

Wednesday
28 October 2009

Volume 498
No. 132



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 28 October 2009

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2009

*This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Parliamentary Click-Use Licence,
available online through the Office of Public Sector Information website at*

www.opsi.gov.uk/click-use/

*Enquiries to the Office of Public Sector Information, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU;
e-mail: licensing@opsi.gov.uk*

House of Commons

Wednesday 28 October 2009

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

RAF NIMROD MR2 AIRCRAFT XV230

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of the Report, dated 28 October 2009, of the Independent Review into the broader issues surrounding the loss of the RAF Nimrod MR2 Aircraft XV230 in Afghanistan in 2006.—(*Mr. Blizzard.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Operation Miser

1. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): What assessment she has made of the findings of Sir Ian Johnston's review of the investigation of leaks from the Home Department under Operation Miser which relate to the actions of her Department. [295973]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and for the Olympics, and Paymaster General (Tessa Jowell): I welcome Ian Johnston's report and the wider report published on the same day by Chief Inspector Dennis O'Connor. We have looked very carefully at both reports, and my Department will shortly send new guidance on managing information to Departments and adopt the chief inspector's protocol for future consideration of police involvement in leak investigations, which recognises the high threshold required for police involvement.

Mr. Turner: The police inspectorate's report has savaged the role of the Cabinet Office in calling the Metropolitan police to arrest my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green). Will the Minister place the current guidelines and protocol in the Library so that we can review the failings of the existing rules?

Tessa Jowell: Both reports reflect very fairly the state of events that led to the police involvement—a series of leaks, some of which gave rise to concern about national security. I would say to the hon. Gentleman that it is very easy, with the benefit of hindsight, to reach a different judgment. I have made it clear in my answer that the lessons of the O'Connor and Johnston reports will be applied in full, and I will certainly consult the Cabinet Secretary about the release of the information that the hon. Gentleman seeks.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham) (Con): The Minister says that there was some concern about national security, but Sir Ian Johnston's report makes it absolutely clear that these leaks were only matters of "embarrassment" that were

"not...likely to undermine government's effectiveness."

So why did a Cabinet Office director write to counter-terrorism asserting that there was

"considerable damage to national security"

from these stories and that

"the potential for future damage is significant"?

Did the Cabinet Secretary, the Prime Minister or Ministers know about this letter before it was sent, and was there any political pressure on civil servants to shut down those embarrassing stories?

Tessa Jowell: Neither report from Chief Inspector O'Connor nor from Sir Ian Johnston makes any claim that the Cabinet Office exaggerated national security claims; the right hon. Gentleman should be absolutely clear about that. He will also know that there was no ministerial involvement in the decision to involve the police.

Mr. Maude: But the report says explicitly that these were only matters of embarrassment that were not likely to undermine Government effectiveness. On 31 October, the Cabinet Office demanded a scoping exercise that then went into detail about the involvement of "members of the Conservative party". Does the Minister think it right that counter-terrorism officers were misled and used, in effect, to try to intimidate and suppress parliamentary opposition? Given that the Prime Minister himself made his political career as a conduit for a flood of civil service leaks, should he have been arrested when he was a shadow Minister?

Tessa Jowell: Let me deal with the substantive point that the right hon. Gentleman makes. I reiterate that neither report drew the conclusion that the Cabinet Office had over-reacted. His judgment is made with the benefit of retrospection and of the two reports having been carried out, as well as with the benefit of hindsight. The important step now is that the recommendations of the report are implemented, as they will be.

Third Sector (Recession)

2. **Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): What her most recent assessment is of the effect of the recession on the third sector; and if she will make a statement. [295975]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Angela E. Smith): We recognise that this is a very difficult time for the sector, with some parts experiencing increased demand for their services at the same time as having concerns about their financial situation. That is why the Government have provided a comprehensive package of support for the third sector worth up to £42.5 million. The money is getting out there right now to groups who need it. Thousands of grants have been made, and that is supporting the communities that need it most and providing jobs.

Clive Efford: I welcome my hon. Friend's answer; that will be very welcome news to the voluntary sector. However, many funders of not-for-profit voluntary organisations do not recognise the need to cover their core funding in order to make them sustainable for the

future. Those organisations want to create income that provides for that. I come across this problem frequently in organisations that I work with in my constituency. Will she encourage funders to bear this in mind in future?

Angela E. Smith: Absolutely. My hon. Friend has a reputation in his constituency for his involvement in the third sector, and the points that he makes are entirely valid. Let me mention some of the things that the Government are doing; I hope that other funders will consider them. Grass-root grants are going directly to smaller organisations—an initiative that has never been taken before, coupled with an endowment process—and that is providing £130 million. That can address the issue of core funding. We also have the community assets programme, providing £30 million across the country for projects involving buildings that are sustainable for the long term. May I direct him also to Communitybuilders, a £70 million programme that was recently opened for applications and has received 1,500 already? That is the kind of programme that the organisations he mentions will benefit from.

Mr. Nick Hurd (Ruislip-Northwood) (Con): We should be concerned that more than 10,000 charities have ceased operating in the past six months, according to the Charity Commission. After two years of consultation, we are still no clearer about Government plans to make gift aid easier and more effective for charities. Instead, we are now getting signals from private meetings that the Treasury actually wants to scrap tax reliefs for higher rate payers who give to charity. This must be the wrong time to be hiding things from the sector. When will the Government come clean on their plans for the reform of gift aid?

Angela E. Smith: The number of charities has reduced, but from talking to the Charity Commission we find that that is about the cleaning up of the charities list. There are charities that have been on the list for some time but have not been functional, or there may have been mergers.

This Government have a proud record on gift aid, and several changes have been brought in.

Mr. Hurd *indicated dissent.*

Angela E. Smith: The hon. Gentleman may shake his head, but it is absolutely true. A number of changes have been brought in to simplify and improve the system and get more money out to charities. I understand the frustration of some charities that want to see change more quickly, particularly on the issue of higher rates, but the problem is that there is not agreement among the charities themselves about the best way forward. We are in talks with the Treasury about how best to address the matter, but the improvements that this Government have made have increased the amount of gift aid going to charities. The number of donations has more than doubled since 2001, when we first started making changes. I understand the frustrations, but we are working with the Treasury to ensure that there are improvements.

Hilary Armstrong (North-West Durham) (Lab): Can my right hon. Friend give us any indication of whether voluntary organisations are responding to the Government's

initiatives to get more people into work by increasing the work that they do, so as to benefit from the programmes that have recently been put in place?

Angela E. Smith: The response to the Government programmes put in place during the recession has been remarkable. I am pleased to say that the anecdotal response that we are getting, particularly on grass-roots grants, is that the forms and application process are easier and simpler than they have ever been before. There is an increased number of volunteers, and we are supporting them through a variety of programmes. The evidence is clear that people who volunteer often find a route into work by gaining skills, confidence and connections with employers.

Charities (Regulatory Burden)

3. **Mr. Ian Taylor** (Esher and Walton) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to reduce the regulatory burden on charities. [295976]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Angela E. Smith): The changes that we have made to charity law and to accounting and reporting thresholds have resulted in savings of thousands of pounds for charities. Departments are cutting red tape for third sector organisations, and further progress will be reported before the end of the year. The Government and the National Audit Office have produced guidance to reduce red tape associated with the £12 billion a year that the sector gets from the Government.

Mr. Taylor: Does the Minister understand that in my constituency, charities are worried about the detailed applications for gift aid, which she has just discussed, the ending of the ring-fencing of Supporting People and particularly the vagueness of the extension of Criminal Records Bureau checks, especially for volunteers dealing with children. The problem is not that the regulations are wrong, it is the application of them that is causing concern.

Angela E. Smith: We have to get the balance right between protection of the public and the regulatory burden that we place on charities. I am very conscious of that, and I have outlined some of the measures that we are undertaking to address the matter. Sir Roger Singleton is currently examining the new vetting and barring system for criminal records checks to ensure that we get the right balance between protection and regulatory burden. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that it will be better for charities and volunteers, and that checks for volunteers will be free. I hope that that reassures him that we are getting the balance right and addressing the concerns that he has raised.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley) (Lab): I welcome the news that CRB checks will be free for volunteers, but I recognise the importance of removing regulation. Any money that is donated that actually goes to charities rather than being spent on costs is welcome. Can my right hon. Friend give us some suggestion of what the savings to charities will be?

Angela E. Smith: It is difficult to ascertain the exact amount that we are saving for charities, because to do so we would have to examine every single volunteer.

One problem has been that some charities have paid for the same volunteer to be checked twice. We will examine the matter, but it is difficult to give my hon. Friend an exact figure.

Dr. William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): But can the Minister be very clear on what particular steps the Government are taking to allow charities that receive from generous donors financial aid at this time of recession to use it on good causes, rather than spend the money on the increasing burden of fulfilling administrative and compliance demands?

Angela E. Smith: We are very conscious of the administrative burden on charities. One thing that we have been doing is supplying grants through the modernisation programme so that charities can look at working with other charities and organisations, perhaps by sharing back-room functions, collaborating or merging. That frees up more money to be spent on the objectives of the charity itself. That is one way that we are able to help. I will be happy to give the hon. Gentleman further information and to look at the particular charities in which he is interested.

Bogus Charitable Collections

4. **Jeff Ennis** (Barnsley, East and Mexborough) (Lab): What steps she plans to take to tackle the practice of bogus charitable clothes collections. [295977]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Angela E. Smith): I am absolutely appalled that any organisation would try and con people into thinking that it is a charity in order to collect goods from the public that are intended to be sold to raise funds for a charity's important work. I can tell my hon. Friend that in 2007, the Government, through the Office of the Third Sector, co-ordinated a Give with Care campaign to increase awareness of bogus clothing collections, and we are planning further such public campaigns in the coming months. We will also continue to encourage enforcement of the legislation.

Jeff Ennis: I thank the Minister for her reply, but two of my constituents, Mr. Dale Rutter and Mr. Mike Hyde, from Sprotbrough in Doncaster my constituency, who do charity collections on behalf of Cancer Research UK, informed me at a recent surgery that the number of bogus charity clothes collection operators working in south Yorkshire is very much on the increase because of the credit crunch. Will the Minister agree to meet me and my constituents to discuss this very important issue in greater detail?

Angela E. Smith: Of course I am happy to meet my hon. Friend, who has a record of campaigning on this issue. I would direct his constituents to look at the campaign that we have been running and the small print on the sacks that are delivered to people's homes to encourage them to donate, because sometimes there is more helpful information there. I would also suggest that if people want to donate, they might want to go to the charity shop directly. That may be a better way of ensuring that bogus collectors do not get the gifts that are intended for charities.

Mr. Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Would the Minister like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Salvation Army, which is one of the leading clothes collectors and recyclers in the country, and whose depot in Kettering is one of the largest clothes recycling depots in the United Kingdom?

