony Blair was.

Laura Sandys: The hon. Gentleman will have to ask them. I was not a Member of this House at the time. However, lots of people from very different political perspectives—people on the right, the left and across the board—were against the war, and there were also people from all the parties who felt it was the right thing to do. I would also say this to the hon. Gentleman: I have seen some of the videos, and I have spoken to people who were tortured by Saddam Hussein, and I can see why people right across the board might have found the humanitarian motive extremely compelling.

One of the gravest failings was mainly constructed in America: the lack of planning post-Saddam and for the future. From my perspective, that was extraordinary. I was part of the “red team” working with military intelligence, and we met three times a week in the run-up to the Iraq war and then during the Iraq war. The minute the so-called conflict stopped, we were all disbanded because we were not needed—because there was no need for anybody with any expertise in Iraq, because the roses were going to be thrown on to the tanks and the Americans and the Brits were going to be embraced in every street, and there were going to be parties and we were going to have liberation right across the board. That naivete was, as has been said, in many

[*Laura Sandys*]

ways a result of the lack of opposition and the lack of questioning of every element of the implications of this intervention.

I have subsequently heard that there were two opportunities for our armed forces to support the Iraqis to topple Saddam: as we arrived in Kuwait as part of our preparations for war, and as we were arriving close to Baghdad. At both times, leaders in the republican guard—not the special republican guard—approached the allies and said, “Can we instigate a revolt against Saddam? Then we will invite you in to support us.” That has received very little coverage and created little interest, but, from what I understand, there is truth in it, and I would be interested to see some of the papers to get to the bottom of it. We were there, and if our objective was to get rid of Saddam Hussein, we should have understood that it was important to do that in conjunction with the many forces and interests within Iraq that wanted to get rid of that brutal dictator.

My final point is that we must learn the lessons of history. I suspect my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border, and many other Members, would agree with me on that. We went into Iraq in 1917 and had a very difficult and torrid time, and many of the issues we faced in 2003 were identical, both in intention and implication. We must make sure that we do not end up across the region with three countries: a Sunni country, a Shi’a country and a Kurdish country. My group at King’s college at that time was explicit about that, and we see the same issue arising again now in relation to Syria. If we end up with those sorts of conflicts arising over the next few years, we will have to see our invasion of Iraq as being the first step in causing some deep fragmentation, some great destabilisation and some great global challenges, faced as a result of this decision on Iraq, which was not well thought through.

2.36 pm

Mr Michael Meacher (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on securing this debate from the Backbench Business Committee, and for her forceful, eloquent and moving opening speech. It is difficult to say the same of the Minister, who, constrained by the unpublished Chilcot report, chose to say, in almost half an hour, very little of substance, although he did give what I thought was a distinctly Panglossian view of the improvement in the state of Iraq, grossly overstating the case.

There has, however, been a great degree of honesty and frankness from all Members, which is extremely refreshing. I particularly congratulate in that context my colleague on the Front Bench, my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas), and although it is always invidious to pick out one person, I thought the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) gave a remarkable speech, making what I think, in my lengthy experience, must be a unique statement in this Chamber: that we should be more willing to admit our own failings. It is true that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, but that is not a doctrine we normally find expounded here.

I want to go over some of the fundamentals. Now, 10 years on, the facts cannot seriously be held in doubt, and they are stark. The United States went to war in

Iraq because of oil and because American control of the middle east region was considered important for their foreign policy, as clearly set out in the Project for a New American Century document published by the Bush election team in September 2000. As we now know from then US Treasury Secretary O’Neill, that war was planned from the very first day of the Bush Administration, and 9/11 simply provided the pretext for launching it.

The United Kingdom went to war because President Bush wanted UK support. I do not think there is any doubt that at the Crawford summit in April 2002, the then Prime Minister Tony Blair in effect committed to providing that support, publicly pledging that he was going to stand shoulder to shoulder with President Bush. From that point on, the assessment of the intelligence data conflated analysis into advocacy, to find a rationale for the war which had already been decided on for other reasons. That, I believe, is the explanation.

The decision having been made to go to war, Whitehall provided a briefing that any rationale depended on being able to show incontrovertible evidence of large-scale—I emphasise: large-scale—activity by Iraq to obtain weapons of mass destruction, but because the UN inspectors had left Iraq in 1998, evidence was non-existent or certainly flimsy. The CIA admitted that its resources on Iraq were “thin” and the UK’s Joint Intelligence Committee had already concluded, in March 2002, that

“Intelligence on Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction . . . and ballistic missile programmes is”—

in words we will always remember—

“sporadic and patchy.”

The key point is that in the evidence put together in those crucial five months between the Crawford summit and the publication of the September dossier to justify the war, all the specific data were flawed. The first and central point is that the inventory of chemical and biological weapons and weapon parts that the then Prime Minister presented to the House dealt with weapons that were unaccounted for in the first Gulf war, 12 years earlier, but they were not presented as weapons that were unaccounted for; they were presented as weapons that Saddam Hussein was definitely believed to possess.

Secondly, the 45-minute claim referred to battlefield nuclear weapons, but the impression given was that the threat went much wider.

Pete Wishart: The case for going to war was bunkum and nonsense, but the right hon. Gentleman voted for the war. Does he feel that he was lied to, misled or duped?

Mr Meacher: Yes—I am glad the hon. Gentleman has given me the opportunity to say, in the spirit of honesty and frankness of this debate, that I am utterly ashamed of what I did on that occasion. It is the worst political mistake that I have made in my lifetime, but I want to say why I did it. I did it because I listened carefully to the then Prime Minister during those two crucial debates. He spoke with enormous assurance and authority, and I believed that, as Prime Minister of this country, he would have been presented with the fullest degree and comprehensiveness of UK intelligence, and he would use those data in a proper and honest manner to make the case. Perhaps I was naive to think that—I now believe that I was—but that is what I believed. I am

speaking today because I am so angry at having been deceived. That experience has deeply damaged my trust in the role of Prime Ministers and in the link between intelligence and the various Departments of State and the Prime Minister, who speaks for the Government. I hope that that will be repaired in future, but the damage done has been considerable, certainly to me.

I was talking about the 45-minute claim referring to battlefield nuclear weapons. When the media took it up—the hon. Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) forcefully recalled the *Evening Standard* headline—that was not corrected, even though the authorities knew very well that the wrong impression was being given.

Thirdly, the claim that Iraq tried to buy 500 tonnes of yellowcake, which is required for nuclear fission, from Niger was included in the dossier, despite its having been confirmed by a visit by the former US ambassador to that country six months before that it was completely bogus. None the less, the claim was included.

The fourth point, which is very important but which has received little attention, is that the then Prime Minister of this country claimed to the House on 25 February 2003 that the defection of Hussein Kamel, Saddam's son-in-law, in 1995 had revealed

“the offensive biological weapons and the full extent of the nuclear programme”.—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2003; Vol. 400, c. 123.]

However, as we now know, from a *Newsweek* exclusive just a few weeks later, what Hussein Kamel actually said during his debriefing was precisely the opposite. He said:

“All weapons—biological, chemical, missile, nuclear—were destroyed.”

Caroline Lucas: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for the tenor of his speech and for putting that fact more strongly in the public domain. To clarify: that piece of information was available in February 2003. The fact that it was covered up to such an extent—not even covered up, but completely contradicted—is one of the most shocking deceits in this whole process.

Mr Meacher: I entirely agree. That is precisely why I feel so let down by someone who was in the unique role of Prime Minister behaving in such a way. I do not expect any Prime Minister of any party ever to behave in that way.

As the Butler report points out so poignantly, all the ifs, buts, qualifications and caveats in the raw intelligence data were dropped from the dossier, while the positive allegations were distinctly overhyped. We all know that. Sources were treated as reliable when they were clearly not, and they were not checked against the expertise of intelligence staff. Anyone who has read appendix B of the Butler report, which was excellently put together, can see set out, step by step, how the massaging and accretion steadily accumulated until we were told in the final September dossier that Saddam's weapons of mass destruction programme was—in words that have echoed for the past 10 years—“active, detailed and growing” and that the intelligence on which that judgment was based was “extensive, detailed and authoritative”. In fact, as we now know, Blair had been told just over a month previously, by the UK intelligence community, that

“we...know little about Iraq's chemical and biological weapons work since late 1988”.

The first great issue is accountability in relation to the Prime Minister's own judgment, his deceitful presentation and his over-eagerness to take Britain into a war on grounds that far exceeded the evidence to justify them. One cannot take a country into a war under false pretences and then proclaim, as the Butler committee did, that no one can be held responsible.

Indeed the most striking characteristic of the Butler report is this disjunction between analysis and judgment. It is excellent on analysis and very poor, very cautious and very fearful about judgment. It catalogues a litany of failures and then pulls all its punches by declaring that, in effect, no one was to blame. I have to say that George Tenet was sacked as head of the CIA for intelligence failures over Iraq, but John Scarlett, who held the equivalent position in the UK and was equally responsible for the intelligence failures, is still recommended by the report for promotion, despite all the damning evidence in the report to the contrary. It is a very British establishment charade, when what is really needed is genuine accountability. I think everyone on all sides of the House is seeking that. But that the excuse is made that no one can be held to account and that it just somehow happened is completely unacceptable.

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech but, on the point about the Joint Intelligence Committee, it is the responsibility of Government to digest intelligence. The information is slid across the table and then it is the Government of the day and Whitehall who make the assessments. If the intelligence is scant, the Government need to respond on the day. Does he agree that people such as Mr Scarlett did their job? It became difficult for them when the documents were slid back across the table by people like Alastair Campbell, who were saying “You need to replicate what they are finding in America.”

Mr Meacher: I agree that the intelligence community can only do what it can do. There are limits to the amount of information it can provide and the politicians then have a responsibility to reflect that. I completely agree and one's anger is not that politicians were selective, but that they said the opposite of what they were being told, which I believe is unforgivable.

There are two issues on which those responsible must be held to account. One is the presentation of the evidence to the House to agree to war. Being sinuous with the truth may not exactly be lying but it is certainly not open or honest. Presenting a seriously misleading account of the facts may not be lying either but it is certainly not truthful or straightforward. The second question is about the framework of governance that allowed this to happen. On that point, of course, it would have been much better if we had had the Chilcot report, but we still have to wait for its recommendations. I think everyone in the House agrees that it is far too long delayed and we need the report urgently.

Even 10 years on, we still have not been told the crucial evidence of the secret pledges that Blair made to Bush at his Crawford ranch in Texas some 10 months before the war began and, of course, before consulting the Cabinet, Parliament or the British people. Chilcot has seen this evidence but, as I understand it, has been prevented from publishing it, even though Blair himself, as well as Jonathan Powell and Alastair Campbell have

[Mr Meacher]

disclosed privileged information when it has suited their case when they have given evidence to the inquiry. Being told, as we have been, that it is not in the public interest that it should be disclosed is, in my view, the strongest possible indication that it is very much in the public interest that it should be revealed.

The second fundamental dimension of this whole saga is clearly what the war achieved in the long term.

Jeremy Corbyn: My hon. Friend is giving a very interesting narrative of the process in government. Does he think that there is now case for legal action at an international level against those who deceived successive Parliaments in this country and in other places, which resulted in this terrible war?

Mr Meacher: That is why I say that we need the Chilcot report, in the light of which my hon. Friend's point will be a serious consideration. The truth is that, in realpolitik, to the victors the spoils, with only those who are defeated paying the penalty. I take my hon. Friend's point, which is an honest and fair one, and we should return to this when the report is finally published.

The second dimension is what the war has achieved. On this 10th anniversary, it has been said that the US won the war, Iran won the peace and Turkey won the contracts. But did the US win the war? At a cost that has been estimated at \$1.5 trillion, something over £1 trillion—Joseph Stiglitz, a former member of the presidential economic council, thinks it is actually twice that level—and at a cost to the US of a death toll of 4,500 troops, 32,000 wounded and with thousands of survivors still struck down with post-traumatic stress disorder, the US completely failed to anticipate the insurgency that eventually forced it out. Moreover, the war actually produced the one thing that the US was desperately anxious to prevent; namely a Shi'a autocracy in Iraq, closely aligned with a resurgent Shi'a Iran. Even the US goal of securing control of the enormous Iraqi oil reserves, second only to those of Saudi Arabia, it was forced to forgo. If one had to pinpoint the moment when the US lost unipolar power as the world's hegemon, it must surely be this comprehensive disaster of the Iraq war.

As for Iraq itself, it remains a bitterly divided and violent country, as others have said. It is not only the hundreds of thousands of dead and, at the height of the war, the 4 million refugees, but after nine years of occupation by US and British troops, thousands are still tortured and imprisoned without trial, health and education have dramatically deteriorated, the position of women has horrifically gone backwards, trade unions are effectively banned, Baghdad is still divided by the checkpoints and the blast walls, the electricity and water supplies have all but broken down, and people pay with their lives if they are honest enough to speak out.

In the longer term, the war has undermined the moral standing of the US and the UK across the world, not only in the middle east. It generated the al-Qaeda presence, which certainly was not there before, and it sent a clear message, which has emboldened Iran and North Korea, that the only way to deter US blackmail and attack was indeed to acquire weapons of mass destruction. It could even be said about the war without

exaggeration that the greatest weapons of mass destruction were those wielded by the Americans. We saw the comprehensive and systematic demolition of Falluja, the US-led massacres at Haditha, Mahmudiya and Balad, and the biggest refugee crisis in the middle east since the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948.

My third and final consideration lies in the lessons, briefly, that can be drawn from this disaster. The chief one, as I said, concerns the governance structure that allowed it to happen in the first place. As we know, there was the mendacious, illegal and devious manner in which the US and the UK claimed authority in launching the war at all. Saddam had no involvement whatever in 9/11. There were no Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, as was widely suspected by western intelligence at the time, but suppressed by the politicians. The ways used by Bush and Blair to take their countries to war were, as we know all too well, brazenly deceitful.

Much is made of the fact that there was a vote in the House of Commons, and there was, but that vote was on the very eve of war, hours before the bombing started when, with 45,000 British troops already deployed in the field, it was virtually impossible to draw back. So the first lesson is obviously that in any such future scenario—God forbid that there ever should be such a future scenario—the House of Commons vote must be at a much earlier stage in the process when war is first seriously being contemplated and at that stage the documentation must be provided to justify, or purport to justify, the war, and that must be fully disclosed to the House before the vote is taken.

Laura Sandys: As somebody who has so much more experience than I do in Parliament, will the right hon. Gentleman speculate what would have happened if we had voted against the war? Would we have been able to roll ourselves back? I think it was almost too late and it would have been a very big dilemma for the Prime Minister of the time to be in that position—an interesting dilemma and one that we need to resolve if we are to have votes before intervention in the future.

Mr Meacher: That is indeed an interesting point. It would not just have been difficult for the Prime Minister—it would have been a massive humiliation and embarrassment if that had happened. One has to ask why the vote was taken so late. Maybe—I can only speculate—it was precisely to put pressure on Members of this House for what was virtually a fait accompli, which would compel a majority of them to support it. I pay enormous tribute to the 139 MPs who voted against the war. Most were Labour Members, but some were Tories or Members from the smaller parties. They need to be given the credit and honour that they are due.

Pete Wishart: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way and for commending the parties that voted against the war. He was just speculating on what might have happened if the House had voted against the war and whether that would have stopped it. One clear conclusion is known, because Tony Blair said that he would have resigned if the vote had gone against him. I think that was as big an incentive as any to vote against it that evening.

Mr Meacher: We all can have our views on that opinion.

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): I was one of the organisers of the rebellion, and it was with great sadness that I rebelled against my party and my Prime Minister. Will my right hon. Friend concede that the vote was not gifted by the Government, but hard fought for? Many of us worked for many months to obtain the vote. Indeed, there was to be an alternative convening of Parliament in Church House, at which we would have had a critical mass, and only 48 hours before the Government conceded that there would be a vote. We had enough Members to convene a Parliament to discuss the Iraq war, and the former Speaker, Bernard Weatherill, was prepared to chair it. It would have included Members from across the House, including some very brave Conservative Members, Members from the Liberal party and friends from the smaller parties across the political spectrum. But 122 Labour Members voted on the first occasion, and indeed the numbers went up on the second vote, which is unheard of, given the whipping operation against those who did not want us to go to war. It was not a gift of the Government; it was hard fought for—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. The hon. Gentleman is making an intervention, not a speech. We have only two hours remaining for this debate and at least six Members still wish to take the Floor. I would be grateful if Members wishing to intervene did so briefly, because otherwise those who wish to make a speech will be disappointed.

Mr Meacher: I am pleased that my hon. Friend provided the House with that information, as I do not think it is well understood. It has been claimed in this debate is that the whipping was not very strong, but that is absolutely not the view that most of us take. It was an attempt to corral Members of all parties to support the war. I think that he has skilfully shown the work that was done under the counter, which forced what was necessary. Without it, the vote might well never have happened.

The second lesson—I will be quick, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I know that I have been speaking for some time—is that the power and wilfulness of a Prime Minister who can so brazenly override normal democratic procedures, quite apart from the personality of Tony Blair, is a very serious issue. He made a commitment to go to war at Bush's Crawford ranch in Texas 10 months before that vote and without consulting anyone. He regularly told Parliament, right up to the very start of the war, that no decision had been taken. Clearly an unstoppable momentum had been deliberately built up. He lent heavily on his Attorney-General between 7 and 17 March to induce him to chance his legal warning that the war was not legal. On 15 February he ignored and dismissed the biggest protest demonstration this country has ever seen, with up to 2 million members of the public marching against the war. According to evidence given by the UK's ambassador to the US at the time, Sir Christopher Meyer, Bush even rung up Tony Blair to suggest that he could "sit out the war", while the Pentagon's Donald Rumsfeld was quite happy to go in alone, but Blair was obsessive and determined to see it through. In an interview in December 2009 he was asked this question:

"If you had known then that there were no WMDs, would you still have gone on?"

He replied:

"I would still have thought it right to remove him"—

that is, Saddam Hussein. To that end, he even colluded with what his own head of MI6, Sir Richard Dearlove, said in July 2002, eight months before the war—that "the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy."

That background of the contumacious wilfulness of a Prime Minister dragging this country, virtually single-handedly, to war—as it turned out, a war of momentously disastrous consequences—makes it the duty of this House to set down inviolable conditions to prevent any such catastrophe from ever happening again. That must, at the very least, embrace unquestioning compliance with UN resolutions; a clear and unwhipped vote of the Commons and, indeed, the Lords, long before any envisaged hostilities; and a full disclosure of all the data and evidence that can be used to justify war. Only when those conditions are made to apply will we have learned the lessons of this dreadful episode.

3.6 pm

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak in this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. Please excuse my croaky voice, but I was very keen to speak for two reasons. First, as a Royal Air Force officer I served in Operation Warden, the no-fly zone over Northern Iraq in the 1990s; and secondly, just a fortnight ago, I was honoured to return Iraq 18 years on from my military service there. I want to give my perspective on Iraq pre and post the war of 2003.

In the 1990s, Operation Warden was the no-fly zone over northern Iraq which operated from Incirlik airbase in Turkey. Aircraft from the UK, the US, France and Turkey prevented Saddam Hussein from waging his war against Iraq's 5 million Kurds. Prior to the no-fly zone, Saddam Hussein's forces slaughtered many thousands of Iraqi Kurds. This included chemical weapon attacks at Halabja and mass executions culminating in the Anfal campaigns of 1988.

In 1995, during my tour, I joined coalition officers from the military co-ordination centre in Zakho, northern Iraq. We toured Kurdish villages near Dohuk and Erbil. Meeting village elders, we spread the word that the only aircraft flying above were coalition ones and that we could help with medical supplies and other immediate necessities such as electricity generators. We were given a warm welcome. The no-fly zone saved lives and has meant that Iraq's 5 million Kurds have experienced relative stability since the end of the 1991 Gulf war.

After the war of 2003, Iraq's 2005 federal constitution gave the Kurdistan regional government an unprecedented level of self-government. Eighteen years on from my military service, I was back in northern Iraq two weeks ago as a guest of the Kurdistan regional government via the all-party group on the Kurdistan region in Iraq. I saw the peaceful and increasingly prosperous Erbil and its surrounding areas. This fairly secular region sees Christians, Jews and Muslims living side by side. In fact, over 2 million tourists visited the region last year. The Erbil citadel, 6,000 years old, is the world's oldest continuously inhabited settlement and a big tourist attraction. Again, the welcome was warm and friendly.

For many years I have spoken of my opposition to the 2003 Iraq war. I come at it from a slightly different angle—a military angle. My view was that Saddam

[Jason McCartney]

Hussein was a caged animal because the northern no-fly zone, like the one in the south, was preventing any repeat of his previous atrocities. However, it is clear that the dictator's removal has allowed Kurdistan to move on. Weapons of mass destruction or oil are often cited as reasons for going to war, as they have been in this Chamber today, but it is the regime change that has made a huge difference in the north of the country.

Having been helped themselves, the Iraqi Kurds are now helping others. On this month's trip we spent an emotional day at the Domiz refugee camp near the Iraq-Syria border. Some 130,000 Syrian Kurds have fled the fighting in Syria. I spoke with many refugees, including children, who continue to be educated in specially constructed schools. The Kurdistan regional government deserves praise for funding and arranging that.

As has been said, however, all is not well in Iraq. There are tensions and rifts between the Kurdistan regional government and Baghdad, the capital is plagued by violence—a post-2006 record of 1,000 people were killed in May alone—and there is a bitter dispute over revenue sharing, as a new oil pipeline from Kurdistan into Turkey nears completion. With an estimated 45 billion barrels of oil reserves—the fourth largest in the world—and a century's worth of natural gas, the Kurdistan regional government has become a major player and its dispute with Baghdad is now based on the breakdown of revenue sharing. KRG is supposed to get 17% of national revenues and, by the same token, should pay 83% of whatever it earns into the national treasury.

Kurdistan's relative stability is now a strong pull for foreign investors. It is not just about oil—hotel and leisure groups are investing there. I hope that this can be a model for the rest of Iraq. Given recent events in neighbouring Turkey, the violence and civil war in Syria and the upcoming elections in Iran, the region and western nations need a stable Iraq more than ever.

Ten years on from the Iraq war, the outlook for Iraq is mixed. The absence of the violent dictator Saddam Hussein has heralded peace and prosperity in the north, while the south and the capital face uncertainty and, potentially, an even more violent future.

As I come to the end of my brief speech, I want to pause to remember and pay tribute to those who died in the Iraq conflict, which started in 2003. There have been 179 UK military deaths and 43 UK civilians have died, as have, as we have heard, hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqi men, women and children. We must remember them all. With Syria in mind, perhaps these are the lessons we need to heed when pondering the removal of another murderous dictator.

3.12 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): To take up the final point made by the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) about honouring the 179 dead, I have in the past read out their names. I am sure it would make a deeper impression today if I read them out again, but unfortunately that is forbidden by the rules of the House.

That is part of the feeling we have—the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) made this point—and our reluctance to face the truth. Only the

future is certain; the past is always changing. We have heard today so many attempts to fictionalise what happened and we refuse to face our failures. The hon. Gentleman made a marvellous speech on which I would like to base my remarks. He said that what characterises this Parliament is the unimportance of being right and the rewards for failure and the punishment for the truth. I am afraid that that is the abiding culture of this place.

I have received a message during the debate from someone expressing, in very strong language, incredulity at the suggestion that there was not a strong Whip on that day in March. I have been here for 26 years and it was the strongest Whip I have ever encountered. Many of those who were opposed to the war—about 30 or 40 of them—who had signed motions and early-day motions against it were bribed, bullied and bamboozled into changing their minds to either abstain or vote in favour of it. Almost all of them regret that bitterly. It was the most important vote of our careers and it is not true to say that it was easy to make our minds up. It was not. The threat was there that we would lose our seats and that the Prime Minister would resign. Members who were in any doubt were called in to see Ministers to be persuaded. Members of the Committees who had knowledge that we did not have, such as the Intelligence and Security Committee, went around cajoling Back Benchers saying, "If you knew what we know, you'd vote for war, but we can't tell you because it's all secret." They were being fed nonsense and exaggerations as well.

Our reluctance to accept the truth seems extraordinary to me. It would be flattering to describe today's speech from the Government Front Bench as vacuous. Even now, the Government cannot admit that there were no weapons of mass destruction. It is little short of insanity to suggest that anyone still believes that there were such weapons.

Members have questioned whether anyone foresaw what would happen. A great many people foresaw it at the time. To suggest otherwise is another attempt to rewrite history. I have dug out a letter that I sent to the then Prime Minister in March 2003 to point out what the consequences of the invasion would be. I see with nausea that Tony Blair is now explaining that the inherent nature of the Islamic religion was responsible for the terrible event that took place in Woolwich a few weeks ago. It was not. That event was a reaction to what happened in 2003. My letter stated:

"Our involvement in Bush's war will increase the likelihood of terrorist attacks. Attacking a Muslim state without achieving a fair settlement of the Palestine-Israeli situation is an affront to Muslims, from our local mosques to the far-flung corners of the world."

That is when it started and it continued in Afghanistan. The only decision that has been taken without a vote that is comparable to the decision to join Bush's war in Iraq is the decision to go into Helmand province. There were two dead UK soldiers at that time. The figure is now 441. Nothing has been achieved in Helmand province. Indeed, conditions are worse than in 2006 when we went in.

This House was deceived. We failed. The organs that should have defended us and given us the truth—the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Defence Committee and the Intelligence and Security Committee—were all part of the hallelujah chorus of praise for the messiah,

Tony Blair, who thought that he could walk on water. He had been successful in Kosovo. He had been successful in Sierra Leone. Although there were people who opposed him, he thought that he was infallible and was determined to go on.

Tony Blair was asked about the crucial decision in a splendid television programme that was aired recently on BBC2. The decision was not about whether we should stop the war. We could never have stopped the war, because Bush was determined to go in. Saddam would have been removed anyway. The decision that we had to make in Parliament was whether our soldiers should be involved in that. Tony Blair admitted to the shoulder-to-shoulder comment. He almost certainly made his decision in 2002, when he shook hands with Bush and said, "I'll be with you." They then invented the facts in order to present this House with a false agenda. If he had not persuaded 40 or so Labour Members to vote the other way, we would not have gone to war.

Tony Blair was asked in the programme why he did not pull out. His comment was:

"I thought it was the right thing to do, I wanted my country to be a part of it. I admit what I said about standing shoulder to shoulder with the US and I would prefer to have gone and left as Prime Minister than to have backed out on the basis that it was too politically difficult."

There are a large number of "I"s in that statement, but 179 British dead is a hell of a price to pay for one man's vanity, which I believe was the situation.

Tony Blair did persuade the House; he was very persuasive and used his great talents. He thought it was a special day; it is the only time, I believe, that he invited his family up to the Public Gallery to watch his performance. He saw this; he was the great actor-manager of politics and he gave a splendid performance in the Chamber. There was the invention of the 45-minute claim, and the sexing-up of the introduction to the dossier. Because of that, we sent those young men to their deaths.

The awful thing is that those families who saw their loved ones die have constructed their own justification by saying, "Well, they died in a noble cause; they did not die in vain. Iraq will be a better place because of it." Slowly, tragically, they must come to terms with a different reality that their loved ones died because of the ego of one man who used his position to send them into an avoidable war.

We must consider all the other wars we are faced with, and the extent of the deceptions. We went into Iraq to defend ourselves against non-existent weapons of mass destruction; we went into Helmand province to defend ourselves against a non-existent Taliban terrorist threat to the United Kingdom. We are now being told that we should perhaps go into Iran to defend ourselves against non-existent Iranian long-range missiles carrying non-existent Iranian nuclear bombs.

One issue that has come to light but received very little publicity is the activity of people such as the Kagans. Kimberly and Frederick Kagan are a married couple who were at Petraeus's right hand. They were privy to all the private conversations, went to every secret meeting, and wrote Petraeus's report to the Defence Secretary on what was happening in Afghanistan. Each time, they wanted a more hard-edged approach to military activities and more aggression, and each time, they tried to sabotage the peace initiatives. The Kagans were not employed by the military or by Petraeus—their paymasters

were the defence industry and contractors. There was a strong element of that in Iraq and certainly in Afghanistan, and we must look to such things and to the revolving door that means that wars go on. We are at a stage where we are being told to go into perpetual wars. When one is over, we are softened up for the next one, and on and on it goes.

It gets worse. The hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) spoke about the error of saying that might is right. That works on the day and we win victories, but we store up huge resentment—just as we are doing now with the use of our vastly superior technology in drones and robot weapons. The price must be paid in the end, and we are paying it with the division between the western, Christian part of the world, and the Muslim side. Those divisions are deep and we did a great deal to cause them through our errors in the past.

I will conclude with a poem that was read the other day about the start of the first world war, because it is something we could apply to the former Prime Minister. It is a poem by Kipling, who spent his life celebrating and glorifying war. He managed to get his son, who was almost blind, into the war by pulling a few strings, but he was then tormented because his son died in the war as a result of his efforts. That changed his view, and if any poem will apply to Tony Blair when he becomes—this is the title of the poem—"A dead statesman", it is this:

"I could not dig: I dared not rob:
Therefore I lied to please the mob.
Now all my lies are proved untrue
And I must face the men I slew.
What tale shall serve me here among
Mine angry and defrauded young?"

3.24 pm

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I have just returned from a brief all-party visit to Berlin, where, with other parliamentarians, I had the opportunity to visit checkpoint Charlie. Anybody who visits will be aware of the big sections of the Berlin wall that remain, covered in graffiti, as symbols of how divided that city was. We find the same walls and constructs—blast containers—all over Baghdad, Kabul, Helmand and so on. When will sections of walls in Baghdad or Basra serve no other purpose than to remind us and remain as symbols of events in the past?

I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on securing this important debate. I am grateful for it. It is appropriate to discuss the lessons learned, considering that almost 200 lives were lost, and that the campaign cost the taxpayer almost £8 billion. I declare an interest as a former regular member of the armed forces and a serving member of the reserve forces. I pay tribute, as other hon. Members have, to those who served and to the fallen—those whose lives are permanently changed through injury and, particularly, those who did not return.

The analysis should be divided into three different areas: first, the justification for intervention; secondly, the military campaign and defeating the enemy; and thirdly, the stabilisation and reconstruction phase. General Petraeus, who had a long-term involvement in Iraq, famously said that it was not enough to defeat the

[Mr Tobias Ellwood]

enemy, and that, if we are to intervene, we need to enable the local. Those are wise words to remember no matter where we want to go, whether upstream or on any campaign or intervention.

Although we might disagree with intervention, I am not sure we would be having this debate and making the cases we are making if the stabilisation and reconstruction had been more of a success story. I would go further than that and say that Tony Blair would probably have continued as leader of his party and not been taken over by his Chancellor had peace prevailed, had Basra been a success, and had the situation not deteriorated as it did in the aftermath of the invasion.

Like other hon. Members, I await the outcome of the Chilcot inquiry, which will be illuminating. I and other hon. Members attended a number of its sessions. It was interesting to hear people giving direct accounts of their roles, small and large, in the decision-making process, not least the military leaders who gave evidence who felt pulled between commitments in Iraq and continuing commitments in Afghanistan, to which hon. Members have referred. Unfortunately, I believe the inquiry will make unpleasant reading for the Labour Government in respect of some of their decisions.

On the justification for intervention, I spoke out prior to invasion against intervention. I made that absolutely clear, even though the Conservative party seemed to be in favour. As a military person, I define a threat as it is defined militarily—a threat is the ability and intent to cause harm. A threat is not just the desire to cause harm to another person, region, community or state; it must be matched with the means. People must have capability to pose a threat. If the two are not together, in military terms, the threat does not exist. That is why I began to question the justification for the invasion.

I do not have the same problem as other hon. Members with the build-up of armed forces, because that shows intent. We needed to build up capacity to allow the politicians to make the decision. Building up armed forces can persuade the enemy to change their minds. We cut the oak for the ships used in the battle of Trafalgar well in advance of any admiralty decision to attack, but it was in mind and preparations needed to take place. I also do not have much of a problem with the vote in the House on the war itself. As I said, I would have put my hand up to say that I was not convinced. Many in the House were convinced by the intelligence that was presented to them.

We realise now that there were many flaws in the intelligence and that the House was misled on, for example, the 45-minute claim that our British bases in Cyprus were somehow under threat from tactical weapons of mass destruction. There was the very sad role of Alistair Campbell interfering with John Scarlett's report and directing British intelligence dossiers to complement US intelligence. He was then forced to resign following the tragic death of David Kelly. There was the role of General Colin Powell, for whom I have a huge amount of respect. Not long ago, he admitted that his Adlai Stevenson moment—if I can put it that way—when he addressed the United Nations to give evidence for the justification of war in February 2003, was one of the most regrettable moments of his career. There was

the CIA's claim about yellowcake coming from Niger, which was used in President Bush's state of the union address, leading, when the truth came out, to Dick Cheney's chief of staff, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, going to prison.

The issue of what Hans Blix knew has been raised a number of times and is still debated. It is clear that while working for the International Atomic Energy Agency and leading the weapons inspectors, he continued to have full access in the country, even if Saddam Hussein was not co-operating fully. He had not found any evidence and could have continued in the country for as long as he liked, but was told leave by the Americans because of the impending invasion. We now realise that there was a single intelligence source—an exiled scientist living in Germany—stating that Saddam Hussein had tactical weapons of mass destruction. That was never corroborated. Finally, United Nations resolution 1441 did not actually give the right to invade—a point made clearly by France. It leant on previous resolution 687, which provided for the right to invade if certain conditions were not met. The UN Secretary-General said that he was uncomfortable with that.

I do not stand here as an apologist and say that war was not avoidable. It might have been, but I do not believe that invasion was justified at that juncture. As has been said a number of times, hindsight is a wonderful thing, but one wonders whether Saddam Hussein would have survived the Arab spring or whether, through a natural process of change in the middle east, we would have seen him removed. It is difficult to say.

In his book "State of Denial" Bob Woodward quotes General Franks, the United States central commander in the middle east, on being asked, in December 2001—when we had just gone into Afghanistan—to draw up plans to invade Iraq. That puts into perspective the energy and determination to push forward with intervention in Iraq.

On the intervention itself, Operation Telic went as well as it could have done. In the first three weeks of March 2003, we managed to defeat the enemy completely and were seen as liberators. I pay tribute to the 7th Army Brigade, which had to set up in a very awkward and difficult environment to establish the peace. The one lesson to be learned relates to the shock and awe policy. It is a matter for further debate, but I do not now think it is right for us, armed with these incredible long-range weapons, to destroy infrastructure on such a scale—the very same infrastructure that we will need a couple of weeks after putting boots on the ground. When a decision to invade is taken, we have to be more cognisant of the need to disrupt and take out the enemy without causing more damage and costing us more in the long-term.

It was not long after the initial invasion that the British started patrolling in berets, using our skills base from Northern Ireland to win over hearts and minds by looking less offensive in our military outfits in order to work with locals. It soon became apparent, however, after the successful invasion, that there was no plan or strategy—no idea what to do or how to harness the euphoria following Saddam Hussein's fall in order to sow the seeds of governance—and so nothing happened and we went from liberators to occupiers. Where was the army of civil servants, linguists, engineers and planners—the people with the skill sets to rebuild Basra

and help its people move forward? And let us not forget the significance of Basra, whose people were elated to get rid of Saddam Hussein, who was never a friend of the city, and whose strategic importance cannot be overestimated: as Iraq's only port, it was a lifeline for moving oil out of the country.

Yet nothing happened. We created an umbrella of security, and our soldiers, having done a brave job, looked over their shoulders, expecting somebody else to come in and deal with governance, reconstruction and development, but nobody was there. I intervened on the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas)—who, as I said, spoke with passion and concern for the position of the then Government, and whom I congratulate for taking a stand at the time—and explained how Clare Short, then at the Department for International Development, which was the one organisation with the money to provide reconstruction and development planning, decided not to participate and sent a message around the Department to that effect. As a result, our armed forces were left on their own. She should have been sacked immediately. I am pleased to say that now the relationship between the Ministry of Defence, DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has improved immensely, but the culture at the time, underlined—I am afraid—by her stance, did not allow DFID even to consider participating in war zones. It was focusing far too much on poverty.

Mr Llwyd: The former right hon. Lady to whom the hon. Gentleman refers made strenuous efforts to get the Prime Minister to plan for the peace, even before entering the war. She did everything she possibly could, and it was directly as a result of his not taking her advice that much of the reconstruction work was not done and the humanitarian resources were not invested immediately. She did everything she could, but she found it impossible to get through to him.

Mr Ellwood: I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman at all. We had a debate on Iraq when Clare Short was in the Chamber. I asked her directly—it is in *Hansard*—whether she sent a diktat round her Department and to her directors saying, “Do not do any planning for participating in post-conflict reconstruction, because I believe the war is illegal and I do not want to get into trouble.” I paraphrase, but those were roughly the words. She replied, “Absolutely. I did that. That was my belief at the time.” That is what happened, but whether there is more to it—

Mr Llwyd: There is more to it.

Mr Ellwood: I shall wait for the right hon. Gentleman's speech for him to elaborate.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I think it is a bit late for that.

Mr Ellwood: As the Minister said, there have been a number of successes of which we can be proud, so we should not be too dismayed: the referendum has led to a new constitution, there has been a series of elections and to some extent all-out civil war has been avoided, but there remains huge sectarian violence and a number of challenges ahead.

My hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), who spoke very articulately and has huge experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, said that Iraq was not Britain's finest hour. This was there with the Suez crisis and our invasion of Afghanistan in 1839. There was no conflict plan. The decision to disband the army and de-Ba'athify Iraq in one fell swoop was bizarre and ignored the fact that teachers, nurses and others were forced to be part of the Ba'ath party. As soon as we made it illegal and those who were part of it unable to work, we lost the mindset of support from an important swathe of the middle-class population.

The timeline makes for grievous reading. In summer 2007, we failed to do any development and reconstruction. Our military were forced to withdraw from the city centre, as it became untenable to stay there, and relocate to the airport. The Prime Minister, Mr Maliki, said:

“Basra has been left to the mercy of the militia men”.

In the absence of anything happening, a vacuum developed. Gangs formed, which turned into militia, which then ran the city. In 2008, it was not the British who liberated the city; it was the Iraqi army. Maliki came down to Basra and decided the situation needed to come to an end and that the Mahdi army needed to be pushed out. In spring 2009, our military interest in Iraq came to an end. We did not hand the base over to the Iraqi army; we handed it over to the Americans.

Paul Flynn: Is it not true that Maliki—who is hardly an ideal figure—was holed up in Basra, surrounded by the militia and about to be killed, when the American army came in and rescued him?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman is correct. The details are that Maliki was surrounded and the Americans came in. Once the Mahdi army was removed and the militia brought under control, that was the first occasion when, finally, governance was possible and a mayor of Basra could be put in place to move the city forward.

In my view, after any invasion or intervention, we have a window of three to six months to get things right before the enemy can regroup and the locals then decide, “Actually, life is no better under the new regime than it was under the old.” We missed that window of opportunity, which cost Britain lives—as it did others in the international community—because of our reluctance to do what was required. My concern is this. We sit at the international top table. We are a power with nuclear weapons, we have a place on the Security Council and we have centuries of serious war fighting experience, and we could not even hold a medium-sized conurbation. The armed forces were under immense strain during this period. As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, this was tied in with, and happened at the same time as, our decision to make an even grander commitment in Afghanistan, with two air bridges operating, to the point that our armed forces were almost unable to cope.

The Minister talked about some of the success stories. Many of us have visited Iraq many times. I recently went to Irbil. It is very pleasing indeed to see how much the region has moved forward from the atrocities it endured under Saddam Hussein. I only hope that such success can be emulated in the rest of the country. Unfortunately, Iraq is not in the headlines anymore, because our troops are not there, but as hon. Members

[Mr Ellwood]

across the House have mentioned, there were as many deaths in this last month as there were in 2008. The scale of continuing atrocities is quite shocking.

In conclusion, there are serious questions about our decision to go to war in the first place, about how Parliament debates these matters and about our ability to do post-conflict reconstruction. This House regularly pays tribute to our armed forces for their commitment and professionalism and the sacrifice they make for our country, but in the long history of British military engagements, Iraq was far from our finest hour. That was no fault of theirs, I should say, but falls totally on the shoulders of the Government of the day, who failed to plan for peace. I am pleased that the Prime Minister, in looking at other interventions, which have also been mentioned in this debate, has introduced three conditions for this House to approve any intervention. First, is there a legal basis for intervention? Secondly, is there regional support? Thirdly, is there an international commitment to the cause? I hope that, as we look for solutions in Syria and the Sahel, the Prime Minister's conditions will not be forgotten.

3.44 pm

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. and gallant Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood). He is of course right to mention the sheer bravery and commitment of our service personnel, the effectiveness with which they conducted Operation Telic, and the speed with which Iraq was defeated, if can use that word. I remember those days clearly, as the MP representing the regimental headquarters of the Black Watch, which was engaged in the operations. I also recall the time of the surge in Falluja, when the media came to me for comment on the many losses sustained by the Black Watch at that time. That was a difficult period for all those Members of Parliament with a military interest in the Iraq war. Those interviews, in which I paid tribute to the many soldiers from my constituency who lost their lives during that war, were among the toughest interviews I have ever had to do. The hon. and gallant Gentleman is also right to mention what happened after the war: the total lack of planning for a sustainable reinvention of Iraq and the stripping of all state infrastructure relating to the Ba'ath party. That was a massive mistake and it led to many of the difficulties that followed the invasion.

I want to go back to 18 March 2003, the day on which we debated the Iraq war. I was here that day, as a few hon. Members who are in the Chamber today were, and I remember it as a dark ugly day, a horrible day. There was nothing like the light Whip that the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) described. I was the Whip of our group, and I remember seeing some of the Labour Whips' activities on that day. People were drawn aside and told that the Prime Minister would resign if the vote did not go through. They were told that their careers would be at risk if they voted against the Government. It was a horrible day. I remember lots of good men and women being dragooned into the Lobby to support their Prime Minister and their Government against their better instincts. It was good to hear the right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Mr Meacher)—it is a pity that he has now left the Chamber—acknowledge that we were fed a lot of

nonsense about the case for war. Many Members of Parliament, particularly those on the Labour side, knew that, but they were dragooned into providing that perverse support for their Prime Minister and their Government.

I remember listening to Tony Blair that day. I actually watched the YouTube video of the speech this morning, just to refresh my memory of the atmosphere in the debate. We had to listen to endless drivel and nonsense. He said that the case for weapons of mass destruction was beyond debate, that they were really there, and that they could reach us in 45 minutes. He talked about collusion with al-Qaeda, and said that Saddam Hussein was preparing a nuclear programme using uranium from Niger. It was all total and utter bollocks—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman should use that word, and I am sure that he will want to withdraw it immediately.