Angela E. Smith: I am always pleased to congratulate a charity that is doing good work. The public can be assured that if a sack comes through their door to collect clothes for the Salvation Army, it is totally genuine.

Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I think I am right in saying that a case of that sort was taken to court by the local authority in Cardiff recently, resulting in a fine of £750. Perhaps that ought to have been higher, but will my right hon. Friend encourage local authorities and magistrates to use their existing powers to the full to drive these cancerous companies out of business, and to allow the public confidence that what they give goes where it is intended?

Angela E. Smith: My right hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. I congratulate Cardiff council on taking that prosecution. A £750 fine is significant for those who are involved in such illegal activities, and I will certainly talk to my colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government to see how we can work together to encourage local authorities to enforce their current powers.

List of Ministerial Responsibilities

5. **Mr. Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): What the cost to her Department was of the (a) production and (b) distribution of the most recent list of ministerial responsibilities. [295978]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and for the Olympics, and Paymaster General (Tessa Jowell): The list of ministerial responsibilities is produced in-house in the Cabinet Office, the costs of which are met from within the existing Cabinet Office budget. They are not, I am afraid, separately identifiable.

Mr. Bone: The Cabinet Office booklet helpfully ranks Cabinet Ministers in order of importance—No. 1 being the Prime Minister, No. 2 being the Leader—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. One would have thought that the hon. Gentleman's colleagues would want to listen to his question and that it would be courteous to do so.

Mr. Bone: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the ranking of the Cabinet: No. 1 is the Prime Minister, No. 2 is the Leader of the Commons and No. 3 is the Lord Mandelson, who is more important than the Chancellor, the Home Secretary, the Foreign Secretary, the Justice Secretary and the Defence Secretary. In fact, the Defence Secretary is listed as the third-least important—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am waiting for the question mark and I have not heard it.

Hon. Members: Answer!

Tessa Jowell: I was waiting for the punch line. The ranking of ministerial offices reflects the significance and importance of the responsibilities carried by the post-holders within the Government. No one is in doubt about the significance of the contribution made, and the responsibility carried, by Lord Mandelson.

Jenny Willott (Cardiff, Central) (LD): Ministerial lists have to be reprinted frequently because of the Government's obsession with changing the machinery of government. Since 2005, the Department for Trade and Industry has had four incarnations, the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have been split up and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills abolished—the list goes on. Does the Minister agree that those reorganisations are unnecessary and expensive, and staff time would be better spent working on policy and problems than on changing the headed paper?

Tessa Jowell: If it were only as trivial as changing the headed paper, yes, but modern government has to be flexible, with the capacity to respond to new and changing demands. That is what the machinery of government changes are designed to do.

Social Enterprise

6. **Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment she has made of the contribution of social enterprise to the economy. [295981]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Angela E. Smith): I am very pleased to answer this question in the run-up to social enterprise day on 19 November, which is a celebration of the 62,000 social enterprises in the UK. Last week, I met 13 social enterprise ambassadors at the restaurant Fifteen, itself a thriving social enterprise, and they are some of the most inspiring social entrepreneurs in the country, together employing more than 1,400 people. Social enterprises contribute about £24 billion to the economy each year and employ 800,000 people. It is clear that at their best social enterprises contribute to a stronger economy and a fairer society.

Mark Lazarowicz: Would the Government consider introducing a community reinvestment Bill to further support social enterprise?

Angela E. Smith: One of things that the Government need to look at—and are doing so—is how to get more capital investment into social enterprises. My hon. Friend may be aware that we have recently concluded our consultation on the creation of a social investment wholesale bank. Consultation closed on 7 October and we are looking at the responses to see how we can best ensure that we get more capital investment into social enterprise, to the benefit of the economy and the community as a whole.

Robert Key (Salisbury) (Con): Will the Minister do her best to encourage Departments, and especially the Government offices for the regions, to participate in social enterprise organisations locally, some of which are working very hard to find practical answers to

problems such as transport in rural areas? Will they also work with organisations such as Policy Connect, which is based in this House?

Angela E. Smith: It is very good when the Government offices for the regions can co-operate with social enterprises. Indeed, I recently visited Hackney transport social enterprise, which is doing tremendous work for the local community. The public are now looking for something different from their business enterprises—social and environmental concern instead of just the financial bottom line. It is important for Government at all levels to co-operate and work with social enterprise—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Members for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) have been conducting an animated conversation for several minutes. I feel sure that that conversation has now been concluded.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South) (Lab): My hon. Friend will know that Community Ventures is a social enterprise that serves my constituency very well. Is her Department considering advising social enterprises to put social clauses into public contracting, so that training opportunities and employment regeneration are added to social contracts?

Angela E. Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which is similar to the point that I made a moment ago about there being more to a social enterprise than the financial bottom line. There is a social return on the investment. I can tell her that yesterday the second phase of the Government's national programme for third sector commissioners began, and it is specifically looking at how to address social issues and how to provide benefit to the public through public service procurement. The short answer is yes.

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Alistair Carmichael to ask Question 7.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Angela E. Smith): I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer a moment ago, but I can also assure him that the Government—

Mr. Speaker: I thought that the Minister was seeking a grouping.

Angela E. Smith: I am, indeed, Mr. Speaker, and I am grateful for your reminder.

Charities (Recession)

7. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What recent assessment she has made of the effect of the recession on charities. [295984]

9. **Sandra Gidley** (Romsey) (LD): What her most recent assessment is of the effects of the recession on charities. [295986]

Angela E. Smith: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we recognise the difficulties facing the sector. As I mentioned to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford), an increased amount of services are being provided, but at the same time there are concerns

about financial support for the sector. The Government's package of support during the recession of up to £42 million will help to address that.

Mr. Carmichael: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Many charities in my constituency are already facing difficulties as a result of the economic climate and are now facing a further threat as a consequence of the dispute between the Lloyds TSB Foundation and the Lloyds TSB banking group. Will the Minister do what she can to intervene in that dispute and to broker some sort of settlement, so that the contribution that the foundation makes to many charities in Scotland can continue?

Angela E. Smith: I would love to be able to do so, but I think that it might be beyond my powers. Obviously, if the Government can give any support or advice, we will be happy to do so. I understand that the Scottish Executive have looked at this matter as well. It is time to place on the record—perhaps this message can go back—how much we greatly value the foundation and the support given by such organisations. We hope that efforts can be made to ensure that it continues.

Sandra Gidley: Is the Minister aware that the number of main reporting charities registered with the Charity Commission has fallen by more than 12,000 over the past year? Although some of that can be attributed to administrative changes in the commission, is it not really a sign that the Government's third sector recession action plan is not working? How can she make it more effective?

Angela E. Smith: I have to challenge the hon. Lady when she says that the £42.5 million put into the third sector is not working. Charitable organisations on the ground will tell us the difference that it makes. I can also say that she needs to talk to the Charity Commission about the reasons for the figure. Plucking out headlines figures does not tell the true picture. More than 1,000 charities have chosen to merge, and the commission has said that it had to clear up the list. A number of those charities have been active for some years. Obviously, we want the number of third sector organisations to increase and those organisations to develop. That is why the Government have a plan to do that.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Has the Minister been able to form any assessment of how banks are treating charities in the current context, in terms of loans, operating charges and other pressures, including on the assets that charities hold?

Angela E. Smith: There is no formal assessment, but anecdotally there is a mixed picture. Some report favourable responses and support from their banks, but in other areas we are finding that banks are perhaps not as sympathetic as they could be. That is one of the reasons that the Government have a programme in place to help charities, and that includes loans being made available.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): Charities have suffered as a result of the recession. Charities such as Age Concern and the hospice movement make a huge contribution to the well-being of certain groups of people in this country because of the large number of

volunteers who give their services free. Can the Government not do more at this time to help charities that are so well regarded in this country?

Angela E. Smith: It is a pleasure—albeit an unusual one—to agree with the hon. Gentleman. I, too, recognise the value of volunteers, and I can assure him that a number of programmes are in place to train volunteers, to help them to broker the arrangements for volunteers that enable them to volunteer in the right way and to use the right skills of volunteers. Not only do charities benefit; the economy as a whole benefits. It is often a route into work. I entirely agree, therefore, with his proposition that volunteers are essential to civic society.

Contingency Planning (Floods)

8. **Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York) (Con):** What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the work of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat natural hazards team in relation to contingency planning for floods. [295985]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and for the Olympics, and Paymaster General (Tessa Jowell): I know that the hon. Lady has a great interest in this matter and is concerned, as we all are, that the recommendations of the Pitt review that followed the 2007 floods be implemented swiftly. To this end, the natural hazards team in the Cabinet Office has been established and is developing a programme to reduce the disruption to critical infrastructure and essential services that caused so much suffering during those floods. A statement of policy is being developed with local authorities, regulators and the relevant industries. A wider consultation on this will follow in November and no doubt Members on both sides of the House will wish to engage in this. The—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have got the drift. Let us have the supplementary question. I call Miss Anne McIntosh.

Miss McIntosh: The Government promised to have undertaken a national assessment of all the critical infrastructure at risk by the beginning of this year. Why have they failed to do so and why have they let down those households that were flooded in 2007?

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Lady is not correct; a lot of work has already been undertaken in establishing the basis for the wider consultation, including discussions with the regulators, local authorities and other relevant industries. Wider consultation with the public will take place in November, after which the policy statement setting out how such humanitarian crises will be avoided in the future will be published.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [295958] **Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab):** If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 28 October.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Gordon Brown): Before listing my engagements, I know that the whole House will want to join me in paying tribute to the members of our armed forces who have given their lives on behalf of our country in Afghanistan. Today we mourn the loss of Corporal Thomas Mason from the Black Watch, 3rd Battalion the Royal Regiment of Scotland and Corporal James Oakland from the Royal Military Police. I know that the thoughts of the whole House are with the families and friends of those brave men. They will not be forgotten for the service that they gave. On behalf of the British people, this morning I have also sent a message to the UN Secretary-General offering our condolences and support, following the Taliban attack on the United Nations in Kabul this morning.

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

Mr. Hepburn: First, may I join the Prime Minister in expressing my condolences to the families and friends of the people he mentioned?

Will the Prime Minister ensure that any announcement by the Justice Secretary on pleural plaques will ensure a commitment to compensating pleural plaques victims from the past, the present and the future?

The Prime Minister: I know the anxieties that people who are diagnosed with pleural plaques have. I know also that there have been a huge amount of medical inquiries into this big issue. I know too that those who end up suffering from asbestosis suffer from one of the worst and most painful diseases imaginable, and it is right that we have the proper compensation in place for them. I am looking forward to meeting my hon. Friend and a group of MPs tomorrow to discuss this very issue with the Justice Secretary. It is important, after the legislation that has come before the House, that we get a resolution soon.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney) (Con): May I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to Corporal James Oakland and Corporal Thomas Mason? They died serving our country and our thoughts should be with their families and friends. As the Prime Minister said, we should also think of those six UN aid workers who were killed in that dreadful attack in Kabul.