Pete Wishart: I withdraw it, of course, Mr Deputy Speaker. It was not that, but something very similar, that we had to listen to on that day.

The House passed the vote on Iraq by 412 votes to 149, and 217 hon. Members voted for the amendment tabled by Chris Smith. I was among those who voted against the war, as were my right hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd), my hon. Friends the Members for Angus (Mr Weir) and for Arfon (Hywel Williams) and the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn). I am looking around the Chamber to see who else is here: I see the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas), whom I commend for his fantastic speech today. It was excellent to hear a speech from the Front Bench from a former Minister who meant what he said and I thank him for that. He was listened to very carefully throughout the House. All of us here on these Benches today voted against the war. The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) was not a Member of Parliament at the time, but one thing is certain: had she been a Member, there is no doubt that she would have been in the Lobby with us that evening.

That vote is the one that I am most proud of in my 12 years as a parliamentarian. It defined my first Session in Parliament. I, a young whippersnapper of an MP in short trousers, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Angus, first came here in the Session that lasted from 2001 to 2005, and the Iraq war was the defining feature of that parliamentary term. That was the context and the subtext of a lot of the debates we had on similar and other issues. I certainly remember during the 2005 election the sheer anger on the doorstep about the invasion of Iraq and how the war went.

Mr Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. As a new MP at that time, I too remember the huge anger on the doorstep and the great pressure being put on MPs to vote for war—by the press, for example. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd), my hon. Friend the Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) and I voted against an earlier motion, I recall that one newspaper named us and provided our phone numbers to get people to ring us up. A stream of people—with Geordie accents, I do not know why; the Scots did not seem to

bother—then wanted me thrown out of the Labour party. That was news to me, as I had never been a member of it.

Pete Wishart: I am, of course, very grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. Lots of strange things were going on at that time, particularly to people who were associated with an anti-war position. He is absolutely right to mention the role of the press in all that. They helped to create the environment, the culture and the mood for invasion and war.

The funny thing is that this did not have any effect on the public. The public loathed the idea of going to war in Iraq. I was at a march in Glasgow where 100,000 people were out opposing the war, while 1 million people in London marched against it. There were worldwide protests, too. It is reckoned that the protests against the Iraq invasion and war were the biggest protests ever witnessed since Vietnam—yet we still had the invasion and the war.

We have heard about the case for war and how compelling it was, and we have also heard about people being duped. The public saw through the case; the public knew that the case was flimsy; they viewed it as nonsense; they knew that there was no case for war. They were against the war because they knew it was wrong to attack Iraq. That is why they went out on the streets in such numbers to ensure that the war would be opposed. The Blair Government, however, were determined to go to war.

Parliament was even recalled in September 2002, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd reminded us, and we came down to listen to the case for war. I remember arriving and there in my pigeon-hole was the dodgy dossier. I remember sharing it with my hon. Friends, and we were almost in hysterics at some aspects of the case for war. It was drivel, but we had to listen to it again and again that day. We now know, of course, that the dodgy dossier was compiled from all sorts of plagiarised sources and that the most notable contribution came from a graduate student called Ibrahim al-Marashi. It seems almost like some sort of script for a failed comedy film kicked out because it lacked credibility, yet this was the case to go to war. I know I cannot say the unparliamentary word again, Mr Deputy Speaker, but that is what this dodgy dossier was.

Of course, there were no weapons of mass destruction, still less any that could have been deployed in 45 minutes. There was no collusion with al-Qaeda either, but al-Qaeda is certainly there now. Al-Qaeda is all over the region, following the political instability caused by this conflict. Of course, there was no evidence of any uranium project and nothing whatever could be found relating to any nuclear programme. We now know that Tony Blair and his Government knew this. How they knew this was revealed in the "Panorama" programme, to which some of my hon. Friends have referred. The programme said that the intelligence case to go to war, which was in the hands of the Prime Minister and the Government, was so flimsy that it lacked any credibility. It was based on an agent called "Curveball", who saw evidence of WMD being compiled, which he passed on to the Germans. It subsequently spread like wildfire around the US and UK intelligence services, so determined were they to find any shred of credibility in the evidence to justify going to war.

We were misled; that is all we could say about all this. This House was misled. I regret that more Members are not here today. We need to hear more testimony, particularly from those who voted for the war. We have to hear from them, as we did from the right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton, to understand that they were misled, lied to and given the wrong evidence. The only way this House can get any sort of closure on this issue is if we massively confess. Those who voted for the war need to come here and say, "We got it wrong. We were lied to by a former Prime Minister, and I wish I had never voted for the war." That would be the honourable thing for hon. Members to do in this House—but I doubt whether it will happen.

The war was not, of course, based on intelligence. Intelligence was just a useful gimmick—a useful tool to ensure that Tony Blair could do what he wanted, which was to fulfil the almost perverse obligation that he felt that he owed to George Bush. He had probably told George Bush that he would take this country to war.

The night on which the five SNP Members voted against the war, as did our colleagues, was indeed a proud occasion, but let me tell the House about something else of which I am particularly proud. When that man, that former Prime Minister, came into the Chamber for his lap of honour, the House got up like a circus to clap him, but I would not rise to clap that warmonger. I sat rooted to my seat, and I am proud that I did so.

Mr Weir: I sat rooted to my seat as well. However, I remember the current Prime Minister, then Leader of the Opposition, standing and waving his hands to encourage his members to rise and cheer on the Prime Minister who had led us into this disastrous war.

Pete Wishart: Members were almost hissing us for sitting still, but I am glad and proud that I never rose to my feet to clap that warmonger.

The Iraq war is, of course, associated with Tony Blair, and always will be. It is his legacy. He might as well have had it tattooed on his head, such is his association with that illegal war. Conflicts tend to become associated with prominent figures and leaders: we have had Thatcher and the Falklands war, Churchill and world war two—and Iraq and Blair.

What was it all for? What was achieved? More than 100,000 dead, a region destabilised, a country divided along sectarian lines, and international diplomacy discredited as never before. We may never retrieve our credibility in the international community following Iraq, and that is a sad, sad indictment of what happened here. I will not even bother to go into the details of the millions of people who have been displaced. But another dreadful thing happened, and it is the thing that we will most regret: we have alienated a generation of people living in the Muslim world. Furthermore, we have dangerously radicalised a proportion of them, and that is what we are having to deal with now. That is another legacy of the Iraq war with which we have continued to contend, and we will live to regret it.

By any standard, Iraq has been an absolute and utter disaster. That illegal war was one of the most regrettable and damaging foreign policy adventures ever undertaken in our name. Some Members have gone on about Suez, but the mighty Suez is nothing but a little stream compared with the foreign policy damage that has been

[Pete Wishart]

created by Iraq. Those responsible must be held to account. History will eventually judge them, but I should like to think that it will be done now, while I am still a Member of Parliament. I should like to think that some justice will be delivered. So far, the only people who have lost their jobs because of Iraq are people who worked for the BBC. One person lost his job because he said that the dossier was “sexed up”. That dossier was more sexed up than some teenage starlet in her latest pop video.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): What is even more regrettable is that after the war, those on what was then the Government Front Bench continued to assert that there were weapons of mass destruction, and that, as a matter of faith, they would be found. Eventually, of course, they had to concede, but it was a matter of belief and not of fact.

Pete Wishart: The Minister has been asked today whether there were weapons of mass destruction, but even now—10 years on, and with a different Government—they cannot concede that there were no such weapons. If the Minister were to rise in order to say, “Yes, we concede that now,” I would give way to him, but so far no UK Government have conceded that there were no weapons of mass destruction, and I think that until a Government do that, we will not have political closure.

We have had five useless reports on Iraq. That is the only thing we can call them: useless. They might as well have been made out of whitewash, given their validity when it comes to trying to discover and understand what actually went on. Now worrying issues are starting to emerge in relation to our best hope of ensuring that those responsible are held to account through the Chilcot report. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd referred to some of the current difficulties with Chilcot.

I mentioned to the Minister David Owen’s view that there is collusion between Tony Blair and No. 10 to ensure that the private correspondence between George Bush and Tony Blair is not revealed. We must see that correspondence, because it will probably tell us more than anything else about the reasons for going to war. We will be able to see how the plan was shaped and designed between the two of them, and to see the commitment that was made by Tony Blair to George Bush.

The Chilcot inquiry started four years ago, and with every year that passes, the Iraq war recedes and the Chilcot conclusions lose their potency. I say this, however, to the current Government and those who were in the last Labour Government: we will not forget. We will not forget this, and we will continue to hold this Government to account for what they do.

History will judge these people. At some point, what actually happened will have to come out. If Chilcot does not do that, it will come out later. I am not confident that we will get the truth about Iraq before the end of this decade, however. I think it will take another generation before the true story of Iraq is told, because there are too many big reputations at stake, and too many pillars would come down if it were actually

revealed. The Foreign Office and the foreign policy of the United Kingdom would probably be totally discredited if the truth about Iraq came out.

That is why I am not confident that we will find out the true story about Iraq before the end of this decade, and I will be out of here by then. I do not want to be part of a country that does this. It is appalling to be part of a nation that indulges in illegal wars. I am from Scotland. Scotland is the nation that defines me, and I want my country to make a peaceful contribution to the world and not get involved in these illegal wars, so I am glad we will have an opportunity next year to ensure that we are no longer part of a nation that is prepared to indulge in such things.

It was not a Tory Government who took us into this illegal war; it was a Labour Government, for goodness’ sake—the last type of Government we would expect to take us into an illegal war. It is not all about the evil Tories, therefore. It was a Labour Government who did that, and I am glad that next year my nation will get the opportunity to vote for independence and ensure we will never be part of illegal wars again.

I think the case for independence is overwhelming, but this issue really helps it. The issue has politicised so many people. We have heard about the Stop the War coalition, which did so much great work on it, and Stop the War lost one of its greatest advocates in the last few days: the iconic author Iain Banks. I remember when he came down here and participated in the activities of Stop the War. He was an author without peer, an iconic Scot and a great, great guy. He was heavily politicised by the Iraq war. In fact, he tore up his passport and sent it to Tony Blair, such was his disgust at the war.

I want to pay tribute to Iain Banks in my final remarks by quoting some words not from his great works, “The Crow Road” or “The Wasp Factory”, but from him to Tony Blair. He said that

“it was Blair who bowed to Bush in the first place, and Blair who convinced the Labour party and parliament of the need to go to war with a dossier that was so close to lying that it makes no difference.”

Indeed!

4.3 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I could do no better than echo the words of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) about Iain Banks. He was a great writer and a great supporter of the Stop the War coalition, of which I am the current chair, and he gave enormous political, practical and financial support to the anti-war movement. We thank him for that, and for all the other great things he achieved during his life.

This debate falls 10 years on from that desperate, fateful time when this country went to war with Iraq. I remember the debate on that here as if it were yesterday. The Chamber was full. We were told there was an ever-present threat from weapons of mass destruction. We were told that there were nuclear weapons and yellowcake, and all the other canards were brought up throughout that debate, and at the same time there was a massive whipping operation going on all around the Chamber. I have to say that I was totally unaffected by that whipping operation—it seemed to pass me by completely—but I observed it going on in dark corners around this building.

It was a shameful day for Parliament, and it was a shameful day for the whole political system in this country. Outside in Parliament square, there were thousands of people. They thought, naively perhaps, that they would be listened to. Some 1 million and more had marched in central London—maybe 2 million were on the streets of London that day—and 600 demonstrations on every continent of the world, including Antarctica, had been held a month before, and the opinion polls all showed that there was no support for this war against Iraq. They thought that Parliament would reflect their views and their wishes.

The vote that day in which Parliament, sadly, endorsed going to war not only did enormous damage to Parliament, but did enormous damage and a disservice to a whole generation, because they had put their hopes in the political process to carry out their wishes and it did not do so. That engendered cynicism and we are still dealing today in many ways with the legacy of the war in this country. Let me deal first with the role of Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) was correct. Up until the Iraq war, taking this country to war at any time was completely a matter of the royal prerogative exercised by the Prime Minister. That royal prerogative remains in operation. A number of us, particularly my hon. Friend, argued strongly that we should have a vote in Parliament on the war—previously, only procedural votes had been possible. Eventually the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, agreed that there could be vote, although I think it was a matter of self-interest on his part: he wanted to share the responsibility and the burden. We were pleased to have the opportunity to vote against the war, and I suspect he was pleased to have the opportunity to get a lot of MPs through the Lobby in support of his view.

Some people think that whipping, lobbying and pressure are the only things that matter in politics, but, quite honestly, we are sent here as representatives of our constituencies; we all have a conscience that we have to live with and decisions that we have to take. At the end of the day, an MP cannot blame anyone else; it is his or her own decision and vote, and the record will stand. I think our constituents understand that, but the very least we can do in recognition of what happened then is, first, in the immediate future, ensure that we have a vote before any arms are sent to Syria; and secondly, ensure that we have a proper war powers Act, so that Parliament must vote before British troops are deployed.

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

Jeremy Corbyn: I will give way to my friend, if I may call her that, the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas). I congratulate her on her absolutely excellent speech and on securing the debate. As a fellow officer of the Stop the War coalition, I can hardly not give way to her.

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Gentleman is making a wonderful speech, as we knew he would. He spoke just now about the importance of having a vote before war. Does he agree with me that it should be a free vote—that we need to be voting from our conscience, not from the Whips' list?

Jeremy Corbyn: Absolutely. On something so fundamental as the deployment of armed forces, a free vote is the right thing to do. Many have said it is easy to

send other people's sons and daughters off to die and then hide behind a veneer of party loyalty, but the issue is much bigger than that.

Mr Llwyd: May I suggest a further prerequisite, which is that some machinery should be adopted whereby we are all made privy to a certain amount of the delicate intelligence information that has led the Government to their conclusion? Otherwise, we could be duped into acting the same way again.

Jeremy Corbyn: The right hon. Gentleman is correct. The legal advice given to the Cabinet is still the subject of debate. The Chilcot report is yet to come out—I understand it is heading for 1 million words, leaving “War and Peace” well behind, and goodness knows how many volumes there will be when it is finally produced. The information we are given is very important if we are to make an informed decision. It is, however, simply not credible to say that we were unaware of the dubiety of the information we were given. I came here at 8 o'clock on the day the dodgy dossier was published to pick up a copy and read it, and by a quarter past 8, I had realised it was a load of utter bunkum and that we had been dragged back to the House on false pretences. The same is true of Colin Powell's address to the UN that September, when he claimed that chemical weapons were hidden in ice cream vans all over Iraq.

I received hundreds of messages, e-mails and so on from people who were involved in the anti-war movement, and I spoke at 200 anti-war meetings in this country and others before the decision was taken. Just think of the commitment of those people who went on the march in February 2003. Many of them were not of the left and many were not necessarily pacifists—anti-war as such—but they were convinced that we were being led by the nose into disaster. Frankly, the whole political establishment should have woken up and understood that, because the consequences were so huge for us and for the rest of the world.

I say all this not because I am any apologist for Saddam Hussein—I am not—and not because I do not recognise the abominable human rights abuses he committed; I do. But I remember that, in the 1980s, raising questions about arms sales to Iraq, human rights abuses in Iraq and the British relationship and trade with Iraq was a very unpopular thing to do in this place. There were not many people supporting that. Even after Malabar—as I said earlier—in 1988, we still participated in the Baghdad arms fair only a year later to continue that relationship. Of course the west did support Iraq against Iran. The consequences of all this are absolutely huge.

I just want to raise a couple of more general points as a lesson from this. What happened in 2001 was wrong, obviously; what happened at the twin towers and the killings was a disaster. Then we merrily invaded Afghanistan, the point at which the Stop the War coalition was founded. We proceeded to occupy the country very quickly and then found that it was not as simple as that. Here we are 12 years later; still in Afghanistan, still not controlling the country and still losing lives there. We denied international law by allowing the Americans to call people enemy combatants, not prisoners of war. Guantanamo Bay was set up. Extraordinary rendition took place. The Homeland Security Act was passed in the USA and a whole raft of anti-terror legislation was

[Jeremy Corbyn]

passed in this country. Civil rights of people all over the world were damaged by the decision to invade Afghanistan, and that was compounded later by the decision to invade Iraq.

Then we invaded Iraq, after the infamous George Bush speech in 2002 in which he talked about the axis of evil without any evidence whatever and tried to claim that Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein were as one. They did have one thing in common, actually. There is some evidence that, at various points in their lives, each tried to kill the other. That was roughly the only thing they had in common.

The behaviour of the occupying forces in Iraq has been far from perfect. We have seen Abu Ghraib, Falluja, the bombing campaigns, the torture of individuals and the driving of hundreds of thousands of people into exile both as internal and as external refugees from Iraq. I have very sad memories of visiting a refugee camp on the borders of Iraq and Syria, where there were a few hundred poor benighted Palestinian people whose families had been driven out of Haifa in 1948. They had been though countries all through the Gulf states, ended up in Iraq and were driven out of Iraq into Syria. Goodness knows where those families are now. They have joined the steady stream of refugees across the region. We have to think for a moment about the Palestinians and so many others.

I conclude with this thought. We have to learn a lesson, and it is a harsh one. We are not a global power. We cannot afford to be a global power, and why would we want to be one? Have we been enhanced as a country by our activities since 2001 in Afghanistan or Iraq, or have we been diminished? Do we have a better image or a much worse image around the world? It is time for us to take stock. Do we have to be a nation with a predilection to go to war and to have a global reach for our armed forces? Or do we wish to become a force in the world that supports international law, human rights and recognises the limits of the environmental destruction of our planet? Do we need Governments or Prime Ministers who say, to use the words of Tony Blair, that this is a chance to remake the middle east? The best way of remaking the middle east is to recognise the injustices done by colonialism, occupation, wars and the treatment of people who are trying to live their own lives, and to try to promote peace. The legacy of this war is a disastrous one. The enmity between the west and the Muslim communities, the enmity that is played out on the streets of this country, is a result of that. It is time for us to learn some very harsh lessons and, above all, to put them into practice.

4.14 pm

Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak in the debate and to congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on the efforts that I know she put in to secure it. I know that a great deal of work was done over some time to get to the point where today was chosen as the day of the debate.

I shall use most of the time available to me to focus on a legacy issue in relation to Iraq. That may have come to the attention of some Members when they have seen television footage of families who have experienced

the effects of depleted uranium and other weaponry used in Iraq. It seems to have resulted in very unusual levels of birth defects and other conditions, especially among children who were conceived during the Iraq war. I intend to focus on those issues mainly because they are not often talked about and because those are issues on which the Government could be taking more action so that we can understand what happened and learn the lessons from that for the future.

The use of depleted uranium in weapons has been controversial from its development in the 1960s to the present. Much of the work in this area has been done on the effects on veterans, rather than on civilian populations. The Ministry of Defence discovered in the early research and development programme that depleted uranium released a chemical that was toxic and radioactive and that contaminated areas that it had been fired into. The scientific work that has been done, as I said, related mainly to veterans, but in recent years more evidence has been collected from civilian populations, including in Iraq.

The work relating to veterans shows clearly that in certain circumstances depleted uranium has the potential to cause cancer and damage to DNA. It can lead to birth defects and contaminate soil and ground water. Depleted uranium was used in the first conflict in Iraq in 1991 and also in the more recent conflict in very significant quantities. It is thought that 290,000 kg of depleted uranium was fired during the Gulf war in 1991, and that in the first six months of the Iraq invasion 140 kg of depleted uranium was used. Studies of the effects on civilian populations which have been made public so far show a staggering rise in birth defects among Iraqi children conceived in the aftermath of the war, with high rates of miscarriage, toxic levels of lead and mercury contamination and spiralling numbers of birth defects ranging from congenital heart defects to brain dysfunctions and malformed limbs. Compelling evidence seems to link these birth defects and miscarriages to military assaults.

We cannot sure whether these are due to depleted uranium or the effects of other ammunition used in the area, but it is clear that there are particularly high levels of birth defects, for example, in Falluja, where the United States has admitted using white phosphorous shells, although it has not admitted using depleted uranium. Findings published in the *Bulletin of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology* are the latest in a series of studies suggesting a link between bombardment and a rise in birth defects. Its findings in 2010 prompted the World Health Organisation to launch an inquiry into the prevalence of birth defects in the area affected. Although that report was expected to be published last year, it still has not appeared. Some claim that it is being buried and 58 scientists have written to the Iraqi Government and the World Health Organisation calling for its immediate publication. It is right that we, as elected politicians, ask the British Government to use their influence and power to do everything they can to ensure that as much information about these issues is brought into the public domain.

As a result of previous work, the Work Health Organisation is looking at nine high-risk areas in Iraq, including Falluja and Basra. We need to say clearly that we want that information in the public domain. We must do more to work out exactly the impact that some of the weaponry used in modern warfare has on civilian

populations. Perhaps in previous centuries the effects of war were felt predominantly by military people and those who went to war, but one of the clear effects of modern warfare is that many of the types of weaponry used have long-term implications for civilian populations.

Of the studies that have been made available in the public domain, one shows that more than half of the babies born in Falluja between 2007 and 2010 were born with a birth defect. Before the siege the figure was more like one in 10, and prior to the turn of the millennium fewer than 2% of babies were born with a birth defect. According to that study, in the two years after 2004 more than 45% of all pregnancies surveyed ended in miscarriage, whereas the figures before the bombing were below 10%. Between 2007 and 2010, one in six of all pregnancies ended in miscarriage. The research that is in the public domain is clearly incredibly concerning.

Another piece of research looked at the health histories of 56 families in Falluja and examined births in Basra in southern Iraq, which was attacked by British forces in 2003. It found that more than 20 babies in 1,000 were born with birth defects at the maternity hospital in 2003, which is 17 times higher than the rate recorded a decade previously. In the past seven years, the number of malformed babies born has increased by more than 60%, to 37 in every 1,000.

We have spoken a great deal today about the politics that led up to the decision to take forces into Iraq in 2003, and that is absolutely proper, but the reality is that families in Iraq are now dealing with the aftermath of decisions that might have been taken by the British Government and the action of British and other troops. I think that it is beholden on Parliament to insist that the Government do everything they can to ensure that this is researched more thoroughly. We must try to find the facts and see whether there is evidence linking the use of particular types of weaponry and the effects on civilian populations, and we must ensure that any lessons are learned for whatever future actions we might be involved in.

4.23 pm

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): It is an honour to follow such a passionate and well-informed speech from the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Katy Clark). I think that we are all indebted to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for securing the debate, and I apologise to her for not arriving in time to hear her speech—I was opening a job show in my constituency first thing this morning—which by all accounts was a powerful introduction to the debate.

Although I was not a Member of Parliament at the time, I am very proud that the Liberal Democrats played such a strong role in opposing the war. I am particularly proud of the role played by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Mr Kennedy), who was leader of the Liberal Democrats at the time, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell). The hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) talked about the breadth of the coalition that opposed the war and said that it was not just made up of predictable left wingers. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Fife is far from being a raging pacifist leftie. He is a thoughtful and

distinguished advocate and is now, as he was then, a distinguished spokesman on international affairs. That voices such as his were ignored at the time is a measure of just how dogmatic certain people in the Labour Government were.

I have found this debate very humbling, not only because of the first-hand accounts of intelligence, diplomacy and military experience that we have heard from people who were connected to the war in different respects, but because of the emotion shown by those who were, in effect, forced to vote against their own colleagues in their own party. The hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) made a very powerful speech about that. We have heard about the bitter regret felt by those who feel that they were misled into voting for the wrong thing. We should also remember the members of the Government who honourably resigned over this issue—Robin Cook, John Denham and others who gave up their ministerial careers. The emotions are clearly almost as strong now as they were then.

We have heard powerful descriptions of what felt like the inevitable momentum towards war. That was certainly felt outside Parliament as well. Those of us who were watching from the outside might not have picked up on all the details of the parliamentary debates, but every day we saw the pictures of the troops gathering in Saudi Arabia and had the sense that it was something that simply could not be stopped, no matter how many people marched, no matter what arguments were deployed and no matter what intelligence was presented to counter what was in the dodgy dossier.

If the right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Mr Meacher) is right, that momentum had started long before. He mentioned the Crawford summit in April 2002, when Tony Blair stood shoulder to shoulder with George Bush. That was reinforced at subsequent summits between the two of them. Although I have a lot of respect for the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), it is not really credible to say that the leaders did not know the detail or had not had time to read it. I am sure that the detail of the intelligence on the military situation and the situation inside Iraq was all gone into in enormous detail, as was the legal advice. As everybody has said, the Chilcot report is long overdue, and we need to start to hear about the detail of the decision-making process. Some of the documents that are still not public need to be made public. It looks from the outside as though there was a deliberate collaboration in creating that momentum towards war in order to make it inevitable.

We have to allow that some aspects of that political mission had, in a sense, some honour to them. Saddam's was a despicable regime. Thousands died in the chemical attacks in Halabja in 1988. There was also the massacre and destruction of the entire lifestyle of the Marsh Arabs in 1991 following the first Gulf war. There might have been a psychological element for George Bush in the sense that, according to the conservative psychology, his father had left the job half done in allowing the massacre of the Marsh Arabs to take place, because they had risen up in the expectation that they would be supported by the allied forces, but they were not.

We should remember that since 1991 there had been a safe haven in Iraq for the Kurds, reinforced from 1992 by the no-fly zone described on the basis of first-hand experience by the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney). Perhaps George Bush felt that he

[*Martin Horwood*]

did not want to repeat his father's error of betraying people in Iraq who were opposed to the regime. Perhaps the psychology of 9/11 also made people feel the need to do something to give some substance to the supposed war on terror, which, to me, has always had a slightly Orwellian ring to it.

Hywel Williams: The hon. Gentleman will perhaps recall the light-hearted quip at the time that for the US and UK to invade Iraq would be as though after Pearl Harbour the United States had invaded Mexico—it would have been as peculiar and as odd as that.

Martin Horwood: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point.

There was the emotional declaration of the war on terror but then a feeling that it did not have much substance. I think that those in the conservative right in the United States were searching for something to give it more edge and substance, and perhaps that was part of the psychology that led them to towards war. The psychology of the British Prime Minister involved is something that I will not go near.

I am not one of those who now hope that the decision will be proved wrong by the failure of Iraqi democracy. I hope that Iraqi democracy will succeed and that a stable, federal state will emerge from the continuing conflict. I do not want to paint everything that is happening in Iraq as being as bad as or worse than it was under Saddam. Nevertheless, I think that those hon. Members who voted against the war made the right decision and I am very proud that Liberal Democrats did so. There are three central reasons why I think they were right to oppose the war.

First, there really was no case: there were no weapons of mass destruction. A few years later, after I had become an MP, I remember Hans Blix telling a meeting in Parliament that he had wanted and had pleaded for more time and that, had they been given it, the weapons inspectors could have established the facts of the case, but of course they were evacuated to make way for the invasion. It was not Iraq that stopped the weapons inspections; it was the United States and the UK. As the right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton has said, the intelligence on which that action was based was old and out of date.

There was no immediate humanitarian crisis. In Syria and Libya, and even in Bosnia, people were dying or being threatened with blood baths, but that was not the case in Iraq. There was no immediate humanitarian justification for intervention. If there was a secondary reason—this was sometimes mentioned—it was the idea that Saddam might be in cahoots with al-Qaeda, but that also turned out to be completely imaginary. In fact, the precise opposite, if anything, was true. Subsequently, of course, we have seen the emergence of al-Qaeda in Iraq as a substantial force of Sunni jihadists, and it is now spilling over into Syria, where a direct offshoot of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Jabhat al-Nusra, is making that conflict worse. The repercussions of the intervention are extraordinary, but there was no fundamental case for it, as we were told there was.

Secondly, our party's view is that the war was illegal. We have still not seen the then Attorney-General's advice to the Government. UN resolution 1441 is cited,

but as other Members have said, it did not provide a legal justification for invasion. Actually, its central concern was with the weapons inspection regime, which, as I have said, was brought to an end by the invasion. The weapons inspectors were evacuated because of the invasion. They were not prevented from continuing their work by Iraq.

Hon. Members' speeches and the recent excellent BBC documentary have highlighted how the real political objective was clearly regime change and that other arguments and cases were deployed tactically to try to support it. Perhaps regime change was a laudable objective—Saddam was a terrible dictator—but the only complication is that regime change is illegal under international law; we therefore participated in an illegal invasion.

The third crucial reason why it was wrong to go to war was the political and diplomatic effort behind it. It was not a united international effort. In the end, the troops were from, I think, the United States, Britain, Australia and Poland. Others might want to correct me. Perhaps Spain was involved as well. NATO was disunited, the French were in opposition and the region was disunited. The United Nations was certainly disunited and the Secretary-General warned that the invasion would be in contravention of the UN charter if it went ahead. This was cowboy diplomacy. It was almost the kind of unilateral interventionism of which the world needs to be very fearful. The decision to invade posed a danger not just to the people of Iraq—although it certainly did—but to the whole world, because it could be used as justification for anybody's decision to intervene without international sanction, regional support or a proper legal case.

I think that the coalition Government have learned those lessons. The recent intervention in Libya stands in stark contrast to the invasion of Iraq. There were no allied boots on the ground. It was a limited intervention, even though militarily it was a simpler prospect than Iraq. There was clear sanction from a UN resolution and an immediate humanitarian case. There was also united regional support in the Arab world. We can say collectively—those who are in the Government in particular—that we have learned the lessons of what went on in Iraq.

We now have the strange situation in which we are still waiting for the final chapter: the Chilcot report. We have been waiting for four years. That is almost as long as Britain's military intervention in Iraq. If it carries on for much longer, it will outlast the war itself. That report will raise deep and serious questions that we still want answers to. For the former Prime Minister, it will raise some threatening legal issues and some deep questions about his role in taking us to war. The irony of ironies is that in the meantime, he has been made a peace envoy to the middle east, which I find extraordinary. All credit to him for the role that he has played subsequently in trying to bring peace to the region. However, we still need to ask how and why he took us to war. We need the Chilcot report and we need it soon.

4.26 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I join other Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on securing this debate. I know that considerable effort went into that, and it is good that

many hon. Members have been able to share their various insights. Some Members have recalled the events in Parliament during the build-up to the vote. Others have shared their experiences of the situation in Iraq before the invasion, of delivering the invasion or of coping with the consequences of the invasion and making the best of the difficult situation that had been created for all.

Like other hon. Members, I acknowledge at the outset that we have heard some telling contributions. As well as the opening speech by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion, which I heard only part of because of other commitments, there was a particularly telling contribution from the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas). His measured and well-meant speech got to the heart of the issue in a way that should make all of us feel uncomfortable, although in a positive way. All of us in Parliament, before we just bunch with our herd, put on our blinkers and vote the way we are asked, should think deeply about the issues. We need to inform ourselves and must not just rely on Whips' whispers. Whatever we are paid, we are paid well enough to inform ourselves and we get a further allowance to help others inform us as well.

I was struck, as were other Members, by the speech by the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart). I cannot match the insights of the hon. Members for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) and for South Thanet (Laura Sandys), who spoke of their personal experiences in situ and showed an understanding of many of the complications in Iraq.

Along with other politicians from Northern Ireland, I have taken part in exchange visits with Iraqi politicians and those who are trying to build civil society in Iraq. We know that the insights that we get into their situation and the aftermath of the invasion are limited. However, while I do not disagree with anything that other hon. Members have said about the poor state of Iraq, its levels of corruption and the deep economic mire that it is in, I would not want our words about those issues or the political questions that we exchange to detract from the good work that many people are undertaking in Iraq, not least those in civil society and those who are trying to build honour and purpose in what passes for the democratic process in that country. We must reinforce those who are trying to do good and take things forward in that very difficult situation. No matter how we try to write off this war and what followed it as a foreign policy and military misadventure on the part of the Government, we should not do anything to write off the democratic purpose and progressive effort that elements in Iraq are trying to undertake.

I was not a Member of the House in the period building up to the war, but I am glad to say that SDLP Members opposed the war, along with the other nationalist parties, the Liberal Democrats, a significant number of Labour Members, and some considerate Conservative Members. At the time, I was leader of my party and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, although of course we were all suspended in October 2002. During that period, however, I had a number of exchanges and meetings with Tony Blair at which—believe it or not—we talked about more than just Northern Ireland.

I recall that in November 2002, Tony Blair convened a meeting in Downing street with leaders of the European socialist and Labour parties. We were supposed to be

discussing common challenges across Europe, but the working lunch that Tony Blair addressed was very much focused on Iraq. In particular, he was trying to allay the concerns that he knew were felt by members of his sister parties across the EU. I remember being struck by the argument he was making for what he was trying to do. He used language saying that he was trying to be the mooring rope that would keep the American impulse closer to where Europe would want. He said he was trying to be a bridge between America and Europe, and that was why he was getting so close to George Bush and maintaining a strong relationship with the American Administration.

He said he believed that if the Americans were committed to the war anyway there needed to be a restraint on any intervention, and he believed that his strong alliance could provide such a constraint. He argued that action could contribute to reigniting the peace process in the middle east. He felt that if America ended up going in on its own, it would be hopeless to think that anything positive could be done in the middle east, whereas if America went in with European support, the requirement that would come with that support would involve a new beginning to the peace process in the middle east.

Some around the table seemed impressed and mesmerised by that, but I was not. I made it clear—with no discourtesy to our lunch host—that I was not there to admire Tony the bridge, and neither did I believe that what he saw as a mooring rope was how the Americans saw things. From my visits to Washington it was clear that they saw him not as a mooring rope, but as a tow rope by which they hoped to take as much of Europe as they could, and they did not care if Europe was ruptured in the process. In my broad political movement of European sister parties I could see exactly where the strains were showing.

I should acknowledge that whatever criticisms anybody may have, Tony Blair did make a significant contribution to our process, although not as much of one as some of his writings and memoirs suggest, as they seem to write out the fact that everybody else made contributions as well. I did not always agree with his judgment and I certainly never always trusted his word, but I never doubted his motives in relation to our process. I am, however, as confounded as anybody else as to how he got himself into such a position and the mental convolutions of his rationale on Iraq.

I had the opportunity to talk to both Tony Blair and George Bush in Hillsborough in the weeks after the invasion of Iraq. I was the first party leader to protest at the fact that George Bush's visit to Hillsborough conflated meetings on the Irish peace process with meetings on the prosecution of the war in Iraq. Despite attempts by the Northern Ireland Office and the British Government to limit or put conditions on people's presence in Hillsborough, I was allowed to present a petition of two wallpaper scrolls, which was organised by Amnesty International in the Foyle constituency and the north-west region more widely. The petition was not simply a protest against the war; as we would expect from a thoughtful organisation such as Amnesty International, the petition focused on the responsibilities that the invading powers had to the civilian population in Iraq—their duties were not just observing human rights and security, but ensuring infrastructure, utilities and the proper operation of commercial or other transactions.

[Mark Durkan]

Protocol did not allow me to hand the petition to the President of the United States, as he was a visiting Head of State. Instead, the two scrolls rested on a chair. I was able to tell the President they were there for him. Not entirely condescendingly, he told me, "You're a good man, Mark, but you're wrong and we are right and we are proving it." Richard Haass, who worked at the State Department and was a special envoy to Northern Ireland, said, "You will see. We will have this finished in weeks." I asked, "Will we have proof of the weapons?" He said, "Yes, we will have that in weeks, too."

Looking on was a frowning Tony Blair, who looked a bit peeved and a bit jealous. He was obviously annoyed that I had taken that opportunity. I said to him, "Don't worry, Tony, we haven't forgotten about you," and gave him two large bags of postcards containing similar protests and making similar points. Richard Haass probably genuinely believed what he told me. I therefore do not know whether I can join in the sweeping judgments against everybody involved and all parties to the enterprise, which led to such death.

A number of hon. Members have mentioned the parliamentary aspect. We have heard hon. Members' recollections, including those of the right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Mr Meacher), of the considerations and conditioning going into the vote. In my time in Parliament, that same occasion was recalled by Frank Cook, then the hon. Member for Stockton North, when the House voted on 42-day detention. He compared the whipping and briefing that day—he was told, "If you don't vote for this, the Prime Minister will be forced to resign and it will be a humiliation. Out of loyalty to the Prime Minister, you have to vote for this, otherwise there will be an election"—with the arguments to which he was subjected on the day of the Iraq vote. He said that succumbing to those arguments on the day of the Iraq vote was the biggest regret of his life, and that he would never make that mistake again for any Prime Minister or party.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion made a key point. We want to ensure that there will be votes in future, but we must ensure that they are honest and honourable. Free votes ensure that people cannot turn round and say, "I voted how I did because it was a vote of confidence. I was opposed to what I voted for, but I voted on a different issue. The issue was confidence and whether we stayed in government or had an election." We need to ensure not only that there are votes, but that the terms on which votes are taken are the right ones. That is why, when we debated the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act 2011, I opposed any amendment that would have given the Speaker the power to decide what issues were issues of confidence. As issues of confidence can trigger an election and abort a fixed-term Parliament, they would have been abused to confuse what Members were actually voting on. Members would have been told to vote not on the issue, but on whether they wanted an election next week, or their leader out.

On the Chilcot inquiry, I met John Chilcot in the context of the Northern Ireland peace process. Again, I would give a mixed account of his contribution. I worked and talked with him very early on in the Hume-Adams process, and he was encouraging of new engagement and new lines of dialogue opening up between the

British Government and all interests in Northern Ireland. After the Castlereagh break-in, he was appointed by the Government to undertake an independent inquiry into it. As I pointed out in a previous debate in the House, his report did not deal with findings on what had happened, how it had happened and who had been involved. Instead, it came up with an ulterior agenda of trying to ensure that MI5 and the security services would in no way find themselves accountable to, or constrained by, the Northern Ireland policing measures introduced under the Patten report. The intention was to try to reroute intelligence policing away from the Patten model—under the chief constable—to one entirely under MI5, beyond any review by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Policing Board or anybody else.

I made the point, when we discussed the establishment of the Chilcot report, that I knew John Chilcot and that he was someone in whom I could recognise skills and articulacy, but he was not someone whose phone number I would expect to find in Yellow Pages under either I for independence or C for challenging. I hope that my jaundiced judgment is proved wrong when we finally see the Chilcot inquiry report. At times during the inquiry, I was given hope that I would be proved wrong. However, we have been waiting a long time. I was particularly struck by the contribution from the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd), who was able to tell us of colourful issues regarding the background, character and composition of the inquiry team. Parliament must be able fully to digest the report, not just respond immediately to a statement on the day. It must be debated subsequently.

In all future debates, as in today's debate, we need to remember that the issue is not just about what happened here on a parliamentary or political level, and not just about the wrongs of dodgy dossiers and undue whipping. The real issue is the story of what happened to the people in Iraq: the people who were sent out in the name of this Parliament and sacrificed their lives and limbs. They and their loved ones are still wondering what it was all about, and I hope we are not adding to their sorrow, misery or sense of futility by speaking the truth today. The contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Katy Clark) was important, because it focused on some of the legacy issues for which we in this House bear a collective responsibility. We still have a responsibility towards the people of Iraq.

4.53 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I thank all right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in this important and useful debate. The honesty and frankness with which Members have taken part does credit to this place: it has shown the House at its best. I note with interest that no one spoke in defence of the UK's support for the war. Over and over again, hon. Members emphasised the heavy price paid for the invasion, not only by people in this country, but crucially by people in Iraq, where sectarian violence continues to grow.

The debate focused on looking forward as well as back, and I want quickly to underline a few of today's conclusions. Hon. Members expressed a lot of support for having free votes—and, crucially, votes based on information—when the House debates going to war. Many hon. Members spoke about the importance of basing our decisions on information. We also heard

about the importance of reforming the relationship between the Foreign Office, the military and Parliament to ensure that it works better; about the need for structural changes to the Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Intelligence and Security Committees; and about the significance of Iran and Syria.

Many Members spoke about how the war undermined Parliament's reputation. I hope that this debate has been a step towards reinvigorating confidence in Parliament. I pay particular tribute to the contribution from the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas), whose comments, as everyone said, were from the heart and delivered with a frankness that made us all listen. I would like to pay tribute to other colleagues, too. The anger with which the right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Mr Meacher) spoke about the level of deception rang out across the House and, I hope, much wider. The hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart) spoke powerfully and with an expertise that not many of us in this place have about the importance of acknowledging when we get things wrong and of being able to say that we are failing. He warned of the dangers of thinking that we can only ever succeed.

I thank the Minister for loyally sitting through just about the whole debate, although I cannot thank him for the substance of his remarks, given that he was constrained, as he explained, by the convention preventing him from speaking before Chilcot reports. Waiting for Chilcot is like waiting for Godot. It would be helpful to have that report as soon as possible. The debate lacked a contribution from a Minister made with the same degree—or any degree, frankly—of honesty and frankness about what went wrong as other speeches. *[Interruption.]* I wanted to give credit to all my wonderful colleagues, but I am being told that my time is up. Is that correct, Mr Deputy Speaker?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): You have had your two minutes, but I am allowing you to continue. I am sure you are coming to an end.

Caroline Lucas: The right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd) made an important point about the conflict of interest of those on the Chilcot inquiry and about the importance of the Attorney-General's advice being put in the public domain. The hon. Member for South Thanet (Laura Sandys) talked about the problem of a lack of planning post-Saddam. The hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) catalogued many of the deceptions and reminded us that the rules of the House prohibit us from reading out names of the dead.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) shared with us his interesting perspective as a serving officer and what it felt like to be in that position. He stressed that threat is a combination of intent and capacity, which needs to be borne in mind when trying to judge what constitutes a threat. I welcomed the contribution from the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), because he put it clearly on the record that there was very heavy whipping during the vote and that that day, 18 March, was a "horrible day". The right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) implied that the whipping was all very nice, light and happy, but that was not the case.

The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Katy Clark) raised the crucial issue of depleted uranium, while the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) rightly reminded us that Hans Blix pleaded for more time. He did not say it was a lost cause and that war was the only option—on the contrary. Finally, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) gave us some fascinating insights into the mind of the Prime Minister. Quite how he thought the invasion would help the middle east peace process is a question that will keep me thinking for the rest of the day and beyond.

I apologise to those I have not mentioned in my brief winding-up speech, which has already stretched your kind patience, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of the tenth anniversary of the Iraq War.

PETITIONS

Walsall Gala Baths

4.59 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I rise to present a petition on behalf of the users of Walsall Gala baths. A petition in similar terms has been signed by 1,938 people.