Before I get on to other questions, may I welcome the Government's complete U-turn on cutting £20 million from training in the Territorial Army? That was brought about after questions by Conservative MPs and Labour MPs, and from this Dispatch Box. Can the Prime Minister tell us what on earth he was thinking of when he was thinking of cutting Army training at a time when the country is at war?

The Prime Minister: First of all, let me repeat my condolences, as the right hon. Gentleman has, to those people who have died, one of whom was injured in the summer and subsequently died in Birmingham. Our thoughts must also be with the United Nations and the relatives of those staff today. I will be speaking to the UN Secretary-General to tell him that no terrorism should deter us from our actions in Afghanistan.

As far as the training for Afghanistan is concerned, there are three stages to it and all are important. First, we have to ensure that our regular Army has the numbers

that are necessary. That is why an additional 9,300 people have been recruited to the Army over the past year. That means that Army numbers are now at 101,000, which of course means more money. The second thing was to ensure that the Territorial Army, which was sending people to Afghanistan, had them going to Afghanistan properly trained and equipped. I was sure when I reported to the House two weeks ago that that is what we would do.

The third thing is that, having spent an additional £1 billion on Afghanistan this year and spending £1 billion extra on defence for costs associated with Afghanistan and other things, we could or would be able to spend on the Territorial Army. Having looked at all the issues, including the extra £1 billion that we are spending on Afghanistan, and having talked to the Chief of the Defence Staff, I decided that that was the right thing to do. However, I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that we are spending £1 billion more on Afghanistan and £1 billion more on defence. It is wrong for him to say that we are not spending sufficiently on defence; we are.

Mr. Cameron: Honestly, this Prime Minister cannot even be straight and straightforward when he is performing a U-turn. He cannot get away from the fact that he was proposing cuts in basic training that would have meant cuts in the TA, and if you cut by that amount, you cannot fight a war. He says that there were three stages to this, and there were: the wrong policy, informed by the wrong values, followed by weeks of dithering in Downing street and, finally, the Government forced by the Opposition to do the right thing in a humiliating climbdown. And it all ends, once again, with a complete loss of the Prime Minister's authority. Why does this Prime Minister keep getting it wrong?

The Prime Minister: What is wrong are the Opposition's policies on the economy. What is wrong are the Opposition's policies on the health service. What is wrong are the Opposition's policies on education. Right throughout the recession, we have got things right, and the right hon. Gentleman has got it wrong.

Mr. Cameron: The Prime Minister turns to the economy, so let us turn to the economy. We learned last Friday that Britain is in the longest and deepest recession since records began. Presumably, one very simple thing has to follow from that: this Prime Minister has got to say something that, up to now, he has completely refused to say. Will he finally admit that he did not end boom and bust?

The Prime Minister: We always said that we would come out of recession by the end of this year. That has been the position that the Chancellor took in his Budget, and the position that we consistently took. It would have been wrong, and made things a lot worse, if we had taken the advice of the right hon. Gentleman, the Leader of the Opposition. Today, in Brussels, we have got permission to enable Northern Rock to be sustained as a company. We agreed to nationalise it, and we saved 3,000 jobs in Northern Rock. If we had taken his advice, there would be no Northern Rock and 3,000 jobs would have been lost.

Mr. Cameron: The Prime Minister tells us that he has been consistent in saying that we would be out of recession by the end of the year. I am not going to let him get away with that. In September, he said:

“We are now coming out of a recession, as a result of the actions we have taken”.

He also said in September:

“I think you will see figures pretty soon that show the action that Britain is taking yielding effect”.

In June, he claimed that Britain was

“leading the rest of the world...out of recession”.—[*Official Report*, 3 June 2009; Vol. 493, c. 268.]

The fact is that France, Germany and Japan have been growing for six months. Does he now accept that he got it comprehensively wrong?

The Prime Minister: If I have to explain to him, Germany and Japan have had a far deeper recession than we have. Equally, at the same time, unemployment in this country is far lower than it is in America or in the euro area, and that is a result of the actions that we have taken. The right hon. Gentleman can read every statement that he likes, but this is absolutely consistent with my view, and the Chancellor's view, that we would come out of the recession by the end of the year. The problem is that the right hon. Gentleman has policies that would keep us in recession. His policies would mean more unemployment, because he will not support the new deal, more small businesses going under—we have supported 200,000 small businesses—and more home owners losing their homes. That is the policy of the Conservative party. He cannot deny that he got every aspect of this recession wrong.

Mr. Cameron: Even when you read the Prime Minister one of his own quotes from September about the recession ending, he cannot be straight about it. France, Germany and Japan have all come out of recession. So have Sweden, Brazil, Russia, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand and New Zealand. Does not this list demonstrate something else? When the Prime Minister said, as he did over and over again, that we were the best prepared country in the world for this recession, he was plain wrong.

The Prime Minister: No, we have been better placed because we have 3 million more people in work than in 1997. We are better placed because we have the new deal in place to help the unemployed, and we have been better placed because we had lower debt starting the recession as a result of the actions that we have taken. The right hon. Gentleman cannot deny the fact that every single country in the International Monetary Fund is against the policies of the Conservative party. Every single country in Europe is against the policies of the Conservative party. The CBI, the chambers of commerce and other institutes in Britain representing business do not like the idea of withdrawing the fiscal stimulus. What sense does it make to withdraw the fiscal stimulus now, which is the policy of the Opposition?

Mr. Cameron: How can this Prime Minister possibly claim that we are the best placed when we have had the longest and deepest recession since records began, when we have 2.5 million people unemployed, when one in five young people cannot find a job and when his recent triumph is that our economy is now smaller than Italy's?

That is what he has given us. Even before this recession, our budget deficit was the biggest in the developed world; we had a regulatory system designed by him that did not work; and we had 5 million people on out-of-work benefits. What he said about the recession was wrong; what he said about the recovery was wrong; what he said about being well prepared was wrong; what he said about boom and bust was wrong. Does he not understand that unless he is straight with people about how we got into this mess, no one will trust him to get us out of it?

The Prime Minister: Not one policy from the Opposition today; not one idea about growth in the economy. They were wrong on Northern Rock; they were wrong on helping the unemployed; they were wrong on helping home owners; they were wrong on helping small businesses; they were wrong on the restructuring of the banking system; they have been wrong on the new deal; they are wrong on just about every economic policy. No wonder every policy announced by the shadow Chancellor collapses just after the morning headlines. They have got no ideas on how to get us out and into growth. Had we taken their advice, we would be in an even deeper and even longer recession with more unemployment than there is now. They are not fit even to be the Opposition, when it comes to promulgating economic policies.

Hon. Members: More, more.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms Patricia Hewitt (Leicester, West) (Lab): In view of this week's state visit by her excellency the President of India, will my right hon. Friend say what more he can do further to strengthen the trading relationship between Britain and India?

The Prime Minister: I welcome, as I think everybody should, the President of India on her state visit to Britain. This is a sign of the strategic partnership that is growing between India and the United Kingdom, and I would like to thank my right hon. Friend for her chairmanship of the British-India association that brings forward proposals for even stronger relationships in the future. More than a million people travel between the UK and India each year; there are about 1.5 million people of Indian origin in the UK; there are 30,000 Indian students in Britain: relations will grow stronger as we develop closer educational, cultural and economic links between these two great countries.

Mr. Nick Clegg (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): I would like to add my own expressions of sympathy and condolence to the family and friends of Corporal Thomas Mason and Corporal James Oakland, who served so bravely in Afghanistan—and, of course, to the family and friends of the six UN aid workers who were so brutally murdered in Kabul.

The international climate change summit is now only a few weeks away, and what happens in Copenhagen will shape our world for generations to come. I welcome a lot of the Prime Minister's pre-summit rhetoric; if words could do the trick, we would be halfway to a deal already. When it comes to the environment, however, it is actions that really count, so how would the Prime Minister characterise his Government's green record over the last decade?

The Prime Minister: We have met the Kyoto targets. We have got the first climate change Act of any country in the world. We have committed ourselves to very radical cuts in emissions not only in the long term, but in the short term. We are fighting hardest to get an agreement in Copenhagen. I have said that I will go to Copenhagen; I want there to be an agreement in Copenhagen. It is based first on us agreeing a political understanding about how the treaty will be developed. We then need to agree on the intermediate targets. I think all countries will have to accept that they have got to make commitments, and we need to have a financial proposal such as the one that we have put forward. This will be discussed at the European Council this week, and I believe that the European Council will want to make progress. I believe Europe will have a position, which can then be put to Copenhagen.

Mr. Nick Clegg (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): As far as the Prime Minister's own record is concerned, the sad truth is that he has done far too little, far too late. Total emissions are up, and air travel is up. The Prime Minister wants a new runway at Heathrow, he wants more dirty coal power stations and more nuclear energy plants, our housing stock is the most poorly insulated in Europe—and last week the Prime Minister got all his MPs to vote against the 10:10 environment campaign. Does he not realise that unless he acts fast to fix things here at home, he will have no chance and no authority to fix things in Copenhagen?

The Prime Minister: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman wrote his second question before he had heard my answer to the first. I set out very clearly the actions that we have taken on the environment. I think that the hon. Gentleman's party's position would be a lot better if Liberal councillors across the country did not vote against planning consent, so that we could have renewable energy, and I think that his own position would be a lot stronger if he could say that he would support nuclear energy, which is one of the means by which we can reduce carbon emissions.

We will continue to fight for a deal at Copenhagen. I believe that all parties should be interested in that being achieved, and I think that we should all campaign together to secure that deal at Copenhagen.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend aware that 2,000 grandparents in this country have taken custody of grandchildren, usually following tragic circumstances affecting the children's natural parents? Is it not time that we gave real financial and practical support to those grandparents and recognised the magnificent work that they do, instead of punishing them as the system does at present?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his efforts to raise the profile of how we can do more to help grandparents. He may know—because I think he has been part of this—that we are holding a cross-government summit in November to listen to the experience of grandparents and their organisations. From 2011 grandparents who look after grandchildren will receive national insurance credit, and we will publish a Green Paper on that in the next few months. The role of grandparents is absolutely vital to every family in the country, and we should do everything that we can to strengthen the role that they can play.

Q2. [295959] **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay) (Con): Even those of us who believed that the Government fundamentally underestimated the task when they first became involved in Afghanistan felt that the recent fraud-ridden presidential election was a worrying development. Given that the Prime Minister is aware that troops provide time and space but not a political solution—which will be an essential part of the jigsaw if we are now to succeed—what lessons has he learned from this period when it comes to any election run-off?

The Prime Minister: First, as the elections take place—and the date has already been set—we must ensure that there are sufficient monitors as well as sufficient security. One of the problems during the last election was that there were insufficient monitors, which allowed corrupt ballots to take place. Secondly, we must work towards a political solution. It is not simply a military solution that we are looking for. We want to strengthen local government so that people in Afghanistan feel that they have a stake in the future of the country, and we want to have a corruption-free central Government. That is one of the problems with which we have been dealing for many years.

We—the Americans, NATO and others—will have to sign a contract with the new President, whoever he is, so that early action can be taken to deal with those abuses. In the longer term, of course, we want to split the Taliban ideologues from the others, and to reconcile where that is possible, so that we can build a stronger democratic centre to ensure the future of Afghanistan. Our role is to be there to build up the Afghan military and police so that they are able to take more responsibility for their own affairs and, as a result, the number of our troops can fall.

Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend will be aware that during his period as Chancellor and Prime Minister, British canals have been turned around from being a drain on our nation's resources to being a national asset. Will he ensure that British Waterways is seen not as an asset to be sold off, but as an asset to be treasured—like our national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty—and used for public benefit as well as local regeneration?

The Prime Minister: I think my right hon. Friend will agree that new investment in British Waterways has been very important to guaranteeing its future. We must consider how we can get further new investment into British Waterways for the future: that is our principal aim.

Q3. [295960] **Bob Spink** (Castle Point) (Ind): As we approach Remembrance Sunday, Canvey Island Royal British Legion proudly reaches its 75th anniversary. It also has its first Gurkha member, Laxmi Ghising. Will the Prime Minister continue his honourable support of the Gurkhas by granting them equal pension rights, and will he congratulate the British Legion?

The Prime Minister: We will look at the case the hon. Gentleman has put forward on the Gurkhas, but I have to tell him on this matter that a High Court case has been taking place over the last period of time. On the Royal British Legion, I commend the work that it does. Particularly as we approach Remembrance Sunday, we

remember the way in which it represents all the families and all the ex-servicemen and women of our country, and its organisation of the festival of remembrance and so many events around the countries is something of which our nation is very proud. I think the whole House will want to join me in thanking the Royal British Legion for everything it does.

Stephen Pound (Ealing, North) (Lab): The African Caribbean community has made an immense contribution to this country, particularly in the field of public services. Many in that community are deeply distressed by the increase in air passenger duty, which appears to be arbitrary and illogical. Will the Prime Minister be prepared to meet myself and a few colleagues, including my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Ms Butler), to see how best we can resolve this problem?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, the taxation of environmental goods, and particularly air fuel, has been a vexed matter for many years. On air passenger duty, the Chancellor tells me that he will be meeting a group including my hon. Friend to discuss these matters in the next few days.

Q4. [295961] **Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): Sections 32 to 34 of the Inquiries Act 2005 specifically give the Prime Minister and his Government the power to co-instigate an inquiry into the Lockerbie disaster. Why is the Prime Minister refusing to take these powers, and thereby yet again outsourcing responsibility to the Scottish Parliament?

The Prime Minister: First of all, let me say to the House that this terrible crime in Lockerbie will never be forgotten and, even many years on, we must remember the hurt that has been caused to the relatives of those people who lost their lives in Lockerbie as a result of what happened over the summer. I want to emphasise that Megrahi is still in the eyes of the law a convicted terrorist for the criminal act he was engaged in. It is for the Scottish authorities to pursue any new leads that exist. They are the authority with whom jurisdiction on this lies, and it is for them to take the action that is necessary.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): We live in dangerous times. There are a number of threats and issues of global importance, such as global terrorism, global warming and the unresolved Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Is Britain's interest best served by a strong European alliance of sensible, mainstream parties, or an alliance of Islamophobes and climate and holocaust deniers like the one that lot over there on the official Opposition Benches have got?

The Prime Minister: When I go to the European Council tomorrow, I will meet not only leaders of socialist groups in Europe, but leaders of the Christian Democrat groups and centre-right parties in Europe. It is amazing that the Conservative party has broken its links with the centre-right in Europe to join a group that can only be described as extremist. The Conservative party will regret isolating itself from the centre of Europe. It is out on a limb; it is putting British jobs at risk; it is angering British business; and it is out of touch with what people know is necessary for the future.

Q5. [295962] **Mr. David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): Could the Prime Minister tell me why we need a President of the European Union and who he is supporting for the job?

The Prime Minister: We have made it very clear that if this position is to be created—the European treaty is not yet through—and if the former Prime Minister Tony Blair comes forward as a candidate, we will be very happy to support him.

Q6. [295963] **Mr. Tom Watson** (West Bromwich, East) (Lab): Some 250 Members from both sides of the House today joined 100,000 petition signers to Ofcom. Phone companies BT and 3UK have joined unions Unite and Amicus and the Royal College of Nursing in support of early-day motion 1531. Consumers are being ripped off. Does my right hon. Friend think that phone companies that have hidden charges for connecting from one network to another should cut their rates?

The Prime Minister: Ofcom is looking at this very matter. There is an unfairness to consumers who change company; the cut-off rates are very high indeed. It is right that Ofcom investigates it, and it is right that the consumer gets a better deal.

Q7. [295964] **Bill Wiggin** (Leominster) (Con): The company Green Energy Supplies of Leominster faces extra costs from the Government's microgeneration certification scheme. To show that the Prime Minister is serious about Copenhagen and renewable energy, will he agree to meet my constituents and get rid of some of this gold-plating?

The Prime Minister: No, the Government are doing more to promote low-carbon industries in this country. We are investing in the new technologies, and we are supporting a range of small, medium-sized and large businesses. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will meet the hon. Gentleman to talk about these issues, but I am convinced that we are doing as much as we can now—we will do more in the future—to help the development of low-carbon industries in his constituency and throughout the country.

Q8. [295965] **Gwyn Prosser** (Dover) (Lab): Sir Jeffrey Sterling famously said that the Labour Government did more for the British merchant navy in their first 18 months than the Tories did in 18 years. Given the news that Maersk Line is starting to ship out of the British register and lay off British seafarers, will the Prime Minister tell us when Ministers will act on the employment and training package put forward in 2007 by the unions and the industry? It will expand the fleet and create new jobs for British seafarers.

The Prime Minister: Shipping is a very competitive global industry, but what we did in 1997 so that ships were flagged from the United Kingdom was a very important act of government to help defend, safeguard and expand jobs and opportunities for seafarers. The proposals put forward by unions and the industry together are ones that we are now looking at in order to create more training and employment opportunities in the industry, and I am very happy to discuss them with my hon. Friend.

Q9. [295966] **Mr. Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): Last weekend, Members from all three of the main political parties and both Houses were among 100 legislators from the major economies who came together at the GLOBE legislators forum, which was attended by the Prime Minister of Denmark, on the subject of climate change. The GLOBE forum resulted in a consensus of the 100 legislators on a set of legislative principles that were jointly put forward by United States Congressman Ed Markey and Chairman Wang Guangtao of China. Will the Prime Minister agree to meet the UK's delegation to that GLOBE meeting ahead of the conference of the parties—COP—meeting in December?

The Prime Minister: I will meet delegations to look at this issue of climate change, but I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that what we need is progress from both China and America, so that we can have a climate change deal. The principles that will underlie the deal must include intermediate targets that are agreed by countries around the world. I hope that as part of the decisions that were made by his group last weekend, there was recognition that we will need intermediate as well as long-term targets and we will need to solve the problem of climate financing. That is crucial and our proposal, which is not to affect international development aid, but to raise additional money for tackling climate change for the poorest countries, is one that I hope will commend itself to all parties.

Sir Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Following the creation of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, and given the fact that Sir Thomas Legg is reviewing five years of our allowances, with the publication next week by Christopher Kelly of the overall review of MPs' allowances, can the Prime Minister tell the House what the next steps will be?

The Prime Minister: I think that all Members of Parliament want to bring the old, discredited system of expenses to an end and to bring in as quickly as possible a new system for expenses. Sir Christopher Kelly will report next Wednesday, and that report will form the basis of a statement to the House. I then expect that IPSA will be given the power to implement it in detail, but that is a matter for the House and there will be a report to the House next Wednesday.

Q10. [295967] **Stephen Williams** (Bristol, West) (LD): Bristol's economy and environment suffers from poor public transport; we have high bus fares from a monopoly provider and far too few passenger trains on

our local rail network. Will the Prime Minister instruct the Secretary of State for Transport to expedite plans for the Greater Bristol area to be given an integrated transport authority, so that service improvements can be brought about?

The Prime Minister: We are investing more in transport than we have ever done. We have not only increased investment in rail transport and moved to the electrification of some lines, but we are investing in bus transport, particularly with the help we are giving to pensioners on concessionary fares. I have not seen the Bristol proposal for an integrated transport system, but obviously I shall examine what the hon. Gentleman says.

Q11. [295968] **Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): We run the risk of being a generation of politicians that did not make the right decisions to tackle one of the biggest issues confronting us, which is climate change, and to minimise its impact on future generations. May I commend my right hon. Friend for the action that he has taken? He has been the first Head of State to recognise the need for leaders of Governments to attend the Copenhagen summit and to take part in those debates. Do not listen to the nay-sayers over there—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think we have the gist of it.

The Prime Minister: The Opposition get very anxious. They have come out against wind turbines and wind renewables; the shadow Business Secretary said that Britain should not be used for that. They are against nuclear power, which is one of the keys to our having lower carbon in this country. The Conservatives should think again. If they want a consensus on climate change, they will have to change their policy.

Q12. [295969] **Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory** (Wells) (Con): As the Prime Minister knows, this is the international year of astronomy. Does he therefore support the campaign for dark skies, which is good for astronomy and also saves energy? If he does, will he play his part by turning off—or at least dimming—the lights in public buildings, including Downing street, where all the lights are on very late into the night?

The Prime Minister: I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was going to complain about European regulations, because that is normally what he does. All of us have a responsibility to save electricity and all Government Departments and all parts of government should be involved in doing so.

Nimrod Review

12.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Bob Ainsworth):

I am today publishing the report of the independent review that the then Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Des Browne), announced on 4 December 2007 following the loss of Nimrod aircraft XV230 over Afghanistan on 2 September 2006. Fourteen members of the armed forces tragically lost their lives on that day.

The Ministry of Defence must take responsibility for many of the failings identified in the board of inquiry. My predecessor said as much at the Dispatch Box in December 2007, when he announced that we were setting up an independent review under a senior Queen's counsel, Mr. Charles Haddon-Cave, to look into the events that led to the loss. I am grateful to Mr. Haddon-Cave, who has provided a rigorous and powerful report. It will be very distressing reading for many, and particularly for those families who lost their loved ones three years ago.

On behalf of the Ministry of Defence and the Royal Air Force, I would like again to say sorry to all the families who lost loved ones. I am sorry for the mistakes that have been made and that lives have been lost as a result of our failure. Nothing I can say or do will bring these men back, but for their sake, and for the sake of those families, friends and former colleagues who grieve, we can provide clarity about what actually happened, where failings occurred and what must be done to ensure that, as far as possible, this never happens again.