The petition states:

The Petition of the users of Walsall Gala Baths,

Declares that the petitioners do not wish to see the closure of the Walsall Gala Baths as they believe that it is important to have swimming facilities in the town centre. Especially and in particular, we do not wish to lose the only brine pool that is centrally located, well used and much appreciated for its medical benefits to many of its users.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to take all possible steps to encourage Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council to consider the objections of the local residents.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

[P001183]

Global Food System

5 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I rise to present a petition that has been collected by Sacred Heart Catholic voluntary academy, in Mere close in Leicester. A similar petition, with 1,000 signatures, was presented to Downing street this morning. The petition has been organised by Catherine McMillan and Catherine Hayles and the year 6 students, who seized on the idea and pushed it through. I also want to mention the headmaster, Gerry Hirst, and the chairman of governors, Father Lally.

The petition declares:

The Petition of a Citizen of the UK,

Declares that the Petitioner believes that the food system is failing the poorest people and that the government should champion aid for small-scale farmers, especially women, to help them access markets and increase their income, bargaining power and voice in decisions; further that the government should champion checks on the power of global food companies, requiring them to report on the lobbying they do and their impacts on human rights.

The Petitioner therefore requests that the House of Commons does all it can to encourage the Government to take such action.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

[P001184]

Genetic Medicine

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Karen Bradley.*)

5.2 pm

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for your patience—and that of the House—in waiting for me to raise this important subject at this time of the week. I also thank the Minister for her presence. I pay tribute to her long interest in this subject, her work at the Department of Health on cancer, screening and public health—she is a tolerant and fair-minded advocate of public health in the Members' Tea Room—and her interest in the difficulties of the early onset of dementia. I was struck the other day by her moment at the Dispatch Box, when she was greeted with extraordinary affection in the House, which was a sign of the great respect and affection in which she is held and the respect for the work she does.

My interest in this debate comes from a family interest in cancer—an interest that I know is shared by many in the House and across the country. Few families have been untouched by the disease, which is increasingly understood to be a genetic disease. I lost my father and my mother-in-law to cancer, and, as the parent of two children, take a close interest in something that I might have inadvertently passed on to them. I also have an interest because I come to this House after a 15-year career in biomedical research and speak in my role as Government adviser on life sciences, taking a deep interest in how current breakthroughs are changing the assumptions on which we base public policy.

For the purposes of giving some background and declaring an interest, I want to explain what I did in those 15 years. I spent four years running a predictive toxicology business, which looked at drug compounds and analysed their likely toxicology and efficacy in different patient groups. I also spent six years in translational medicine, working with academic health science centres up and down England and Scotland, helping to set up the Scottish translational medicine research institute and working at University college London on the cardiovascular institute and at King's Health Partners on dementia. I was delighted two years ago to be given the chance to support the Government as life sciences adviser. I stress that I have no ongoing commercial interest in the sector. For the purpose of clarity, I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. It details historical investments, including a very small shareholding in GlaxoSmithKline, which has been passed down through our family since my grandfather met the founder and decided that the then baby milk business might have a good future.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Foresight!

George Freeman: Indeed. The register also shows a very small shareholding in a women's cancer diagnostics joint venture business that I helped to set up with Cancer Research UK and UCL Partners.

This is a topical debate. We have seen in the newspapers recently the news of Angelina Jolie's decision to have a double mastectomy, having received a diagnosis of a high chance of developing breast cancer based on the

most well-known and acknowledged genetic test, the BRCA mutation. The widespread coverage in the press of her decision has been helpful in raising public awareness, as have the powerful and moving descriptions of the thinking behind her decision and of her husband's support for her.

Only yesterday in *The Times* we saw the news of the NHS cancer registration service launching a project to bring together all the available data on the 350,000 types of cancer across the 50-million-patient database in Britain. Over the past month, we have also seen the launch of Cancer Research UK's contribution to the global alliance on sharing genomic and clinical data. Topically, there is also an ongoing battle in the American Supreme Court involving Myriad Genetics and the ownership of the BRCA gene.

I believe that the revolutions in translational medicine, in experimental medicine and in the personalisation of medicine are a huge force for good. They raise a number of important issues, some of which we might touch on in the debate. By way of illustration, I want to share with the House a couple of stories illustrating how I came to see that force for good in practice.

The first involves a project at King's Health Partners in south London, led by Professor Simon Lovestone, who is a pioneer in clinical research into psychiatric disorders, particularly dementia. The project is funded by the National Institute for Health Research, and I congratulate the previous Government on putting in place that infrastructure, which we have developed and continued. Professor Lovestone and his team have developed a case register information system, which is a portal for data for the whole of the South London and Maudsley NHS mental health trust, involving 250,000 patients. It brings together all the information, anonymised and in large datasets, on medical records and clinical histories and on the often complex drug histories involved in treating mental health, along with MRI brain scans, to create a powerful database for the purpose of shedding light on the mechanisms of action and the clinical drivers of early-onset and late-onset examples of the disease.

The portal is now being used by researchers on campus for purely academic work, alongside researchers from industry who, quite fairly, pay substantial amounts of money to King's Health Partners in order to use the facility. They often find themselves working alongside leading-edge researchers. As a result, King's Health Partners has signed up to a number of collaborations with industry to work on some very expensive drug programmes. That is an example of how data can accelerate academic research and bring academic and industry researchers together in pursuit of a common cause.

The other company that I want to mention is the joint venture set up by UCL Partners called Abcodia. It is based around a database of 250,000 women who are at risk of gynaecological cancer. It was funded by Cancer Research UK and the Medical Research Council over 20 years, but at the end of the academic study, the database was sitting gathering dust. It is now being used as a powerful database to provide all sorts of screening and diagnostic molecular biomarker services, and is helping to identify the biomarkers that predict and are implicated in the onset of gynaecological cancer. It is also a powerful database for all the diseases of ageing in women, many of which are the same in men. It is a

powerful tool for understanding the molecular biomarkers and the drivers for the early onset of a whole range of late-life diseases.

These databases are incredibly powerful, and across the NHS and across our university academic health science centres, they are being run under very high standards of ethical and regulatory regimes and with very strong patient consent. One lesson is that where clinician scientists work with patients to do basic and clinical research, patients and the research charities that work with them are hugely supportive of this revolution in genetics and computing.

More than 10 years ago we sequenced the human genome. It was a massive global collective effort, which took several decades and several hundred million pounds to achieve. It now costs about \$1,000 to sequence the entire genome of one of us, and it takes no less than 24 hours—and those numbers are falling fast.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend is to be congratulated on the widely respected work he is doing as a Government life sciences adviser; he really is doing a fantastic job. I congratulate him, too, on securing this debate. I think he is aware of the campaign of my constituent, Les Halpin, to accelerate the use of drugs in the NHS in carefully controlled circumstances on a trial basis for people with terminal illnesses. With the sort of conditions my hon. Friend has been talking about, if we could change the protocol in the medical profession and harness our innovative bio-sciences sector, we could become a world leader in the development of new drugs.

George Freeman: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and I pay tribute to his advocacy, on behalf of his constituent Les Halpin, of the access to medicines campaign. We have plans to continue to help support it. My hon. Friend's point is important, and the point that Les Halpin has made is that people like himself with a terminal disease actively want the opportunity to take part in trials and research so that their disease and suffering will not be in vain. My hon. Friend speaks powerfully on behalf of his constituent and on behalf of those with other diseases who share that view.

The truth is that this revolution of translational personal lives medicine is all about the end of the one-size-fits-all blockbuster model of drug discovery and development. The more we know about disease, the more we discover the genetic predispositions of disease and how different patients respond in different ways both to drugs and to the onset of disease. We discover that what was yesterday one cancer is today three or four and tomorrow will be 30 or 40. This is breaking down the size of markets and requiring a whole new model of research around patients. It puts patients right at the heart of the research process. That is challenging for hospitals and for companies, but ultimately, I believe—we are seeing the evidence—it is good for patients, leading to quicker innovation and quicker access to drugs. It is also good for our life sciences sector. It is a win-win, which is why the Government were right to describe the report on the subject as “health, wealth and innovation”. The three do indeed go together.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister and the Department on the work they are doing in pursuit of the life sciences strategy, particularly

on the £100 million cancer genomics project. That provides an extraordinary opportunity for Britain to sequence the genomes of 100,000 patients and combine that information with the clinical data—one of the world's most precious resources in our NHS—creating a global hub that would put Britain right at the forefront of unlocking this field of cancer genomics.

I pay tribute, too, to the work of the research charities, which do extraordinary work driving funding and research, but also in advocating some of the changes that need to be made. In the time available, I will not be able fully to go through all the information I have received, but the Minister and I may be able to pick up some of the points afterwards.

I do want to say that Cancer Research UK has done a huge amount of work in this field, setting out a very clear analysis of what it wants to see happening—support for NHS provision of genetic tests for inherited cancer risk, improving existing molecular diagnostic services for cancer and strong support for the 100,000-patient cancer genome project.

The Prostate Cancer UK charity—you will remember, Mr Deputy Speaker, the moustache that I sported in the autumn in support of the Movember campaign—has highlighted the fact that nearly 35,000 men are diagnosed with prostate cancer every year and that 215,000 of us are living with the disease. By 2030, it will be the most common cancer in the UK. One in eight men will get prostate cancer at some point in their lives. The genetics of prostate cancer is well behind that relating to other diseases and needs to be accelerated as it is not as well understood. However, recent developments in understanding the genetics of prostate cancer have been crucial to driving up survival rates and showing the potential for future improvements in treatment.

Breast Cancer UK is investing substantial sums in the study of genetics, and the Breast Cancer Campaign has already provided £10 million. It has highlighted the role of Angelina Jolie's recent decision in drawing public attention to the importance of genetics in providing earlier diagnosis and better treatment.

The Alzheimer's Society has raised some interesting points. In many respects, Alzheimer's is the toughest of the blockbuster diseases for us to crack, and it is becoming increasingly apparent that it is one of those diseases that we will not crack through the magic discovery of some drug. What is needed to beat this disease is a completely new model: a massive collective effort by patients and researchers using data and online tools such as PsychologyOnline. The Alzheimer's Society has said that genetic testing may cause difficulties in some cases. A genetic defect cannot be repaired, effective treatment to slow the disease is not yet available, and the society fears that some premature genetic testing may trigger inappropriate responses.

Genetic Alliance UK has set out a detailed response to the debate, and has issued some important calls. In particular, it has called for the explicit inclusion of genetic testing in NHS England service specifications for all services that may utilise genetic testing. It has also called for investment in research that will help to elucidate the findings of whole genome sequencing and exome sequencing for clinical use, so that the benefits of the technology will be available to patients as soon as possible; for recognition of the importance of clinical genetic services as a resource for single-gene conditions;

[George Freeman]

and for the linking of the commissioning of companion diagnostics with the stratified medicines for which they indicate patient response.

I have referred elsewhere to an Arab spring of health care. I believe that the current revolution—the stratification, targeting and, ultimately, personalisation of therapy, which cancer therapy is leading but in which other therapeutic areas are rapidly making progress—is all about patient empowerment. That applies both to someone like Les Halpin, who was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown)—someone who has a terminal disease, and wants to play his part in ensuring that others do not suffer in the same way—and to much younger patients with an easier diagnosis who want a chance to play their part in research. The aim is to give patients better access to information about their disease, and to earlier treatment. All the research findings show that patients on research programmes respond better, have better outcomes, and appreciate and enjoy—if that is the right word—the process.

There is also an Arab spring of disease charity involvement. Our disease charities are raising ever larger sums, and playing an ever bigger role. Movember, which was started five years ago by two Kiwis who raised \$500, has now raised \$23 million, and is the world's biggest prostate cancer charity. It is using the internet and driving social media, establishing research committees, and setting standards for prostate cancer research all over the United Kingdom. The power of computing in genetics is transforming the way in which we conduct medical research.

Lord Saatchi's Medical Innovation Bill, which is currently in another place but is coming our way, raises a number of the issues to which I have referred. It makes a powerful case for adapting regulations so that clinicians are no longer bound to stick to protocols that they do not believe will be effective. We need to make it easier for clinicians to innovate and to adopt new medicines and new treatments when they think there is a reasonable chance of a better outcome, without in any way undermining their duty to put patients' interests first.

A number of other campaigns are coming our way. One of my reasons for initiating the debate was to give the Minister a chance to respond to some fairly specific policy questions. They cannot all be answered this evening, but let me present a few of them. Who owns the rights to genetic data, the rights to DNA—that issue has been highlighted by the Supreme Court's ruling against Myriad Genetics—and the rights to clinical data? Some interesting work done in the other place suggests that, ultimately, we need to establish the idea that the data are ours. Your medical records are yours, Mr Deputy Speaker, and mine are mine. If we put patients at the heart of this, we will build a framework for consent and for enlightenment, which will be all to the good.

Who has the right to be tested, and when tested, what rights do they have to counselling? I want to reiterate that this has nothing to do with the insurance scare stories we sometimes read about in the press. I call again for the insurance moratorium to be extended. This is not about in any way wanting to undermine the ability of those who have had testing to receive health insurance.

The point of this revolution is that it is about empowerment. It is about empowering patients actively to seek, and take, more responsibility for their health care earlier in their life, not penalising those who do that. There are also some important questions to be asked about how we open up the NHS to allow greater access to the types of medical breakthroughs that will fundamentally change the way we treat illness and disease in our society.

I am delighted to give the Minister some time to set out the Government's support both for this important and emerging field and, as the Prime Minister said in his speech in December 2011 launching the life sciences strategy, for the inspiring vision that every patient in the NHS will be a research patient.

5.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Anna Soubry): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) on securing this debate and pay a warm tribute to him for the great work he does as the Government's life sciences adviser. I also thank him for his kind words about me. I pay tribute, too, to my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), who yet again, quite properly, advances the campaign of his constituent, Mr Les Halpin. There is much merit in that campaign, and my hon. Friend has brought it to the Floor of the House before, and so he should. We wish Les Halpin all the very best, and I pay tribute to the great work he has done and the valid points he makes in his campaign. I should also congratulate all the charities my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk mentioned that are concerned with prostate and breast cancer and Alzheimer's disease; I pay tribute to them for all the work they do on those diseases, and all the campaigning work they do in advancing this topic.

It is a good time to hold this debate, but I fear I will not have enough time to address the subject in as much detail as I would wish. Numerous questions have been asked, and the usual rules apply: if I do not answer any of them, I will, of course, write a letter—or, rather, my officials will write a letter—to my right hon. Friend. I just called my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk my right hon. Friend, and why not?

George Freeman: That is very kind.

Anna Soubry: Yes, it is very kind of me.

It is a good time to hold this debate, as the development of genomic technologies, based on the individual's genetic data, is a rapidly developing field that will bring benefits for NHS patients and the economy. The UK is a recognised world leader in scientific research in genetics, and the services that are available to NHS patients are among the best, if not the best, in the world. The NHS, in its unique position as a single, national health care provider, is ideally placed to harness this new technology and reap the benefits.

The data that are obtained from sequencing part of, or the whole, genome are limited in their usefulness unless they are linked to more information on the individual and the results of their treatment. That is why controlled access to patient records will be vital in our efforts to improve diagnostic capability, understand better the epidemiology—I hope I do not struggle in pronouncing that word—of disease and develop better health care tools and treatments.

On generating more data, the issue of ensuring we protect data obtained from an individual's DNA has been discussed in many different forums, including the 2009 Lords inquiry into genomic medicine in health care and the consequent work by the Human Genomics Strategy Group, which was led by the Department of Health.

In December last year, the Prime Minister announced that we would be the first country in the world to put in place a programme to sequence 100,000 whole genomes. That is part of a programme that will receive an extra £100 million in funding over the next three to five years. The result will be the building of safe platforms of data that will open access.

Now that it is becoming a reality, access to genetic data will continue to be a subject of keen interest to many. It is only right that it is debated on the Floor of this House because it is so important. As with other data, DNA sequence data will be governed by strict legal controls. It will not be shared with other parties in a form that identifies the individual unless there is a legal and appropriate basis for so doing, and where such a legal basis exists, the patient has the right to be informed about how their DNA sequence data are used. The sequencing information will be strictly controlled within existing NHS arrangements and managed in a way that protects patient confidentiality.

As I said, the raw read-out data are of little value to clinicians, researchers or indeed the industry if they cannot be linked to phenotype and clinical data, so we need to ensure that information-rich data sets are developed that have been value-added through linking genetic and genomic data to disease development, treatment and results. Data need to be made available in an environment that fully meets consent and data protection requirements. To ensure that we harness that potential as part of the growth agenda, which my hon. Friend mentioned, we must develop an industry ecosystem that helps to promote innovation within a healthy, competitive economic atmosphere, which respects data protection and consent boundaries and allows open data sharing for academic research.

While the protection of personal data is important, we should not forget that sharing data has immense benefits. Those patients with cancer or rare diseases who will have their whole genome tested as part of the Prime Minister's initiative may well argue that they want more of their data to be shared, to help research into their condition and to help fellow sufferers. The recent review carried out by Dame Fiona Caldicott recognised that people's concerns about what happens to their information, who has access to it and for what purposes, is hugely important; but people also raise

concerns about why their data are not shared more frequently when common sense tells us all that it really should be. On the other hand, there was high level of anxiety among some clinicians about when it is safe to share information and what safeguards are required, including concerns about breaching data protection laws or threats to their professional status.

Clearly, a cultural change is required to rebalance sharing and protecting information in patients' and service users' interests. We believe that the Caldicott recommendations strike a good balance between the rights of the individual and the need to develop new treatments and services for the greater good. There is no contradiction between demanding rigorous safeguarding of personal information and enthusiasm about sharing information. We want to develop systems that provide open data from what we call safe platforms. There should be no surprises to patients or service users about who has access to their information, and they should be fully informed about their rights in relation to their data. That includes explaining to individuals how their information will be used, including de-identified information, and that it may be used for public health prevention and research, as well as providing assurance that any misuse will be tackled vigorously.

If we are to get better, less fragmented care and to harness the potential of genetic and genomic data for the benefit of all, any lack of trust between individuals, be they individual patients or organisations, in relation to their practice of information governance has to be overcome. The Department of Health research indicates clear public support for using health and care information in research to better inform and develop new treatments. We want to ensure that individuals retain consent to any use of their personal information. That is why we have asked the chief medical officer, Professor Dame Sally Davies, to retain oversight of the programme to sequence 100,000 whole genomes, to ensure that the patient and public interest is protected.

I pay tribute again to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk. We could have a huge debate on this subject, and I apologise again that we do not have the time to take it further today, but as I said, I shall ensure that he has a response to all his questions. He has kindly provided me with many of them already, and my officials have compiled a long, long set of answers—far too long for this short speech. He will be in full possession of our responses, and I am sure that he will share them throughout the industry. I thank him again for all his hard work.

Question put and agreed to.

5.29 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 13 June 2013

[MR ANDREW TURNER *in the Chair*]

Dog Control and Welfare

[*Relevant documents: Dog Control and Welfare, Seventh Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Session 2012-13, HC 575, and the Government response, Session 2012-13, HC 1092.*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(Nicky Morgan.)

1.30 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): A very warm good afternoon to you, Mr Turner; I welcome you to your place. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I also welcome the Minister from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr Heath), and the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ogmere (Huw Irranca-Davies). My hon. Friend is not just an hon. Friend but a reasonable man, and I am sure that he will respond warmly and enthusiastically to our debate.

The Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is pleased to have this opportunity to debate the issues addressed in our two recent documents: the report “Dog Control and Welfare” and the draft Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill, which we have tagged on to the report and which encompassed the Committee’s pre-legislative scrutiny of draft clauses that now form part of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill.

Dog control and welfare issues have been central for the Select Committee over the past 12 months. Out-of-control dogs are an increasing menace: hospital admissions due to dog attacks doubled from 3,000 in 1997 to more than 6,000 in 2010, and a conservative estimate of the cost to the national health service is approximately £3 million a year.

Not all episodes are reported. I was bitten in a rather tender place at the top of my thigh—I still bear the scar—but I chose not to report the attack, as I was out canvassing and the dog was owned by a Conservative supporter. There are many reasons why people might choose not to report attacks. Dog offences might go under-reported.

Sadly, nine people have been killed since 2007 by dog attacks in the home. Five of those victims were under the age of four. Opposition Members here have had constituency experience of such cases, and I commend how they have represented those who have suffered such losses. Offences relating to dangerous dogs increased by 39% in one year alone—from 855 in 2009 to 1,192 in 2010. As we know, some eight guide dogs a month are attacked by other dogs. We also know that there are countless attacks on other dogs and protected animals, such as cats, horses and livestock. That has huge implications for rural constituencies such as mine, particularly for livestock—there are sheep-worrying incidents at this time of year, for example.

In May 2012, we launched an inquiry into the Government’s policies for tackling irresponsible dog ownership and improving dog welfare, particularly those linked to breeding approaches. I pay tribute to the charities doing work on the issue, including Blue Cross in my constituency and Battersea Dogs Home in London.

We were fortunate to be able to launch our inquiry at Battersea Dogs Home, see at first hand the impact of policies on dog welfare and hear about the impact of poor breeding practices and irresponsible ownership on individuals and communities. A leading charity, Blue Cross, talks at great length about stray dogs and shares the Committee’s concern about the impact of this financial climate, particularly on dog warden services across the UK. A recurring theme throughout our inquiry was resourcing and ensuring that dog wardens have sufficient resources.

I believe that one event leading to the increase in the number of stray dogs on our streets was the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, which transferred the responsibility from the police to local authorities, not all of which see it as ring-fenced and obligatory. That must be tackled.

Sadly, since we launched our inquiry last summer, four more people have lost their lives in dog attacks, including, most recently, the teenager Jade Anderson, who was attacked just before Easter by four dogs in a private home. A pensioner was also attacked in Liverpool last month. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bolton West (Julie Hilling), who represents Jade’s parents, for initiating an Adjournment debate on dangerous dogs in May. I had the opportunity to meet Jade’s parents through her, for which I was grateful. I thank her and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) for all that they have done to raise the issue in the public domain.

During our inquiry, we were moved to hear from a constituent of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree—the mother of John Paul Massey, another child killed by a dog. He was just four years old when a relative’s pit bull attacked him at his grandparents’ home in 2009. His mother, Angela McGlynn, and the many others from whom we received evidence, want urgent Government action to tackle out-of-control dogs.

We reported in February this year, with a number of recommendations for Government on what improvements could be made to the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and other legislation. As I mentioned, the Committee has also had the opportunity to scrutinise draft clauses on dangerous dogs, published as the draft Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill on 9 April. Subsequently, the Government published the measures with the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill on 9 May, and we published our pre-legislative scrutiny report on 16 May.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I know that all the families affected will welcome this debate. Does the hon. Lady share my concern and regret that the Government, as she outlined, published the Bill before receiving the Select Committee’s response? Does she share my sentiment that that was highly regrettable?

Miss McIntosh: I think that the Committee would like to record our disappointment that it took so long to produce the draft legislation yet the Government were unable to wait. As Members will know, the one time when

[Miss McIntosh]

a Select Committee cannot meet is during Prorogation, between the House rising to represent the end of one parliamentary year and reconvening.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): Could the Government make good that slight on the Committee by introducing draft guidance—they have plenty of time—on the provisions introducing not dog control notices but other measures? Then we could see the draft guidance not on Report but in Committee. There will have been plenty of time, and then the Committee could give it the scrutiny that it has given to the wider range of measures needed.

Miss McIntosh: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I am sure that the Minister will have heard his remarks; I hope that he will endorse what the hon. Gentleman has said.

We had only eight sitting days to conclude our work. We are grateful to the 40 or so individuals and organisations who sent written evidence on a tight time scale, and to those who gave oral evidence. That demonstrates the importance that many attach to finding better ways to tackle dangerous dogs. In our pre-legislative scrutiny report, we made numerous recommendations for improving the draft Bill, which we now expect the Government to amend. As I said to my hon. Friend the Minister, the Committee stands prepared to table amendments to improve the Bill if we think fit.

We feel that the Bill shows that the Minister has not fully understood the level of public concern about dangerous dogs, nor have Government policies matched the level of action required. Our headline findings are: that the Government have failed to respond adequately to public concern about dog attacks and poor dog welfare; that legislation must be amended urgently to protect the public from dangerous dogs; that current laws have comprehensively failed to tackle irresponsible dog ownership; and that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs proposals published belatedly in February are too limited in their present form.

The evidence we received from DEFRA and the Home Office did little to reassure us that either Department is giving sufficient priority to dog control and welfare issues. The Home Office approach to tackling antisocial behaviour is too simplistic. Indeed, when we were in opposition, the Conservatives felt that antisocial behaviour was not the right vehicle. The legislation fails to reflect the impact that poor breeding and training by irresponsible owners can have on a dog's behaviour.

We recommended that DEFRA should introduce comprehensive legislation to consolidate the fragmented rules relating to dog control and welfare. New rules should give enforcement officers more effective powers, and our key recommendation is to include dog control notices, such as those already in use in Scotland, to prevent dog-related antisocial behaviour.

We also found that local authorities need to devote more resources to the effective management of stray dogs or else consideration should be given to returning responsibility to the police. We stand by that recommendation. The Committee agreed that all dogs should be microchipped, as much for animal welfare as for controlling dangerous dogs, and that being able to link an animal to its owner was essential to clamp down on irresponsible dog ownership.

On a personal note, may I remind the House that when we had dog licensing—I am sure the Minister will confirm this—only 50% of dog owners bought a dog licence in any one year? The House and the public expect us to bear down on the irresponsible dog owners who did not purchase a licence and who may not microchip.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Chair of the Select Committee for her excellent speech, and I apologise for interrupting it. She mentioned the issue of dog microchipping, which is extremely important to combat many of the problems that she has outlined with dangerous and stray dogs. It is the Government's current intention to introduce such a measure in 2016. The position in respect of horses is the same, so should it not be possible with modern technology to accelerate the process?

Miss McIntosh: I welcome my hon. Friend's intervention. It is important that we get the measure right. The parallel with horse passports is appropriate, but we need to see the guidance and exactly how the programme will be rolled out. Microchipping is an important tool, but it is not the full answer.

Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for giving way and compliment her on her report. She makes the point that when dogs were supposed to be licensed, only 50% of owners complied with the requirement. The same will be true of microchipping: the responsible owners will carry it out and the irresponsible ones will not. Does she agree that it should be a serious offence not to have a dog microchipped and that that offence should be subject to punishment?

Miss McIntosh: My hon. Friend reinforces the Select Committee's point that the microchip is a tool but not the whole answer. We fear that we will only find out the unmicrochipped dogs when they are left abandoned as strays on the street, when it is impossible to bear down on the irresponsible dog owner. Each and every one of us has a role to play if we see dubious breeding activities or dubious behavioural activities in dogs. I hope that goes some way to answering my hon. Friend's point.

The Committee agreed with the Government's proposed amendment of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, which makes attacks on private land the same as attacks on public land, and we welcome the fact that that loophole will be closed. It will go some way to reassuring people, such as the parents of Jade Anderson, that such horrendous attacks will not happen in the future. However, we warned that police and prosecutors must distinguish between intruders and those who are lawfully on a person's property when enforcing the law. That is reflected in the representations we received for today's debate from Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, Blue Cross, Dogs Trust and other such charities.

Having seen the details of how the measure would be enacted, we recommended in our pre-legislative scrutiny report of May a number of changes to the proposed clauses. I hope that the Minister will look favourably on the key recommendations that the proposed clauses be amended to enable the exemption from prosecution for someone whose dog attacked an intruder to apply to sheds and other enclosed buildings associated with the

home and not just to the main home. That relates to the vexatious argument of curtilage and other appendages. Perhaps the Minister can update us today on that matter.

The Government give assurances that mitigating circumstances for dog attacks in gardens and other open spaces around the home will be taken into account by the courts and enforcement agencies. To safeguard legitimate visitors to a property, such as postal and health workers, we thought it reasonable for the householder exemption from prosecution to apply only to buildings, not to open spaces around the home. The briefing we have had from the Communication Workers Union highlights the staggering number of attacks on postal workers in any one month, and in any one year.

Luciana Berger: As the hon. Lady rightly highlights, the CWU makes that point strongly, because of the number of people who have to go to the front door of a property, whether they are a postman or woman, social worker, health visitor or meter reader. In Liverpool just a few weeks ago, Clifford Clarke tragically lost his life when two out-of-control dogs attacked him while he was cooking a barbecue in his garden, so I very much welcome and support the hon. Lady's comments.

Miss McIntosh: The Committee and I welcome what the hon. Lady says. When I visited the Blue Cross home in my own constituency, which looks after stray cats and dogs, I saw how massive a bullmastiff is. It would easily have pushed me over if it had leapt up. It is a worrying issue, especially for those who cannot enjoy the safety of their own home and garden. We need to distinguish between responsible dog owners, who, for example, secure the gates to their back or front garden, and those who are negligent over whether their dog is allowed to cause injury.

We also recommended that the definition of an assistance dog be amended to prevent the erroneous application of the assistance dog measures to dogs that are not genuine assistance dogs. We are pleased that the Government amended the draft clauses to allow the exemption from prosecution for householders whose dog attacks a trespasser to apply whether or not someone was home at the time of the attack.

The Committee believes that the current legislation before the House has gaps and needs to go further. We concluded that the Government's proposals were insufficient and that a comprehensive overhaul of the legislation is needed, including the consolidation of the several dozen statutes that impinge on the issues, and that remains our view. I am talking about not just the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 but the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 and a whole host of legislation that pertains to that area.

On Second Reading of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill on Monday, there was unanimous support for our recommendation that targeted dog control notices such as those in place in Scotland be introduced to give police and local authorities effective measures to tackle irresponsible dog owners before their dog inflicts harm. It is that preventive measure that is the key to controlling dangerous dogs and potentially dangerous behaviour.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Once again, I commend the Chair of the Select Committee on her contribution. Does she agree that the Government have listened to

many of the evolving concerns and have acted to respond to them, but the one remaining thing they need to do is listen to the Committee and not be governed by the directives of the usual channels? Should there be overwhelming consensus on a point such as dog control notices, they should listen and respond accordingly. We are not daft, because we have based our views on what we see in Scotland and elsewhere.

Miss McIntosh: I welcome the intervention by the hon. Gentleman; I am tempted to call him my hon. Friend. On a number of issues, this Government have proved that they listen. As I have mentioned, my hon. Friend the Minister is indeed a deeply reasonable man and I am sure that he will pass the test of reasonableness as the Bill goes through. It is, of course, a Home Office piece of legislation, but the clauses that I have referred to relate to DEFRA.

In our pre-legislative scrutiny report, we made a recommendation that a dog attack that injures any protected animal—such as other dogs, cats, horses or livestock—should be deemed an offence. I pay tribute not only to the dog charities but to Cats Protection, which supports this recommendation. It is very important that attacks on other animals—such as other dogs, cats and horses, whose riders might be seriously injured, and especially livestock—should be addressed.

The Committee was also concerned about the provisions under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 that currently ban certain types of dog, regardless of temperament, while excluding other aggressive breeds. In our pre-legislative scrutiny report, we called for a focus on the owner rather than on dog type, given that any dog can cause harm if it has an irresponsible owner—deed rather than breed.

To tackle stray dogs, we need to have a properly resourced dog warden service in all local authority areas. We also need to be aware of the increasing number of aggressive dogs that are being abandoned and of the additional burden on local authorities and dog charities, which are already overstretched. I have mentioned the provisions of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 that might be leading to more stray dogs coming on to our streets.

On dog breeding, we criticised the Government for doing too little to tackle poor breeding practices. Relying on voluntary action has not delivered sufficient reform, and the Advisory Council on the Welfare Issues of Dog Breeding should be given a formal regulatory role to enforce standards.

Luciana Berger: The hon. Lady has been generous in allowing me to make many interventions. On the point about breeding, she might be aware that in recent weeks an online petition has gathered almost 20,000 signatures from people who are urging the Government to look seriously at the issue of breeding. The petition specifically wants to ensure that when people buy new pets they should, first and foremost, get them from rescue homes wherever possible and, secondly, not buy them from breeders that separate a new pup from its mother. There is a big campaign, "Where's Mum?"

Miss McIntosh: Indeed. That was one of our conclusions. One hesitates to use the word "bitch", but in this debate it is appropriate. No puppy should be sold without the

[Miss McIntosh]

mother—the bitch—being present. That is so important, and I pay tribute to those who have done so much to highlight it.

Again, things should be done on the basis of deed not breed. However, we need to look at the ban on certain types of dogs in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. That Act has not prevented attacks. There have been ways of “breeding round” the ban, which should be addressed.

We were especially concerned about the poor welfare of puppies and dogs, due to common breeding practices among puppy farmers and some pedigree breeders. Our report calls for any breeder producing more than two litters per year to be licensed and subject to welfare checks; I hope that goes some way to addressing the concerns expressed by the hon. Lady. That simple change could help to prevent irresponsible breeders from producing more animals than they are able to manage effectively, which are then sold on to unsuitable owners for profit.

To sum up, we welcome the extension of legislation to attacks on private property and to attacks on assistance dogs. However, we believe that it is something of a wasted opportunity not to have pursued a fuller, wider, more comprehensive consolidation of all the laws in this area. Also, I urge the Minister to introduce dog control notices and to persuade his colleagues in the Home Office that they are a much better tool than some other measures.

On sentencing, it has been put to me by a constituent that a sentence of two years is insufficient for a fatal dog attack. Death by dangerous driving carries a 14-year prison sentence, whereas death by careless driving carries a five-year prison sentence. Where prosecutions under these new laws on dogs are brought, perhaps somewhere between a five-year and a 14-year jail term would be a more fitting tribute to those loved ones who have been lost rather than the two-year term that is being proposed.

Julie Hilling (Bolton West) (Lab): As with driving offences, we must differentiate between those people who are deliberately setting their dogs on other people and deliberately training their dogs to be vicious and to be attack dogs, and those people who have not cared for their dog appropriately, with the result that the dog becomes vicious. Two years in jail is inadequate, as the hon. Lady said, particularly for those people who have deliberately set out to use their dog as a weapon.

Miss McIntosh: Indeed. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for those comments. I do not know if that was what the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ogmere, had in mind when he said that the guidance should be published. However, it is obviously for the Sentencing Council to direct what the sentence should be. Nevertheless, I hope that the message will go out from the House today that we are united in our concern in this regard, and that the sentence should be appropriate for what is judged to be effectively a new crime.

To conclude on sentencing, I will just refer to our concern about resources in relation to local authorities. There should be dog wardens in each area. Also, the police should be properly funded and resourced with a tool more akin to a dog control notice, which we know already works successfully in one part—Scotland—of the United Kingdom.

I will conclude my remarks by saying that action is urgently needed on these key issues. Clearly, there is a balance to be struck between the freedoms of responsible dog owners—I wish to record that the vast majority of dog owners in this country are indeed responsible—to enjoy their pets, and the need to protect the public from those who are not responsible and who do not control their dogs responsibly. The welfare of dogs, other animals and local communities must be protected from the actions of irresponsible dog owners. We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to rehearse these arguments, and I urge the Government to act on the Committee’s recommendations.

1.56 pm

Julie Hilling (Bolton West) (Lab): I start by saying how much I welcome the two reports on this issue from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. I congratulate its Chair, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh), and her Committee for all the work that they have done on this issue, their excellent campaigning and the reports that they have produced.

In addition, I echo the Chair’s commendation of the charities that have also been involved in campaigning on this issue. I also commend the Communication Workers Union, the Royal College of Nursing, the British Veterinary Association and all the other organisations that have joined together to urge the Government to take action, and particularly to introduce dog control notices, which I will talk a little bit about in a moment.

I share the Committee’s disappointment that the Government are not introducing holistic legislation to cover the issues of dog control and dog welfare, because the two issues cannot be separated. This debate is about control but fundamentally it is about dog welfare, because the fundamental question is, “Why do dogs attack?” They attack because of how they have been trained, or not trained, and how they have been socialised and educated.

As someone who has tried to get the authorities to take action on a number of occasions, I believe that it would be much more straightforward to have one source for action—one consolidated Bill—rather than having to rely on different pieces of legislation, including some that go back 150 years.

The House is, of course, aware of the tragic death of 14-year-old Jade Lomas-Anderson, and I am grateful to the Chair of the Select Committee for meeting Jade’s parents and her kind words. Jade was attacked by four dogs—we believe that they were two Staffies and two bull mastiffs—in her friend’s house, where she was staying overnight as a special treat because she had done so well at her new school. By all accounts, Jade was a very bubbly girl who was loved by many people. Her parents, Michael and Shirley, are campaigning for a change in the law—as they say, Jade would have wanted them to—so that no other family has to suffer as they are suffering.

I cannot now say, as I could the first couple of times I spoke about her, that Jade was the last person to die because of dangerous dogs. Since Jade’s death on 26 March, 79-year-old Clifford Clarke was killed by two dogs in Liverpool. There are 210,000 dog attacks each year and more than 6,000 people are hospitalised each year because of them, so there have been many attacks since Jade’s death.

In Bolton, six-year-old Abigail Boyd was attacked in Farnworth. She was sitting in her garden when a dog that had already been reported to the authorities for being loose came in and bit her. Her eyelid had to be stitched back on and she has deep wounds under her eye. She was lucky not to lose her sight. Two-year-old Ryan Magee was left terrified when he was bitten by a dog tied up outside a community centre, as he and his father were walking past to go in.

Last week, in Atherton, Jade's home town and mine, there were three attacks by dogs. Even following the attack on Jade, the police's attitude has not been as one would have wanted, in terms of taking such attacks as seriously as they should be. It is fortunate, although I am sure the victim does not feel fortunate, that one person who had to go to hospital after an attack was a young man in his 20s. Had he been a child, it is likely that the dog would have attacked his face.

After every attack, no matter how small or large, there are terrible after-effects and the victim is left traumatised. Earlier this week, I spoke about a farmer who signed my petition. After her cattle were attacked, she was deeply traumatised and unable to sleep for a week. People are left with a lifelong fear of dogs. People suffer life-changing injuries—often children, who have the most terrible facial scarring. I read of somebody recently who lost a foot to a dog attack. In the worst situations, family and friends are left mourning loved ones.

The Government have said that they want to retain remedies under statute and common law, but I encourage them, again, to bring those together under one dog control and welfare Bill, because it is difficult to get action under myriad legislation.

I started doing a little bit of work on this, even before I was elected, when one of my volunteers was attacked by a dog while delivering leaflets for the election. He had gone into the owner's property to put a leaflet through the door and, as he was bending down, another bull mastiff attacked him, latching on to his arm. Fortunately, it was a man who was attacked, not a child, a woman or somebody of smaller stature. Pat managed to stay on his feet, with the dog still latched on to his arm.

The police could take no action, because it was private property. The owner said, "Of course, we're going to have our dog put down because of this terrible attack." The dog is still alive and living in the garden and people are still able to enter it. We asked about the paper boy and the owners said, "Oh, it's all right. The paper boy knows not to come in." That is fine, as long as it is that paper boy, but what about a different paper boy, or somebody else—whether a postal worker, the nurse, or some other worker who needs to enter that property?

The ex-mayor of Blackrod lost two cats to attacks. Eventually, we managed to get the police to take action, but initially the response was, "There is nothing that we can do about it", which illustrates the need to bring legislation together. The ex-mayor of Westhoughton was walking his dog nicely in the park when it was attacked by a loose dog. When he took his dog to the vet, the vet was able to describe the dog likely to have attacked it, because he had seen a stream of people whose dogs had also been attacked. To date, we are not aware of any successful action taken against that owner. Clearly, the authorities have to sharpen up their act.

I was contacted by a constituent soon after Jade's death who said that, close to Jade's house, no more than 400 yards away, there is a dog loose in a shared communal garden. We struggled to get anybody to take action about this, because it is supposedly private property, but—hang on a minute—everybody else walks through this garden as well. The police have now instructed the owner to keep the dog muzzled when it is out of the house, but we have still failed to get the housing authorities to take proper action.

We need all the legislation to come together, so that it is easy for action to be taken, but most importantly we need dog control notices. We need that early intervention mechanism, so that when a concern is expressed about a dangerous dog, action can be taken.

Luciana Berger: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the Government's proposals in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill, which they say will deal with this problem, just introduce a new layer of bureaucracy, adding to a lengthy process involving the courts? Conversely, a dog control notice could be issued on the spot and could adequately and properly deal with prevention.

Julie Hilling: I agree, and because the proposals are subsumed in antisocial behaviour legislation, not enough priority is going to be given to dog attacks. I understand that the police are, potentially, dealing with drugs or other issues, so when somebody is just complaining about a dog barking, for example, how much attention will that get?

Huw Irranca-Davies: My hon. Friend makes a good point about prioritising the matter among the wide range of measures that police and community safety agencies have to deal with. There is also the technical, but important, issue of how much time during the progress of a large, complex Home Office Bill will be put aside for debating these issues, which have not been debated enough, technically and in detail. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should definitely find time to do that, and that introducing guidance as rapidly as possible would help us?

Julie Hilling: I agree. My hon. Friend raises some important points.

The dog control notice could say, "Keep that dog on a lead", "Keep it muzzled", or "Keep it away from children". I hope that it would state, where necessary, that the dog owner needed to reduce the number of dogs in the household, because the home was not suitable for them. A range of actions could be taken.

We still cannot talk about Jade's case in detail, but the one complaint we know of was about noise. Had a properly trained person who understood dogs been able to go round at that point, perhaps action could have been taken. I would be the last to say that action could have saved Jade, but the fact that we do not take action at all, apart from saying, "Keep your dogs quiet", means that we are liable to have more and more of those terrible attacks and tragedies.

Miss McIntosh: I am a little concerned that in the debate about dog control notices, which, for the reasons the hon. Lady has given, are specific to a particular dog

[Miss McIntosh]

owner and dog, we will lose the argument because of that business of a dog being muzzled. The dog does not need to be muzzled all the time. It is important to show that we are being reasonable in what we ask.

Julie Hilling: Absolutely. I agree that people may be concerned that it is cruel to keep a dog muzzled. However, that is only in specific situations and with specific instructions about what to do with a specific animal. There is also concern that the proposed legislation will get rid of dog control orders as well. Such an order is a good, simple mechanism whereby local authorities can introduce exclusion orders in parks; orders about clearing up after dog fouling; orders about keeping dogs on leads in particular areas; and orders about people having to put their dog on a lead, if instructed to do so by a responsible person. I am concerned that, again, we may lose those measures in a much larger piece of legislation that does not allow such detail.

I agree with the hon. Lady that we should extend this welcome legislation to other protected animals, including assistance dogs. I see no reason why it should not be extended to other protected animals. If someone's dog, or other animal, is attacked while they are behaving responsibly, they have to face all the trauma and expense of an injured animal. One indicator of a dog being dangerously out of control is that it attacks other animals. We should take account of that and extend the legislation.

I agree with what has been said about breeding. A dog is much like a child, in that it needs to be properly educated and know its place in the hierarchy. It needs a proper beginning in life, and should not be taken away from its mother too soon. I appreciate that there is now consensus that people breeding more than two litters a year should be registered, but I was interested to hear the comment from the ex-chief vet of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, who believes that anyone who breeds a litter should have their dog registered, even if it is an accidental breeding. That is his personal view, not the RSPCA's view.

Luciana Berger: May I correct the record? I previously said that 20,000 people had signed the petition, but the figure is actually more than 30,000. Does my hon. Friend wish to join me in congratulating Pup Aid, which put together the petition, and Marc Abraham, who is the vet leading the charge? I hope the Government will sincerely respond to the need to consider dog breeding, particularly the need not to separate pups from their mothers too soon.

Julie Hilling: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating the people involved. Dogs are similar to children, and early intervention, early training—I do not know about early training of children—early socialisation, and all those sorts of thing, are crucial to ensuring that at the end we have a well behaved dog and owners who understand what to do.

There is lack of education, starting with which dog people should have in their particular domestic circumstances. The trend now for many people to go for bull breeds is worrying. Thinking back 30 years, people on estates such as Hag Fold, where Jade and I lived,

would have walked around with a Heinz 57, which is a mongrel; now people choose big, powerful dogs that need a lot of exercise, which they will not necessarily get in their environment, and a lot of care, and they are not necessarily safe around children. I am not castigating all the bull breeds—I am not castigating Staffordshire bull terriers or anything else—because we know that some of those dogs are well socialised, well trained, well cared for and well controlled, but I am worried by the proliferation of such big breeds in areas where they are not suitable.

The Blue Cross and other animal charities offer good training to school children at both primary and secondary level to teach them how to be around dogs, how to behave around dogs and how to understand the signs that dogs give out so that they know whether it is, “Yes, you can come and stroke me,” or “No, please stay away.” We need children to understand how dogs behave and the signals that they give. The training also teaches children how to care for their pets, particularly dogs, how to train them and how to look after them. Again, part of the problem with dangerous dogs is the way those dogs are treated, whether accidentally because people just do not know enough or, as I said in my earlier intervention, because people deliberately train dogs to be vicious and aggressive.

We need adequate enforcement, even of the current legislation. Michael Anderson, Jade's dad, did a bit of research and found that there are just two dog wardens for the whole of Wigan, which is a large borough where more than 300,000 people live. Goodness knows how many dogs live in our community, so having two dog wardens feels inadequate. We somehow need to provide adequate resourcing.

Michael Anderson talks of dog attacks being of epidemic proportions, and I agree. With so many dog attacks each year, we need concerted, dedicated action to address them. We need to promote responsible ownership and early intervention measures. When I was out with my petition, many people said that it was not dangerous dogs but dangerous owners that were the problem. Our focus needs to be very much on ensuring that people treat dogs properly; it is very much about dog welfare.

I hope the Minister will consider not only the Bill that is going through the House, and how it might be amended, but further action on the whole issue of dog control and welfare. Even if we get the amendments to the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill that we want, they will still not go far enough in addressing dog control and welfare. I hope he will say something positive about what DEFRA will do to bring all that legislation together.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Andrew Turner (in the Chair): Order. There are about 15 minutes per person remaining.

2.15 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Turner. I will try to ensure that my contribution is less than 15 minutes.

It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bolton West (Julie Hilling). I sympathise with her constituents who have lost their lives, as I think we all do. I also agree with her about the need for education in our schools. It is not only the children who may not have pets in their homes who need education; children in homes where, unfortunately, animals are being treated cruelly also need to be shown the right way to rear and look after animals. There is a lot that can be done in our schools, so I welcome the hon. Lady's comments.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh), the Chair of the Select Committee, for bringing this opportune debate to the Chamber today. We on the Select Committee have done a lot of work on the matter, and it is good to have both the Minister and the shadow Minister here this afternoon.

I welcome the microchipping proposal because it means all dogs will be microchipped; it will also help people whose dogs have strayed. Of course, microchipping will only be as good as the database that is put in place. If people go to Blue Cross or Battersea Dogs Home, they will find that of the dogs that come in with microchips, which is probably only 30% or 40% of the total, only 30%—10% or 15% of the total—can be traced back to their owners; the microchips are often not up to date. I am sure the Government will bear that in mind.

We must ensure that the original owner is responsible for the microchip and, if they sell the dog, for ensuring that the microchip is up to date so that the dog can be properly traced. People who sell their car have to ensure that they know exactly where the car is going because otherwise if someone is later done for speeding, the original owner would receive a notice through the post stating that they were driving the car when they were not. I suggest, therefore, that if the previous owner of a dog receives a fine or a summons to court, they are responsible for it. That would concentrate people's minds. People who sell their dog would then ensure that they know where the dog is going.

We have talked this afternoon about the need to be careful that, as with dog licences, microchips are not just for the law abiding, which is an issue I have raised before. The last thing someone who is breeding a dog to be dangerous or to be a weapon wants is for that dog to be traced back to them. There are people out there who will wilfully ensure, as far as practicable, that their dog is not microchipped, or if the dog is microchipped, that it is not linked with them. That is fundamental.

When police and council dog wardens come across people who are, say, beating their dogs in the park to train them to be vicious, that is the moment to take in and microchip the dogs, and probably take them away from their owner. At the very least, the dogs should be linked with the owner so that the owner can be held responsible for what the dog does thereafter. Again, I agree with the hon. Member for Bolton West that it is not necessarily the dog that is at fault; it is about the owner who has trained the dog to be vicious. We have to be absolutely clear about that.

That brings me neatly to my next point. It is right that we extend the legislation to deal with people who have dangerous dogs in their home that bite postmen or social workers. In doing so, however, we must be aware that if the dog is protecting the property and someone goes in to trespass or burgle, the dog will take some sort of action against that person. In that case, I do not see

why any individual should be prosecuted as a result. That will be the difficult balance in the legislation. Often, when postmen or social workers going into people's houses are bitten, it is not the first time it has happened. The dogs are sometimes well known for being vicious, and we need to take action on those types of dogs and owners. That is absolutely clear.

Furthermore, while breed-specific legislation is okay up to a point, we now have people bringing dogs into the country and breeding them to be dangerous, so we have to be clear that our concern is the act of the dog and not necessarily the breed of the dog. Leaving the breed-specific legislation as it is does not help when dogs from all over the world are being brought in to breed a more vicious breed of dog. People who do that are outside the law and they do not want to be found; we need to make sure of them, so that we can pin their dogs back to the individual.

Julie Hilling: Local authorities spend about £57 million a year on kennelling costs, when dogs are thought to be or might be of a dangerous breed, but with two effects. First, kennelling costs a great deal of money; and, secondly, the dog suffers more trauma when kept in kennels while we work out what we should do with the animal. I absolutely agree that it is deed, not breed, that is more important.

Neil Parish: The Blue Cross hospital here in London might have dogs of a breed that is considered vicious, yet an individual dog need not be vicious. Once such a dog is taken into care, there is a death warrant on it, irrespective of whether the dog deserves it. We could go round such conundrums all day, but we should rehouse dogs if possible. Sometimes dogs are taken into care just because people cannot cope with them—they are not training the dogs to be vicious, they simply cannot cope with them any longer. Dogs of a good temperament, but of a breed that might be considered more dangerous, are often the ones that have to be put down, and I do not agree with that.

Moving beyond dangerous dogs as such, an issue at the top end of dog breeding is that many are bred to be too pure. Pugs might be bred so they cannot breathe properly, because that is how masters and breed judges see the case; Alsatians are bred with bad hips, because sometimes that is how the pedigree breeders think that breed should be. Linking with the microchip measures and, clearly, back to the breeding, therefore, the Government need to be absolutely certain that dogs are bred to be not only pure, as in that instance, but healthy. That might be going beyond the subject of today's debate, but the Kennel Club and others are working hard on the issue, and we need to do more. If some pedigree dogs are being bred from a gene pool that is too small, we need to introduce other breeds to ensure a proper gene pool so that they can breed properly—so that they have good hips, for example.

On puppy farming, it is right that for more than two litters the farms or breeders should be registered. DEFRA is working on that; people need to be clear where dogs come from—through puppy contracts, such as those used by the British Veterinary Association—what the dog's parentage is and where its mother is. If possible, people should see the puppy with the mother, so that they know exactly what they are buying; they should

[Neil Parish]

not buy something advertised over the internet or out of the back of a white van, because they have no link to the mother. Such puppies could have been taken from their mother far too young and they could be traumatised and may also be suffering from many diseases. When something happens to a puppy because it has many illnesses, the children of the family it was brought into might be traumatised as well. Again, proper linking to the original breeder through the puppy's microchip will make all the difference, because people will find it much more difficult to bring puppies in and pass them off as bred somewhere else, which is often the case.

This afternoon, we have a huge wish list, yet as all of us recognise, Ministers and shadow Ministers included, we can make as many laws as we like, but we also have to enforce them. The laws have to be enforceable, and that is what we are keen to see. Resources in councils and the Government are limited at the moment, so we need to concentrate on getting the system—the microchipping—right, with a link to the owner so that the police or dog wardens can take action quickly and effectively. Making sure that we do not have to kennel dogs for so long will also reduce costs. A lot of good can be done through the Bill.

I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton: the vast majority of dog owners in this country are good and responsible. We must ensure that we go after those who are not. We must also act against dogs that attack not only people but a dog guiding a blind person—that has to be just as bad as an attack on a person. It is terrifying enough to have a dog of one's own attacked by another dog, but imagine people walking down a road unable even to see the other dog approaching before it attacks their guide dog. That must be absolutely terrifying, and all those things should be taken into consideration.

Finally, as has been said, if horrendous crimes have been committed by dogs, and if the owners have trained the dogs to carry out such acts, we must ensure that the book is thrown at those people, and that they receive sentences commensurate with their crime. Sometimes, of course, a dog that is not normally dangerous goes out of control, and that has to be looked at slightly more leniently. The situation now is that we must take action against those who are out to perpetrate crime. Once again, I thank my hon. Friend for the debate, and I look forward to the Minister's reply.

2.28 pm

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak, Mr Turner, and I am sorry that I was a few minutes late.

I was keen for the Select Committee to look at this issue, because there has been a sharp increase in the number of problems associated with so-called status dogs. The number of people hospitalised as a result of dog attacks has doubled—it went from around 3,000 as recently as 1997 to well in excess of 6,000 in 2010. That is a real problem, and I welcome many of the measures that the Government have brought forward to date, all of which have been referred to already.

The decision to have compulsory microchipping and the strengthening of that proposal have been important, and I welcome the decision to make an attack on an

assistance dog an aggravated offence—I agree that that is an important step forward. It is also right to make it an offence for there to be a dog attack on someone, whether on private or public property.

My only concern is the possible final unintended consequences of such legislation, which we need to think about. I hope that the courts will have wide discretion to take into account individual cases. For example, a couple of border collies could be working dogs on a remote farm, running loose most of the day, but they might nip someone who is not trespassing and who might even be delivering a political leaflet. The implication of that becoming a dreadful offence might be that dogs would have to be locked up all day because someone canvassing for a political party might come round once every couple of years. We must be careful and give some discretion to the courts.

I want to focus most of my comments on dog breeders. My one concern about community protection notices is that there is too much emphasis on irresponsible behaviour by dog owners and the dog is treated as though it were an accessory to antisocial behaviour and crime in the same way as a knife or baseball bat might be.

As the hon. Member for Bolton West (Julie Hilling) said and as I have stressed, the issue is not as simple as that. So much about how a dog behaves and whether it is unpredictable and likely to bite someone depends on whether it was socialised in the first few months when it was a puppy and whether it was cared for properly. If it was brutalised in those first few months, it will never be right, however responsible the current owner might be.

The evidence from dog charities, such as Battersea Dogs Home, was very clear. Many of the dogs they receive were bought as puppies from a disreputable breeder who did not raise them properly. It might be a mastiff, and a year down the line the buyer finds that they have a huge dog that they cannot control. They do not know what to do with it so they abandon it and leave it on the streets.

Many dogs that go to charities have been abandoned by people who have bought puppies from disreputable breeders and then did not know what to do with them, so abandoned them. That is a real problem; so many of those dogs end up being destroyed because their experience as puppies means that they are completely unsuitable to be rehomed with families.

As hon. Members have said, we recommended that one way of dealing with the problem was to change legislation so that the maximum number of litters that a hobby breeder could breed before having to be licensed with a local authority was reduced from five litters a year to two. The Government rejected that, and I want to press the Minister on the current position. Our understanding was that a hobby breeder could breed up to five litters a year. That is a lot of dogs; an irresponsible hobby breeder could send 50 dogs into the outside world and cause problems.

In their response, the Government thanked the Committee

“for the opportunity to clarify the legislation on dog breeding” and said:

“The Government would like to stress that anyone in the business of selling dogs, which is anyone that a local authority justly believes to be trading must be licensed”

and that is the case whether it is five litters or even one litter. I am interested in what the phrase

“in the business of selling dogs”

means. Does it mean anyone who sells a dog? Does it mean that if someone breeds one litter of puppies and gives five away to friends but sells three, they would have to register because they had sold a dog? Does it mean someone who earns their full-time income in that way, or a part-time income, and is there an income threshold? Does it mean that someone receiving more than £500 from puppy sales must be licensed, but not if they receive less than that? The figure is vague and I would like to know what the phrase means. If there was clarity and someone breeding fewer than two litters would be a hobby breeder and exempt, but those breeding more than two litters would automatically be caught, that would remove the vagueness. That is important, and I would welcome the Minister’s comments.

After the publication of the report, I met some dog wardens who raised various issues with me. They said that the most important one was that doing what I suggested and reducing the threshold from five to two litters would be for the birds because they did not have the resources or powers to carry out the necessary surveillance to pick up such breeders. When I pressed them on how much such work they do, the answer was, “Not a great deal.” We must not delude ourselves into thinking that this simple tweak in the legislation would solve the problem.

Those wardens said that one obstacle to their looking into such problems is the difficulty, bureaucracy and complexity of obtaining the relevant authorisation from the right authorities to carry out surveillance on people they suspect of running illegal puppy farms. They said that what usually happens is that the police or a local authority decide to conduct surveillance on a household for some other reason—suspected cannabis growing, selling of drugs or dealing illegally in something else—and only incidentally do they find out that dogs are being illegally bred and sold, and that there is a business in dogs that is not properly licensed.

An interesting area that we did not look at in our last inquiry, and which I hope the Government will take on board, is whether more should be done to ensure that local authorities have the necessary powers to hand to obtain such authorisation, so that they can carry out surveillance and catch people engaged in back-street puppy farms that are causing so many problems, as other hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Bolton West, made so clear.

2.35 pm

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): I am grateful that I have caught your eye, Mr Turner. Dogs’ hackles are up and their hair is on end. I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister to the Chamber to respond to the debate, and I hope that he will be able to calm some of the nerves that I will allude to. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh) on this timely and important report. Her Committee has done dog welfare a great service.

I have taken a strong interest in the welfare of dogs for a number of years, and have been involved in a campaign with my constituent, Carol Fowler, for the past eight. Highlights of the campaign led to the

BBC1 documentary, “Pedigree Dogs Exposed”, which I am sure many hon. Members saw. It graphically exposed welfare issues associated with pedigree dogs and genetic health.

There are some horrific examples—particularly Chiari malformation and syringomyelia in Cavalier King Charles spaniels; as you may know, Mr Turner, the brain grows too large for the size of the skull, causing some sufferers to writhe around in agony before they die. There are many other examples, including boxer dogs having heart diseases and German Shepherds having abnormal hip joint development, causing them to die prematurely. The programme led to the BBC suspending its broadcasting of Crufts which, given its 42-year history with the broadcaster, was highly symbolic.

I want to touch on four of the issues that several hon. Members have raised. First, we must tackle the horrific business of inherited genetic disease through improper breeding, which can seriously compromise dogs’ welfare. Secondly, we need a proper microchipping process for dogs. Thirdly, I want to talk about puppy farms and fourthly about puppy contracts.

Welfare problems caused by those who buy problem dogs are extensive both financially and emotionally. Such puppies often die prematurely and their owners have to face the associated costs, including vets’ fees, and the emotional trauma that goes with that. I will concentrate on dog welfare today. We should remember that dogs are sentient beings who can feel both pain and fear.

The Government must not wash their hands of all aspects of dog breeding, particularly when welfare problems are involved, and they could use a light regulatory touch with a sector of welfare groups operating properly through the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England. There must be responsible dog-breeding regulation so that puppies are sold to suitable owners and socialised properly, which would alleviate many of the dog control problems to which hon. Members have alluded.

I turn first to the lack of funding. The Animal Health and Welfare Board for England is, rightly, weighted towards farm animals and received £200,000 from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Farm Animal Welfare Council received £280,000. In contrast, the Dog Advisory Council, which is so ably chaired by Professor Sheila Crispin, had to make do with a mere shoestring budget of £28,000 last year. It tried to approach the pet food industry for more funding, but that has so far failed. The Dog Advisory Council has been widely acknowledged as providing the most independent, far-reaching welfare advice of any of the dog organisations.

That brings me to the second, perhaps most important part of my speech, and the issue that is causing so much unhappiness; I hope that the Minister pays close attention. It seems that a new canine and feline sector group has been established, with a surprising lack of consultation anywhere. If there is to be a new organisation, it should be fully independent from any sectoral interests. Only with an independent group will the correct provisions be put in place to protect the welfare of dogs in the UK.

I also question the establishment of the group. I do not understand why it was set up, what the process for the recruitment of its members was, or how the group is to be funded, and I would be grateful if the Minister clarified those issues. Was the group and its membership established under the Nolan principles?

[Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

I understand that the new group will be under the chairmanship of Professor Steve Dean. I have met him, and he is extremely knowledgeable about dogs—the problem is that he happens to be chairman of the Kennel Club. It would appear that a cosy relationship has formed between the Kennel Club and DEFRA, which, as I said in a letter to the noble Lord de Mauley, is seriously dividing opinion-formers in the dog world, and compromising, I believe, the welfare of dogs. The creation of the new group and the choice of chairman have frankly created hostility in the dog world. Any chairman of a dog welfare board, I suggest to the Minister, should be able to unite, not divide, that world.

The position of the Kennel Club as a regulatory body seems to have been elevated recently, following a speech from Professor Steve Dean, in which he said that the Kennel Club had the

“primary role as the regulator for the welfare of dogs”,

and had worked with DEFRA to form the canine and feline sector group, under his chairmanship.

There is a fundamental conflict of interest in the Kennel Club's taking a leading role in the welfare of dogs, as its main source of income comes from the fees that it charges for the registering and transfer of ownership of puppies. Therefore, it is not in the Kennel Club's interest to restrict the number of organisations by imposing tougher health requirements. Given that conflict of interest, I do not believe that the Kennel Club is the best organisation to be given responsibility for the regulation of dog welfare.

The establishment of any group should at least have had involvement from the Dog Advisory Council, which provides expert independent advice on how best to advance the welfare of dogs. It would have been far more beneficial to build on the Dog Advisory Council's work, rather than to establish this entirely new group under the Kennel Club's chairman. The advice given by the Dog Advisory Council is truly independent and widely respected by all dog groups.

If we are to work within the current structures, they must be rigorously independent and have the Dog Advisory Council at their heart. I believe that the Dog Advisory Council should remain in place until such time as a suitable structure is formed that can guarantee the independence and regulation of dog welfare. Following that, a dedicated dog subsection should remain in any canine and feline group, due to the population of dogs and the problems that we have heard in today's debate. There are—I believe; nobody quite knows the exact figure—about 11 million dogs and about 11 million cats in this country, but it seems that there are far more problems with dogs than with cats.

Moving on quickly, Mr Turner—I know that you will want me to conclude shortly—I would like to talk about microchipping. I know through a constituent of mine, who is actively involved in the matter, that we are being pressed to do something urgently about microchipping in horses, to deal with horse diseases and the issue of traceability, including dog meat. The technology required for the chipping of dogs and horses is exactly the same. Surely we can accelerate the microchipping process, so that it is dealt with faster than by 2016, as is currently proposed.

Briefly, the third issue is so-called puppy farms, which others have discussed. I quickly comment that the problem is that the farms often produce puppies in environments with inadequate welfare conditions and inadequate genetic disease control. Puppies are often poorly nourished and not properly socialised, so that is an issue that we need to tackle.

The fourth issue, which my constituent, Carol Fowler, was at the forefront of proposing, is puppy contracts. It is important that members of the general public have access to an effective public education campaign about genetic welfare issues. The poor welfare standards of many commercial breeding establishments and dealers mean that many innocent puppy buyers will still purchase a puppy on emotional grounds rather than as informed consumers. Choice of breed can often be based on appearance or even fashion, with little regard to potentially harmful conformational traits or known breed-related genetic diseases, let alone whether a particular breed of dog is suitable for their lifestyle, or whether they should have a dog at all.

The current, unregulated system is failing to protect dogs from suffering from the effects of inbreeding, genetic diseases, exaggerated conformational traits, poor husbandry and the poor welfare that can be associated with the breeding of dogs. The majority of purebred dogs are owned by the general public, who often pay a very high financial and emotional price in dealing with such problems.

The UK claims to be a nation of animal lovers and, on the whole, I am sure that that is true. However, there will be a falsity behind that claim if we do not ensure the highest welfare standards possible. The UK's standard of welfare of companion animals often falls below that of Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, and possibly other European countries as well.

In summary, I believe that the case for an independent regulator for the welfare of dogs is clear. A clear distinction has to be made between a sectoral council, which represents the interests of the industry concerned, and an independent regulator, which will act on behalf of the welfare interests of animals. With the creation of the new canine and feline body, it very much feels as though the poachers are regulating the gamekeepers.

A truly independent body, with statutory powers, would have the capability to ensure both the protection of dog welfare and that dog breeding was carried out to the highest possible standards. Having those safeguards in place would, in turn, alleviate many of the dog control issues that we have discussed today, including that of dangerous dogs. I hope that the Minister will be able to comment on those important welfare issues today.

2.47 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): I am delighted that we are able to debate this important issue in response to the seventh report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, on dog control and welfare. I welcome the report, which was exhaustive in the evidence it took and in its comprehensive insights on dog control and welfare.

The point has been well made that one difficulty we are experiencing, both in this debate and in governmental terms, is about who champions the matter in Government.

A forthcoming Home Office Bill deals with one aspect, while other aspects, such as sentencing, are dealt with elsewhere. In his response, the Minister—good chap that he is—might want to identify the individual who champions the whole remit. In the absence of a holistic reform of dog welfare and controls, and given that we are dealing with it in a more piecemeal way, who champions the issue right across Whitehall? Who bangs heads together? Who chairs the committees in Government? Who drags the Home Office and others together and says, “This is the way it is all going to hang together.”? I think that role is vital, and it would be good to have information from the Minister when he makes his remarks.

I welcome the debate and thank the Committee members and its Chair, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh), for their truly excellent work on this report and others that relate to such issues. It is right to recognise, as hon. Members have done, the intense suffering of many families who have been traumatised, not only through injuries, but through deaths in their families because of attacks by dogs. That includes most recently Jade Anderson, John Paul Massey four years ago and the 79-year-old pensioner, Clifford Clarke. It is true that they and others personify the tragedy of dog attacks, which has been so ably and eloquently set out here today by my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton West (Julie Hilling) and for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) and by other hon. Members, and in other debates. That gives us the stimulus we need; it is why we need to get this right.

I give immense credit to all the dog and animal welfare charities, the police, the Royal College of Nursing, other health care professionals, veterinarians, postal workers, represented by the Communication Workers Union, and many assorted others who have come together to campaign with an immense degree of unanimity and sense of purpose on the issue. I remember at one point a Minister—I am not sure whether it was this Minister, but certainly it was a predecessor—saying to me, “One of the difficulties is that there isn’t a unified voice.”

Well, there has been one for some time, and the people concerned are still pretty unified in demanding what they want; I shall refer to some of the details in a moment. They have played an excellent hand, and for the right reasons. That has to do with the issues that have been mentioned by all hon. Members here today, including the hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), who has great experience in this area. Those issues include animal welfare and breeding, as well as dog attacks and responsible ownership and what we can do in that respect.

On a personal level, I thank not only the CWU and Dave Joyce, but Mark, a postal worker from Pencoed, who took me out on his rounds delivering letters in my local patch and talked to me about this and other matters. I also thank Tina, who took me around Euston blindfolded with a guide dog. She took me through Euston and across the front of the station, through busy areas, to show me not only the expertise of guide dogs, the immense amount of training that they receive and how easily it can be lost if they are attacked by other animals or scared in other ways, but the real bond of trust that develops and how that trust can be so easily broken by an inadvertent or a deliberate attack on a precious companion animal or guide dog. Jonathan, a black lab, took me round the course, with Tina

instructing me as we went. Jonathan was a black lab—not black lab as in Labour, but as in Labrador, although he could have been Labour. I do not know; he did not tell me at the time.

I also thank Blue Cross, the RSPCA, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and others for the time they have spent with me on frequent visits to their institutions to see their work and how a multifaceted approach is needed to dealing with abandonment, stray dogs and breeding; I will come to some of the detail in a moment. On that basis, one message I have for the Minister, or one thing that I would like him to ask today and when his colleagues go into Committee with the Home Office Bill is this: why not consolidation? I suspect that his civil servants, good people as they are, will have said, “There is a more pragmatic way to do this. Let’s do a little bit here and a little bit there and so on.” But there are real concerns about that.

It comes down to this point: how do we pull together a very comprehensive range of issues? They are not simply about sanctions, penalties and stepping in after the event. They are about education, early intervention, stepping in at an early stage when we see that there are problems to prevent them from getting worse, and dealing with what is now in some ways the factory turnover of dogs, and other animals, through the internet and elsewhere. How is that to be dealt with if we do not pull things together in a consolidated Bill? We come back to these points. First, who is championing the issue, and secondly, where is the overall strategy? We have little bits here and there. Many of those things I will welcome in my contribution, but other things could easily be lost. We have to do this properly.

One of the biggest lessons for us on the issue comes from what we did with the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. That was a classic case of well intentioned legislation that had perverse consequences, which is why we need to get it right this time. The DDA was poorly targeted, which has led to good dogs being seized from good owners and all the personal trauma and inconvenience that go with it. We see dangerous individual dogs that are not from the four proscribed breeds and thus cannot be seized under the Act.

There is confusion. Veterinarians regularly tell us, “We find it hard enough ourselves to identify whether that dog is from one of the four proscribed breeds, but we know that that one needs to be lifted up, taken away and either retrained or kennelled for some time and re-homed with someone who will look after it.” Alternatively, they say, “We think that dog is dangerous, but we can’t actually get to it to lift it.”

The DDA was a classic piece of well intentioned but not well designed legislation. To get the legislation right this time, I urge the Minister, including in discussion with Home Office colleagues and others, to really think about it, because we may not have another good opportunity for a while to get the detail right and to work on the measure with very experienced organisations outside the House, with the EFRA Committee and its members, who have a great deal of knowledge, and with other hon. Members. Working with those people means occasionally giving way and acknowledging that some points that are well and democratically made from the Floor of the House may trump what the Minister is being told by his very able and expert civil servants.

[MR GRAHAM BRADY *in the Chair*]

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is precisely the type of issue that needs to be widely consulted on, and that it is much better if there is broad consensus, just as it is much better if there is broad consensus on how the whole dog issue is to be regulated?

Huw Irranca-Davies: Very much so. The hon. Gentleman made that point well in terms of the organisational structure that is now giving input to Government and advising them. He is also right in terms of parliamentary consensus and outside organisations. There has been a fair degree of consensus on the holistic way to take this forward. Blue Cross is not the only organisation that is very strong on education and early intervention; so are many others. There is a degree of consensus on the issue, so the hon. Gentleman is right to urge me, as the Opposition Front Bencher, and the coalition Government to work together and to continue it. That might mean a bit of give and take on some things.

There are many points on which we agree with the Government. I have made it clear to the Minister and his colleagues in the other place that we want to provide support and ensure that the legislation goes through in the right shape. However, on the broad principles, in the long term we have to focus on deed, not breed, and replace crude lists of proscribed breeds with a much more holistic approach.

As to the medium term, we are with the Government, and the police, in their argument that we cannot scrap the DDA, despite my criticisms of it—because it is fundamentally flawed—without looking much more at causes than symptoms, without that holistic approach. For the moment, we have to focus on both deed and breed. We will have to do that until we get the whole package in place. In many ways, I regret saying that. I would like to say that we can turn a switch and do it now, but we are in a process. If we can get it right, we will get to the idea of focusing on individual owners and individual dogs, rather than castigating whole breeds or castigating pet owners or dog owners generally, but we are not quite there yet.

An overhaul of our approach is long overdue. We cannot yet discard one of the few tools that we have in the DDA, crude as it is, but I have to say to the Minister that it is more a blunderbuss than a rifle; it is more a cutlass than a rapier. Innocent owners and innocent dogs get caught up in it as well, and that is a matter for regret.

On that basis, great care should be taken in extending the range of the DDA. This is one area where we are concerned about the line that the EFRA Committee has taken, because I understand that it suggested that we might extend it and add to it. I have some concerns about that, because we would be reinforcing the use of the blunderbuss approach. With all the concerns of veterinarians about identifying the right breeds and the development of mongrel mixes—huskies with other dogs and even wolf hybrids and so on—I wonder whether extending the DDA is the right approach. We should be ensuring that we get the mix right: we should be looking at the individual dog, looking at the individual owner and getting the packages in place to intervene very early before the dogs attack and we have to lift them. I am sure we will explore that in the Committee.

Miss McIntosh: To put the hon. Gentleman's mind at rest, I can tell him that when we looked at the issue in our second bite of the cherry, we focused much more, as I and hon. Members have said this afternoon, on the deed rather than the breed, for the simple reason that people can breed round a particular breed, so we would only be creating another loophole.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I welcome that intervention, and I welcome the fact that the Committee's thinking has evolved based on more evidence. That is the right approach. We should explore such things, to get the right evidence-based policy outcomes.

I want to spend a little time on the detail in dog control notices. The other day, I pointed out on the Floor of the House that we are not convinced by the Government's explanations why dog control notices are not necessary and will not work. I will go through some of the reasons. Neither the Secretary of State for the Home Department nor her Minister could respond in detail to some of my questions, but my point was that they need a pretty compelling case why the Government's approach is better than the one everybody else has lined up for—all the organisations I spoke about. Everybody is arguing against it on the basis of not only what the Scottish Government have done, but the other examples of similar animal welfare measures that are used effectively in England already, and to which I alluded in the debate the other day.

We will have to test the measure to the point of destruction in Committee and test the Government on why they are sticking with it. We will try to persuade the Government of the arguments and persuade them to go further, and I shall explain why. We are far from being convinced that the Government's proposals based around community protection notices and public space protection orders will deal with the individual circumstances of problem dogs and problem owners, rather than tackling all dogs and all owners in an area, district, or region and so on, or that the proposals can be individualised to allow for early intervention.

We need to see that the proposals can be personalised and individualised, including aspects such as an individual dog needing to be muzzled in certain circumstances, a fence around a garden being maintained to an adequate condition, an owner being sent on a training course, a dog being neutered, or restrictions placed on off-lead activity. We will be testing all those things.

We also need to see that the response before there is an attack and public safety is compromised is flexible and proportionate, so that the proposal does what all the organisations have been asking for: protects public safety and the dog's welfare, rather than steps in afterwards. We are trying to get at the owners who are repeatedly termed "irresponsible", which could be for a number of reasons, such as ignorance, lack of awareness or general malicious intent. We need to go towards them and their dogs, rather than having a blunderbuss approach.

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr David Heath): *indicated assent.*

Huw Irranca-Davies: The Minister is nodding, so I know he is going to say a lot of good things in his response.

Are CPNs and the PSPOs—sorry for the jargon—a version of what has been termed a “DOGBO” for problem dogs and owners? If so—the shadow Home Office team will also ask Ministers about that in Committee—given the scale of the challenge and problem identified by the EFRA Committee and other hon. Members, what assurances do we have that such measures will be prioritised among the plethora of other powers in the Bill? An individual police chief constable, or his officers on the ground, must decide with the local authority and other community safety partners that dogs, among all the other challenges, are the pressing priority on an estate or in an area where there is a problem. Without a focus on dog control notices, the worry is that the issue will not be a priority and will become mixed up in the whole.

Mr Heath *indicated dissent.*

Huw Irranca-Davies: I see the Minister shaking his head and I know that he will come back on that issue. I am glad to see him suggest that that will not be a problem. He will explain today why that is the case.

Will there be adequate resources? I asked on the Floor of the House whether the problem with the dog control notice is that it instantly sends shockwaves through Whitehall and down to local government that resources must follow. If that is the case, let us be honest about it. If that is the problem, which it is, and if we agree on the scale of the challenge and the need to turn things round, which we do, let us have a frank discussion about how we resource this. We have rising dog attacks, injuries and fatalities; rising kennelling costs for local authorities and the police; and more people washing up in A and E units and costing the NHS money. It has to be resourced; otherwise, we can pass all the legislation and regulation and employ all the nudge factors or whatever in the world, but we will not have an effect on the ground, as the hon. Member for The Cotswolds pointed out.

In the absence of dog control notices, how will the Minister ensure that the measures he proposes, among the plethora of measures in the Home Office Bill, will be adequately understood, not only by the police and community safety agencies, which are expected to enforce them, but by the public, who will come to our constituency offices and say, “We know of a problem,” or by a postal worker who says to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West, “We’ve identified a dog; I don’t know what to do about it.”? Will it be properly explained and understood, so that they can use the mechanisms at hand?

Are the measures too bureaucratic? One great advantage of a flexible early intervention approach is that we can get in early, without having to go back to a magistrates court or get another type of permission that requires 20 forms to be filled out. There can be early, gentle, soft, clever interventions, such as, saying to an owner, “He hasn’t done anything yet, but there is a problem. You’ve had a visit from the RSPCA and the local health worker. They have both said that there is a problem. When you have visitors in your property, will you please muzzle that dog. What you do otherwise is up to you.” Will it be that sort of approach, or will a massive bureaucracy have to be gone through to take any action under the proposal?

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way twice, but I believe that we have time to debate these matters, which is a good thing. Does he agree that, if at all possible, such issues should be framed in legislation to keep people out of court but to have the desired result? A system of police warning, followed by a ticket with a substantial fine, if breached, would be one way of doing that.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be on the Committee—I will not be—because I think that is an intelligent observation. If he is not on the Committee, he ought to ensure that that point is raised at that stage. The idea of proportionate intervention may avoid the heavy-handed, further-down-stream measures, if we can get in early with a lighter touch. We also do not want to take unduly disproportionate measures against individuals who might be identified by a neighbour who says, “I’ve had enough of this one. I’ll go in and sort it out.” There must be some evidential test and measure to say whether there is an issue that we need to deal with. I agree entirely with what he said, both in terms of sanctions and the types of measure that could be deployed. We need flexibility, before we lift a dog or take stronger, more punitive action against an owner. In that way, we hope to reduce the number of attacks, rather than wait for them to happen and then take punitive action.

I asked in an earlier intervention when the guidance will be issued. The proposals have been quite a while in fruition in the Home Office, and DEFRA Ministers have been involved as well. I am absolutely convinced that some form of draft guidance is being worked up in DEFRA, the Home Office or both combined, and that that can be presented at the earliest opportunity. For the benefit of taking the measures through and getting them right, the guidance needs to be presented in Committee, not on Report. If the Minister says that he cannot do it, I can tell him that I regularly did it as a Minister. I have been told by a Committee, “We need this next Monday.”, and I have had to do it and tell my civil servants, “Do it.” I do not mind how rough and ready it is; we need it to be done.

I hope that the Minister and his expert team of civil servants will be able to provide that guidance so that the Committee can take the provisions apart. If he has difficulty with that, the Committee should, even in the absence of dog control notices, simply lift the current Scottish Executive guidance off the shelf and say, “How do we apply this to the Government’s proposals?” If the DEFRA measures are similar to those in Scotland, and they are going to do the same job, the Scottish Executive guidance should perhaps be the basis for the guidance DEFRA brings forward.

I have one final, important point on DCNs. We need to know what protections and appeals mechanisms will be in place for owners. We need to get the balance right to protect good owners and good dogs. What protections will be there for them?

In short, we are not convinced that the Government have got this issue right or that their opposition to dog control notices is well founded. The Committee must urgently be given draft guidance so that we can test not only the Minister’s words and aspirations, but their tangible expression in black and white.

[*Huw Irranca-Davies*]

Let me turn briefly to a couple of other issues. We welcome the proposals to extend to private property the ability to prosecute somebody for an attack by a dog. We also welcome the fact that the Government have listened on the issue of trespass, but we will need to test in Committee what trespass entails, and that will include the issue of a property's curtilage. Sheep dogs or other dogs belonging to farmers, but not just farmers, will often be free to roam in outbuildings. Such buildings are private property, and the dogs will be there for good reasons—often for animal husbandry reasons, because they are working dogs, not pets. We need to test how that will work, because we need to get it right.

In another expert contribution, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) mentioned attacks on innocent political canvassers, although I am not sure there is such a thing. He made a very good contribution, and I hope he is also on the Committee. I will be down in his patch at the weekend, although not on an official visit; I am taking my son down to visit Exeter university's Camborne campus, which is a fantastic mining, engineering and geology campus. I hope the weather there is good at the weekend.

Attacks on livestock and protected animals are another issue on which we agree with the EFRA Committee, and we need to look at it. Again, it is partly about taking a holistic approach. How do we pull things together so that not only guide dogs, assistance dogs and companion dogs, but a wide variety of other animals, are protected? Such animals are quite easily defined under the protected animal provisions of the Animal Welfare Act 2006. That may be the approach the Government want to look at, or there may be some other way. We certainly do not want to create a new list of animals—"We'll have llamas, but not alpacas" and so on. There is a ready-made opportunity under the Act to deal with the issue.

Several Members have mentioned the breeding and sale of dogs, and they are absolutely correct that we have far too many poor breeders. The EFRA Committee is correct that the current threshold for licensing dog breeders needs reviewing, and I hope that will be part of the overall approach the Government bring forward. Good dog breeding is to be welcomed, and good prospective owners welcome the fact that a dog has been reared and looked after well and that it has had all the medical treatment and some of the early elements of training, if appropriate, before they take it. However, through ignorance or sheer greed, far too many individuals out there are breeding to no good standard or to no standard whatever. Unfortunately, much of that spills out on to the internet. It amazes me—perhaps it should not—that there is now a trade in all sorts of animals on the internet, and we have to accept that.

That takes me to my next point, on which the EFRA Committee also made some wise recommendations. We need to look at how we promote good, responsible advertising for animals on the internet, and the Government are doing some good work on that. We accept that there will be some advertising on the internet, but how do we stamp out the practices of those who are churning out dogs and other animals that will end up abandoned and wasted? Those dogs will wash up in kennelling, with all the costs that go with that, or in places such as Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, or they will be euthanased. That is an absolute tragedy.

I have touched on breed-specific legislation. I want now to touch on education, because we often miss this aspect. Many charitable organisations are doing great work on education, including in areas that commentators will stereotype, saying things such as, "The problem is on that working-class estate down the road." Such views are not always true; there are plenty of problems with poor ownership and poor welfare conditions across all social groups. Organisations such as Blue Cross and the RSPCA are going into areas where they perceive there is a problem. They use the generous funding people have given them to do educational work. I would like to hear from the Minister how the Government tie that together. How do they assist and encourage that work? What do they add to it? If we are seriously going to tackle this wide-ranging issue, the Bill cannot simply be a Home Office matter—it must cover the other elements I have mentioned.

That comes back to my point about the Minister standing up and saying, "I am the one who is championing this through the whole of Government. I am the one who is banging heads together." I strongly support the idea that a DEFRA Minister should be doing that, and I hope the Minister can do it. If he does not, I will be more than happy to speak to his colleagues, to bang their heads together and to say, "You should listen to the Minister as he brings forward a more holistic approach."

There are some great initiatives out there, including Respect-A-Bull, which works with youngsters who go around with what they think are tough-looking dogs. The organisation promotes a responsible approach to dogs' welfare and to taking them out in public. There is some great work going on there.

I commend the Government on their microchipping proposals, although I repeat my criticism, which the Minister hates, that we have waited some time for them. However, they are there. I also commend the Government on the fact that they have gone further than we anticipated, which is welcome. They are not simply rolling things out stage by stage; they are saying that, on a certain date, we will have only mandatory microchipping.

The Chair of the EFRA Committee wisely said, "Let's get microchipping right. If it requires until 2016, so be it." However, I would like the Minister to answer the question posed by other hon. Members: why could this not have happened a little earlier? Are things not in place, and are they preventing us from getting this right by 2015? Is something really holding the process up? There may be good reasons for the delay, but I would like to hear them. I agree with the Committee's Chair that we need to get this absolutely right. It is a welcome move, but it does raise a number of points, which were mentioned earlier. What do the microchipping proposals mean for the link between the dog and the individual? What do they mean in terms of liability, culpability and people being held to account?

I do not have a dog, although I used to have loads of Jack Russells. I have cats now—I do not know what that says about me as an individual, but there we are. I will have a dog again at some point, when I am back home and retired, and it will be a Jack Russell. They are little dogs; they are lovely, great dogs—I am appealing directly to anybody who is listening who likes Jack Russells. Owners of other kinds of dog are saying, "We hate this guy. Those aren't proper dogs." That aside, I like the idea that owners should microchip their dogs and take

full responsibility for them. If the dog is lost or strays, the owner should pass the information on, whether to a database or whatever. If the dog washes up in Swansea dogs home, Battersea or wherever, the owner should pay for the kennelling and take the dog back. That raises some interesting issues, but I welcome the Government's moves, and we will test the proposals.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) raised the issue of liability and sanctions not only for owners who do not microchip, which is a very valid point, but for those who do microchip, but who do not control their dog or who lose control of it. The fundamental question is whether microchipping is a stick or a carrot. Is it simply part of a lost and returned service, or is it more than that? The hon. Gentleman also mentioned adequate enforcement, which was discussed by other Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Julie Hilling).

The hon. Member for The Cotswolds raised important issues about the bypassing of the existing dog advisory council, and equitable access to DEFRA and Ministers. I hope that the Minister will respond, because although the process has been long and arduous, lasting decades, for some organisations, the great success that has now been achieved has been predicated on effective collaboration and getting people to agree. Anything that signals that priority is being given to one or other group would pull that apart, and none of us would want that. I commend the hon. Member for The Cotswolds for his long interest in issues such as breeding and hereditary health problems, and for his well known support for the work done by his constituent, Carol Fowler, to raise the profile of those issues.