Flying, especially in a military context, is never without risk. We have an obligation to our people to understand and manage those risks and to ensure they are as low as reasonably practicable. The safety of our personnel is of paramount importance and that is why the report is so significant. Mr. Haddon-Cave was asked to review the arrangements for assuring the airworthiness and safe operation of the Nimrod aircraft over its service life, to assess where responsibility lies for any failures, to assess more broadly the process for compiling safety cases, taking into account best practice in the civilian and military world, and to make recommendations. In his report, Mr. Haddon-Cave has been critical of both the MOD and our industrial partners, at both organisational and individual levels. He has stated clearly that the loss of XV230 was preventable.

As he was asked to do, Mr. Haddon-Cave has also made a number of recommendations in his report about what we must do to learn lessons for the future. He has proposed new key principles around which we should base our airworthiness processes—leadership, independence, people and simplicity.

I met Mr. Haddon-Cave this morning and we discussed his report. It identifies numerous weaknesses in the airworthiness system that we will address thoroughly and urgently, but he has confirmed to me that his report does not raise concerns over the actual airworthiness of individual fleets, and I have been assured by the Chief of the Air Staff and the defence chief airworthiness engineer that our fleets remain safe to fly. I have full confidence in our people carrying out airworthiness duties, but we need to ensure that they are supported by an improved process.

Mr. Haddon-Cave also states that, in our pursuit of financial savings, the MOD and the RAF allowed their focus on safety to suffer. We accept this with regard to the Nimrod XV230. As a Department, we have a duty to continue to seek efficiencies in how we deliver defence, but I am absolutely clear that that must not be done with any detriment to safety.

The two officers still serving in the RAF who are strongly criticised in the report have been moved to staff posts that have no responsibility for safety and airworthiness. The RAF will now consider what further action should be taken in relation to these officers, in light of the evidence uncovered by the report. Mr. Haddon-Cave has, quite rightly, made it abundantly clear that he wants the Department to produce a considered response to his report.

We will now examine all aspects of the report, produce a full response and update the House before the Christmas recess. I have set this challenging timetable because I want to ensure that we can act with confidence that the right decisions will be made and that the necessary work will be seen through.

We have not been idle waiting for the outcome of Mr. Haddon-Cave's review. Let me set out briefly what the Ministry has already done in the three years since the loss of Nimrod XV230. We have implemented a comprehensive programme of work to ensure that we can have confidence in the safety and airworthiness of the Nimrod aircraft as it is today. This involves implementing the recommendations of the board of inquiry, and includes ceasing the use of the air-to-air refuelling system, as well as of the aircraft's relevant hot air systems while the aircraft is in flight, and adopting an enhanced aircraft maintenance and systems inspection regime. We do not allow Nimrod aircraft to fly without having had their engine bay hot air ducts replaced, and we have introduced an ageing aircraft systems audit focused on guaranteeing the safety of the Nimrod's systems for the remainder of its service life. This included a forensic-level inspection of a Nimrod aircraft.

We have applied these lessons to other aircraft as necessary, taking steps to examine, review, strengthen and improve the systems for assuring safety and airworthiness. We are aware that the implications stretch more broadly across defence to other items of equipment, and so we have also scrutinised our safety management processes and organisation with great care.

Safety is now given absolute priority at the highest levels in the MOD. It is the first point on the agenda at every senior management team meeting, and this flows down throughout the organisation as a whole. As a demonstration of our commitment to improved safety and airworthiness, we have also established a new senior post, that of the defence chief airworthiness engineer, to provide improved assurance to me that the whole technical airworthiness process, from end to end—that is, from industry through project teams to the front line—is in accordance with the Department's regulations. Mr. Haddon-Cave welcomes this in his report as a step in the right direction. We are working hard to ensure that we capture the lessons from incidents and inquiries to improve our safety. As an organisation, the MOD is changing its culture and approach to put safety first.

All these measures ensure that we can continue to fly the Nimrod safely and that it can continue to conduct its essential work in the remaining months of its service

[Mr. Bob Ainsworth]

life. Mr. Haddon-Cave undertook at the outset of his review to issue an urgent interim report outlining his concerns, if he found evidence that the Nimrod fleet was not safe to fly. As he says in his report, he has not found it necessary to do so. He states in his report “that appropriate and timely steps have been, and continue to be, taken by the MOD and the RAF to address the immediate airworthiness issues raised by the loss of XV230 and the BOI report and subsequent discoveries about the Nimrod fleet. Indeed, the level of scrutiny now applied to the Nimrod fleet is such that it is probably one of the most closely monitored operational military aircraft fleets in the world.”

The report is a tough read. Its subtitle—“A Failure of Leadership, Culture and Priorities”—is a stark judgment. We are determined to address this and the clear message in the report that we have to do more. I pay tribute, as does Mr. Haddon-Cave in his report, to the Nimrod communities, whom I commend for their skill and professionalism. The Nimrod continues to have an important role in the defence of this country, and the current fleets are, on current plans, very shortly to be replaced by new aircraft.

Our armed forces are truly the best in the world, and we are committed to providing them with all the support that they need, including learning the lessons and making the changes for the better if tragedies occur. Let me say again that the safety of our personnel is of paramount importance. In the case of Nimrod XV230, we failed. We cannot undo this. Nothing will bring back those 14 men, and for their grieving families, the loss will be with them for ever. I will do everything in my power to guard against anything like this happening again. I am today placing a copy of Mr. Haddon-Cave’s report in the Library of the House.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring) (Con): For the families of those whose lives were lost, today will bring back painful memories and reawaken emotions of grief and anger. Our thoughts are with all those families today.

The House owes a great debt to Charles Haddon-Cave for the report. It is a formidable indictment and describes multiple and repeated systemic failures. It is genuinely shocking. Its most damning central conclusion is that there were previous incidents and warning signs that were ignored, and that the loss of the aircraft was avoidable.

The criticism of the Nimrod safety case is excoriating. The report says that it

“was a lamentable job from start to finish. It was riddled with errors. It missed the key dangers. Its production is a story of incompetence, complacency, and cynicism.”

How will oversight of such projects occur in future?

The report is critical of the Nimrod integrated project team, and of QinetiQ and BAE, including specific individuals. How will these be dealt with, and how can we ensure that technical guarantees given to Ministers in the future by these and other companies can be relied upon and independently verified?

The Government as a whole must bear responsibility for the way in which the MOD has been treated under the pressure of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. As the report says:

“Financial pressures and cuts drove a cascade of multifarious organisational changes, which led to a dilution of the airworthiness regime and culture within the MOD, and distraction from safety and airworthiness issues as the top priority.”

Ministers themselves must address their failure of stewardship at the MOD. The report says:

“The shortcomings in the current airworthiness system in the MOD are manifold and include...a failure to adhere to basic Principles...a Military Airworthiness System that is not fit for purpose...a Safety Case regime which is ineffective and wasteful...an inadequate appreciation of the needs of Aged Aircraft...a series of weaknesses in the area of Personnel...an unsatisfactory relationship between the MOD and industry...an unacceptable Procurement process leading to serial delays and cost-overruns; and ...a Safety Culture that has allowed ‘business’ to eclipse Airworthiness.”

This report must act as a wake-up call for us all—for politicians, for industry and for the military. Cutting corners costs lives. Wars cannot be fought on a peacetime budget, and there is a moral imperative that those who are willing to risk their lives in the armed service of their country should know at all times that everything is being done to maximise the chance of success of their mission and to minimise their risk in carrying it out. The failure to do this resulted in the death of 14 servicemen—the avoidable and preventable death of 14 servicemen. The report concludes: “In my view”—the aircraft—

“was lost because of a systemic breach of the Military Covenant brought about by significant failures on the part of all those involved.”

There could not be a more damning charge list.

Mr. Ainsworth: I do not retreat from many of the comments made by the hon. Gentleman. Mr. Haddon-Cave asks us to implement an entire new airworthiness system and to address further the culture that he sees as the basic problem within the MOD and in parts of the armed forces. The only thing that I can say in mitigation is that that has been recognised, and recognised some time ago, and that a lot of work has been done throughout the time that I have been a Minister at the MOD to try to put those systems in the right place. Having looked at Mr. Haddon-Cave’s report, we have to make absolutely certain that we are going to the lengths that we need to to make certain that we recalibrate that culture within the Department. I am not sure whether we have got there yet, so there is more that we have to do.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this is a wake-up call, probably for far wider than just defence. The pursuit of efficiency is something that every organisation must do—public sector, private sector, Government and the rest. But sometimes organisations lose sight of some of the basic fundamentals as they try to drive in those efficiencies. We need to consider matters in detail, and we need to use the report as a tool to get the change that is absolutely necessary within the MOD. There were glaring dangers apparent in the aircraft for decades, and there were opportunities to spot those dangers, which were simply missed. My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun, apologised to the House for that. We knew that that was so at the time of the board of inquiry, and we need to repeat it and to have some due modesty about the situation that we find.

Nick Harvey (North Devon) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for his necessarily very sombre statement to the House this morning. This is a tragic case of an accident that could have been avoided. The 40-year history of Nimrod has, as the Secretary of State just acknowledged, been very difficult. Many critics of procurement in the

MOD have their own candidates as to which has been the most bungled procurement. The distinction of Nimrod is that it has culminated in the tragedy of unnecessary deaths, and today's report will certainly reawaken the sense of grief in the families and communities involved.

I welcome the candour of the Secretary of State's admission of fault by the Government, and I welcome his saying that the MOD is changing its culture and approach to put safety first, but I regret that he had to acknowledge that that is necessary and was not always the case in the past.

This has not been a good few weeks for the Government, with Bernard Gray's report last week indicating a culture of poor process, indecision and mismanagement, and we must all hope that lessons are learned. The case under discussion has been one of wake-up calls from previous incidents not being heeded. The report in 1998 gave warnings that were not taken on board by those managing the project, and, as today's report says, that was the

"best opportunity to prevent the accident",
and it "was, tragically, lost".

The report is also damning of industry, which it accuses of "incompetence, complacency and cynicism." There is always a danger with flying military aircraft, but some of those issues were unnecessary and avoidable, and the lives of personnel have been lost. BAE Systems, as our biggest defence contractor, finds itself on the wrong end of some scathing words. Its involvement in the Nimrod safety case was

"poorly planned, poorly managed and poorly executed, work was rushed and corners were cut."

In addition to the errors in industry and in the MOD, Mr. Haddon-Cave refers in the report to "organisational trauma" in the MOD between 1998 and 2006 as a result of the 1998 strategic defence review. I hope very much that Ministers will dwell upon that and ensure that the forthcoming strategic defence review avoids any similar aftermath. Where will Nimrod feature in the new review? Can we please be assured that all the lessons of this appalling story will be learned for the future?