I thank all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. They have shown great expertise. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West on the passion she showed, and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree on her interventions; she has spoken with families affected by this issue, and has provided them with access to decision makers including members of the EFRA Committee, Ministers and the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh). It is important to listen to such families and to try to get things right for them.

Fundamentally the issue is about tackling those owners who for one reason or another do not understand about the control and welfare of their dogs—their pets or companion animals. It is also about recognising that the majority of owners are good ones. We need to design policy that does not unduly affect the responsible owners while leaving the others aside: that must be its thrust. We look forward to working with the Government, and thank the EFRA Committee for its continuing work, which has flushed out some of the issues. I hope that in a few months we will be able to bring forward part of what is required, and that the Minister will deal with all the other aspects of the matter. Then we can genuinely and radically take the action that we should have taken at the time of the Dangerous Dogs Acts. They were flawed: let us get this one right.

3.22 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr David Heath): We have had an excellent debate. I commend the hon. Member for

Thirsk and Malton (Miss McIntosh) on introducing it and on the work of her Committee on a crucial issue. I am also pleased to commend the Liaison Committee on choosing the subject as suitable for debate today.

Perhaps I should start by saying that there is much more that unites us on this subject than divides us. We are working to the same end, and have shared much thinking in policy formation. The hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton was kind enough to point out areas where the Government have not only listened, but acted, to bring in measures that will, I hope, make a difference to the minority—I agree with the hon. Member for Ogmere (Huw Irranca-Davies) that it is a minority of dog owners—who, whether through ignorance, neglect, or sometimes, I am afraid, malice, end up with dogs that are a danger to others and a nuisance to the community. Such measures are what we need to achieve.

The hon. Member for Ogmere repeatedly asked me to declare myself “the one”, in a Mourinho sort of way—“the special one”—in relation to dogs. Rather shamefacedly, I must say that I am not actually “the one”: my noble Friend Lord de Mauley is. He has responsibility for those matters in the Department. However, I am happy to be “the one” as far as this House is concerned, and to respond to the debate.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Will the Minister confirm that Lord de Mauley—great chap that he is—chairs some cross-Whitehall group that pulls all the strands together?

Mr Heath: He has certainly been working closely with others, including the devolved Administrations—but particularly with the Home Office. There is a shared responsibility with the Home Office, and it is important that we speak with one voice, and come to the same conclusions. I assure the hon. Gentleman that such a liaison has happened.

A Bill is before the House that will enact parts of our response to the undoubted issue raised by hon. Members, on which some have campaigned for a long time. I welcome the support that the Committee has been able to give to the Government's position. As I have said, there are several aspects of the matter on which we have gone further than was perhaps originally intended, in recognition of the strength of the Committee's arguments. There are some areas on which we still do not have 100% agreement, and I shall deal with those in my remarks.

The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill, which amends the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, had its Second Reading on Monday, and there was an excellent debate. The House broadly endorsed the Government's approach. The Bill includes provisions that will extend the 1991 Act to all places, including private property. It provides legislative backing for the police and Crown Prosecution Service to pursue prosecutions for attacks on private property. That will reassure victims and their families that the law is on their side. I hope that once the Bill is passed the circumstances that the hon. Member for Bolton West (Julie Hilling) is all too familiar with, and which she spoke about forcefully in the House, will never again arise.

The Bill for the first time incorporates an aggravated offence, under the 1991 Act, of an attack on an assistance dog, recognising the terrible consequences of such an attack. That is important: an assistance dog is almost

[Mr Heath]

an extension of the person with whom it works. It is part of that person's being, and an attack on a guide dog or hearing dog makes a huge difference to their life. It is right to clarify and extend the law in that way.

The Bill will also clarify the fact that courts should consider the character of the owner when taking decisions about dogs of prohibited types, and dangerously out-of-control dogs. That point was raised by several hon. Members: it is not the breed, but what the individual dog is doing, that is important. There is no breed that cannot be dangerous in the hands of an irresponsible owner. Sometimes that fact is taken to considerable lengths, because there are people—a very small number—who deliberately have dogs that they use as weapons, to intimidate and on occasion actually cause hurt to another person.

That leads me to a point raised by the hon. Member for Bolton West: new legislation is not needed to deal effectively with a dog being deliberately set on a person, to injure them. It would be covered by the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, and the maximum penalty would be life imprisonment. The question of the appropriateness of the maximum fine level does not apply: the law treats such action as a very serious offence, and the prosecuting authorities have the capacity to deal with it.

The Bill would also provide the police with discretion to use the civil route in cases involving prohibited types of dog, with improved welfare, reduced kennel time and police savings in time and money. It would provide comprehensive powers for the authorities to take preventive action to stop dog attacks and nip issues in the bud, through, for example, a community protection notice.

That issue was raised by many hon. Members in the debate, and we need to discuss the fundamental question whether our proposed measures in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill treat the same issue and have the same rigour as the so-called dog control notices that many advocate. My answer is that they do. In fact, they are an even more flexible tool.

I accept, however, that we need to substantiate that position and satisfy people's concerns. One thing I would say to everyone involved in the debate is, "Please let us not get hung up on the label of dog control notices". It is profoundly unhelpful to the debate about providing protection if the only thing people are arguing for is something with that name, rather than something that does what they want to see done. That is my first point.

Secondly, many people have pointed with approbation to what is available in Scotland, saying, "That is the answer. Why on earth are the UK Government so stupid or obstinate as not to follow the Scottish route?" Of course I respect what the Scottish Government do and the measures they introduce, but we need carefully and critically to consider whether the dog control notice legislation in Scotland actually achieves the objectives it was set. There is some evidence from Scottish local authorities that the notices are not working as well as hon. Members would believe—if, indeed, they believed everything that was sent to them.

At the 21 May meeting of the cross-party group on animal welfare in Edinburgh, Scottish local authorities expressed a number of concerns, which highlighted the

ongoing problems with the dog control notice—or DCN—system. The meeting was also attended by a number of dog welfare organisations from across the UK, and a series of detailed problems were identified.

A dog control notice in Scotland must be served by two officers, and any breach needs corroborated evidence from two officers to pursue a case, which is a limiting factor in bringing successful conclusions. A person who is served a dog control notice must attend the council offices, or two officers must visit their home, so it is hardly the on-the-spot mechanism that some have suggested it is. A dog has to have been out of control on at least one occasion before a DCN can be served, so the measure does not nip the issue in the bud. Since some people have strongly advocated that we need to be able to identify the problem before it happens, I am not sure that the notices satisfy that test.

Another problem is that the police in Scotland have no powers to serve DCNs; only local authorities do. Importantly, there is no requirement for a dog owner to advise their local authority if they re-home a dog with another owner, or to inform it of the new owner's address. A potentially dangerous dog, therefore, can easily appear in a different local authority area with absolutely no recourse.

We need to make clear what the DCNs in Scotland do that we do not and, likewise, what we can offer that DCNs do not. When we have done that critical comparison, I hope that hon. Members will take a view as to whether we are working on the right lines. I perfectly understand the concerns, but I ask people to treat the arguments with the necessary respect and care, rather than simply adopting the slogan that this is the only possible solution to the problem.

Miss McIntosh: I should declare that I am a Scottish advocate, albeit a non-practising one. I am aware of the criticism that the dog control notices in Scotland are labour and resource-intensive, but I think that the Minister has just walked into a situation where he has given very good grounds for the dog control notice legislation to be reviewed, to allow the police to administer the notices.

I do not think, however, that the Minister has answered the question about prevention that has been put by a number of hon. Members. Although there has to have been one incident, I think that the hon. Member for Bolton West said correctly that it has to be a proven incident and not just a malicious report. I think that the Minister has just made the case for a review of dog control notices, and I personally do not see in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill anything that comes close to a preventive measure.

Mr Heath: That is where we need detailed and careful examination of the proposals. I accept the point that the hon. Member for Ogmour made—that part of that process will be to consider the guidelines—but I cannot give him an absolute commitment that the guidelines will be ready for Committee stage. I wish I could, but there is a very good reason why I cannot: we are working carefully through the issues, with the various dog welfare interests, the police, the local authority associations and everyone with a professional interest in the matter, so that we get the guidance and the compass of the notices right, and the hon. Gentleman's demands are met.

I do not want to speak out of turn or put words into the mouths of other organisations—that would be inappropriate—but we have generally found that when we have been able to explain the benefits to interested organisations, and have done a “compare and contrast” between what they hope could be achieved through dog control notices and what we believe we can achieve through the new orders, they acknowledge the facts.

I hope that hon. Members do not see this as patronising, because that is not my intention, but there is sometimes a lag between what hon. Members are aware of as concerns and the solutions to those concerns. I hope that there will be a catching-up regarding the briefings that some people have received—from the Local Government Association, for instance, which now welcomes the antisocial behaviour measures and accepts that they will enable local authorities to do a lot for dogs.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I am tempted to use, or subvert, an old adage, and say that I have been patronised in better places—as indeed I have.

If the Minister cannot introduce the guidance at short notice, I suggest that he brings forward at Committee stage, or even before, the comparisons he has talked about, along with any other detail. The more we have in black and white to work with, the more we might be assured. Alternatively, we might say that we are far from assured; nevertheless we need in front of us whatever he has.

Mr Heath: I very much understand that, having sat in more Bill Committees over the years than I care to enumerate. I recognise that that is exactly what the Public Bill Committee will wish to do, in examining the notices. What I hope will emerge is that the antisocial behaviour measures provide a flexible package that will deal effectively with irresponsible dog owners, and will do everything available under a DCN, and more.

When the hon. Gentleman was saying, “Will it do this, will it do that?” he saw me nodding. That was because I had a sort of mental checklist, and was thinking, “Yes it will do that, yes it will do that.” It could include, for instance, positive requirements for an individual to attend training classes or to keep their dog on a lead—that sort of specificity.

There is a view that we are talking about a broad-brush area-based measure, but that is not the case. The measures are intended exactly as we are saying—to address the issues of a person with a dog that might get out of control, and to be able to deal with that at an early stage. Crucially, they are personal to the owner and not the dog—a point stressed by everyone—and that is an important difference between our measures and the dog control notices. The focus must be on the individual understanding of the person’s responsibility for the animal under their control, and what they need to do to improve their management of that animal.

My expectation is that once people understand both the flexibility and the compass of the proposals, they will accept that such matters are covered. However, it is not for me to pre-empt discussions in Committee. I simply invite Members in each place to approach this with an open mind and to see whether the items on their individual mental checklists are ticked off.

Incidentally, public space protection orders will directly replace dog control orders, which will enable local authorities to impose the same restrictions, while also consulting on other issues in the vicinity.

I think that all that will do the job, but I completely recognise that Members need to be persuaded, which is why I invite them to consider the evidence carefully.

Julie Hilling: I may be pre-empting the Minister’s comments, but another concern is about prioritising and resourcing. In talking about the whole gamut of antisocial behaviour, what priority and resources will be given to this area?

Mr Heath: That is difficult for me to answer, because it will be in the hands of local authorities in combination with the police. I can only express the hope that such behaviour will be a key area, but we will not give it a greater priority just by giving it a different name. Either it will be seen as something that local authorities and constabularies need to address, or it will not. I hope and expect that local authorities will address it because of all the cases that hon. Members have recited, which we all recognise as extremely serious. If they do not do so, I hope that they will swiftly be reminded by their constituents that they need to give that matter proper care. It would be meaningless for me to give her a blanket assurance, other than to say that that is certainly my expectation.

Another issue that has repeatedly been raised, with several Members covering common ground, is consolidation of legislation. I perfectly understand the argument that it is nice to have a neat legislative bundle with everything that relates to a particular subject. The fact is that English and Welsh law is not like that, and never has been. It is quite difficult to achieve, and we have sometimes found that consolidated legislation misses out important elements of former legislation. To be perfectly honest, I am not convinced that the substantial resource required to consolidate legislation is worth it, because practitioners perfectly well understand the legislative tools at their disposal.

We should instead concentrate on consolidating our approach to, and our strategy for dealing with, dog control and welfare issues. That is different from getting the legislation into some sort of legal Napoleonic code. For instance, when we considered consolidation, we found that the provisions are reasonably accessible and that there is no great confusion. It certainly has not been brought to my attention that there are significant confusions in existing legislation.

If we consolidated, would we retain all the civil and criminal options currently available? Some people ask why on earth we rely on legislation from 140 or 150 years ago, but such legislation is sometimes a good basis for dealing with illegal activity. Many practitioners have told us that it would be a great mistake to consolidate the Dogs Act 1871 into current legislation because it is very useful and covers some areas that are not obviously covered by other legislation.

I hear the arguments for consolidation, but, first, we could not have introduced the measures currently before the House in the time scale available—that is important, because this is urgent—and secondly, it would not necessarily achieve anything. I agree with the hon. Member for Ogmore that we must ensure that we provide perhaps a single set of guidance—I shall talk to

[Mr Heath]

my noble Friend Lord de Mauley about whether that is appropriate—so that everybody knows what applies, how it applies and how best to use it to achieve Parliament's objectives.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I thank the Minister for his explanation. To give him some comfort, when I was in his position and I was asked to consolidate legislation, wise civil servants always said, "Keep well away from it. If you do that, we will not be able to do a dozen other important things, because of the timing." If that is his approach, I urge him to consider how to bring forth a more consolidated strategy across Government, and not just have a piecemeal approach. All the issues that we have talked about show the clear necessity of having a joined-up approach—not just in Whitehall, but in local government and agencies—to deal with a range of measures. If we are not going to have consolidated legislation, we certainly need a joined-up strategy that is down in black and white.

Mr Heath: Having now conceded the fact that when he was in my position in government he received exactly the same advice about consolidated legislation, which he has just called for, the hon. Gentleman has now mirrored my advice to him that there is a case for a consolidated strategy. That is a clever bit of opposition—he first asks for something on which he knows that the answer will be no, and he then, when I give him something on which the answer is yes, asks me to do it.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Will you do it?

Mr Heath: I will certainly discuss with my noble Friend whether the matter commends itself to him, and he will need to work on it with other Departments. I can see the strength of the sentiment behind being very clear about how we bring together holistically the various elements relating to dealing with dogs. I simply reject the view that we should spend a lot of parliamentary time on trying to fit together various bits of legislation that do not fit well together, some of which have criminal standards of proof and some of which have civil standards of proof.

Huw Irranca-Davies: It would be a great test for your civil servants.

Mr Heath: It might be a good examination question—we sometimes refer such matters to the Law Commission for their erudite musings—but I do not particularly want my Department to spend time on that at the moment. I am not being flippant; I am simply saying that that is not the most pressing thing, because it would not improve the effectiveness of what we are doing.

On microchipping, which several Members mentioned, I am grateful for the support expressed for what we are doing. It is absolutely essential to get it right and that implementation is successful. We are working closely with everybody who has a direct interest, such as the Association of Chief Police Officers, local authorities, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, Blue Cross, the British Veterinary Association, Dogs Trust, the Kennel Club and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. We will ensure that, as far as possible, we get

the message across to the great bulk of the public that they now need to do microchipping. We are working with database operators and the microchip manufacturers and implanters to address standards and ensure quality and consistency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) made the point that the onus is on owners to maintain the data on the microchip. It will be an offence not only not to microchip a dog, but, just as for a vehicle registration, to have inaccurate information on the registered database.

We have addressed the issue that some dog owners do not have much financial resource available and may see microchipping as a difficult cost to bear: free microchipping is accessible through Dogs Trust, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and Blue Cross centres—35 in total—and some local authorities also offer free or discounted microchipping. I am grateful to everybody working on that, and to the Kennel Club for providing free microchip scanners to all local authorities.

This is a good opportunity to promote national microchipping month. Its launch a week ago was most successful. It was hosted by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, who is not in the Chamber at the moment. We are progressing on the issue in what I hope is an effective way.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury—

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: The Cotswolds.

Mr Heath: I am sorry; I am behind the times. It was Tewkesbury. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) that we would love to move more quickly, but all the advice says that we are moving at the most sensible rate to get to our objective. We will ensure that microchipping starts with puppies and is extended to the whole dog population. In my view, the most important thing is to get it right and have something that is usable, in terms of tracing back to their owners not just all the dogs that go missing each year but those that cause nuisance. Hopefully we will be able to connect them to an owner rather more easily than at the moment.

Of course, some owners will not do it, just like the huge number of people mentioned by the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton who ignored dog licensing procedures when they were in place. There will be some who will simply not want to do it, but at least now there will be an offence. When a dog is found, if it does not have a microchip and we can trace it to an owner, that owner will have committed an offence. No licensing system is perfect, but this will certainly go a long way.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I thank the Minister for the detailed responses that he has given. I do not want to pre-empt subsequent Committee stages on the Home Office Bill, but if a microchipped dog identified to have been part of an attack on a companion dog or an individual is traced back to an owner, what will the repercussions be?

Mr Heath: That pre-empts not only the legislation but the secondary legislation that we are introducing, although of course we will answer in due course. It will be an offence, so there will be a penalty. The offence, in the first instance, would be failure to keep the information

up to date, but if the information is there and we can trace the dog back to the owner, it will depend what the dog has done and the circumstances.

I should mention an important point. Having discussed the circumstances, I should give some reassurance to my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) that the courts will be able to take into account the circumstances of the case. We will have to return to the discussion about what comprises curtilage of a property, what a dwelling is and so on.

There is a difficulty of definition. We certainly want to deal with the issue of the postman or the political canvasser who gets bitten by a dog out in the yard or garden, where they have perfectly legitimate business, but we also do not want to penalise the householder whose dog is doing its job of protecting property against an intruder who has no business there. Getting that balance right is critical. When someone is within a house, it can reasonably be assumed that unless they have been invited in, they must give a strong argument for why they have legitimate business in the house rather than being an intruder.

It is different for a garden, or sometimes even a shed. A child going to pick up a football that has been kicked into a garden should not be set upon by a dangerous dog. They may be an intruder, but they are nevertheless not a burglar or anyone with malicious intent. A public interest test must be satisfied before a prosecution can be brought. I hope that the guidance to the prosecuting authority will make that distinction clear. It might satisfy the difficulty that Members have correctly spotted with the definition of what exactly comprises the area that we are discussing.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend has been speaking for a long time and has given us a huge amount of detailed information. Before he sits down, will he comment on the divisive issue of the feline and canine sector council, which is dividing the dog world and making dogs' fur fly?

Mr Heath: I most certainly will. I have the unprecedented benefit of having rather longer than usual to reply to the debate. I hoped that I was making use of it to provide the answers that hon. Members wanted, so I apologise to my hon. Friend if I was taking too long to get to the issue he raised. I have one more thing to discuss first, if I may—dog breeding—because it was raised by a number of hon. Members.

It is absolutely right that breeding is a key element of education, apart from anything else, which is exactly the point made by the hon. Member for Ogmire. People must know, first of all, what is and is not appropriate, and the consequences of breeding puppies. Buyers also need to know whether they are buying a breed that needs a five-mile run every morning, so they do not keep it in a flat on the 17th floor. They need to know—the hon. Gentleman will know—how adorable a Jack Russell might or might not be before they buy one, and what special requirements it might have.

A sort of ignorant cruelty can be involved when people buy the wrong breed of dog in the wrong circumstances and then find that they cannot manage it. It is sad, because they probably bought the dog for unimpeachable reasons—they love the look of the dog and its nature—but they simply cannot look after it. Education is important.

Another important point was raised by the Committee and my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth about the threshold for needing a licence. I would love to be able to give him an absolutely explicit response, so that he could say, “Yes, that’s the answer.” It is not as simple as that, as is so often the case with licensing. Although there is a five litter cut-off for what is, in any circumstances, considered a business, it is for the local authority to determine who is in the business of breeding and selling dogs when it comes to smaller numbers of litters a year.

There is no definitive term that has the sanction of statutory law behind it; it is for the courts to agree or not agree with the local authority. Actually, there are a variety of circumstances in which that sort of decision comes before the court: there is a degree of flexibility, and trading standards officials must satisfy the court that what they are dealing with is a business in the legislative sense. One litter produced in a 12-month period is unlikely to be considered a business; five litters almost certainly will be, but local authorities have a number of tests that they are asked to apply to determine whether somebody is trading. I will not go into them now, because that is for another Department to determine, but those are the criteria used, and they have the support of case law, if not statute law, in deciding whether somebody falls into that category.

I do not know whether I have satisfied my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth; I suspect that I have not, because it is a vague response. If he is not satisfied, I ask him to talk to his local trading standards officials about whether they feel they have the right legal criteria in place to do their job.

George Eustice: The point I was making is that there would be clarity if the number was simply two litters. Local authorities could work to that. The situation that the Minister outlined means that if a local authority has concerns about a breeder producing three litters a year, it must then go through a legal process. The breeder could use as a defence the fact that there were fewer than five litters. Then there is an expensive, difficult legal process, which does not incentivise local authorities to enforce standards in those areas.

Mr Heath: I do not think that it would be a defence to say that there were fewer than five litters. It would be about the circumstances of the breeding programme and the puppies being put on sale. I hear what my hon. Friend says. I will take the matter back to my hon. Friends in Departments with responsibility for that area to see whether clarification is necessary.

My hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds set out clearly why he is concerned about the canine and feline sector council. Let me be absolutely clear that it is not a Government organisation; it is independent of Government. I hope that immediately sets some of his concerns to rest. However, as an independent sectoral body, it could be a useful vehicle that pulls together the views of the sector and feeds them into the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England, which again is not a regulatory body. It simply provides advice for Ministers from the perspective of the users of welfare legislation in the widest sense. Therefore, what we are talking about is not a regulatory or a policy formation body, but a conduit for information, hopefully with the benefit of proper discussion within the sector.

[Mr Heath]

The Kennel Club is one of the bodies represented, and the Dog Advisory Council, which my hon. Friend mentioned, has been invited on to the sector council. I hope that Sheila Crispin will take part, because I would certainly like her views as well. The one thing I stress again is that this is not a regulatory body set up for the purposes of excluding anybody or indeed including one sector to the disbenefit of others. I hope that satisfies my hon. Friend.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I hear what the Minister says, but it seems that the support council was set up with undue haste and very little consultation. Perhaps the Minister will tell us how the chairman was chosen. Was he chosen by open advertisement for example?

Mr Heath: I cannot answer that because the council is not a body of Government; it is independent of Government. Perhaps my hon. Friend needs to have a discussion on this matter with Michael Seals, the chair of the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England. I am happy to try to arrange that for him if it would help. As I said, it would be wrong for me as a Minister to assume responsibility for something that is not within my control, but I am, none the less, happy to try to oil the machinery that allows him to get the answers he wants.

I have, as my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds reminded me, spoken for some time now.

Huw Irranca-Davies *rose*—

Mr Heath: Obviously, the hon. Member for Ogmores feels that I have not spoken for long enough, so I give way.

Huw Irranca-Davies: The Minister is being generous. I do not want to take time away from the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton who will be responding to the debate, but I am not sure whether I missed the Minister addressing the question of cattle, horses, llamas and alpacas. Will he explain the Government's current thinking on them?

Mr Heath: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because I did miss that out. At the moment, there is no evidence to support the necessity of extending the definition of livestock in the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953 to include camelids. Obviously, we will keep the matter under review. I do not wish to trivialise the matter, but, in my experience, camelids generally are quite capable of looking after themselves in most circumstances and would not take kindly to a dog yapping round them. If there is evidence that they need adequate protection, I am happy to provide it.

I reassure hon. Members that we do not need specific legislation if there is an emerging problem, because there is current recourse to justice through the Dogs Act 1871, which I mentioned earlier, the Animal Welfare Act 2006, and the Criminal Damage Act 1971. Indeed the new antisocial behaviour measures that we are bringing in could be brought to bear as well. We will continue to talk to all the organisations that are involved.

If there is a strong view that further protection is needed, we will give it consideration. At the moment, though, we do not feel that a case has been made. I absolutely agree that we do not want a new prescribed list; that is not the way to do this sort of legislation. The generic protections that are in place are more useful than anything else.

I hope I have answered exhaustively all the questions that have been raised—looking at the exhausted faces around the room I think I probably have done so. This has been an extremely useful debate. I thank the Committee for its care in bringing forward the report and the valuable points it raises. I hope that during the proceedings on the legislation currently before the House we will be able to tease out yet more details of what is proposed, and that at the end of the day we will have in place exactly the sort of holistic legislation that people have been calling for and which is crucial to deal with the small minority of dog owners who simply are not up to the task.

4.5 pm

Miss McIntosh: I welcome you to the Chair, Mr Brady. I thank the Liaison Committee for allowing us to debate the two reports, including the Government response, and all who contributed. I give special thanks to the hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mrs Glindon) who has carefully followed the debate all afternoon and who makes a major contribution to the work of the Committee. I also want to thank all colleagues on the Committee for cramming in the work in such a short space of time. There will be disappointment, not least among charities and practitioners, that the Minister has repeated that there will not be consolidation of the legislation.

I want to dwell on two or three points in our report. The hon. Member for Ogmores (Huw Irranca-Davies) and especially the Minister gave bravura performances this afternoon, summing up all the points that have been raised. There is an issue about the definition of curtilage of a dwelling or ancillary buildings, but that is something that we can consider during the passage of the Bill. When a dog is a danger to public safety, we would like to see clear guidance on the test to determine “whether someone is fit and proper to own or keep a dog, as well as to how the temperament of the dog is to be assessed. Those advising the courts must be required to have appropriate training in dog behaviour.”

I echo the points about resources and proper sentencing that were made this afternoon.

Dog control notices, or whatever we call them, must reassure the public that some up-front savings will be made by managing out of control dogs in a much more appropriate way than we have done in the past in England, and that savings will be recouped from the police, local authorities, the health service and individuals in the community if dog attacks are reduced. Finally, let me reiterate that we concluded in our second report that it is not helpful for policy to focus on the breed type, as any dog may become aggressive in the hands of an irresponsible dog owner.

Question put and agreed to.

4.8 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 13 June 2013

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Pre-Council EU Foreign Affairs Council

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Vince Cable): The EU Foreign Affairs Council (Trade) will take place in Luxembourg on 14 June 2013. I shall represent the UK on all the issues on the agenda.

The substantive items on 14 June will be: the EU negotiating mandate for the EU-US transatlantic trade and investment partnership agreement; the state of play of negotiations on the EU-Canada free trade agreement, known as the comprehensive economic and trade agreement (CETA); and the prospects for a successful agreement on trade facilitation at the ninth WTO ministerial conference (MC9) in December.

Two AOB items will also be discussed: EU work with the Bangladeshi authorities and the International Labour Organisation following the tragic collapse of a garment factory in Dhaka; and political agreement on the two trade omnibus dossiers which bring EU decision making into line with the Lisbon treaty.

TREASURY

Double Taxation Convention and Protocol (Netherlands)

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): A double taxation convention and protocol with respect to bank taxes with the Netherlands was signed on 12 June 2013. The text of the convention and protocol has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and will be made available on HM Revenue and Customs' website. The text will be annexed as a schedule to a Treasury Order and laid before the House of Commons in due course.

A protocol amending the double taxation convention with respect to taxes on income and on capital gains with the Netherlands was also signed on 12 June 2013. The text of the protocol has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and will be made available on HM Revenue and Customs' website. The text will be scheduled to a draft Order in Council and laid before the House of Commons in due course.

Royal Bank of Scotland

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) yesterday announced that Stephen Hester will be stepping down as chief executive officer (CEO) later this year.

When Stephen Hester took on the job at RBS in 2008 it was on the edge of collapse. RBS today is safer, stronger and better able to support its customers. I commend Stephen Hester for everything he has done to make this turnaround possible.

Having brought RBS back from the brink, now is the time to move on from the rescue phase to focus on RBS being a UK bank that provides greater support to the British economy, helping businesses and job creation here, and which can return to the private sector in a way that ensures value for the taxpayer.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Energy Council

The Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Michael Fallon): The United Kingdom was represented by Shan Morgan, Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU, at the EU Energy Council in Luxembourg on 7 June 2013. Discussion centred on the internal energy market, energy technology and innovation, biofuels and external energy relations.

The presidency reported on progress on the proposed directive relating to the quality of petrol and diesel fuels and on the promotion of renewable energy. The Energy Commissioner noted that the Commission was flexible on its proposal to cap at 5% the contribution of so-called first generation—or land-based—biofuels to the 10% renewable fuel target for 2020. The Irish presidency concluded that discussions would continue in a final meeting of the indirect land use change ad hoc group under its presidency.

Responding to the Commission's 2012 communication and taking account of the outcome of the 22 May European Council, the Council adopted conclusions on "Making the internal energy market work". The Commission set out some concerns over capacity mechanisms, arguing that if 28 member states each put in place expensive arrangements to have reserve generating capacity in times of shortage, then this would both be expensive and undermine the single market.

In a debate on the Commission communication on "Energy technologies and innovation", Ministers agreed on the need to prioritise research and innovation, in order to bring down the cost of new technologies and accelerate their entry to the market; and endorsed Commission proposals to update the strategy energy technology plan and develop an integrated road map by the end of 2013. A number of member states, including the UK, called for more detail on how national and EU funding mechanisms would be integrated. Other member states underlined that any new reporting system should avoid the excessive administrative burdens associated with the strategic energy technologies information system (SETIS).

On energy external relations, the Energy Commissioner reported on developments on gas import pipelines, underlining that the EU's energy single market rules would apply to all import pipelines into the EU and that member states' bilateral contracts with neighbouring third countries should embody the principles of

transparency and fair competition. On the southern corridor, it was noted that Georgia may soon join the energy community treaty and that Azerbaijan's President would visit Brussels on 21 June for discussions concerning the preferred pipeline option. The Commission announced two conferences towards the end of the year, including one on eastern Mediterranean gas.

Finally, Lithuania gave a presentation of its presidency priorities: completing the internal market and strengthening the external dimension. Lithuania also hoped to make progress with the European Parliament towards an agreement on biofuels, on notification of infrastructure investments and on an expected Commission proposal on sustainability criteria for biomass.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Correction to PQ Answer 154587

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Richard Benyon): I responded to a written PQ from the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) on 20 May 2013 asking which coastal towns have benefited from flood defences under the coastal change pathfinders scheme, and how much has been spent on coastal defences in each such community since the termination of that scheme.

My response included a table detailing spend by authority. This table has now been updated by clarifying the figure given for Waveney district council.

<i>Local Authority</i>	<i>Amount spent</i>
Chichester District Council	£450,000
Dorset County Council	£0
Sefton Metropolitan Council	£0
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	£1,200,000
East Sussex County Council	£294,997
Great Yarmouth Borough Council	£26,059,700 with £15,760,200 expected in 13/14
Somerset County Council	£0
Hampshire County Council	£254,000
South Hams District Council	£0
Hastings Borough Council	£115,625
Lincolnshire County Council	£14,111,100 with £7,720,000 expected in 13/14
Tendring District Council	£2,817,800 with £525,000 expected in 13/14
North Norfolk District Council	£410,500 with £3,100,000 expected in 13/14
Scarborough Borough Council	£1,000,000
Waveney District Council	£10,000

The total expenditure in Waveney was £10,000. I originally gave a figure of £101, which was the Environment Agency contribution to the project. The remainder of the funding came from their project partners. Our partnership funding approach clarifies what level of investment communities can expect so that they can secure funding from other sources to allow schemes to go ahead.

The funding was used as part of the Southwold Easton Bavents relocation project.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Conflict Resources

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague): I, together with my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for International Development, the Member for Putney (Justine Greening), and the Secretary of State for Defence, the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), wish to update the House about our plans for funding conflict prevention, stabilisation and peacekeeping activities through the conflict resources settlement over the next two financial years. Our written ministerial statement of 19 November 2012, *Official Report*, column 19WS, provided details of planned allocations, covering both the conflict pool and the peacekeeping budget, for the 2010 spending round period. This statement updates the House on adjustments made to these planned allocations.

We have now reviewed conflict pool allocations for FY2013/14 and FY14/15. We intend that this funding continue to be spent within the strategic context set out by the building stability overseas strategy (BSOS). Delivering this strategy is an important priority for the Government. Enhancing genuine stability by supporting the development of societies with strong and legitimate institutions which can manage tensions peacefully is central to our national interests.

The size of the settlement increased to £664 million in FY 13/14, with the peacekeeping budget continuing to have first call on available resources. Taking into account the significant savings we secured at the UN in FY12/13, in particular in the tri-annual negotiations on the scale of contributions, £435 million has been set aside for peacekeeping budget requirements. Based on this we have allocated £229 million to the conflict pool in FY 13/14. This represents an increase of £20 million over the £209 million allocated in FY 12/13.

For FY14/15 we currently have less certainty about peacekeeping demands. We have provisionally estimated a peacekeeping top-up of £85 million from the conflict pool, giving a projected available allocation of £224 million for conflict pool programmes. Once the position is clearer, and further negotiations on UK contributions to UN peacekeeping have taken place, we will update these figures and would expect to be able to allocate some additional funding to the conflict pool for the FY 14/15. The table below shows the details.

Table 1: SR10 Total Conflict Resources (£ million)

<i>Year</i>	<i>FY11/12</i>	<i>FY12/13</i>	<i>FY13/14</i>	<i>FY14/15</i>
Total allocation	630	644	664	683
Peacekeeping agreed claim on the Treasury reserve	374	374	374	374
Peacekeeping top up from pool	76	61	61	85
Conflict pool	180	209	229	224

The table below shows confirmed conflict pool allocations for individual programmes for FY 13/14 and indicative allocations for FY14/15.

Table 2: Conflict Pool Allocations

Programme	FY 13/14 (£m)	FY 14/15 (£m)
Afghanistan	45	25
Middle east and north Africa	39	35
Africa	51.5	45
Wider Europe	36	36
South Asia	20	23
Strengthening alliances and partnerships	10	13.5
Stabilising unit	10.8	10.6
Early action facility	20	20
Unallocated	-	15.9
Total	232.3*	224

* includes over £3.3 million over allocation

The middle east and north Africa programme will be increased substantially (from £23.7 million in FY12/13) to provide a major uplift for work on the crisis in Syria and its regional consequences, as well as further funding for Libya and Egypt. We will continue our commitments in Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Iraq.

There will also be an increased allocation for the Africa programme, mostly geared towards building momentum on security, stabilisation and the political process in Somalia. There will also be increased resource for Mali and Nigeria.

Funding for Afghanistan remains significant but is being reduced in FY13/14 as conflict pool-funded activity in Helmand decreases ahead of transition in 2014.

An increase in the south Asia programme will largely focus on Pakistan, including relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The programme will continue other regional commitments including in Nepal and Sri Lanka.

The wider Europe programme will continue to cover the costs of UK personnel in the UN peacekeeping mission in Cyprus and our commitments to EU peacekeeping and security sector reform missions in the western Balkans.

The thematic strengthening alliances and partnerships programme are receiving an increased allocation to support UN work on peacekeeping and protection issues, and for new activity on the UK-led preventing sexual violence initiative.

The conflict pool will continue to provide funding for the tri-departmental stabilisation unit. The allocation includes a small increase to cover the costs of the unit's physical relocation to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office later in 2013.

A total of £20 million of conflict pool funding will again be ring-fenced for an early action facility (EAF) to respond to unforeseen demands in year without disrupting planned programming. In FY 12/13 the EAF was used for work in Syria, Libya, Somalia and Mali/the Sahel.

Allocations for FY14/15 remain partly indicative at this stage. They are in line with those previously agreed by the National Security Council and reported to Parliament in November 2012, with increases in line with the FY13/14 trends indicated above. In order to retain flexibility to meet priority new demands, we have retained £15.9 million as unallocated funding at this stage. As indicated above, the overall conflict pool total is based on cautious assumptions of peacekeeping budget demands and is expected to increase.

HEALTH

Health Select Committee Report (Public Expenditure)

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): I have today laid before Parliament "Government Response to the House of Commons Health Select Committee report into Public Expenditure on Health and Care Services: Eleventh Report of Session 2012-13", Cm 8624.

Even with this Government's £12.7 billion investment in the NHS and additional £7.2 billion investment in adult social care, I acknowledge that our health and care system is facing enormous pressures from rising demands for its services. Yet both the NHS and local authorities are rising to these challenges, and through a combination of increased efficiency and wiser spending are continuing to deliver high-quality care for their patients and service users.

However, we do need to go further than just delivering the same service. If we are to meet the needs of our ageing population, the NHS and its partners in social care need to look seriously at how care is being provided, particularly to older patients and those with long-term conditions.

Our healthcare services need to be more efficient. This does not mean cutting services or finding short-term fixes—it means getting better services to people in a timely way. The number of people over 85 is set to double in coming decades. Doing things differently is the only way we will meet people's expectations within a constrained budget.

Since April—under this Government's reforms—GPs, local authorities and hospitals are now working together to make sure that services are integrated and that more is provided in the community and closer to patients' homes.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justice and Home Affairs Post Council Statement

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council was held on 6 and 7 June in Luxembourg. The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), and I attended on behalf of the United Kingdom.

The Council began with the Justice day. The presidency invited member states to give general support to part of the proposed regulation on data protection, while at the same time stressing that nothing would be formally agreed until agreement had been reached on the entire proposal. There was a detailed discussion during which a number of member states including the UK stressed that further work was needed, that clarity was required on where exemptions would apply, and supporting a properly-defined "risk-based" approach. The UK stressed the need to take account of the effect on small and medium-sized enterprises as well as major ones. A number of states, including the UK, argued that it was too soon

to accept the presidency's text and the level of "general support" called for by the presidency was not forthcoming. The relevant text will be further discussed in future negotiations.

The presidency secured a general approach on the proposed directive on protection of the financial interests of the Union by criminal law. The Council agreed to a number of amendments to the Commission's proposal, including excluding VAT from scope and deleting the requirement for member states to set minimum terms of imprisonment. The presidency made it clear that the general approach was conditional on the text being based on article 83(2) rather than article 325 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union. This was an outcome which the UK supported.

The presidency presented a paper concerning the proposed regulation on a European account preservation order (EAPO), highlighting the importance of striking an appropriate balance between the interests of the creditor and the debtor—the concern that had led to the UK deciding not to opt in. Discussions covered the possible liability of a creditor who had suffered loss as a result of a wrongly issued EPAO, the possibility of the creditor being required to provide security, and the issue of *ex parte* proceedings.

Over lunch Ministers discussed the charter of fundamental rights, and rejected calls for work designed to increase its visibility.

The Council considered the proposed regulation on insolvency. All member states which spoke, including the UK, supported the proposal. The UK pressed for speed, highlighting the benefits of the proposed measure for the internal market. Various delegations intervened to raise points of detail.

The Commission presented its new proposal on acceptance of certain public documents as one which would reduce regulatory procedural burdens and enable savings of £255 million per year.

The Council adopted conclusions on fundamental rights, rule of law and the charter of fundamental rights. The Commission presented its annual report on the charter and made reference to the justice scoreboard. The UK stressed that the justice scoreboard had not been accepted by the Council and had no legal base; moreover, rule of law work at EU level should focus on an informal exchange of views—there was no power for the Commission in respect of member states' constitutions.

A state of play report was given on EU accession and the presidency noted the progress made.

The Council adopted the EU action plan drugs strategy for 2013-17, and received a presentation by the director of the European monitoring centre for drugs and drugs addiction.

The Lithuanian Minister made a presentation of his country's justice priorities for their forthcoming presidency. They included the common European sales law and data protection, and they would seek general approaches on the account preservation order and the insolvency regulation. They would also take forward proposals on counterfeiting and protection of the Union's financial interests.

The second day began in mixed committee with Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland (non-EU Schengen States) where Ministers welcomed the deal reached in trilogue on the Schengen evaluation mechanism (SEM) and Schengen borders code (SBC). The package retains the member state peer-to-peer evaluation system and control over reintroduction of temporary internal border controls, with a greater role for the Commission in the implementation of the evaluation system and increased European Parliament access to documents. The presidency also welcomed the third biannual Schengen governance report. The Commission noted that the pressure at the Greece-Turkey land border had decreased, but warned member states to remain vigilant for displacement pressure.

The Greek Minister then presented an overview of progress made on the Greek national action plan on asylum and migration (GNAP). The Minister highlighted what he saw as key achievements, the greatest being the full operation of the new asylum service, as well as the appointment of a single co-ordinator to administer the structural funds. He noted that the focus would now be on raising the standards by opening new reception centres, introducing mobile screening units and through quicker processing. The Greek Minister thanked the UK for its financial support for returns from Greece. The Commission welcomed Greece's progress, but remained concerned about conditions in some detention centres, and reminded Greece that, given continuing under spending of EU funds, increasing absorption capacity should be a focus for the Greek authorities.

The main Council started with a discussion on foreign fighters and the potential threat they pose if and when they return to Europe. Member states expressed concern about the matter and I agreed to take forward work with a small number of affected member states. The EU counter-terrorism co-ordinator (Gilles de Kerchove) provided an overview of his recent paper on foreign fighters and urged Ministers to take immediate action to address the potential threat to EU internal security that jihadists travelling to Syria posed. The UK highlighted the importance in supporting those who wanted to do all they can to support the humanitarian effort, while deterring them from actually travelling out to Syria where they are at risk of putting themselves and innocent Syrians in danger. I expressed my disappointment that the European Parliament had failed to adopt its report on the EU PNR directive. The external action service (Maciej Popowski) cautioned against viewing all those who travelled to Syria as terrorists and reminded member states of the need also to address counter-proliferation. The Commission declared its intention to carry out a risk assessment on foreign fighters and enhance the work of the radicalisation awareness network. The presidency concluded that there was broad support for the ideas in the CTC's paper which would be taken forward at working level. The UK also provided a brief update on the recent attack in Woolwich and thanked colleagues for their messages of condolence.

Next the presidency sought views on the Commission's proposal for a new Europol regulation focusing on the proposed merger of Europol and the European Police College (CEPOL) and strengthened obligations on member states to provide Europol with information. There was a clear consensus against the merger despite the Commission

highlighting that the Council had a duty to follow the common approach on EU decentralised agencies and make efficiency and cost savings. The UK spoke out against the merger, agreeing with 18 other member states that it would have a negative impact on both training and operational activities and that the Commission's own calculations had failed to demonstrate cost savings. The presidency concluded that work would begin at expert level on the assumption that the merger would not be included in the regulation.

On the proposed obligation to share information, a number of member states expressed opposition to the Commission's proposals. The UK acknowledged the importance of information sharing but said we could not accept any proposal that made national law enforcement agencies accountable to Europol, or that would lead to member states losing control over decisions on what data they share and with whom. Increased obligations could also result in member states overwhelming Europol with information in order to comply with the regulation, to the detriment of the quality of the information. The UK also raised concerns over obligations to carry out domestic investigations at the request of Europol. No other member states intervened on this point. Discussion will move to expert level.

There was an update on the common European asylum system (CEAS). After four years of negotiations, three of the four instruments were adopted by the Council, and the final element (Eurodac regulation) will be adopted at the June Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) Council.

There was a discussion on the protection of refugees from Syria. The European external action service was pleased to announce that President Barroso had secured additional aid for Syria, and hoped that the Geneva II process, the international peace conference held in Geneva that discusses the conflict in Syria, would make progress in the medium term. According to the European asylum support office, Syria remained in the top three asylum intake for the EU member states and anticipated that this trend would remain. The Commission welcomed the increase in humanitarian aid and noted that the UNHCR would shortly call for the humanitarian admission of 10,000 refugees, with a further 2,000 set aside for resettlement to the EU. The Commissioner welcomed the high recognition rate within the EU, but remained concerned about the divergent practices between member states and the detention of Syrian nationals. The UK noted an increase in Syrian asylum seekers, and pointed to increased humanitarian aid as the most urgent short-term priority for the EU; the UK had pledged £170 million to date. The medium-term priority should be the establishment of the regional protection programme (RPP) to provide support in the regions affected and the UK hoped its place on the steering committee for the programme would be confirmed soon. Finally, the UK welcomed work by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) to develop an accurate picture of asylum claims and in co-ordination of any special support that would be required as a result. The presidency noted that this discussion would continue at the Informal Council in July, where the UNHCR would outline further the plans for the admission and resettlement of Syrian nationals.

In the margins of the Council, the Ministers of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK signed the mobility partnership with Morocco, alongside Commissioner Malmström and the Moroccan Foreign Affairs Minister, Dr Saad Dine El Otmani.

Over a working lunch Ministers discussed free movement an issue the UK has been working hard to get the Council to consider. Although there was a divergence of views on how to deal with this issue, all Ministers agreed that free movement was a core right that should be protected and expressed a wish to work together to look at possible abuse of free movement. The UK, supported by a number of other member states, stressed the need to tackle abuse to ensure continued public confidence in the principle, and called for follow-up work in the Council with a report back to JHA Ministers. However, led by the Commission, a number of member states resisted, arguing that the discussion should be led by the Commission with a focus on the evidence of the problem. The presidency asked a Commission-led group to investigate the issue to provide an interim report to the October JHA Council and a final report in December. It was decided that the EPSCO Ministers would also be given the opportunity to feed into the report. The UK thanked the presidency for the discussion and for the recognition that there should be follow up work at EU level and indicated that the UK, Germany and a number of other member states would also be progressing work on ways of dealing with the abuse of free movement.

Under any other business the presidency reported on work on the Eurosur regulation, regulation 562 (Schengen borders code) and regulation 539 (visa requirements for nationals of non-EU countries). The presidency also provided updates on the three legal migration directives. It called for member states' flexibility on the files on seasonal workers and intracorporate transferees (ICTs) as they hoped to reach first reading deals. Negotiations for the students and researchers proposal would continue under the Lithuanian presidency. The Commission emphasised the importance of the instruments in making the EU more attractive for companies and highly skilled workers while protecting those who were at risk of exploitation. The UK has not opted in to the proposals on seasonal workers and intracorporate transferees and is considering whether to opt in to the third measure on students and researchers.

The multi-annual financial framework (MFF) was making good progress, and the presidency hoped to secure the basis of a deal before the end of June. The presidency highlighted that negotiations continued on the asylum and migration fund (AMF) and internal security fund (ISF police). On the former, there were a number of issues that required flexibility from member states but there was agreement on the latter, subject to the actual budget itself.

The Lithuanian presidency noted that theirs would be the last full term presidency before the European Parliament elections, so there would be a concerted effort to conclude all outstanding negotiations. In addition, Lithuania had put Europol and cyber security high on the agenda and a debate on the latter would be a focus for the Informal Council in July, alongside a review of the Stockholm programme, a discussion on Syria, and

the annual report on immigration and asylum. The eastern partnership would be a horizontal priority for the presidency, and the Minister noted that the eastern partners would be present at the October JHA Council.

Finally, the Commission presented its Communication on migration and development in preparation for the forthcoming high-level dialogue; Sweden briefly explained the role of the global forum on migration and development (GFMD) and looked forward to welcoming member states to the meeting in Stockholm next May; Hungary fed back from the recent ministerial meeting in Istanbul on the Budapest process and discussions on the silk routes partnership; and Slovenia provided an update on the Brdo process (intended to strengthen ties with the western Balkans) and the recent informal meeting of Ministers which discussed action to tackle abuse of visa liberalisation and co-operation on combating illegal arms trafficking. The EU-Russia summit on 3-4 June had briefly touched on JHA issues, in particular the visa facilitation agreement (VFA), which the Commission hoped would be signed soon.

Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): Section 19(1) of the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011 (the Act) requires the Secretary of State to report to Parliament as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of every relevant three-month period on the exercise of her TPIM powers under the Act during that period.

The level of information provided will always be subject to slight variations based on operational advice.

TPIM notices in force (as of 31 May 2013)	8
TPIM notices in respect of British citizens (as of 31 May 2013)	8
TPIM notices extended (during the reporting period)	1
TPIM notices revoked (during the reporting period)	1
TPIM notices revived (during the reporting period)	1
Variations made to measures specified in TPIM notices (during the reporting period)	25
Applications to vary measures specified in TPIM notices refused (during the reporting period)	4

During the reporting period one TPIM notice was revoked because the subject was remanded in custody; and one TPIM notice that had been revoked in a previous quarter was revived upon the subject's release from prison.

One individual was charged in relation to an offence under section 23 of the Act—contravening a measure specified in a TPIM notice without reasonable excuse—during the period.

Section 16 of the Act provides rights of appeal in relation to decisions taken by the Secretary of State under the Act. No appeals were lodged under section 16 during the reporting period. One judgment was handed down by the High Court in relation to an appeal under section 16 of the Act, lodged in a previous quarter. In *Secretary of State for the Home Department v. CF* [2013] EWHC 843 (Admin), handed down on 12 April 2013, the High Court upheld the Secretary of State's decision not to vary four of the measures imposed under CF's TPIM notice; the Secretary of State was directed to make an amendment to one other measure. This judgment is available at: <http://www.bailii.org>.

The TPIM review group (TRG) keeps every TPIM notice under regular and formal review. The TRG has not met during this reporting period.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 13 June 2013

HEALTH

Dementia

Tracey Crouch: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the need to raise awareness of dementia in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities to remove stigma, achieve better understanding and acceptance of the disease and allow better access to service provision. [159247]

Norman Lamb: In July 2011, the Department published an equalities action plan for the National Dementia Strategy. Local national health service and social care commissioners should consider the needs of their local population when commissioning services for people with dementia.

The latest Government dementia campaign, which ran from September 2012 to January 2013, consisted of national television, radio, press and digital advertising supported by public relations. Its objective was to raise awareness of the signs of dementia across all communities, and encourage people to visit their doctor if they are concerned about their memory.

Diabetes: Children

Mr David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children aged up to 18 years in (a) Haltemprice and Howden constituency, (b) the East Riding of Yorkshire, (c) Yorkshire and the Humber and (d) England were diagnosed with diabetes in (i) 2010, (ii) 2011 and (iii) 2012. [159533]

Anna Soubry: Information is not collected in the format requested. The table shows the number of children up to 18 years newly diagnosed with diabetes in the East Riding of Yorkshire primary care trust (PCT) area, the Yorkshire and Humber strategic health authority (SHA) area and in England in the latest two years for which data is available.

Geographical area	2009-10	2010-11
East Riding of Yorkshire PCT	22	18
Yorkshire and the Humber SHA	371	409
England	3,258	3,468

Notes:

The National Diabetes Audit (NDA), which audits diabetes registrations in primary and secondary care, is not mandatory (NDA does not have 100% coverage or participation and therefore cannot accurately provide the information required).

Source:

National Diabetes Audit (NDA).

Fertility

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 5 June 2013, *Official Report*, column 1138W, on fertility, what progress has been made by clinical commissioning groups on implementing the recommendations of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence Fertility Guideline to date; what steps he is taking to encourage further progress on implementation; what mechanisms he is putting in place to monitor future progress; and if he will report the results of such monitoring to the House.

[159252]

Anna Soubry: We have been advised by NHS England that there is not a separate approach to oversight of the commissioning of NHS fertility services. However, NHS England has general intervention powers in relation to clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), should it be satisfied that a CCG is failing or has failed to discharge any of its functions, or there is a significant risk that it will fail to do so. These include directing the CCG to discharge a function in a particular way and within a specified period. NHS England also has powers to require documents and information, and to require from a CCG explanation of how it is proposing to exercise any of its functions. Legislation requires NHS England to publish guidance setting out how it proposes to exercise its intervention powers, so as to ensure that the arrangements are clear and transparent.

The planning framework 'Everyone Counts' sets out the approach NHS England will take to seek assurance that CCGs deliver improved quality at a time of limited resource growth. Thus, NHS England will receive systemic oversight through assurance by:

each clinical commissioning group providing confirmation that it has carried out a clinically-led quality impact assessment of all cost improvement schemes undertaken by its providers;

the use of local metrics and intelligence such as the views of staff and patients, more clinically based tools such as the NHS Safety Thermometer and other resources developed locally to reflect the needs of the local health economy; and

a line of sight on the clinical assurances that there has been no clinically inappropriate reduction in the availability of local services.

Health Services: Bradford

George Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many compromise agreements have been made with NHS employers in Bradford since 2000; and what the total cost to the public purse was of those agreements. [159179]

Dr Poulter: This information requested is not held centrally. Such information as is available is as follows.

From the 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2013, HM Treasury approved eight non-contractual severance payments to employees of Bradford NHS employers, (excluding foundation trusts). All eight cases were for Bradford and Airedale Teaching Primary Care Trust. The value of the approved payments totalled £75,240 in 2009-10.

Business cases submitted to the Department prior to seeking HM Treasury approval do not include compromise agreements and therefore the use and content of compromise agreements are not routinely monitored.

We do not know if any payments were actually paid or if so, at what cost to the public purse. HM Treasury approval is given for the maximum amount payable.

The procedure requiring the submission of business cases to the Department was introduced from April 2008.

Herbal Medicine: Regulation

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made towards developing a framework for statutory regulation of herbalists; and if he will make a statement. [159187]

Dr Poulter: The legislation around this policy is complex and there are a number of issues that have arisen which we need to work through. We appreciate that the delay is causing concern; however, the Department will make an announcement on the progress of this policy once the issues have been resolved.

Maternity Services

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish statistics on the number of home maternities in each local health authority area in England in 2012. [159571]

Mr Hurd: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Cabinet Office.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent question to the Secretary of State for Health, asking when we expect to publish statistics on the number of home maternities in each local health authority area in England in 2012 [159571].

The number of home maternities by strategic health authority in England will be published in the Characteristics of Birth 2, 2012 release which has a provisional publication date of November/December 2013. The exact release date will be announced at least four weeks before the publication on the UK National Statistics Publication Hub:

www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html

Following the release, home maternities by local authority can be requested.

The latest Characteristics of Birth 2 release is available on the ONS website:

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/characteristics-of-birth-2--england-and-wales/index.html

Mental Health Services: Children

Tracey Crouch: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to (a) improve child suicide prevention, (b) tackle depression in children and (c) improve provision for mental health issues arising from bullying; and if he will make a statement. [159253]

Norman Lamb: Children under 18 have the lowest risk of suicide of any age group. However, the risk is higher among some vulnerable groups of teenagers, including those with depression and those who are bullied, and so we identified children in the suicide strategy, which we launched in September 2012, as a group for which tailored approaches are needed.

The implementation framework of the mental health strategy, published in July 2012, outlines the important role schools and colleges play in relation to health and well-being and that includes addressing bullying.

The Children and Young People's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies project is transforming Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). It provides training in therapies that have been proven to be effective in treating mental health problems in children, including depression. It focuses on building a more collaborative relationship between children, young people, families and therapists through use of frequent outcome monitoring and extending participation in service design and feedback, extending training to staff and service managers in CAMHS and embedding evidence-based practice across services.

NHS: Apprentices

Steve Rotheram: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many apprentices are employed in the national health service; and what the average wage is of a full-time NHS apprentice. [159421]

Dr Poulter: Data provided by NHS Employers, who collect information on the number of apprentices in the national health service from strategic health authorities, show that as at March 2013 there were 7,894. This data does not include the number of apprentices within the former London strategic health authority who did not provide their data for the reported period.

The NHS has already seen significant progress in the development of apprenticeships in recent years. Health Education England has an objective in its mandate for 2013-15 to increase the number of health care apprentices and will work with key delivery organisations such as Skills for Health to achieve this.

Information on the average wages of apprentices in the NHS is not centrally held but wages for apprentices across the sector vary and are subject to local pay decisions.

NHS: Disclosure of Information

George Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many compromise agreements have been made in the NHS since 2000; and what the total cost to the public purse has been of such agreements. [159227]

Dr Poulter: The information requested is not held centrally. Such information as is available is as follows.

From 2008-09, all national health service bodies other than foundation trusts were required to submit business cases proposing non-contractual severance payments to the Department. Where these were supported by the Department they were sent to Her Majesty's Treasury for approval. Such payments may be made under a compromise agreement. However, neither the Department nor HM Treasury had sight of any compromise agreements, where used, as they are confidential between the employer and employee and do not form part of the business case.

From 1 April 2013 NHS trusts are required to send business cases to the NHS Trust Development Authority, and clinical commissioning groups are required to send cases to NHS England before HM Treasury approval is sought.

Data on the number of business cases and value of approvals for non-contractual payments by HM Treasury

	2008-09		2009-10		2010-11	
	Number	Value (£)	Number	Value (£)	Number	Value (£)
NHS trusts	101	3,349,052	71	1,281,294	20	281,673
Special health authorities	13	154,053	9	271,900	2	57,214
Strategic health authorities	3	801,223	3	199,985	3	35,791
Primary care trusts	75	1,686,176	47	737,789	10	133,496
Total	192	5,990,504	130	2,490,968	35	508,174

	2011-12		2012-13		Total	
	Number	Value (£)	Number	Value (£)	Number	Value (£)
NHS trusts	20	537,267	8	95,939	220	5,545,225
Special health authorities	6	172,793	6	84,747	36	483,167
Strategic health authorities	0	0	0	0	9	1,294,539
Primary care trusts	12	328,846	0	0	144	2,886,307
Total	38	1,038,906	14	180,686	409	10,209,238

Notes:

1. The above data do not include foundation trusts. From May 2008 foundation trusts have been required to submit business cases to Monitor before HM Treasury approval is sought.

2. The above data do not include payments made under local mutually agreed resignation schemes (MARS).

3. A business case may cover more than one individual.

4. The values shown are the maximum amounts approved by HM Treasury for payment. The actual payment may be less than the approved value or may not be made at all depending on the outcome of subsequent negotiations between the parties. The approved value and/or payment could also contain some contractual elements.

Source:

Business cases submitted to the Department and approved by HM Treasury

Patients

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the recommended maximum number of patients is per individual nurse ration on a general adult ward. [159192]

Dr Poulter: It is not appropriate for the Department to mandate nurse to patient ratios. Local health care organisations, with their knowledge of the patients they serve, are best placed to plan and employ a workforce appropriate to the needs of their patients, based on clinical need and sound evidence. Where changes are planned to the size and shape of the workforce, health care organisations must provide assurance that the safety and quality of patient care is maintained or improved. The process should include clinical involvement, leadership and sign off.

Commissioners of services will want to know that their workforce is fit to support the quality of care they want for patients and we are expecting boards who provide services to publish their staffing numbers for the first time this year.

The NHS Mandate makes it clear that quality of care is as important as quality of treatment. Nursing leaders must ensure that their teams are focused on delivering person-centred, intelligent and compassionate care where the patient's fundamental requirements for daily living have the priority they deserve.

EDUCATION**Education: Assessments**

Charlotte Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many readers were used in public examinations to help pupils in the latest period for which figures are available; and which other organisations hold such information. [159487]

Elizabeth Truss: Information on applications for the use of readers in public examinations, along with other access arrangements granted to support GCSE and A level examination candidates, is not held by the Department. This information is collated by the qualifications and examinations regulator, Ofqual.

I have asked Glenys Stacey, Ofqual's chief regulator, to write to my hon. Friend with such information relevant to the question as Ofqual holds. A copy of Glenys Stacey's reply will be placed in the Library.

Education: Cumbria

Mr Jamie Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the statement of 4 June 2013, *Official Report*, columns 89-90WS, on school funding reforms, how this change will affect the education budget for Cumbria County Council. [159419]

Mr Laws: The arrangements for funding schools in 2014-15 will not affect the overall education budget which the Department allocates to local authorities, including Cumbria County Council.

The new arrangements build on the reforms we made in 2013-14 which sought to simplify the school funding system. Following the Department's review of the 2013-14 arrangements, we are making a number of small changes which will give local authorities some additional flexibility to, for example, support small schools in rural areas.

GCSE

Damian Hinds: To ask the Secretary of State for Education with reference to the answer of 10 April 2013, *Official Report*, column 1190W, on GCSE, whether those results data can be further disaggregated by ethnicity from the broad categories of ethnicity listed. [159193]

Mr Laws: The requested information has been placed in the House Libraries.

Pupil Exclusions: Health

Mr David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking to prevent children being excluded from school solely on the grounds that they have (a) diabetes or (b) other health conditions.

[159534]

Elizabeth Truss: It is totally unacceptable for any school to exclude a child purely on the basis of the fact that they have diabetes or another health condition.

Schools are under a specific duty through the Equality Act 2010 not to discriminate against disabled children in relation to their access to education and associated services. The Equality Act 2010 states that children with additional health needs may be classified as disabled for the purposes of the Act. Schools are also under an obligation to ensure that children with health conditions are not put at a substantial disadvantage.

Schools should be aware of their responsibilities in this respect and mindful of the potential to be legally challenged by parents or pupils if it is shown that they have contravened their duties as set out in the Equality Act 2010. In addition, cases that are brought to the Department's attention will be dealt with appropriately and, if necessary, through the Secretary of State's powers of intervention.

Schools: Birmingham

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many surplus places there were in (a) secondary and (b) primary schools in the Birmingham local authority area in (i) 2010, (ii) 2011, (iii) 2012 and (iv) 2013 to date.

[159190]

Mr Laws: The Department collects information from each local authority (LA) on the number of available and unfilled places in state-funded primary and secondary schools (except special schools) via the annual School Capacity Collection. The tables below show the number of unfilled places in secondary and primary schools in Birmingham between 2010 and 2012. Data for 2013 are not available.

Unfilled places in state-funded secondary schools, Birmingham LA

	Unfilled places		
	2010 ¹	2011	2012
Total	2,783	4,827	5,184

¹ 2010 data does not include unfilled places in academies.

Note:

Number of places relate to position as at May in each year.

Source:

School Capacity Collection

Unfilled places in state-funded primary schools, Birmingham LA

	Unfilled places		
	2010 ¹	2011	2012
Total	7,875	7,635	10,534

¹ 2010 data does not include unfilled places in academies.

Note:

Number of places relate to position as at May in each year.

Source:

School Capacity Collection

Birmingham LA has increased school capacity between 2010 and 2012 in response to a rising primary population, which is expected to continue to increase over the next few years. The LA has been allocated £61.46 million basic need funding to support the provision of additional

school places in this spending review period (2011/12 to 2014/15). This compares with £45.03 million allocated in the previous four years (2007/8 to 2010/11).

Schools: Finance

Mr Jamie Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the statement of 4 June 2013, *Official Report*, columns 89-90WS, on school funding reforms, what discussions he has had with stakeholders to inform this policy.

[159420]

Mr Laws: On 12 February 2013, the Department for Education published 'Review of School Funding Arrangements for 2013-14' which sought views on how the new school funding arrangements have been received across the country and whether changes should be made for 2014-15.

Officials from the Department also undertook fieldwork visits to 11 local authorities (including Cumbria) where they spoke to local authority representatives, head teachers and governors. Officials have also held ongoing discussions about reforms to school funding with representatives from local authorities, academies, maintained schools and the main teaching trade unions.

Over recent months, I have had meetings with around 10 Members of Parliament to discuss how the school funding reforms have affected schools in their constituencies. This included a meeting with the hon. Members and councillors representing Cumbria county council.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Homicide

Mr Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many domestic violence-related homicides were committed in England and Wales in 2012.

[159735]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The available information relates to crimes recorded by the police on the Homicide Index in England and Wales in 2011-12.

The ONS publication "Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences":

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/focus-on-violent-crime/stb-focus-on--violent-crime-and-sexual-offences-2011-12.html>

provides figures on the number of homicides where the victim's relationship to the principal suspect was partner or ex-partner. In 2011-12, 105 such homicides were recorded.

Misuse of Drugs Ministerial Group

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 21 May 2013, *Official Report*, column 695W, on Misuse of Drugs Ministerial Group, if she will provide the link to the Cabinet Office webpage on which the details of meetings of the Inter-ministerial Group on Drugs are published and indicate the location of that information on that webpage.

[159239]

Mr Jeremy Browne: Further to the answer I gave on 21 May 2013, *Official Report*, column 695W, I can inform you that the details of meetings requested are not available on the Cabinet Office website; the Cabinet Office website only gives the details of external meetings and not internal meetings like the Inter-Ministerial Group on Drugs. I would like to apologise for this inaccuracy.

I can confirm that the Inter-Ministerial Group on Drugs met on the following occasions:

14 March 2012
8 May 2012
13 June 2012
12 November 2012
10 January 2013
30 April 2013.

As was the case with previous Administrations, it is not the Government's practice to publish details of such meetings.

Police Custody: Death

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on investigations by the Independent Police Complaints Commission on cases relating to deaths during or following police contact in each of the last three years. [158861]

Damian Green: The Home Office does not hold this information.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate she has made of the cost of legal representation of the Government at inquests into all cases relating to deaths during or following police contact in each of the last three years. [158862]

Damian Green [*holding answer 12 June 2013*]: The Home Office has made no such estimate.

Telephone Services

John Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether her Department receives any financial or non-financial benefit from its telephone providers for telephone lines that (a) her Department and (b) the agencies for which she is responsible operate, including but not limited to (i) a share of call revenue, (ii) a reduction in the Department's telephone bill or tariff and (iii) telephony services for free or at a reduced price. [157740]

James Brokenshire: The Department and its agencies:

(i) have no revenue sharing arrangements on any of their telephony services.

(ii) receive a volume based discounted tariff on internal audio conferencing services based on minutes used per month. These volumes are aggregated across core Home Office (incl. ex UKBA) and Her Majesty's Passport Office.

(iii) do not receive any other free or reduced rate telephony services.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Business Committee

Mr Meacher: To ask the Leader of the House with reference to page 27 of the Coalition Agreement, when he plans to bring forward proposals for a House Business Committee. [159493]

Mr Lansley: I explained to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee in my evidence on 16 May that I have not yet been able to find a basis on which to bring forward a workable proposal for a House Business Committee. The Government will consider the recommendations of that Committee in due course.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Green Belt

Jacob Rees-Mogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) whether the effect upon agriculture, including the need for food security, is a factor to be considered when an application is made to remove a greenbelt designation from agricultural land; [159263]

(2) whether the decision-making process to remove a greenbelt designation is required to include a formal consultation with the (a) local community and (b) local authority. [159265]

Nick Boles [*holding answer 13 June 2013*]: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to him of 11 June 2013, *Official Report*, column 222W.

Information Officers

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many (a) press officers, (b) internal communications officers, (c) external communications officers, (d) communications strategy staff and (e) any other communications staff were employed by his Department in 2012-13; and what the total cost of their salaries and any on-costs was in that period. [158394]

Brandon Lewis [*holding answer 6 June 2013*]: Since May 2010, my Department has made significant savings from the consolidation of communications spending, as part of our wider agenda of delivering a smaller and more effective Department.

Including the Government offices for the regions, the Department for Communities and Local Government had 95 communications staff in 2009 (source: Central Office of Information, 'White Book', March 2009). There were a further eight "embedded communicators" staff members who were not listed in the White Book (as stated at 5 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 632W), bringing the total to 103.

By contrast, as at 31 March 2013 there are 44 staff working in communication roles (42.6 full-time equivalent posts) in the Department; the Government offices for the regions have been abolished completely. This represents a reduction in communications staffing of 57%.

This equates to as follows:

- (a) Press office staff: 18.3
- (b) Internal communications staff: 4.8
- (c) External communications (marketing) staff: 3.6
- (d) Communications strategy staff: 4
- (e) Other communications (digital, corporate and senior management) staff: 11.8.

The Department does not allocate 'on costs' on a Directorate or employee basis. The total cost of salaries for the 42.6 full-time equivalent staff for 2012-13 amounted to £2.5 million. This compares with (extrapolated) estimates for the 103 staff in 2009-10 of £4.5 million—thus representing a yearly saving of £2 million in cash terms (and more in real terms).

The last Administration also frequently used taxpayers' money to pay for external public relations agencies, on top of its 103 in-house communications staff, spending a further £1.1 million in 2009-10 (source: DCLG, 'Communication directorate: Marketing expenditure report 2009-10'). We do not see the need for using such external public relations firms—thus saving a further £1.1 million in cash terms.

The last Administration was also spending £299,229 a year on press cuttings in 2009-10; as outlined in our answer of 22 March 2012, *Official Report*, column 832W, we have cut this to a quarter of that.

The last Administration also wasted taxpayers' money on vanity marketing. They spent £22,000 of taxpayers' money on home information packs branding; £21,090 on Homebuy scheme branding; £15,000 on branding the Sustainable Communities summit (subsequently cancelled); £10,000 on branding the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit quango; £25,000 on Community Builders branding; £7,260 on Code for Sustainable Homes branding; £33,400 on Cleaner Safer Greener Communities branding; £3,520 on re-branding Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services as the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser; £3,830 on a logo for the Department and Communities and Local Government followed by spending £24,765 on renaming it Communities and Local Government; and £1,371 on re-branding the 'Office of the Deputy Prime Minister' to the 'Deputy Prime Minister's Office'.

Across the board, under this Government, the DCLG Group is making a 41% real terms saving against its running costs over this spending review period by 2014-15. This equates to savings of at least £532 million by 2014-15.

Local Government: Billing

Andrea Leadsom: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps he is taking against late payment of invoices by local authorities. [159418]

Brandon Lewis: Small and medium businesses are an essential part of local economies, and rely on prompt payments for survival. The Government is therefore taking steps to tackle instances of late payment across the whole public sector, not just by local authorities. We recently amended the law to introduce a statutory obligation for public authorities to pay invoices in 30 days.

Many local authorities already have prompt payment clauses in their contracts, and the winners of the recent 'Best councils to do business with' contest showed examples of this working throughout the supply chain. We are working with BIS to raise further awareness of this best practice and the impact of the Late Payment Directive, and we will be taking forward the recommendations in Lord Young's report to create a 'single market' in public sector procurement.

Outdoor Advertising: Broadband

Mr Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what guidance he has issued to local authorities on commercial advertising being placed on broadband cabinets without planning consent; and what assessment he has made of the adequacy of powers available to local authorities to prosecute those who place advertising in that way. [159259]

Nick Boles: I published a letter on 11 February 2013 setting out the Government's view on commercial advertising on broadband cabinets, and placed a copy in the Library of the House. The letter is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advertising-on-broadband-cabinets-ministerial-letter>

In summary, the Government's view is that there are no deemed consent provisions in the Town and County Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) that would, in our opinion, apply for the purpose of commercial advertising on broadband boxes. Therefore our view is that advertisements should only be placed on broadband boxes with the permission of the local planning authority.

Local authorities have a range of relevant enforcement powers. Circular 03/2007 on the Control of Advertisements Regulations contains guidance on the enforcement options available to local authorities including applying to the Courts for a decision on a particular case.

I understand that BT was recently fined by Bridgend magistrates court (a £500 fine and a requirement to pay £800 costs) for breach of these regulations following local authority enforcement.

Renewable Energy: Peterborough

Mr Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he plans to call in the planning proposals by Peterborough City Council for a renewable energy park east of Peterborough; and if he will make a statement. [159486]

Nick Boles: The proposals for a renewable energy park are split into three separate planning applications, the first of which, Morris Fen, is due before Peterborough city council's planning committee on 17 June. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr Pickles), has received a number of requests to call-in the three applications for his own determination, and should Peterborough council be minded to approve them, the Secretary of State will carefully consider this case against call-in policy, as set out in the written ministerial statement on 26 October 2012, *Official Report*, columns 71-72WS. In the meantime, it would be inappropriate to comment on the detail of the applications, while considerations are still ongoing.

TREASURY**Accountancy**

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will initiate an inquiry into the advice given and sold by the big four accountancy firms. [159178]

Jo Swinson: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

No, this is a matter which the independent competition authorities are taking forward. The Office of Fair Trading, under sections 131 and 133 of the Enterprise Act 2002, on 21 October 2011 referred the market for statutory audit services to the Competition Commission (CC). The CC published its summary of provisional findings on 22 February 2013, and on 5 June 2013 issued a notice of a Further Possible Remedy under Rule 11 of its rules of procedure. These can be viewed at:

<http://www.competition-commission.org.uk/our-work/statutory-audit-services/provisional-findings-report>

Domestic Visits

Mr Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times he has visited (a) Scotland, (b) Wales and (c) Northern Ireland in an official capacity since May 2010. [159255]

Sajid Javid: Treasury Ministers' official duties entail visits throughout the United Kingdom. As was the case with previous Administrations it is not normal practice to disclose details of such visits.

Fuels: Tax Evasion

Mr Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the working relationship between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and HM Revenue and Customs in tackling oil fraud in Northern Ireland. [158838]

Sajid Javid: HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is an active member of the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) and works closely with its partner agencies in the OCTF, including the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), to tackle a range of organised crime, including fuel fraud.

HMRC chairs the Cross Border Fuel Group which includes: (a) from Northern Ireland, representatives from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Serious Organised Crime Agency and Department of Justice and (b) from the Republic of Ireland, The Revenue Commissioners, An Garda Síochána, Criminal Assets Bureau and the Department of the Environment. This group meets quarterly to discuss strategic issues relating to tackling fuel fraud. However, the agencies work together on operational matters on an ongoing basis.

HMRC in Northern Ireland has an excellent working relationship with the PSNI. The PSNI regularly provide support for HMRC operations. In the 2012-13 year, HMRC detected 22 fuel laundering plants. The PSNI routinely assisted HMRC Officers during these operations and continue to be present on site when laundering plants are dismantled.

Income Tax: Scotland

Margaret Curran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many officials of his Department are engaged on the project to implement the Scottish rate of income tax. [159550]

Mr Gauke: The estimated HMRC project costs for 2013-14 equate to around 11 full-time staff. However this draws on the expertise of over 75 HMRC staff and includes contributions from individuals on specific technical issues as part of their full-time duties.

Margaret Curran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 6 June 2013, *Official Report*, column 1239W, on income tax: Scotland, how many pensioners in each parliamentary constituency in Scotland pay income tax at (a) the highest rate or (b) the additional rate. [159552]

Mr Gauke: Data on the number of (a) higher and (b) additional rate taxpayers above state pension age at parliamentary constituency level are not published, due to small sample sizes.

Margaret Curran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 5 June 2013, *Official Report*, column 1167W, on income tax: Scotland, what steps he has taken to control the costs of the implementation of the Scottish rate of income tax. [159553]

Mr Gauke: Work to implement the Scottish rate is being managed by HMRC's implementation project. Board members, including the Scottish Government, Scotland Office and HM Treasury are involved in decision making to ensure that the project provides effective solutions and value for money. A Memorandum of Understanding between HMRC and the Scottish Government sets out arrangements for implementing the Scottish rate including how HMRC will ensure that its expenditure represents value for money. The Memorandum was published on the HMRC and Scottish Government's websites.

Margaret Curran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 5 June 2013, *Official Report*, column 1167W, on income tax: Scotland, when he expects to be able to report a revised estimate of the costs of implementation of the Scottish rate of income tax. [159554]

Mr Gauke: HMRC expects to be able to provide a more accurate estimate of the operational cost of implementing the Scottish rate of income tax later in 2013-14 when the planned work on designing the process for identifying Scottish taxpayers is undertaken. Detailed work on the implementation of the IT changes will begin in 2014; a more accurate estimate of these costs is expected to be available during 2014-15.

PAYE

Mr Byrne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his most recent estimate is of the cost to the public purse of implementing PAYE Real Time Information; [159530]

(2) what recent estimate he has made of the cost of implementing PAYE Real Time Information. [159732]

Mr Gauke: The latest version of the full business case for PAYE Real Time Information (RTI) shows a cost to Government of £273.84 million for the spending review period to March 2015.

Revenue and Customs

Catherine McKinnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many and what proportion of telephone calls to HM Revenue and Customs have been unanswered in (a) the first quarter of 2013 and (b) 2013-14 to date; [159449]

(2) how many and what proportion of letters to HM Revenue and Customs have remained unanswered in (a) the first quarter of 2013 and (b) 2013-14 to date. [159450]

Mr Gauke: HMRC does not count letters separately from other incoming post such as certain forms, faxes and email.

HMRC periodically publishes performance statistics which include:

the proportion of telephone calls handled in total and by line of business; and

the number and proportion of post items (including letters) to HMRC from customers which remained unanswered at the end of each quarter

at:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/about/bus-plan-qds.htm>

And now at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/business-plan-indicators>

HMRC plan to publish 2012-13 quarter 4 figures at the end of June 2013, and the quarter 1 results for 2013-14 in August 2013.

Revenue and Customs: Nurseries

Mr Anderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the potential effect on parents and children who use the nursery school on the HM Revenue and Customs site at Waterview Park, Washington, of a closure of the school. [159241]

Mr Gauke: HMRC wrote to affected parents on 7 May, inviting them to face-to-face consultations about what the impact of not re-tendering the nursery provision in three sites in the North East (Waterview Park, Benton Park View and Tyne View Park) would be on them.

Face-to-face consultation meetings were held in all three sites and parents and interested parties were invited to attend and offer their views. These impacts were noted down throughout the meetings.

A dedicated mailbox was also set up to allow parents to e-mail their questions and feedback directly. This has been monitored daily and every e-mail has been responded to.

Parents submitted a range of views. A summary of this feedback was shared with all affected parents on 10 June. This summary and a People Impact Assessment forms part of a decision paper that will be discussed by HMRC's Executive Committee on 18 June.

The impact assessments will also be used to put together a support package for parents, similar to that made available in 2012, which will be used if the decision is not to re-tender for the nursery provision in these three sites.

Mr Anderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on parents and children who used nursery schools on HM Revenue and Customs sites which have recently been closed. [159242]

Mr Gauke: In 2012, HMRC announced the closure of eight nurseries that were on HMRC premises. These nurseries had varying levels of occupancy and many of the nursery places were available to non-HMRC staff.

Following the announcement, HMRC put in place a series of support measures for affected parents. This included some short-term financial support, flexible working and special leave to give them time to find alternative arrangements. Members of HMRC's HR support were also on hand to support parents with agreeing what measures they needed to make use of.

The take up of these measures varied. In some cases parents found alternative nursery provision very easily and did not approach HMRC for additional support. In others they needed some support to do so.

Six of the nurseries closed in November 2012 and HMRC has not received any further requests for help from affected parents. Two nurseries, East Kilbride and Cardiff, were given a commercial lease and will continue until August 2015. These two nurseries were granted these leases as over 50% of those using them worked for HMRC. Both the nursery provider and the parents are aware of this arrangement.

Unpaid Taxes: Football

John Mann: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many English and Welsh football teams with an up-to-date arrangement with HM Revenue and Customs to pay by instalments their PAYE and national insurance contribution (NIC) deductions have not paid fully their PAYE or NIC deductions in tax year (a) 2012-13 and (b) 2013-14 to date; [159585]

(2) what sums in PAYE and national insurance contributions remain unpaid by football clubs who are members of the FA Premier League and the Football League in respect of the tax year ended 5 April (a) 2013 and (b) 2014; and what sums are outstanding in cases where clubs (i) have not yet been contacted by the local tax office or debt management office, (ii) are working with the local tax or debt management office and are either subject to an arrangement to pay or are having the case forwarded to an enforcement office, (iii) are working with an enforcement office and are either subject to an arrangement to pay or are having the case forwarded to the solicitor's office and (iv) have had their case forwarded to the solicitor's office for action in the High Court; [159581]

(3) how many football clubs who are members of the FA Premier League and the Football League have not fully paid PAYE and national insurance contributions due in respect of the tax year ended 5 April (a) 2013 and (b) 2014; and how many such clubs (i) have not yet been contacted by the local tax office or debt

management office, (ii) are working with the local tax or debt management office and are either subject to an arrangement to pay or are having the case forwarded to an enforcement office, (iii) are working with an enforcement office and are either subject to an arrangement to pay or are having the case forwarded to the solicitor's office and (iv) have had their case forwarded to the solicitor's office for action in the High Court. [159582]

Mr Gauke: There are fewer than five English and Welsh football clubs that have an up-to-date arrangement with HMRC covering their PAYE or NIC deductions for either of the tax years (a) 2012-13 and (b) 2013-14 to date. In view of the small number involved, HMRC is not able to disclose the actual number of clubs, as to do so would breach statistical standards that protect the confidentiality of information relating to HMRC's customers.

HMRC is not able to disclose the sum of PAYE and national insurance contributions remaining unpaid by FA Premier League and Football League clubs for the tax year ended 5 April 2013, as to do so would breach statistical standards that protect the confidentiality of information relating to HMRC's customers.

The sum of PAYE and national insurance contributions remaining unpaid by FA Premier League and Football League clubs for the current tax year is £1,025,731.

HMRC is not able to disclose the sums outstanding in cases where clubs have not yet been contacted by the debt management office, as to do so would breach statistical standards that protect the confidentiality of information relating to HMRC's customers.

HMRC is not able to disclose the sums outstanding in respect of cases that are working with the debt management office and are either subject to an arrangement to pay or are having the case forwarded to an enforcement office, as to do so would breach statistical standards that protect the confidentiality of information relating to HMRC's customers.

HMRC is not able to disclose the sums outstanding in cases that are working with an enforcement office and are either subject to an arrangement to pay or are having the case forwarded to the solicitor's office, as to do so would breach statistical standards that protect the confidentiality of information relating to HMRC's customers.

HMRC is not able to disclose the sums outstanding in cases that have been forwarded to the solicitor's office for action in the High Court, as to do so would breach statistical standards that protect the confidentiality of information relating to HMRC's customers.

There are fewer than five Premier League and Football League clubs that have not fully paid PAYE and national insurance contributions due in respect of the tax year ended 5 April 2013. There are nine Premier League and Football League clubs that have not fully paid PAYE and national insurance contributions due in respect of the current tax year. And of those clubs:

There are fewer than five clubs that have not yet been contacted by the debt management office.

There are nine clubs that are working with the debt management office and are either subject to an arrangement to pay or the case is being forwarded to an enforcement office.

There are fewer than five clubs that are with an enforcement office and are either subject to an arrangement to pay or the case is being forwarded to the solicitor's office.

There are fewer than five clubs that have had their case forwarded to the solicitor's office for action in the High Court.

Where there are small numbers involved, HMRC is not able to disclose the actual number of clubs, as to do so would breach statistical standards that protect the confidentiality of information relating to HMRC's customers.

Welfare Tax Credits

Hilary Benn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many claims for tax credits are being appealed; and what the average waiting time for an appeal to be (a) heard and (b) concluded was in each of the last two years. [154648]

Sajid Javid: In 2011-12 HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) received 24,001 tax credit appeals, and in 2012-13 received 23,745 appeals.

Figures for appeal waiting times, hearings and conclusions are provided by HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS). HMCTS split tax credits into working tax credits and child tax credits and their figures are:

<i>Working tax credit appeals</i>				
<i>Period</i>	<i>Number of receipts</i>	<i>Total disposals (number)</i>	<i>Weeks</i>	
			<i>Average time receipt to first hearing</i>	<i>Average time receipt to outcome</i>
2010-11	356	295	15.0	14.6
2011-12	790	782	16.1	14.7
April to December 2012 ¹	400	472	17.2	18.4

<i>Child tax credit appeals in Britain</i>				
<i>Period</i>	<i>Number of receipts</i>	<i>Total disposals (number)</i>	<i>Weeks</i>	
			<i>Average time receipt to first hearing</i>	<i>Average time receipt to outcome</i>
2010-11	2,672	2,497	15.4	15.5
2011-12	3,499	3,606	18.8	18.8
April to December 2012 ¹	1,730	2,133	22.6	23.5

Data for April to December 2012 are provisional.

The number of appellants opting for an oral hearing increased from 26% in 2011-12 to 50% in the first nine months of 2012. This has led to an increase in the average time to dispose of appeals because in addition to the time taken for the tribunal to consider written evidence, time is needed for oral evidence to be given, for any follow-up questioning, and for that evidence to be considered by the tribunal alongside the written evidence.

World Environment Day

Paul Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department took to mark World Environment Day on 5 June 2013. [159174]

Sajid Javid: HM Treasury did not take specific steps to mark World Environment Day. As set out in the Annual Report and Accounts, the Treasury takes a

range of measures to reduce its environmental impact, raise awareness of environmental issues amongst staff, and co-ordinate its consideration in policy development.

JUSTICE

Autism

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what procedures are in place to ensure that training in autism is available to all staff in the criminal justice system. [157883]

Mrs Grant: Disability and diversity guidance and training, including on learning disabilities, is available for staff of the Ministry of Justice.

Autism training, including for criminal justice system staff, is currently being looked as part of the review of the 2010 Autism strategy 'Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives', being led by the Department of Health, and my Department is contributing to this work.

Immigrants: Detainees

Sarah Teather: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many applications for immigration bail were heard by an immigration judge in each of the last five years; and in how many such cases applicants received legal aid. [156775]

Jeremy Wright: In each of the last five years judges of the First-tier and Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber) have heard the following number of bail applications:

<i>Bail application hearings</i>	
<i>Calendar year</i>	<i>Number</i>
2008	9,294
2009	10,077
2010	9,873
2011	10,228
2012	10,650

These figures do not represent the number of appellants applying for bail, as the same appellant may apply for bail on multiple occasions. These figures also exclude bail renewals, variations and forfeitures.

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) does not hold information on which of the applications set out in the table received legal aid. In such cases providers assist clients directly, and the LAA does not hold records of applications.