Mr. Ainsworth: I do not disagree, again, with many of the hon. Gentleman's comments. We are not unaware of the weaknesses in the procurement system. We commissioned Bernard Gray's report in the first place and we published it last week—I think that it was only last week—to help us to address those issues. Mr. Haddon-Cave, in his report, refers to procurement as part of the cause of the problem, and we need to make absolutely certain that we learn the right lessons, not the wrong lessons.

In the Nimrod saga, there has often been a focus on the safety of the aircraft itself and whether it should be grounded. Charles Haddon-Cave focuses on the systems themselves, and that is where the focus needs to be. There were systems that simply did not fit the purpose for which they were designed, and, instead of being distracted by other issues, that is where we must focus our attention and that is what we must put right. As the hon. Gentleman has said, safety cases have become completely distorted to the point where they simply are not—or were not, in this case—value for money or of any benefit at all. Putting those systems right has to be our overriding priority.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend's attitude with regard to the statement. There was humility, and he said, "Sorry, we admit we got it wrong and we are going to put it right." I await with interest the Government's response to the report. He said that Nimrod issues were missed over the years, but will he change that to "ignored" over a number of years?

Mr. Ainsworth: The report makes grim reading. Glaring dangers with the Nimrod aircraft existed for decades and were not recognised for decades. The safety casework was, as Mr. Haddon-Cave says, far and away the best opportunity to identify those dangers that were so clear to see, but it was missed. Despite great expertise and expense, the dangers were simply not identified, proving that the system was totally and utterly inadequate for the job.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire) (Con): As I listened to the Secretary of State's words and read about the tick-box culture, I thought that he was genuinely sorry. However, I thought that he and, perhaps, all of us have no understanding of the massive job that we face in changing the culture not just of the Ministry of Defence, but of the country. In that respect, I was very pleased to see the Leader of the Opposition in his place, listening to the Secretary of State's statement. However, if we are to change the culture, let us start here. The strength of this crushing report is that it was rigorously independent. But the Secretary of State has yet to accept the key recommendation of Bernard Gray's review of acquisition—that the assessment of the equipment programme should be similarly rigorously independent. Why not; and, will the Secretary of State please do so?

Mr. Ainsworth: I recognise that the lessons that we could learn from this episode are absolutely profound in terms of defence, and we have to try to learn them. However, they go far wider than defence. How do we get right in our modern world the balance between the pursuit of efficiency, which everybody wants us to pursue because nobody wants to pay more than they absolutely have to for equipment or capability, and making certain that we do not compromise safety in any way? We really have got to put in place systems that properly calibrate those priorities.

On Bernard Gray's report, the one significant recommendation that I do not accept is that we will improve procurement by placing defence equipment and supply with a contractor-run organisation. We can and must do that by other means, and we have to have military knowledge properly plugged into our procurement processes. That recommendation would not be an aid to procurement; it would be a detriment.

Frank Cook (Stockton, North) (Lab): I commend my right hon. Friend on the manner in which he registered the Government's contrition for the events that have taken place, but I refer him to the assurance that he received from the Chief of the Air Staff and the defence chief airworthiness engineer that our fleets remain safe to fly. Had my right hon. Friend asked for such an assurance on 2 September 2006, would he not have received the same assurance? He says that he has full confidence in the people who carry out airworthiness duties, but how confident can the House be? Will he give an assurance now that no incident in the future will occur due to any fiscal shortfall?

Mr. Ainsworth: If my hon. Friend manages to read the report, which is very lengthy and detailed, he will see that it contains words that could be read as indicating that Mr. Haddon-Cave himself feels that not only the Nimrod fleet, but some of our other aircraft fleets are not safe to fly today. The reason why I met Mr. Haddon-Cave this morning was to make absolutely certain that I understood what he was saying in his report—I thought that I did on my overnight reading of it, and he confirmed that this morning. It is not only the Chief of the Air Staff and the individual in the new position of defence chief airworthiness safety engineer who are telling me that the fleet is safe, but Mr. Haddon-Cave. Mr. Haddon-Cave says that, on Nimrod, he had been invited to make an interim report, if he felt that one was necessary, because of airworthiness considerations. He has not made that report. He assured me this morning that his report should not be read as saying that our current fleet or fleets are not safe as they fly today.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): May I say to the Secretary of State that I accept that he is deeply distressed by the report and will do his best to implement the recommendations? May I also say that many of us fear that the long-standing disregard for safety, arising out of a concern for savings, may extend right across the MOD budget—for example, into the military budget, including armoured vehicles and the historical lack of body protection; the Navy, perhaps, with its submarines; and the RAF, with the Nimrod and, I fear, the Puma? Given all that, will he accept that the situation requires a change of culture at the highest level of the services, probably involving direct intervention from Ministers?

Mr. Ainsworth: Yes, I do. I accept that savings were a part of the problem—I do not demur from that at all—but I do not think that the pursuit of savings alone is the cause of the problem. It is therefore necessary to drive through culture change. We have been trying to do that, as I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will accept. We have learned the lessons not only from Nimrod but from the deaths on the Tireless submarine a couple of years ago. We have tried to learn the lessons of our own boards of inquiry in trying to drive in the management and cultural change that is needed in the armed forces as well as in the MOD.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): I welcome this hard-hitting and detailed report, as will my constituents, who wish all the best for everybody at RAF Kinloss and the families of the 14 brave service personnel who died aboard the Nimrod XV230. We have had an independent inquiry and inquests, we have had reviews, we have had numerous reports, and we have had analysis about Nimrod. At every stage, Ministers have given assurances that the right lessons would be learned and acted on. Clearly, they were not—so why should we have confidence in the assurances that we have heard today?

Mr. Ainsworth: We commissioned the report because we knew that assurances were necessary given the findings of the board of inquiry—not through any fault of its own, but because the terms of reference of boards of inquiry mean that they do not consider the wider background and apportioning blame but the direct causes of the accident. There was an absolute necessity to commission this piece of work because it was obvious

that some of the reasons for the crash went beyond the remit of the board of inquiry. I hope that we are able to reassure the hon. Gentleman and his constituents—many of the lost lived in his constituency—that we take this matter very seriously and are determined to drive in the change that is necessary. When I meet the families of service personnel who have lost their lives in very many circumstances, I find that their overriding desire is to know that their loved one did not lose their life in vain and that we genuinely learn the lessons of the loss that they have suffered; and that is what we must try to do.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) (Lab): When will the Nimrods be phased out of service?

Mr. Ainsworth: The Mk 2 Nimrod is nearing the end of its service life. Indeed, part of the report exposes the fact that we have extended its out-of-service date repeatedly because of delays in the supply of a replacement. On current plans, the MR2 has only a few more months of service life left. However, I remind my hon. Friend that we also have the Nimrod R1, which is conducting vital operations in Afghanistan.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): The MOD is very often—continually, it seems—criticised for its inability to provide the right equipment at the right place. Surely we can expect that when equipment is provided it is at least safe and airworthy. There are two stark facts in this report. First, Mr. Haddon-Cave refers again to the pursuit of financial savings and taking eyes off the safety ball; and secondly, he is very critical of our industrial partners. We heard what the Secretary of State said about the internal review that he is going to conduct within the MOD. What ultimate sanctions can be taken as regards our industrial partners, and how can they be called to account?

Mr. Ainsworth: This is a very detailed report with some pretty far-reaching criticisms, not only of us but of others—individuals and companies, including important British companies. I therefore do not want to leap to conclusions about how we take these matters forward. I have promised to look in detail at every aspect of the report and to come back to the House before Christmas, and I will do that.

Anne Main (St. Albans) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's saying that he is going to learn from Army boards of inquiry, because, as he knows, a second Army board of inquiry is due on my late constituent, Captain James Philippon.

I was pleased to hear that the Secretary of State is aware of the financial implications stretching more broadly across other items of defence equipment. Will he take that down to the lowest common denominator—namely, not just equipment that is out there and may not be functioning correctly, but the absence of equipment that should be there?

Mr. Ainsworth: In the case of the hon. Lady's constituent, she knows that we are awaiting a second Army board of inquiry. Her constituent was not at all happy with the outcome of the first Army board of inquiry, and I would not like to prejudge any findings that the second board of inquiry comes to.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater) (Con): The parents of one of the dead crew members live in my constituency. They find it almost impossible to get closure on the situation because of the time that it has taken to come up with these reports. Will the Secretary of State build into the MOD ethos the fact that the speed with which people need to know what happened is paramount? These parents and families need to know, as quickly as possible, the reason that their child, or whatever, died. Could we please have some form of timetable after a disaster for when the information comes back to this House?

Mr. Ainsworth: I accept that the hon. Gentleman is genuine about the point that he makes. This was a big issue with me when I first became Minister for the Armed Forces over two years ago. These things go on for such a length of time that people cannot possibly get closure. However, I have come to accept that one cannot impose arbitrary timetables in such cases. The board of inquiry in this case took more than a year, which was very frustrating. We then had the inquests, and we then commissioned the Haddon-Cave review. We must be mindful, all the time, that there are grieving people suffering as a result of the process. However, when I talk to them they say that their first demand is thoroughness. Yes, they want speed, and yes, they want closure, but they do not want short cuts. We therefore cannot impose an artificial time line on these things.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): The Nimrod aircraft was built at BAE Systems at Woodford; part of the site lies in my constituency. I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and his assurance that all the recommendations will be implemented, as the crash was an absolute tragedy. However, will he not stand up for this wonderful aircraft that has done a magnificent job over the years? The R1 is still performing a brilliant role. Will he tell me, and all the work force still at BAE Systems at Woodford, that following this tragic accident, which I deeply regret—my condolences go out to the families of all those who were killed—the Nimrod will not be prejudiced in future purchases by the Ministry of Defence?

Mr. Ainsworth: Mr. Haddon-Cave pays glowing tributes to all those who were associated with the Nimrod, and rightly so. The overwhelming thrust of his report—I have not managed to read every single page and every detail overnight—is not an attack on the aircraft itself in any way: it is an attack on the systems that have effectively let our people down.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for the content and tone of his statement. He says that lessons have been learned and that there is still more to be done. As part of that process, will he look at the procurement programmes that he has already announced, such as the Puma

extended life programme? That programme was much criticised by the Defence Committee, and there are modern alternatives that may prove to be better value and cheaper in the long run.

Mr. Ainsworth: We must look at our procurement processes. The purpose of commissioning and delivering the Gray report was, in effect, to force us to do that. We will bring forward proposals for acquisition reform as part of the Green Paper process that the hon. Gentleman's party and the Conservative party are co-operating with, and I hope that we will bring forward some work early in the new year. However, I do not want to get distracted into individual programmes and decisions that people may or may not agree with. This is a far bigger problem than that, and it needs to be considered at a comprehensive and strategic level.