Legal Aid Scheme

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he has made of the potential effect of his planned changes to legal aid on client choice. [159275]

Jeremy Wright: Between 9 April and 4 June 2013 the Government consulted on a number of proposals to reform legal aid via the 'Transforming Legal Aid: delivering a more credible and efficient system' consultation. This included a proposed model of competitive tendering for criminal legal aid services. We have been clear we must continue to bear down on the cost of legal aid, including

the £1 billion of taxpayers' money spent on criminal legal aid a year, to ensure we are getting the best deal for the taxpayer.

An assessment of the potential effect that proposals to reform legal aid would have on client choice was published in the impact assessment alongside the 'Transforming Legal Aid: delivering a more credible and efficient system' consultation.

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will meet the Chairman of the Criminal Bar Association to discuss proposals to reform the legal aid system; and if he will make a statement. [159319]

Jeremy Wright: Between 9 April and 4 June 2013 the Government consulted on a number of proposals to reform legal aid via the 'Transforming Legal Aid: delivering a more credible and efficient system' consultation. This included a proposed model of competitive tendering for criminal legal aid services. We have been clear we must continue to bear down on the cost of legal aid, including the £1 billion of taxpayers' money spent on criminal legal aid a year, to ensure we are getting the best deal for the taxpayer.

During the consultation the ministerial team and officials met with many stakeholders, and I refer the hon. Gentleman to the parliamentary question (158068) asked by the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), for a full breakdown of those meetings. It states that Lord McNally met with the Chairman of the Criminal Bar Association on 30 May 2013 for 45 minutes, along with a senior civil servant and a representative from the Legal Aid Agency (LAA).

This consultation has now closed and my officials and I will be considering the responses, including the response received from the Criminal Bar Association, with a view to publishing the Government response in the autumn.

CABINET OFFICE

Buildings

Margaret Curran: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much his Department has spent from the public purse on modernisation of buildings that are part of the Cabinet Office estate in each of the last three years. [159545]

Miss Chloe Smith: This Government has taken a determined approach to cutting its expenditure on property to address the wasteful situation it inherited at the time of the last election where millions of pounds of taxpayers' money were spent on unnecessary and under-occupied buildings. These efforts to consolidate and slim down the property estate ensured savings of £620 million last year alone and contributed to the £10 billion of savings made from efficiency and reform last year.

The Cabinet Office is leading by example. Our strategy for London is to consolidate as far as possible into its core freehold buildings. To achieve this the Cabinet Office is co-locating with HM Treasury at 1 Horse Guards Road. In addition the Department has vacated 22-26 Whitehall (which have been re-used by the Department for International Development) and Admiralty

Arch. A long lease is being sold on the arch to allow for future use as an hotel. This will enable public access and provide a capital sum of £60 million. The Cabinet Office's main building at 70 Whitehall is being modernised under a programme which began in 2008-09.

Information on capital expenditure on modernisation of the Cabinet Office's buildings is published in the Department's Annual Report and Accounts.

Cabinet Committees

Jonathan Reynolds: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will publish a list of Cabinet committees currently in operation; and what the membership is of each such committee. [159695]

Mr Letwin: The list of Cabinet committees and sub-committees and their members is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-cabinet-committees-system-and-list-of-cabinet-committees>

Electronic Surveillance

Dr Huppert: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will assess the consequences for the cyber security of UK companies and individuals of the US Prism programme. [159575]

Miss Chloe Smith: I refer to the statement made by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), on 10 June 2013, *Official Report*, columns 31-43.

Employment: Lincolnshire

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion and how many of those employed in North-East Lincolnshire were employed in the public sector in each year since 2007. [159929]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson, dated June 2013:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what proportion and how many of those employed in North-East Lincolnshire were employed in the public sector in each year since 2007 (159929).

The ONS compiles Labour Market Statistics for areas below the UK following International Labour Organisation (ILO) definitions using the Annual Population Survey (APS).

Individuals in the APS are classified to the public or private sector according to their responses to the survey. The public sector estimates provided do not correspond to those derived as part of the calculation of the official Public Sector Employment estimates. These are based on a National Accounts' definition, are generally lower and are not available for areas smaller than regions.

The table shows the proportion and number of people employed in the public sector in North East Lincolnshire. These estimates are compiled from APS interviews held during the period January 2012 to December 2012, the latest period available, and the 12 month periods ending in December in each year since 2007.

As with any sample survey, estimates from the APS are subject to a margin of uncertainty. A guide to the quality of the estimates is given in the table.

National and local area estimates for many labour market statistics, including employment, unemployment and claimant count are available on the NOMIS website at:

<http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

Proportion and number of people employed in the public sector¹ in North East Lincolnshire

12 months ending December:	Public sector employment	
	Number (Thousand)	Proportion of people in employment (%)
2007	13	17.7
2008	14	20.4
2009	15	21.4
2010	16	23.4
2011	15	21.9
2012 ²	**14	20.6

¹ Individuals in the APS are classified to the public or private sector according to their responses to the survey.

² Coefficients of Variation have been calculated for the latest period as an indication of the quality of the estimates. See Guide to Quality below.

Guide to Quality:

The Coefficient of Variation (CV) indicates the quality of an estimate, the smaller the CV value the higher the quality. The true value is likely to lie within +/- twice the CV - for example, for an estimate of 200 with a CV of 5% we would expect the population total to be within the range 180-220.

Key:

* 0 ≤ CV < 5%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered precise

** 5 ≤ CV < 10%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered reasonably precise

*** 10 ≤ CV < 20%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered acceptable

**** CV ≥ 20%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered too unreliable for practical purposes

Source:

Annual Population Survey

Employment: Swindon

Justin Tomlinson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the net change in the number of private sector jobs in (a) North Swindon constituency and (b) Swindon Borough was in the latest period for which figures are available. [159389]

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Glen Watson, dated June 2013:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking what the net change in the number of private sector jobs in (a) North Swindon constituency and (b) Swindon Borough was in the latest period for which figures are available. (159389)

Information regarding the number of private sector jobs for parliamentary constituencies is not available. As an alternative, estimates relating to the number of people employed in the private sector have been provided. Employment statistics for local areas are calculated from the Annual Population Survey (APS).

Individuals in the APS are classified to the public or private sector according to their responses to the survey. The private sector estimates provided do not correspond to those derived as part of the calculation of the official Public Sector Employment estimates. These are based on a National Accounts' definition, are generally higher and are not available for areas smaller than regions.

The table shows the number and net change of people employed in the private sector in North Swindon constituency and Swindon. These estimates are compiled from APS interviews held during the period January 2012 to December 2012, the latest period available, and the 12 month period ending in December 2011.

As with any sample survey, estimates from the APS are subject to a margin of uncertainty. A guide to the quality of the estimates is given in the table.

National and local area estimates for many labour market statistics, including employment, unemployment and claimant count are available on the NOMIS website at:

<http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

Table 1: Net change in the number of people employed in the private sector¹ in North Swindon constituency and Swindon

12 months ending:	Thousand	
	North Swindon constituency	Swindon
December 2011	45	80
December 2012 ²	**41	**80
Net Change	-4	0

¹ Individuals in the APS are classified to the public or private sector according to their responses to the survey.

² Coefficients of Variation have been calculated for the latest period as an indication of the quality of the estimates, See Guide to Quality.

Guide to Quality:

The Coefficient of Variation (CV) indicates the quality of an estimate, the smaller the CV value the higher the quality. The true value is likely to lie within +/- twice the CV—for example, for an estimate of 200 with a CV of 5% we would expect the population total to be within the range 180-220.

Key:

* 0 ≤ CV < 5%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered precise

** 5 ≤ CV < 10%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered reasonably precise

*** 10 ≤ CV < 20%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered acceptable

**** CV ≥ 20%—Statistical Robustness: Estimates are considered too unreliable for practical purposes

CV = Coefficient of Variation

Source:

Annual Population Survey

High Speed 2 Railway Line

Mrs Gillan: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the answer of 16 May 2013, *Official Report*, column 343W, on the High Speed 2 railway line, and consequent on the Information Commissioner's decision on publication of the Major Projects Authority Report into High Speed 2, when he plans to place in the Library a copy of the report. [159498]

Miss Chloe Smith: We are reviewing the Information Commissioner's decision but in the meantime the MPA Annual Report can be accessed here:

<http://engage.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/major-projects-authority>

A copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

The Department for Transport has published more detailed information on HS2 which can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-major-projects-portfolio-data-for-dft-2013>

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hunger and Nutrition

Sir Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development What work her Department is undertaking in respect of hunger and nutrition in developing countries. [159158]

Justine Greening: Our existing nutrition programmes will reach 20 million pregnant women and children under five by 2015 and ensure another 4 million people have enough available food by 2015.

The 'Nutrition for Growth' event on 8 June catalysed political and funding commitments to improve global nutrition.

Private Sector Investment

Rebecca Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to encourage responsible private sector investment, including in supply chains for retailers. [159159]

Justine Greening: Bangladesh shows the tragic consequences of ignoring the responsibilities businesses carry for the safety and well-being of the people they affect. My Department places great importance on shaping investment and business operations to improve working conditions and promote economic development.

The steps we are taking to encourage responsible private sector investment include (i) working jointly with retailers committed to improving conditions in their supply chains, (ii) strengthening standards and company reporting, and (iii) ensuring workers have a voice and can gain redress.

I intend to host a roundtable event next month with major UK retailers to discuss this issue.

Overseas Aid

Mr Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which 10 countries received the most support from her Department in the last year for which figures are available; and which other countries received support from her Department in that year. [159115]

Mr Duncan: The following table shows the 10 countries which received the most support from DFID's bilateral aid programme in the financial year 2011-12:

Rank	Country
1	Ethiopia
2	India
3	Bangladesh
4	Pakistan
5	Nigeria
6	Afghanistan
7	Congo (Dem Rep)
8	Tanzania
9	Somalia
10	Kenya

Details of all countries in receipt of DFID bilateral programme expenditure, for the last five years, are listed in Tables 14.1-14.5 of the 'Statistics on International Development' publication, available online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statistics-on-international-development>

Information on the amount of support received by different countries in 2012-13 will be published in 'Statistics on International Development' in autumn 2013.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance the UK gives to wildlife conservation in sub-Saharan Africa. [159551]

Lynne Featherstone: In 2012 DEFRA gave £8.5 million to 33 new projects under the Darwin Initiative, which has backed wildlife conservation projects in some of the world's poorest countries for the last two decades. Many of these were in Africa, including a project in Liberia to build the capacity of the next generation of conservation professionals.

Unmanned Air Vehicles

Anas Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether her Department has made an assessment of the effect of drone strikes on shifting livelihood strategies in the affected regions in Somalia and Yemen. [159422]

Justine Greening: DFID receives regular reports on persons displaced by conflict, including in countries affected by drone strikes such as Somalia and Yemen. These are not disaggregated by specific cause but provide sufficient information to assess and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable.

Anas Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether her Department has undertaken research on retaliation attacks on local and international aid workers following drone strikes in Pakistan and Afghanistan. [159438]

Justine Greening: We have not undertaken any research on retaliation attacks on aid workers following drone strikes in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

TRANSPORT

Bus Services: Concessions

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many local authorities provide free bus travel to 16 to 24 year olds not in education, employment or training. [159559]

Norman Baker: Local authorities which are travel concession authorities (TCAs) have powers to implement discretionary schemes providing concessionary fares for groups of people.

Statistics on the provision of youth discounts can be found in National Statistics Table BUS0842, at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/bus08-concessionary-travel>

However, we do not have detailed or complete information on which specific age groups such concessions are provided for or what level of fare discount is offered.

Overall, in 2011-12, 28 out of 89 TCAs outside London offered concessions to young people. In addition, bus operators in 80 TCA areas offered their own commercial discounts. The age restrictions applicable to each local scheme will vary.

Railway Track

Mr Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what total mileage of rail track in (a) Scotland, (b) England and (c) Wales is owned and operated by Network Rail. [158969]

Mr Simon Burns: The total mileage of rail track owned by Network Rail in Scotland, England and Wales is shown in the following table. These figures are for the total amounts of running track owned by Network Rail, which include the running lines on the network, but exclude sidings and depots.

<i>Network Rail owned running track 2012-13</i>	
	<i>Miles</i>
England	15,156
Scotland	2,632
Wales	1,520
<i>Source:</i>	
Network Rail.	

Railways: Devon

Mr Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the railway network between London and Devon. [159180]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department has not recently carried out an assessment of the railway between London and Devon. There is an industry process, led by Network Rail, for the ongoing assessment of the network's capability and prioritisation of funding for upgrades. Network Rail published the Great Western Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) in March 2010, which is available on their website, and this is currently being updated through the Network Rail's Long-Term Planning Process.

Network Rail is also actively investigating the resilience of the route to Devon in light of the recent severe flooding.

Mr Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he plans to take to improve the railway network services between London and Devon. [159181]

Mr Simon Burns: A significant programme of upgrade work is already under way on the Great Western route, including electrification to Newbury, Oxford, Swansea and Bristol, new intercity trains, and the redevelopment of Reading station.

The Rail Investment Strategy for 2014-19 provides a £300 million fund for journey time and performance improvements for which the London to Devon route would be eligible.

The outcome of Network Rail's Long-Term Planning Process, now currently under way, will consider possible improvements for the period after 2019.

Thameslink Railway Line

Dr Offord: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the prospects for completion of the Thameslink tender franchise by 2018. [159240]

Mr McLoughlin: The Department continues to aim for delivery of the 24 trains per hour service by December 2018.

As soon as the rolling stock contract has been awarded, the Department will work with industry partners to complete a detailed review of the cross-industry plan to confirm delivery timescales.

With regards to the Thameslink franchise, the Department announced in March that the procurement process for the new Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern (TSGN) franchise has restarted with the aim of the next franchisee taking over the elements of the route currently operated by First Capital Connect (Thameslink and Great Northern) in September 2014, with those elements currently operated by Southern becoming part of the franchise in July 2015.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Accountancy

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the names, job titles, area of work, term of appointment and Civil Service equivalent grade are of personnel currently seconded to his Department from the big four accountancy firms. [159043]

Richard Benyon: Core DEFRA does not have any personnel currently seconded from the big four accountancy firms.

Agricultural Shows

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will hold discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on reducing taxation for England's agricultural county shows; and what steps he is taking to reduce the regulatory burden on such shows. [159184]

Mr Heath: I have no current plans to discuss the taxation of agricultural county shows with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and DEFRA is taking no steps at present specifically to reduce the regulatory burden on agricultural county shows. However, DEFRA is keen to reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens wherever possible, so I would welcome a letter describing the specific burdens of DEFRA regulation on such shows along with suggestions for improvement. DEFRA will launch a new Red Tape Challenge theme later in the summer covering agricultural and animal health regulations and, if it is felt that these regulations place a burden on agricultural county shows, we would welcome comments on this to feed into our review.

Animal Experiments

Henry Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on reducing the number of animals used in scientific procedures; what steps he is taking to reduce the number of animals used in such procedures; and if he will make a statement. [159410]

Mr Heath: DEFRA officials meet with Home Office officials and key stakeholders at regular intervals to discuss a range of issues relating to animal welfare, including policies on the use of animals in scientific procedures, for which Home Office is the lead Department.

Bees

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on the decline in the bee population. [159010]

Mr Heath: DEFRA Ministers have not discussed strategies to protect bee populations with their counterparts in other European countries or in the EU. However, the UK is fully engaged in all the appropriate European fora. There is a considerable body of Government funded work that benefits bee species and other important pollinators. The Government is considering whether there is added value in bringing all this work together in a holistic strategy.

Mr Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans he has to support the declining bee population. [159072]

Mr Heath: We are reviewing the health and value of bees and other pollinators to develop a better understanding of the various factors that can harm pollinators and the changes that Government, other organisations and individuals can make to counter their impact. This review will consider the value that a National Pollinator Strategy might add in addition to the other Government initiatives that are currently under way.

My noble Friend, Lord de Mauley, and DEFRA's chief scientific adviser have already met to discuss this work with a number of interested parties, including some non-government organisations. We are seeking to host discussions with other stakeholders over the summer.

Meanwhile, there are a number of initiatives in place to support the bee population.

In 2009, DEFRA and the Welsh Government launched the Healthy Bees Plan which is aimed at improving and protecting the health of honey bees over the next 10 years.

DEFRA is providing £2.5 million over five years (from 2010-11) towards the £10 million Insect Pollinators Initiative, which is being jointly funded with the Scottish Government, Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, Natural Environment Research Council and the Wellcome Trust.

'Biodiversity 2020' committed to an increase in the overall extent of priority habitats by at least 200,000 hectares and to preventing further human-induced extinctions of known species. Further to this, Natural England funds conservation projects to support priority species such as bumble bees.

Funding is also available to encourage farmers to provide forage and nesting sites for bees. Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) provides payments for the establishment of nectar flower mixtures. Several new ELS options were introduced from 1 January 2013, including a supplement to add wildflowers to buffer strips and field corners, plus options for legume-rich and herb-rich swards to provide habitat and food for invertebrates including bees.

Mr Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans he has to support the honey industry in light of decreasing bee yields. [159073]

Mr Heath: There are no plans to support the honey industry directly. However, there are a number of initiatives in place to support the honey bee sector through DEFRA's Healthy Bees Plan and bee health programme.

Bees: Lancashire

Jake Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if he will estimate the bee population of Lancashire in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; [159296]

(2) what steps he is taking to preserve the bee population in Lancashire. [159299]

Mr Heath: We are taking a number of steps to support wild bees and managed honey bees across England that will benefit their populations in Lancashire.

Currently, we are reviewing the health and value of bees and other pollinators to develop a better understanding of the various factors that can harm pollinators and the changes that the Government, other organisations and individuals can make to counter their impact. This review will consider the value that a National Pollinator Strategy might add in addition to the other Government initiatives that are currently under way.

My noble Friend, Lord de Mauley, and DEFRA's chief scientific adviser have already met to discuss this work with a number of interested parties, including some non-government organisations. We are seeking to host discussions with other stakeholders over the summer.

Meanwhile, there are a number of initiatives in place to support the bee population. These include the following:

In 2009, DEFRA and the Welsh Government launched the Healthy Bees Plan which is aimed at improving and protecting the health of honey bees over the next 10 years.

DEFRA's bee health programme, delivered by the Food and Environment Research Agency's National Bee Unit (NBU), provides free inspection and comprehensive education on a wide range of beekeeping issues. The aim of the programme is to control the spread of statutory pests and diseases and improve beekeepers' disease recognition and husbandry skills. In 2012 there were 649 colony inspections and 20 training events in Lancashire.

DEFRA is providing £2.5 million over five years (from 2010-11) towards the £10 million Insect Pollinators Initiative, which is being jointly funded with the Scottish Government, Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, Natural Environment Research Council and the Wellcome Trust.

Our biodiversity strategy, 'Biodiversity 2020', committed to an increase in the overall extent of priority habitats by at least 200,000 hectares and to preventing further human-induced extinctions of known species. To help drive this commitment, the UK Government has provided funding to establish 12 new Nature Improvement Areas to create more and better-connected habitats at a landscape scale. We have provided £610,000 to support the Morecambe Bay Limestone and Wetlands Nature Improvement Area which spans Lancashire and Cumbria.

Funding is also available to encourage farmers to provide forage and nesting sites for bees. Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) provides payments for the establishment of nectar flower mixtures. Several new ELS options were introduced from 1 January 2013, including a supplement to add wildflowers to buffer strips and field corners, plus options for legume-rich and herb-rich swards to provide habitat and food for invertebrates including bees.

There is no published data on the number of honey bees in Lancashire. However, the NBU has a voluntary database of beekeepers which has the following information recorded for Lancashire:

	Beekeepers	Colonies
2010	412	1,318
2011	477	1,688
2012	531	1,766

Monitoring to detect changes in the abundance of wild insect bees accurately is not, and has never been, carried out systematically in the UK or in Europe. It is not possible therefore to estimate the size of the wild bee population at national or individual county level. In Great Britain, we do know that there has been an overall decline in the diversity of wild bees in recent decades¹ with some areas showing an increase in diversity, but a significantly greater area showing a decline. This broad trend is likely to be reflected across the country. Changes are likely to be driven, at least in part, by significant range contractions for specialist species that are associated with natural or semi-natural habitat or have narrow forage requirements.

The question of how best to measure population trends in the future will be addressed as part of our review and will be discussed at related expert workshops in autumn 2013.

¹ As measured by number of species per unit area.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what evidential basis the badger cull has been planned. [158455]

Mr Heath: The badger cull policy is based on evidence from the Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT). Using the results of this trial (based on an average of five years' culling plus a four-year post-cull period), culling over an area of 150 km² could be expected to lead to an average 16% reduction in TB incidence in the local area. This figure was agreed by an independent panel of scientists at a meeting with Professor Bob Watson, DEFRA's then Chief Scientific Adviser. A summary of the key conclusions from this meeting is available on the DEFRA website at:

<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/farmanimal/diseases/atoz/tb/documents/bovinetb-scientificexperts-110404.pdf>

Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the additional costs associated with cage trapping and shooting of badgers will be borne by (a) the Government and (b) the National Farmers' Union. [159035]

Mr Heath: The industry will be responsible for the operational costs of delivering culling. The methods of cage trapping (followed by shooting) or controlled shooting of badgers can be used in combination or as single control methods. It is for industry to decide which culling method(s) should be used to remove badgers.

Flood Control

Simon Hart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether his Department has considered the possibility of widening and deepening rivers to help alleviate flooding in regularly affected areas. [154626]

Richard Benyon: The Environment Agency, as a risk management authority, has powers to carry out flood and coastal risk management work on main rivers in England. This includes widening and deepening rivers.

Dredging and other types of watercourse management are routinely considered by the Environment Agency when assessing how best to manage flood risk to protect people and property.

Each site is different so the Environment Agency takes a risk-based approach and adopts the most suitable maintenance procedure for each stretch of river, ensuring that this does not adversely impact on habitats or protected species.

Food: Waste

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether his Department has any plans to set targets for food waste reduction for producers and retailers. [158985]

Richard Benyon: The Government has set targets for food producers and retailers to reduce food and packaging waste under the voluntary Courtauld Commitment. The targets that feature food waste for the three phases are:

Objective	Courtauld Commitment phase 1 targets (2005-09) ¹ (tonnes)	Reduction Percentage	
		Courtauld Commitment phase 2 targets (2010-12) ²	Courtauld Commitment phase 3 targets (2013-15) ³
Manufacturing and retail waste ⁴	5	5	3
Household food and drink waste	155,000	4	5

¹ Against a 2008 baseline.

² Against a 2009 baseline.

³ Against a 2012 baseline.

⁴ This includes food and packaging waste.

⁵ Not included in Courtauld 1.

The third phase already has 45 signatories, representing a combined share of over 90% of the UK grocery market, based on sales.

Guide Dogs

Jake Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will take steps to help harnessed guide dogs from being attacked by other dogs. [159297]

Mr Heath: On 9 May the Government introduced into Parliament the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill, which will streamline measures designed to tackle antisocial behaviour including such instances where they involve a dog. This will allow action to be taken before a dog becomes dangerously out of control. The Bill will also amend the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 so that a dog attack on an assistance dog will be treated as an aggravated offence, as if it were an attack on a person. This will mean that the owner of the dog that attacks an assistance dog will be liable to prosecution and on conviction a potential unlimited fine and imprisonment for up to two years.

Horse Racing

Chris Williamson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 21 May 2013, *Official Report*, column 688W,

on horseracing; (1) if he will estimate the number of racehorses killed outright or destroyed at each British racecourse in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; [159454]

(2) if he will publish the names of all racehorses (a) killed outright and (b) destroyed on British racecourses or shortly afterwards due to injury in (i) 2010, (ii) 2011 and (iii) 2012. [159434]

Mr Heath: The Government do not hold this information.

Horses: Diseases

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether (a) contagious equine metritis and (b) equine viral arteritis are to remain notifiable diseases under the Animal Health Act 1981. [159549]

Mr Heath: There are no plans at present to delist any notifiable diseases, though we are keeping this under review. We will, of course, work closely with the industry on this and consult on any potential changes. Our priority will remain the safeguarding of human and animal health and to protect trade and wider society.

Insects

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what arrangements are in place to monitor the population of (a) bees and (b) other pollinators across the UK. [159008]

Mr Heath: The Government recognises the importance of all pollinators, including bees, and their value to both food security and sustaining the natural environment.

Monitoring to detect changes in the abundance of insect pollinators accurately is not, and has never been, carried out systematically in the UK or in Europe. Our current knowledge is derived from limited abundance surveys for some species groups or from analysis of occurrence records to identify changes in range or diversity.

DEFRA has been exploring ways to support more systematic approaches to monitor wild pollinator species, in collaboration with other organisations, such as the Research Councils, and the voluntary sector.

Specifically we are looking at how to build on existing expertise within the voluntary sector to develop innovative ways to collect monitoring data. The question of how best to measure population trends will also be addressed by a comprehensive review of evidence on pollinators and will be discussed at related expert workshops in autumn 2013.

Nitrogen Dioxide: Pollution

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the European Commission on laws and regulations on nitrogen dioxide pollution; and if he will make a statement. [159292]

Richard Benyon: The meeting of the Informal Environment Council of the Irish Presidency on 22 April included a wide ranging discussion of the European

Commission's outline plans for its review of the 2005 Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution and associated policies. The review is due to conclude in October; a key objective is to address the compliance challenges faced by member states, including for nitrogen dioxide.

Pets: Poisoning

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate his Department has made of the number of (a) cats, (b) dogs and (c) other household pets poisoned by antifreeze in each of the last 10 years. [159914]

Mr Heath: The Government has not made any estimate of the number of cats or dogs poisoned by antifreeze.

Scotland

Margaret Curran: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what (a) his Department and (b) its non-departmental public bodies procured from companies based in Scotland of a value in excess of £25,000 since May 2010; and what the cost to the public purse was of each such procurement contract. [155769]

Richard Benyon: Placed in the Library of the House is a table that sets out what has been procured by core DEFRA, and its non-departmental public bodies from companies based in Scotland of a value in excess of £25,000 since May 2010 and what the costs have been to the public purse.

This uses Scottish postcodes to identify companies based in Scotland, even though some are subsidiaries of UK or international groups.

Since January 2011, central Government Departments, including their agencies and non-departmental public bodies, have been required to publish on Contracts Finder information on the contracts they award:

www.contractsfinder.businesslink.gov.uk

In addition, core DEFRA publishes details of spend in excess of £25,000:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defra-spending-over-25-000-published>

Stray Dogs

Jake Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps he is taking to control stray dogs. [159298]

Mr Heath: On 9 February the Government announced proposals for every dog to be microchipped from April 2016. Voluntary microchipping of dogs enables around 50,000 stray or displaced dogs each year to be reunited with their owners. If all dogs were microchipped it would reduce the time any stray dog has to spend in kennels while the owner is traced.

DEFENCE

Redundancy

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many employees of his Department who have worked on the Government's nuclear policy have been made redundant since 2010. [159543]

Dr Murrison: No Ministry of Defence officials working on nuclear policy have either been made redundant, or left under the Voluntary Early Release Scheme (VERS) since 2010. It is Government policy not to release Nuclear Suitably Qualified and Experienced Personnel.

Details of officials who have left the Department under VERS and have worked in the nuclear policy area at any point in their career are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Afghanistan

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes his Department plans to make to the data collection process relating to compensation claims for deaths caused by drone strikes in Afghanistan. [158778]

Mr Robathan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 17 December 2012, *Official Report*, column 601W, to the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Mr Watson).

Armed Forces

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many members of the armed forces with an interrupted service career history have been re-employed in the armed forces since May 2005; [158976]

(2) how many members of the armed forces with an interrupted service career history were re-employed in the armed forces between 6 April 2005 and 1 January 2010. [159537]

Dr Murrison [holding answer 10 June 2013]: Information on the number of armed forces personnel with interrupted service career history that have been re-employed since April 2005 is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Armed Forces: Redundancy

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has to review his Department's policy on early departure payment awards for members of the armed forces with an interrupted service career history; [158979]

(2) what his Department's policy is on early departure payments to those who have previously had a break in their service in the armed forces; [159536]

(3) whether he plans to review his policy on early departure payment awards to members of the armed forces who have an interrupted service career history. [159542]

Dr Murrison [holding answer 10 June 2013]: The terms of the Early Departure Payment (EDP) scheme were set under the previous Administration and came into effect when the Armed Forces Pension Scheme 2005 (AFPS 05) was introduced in April 2005. To qualify for an EDP an individual has to reach age 40 or over and have at least 18 years relevant service. Relevant service includes any period of AFPS 05 service on or after 6 April 2005.

Those who have had a break in service prior to 6 April 2005 cannot normally count their previous service—which would have been as a member of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme 1975 (AFPS 75)—as relevant service for EDP purposes. However, where that service was aggregated with a subsequent period of AFPS 75 service for pension purposes and the individual transferred their benefits to AFPS 05 under the 2006 Offer to Transfer, it can be counted towards the EDP.

There are no current plans to review the existing legislation relating to early departure payments for members of the armed forces with an interrupted service career history. However, for the new Armed Forces Pension Scheme, which will be introduced in 2015, the wider issue of transfers and re-joiners is currently the subject of discussions between the public service schemes and HM Treasury.

Cybercrime

Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking through the Defence Cyber Security Programme to increase the cyber awareness of (a) civilian staff in his Department and (b) armed forces personnel. [159280]

Mr Robathan [*holding answer 11 June 2013*]: Cyber awareness is key to the cyber defence of our networks.

All Defence personnel are required either to complete the Protecting Information e-learning which now contains essential cyber security messages, or (for those without routine access to departmental IT systems) to attend a briefing covering similar messages. Cyber awareness also forms a part of the short security briefing which all Defence personnel must attend annually. We regularly review the content to ensure that the latest information is given.

We have rolled out an e-learning programme on cyber awareness (including an assessment test). As at 9 June 2013 this had been completed by over 49,000 staff, with a further 11,000 enrolled. The programme covers both civilian and military personnel.

We are also engaging directly with single services and civilian training authorities to ensure that cyber awareness is included at appropriate levels in training courses ranging from induction to senior-level courses, and with particular professional groups to ensure that their needs for additional aspects of awareness are met.

Defence Equipment

Mrs Moon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what equipment was tested under Better Equipment through Ashchurch; what cost savings were made as a result of that programme; and if he will make a statement. [159557]

Mr Dunne: Better Equipment Throughput at Ashchurch (BETA) is not an equipment programme but a forum that meets quarterly to prioritise, agree, plan and review the business performance of Ashchurch. These sessions are chaired jointly by Director Land Equipment and Army HQ at a senior level, the purpose of the joint chair is to align the two customer demands at Ashchurch. Benefits accrued to date are:

Bowman Control and Optimisation;

Site rationalisation plan and implementation;
Restructured Ashchurch business;
Resource control;
Improved disposals programme;
Improved Fleet coordination;
Improved health and safety and quality standards;
Increased population of the Controlled Humidity Environment facility;
Consistent delivery of equipment platforms under Urgent Operational Requirements;
MAN SV Programme—Backlog reduction from 1,200 to 500; and
Introduction of JAMES, a logistics IT system, and its operator roles.

The Defence Support Group calculates that the BETA process has contributed in delivering cost avoidance savings to Ministry of Defence of £6.29 million to 31 March 2013.

Unmanned Air Vehicles

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether UK personnel have flown unmanned aerial vehicles as part of NATO operations. [159186]

Mr Robathan: Yes.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Accountancy

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many officials in his Department are currently seconded to any of the four largest accountancy firms; and what the (a) job titles and (b) pay grade is of each such secondee. [159907]

Gregory Barker: The Department of Energy and Climate Change does not have any people currently seconded to any of the big four accountancy firms.

Electricity

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the potential effects of electricity market reform on the development of (a) gasification, (b) pyrolysis and (c) other nascent technologies. [159548]

Michael Fallon: DECC is considering the appropriate level of support for gasification, pyrolysis and other nascent technologies. Proposed support levels under Contracts for Difference will be published for consultation in July, as part of the draft Electricity Market Reform Delivery Plan. This will be accompanied by an impact assessment which will set out the potential effects of these strike prices on the electricity market.

Energy

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the potential effect (a) on levy control framework funding of his proposals for the capacity market and (b) of the interaction between the two. [159547]

Michael Fallon: The costs of the capacity market will not count against the £7.6 billion levy control framework limit agreed for 2020-21. The limits to levy control framework funding were set assuming de-rated capacity margins consistent with the operation of the capacity market. As such, they are sufficient to deliver our low carbon objectives alongside the introduction of a capacity market to ensure future security of supply.

Fossil Fuelled Power Stations: Wales

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether his Department is responsible for the decommissioning costs of fossil fuel-fired power stations in Wales. [159596]

Michael Fallon: The costs of decommissioning fossil fuel-fired power stations in Wales are the responsibility of the operators of such stations.

Green Deal Scheme

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to the answer of 21 May 2013, *Official Report*, column 711W, on the Green Deal Scheme: North East, what information will be contained in the first quarterly Official Statistics which his Department plans to publish on 27 June 2013. [159544]

Gregory Barker: The first quarterly Official Statistics on Green Deal and ECO, to be published on 27 June, will cover the period to 31 March 2013. This quarterly report will contain more detailed analysis of the GD assessments carried out in that period including breakdowns by type of property and of measures recommended in these assessments. The report will also include a section on planned additional content for future quarterly releases as more data becomes available.

Luciana Berger: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on what date he plans to publish the number of Green Deal packages that have been signed since the programme's inception. [159546]

Gregory Barker: The Department's next monthly Green Deal/Energy Companies Obligation (ECO) statistical release, to be published on 27 June, will be an expanded version of previous monthly releases and will include numbers of Green Deal Plans.

National Grid: Wales

Jonathan Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what discussions he has had with National Grid on energy transmission infrastructure projects to connect North and South Wales. [159514]

Michael Fallon: DECC Ministers hold discussions with National Grid across a range of its activities. These have included updates from National Grid on some of its major projects. When this has occurred, Ministers have abided by propriety rules due to the role they play in deciding on planning applications for such projects.

Renewable Energy

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps he is taking to increase investment in green and renewable technology. [159375]

Michael Fallon: The Energy Bill and Electricity Market Reform will provide a flexible toolkit to deliver a diverse and low-carbon electricity market at least cost to the consumer. It will help bring forward some £110 billion in the electricity sector to meet our low carbon and renewable goals.

We intend to publish details of the proposed support levels under Contracts for Difference—or strike prices—in July. In parallel we are running a Final Investment Decision enabling project for renewables, which aims to enable successful applicants to take final investment decisions ahead of the implementation of the enduring Contract for Difference regime. We intend to publish further details shortly.

Sign Language

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps his Department is taking to ensure the services it offers are accessible to British Sign Language users. [157929]

Gregory Barker: The Department and I take diversity and accessibility issues seriously. Although DECC does not provide direct services to the public in the way that a Department like DWP would, we take steps to comply with the reasonable adjustment duty set out in the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that disabled people, including BSL users, can access information about our policies and programmes. DECC ensures that where we are aware of sign language requirements, we would provide these as a matter of course.

DECC has not made use of a British Sign Language signer recently, nevertheless there are a range of adaptations we have put in place to make information accessible to people. For example, audio looping, subtitling and putting captions on promotional and information videos which explain our policies, programmes and the nature of the challenge that we are aiming to tackle.

A practical example is the transition to the new one Government website; one of the main drivers for transferring to the new platform is to make information about the Department and its policies available and accessible to as many members of the public as possible.

World Environment Day

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what steps his Department took to mark World Environment Day on 5 June 2013. [159175]

Gregory Barker: The Department did not specifically mark World Environment Day on 5 June 2013. Officials were aware that this was taking place and we support it, but no particular departmental activities were delivered.

World War II: Medals

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent consideration has been given to official recognition for the service of non-conscripts who worked in mines during the Second World War. [159556]

Michael Fallon: There has been no recent consideration on extending wartime service recognition to those non-conscripts who worked in mines during the Second World War. The Bevin Boys Veterans Badge, introduced in 2007, recognises those that served under the scheme introduced by the then Minister of Labour and National Service in 1943.

The Government fully appreciates that those involved in reserved occupations, such as those employed in the mines prior to the Bevin Boys Scheme being introduced in 1943, also did sterling service for their country. However, given the non-availability of records and the length of time that has now passed it would not be possible for the Department to verify potential applications, hence the decision to focus recognition on the Bevin Boys.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Accountancy

Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the names, job titles, area of work, term of appointment and Civil Service equivalent grade are of personnel currently seconded to his Department from the big four accountancy firms. [159044]

Alistair Burt: According to our centrally held records, no UK based staff are on secondment to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office from the big four accountancy firms. We have interpreted 'the big four' to mean KPMG, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Price WaterhouseCooper.

Afghanistan

Mr Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Afghan government on (a) increasing support for family response units and (b) increasing women's recruitment and retention in the police. [158839]

Alistair Burt: The UK has been forthright in its promotion of the full participation of women in all aspects of Afghan society, which is fundamental to securing a stable and prosperous future Afghanistan. We regularly raise the protection and promotion of women's rights with the Afghan Government and wider Afghan authorities. During her visit to Afghanistan in March, the Senior Minister of State, my noble Friend the right hon. Baroness Warsi, discussed women's vital contribution to building peace, security and prosperity in Afghanistan with the Afghan Government and wider Afghan authorities, leading female parliamentarians and other government and civil society, representatives. In Helmand, Baroness Warsi visited the Provincial Police Headquarters and met female police officers who are contributing to the provision of security in their community.

The UK provides £7.1 million assistance to the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) in Afghanistan, which includes supporting work that is helping to protect and uphold women's rights. This includes the development of the Afghan National Police's policy on promoting human rights and protecting women and women rights defenders from violence. The MoI has set up a working group (to which EUPOL, the European Police Mission for Afghanistan, provides specialists) to come up with a comprehensive approach to the role of females in the police. Its aim is to increase the number of police women by adjusting selection procedures, improving working conditions and providing better training.

Through our support to EUPOL, the UK supports the Ministry of Interior in its efforts to increase the numbers and capacity of Family Response Units across Afghanistan. Earlier this year, a Memorandum of Understanding between EUPOL, the Ministry of Interior and United Nations Development Programme was signed to this effect. EUPOL also funds the trial of community police units in seven provinces with the aim to bring the community closer to the police. Each of these community police units will include female officers.

China

Nicholas Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Chinese government on cyber-security issues; and if he will make a statement. [159064]

Alistair Burt: The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), hosted the London Cyber Conference in 2011 and attended the Budapest Cyber Conference in 2012. The Chinese Government was represented at both conferences. The Secretary of State would welcome the Chinese Government attending the next Cyber Conference in Seoul in October, where we can continue to engage on important cyber issues, however, we continue to follow a policy of not commenting on the country of source of cyber attacks against British interests.

Cyber security remains a top priority for the UK Government, and we already cooperate constructively with China at officials' level on issues of common cyber concern such as criminal activity. We aim to broaden this relationship to address wider cyber issues on prosperity and security which underpin our mutual bilateral interests.

Electronic Surveillance

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will seek assurances that communications of British parliamentarians are not monitored by the National Security Agency; [159576]

(2) if he will seek an exemption to the US Prism programme for UK companies and individuals. [159577]

Alistair Burt: It is the long-standing policy of successive governments not to comment in detail on matters of intelligence. This includes discussions with allies and liaison agencies. For more information on UK safeguards, I refer to the statement made by the Secretary of State

for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), to the House on 10 June 2013, *Official Report*, columns 31-49.

NATO

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many performance reports were prepared by the International Board of Auditors of NATO in each of the last three financial years; what policy changes were made in response to the Board's findings; and what recent discussions he has had with the NATO Secretariat on this matter. [159140]

Mr Lidington: The International Board of Auditors of NATO (IBAN) published four performance reports in 2010; five reports in 2011; and three performance reports in 2012. The 2012 performance audits covered the implementation of NATO agency reform, the arrangements for managing the construction of the new Alliance-headquarters building, and the supply of fuels to NATO forces in Afghanistan, in each case the audit feedback has been used to drive improvements in decision making and management process. The UK regularly raises these issues directly with NATO staff and at the North Atlantic Council where we are strong proponents of accountable and effective governance, and best practice in budgetary control and financial management. Strong, independent, and effective external audit is a critical element of this.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many sets of financial accounts were prepared by NATO in each of the last three years; how many such accounts were audited by IBAN within (a) six months, (b) 12 months, (c) 24 months and (d) more than 24 months of the end of the accounting period; how many such accounts have yet to be audited; how many such financial audits were (i) qualified, (ii) accompanied by a management letter advising a need for consequential management action and (iii) given unqualified approval; and how many of these audited sets of accounts have been published to date. [159141]

Mr Lidington: Different NATO entities are auditing on different cycles. Typically, its field work within six to eight months of receiving financial statements although post-audit consultation means that final publication sometimes takes longer. Core entities (NATO HQ, Military Command Structure and certain agencies) are audited annually; the accounts of other NATO bodies (including those of multinational high readiness headquarters, and centres of excellence) are audited on a two-year cycle, in agreement with the participating nations.

In 2010, IBAN issued 29 financial audit reports which comprised 42 auditor's opinions on the accounts of NATO bodies and associated organisations. 32 of these accounts received unqualified audit opinions, including two accounts that were corrected and re-issued. The board issued nine qualified audit opinions and one disclaimer of audit opinion on the financial statements of eight entities.

In 2011, there were 33 financial audit reports which comprised 49 auditor's opinions. The board issued 14 qualified, adverse, or disclaimer of audit opinion on the financial statements of nine different entities.

In 2012, 36 financial audit reports were issued comprising 44 auditor's opinions of which 30 were unqualified opinions. The board issued 14 qualified, adverse or disclaimer of audit opinion on the financial statements of 11 different entities.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library (a) a copy of the NATO Secretariat's report on the review of NATO's external audit arrangements, (b) a synopsis of the report into NATO's external audit arrangements if the report itself is classified and (c) a summary of the views expressed by the UK representatives and a list of the actions agreed by the North Atlantic Council during its consideration of that report. [159142]

Mr Lidington: As part of a wider process of Alliance Reform, the NATO Secretary-General initialled a review aimed at strengthening NATO's external audit function and the resulting report was considered by the North Atlantic Council on 29 May. The UK has pushed for the highest possible standards of fiscal governance, and for a strong and effective audit arrangement in order to assure compliance. More specifically the UK has sought improved transparency through the automatic publication of NATO audit reports (unless there is a security reason not to do so) and improved accountability through the update of NATO's financial regulations to draw clear lines of responsibility. We have also sought improved financial reporting across the Alliance, including through the appointment of a head of financial reporting. The UK has also sought to improve IBAN's accountability and it has been agreed that IBAN will be peer-reviewed by national supreme audit institutions (SAI); a pilot study will be conducted to explore how IBAN might make the best possible use of the expertise that exists in SAIs.