Dr. William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): I join the Secretary of State in expressing the sympathy of my right hon. and hon. Friends to the grieving families of the 14 servicemen who tragically lost their lives. I commend the Secretary of State on the manner in which he made his statement and the humility with which he has accepted the report. Can he guarantee that the failings that have been outlined will be corrected, and that a time scale will be given for when those corrections will be made?

Mr. Ainsworth: There are many people in the MOD who, over the period I have been there, have been absolutely bent towards trying to ensure that we learn all the lessons that we need to learn to put safety in place. Nimrod has been a big part of that lessons learned process. There is a desire to do that, but are we at the right place? No, we are not. We have not yet achieved the culture change that needs to take place, but there is a huge desire to do so and I want to ensure that I encourage that and drive it through so that we get to where we need to be.

Bob Spink (Castle Point) (Ind): Three companies of my local Royal Anglian Regiment went to Afghanistan last week. They will welcome the Secretary of State's gracious words, but there are of course implications for them in the report. Will he seek to ensure that the replacement aircraft that comes in soon will be able to operate from a base much nearer its operational zone? That may help to reduce risk.

Mr. Ainsworth: I am not aware of the basing considerations that the hon. Gentleman raises, but I am more than happy to talk to him and listen to any representations that he has. Ensuring that we have sufficient surveillance for operations in Afghanistan is a vital part of keeping our people safe there. That surveillance is provided not only by Nimrod but by many other platforms, and we must ensure that we do all that we can to maintain the overall capability in the best possible shape that we can.

Points of Order

1.12 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make clear my displeasure at the fact that a written ministerial statement pertaining to today's debate has in fact not been released. The Government have announced publication of the responses to the consultation on local spending reports, but I find it curious, to put it generously, that the statement is being published on the day of the debate. I find it incredible that Members were not given the courtesy of seeing the statement, and that it is still not available in the Library of the House as late as 12 minutes past 1. Not only is that a grave discourtesy to Members of all parties, who have worked together in a non-partisan way on the issue of local spending reports, but it makes a mockery of the Chamber being used in any meaningful form.

I believe that there was a similar incident the Thursday before last, Mr. Speaker, when you described it as a grave discourtesy to Members that a statement was made available only one hour before a debate. I should like to know what your view is of the fact that the statement pertaining to today's debate has not yet been made available.

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order and for giving me advance notice of it. My view is straightforward: I regard the situation as extremely unsatisfactory. A statement of that kind ought to be delivered in a timely way. If it has not been, we need to know why and the matter needs to be put right. Above all, I hope that there will not be a repetition. It is a discourtesy to Members of the House.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I address this point to you in your capacity as custodian of the interests of those who work in the Westminster village. You will be aware of the speculation surrounding the leaking of Sir Christopher Kelly's report and the impact that that is having upon a lot of individuals who work for MPs or are members of MPs' families. I do not believe that it is tolerable that that speculation should be allowed to continue until next Wednesday.

It is well known that the report has been completed and is at the printers at the moment. I wonder whether it is within your power, Mr. Speaker, to order that the report should be published as soon as possible so that the speculation can be ended and we can answer questions from our staff based upon the facts in the report rather than speculation.

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. It is not a parliamentary report that is being produced, and although I note that he either thinks that it is within my power to do as he asks or wishes to extend my power to ensure that it is, the present situation is that it is not. The report is due to be delivered to the Government by 4 November and published on that date.

I have heard the very serious point about the leakage that has taken place, and I say to the hon. Gentleman, who is an immensely experienced and perspicacious parliamentarian, that if he wants to address his concern to representatives of the Government, business questions might be a suitable opportunity for him to do so. I have a hunch that he will probably be there.

Rentcharges (Notification)

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

1.15 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require rentcharge companies to notify annually residents subject to chief rent of their statutory right to redeem their charge under the Rentcharges Act 1977; and for connected purposes.

I am pleased to have been given this opportunity to bring to the attention of the House a specific problem affecting properties in my constituency and a small number of others, and to provide a practical and, for the Government, cost-free method of resolving a long-standing problem. In short, I wish the existing law to be amended to allow for a tightening up of the regulations regarding chief rent charges and to prevent some of the bad practices that rentcharge companies have used on my constituents in recent years.

I first raised the issue of rentcharges in my maiden speech, and since then I have been contacted by a large number of local residents who have been caught up in various chief rent scams and have quite frankly been conned out of money, often hundreds of pounds, by estate management companies. Greater Manchester is one of only a handful of areas in the country where chief rents were legally established. Chief rent is a perpetual charge, a form of ground rent that is charged on freehold properties by a previous landowner. It affects properties only in small parts of the country including parts of Greater Manchester such as Tameside and Stockport in my constituency.

As with any charge, the resident is billed by the property company each year to pay the chief rent. It is often a very small sum of a few pounds a year, and because the charge remains at the level at which it was originally set in the deeds, it is of diminishing value in real terms to the rentcharge companies as time goes by.

Under the provisions of the Rentcharges Act 1977, the freeholder can unburden themselves of any annual rentcharge created before 22 August 1977 by applying to make a lump sum payment through the relevant Government office. In the case of my constituents, that is the Government office for the north-west. The Act provides a formula that enables the Government office to calculate the redemption figure that the rent payer has to pay the rent owner in order to redeem their rentcharge. That figure comes out at roughly 14 times the annual chief rent.

When the transaction has been completed, the Government office, on behalf of the Secretary of State, issues a redemption certificate to the rent payer. That provision was secured by intensive campaigning in the 1970s by a number of MPs, including my predecessor but one Ken Marks, who was the Member for Manchester, Gorton, in the days when much of my constituency was in that one. He also successfully campaigned to ensure that no new chief rents could be created after 1977 and that any rentcharges still in existence by 2037 would be automatically extinguished. However, those laudable changes unfortunately created some new challenges, as I will briefly explain to the House.

For all the time that I have been an elected representative, first as a councillor on Tameside metropolitan borough council and since 2005 as an MP, I have been contacted by many local constituents who have been subject to various underhand tactics by unscrupulous management companies. In the past, I have launched campaigns to warn residents throughout Tameside and Stockport about various chief rent scams. In the most recent scam, letters were sent out by property companies to local residents, offering a “cut-price reduction” for homeowners to buy out their chief rent. One area where they targeted householders was the Dane Bank area of Denton, where the chief rents were set in the 1930s, generally at around £2 to £5 a year, depending on the size of the landholding. Had residents been made aware of the 1977 Government scheme, the average cost of buying out the rent would have been between £30 and £60 in total. The property company’s offer was for people to pay around £350 but, in a twist, there was a “special offer” whereby that was reduced to £250 for a limited period. In essence, people were being fleeced for hundreds of pounds by those property companies.

There are other examples of such practices. Companies sent out property surveys to see what improvements residents had made to their homes. When people filled out the details, they were hit with excessive charges for making alterations without having the rentcharge company’s permission to do so, despite being freeholders. Such administration and penalty charges can also run into hundreds of pounds.

It appears that that tactic is being used only on properties on which it is not now economically viable to collect the charge annually, so the companies are looking for other methods for raising income from the rentcharge. For years, rentcharge companies have been trying it on with residents, attempting to fleece them for as much money as they can, especially as the value of the rentcharge is worth less and less as time goes by. Frankly, it is outrageous that the companies can charge people for occupying land that, as freeholders, they own outright anyway. It is nothing short of a throwback to feudal times.

Until the rentcharges are extinguished in 2037, I want to ensure that my constituents are made fully aware of their rights to buy the rent out using the existing Government scheme. I would hate for even more local people, particularly vulnerable groups, to pay over the odds. That is why I am presenting this Bill.

My concern is that some residents who are unaware of the provisions in the 1977 Act will think that the £250 offers and the like are a good deal. I want to make local residents in Denton and Reddish, and elsewhere, aware that they can purchase their chief rent for a lot less money by filling in an application form and sending it to their Government office. That can be achieved very simply and at no cost by legally obliging all property companies to automatically notify residents of their rights under the 1977 Act to buy out their chief rent, in plain English and in a prominent way, when they send out demands for the charge each year.

Back in 1977 when the Rentcharges Act was being debated, probably nobody anticipated how rentcharges would be abused. The small changes proposed in my Bill will ensure that people are correctly notified about their existing statutory right to purchase and buy out chief rents, and most importantly, give them the absolute confidence that they are doing so at the correct price.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That David Heyes, Ann Coffey, James Purnell, Sir Gerald Kaufman, Tony Lloyd, Graham Stringer, Mr. Graham Brady, Mark Hunter, Andrew Stunell, Mr. John Leech, Jim Dobbin and Andrew Gwynne present the Bill.

Andrew Gwynne accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 30 October and to be printed (Bill 154).

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr. John Denham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I came in very slightly too late to hear the gist of an earlier point of order made by the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), but I gather that the document the Government have published today, which is referred to in our amendment, is not in the House of Commons Library and that it may not have been provided to the hon. Lady and other Opposition spokespersons. I deeply apologise for that. I personally attach great importance to the matter. I will endeavour to find out what went wrong, but for now, I give my apologies to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the House.

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order and I know that what he has said will be appreciated by the House.

Opposition Day

[20TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Local Spending Reports

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

1.25 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the provisions of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 requiring the publication of local spending reports; believes that people have a right to know how their money is spent by public bodies; especially welcomes the assurances given by the then Minister for Local Government, the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth, that the local spending reports would include all public agencies; further welcomes the Minister's assurance that the purpose was to achieve a report that identified how much would be spent in each area by the authorities; is therefore very concerned by the limited information available in the local spending reports produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government; believes them to be a contravention of the expressed assurances of the Minister; and calls for proper local spending reports to be published, which will give effect to those assurances.

Obviously, I appreciate the Secretary of State's apology for the non-availability of the written ministerial statement to hon. Members. However, I am sure that hon. Members share with me just a touch of incredulity that the consultation report is being produced on the very day of the Opposition day debate. That we do not have access to the information will obviously have an impact on the quality of the debate. It is right to record that. We accept the apology, but the impact remains.

I shall proceed by setting out why we feel it is so important to revisit the issue of local spending reports and then spend some time looking at the implications of the Government's failure to implement local spending reports as they were originally conceived in the Sustainable Communities Act 2007. In conclusion, I will look at how the policy should be implemented and at how, as elected representatives, we should go further and faster in responding to the public appetite for transparency and efficiency.

All hon. Members will be familiar with the history of the 2007 Act as many of us took part in its passage. As a Bill, it enjoyed genuine cross-party support and it would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to colleagues on both sides of the House, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Hurd), whose private Member's Bill was responsible for the 2007 Act and who will wind-up the debate, and the hon. Members for Falmouth and Camborne (Julia Goldsworthy) and for Stroud (Mr. Drew), for all their hard work in getting this important piece of legislation on to the statute book.