We will place in the Library the relevant documentation as soon as possible.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reforms he is seeking to NATO's financial accounting and audit arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [159143]

Mr Lidington: The UK is a leading voice in the area of NATO reform. We have pressed for the need for an efficient and effective NATO that makes the best use of its resources. We want any NATO auditing authority to be effective in holding NATO to account, using best practice to help deliver value for money. However external audit is but one element of the wider governance process, and we continue to push for accountable and effective management at all levels within the alliance.

Redundancy

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many employees of his Department who have worked on the Government's nuclear policy have been made redundant since 2010. [159535]

Alistair Burt: No UK-based members of staff who worked on nuclear policy have been made redundant.

We cannot confirm the position for locally-engaged members of staff overseas as this would involve contacting every overseas post and would incur disproportionate cost.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Child Support Agency

Pat Glass: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was to the Child Support Agency of compensating customers in the form of conciliatory payments for the financial years (a) 2010-11, (b) 2011-12 and (c) 2012-13. [159183]

Steve Webb: The following table provides information on consolatory payments for the financial year's 2010-11 and 2011-12. These figures are included in the total compensation figures as published in the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission's (The Commission) Report and Accounts.

Payments are compensatory amounts paid to parents on an ex gratia basis where delays or administrative errors have resulted in lower than expected service standards. Figures exclude financial loss.

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Total consolatory payment (£)</i>
2010-11	438,000
2011-12	282,000

On 1 August 2012 the work of the Commission including the Child support Agency transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and as part of this transfer the requirement for the Commission to produce Annual Accounts ended.

Consolatory payment figures for 2012-13 will be available in the coming weeks when the DWP Report and Accounts is finalised and published.

Employment and Support Allowance

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many former recipients of incapacity benefit who have been reassessed for eligibility for employment and support allowance (ESA) and initially found not entitled to ESA have appealed against the decision; and, of those, how many have (a) had their appeal upheld, (b) had their appeal refused and (c) not had their appeal determined. [159435]

Mr Hoban: Information on appeal outcomes for incapacity benefits reassessments is not available.

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects the migration from incapacity benefit to employment and support allowance to be complete. [159437]

Mr Hoban: The national incapacity benefit reassessment process is expected to be completed by April 2014.

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many former recipients of incapacity benefit who have been re-assessed for eligibility for employment and support allowance (ESA) were

initially found to be (a) entitled to ESA and (b) not entitled to ESA, including those who appealed against the refusal of their benefit. [159423]

Mr Hoban: The Department regularly publishes official statistics on employment and support allowance (ESA), the work capability assessment (WCA) and the reassessment of incapacity benefit claimants. The latest report was published in April 2013 and can be found on the internet at the following link:

http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa_wca/esa_wca_20130430.xls

Note that table 10 shows the outcomes of Work Capability Assessments for Incapacity Benefit Reassessment and is adjusted to account for the outcome of appeals.

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many former recipients of incapacity benefit who have migrated to employment and support allowance have a mental health condition. [159436]

Mr Hoban: Statistics on the number of former incapacity benefit (IB) recipients who have migrated to employment and support allowance (ESA), by IB ICD (disease) code, which includes mental and behavioural disorders, can be found at:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=tabtool>

Guidance for users is available at:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/tabtools/guidance.pdf>

Employment Schemes: Hearing Impairment

Charlotte Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to support employment opportunities for deaf people. [159483]

Esther McVey: We are committed to ensuring that all disabled people have the opportunities, chances and support that they need to get a job and remain in employment and there is a range of provision to help them.

The Work programme is the biggest single Welfare to Work programme. It provides more personalised back-to-work support for unemployed people, including deaf people.

For deaf and hearing impaired people with more complex needs which cannot be met through the Work programme, they can access a range of specialist disability employment provision.

Work Choice provides tailored support to help disabled people who face the most complex barriers to employment, find and stay in work and ultimately help them progress into unsupported employment, where it is appropriate for the individual. Work Choice is voluntary and available regardless of any benefits being claimed. Work Choice can provide an indefinite period of support once the customer is in work, unlike mainstream employment provision. This is in recognition of the fact that some Work Choice participants may need ongoing support to overcome barriers in work that cannot be met through normal workplace adjustments.

Access to Work provides additional support for individuals whose health or disability affects the way they do their job. It provides individuals and their employers with advice and support with extra costs which may arise because of an individual's needs. The type of support Access to Work provides can include transport to work, support workers, specialist adaptations, BSL translation and equipment.

During 2011-12 Access to Work supported over 30,000 people to keep or get employment.

Residential Training provides vocational training to unemployed disabled adults, whose needs cannot be met through any other Government funded programmes and is delivered through nine Residential Training Colleges. Colleges have the freedom to develop their services to meet the needs of the individual. Doncaster College for the Deaf provide specialist support for deaf and hearing impaired people.

Jobcentre Plus Disability Employment Advisers can provide support and advice for disabled people who need help finding and retaining employment. They can refer individuals to specialist programmes, including Work Choice, and can use the professional expertise of Work Psychologists, who specialise in working with disabled people. Disability Employment Advisers can advocate with employers on the individual's behalf and help employers to explore job solutions such as the restructuring of a job's tasks/environment, or the provision/change of equipment.

The Department is also currently updating its strategy on engaging with employers on disability employment. This is expected to include deepening the support and resources available to employers in a strategic way.

Food Banks

Mr Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit claimants were referred by jobcentres to food banks in (a) Birmingham, Hall Green constituency, (b) the West Midlands and (c) the UK in (i) 2011-12 and (ii) 2012-13. [159507]

Mr Hoban: DWP does not collate or hold numbers on the usage of food banks.

Remploy

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of employees in former Remploy factories that have closed since May 2010 have since found alternative employment. [159343]

Esther McVey: Since the announcement by the Department and Remploy in March 2012 about Remploy's future, 1,522 employees have been made redundant.

Of these, 1,100 have elected to take up the offer of tailored individual support to find another job. A total of 462 jobs have been found for disabled former Remploy employees, and 386 are currently in work. This means that approximately 35% of former employees are currently in alternative employment. A further 30% of those former employees who are engaging with our tailored package of support are on Work Choice undertaking training and other activities aimed at moving them closer to employment.

Social Security Benefits

Mr Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make it the policy of his Department to record the nationality of benefit claimants. [159195]

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress the Government has made in developing ways to record the (a) nationality and (b) immigration status of benefit claimants. [159243]

Mr Hoban: We check nationality and immigration status of benefit claimants to ensure the benefit is paid properly and to prevent fraud. While this information is used, it is not currently recorded as part of the payment administrative systems.

As we progressively roll out universal credit we will be recording nationality and immigration status as part of the process.

Social Security Benefits: St Helens

Mr Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in St Helens South and Whiston constituency have been subject to benefits sanctions in each month of the last three years. [159327]

Mr Hoban: The number of jobseeker's allowance claimants with a sanction applied in St Helens South and Whiston constituency by month from 1 June 2009 to 31 May 2012 is shown in the following table:

	<i>Claimants with a jobseeker's allowance sanction applied</i>
<i>2009</i>	
June	70
July	90
August	50
September	80
October	60
November	70
December	40
<i>2010</i>	
January	50
February	80
March	100
April	70
May	100
June	110
July	130
August	120
September	140
October	160
November	160
December	120
<i>2011</i>	
January	150
February	170
March	160
April	90

	<i>Claimants with a jobseeker's allowance sanction applied</i>
May	80
June	80
July	70
August	90
September	110
October	110
November	80
December	70
<i>2012</i>	
January	100
February	120
March	120
April	130
May	160

Notes:

- Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
- The number of sanctions applied is the number of varied, fixed length and entitlement decision referrals where there has been an adverse decision.
- Varied length sanctions: A sanction of between one week and 26 weeks is imposed for leaving employment voluntarily without just cause, refusing employment without good cause, or losing employment through misconduct. The actual period in each case is at the discretion of the adjudication officer who makes the decision.
- Fixed length sanctions: A sanction of between one week and 26 weeks is imposed for refusal, without good cause, to attend an employment programme or carry out a Jobseeker's Direction. Payment of benefit continues in full pending the adjudication officer's decision on a sanction question.
- Entitlement decisions: These are questions on which entitlement to JSA depends. For example, if there is doubt around whether the jobseeker's agreement is suitable, whether they are actively looking for work or making themselves available for work. In most cases payment of JSA will be suspended by benefit processing until the doubt is resolved.
- Month of decision: The month in which the decision on the sanction referral, reconsideration or appeal was made. This table only includes data up to and including 31 May, which is the latest data available for all geographical areas.

Source:

DWP Information, Governance and Security Directorate: JSA Sanctions and Disallowance Decisions Statistics Database.

The number of income support lone parent claimants with a sanction applied in St Helens South and Whiston constituency by month from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2012 is shown in the following table:

	<i>Claimants with an income support lone parent sanction applied</i>
<i>2010</i>	
January	20
February	30
March	20
April	20
May	30
June	30
July	30
August	40
September	20
October	30
November	20
December	10
<i>2011</i>	
January	30
February	30
March	30
April	30
May	30
June	20
July	20
August	20

	<i>Claimants with an income support lone parent sanction applied</i>
September	30
October	40
November	30
December	10
<i>2012</i>	
January	20
February	20
March	20
April	20
May	20
June	20
July	30
August	—
September	10
October	10
November	10
December	10

Notes:

- Figures are rounded to the nearest ten. Values less than five are suppressed with a "—".
- The month is the month in which income support lone parent sanction was applied. This table includes data up to and including 31 December, which is the latest data available for income support lone parent sanctions.

Source:

ISLP Sanctions Official Statistics Database.

The number of claimants with a sanction applied is not readily available for employment and support allowance claimants.

The sanctions regime for employment and support allowance claimants in the Work Related Activity Group changed from the beginning of December 2012. As a result of the changes to the regime, the Department reviewed its methodology for publishing employment and support allowance sanctions official statistics to ensure the publication remains relevant while also seeking to maintain a consistent time series.

In comparing methodologies to produce statistics relating to the previous sanctions regime with the new regime, an error was discovered, leading to double counting of some sanctions. For this reason, departmental statisticians decided to suspend publication of employment and support allowance sanctions statistics based on the current method. Therefore the final set of official statistics relating to the previous sanctions regime, due for publication in February 2013, was cancelled.

The Department is aiming to publish the first set of statistics for the new employment and support allowance sanctions regime by August 2013 alongside a revised historical series and a working paper explaining the differences between the methodologies. These statistics have been delayed from a May release to allow the new regime to bed in and to allow sufficient quality assurance of the new methodology.

State Retirement Pensions

Gregg McClymont: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if his Department will make an estimate of the cost to the public purse of implementing the recommendation in the Fifth Report of the Work and Pensions Committee, Session 2012-13, The Single-tier State Pension: Part 1 of the draft Pensions Bill, HC 1000, on providing transitional arrangements for 15 years with regard to derived benefits under the new single tier state pension.

[159484]

Steve Webb: The Government has published its response to the Fifth Report of the Work and Pensions Committee, and this is available on GOV.uk. This response did not estimate the cost of implementing the recommendation made.

There is no immediately apparent policy for extending derived entitlement to basic pension to individuals who reach state pension age after the implementation of single tier, as any continuation of this facility as it currently stands would essentially involve a continuation of the current system in tandem with the new system. Administratively this would be complex, and more importantly it would mean that the new system would not result in the clarity of outcome which is central to the reform package.

At the same time, the Government notes the decreasing need for this facility in Great Britain. As the paper 'State pension entitlement derived from a current or former spouse's or civil partner's National Insurance contributions', published on GOV.uk, makes clear, women's state pension entitlements have consistently improved, and the significant majority of women reaching state pension age in GB can now expect to receive at least the equivalent of a full basic state pension in their own right.

Universal Credit

Mr Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the (a) forecasted and (b) actual spend of the universal credit budget was in 2012;

[159730]

(2) what the (a) forecast and (b) actual expenditure of his Department on the universal credit was in 2012;

[159586]

(3) what assessment he has made of whether his Department's budget for universal credit will be underspent in 2013-14; and if he will make a statement. [159531]

Mr Hoban: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 3 June 2013, *Official Report*, column 1053W, and on 15 May 2013, *Official Report*, column 329W.

Of the £2 billion budget, spend in 2011-12 was 5%, and in 2012-13 16%. Plans continue to be developed to support the gradual roll-out from autumn 2013 within budget.

Work Capability Assessment

Stephen Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what specialist training is provided to Atos assessors making work capability assessments on understanding the needs of individuals with mental health disorders; and if he will make a statement.

[159439]

Mr Hoban: All health care professionals receive training in mental health issues as part of their induction training. As part of their induction training they are required to read evidence based protocols on mental health conditions.

In addition, all health care professionals are required to engage in a programme of continuing medical education which includes modules on mental health issues.

All health care professionals are monitored to ensure that their work meets the required quality standards.

If a problem is identified, the health care professional may be required to undertake tailored training, which may involve training in mental health issues if required.

Work Capability Assessment: Appeals

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people died before their appeal against a work capability assessment conducted by Atos was heard in each year since 2010. [158370]

Mr Hoban: Decisions on entitlement to employment and support allowance (ESA) lie with the Department's decision makers who take into account the medical assessment reports from Atos and any other relevant information. Any appeals are therefore against the benefit entitlement decision taken by DWP rather than against the recommendation in a WCA.

DWP does not hold the information requested. The Department only holds information on appeals once they have been heard by HM Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS). Information on pending appeals is not collected by DWP.

Work Capability Assessment: Warrington

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many appeals against the outcome of work capability assessments carried out by Atos were made in (a) Warrington and (b) Warrington North constituency in each year since 2010; what the cost of those appeals to the public purse was; and what proportion of such appeals were successful. [158424]

Mr Hoban: Decisions on entitlement to employment and support allowance (ESA) lie with the Department's decision makers who take into account the medical assessment reports from Atos and any other relevant information. Any appeals are therefore against the benefit entitlement decision taken by DWP rather than against the recommendation in a WCA.

The Department only holds information on appeals once they have been heard by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS). Information on pending appeals is not collected by DWP.

The table shows the number of appeals that have been heard against Fit for Work outcomes at initial work capability assessments (WCAs) for new ESA claims that started between January 2010 and February 2012 (the latest data available) in the Warrington local authority area, by the year that the claim started. Data are available only for claims that began before the end of February 2012 due to the time required to arrange and complete assessments and go through the appeals process, as well as the time required to record and process data.

Appeals heard against Fit for Work outcomes at initial WCAs for new ESA claims that started between January 2010 and February 2012 in the Warrington local authority area

Claim start date	Number of Fit for Work outcomes	Number of appeals heard	Percentage of appeals successful
January to December 2010	790	330	32
January to December 2011	730	240	32
January to February 2012	110	10	—

Appeals heard against Fit for Work outcomes at initial WCAs for new ESA claims that started between January 2010 and February 2012 in the Warrington local authority area

Claim start date	Number of Fit for Work outcomes	Number of appeals heard	Percentage of appeals successful
Total	1,630	580	32

¹ Nil or negligible amount of cases. It would potentially be disclosive to provide any figures for these cases.

Note:

Rounding:

All volumes are rounded to the nearest 10 and all percentages are rounded to the nearest percentage point.

Source:

Department for Work and Pensions benefit administration datasets.

The Department does not hold information on the cost of appeals to the public purse. Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal's Service may be able to provide data on the cost of an appeal.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legal Costs

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Attorney-General (1) how much the Law Officers' Departments spent on external legal advice from Queen's Counsel (a) between 7 May 2010 and 4 September 2012 and (b) since 4 September 2012; [155614]

(2) how much the Law Officers' Departments spent on external legal advice (a) between 7 May 2010 and 4 September 2012 and (b) since 4 September 2012. [155615]

The Solicitor-General: Between 7 May 2010 and 4 September 2012, the Treasury Solicitor's Department (TSol) records indicate that they spent £48,807 on external legal fees. Since 4 September 2012, TSol spent £6,928 on external legal fees. For both these periods, this was not in the context of seeking legal advice, but for legal representation in respect of litigation.

Between 7 May 2010 and 4 September 2012, the Attorney-General's office (AGO) have a recorded spend of £676,954 on external legal fees. Since 4 September 2012, the AGO spent £168,085 on external legal fees. It is not possible to ascertain whether this was for legal advice or for representation

TSol has not instructed any QCs for its own legal advice and representation since 7 May 2010. The records

are not kept in such a way as to make it possible to ascertain how many times the AGO has instructed QCs since 7 May 2010.

The TSol and AGO figures do not include legal advice paid for by other Departments in the context of legal advice or representation by the AGO or TSol. It cannot be guaranteed that the TSol/AGO data are complete, particularly in respect of the older figures. There have been historic problems with record keeping in respect of the time and disbursements incurred for the AGO and TSol's own cases (which are not billed to other Departments). This was addressed and systems are now in place to ensure accurate recording in the future.

The Serious Fraud Office (SFO) does not routinely distinguish between external legal advice and external litigation (legal representation) services when recording legal expenditure. SFO records show that expenditure incurred on all external legal services (a) between 7 May 2010 and 4 September 2012 was £10,960,618 and (b) since 4 September 2012 was £3,725,889. SFO expenditure incurred on all external legal services from Queen's Counsel (a) between 7 May 2010 and 4 September 2012 was £4,350,459 and (b) since 4 September 2012 was £1,313,769. Approximately 1% of the expenditure on external legal services between 2010 and 2012 relates to external legal advice.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) spent £5,021,866 on external legal advice between 7 May 2010 and 4 September 2012 and £2,051,436 between 5 September 2012 and 31 March 2013. CPS spent £781,809 on external legal advice specifically from Queen's Counsel between 7 May 2010 and 4 September 2012 and £319,069 between 5 September 2012 and 31 March 2013.

HMCPSPSI has not recorded any expenditure on external legal advice since 7 May 2010.

Personnel Management

Priti Patel: To ask the Attorney-General how many officials in the Law Officers' Departments were employed in human resources functions in each of the last five years; at what grades such staff were employed; and what the total cost of the Law Officers' Departments' human resources functions was. [156662]

The Solicitor-General: The information requested is contained in the following tables:

Treasury Solicitor's Department

Number and grades of officials employed in human resources and the annual cost of the HR function

	Senior Civil Service	Grade 6	Grade 7	Senior Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer	Executive Officer	Admin. Officer	Total	Total cost of the HR Function (£) ¹
2012-13	1	1	2	3	1	5	4	17	849,000
2011-12	1	1	3	1	3	4	2	15	1,014,000
2010-11	1	1	3	2	5	5	4	21	1,879,502
2009-10	1	1	3	2	5	5	7	24	1,937,980
2008-09	1	1	2	2	2	2	8	18	1,813,460

¹ TSol data also includes the Attorney-General's Office and HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate. For 2011-12 and 2012-13 the cost figures cover the HR Function provided as programme tracking for Next Generation HR which began 1 April 2011. For the other years the cost figures relate to the full allocated budget for the HR function including staff and non-staff costs.

Crown Prosecution Service

Number and grades of officials employed in human resources and the annual cost of the HR function

	Senior Civil Service	Level E	Level D	Senior Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer	Executive Officer	Admin. Officer Assistant	Total	Total cost of the HR Function (£) ¹
2012-13	1	3	15	18	21	8	6	72	7,484,000
2011-12	1	2	15	19	19	10	8	74	5,319,000
2010-11	1	3	14	17	37	18	13	103	6,010,000
2009-10	4	5	19	20	42	25	22	137	11,700,000
2008-09	4	3	16	14	49	22	27	135	11,607,000

¹Years 2012-13 and 2011-12 reflect the Cabinet Office publication Common Areas of Spend and mirror the quarterly returns requested under the Civil Service HR programme. The figures for years 2010-11, 2009-10 and 2008-09 reflect the definitions for HR resourcing of the Next Generation HR Resourcing Survey for these years.

Serious Fraud Office

Number and grades of officials employed in human resources and the annual cost of the HR function

	Senior Civil Service	Grade 6	Grade 7	Senior Executive Officer	Higher Executive Officer	Executive Officer	Admin. Officer	Total	Total cost of the HR function (£) ¹
2012-13	1	—	1	—	1	2	2	7	429,000
2011-12	1	—	1	—	2	1	3	8	451,000
2010-11	—	1	1	—	1	3	2	8	568,000
2009-10	—	1	1	1	—	4	2	9	705,000
2008-09	—	—	1	—	1	4	2	8	894,000

¹ The cost of the HR function covers the total actual HR budget expenditure for those years, less costs associated with business specific learning, payroll, diversity and other business related costs. That includes total staff costs (payroll and non-payroll) as it is not possible to pro-rata those costs against the CSHR definitions.

PRIME MINISTER

Domestic Visits

Mr Dodds: To ask the Prime Minister how many times he has visited (a) Scotland, (b) Wales and (c) Northern Ireland in an official capacity since May 2010. [159254]

The Prime Minister: I have placed a list of my official visits to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the Library of the House.

I shall be attending the G8 summit in Lough Erne on 17-18 June.

Tax Avoidance

Catherine McKinnell: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to the answer of 6 June 2013, *Official Report*, column 1266W, on tax avoidance, whether he has received any replies to his letter of 20 May 2013 to the UK's Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories on tax information exchange and beneficial ownership; and what steps he plans to take if any of the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories do not make their policies on this issue clear publicly. [159485]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the answer I gave on 6 June 2013, *Official Report*, column 1266W.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Domestic Visits

Mr Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many nights (a) she and (b) the Minister of State for Northern Ireland has stayed overnight in Northern Ireland in an official capacity since 1 January 2012. [159257]

Mrs Villiers: Since taking up post on 4 September 2012, I have stayed overnight in Northern Ireland on 62 occasions in an official capacity, up to and including 12 June 2013. The Minister of State has stayed overnight on 40 occasions over the same period.

Hillsborough Castle

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many days Hillsborough Castle was open to the public in (a) 2010, (b) 2011, (c) 2012 and (d) 2013 to date. [159555]

Mrs Villiers: Hillsborough castle was open to the public on 12 days in 2010, 35 days in 2011 and 31 days in 2012. To date in 2013, it has been open on 19 days.

Patrick Finucane

Valerie Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions she has had with the family of Patrick Finucane. [159453]

Mrs Villiers: I have not held any formal discussions with the family of Patrick Finucane. However, I did meet with some family members during the St Patrick's Day celebrations in Washington.

Public Expenditure

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was allocated to Northern Ireland in block grant in (a) 2010-11, (b) 2011-12 and (c) 2012-13; and how much has been allocated for (i) 2013-14 and (ii) 2014-15. [159572]

Mrs Villiers: Details of the allocations to Northern Ireland in block grant for the years requested are provided in an Annex to the Northern Ireland Office Annual Report and Accounts for 2011-12 which have been laid in Parliament and published. Copies are available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much her Department spent (*a*) in total and (*b*) under each category of expenditure in (i) 2010-11, (ii) 2011-12 and (iii) 2012-13; and how much it plans to spend in (A) 2013-14 and (B) 2014-15. [159573]

Mrs Villiers: My Department's total spend, and the analysis of this expenditure by category for the years 2010-11 and 2011-12 can be found in the Annual Report and Accounts for each year which have been laid in Parliament and published. Copies are available at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications

The required information for 2012-13 is not yet finalised as the draft Annual Report and Accounts are currently being audited. It is anticipated that this document will be laid in Parliament and published prior to the summer recess.

My Department's spending plans for the current financial year are documented in the Department's Main Estimates which has been published and is available at:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/nio_mainsupplyestimates_201314.pdf

As regards 2014-15, spending plans were originally agreed in the spending review 2010, details of which are available at:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spend_index.htm

Adjustments have been made to the figures through subsequent spring budget announcements, and autumn statements.

WALES

Domestic Visits

Mr Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many nights (*a*) he and (*b*) other Ministers of his Department have stayed overnight in Wales in an official capacity since 1 January 2012. [159256]

Mr David Jones: All current Wales Office Ministers live in Wales and frequently carry out official duties while there. Depending on the location and time of meetings there may be occasions which require Ministers to stay overnight in Wales away from home. Between 1 January and 4 September 2012, the previous Secretary of State for Wales stayed overnight as and when necessary. This was often to attend early morning meetings or where it was more practical to travel the evening before because of the distances involved.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Local Broadcasting: Radio

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many community radio licences are unallocated; [159538]

(2) if she will take steps to ensure that Ofcom use up unallocated community radio licences. [159539]

Mr Vaizey: Ofcom is responsible for licensing community radio stations and it has advised there are no unallocated community radio licences.

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support her Department gives to community radio stations. [159540]

Mr Vaizey: The Department has made available more than £400,000 a year to support the community radio sector through the Community Radio Fund. The majority of this funding is allocated to Ofcom to distribute as grants to licensed community radio services. In recent years we have also allocated funds to the Community Media Association to support its work in promoting best practice within the community media sector and encouraging self-sustainability.

Olympic Games 2012

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport with reference to the answer of 26 March 2013, *Official Report*, column 1031W, on Olympic Games 2013, what the excluded categories under the Supplier Recognition Scheme are; and how many firms whose applications have been rejected there are in each such category. [156998]

Hugh Robertson: As at 22 May, 640 companies have successfully applied for a licence and 92 have had their application rejected on the basis that they fall within one of the excluded categories that are necessary to prevent the rights of the IOC sponsors being infringed. Notwithstanding the need for some exclusions, the new Recognition Scheme allows licensed suppliers greater freedom to promote their activities on 2012, than was permitted under the earlier LOCOG marketing protocol of 2007. This information is broken down in detail in the following table:

Exclusion	Number of companies	As a % of all companies rejected on the basis of their supply falling into an excluded category	
			As a % of all companies who have submitted an application
Information technology services and solutions	18	20	2.3
Non-alcoholic beverages	1	1	0.1
Chemicals, raw materials and compounds	13	14	1.7
Industrial equipment and systems	33	36	4.3
Ready to eat food and food service operations	11	12	1.4
Beauty, grooming and health care products	2	2	0.3
Audio, video and audio-visual equipment	7	8	0.9
Wireless communications systems and equipment	6	7	0.8
Consumer payment systems	1	1	0.1

<i>Exclusion</i>	<i>Number of companies</i>	<i>As a % of all companies rejected on the basis of their supply falling into an excluded category</i>	<i>As a % of all companies who have submitted an application</i>
Total	92	—	—

Press: Regulation

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the circumstances in which the draft Royal Charter on press regulation published on 18 March 2013 would be subject to renegotiation prior to its sealing by Her Majesty in Council; whether she has received any indications from party leaders that such a renegotiation is likely to occur; and if she will make a statement. [159445]

Mr Vaizey: The cross-party agreement on a Royal Charter on 18 March will help deliver a new system of independent and robust press regulation in our country that will deliver for victims and meet the principles set out in Lord Justice Leveson's report. Cross-party discussions on the draft charter have not been reopened.

Tourism: Seas and Oceans

Dr Offord: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps her Department is taking to support marine tourism in the UK. [159778]

Hugh Robertson: Britain's beaches are important tourism assets, and feature in the marketing campaigns led by VisitEngland and VisitBritain, including the GREAT campaign. VisitEngland has also contributed to the work of the Environment Agency on issues such as bathing water quality and has been working with DEFRA and the Marine Management Organisation to include tourism and the visitor economy in the marine planning process. Recently, English Heritage has commissioned research into the impact of diver trails on the local economy, and we await the results with interest.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Children: Day Care

Lucy Powell: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities (1) what assessment she has made of the average cost of setting up a new (a) childminding and (b) nursery business; and what proportion of such costs for (i) individual childminders and (ii) nursery businesses the Childcare Business grant scheme is expected to cover; [159429]

(2) what discussions she has had with Liberata regarding the criteria for distribution of the Childcare Business grant scheme; and whether she will place a copy of such criteria in the Library; [159430]

(3) for what reasons men have been excluded from applying to the Childcare Business grant scheme; and if she will reconsider this exclusion; [159431]

(4) how many Childcare Business grants have been allocated through the Childcare Business grant scheme to date; who has received each grant; what the value of each such grant is; and when each grant was distributed; [159433]

(5) if she will publish the tender process carried out by her Department for the management of the Childcare Business grant scheme; which other organisations tendered for this project; what criteria she used to award the bid; how much the tender process cost; what fee Liberata will receive for administering the scheme; and whether this cost is part of the £2 million allocated for the scheme. [159432]

Jo Swinson: From April 2013, grants of £250 have been available to help prospective childminders to set up new businesses. Their immediate costs will include mandatory courses in child care and paediatric first aid; clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service; obtaining insurance; and being inspected by Ofsted. The grants should cover these.

Grants of £500 are available to childminders who intend to care for disabled children, and to people seeking to open new nurseries, in recognition of the additional costs they will face. The actual cost of setting up a child care business of any sort will vary significantly. We have made no assessment of the average cost.

Details of the tender specification for the scheme, including the selection criteria applied, are already in the public domain at:

<http://bit.ly/ChBusGr>

and the contract with Liberata will be published shortly, in line with normal practice. I will arrange for copies of these to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Information relating to any other bidders is commercial in confidence. There were no costs involved in the tender process, beyond those associated with my officials' time.

The value of the contract will depend on the number and nature of applications, but is expected to be slightly less than the £200,000 advertised for this purpose. This sum is in addition to the £2 million available in grants.

Grants are allocated on a first-come, first-serve basis, to those who meet the qualifying conditions. Men are not excluded from applying. The conditions are set out on the scheme's website, and I will arrange for a copy of the relevant guidance to be placed in the House Libraries. Applicants are given time to complete their training and secure the necessary Ofsted registration, thus encouraging genuinely new providers to come forward. £25,000 has been paid out in grants so far, and a further £125,000 has been committed. We do not intend to publish the details of every successful applicant.

Regular updates on the volume of grants paid out will be made available on the scheme's website:

www.childcarebusinessgrants.dcms.gov.uk

Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012

Hazel Blears: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities what steps her Department is taking to implement the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 in its procurement procedures. [154544]

Maria Miller: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by the Minister of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Hugh Robertson) on 15 May 2013, *Official Report*, column 170W.

Regulation

Priti Patel: To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities what the title was of each set of regulations introduced by the Government Equalities Office in each month since May 2010; and which of those regulations have been (a) subject to the (i) one in one out and (ii) one in two out procedure and (b) (i) revoked and (ii) amended. [155818]

Maria Miller: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by the Minister of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Hugh Robertson) on 20 May 2013, *Official Report*, columns 409-10W.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Animal Experiments

Henry Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on reducing the number of animals used in scientific procedures; what steps he is taking to reduce the number of animals used in such procedures; and if he will make a statement. [159402]

Mr Willetts: Ministers in this Department and the Home Office are in regular contact on a range of policy areas. As a key commitment in the Programme for Government, our Departments are collaborating closely to work to reduce the use of animals in scientific research.

The use of animals in scientific research continues to play a vital part in developing improvements in health care and the environment. The UK has one of the most rigorous systems in the world to ensure that animal research and animal testing is only carried out where no practicable alternatives exist and under stringent controls where suffering must be kept to the minimum.

This Government is committed to working to ensure that the opportunities presented by scientific advances are used to replace or reduce animal use wherever possible, and to refine procedures to minimise suffering. It is backed by strong regulation delivered through a stringent licensing regime operated by the Home Office.

Together with the Home Office, we are working with The National Centre for Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) and cross-Whitehall Departments to further develop the strategy to promote the 3Rs (replacement, reduction and refinement) to deliver the coalition commitment. We will provide an update on this work in due course.

Broadband

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on the provision of broadband; and if he will make a statement. [159359]

Mr Willetts: I met with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Maria Miller), to discuss the provision of broadband in March. Broadband provision is crucial to our economic growth and DCMS is considering how best to encourage further supplier led broadband coverage in rural and remote areas in parallel with the rollout to the rest of the country. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is also working closely with DCMS on the Government's Information Economy Strategy, which we intend to publish shortly.

Business: Government Assistance

Claire Perry: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the recommendations of Lord Young's report on Growing Your Business. [159363]

Michael Fallon: The Prime Minister announced on 5 June that Government will accept all recommendations in Lord Young's report 'Growing Your Business'. Work has now begun to implement these recommendations including the extension of Start Up Loans, a Growth Voucher programme to test innovative approaches to small business support, the reform of public procurement to increase access for SMEs, and improved marketing of Government schemes through a new GREAT campaign targeted at new and developing small businesses.

Clothing: Bangladesh

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will give consideration to introducing a small additional levy on Bangladeshi garments sold in the UK, the proceeds from which would be put towards ensuring the future welfare of workers in the Bangladeshi garment industry. [159244]

Michael Fallon: Bangladesh benefits from the EU's "Everything but Arms" arrangement, which grants duty free, quota free access to EU markets for all their exports, except arms and ammunition.

Removing duties positively contributes towards the competitiveness of Bangladesh exports, and adding a levy on exports could therefore have a detrimental effect on the garment sector. Given the sector's importance to the Bangladesh economy, the creation of jobs and subsequent poverty reduction, and to the position of women, who make up approximately 80% of the workforce, we do not want to reduce the advantages brought by this removal of duties.

Instead, the UK is committing funding towards initiatives that see buyers, manufacturers, workers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the Government of Bangladesh all work together to agree a set of common compliance standards, bringing accountability to the supply chain, health and safety to workers, and robustly enforced construction standards to the buildings in which they work.

Local Enterprise Partnerships: EU Grants and Loans

Catherine McKinnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills with reference to the answer of 17 April 2013, *Official Report*, column 489W, on EU grants and loans, how much EU structural

funding will be allocated to each local enterprise partnership (LEP) in England for 2014 to 2020; and how much such funding would have been allocated to (a) England and (b) each LEP in England if the EU formula for the allocation of funds had been implemented. [159444]

Michael Fallon: As set out in my response of 17 April, and 26 March 2013, the Government announced the indicative Structural Funds allocation across the UK. All these figures remain indicative and will be confirmed only after agreement between Heads of State and Government and the European Parliament on the EU budget 2014-20.

According to our estimates England will receive €6.174 billion, Scotland €795 million, Wales €2.145 billion and Northern Ireland €457 million. Compared to the 2007-13 UK allocation, this represents a 5% cut for England and each of the devolved Administrations. Provisional allocations to LEPs will be announced shortly.

If the EU formula had been applied, the devolved Administrations would together have a significant cut in funding, in total 27%. The Government did not believe that this would have been fair.

The EU formula is only used to determine a member state's national allocation for the three categories of region—less developed, transition and more developed. The European Commission will confirm the UK's allocation to these three categories once the regulations are agreed but will not provide a regional or LEP breakdown.

The UK may also receive additional funding of approximately 200 million euros to tackle youth unemployment in regions where this is above 25% in 2012. Eurostat figures have now been published and those regions in England in 2012 with youth unemployment above 25% are Tees Valley and Durham, West Midlands, Inner London and Merseyside. When the regulations that underpin this initiative are confirmed, the Government will confirm the allocations to the relevant LEPs.

Music: Copyright

Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent representations he has made to his (a) European and (b) US counterparts concerning the resolution of any music copyright disputes as part of any Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the EU and the US. [159304]

Jo Swinson: The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a proposed free trade area between US and the European Union. The Commission acts on behalf of member states.

The responsibility for taking forward any dispute within this forum lies with the European Commission.

Officials are engaged regularly, with both US and EU counterparts, in discussions about the issues, including IP issues, to be raised in the context of the Partnership.

Printing Machinery

Rehman Chishti: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the potential effects on businesses of the development of 3D printers. [159117]

Michael Fallon: As a high value manufacturing economy, the UK has a great deal to gain from increased 3D printing/Additive Manufacturing (AM) penetration. There are opportunities for technology adoption in key sectors such as aerospace, medical devices and implants, power generation, automotive and the creative industries, with some companies already engaged in technology assessment and small scale use. There are also domestic and export opportunities for companies engaged in the 3D/printing AM machine tool, materials and enabling software markets.

The UK is one of the world's leading sources of 3D printing/AM related knowledge and research activity, along with Germany and the USA. The UK has the potential to build a strong 3D printing/AM supply chain with the presence of enabling software, materials providers developing innovative product offerings and world class product designers with a strong interest in 3D printing/AM.

Following publication in September 2012 of the Additive Manufacturing Special Interest Group report 'Shaping our national competency in additive manufacturing':

https://connect.innovateuk.Org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=3e6091f6-6874-4dc5-80ea-d565249cce45&groupId=47343

the Technology Strategy Board (TSB) developed a £7 million competition for innovation funding, "New Design Freedoms in Additive Layer Manufacturing". The competition was aimed at accelerating the commercial adoption of 3D Printing/AM technologies across a wide range of industry sectors from jet engines to jewellery and from medical implants to personalised confectionary.

The results of this competition were announced on 6 June 2013. The competition delivered a field of submissions that was among the highest quality it had ever seen, prompting TSB to increase its funding by 50%. Along with co-funding from three Research Councils amounting to £800,000, over £9 million grant funding has been offered to 18 projects with a total value of nearly £15 million.

Public Houses

Guy Opperman: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he is taking to support pubs. [159364]

Vince Cable: We are currently consulting on proposals to introduce a statutory code of practice and adjudicator for the pubs sector. The consultation closes on 14 June.

Royal Mail

Mr McKenzie: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what his plans are for the future of Royal Mail. [159376]

Michael Fallon: Parliament decided, via the Postal Services Act 2011, to allow Royal Mail to have future access to private capital in order to secure the universal postal service. We have already relieved Royal Mail of its historic pension deficit and established a new regulatory regime.

Our firm intention is to give Royal Mail future access to private capital through a sale of shares this financial year. As part of this sale the Government will honour the commitment that Parliament made in 2011 that at least 10% of shares should be reserved for employees.

Street Trading

Jason McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when his Department last reviewed the law relating to the issue of pedlars' licences. [159250]

Jo Swinson: The law relating to the issue of pedlars' licenses was reviewed in 2009 and again in 2012, in both cases in the context of ensuring compliance with the European Services Directive. A public consultation was held on both occasions. The 2012 consultation closed on 5 April 2013 and the responses are currently being analysed.

Teachers: Further Education

Mr Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what strategies he plans to put in place to attract, retain and upskill the further education teaching workforce. [159426]

Mr Willetts: The Government set out its long-term strategy for the future of the further education (FE) teaching work force in 'New Challenges, New Chances' (December 2011). In that we confirmed we would take action to develop and promote excellent teaching. Since then, an independent Commission into Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning and a Review of Teacher Professionalism have both been undertaken and reported. Their recommendations have been endorsed by Government and a range of action is in hand. This includes specific measures focused on the recruitment and retention of skilled FE teachers and a fuller announcement on this will be made in the near future.

Unemployed: Travel

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the benefit to businesses of local authorities providing free transport to 16 to 24 year olds not in education, employment or training. [159558]

Mr Willetts: Support for this age group is not the sole responsibility of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

BIS has not carried out any such assessment as it is for individual local authorities to assess and introduce relevant approaches to aid those not in education, employment or training.

For 16 to 19-year-olds, local authorities have a duty to publish an annual transport policy statement which sets out the travel arrangements they will make to support young people access further education. Provision is at the local authority's discretion, although this can include free or subsidised travel where appropriate. This duty recognises that supporting young people through subsidised transport costs can give them better access to the courses and institutions of their choice, meaning that they could be less likely to become disengaged and more likely to leave with the qualifications and employability skills sought by businesses.

Free or subsidised travel for unemployed young people could also offer employers access to a wider field of candidates, across a wider geographical area. This benefit

might be felt more greatly in rural areas, where young people often have to travel significant distances to find and attend work and businesses can struggle to find suitable candidates for their vacancies.

The Government funds a range of support for young people in learning. The Department for Education's 16-19 Bursary Fund can be used by education and training providers to help students with travel costs. The Discretionary Learner Support allowance given to colleges by BIS via the Skills Funding Agency can, at the college's discretion, also be used to support students over the age of 19 with transport costs.

In addition, those aged 18 to 24 and claiming jobseeker's allowance for more than three but less than nine months are eligible for up to a 50% reduction in train fares and free travel with several major bus companies, providing they have a Jobcentre Plus Travel card.

The positive impacts on business of the provision of such funds should be taken into account by each LA or institution when selecting the support they provide.

Vocational Training

Mr Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills who the successful bidders were for Round 1 of the employer ownership pilots, by English administrative region. [159424]

Mr Willetts: There were 37 successful bids for round 1 of the employer ownership pilots. These are divided by region as follows:

Nationwide

PWC
Timpson
Aria Foods UK
Whitbread Group
Daylight Ltd
Energie Group
Laing O'Rourke
Midland Co-operative Society
Rolls-Royce plc on behalf of LEEAC
Construction Industry Training Board
Doosan Power Systems
Livery Companies Apprenticeship Scheme
Channel 4/BBC

North East

Sembcorp
Nissan Manufacturing (UK) Ltd
Jacobs E&C Ltd
AkzoNobel

North West

Man Diesel Turbo
Contact Company
Manchester Airport
BAE Systems plc

Yorkshire and Humber

Textile Centre of Excellence
British Glass
Fabricom Oil Gas and Power Ltd

West Midlands

Heart of England Attractions Ltd

DENSO Manufacturing UK Ltd

East Midlands

Goodwin International

East of England

A J Woods Engineering

Berforts

Greater London

Fix Auto Dagenham

Agilisys

South East

Denne Construction Ltd

Siemens plc

South West

Langdon Industries Ltd

GE Aviation

Spiral Construction

Cascade Drinks (subsequently withdrew from grant negotiations).

Mr Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many bids were received for Round 2 of the employer ownership pilots, by English administrative region. [159425]

Mr Willetts: 315 bids were received requesting £1.5 billion in EOP funding and offering £2.4 billion in total employer investment.

There is a good geographical and sectoral distribution of applications. Half of all projects have nationwide coverage.

As bids are still being appraised the information available is limited to the areas of activity as declared by applicants.

<i>Projects</i>	
<i>Regional breakdown</i>	<i>Number</i>
Greater London	56
Nationwide (ie England)	150
North West	53
South West	44
West Midlands	55
East Midlands	41
East of England	33
Yorkshire and the Humber	34
South East	55
North East	38

It is important to note that some bids might have registered activity in more than one region so the total above is greater than 315.

World Environment Day

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps his Department took to mark World Environment Day on 5 June 2013. [159173]

Michael Fallon: The Department of Business Innovation and Skills did not formally mark World Environment Day. The Department did however organise a number of activities throughout Climate Week from 4 to 8 March to raise awareness among staff of climate and related issues.

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