Of themselves, those tributes emphasise the cross-party nature of the support for local spending reports. It is also fitting to record our thanks to the tireless efforts of Local Works, which has done so much to drive support for the 2007 Act. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will have received letters and e-mails from their constituents expressing strong support for the legislation.

Hon. Members will have noticed that the wording of today's motion is based on that of early-day motion 1064, tabled by the hon. Member for Stroud. That early-day motion, like the original Bill, drew widespread cross-party support—254 signatures in total. In that spirit of cross-party working, let me say to Liberal Democrat colleagues how helpful it is for the debate that they have become co-signatories of today's motion. I, for one, hope that that bodes for a constructive and conciliatory debate—an example of the new politics that people want to see.

To my mind, the reason why the Sustainable Communities Bill enjoyed so much support—not just in this House, but among the public—was that it was seen as a way of delivering a clear, tangible change in the balance of power between communities and their elected representatives. It was seen as a way of giving the people the tools with which they can better shape the communities where they live. Measures that could help to reverse the pattern of the development of ghost towns or to reduce local carbon emissions were seen to be strong moves in the right direction, and as a way to empower communities and give people more say over what happened in their locality.

However, arguably, the centrepiece of the 2007 Act is section 6, which is on local spending reports, and I shall focus for a moment on why the spending reports are so significant. On the one hand, it is a matter of transparency and accountability, but on the other, getting a clear understanding about where money is being spent is the key to getting better use of financial resources. If local strategic partnerships, which we all support, are really to deliver, they need the information that would have been provided in the local spending reports and must be able to get their arms around the totality of local spending.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is remarkable that in the case of Cumbria, the Local Government Association—presumably in collaboration with the Department—has managed to publish all of the relevant information, non-departmental public body by non-departmental public body and Department by Department? Does she agree that it is therefore likely that this information might already exist on the COINS—combined online information system—database and other Government databases?

Mrs. Spelman: I thank my right hon. Friend for that helpful information. Residents in Cumbria have access to the sort of information that we would all like to have. His intervention shows that providing such information is perfectly possible.

The information is the bedrock for finding out where there is duplication, where spending can be pooled or better aligned to optimise efficiency, and where funds can be reinvested or redirected for a better outcome. These reports are integral to ensuring that we get more for the money spent. In this time of recession, the imperative for that has never been stronger. On that basis, it is no surprise that early-day motion 1064 attracted such support.

Local spending reports are fairly innocuous in name, but hugely significant in nature. As colleagues will know, they were the key to unlocking the level of departmental spending in local areas. The clause provided

for all public authorities to insist on local spending being publicised so that people could see where their hard-earned money was going, and if they wished, challenge it. Indeed, this was a clause lauded by Ministers at the time.

The former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Salford (Hazel Blears), said:

“Less of Whitehall calling the shots and more of men and women everywhere working with their council to set the agenda”.

The former Minister, now Minister for Borders and Immigration, said:

“The fundamental point of the reports would obviously be to aid transparency and accountability, but I believe that they would also have the beneficial effect of prompting serious debate in local areas”.—[*Official Report, Sustainable Communities Public Bill Committee*, 2 May 2007; c. 47.]

Against that backdrop, people rightly had high expectations of the Bill.

Age Concern and Help the Aged have publicly observed:

“A breakdown of all public spending would ultimately be of great benefit to older people, particularly with regards to transparency about spending on things like benefits and public services in local areas.”

The National Federation of Women's Institutes has said:

“We urge the Government to deliver on their promise to publish the full local spending reports which are so vital to the Sustainable Communities Act. Local communities can only effectively use their right to have a say in their local services if they know how the money which was raised from their taxes is being spent.”

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations said:

“The voluntary sector fully supports the need for local spending reports as a breakdown of all public spending by local authority areas. This information would not only be valuable to voluntary organisations everywhere, it would also encourage more people to get involved in the Sustainable Community Act's exciting new processes.”

There are other endorsements from third-party organisations of the need for local spending reports.

As a result, it may cause some consternation that colleagues find themselves having to use valuable parliamentary time today debating why the Government have watered down the scope of these vital local spending reports. In the consultation paper on spending reports, Ministers released details of a critical change so that the reports would now apply only to local authority spending and primary care trusts. To a large extent, that information is already available, but more significant than what the 2007 Act covers is what it does not cover. It is worth taking a moment to list those organisations missing from the current proposals for local spending reports. They include the Environment Agency; Natural England; Jobcentre Plus; the Health and Safety Executive; local probation boards; probation trusts; NHS foundation trusts; regional development agencies; the Learning and Skills Council; national health service trusts; Sport England; English Heritage; the Arts Council; the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council; the Highways Agency; and the Homes and Communities Agency.

Mr. Letwin: Would it interest my hon. Friend to know that details for all the bodies that she has just listed are published in the case of Cumbria, making it slightly odd that they will not be published for the rest of the country?

Mrs. Spelman: Once again, my right hon. Friend's observation about Cumbria shows that it is perfectly possible to provide such information for every area. The question is why that is not happening.

This huge chunk of public spending, which is channelled through non-departmental public bodies, including RDAs, has been granted an exemption. So what started out as a means of shining a light on the way that public money is spent seems to have ended up as more of a dull fog concealing the truth. I am sure all hon. Members will share my concern that many supporters of the Bill will see that as a fundamental breach of trust. They will know from their constituencies that when Local Works campaigners held public meetings and signed up supporters, this halfway house is not what they had in mind, and the practical working of this compromised position has set back what pioneers of the Bill sought to achieve. It makes a nonsense of the time spent debating the Bill, with so much work put in by hon. Members, only to end up with such a large proportion of public spending being exempted. In essence, that fatally undermines the power that people have to scrutinise and challenge where their money is being spent.

In my constituency, I am astonished that we are not able to find out where and when public money is being spent by our RDA. What I can ascertain is that significantly less public money is awarded to Advantage West Midlands than to One NorthEast—approximately half, to be precise. The figure is £55 per head in the west midlands, as opposed to £96 per head in the north-east for 2008-11. That will seem very strange to people in my area, which is so badly affected by the recession.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr. John Denham): The hon. Lady is obviously not speaking as a constituency MP but as her party's representative on these matters. May we take what you have just said as a clear indication that you would change the allocation of resources to RDAs on the lines that you have suggested? That would be very important news to many people—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The Secretary of State is very experienced and he knows that he must use the correct parliamentary language.

Mrs. Spelman: I am sure that you would not want to have to answer such a disingenuous question, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Given that the Government are already in bad odour in the Chamber for failing to produce a document pertinent to today's debate, attempting an intervention that is just point-scoring party politics is not a good start by a comparatively new Secretary of State.

The important point is that we want to know where the money is going. I cannot cross-reference how spending in the north-east compares with spending in the west midlands, but our constituents might reasonably expect us to be able to do so. Constituents in Cumbria are fortunate to have the opportunity to do so, but it is not generally available. Does the Secretary of State understand how infuriating it is to be kept in the dark over exactly where the money is going, and in what sort of quantity? It is not only infuriating, but disempowering for elected representatives and the communities that they serve.

The Minister for Regional Economic Development and Co-ordination (Ms Rosie Winterton): The hon. Lady makes several points about the spending of RDAs. Why is her party failing to participate in the Regional Select Committees, which could look in detail at those very issues?

Mrs. Spelman: Most hon. Members find it an extraordinary afterthought that, so late in this Parliament, the Government have realised that there might be a problem with lack of accountability in the regional structures that they have tried to create. All of us understand that there is something fundamentally wrong with the regional structures that the Government have set up. My party would seek to solve that by returning powers to local government, where there is democratic accountability.

At a time of recession, when households are having to account for every penny carefully, and our national debt is forecast to grow by £240 billion a year, it is all the more poignant that people cannot see where their money is going. Insulating quangos from public scrutiny will serve only to strengthen people's suspicion and distrust of quangos. They are seen as mandated by Whitehall to take the decisions that Ministers do not want their fingerprints on, and the bodies which spend taxpayers' money are free from interrogation.

In recent years, the quango machinery has accelerated. In 2007, spending on non-departmental public bodies rose from £37 billion to £43 billion. That information comes from the Cabinet Office. There are now 1,152 quangos in the UK employing more than 500,000 people. The TaxPayers Alliance estimates that every year £90 billion of taxpayers' money is spent by unelected quangos—equivalent to more than £3,500 for every household. The fact that the best that we can obtain is an estimate is telling in itself. Surely, we should all be entitled to know exactly how much money is being spent. My sense is that, if anything, £90 billion is probably on the low side.

Under the current regime, the figure will certainly be escalating. Let us take two examples with which the Secretary of State will be dealing. The Infrastructure Planning Commission is forecast to cost £10 million a year and will take the most controversial planning decisions out of the hands of elected representatives, but despite the scale of its finances and the impact of its decision-making power, it is not covered by the 2007 Act.

Just when we thought that public patience with elaborate and unaccountable quangos, which have failed to deliver in important areas such as housing, had run out, the Government have put them on a life support machine in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill. RDAs will now be spending vast sums of taxpayers' money on functions that they were never designed to deliver and taking decisions over some of the most controversial aspects of housing and planning. Yet RDAs, along with the rest of the quangos, have been exempted from the 2007 Act.

At a time when every publicly funded organisation is having to demonstrate its value for money, I cannot believe that the RDAs welcome being veiled in secrecy. Ironically, the RDAs might be better placed to advocate their case if they were covered by the 2007 Act. The quango culture is of a piece with public suspicion that politicians seek to abrogate responsibility and spend

taxpayers' money without recourse. That corrosive cynicism is undermining our democracy and we need an antidote to it. People need to know how much is being spent, by whom and on what. Could it be the case that at the back of the Government's decision to dilute the requirements for publishing spending, there is a genuine concern that people would be horrified at the level of waste? What is incontrovertible, however, is that opening up the books would enable people to see just how their area compares to others in the share of funding that it gets.

Having set out how and why I believe that the Government have got it wrong in compromising the scope of local spending reports, I want to advocate how we might better match the reality of the 2007 Act with the rhetoric of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill. For a start, we should honour the commitment given by Parliament to enact the legislation in full. As legislators, we should aim to meet not just the letter but the spirit of the legislation and really open up spending to local scrutiny and counter-bid.

Hon Members on both sides of the House have sought opportunities to do this, and I know that my hon. Friends the Members for Peterborough (Mr. Jackson) and for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) recently tabled amendments to the Bill to that effect. Sadly, however, those were to no avail. It is clear, therefore, that if the public's desire for transparency in local spending is to be realised, it will take bold action. On my part, I believe that we should go further than the terms of the Bill, and that we should be bolder and even more radical in the quest to get transparency and accountability into public spending.

The Conservative party has made it clear that under a Conservative Government councils would have to publish online details of all expenditure over £500—already some Conservative councils, such as Windsor and Maidenhead, do that. That will let people see, at the click of a mouse, how their local authority is using their money. The emphasis will be on making the data easy to access, easy to understand and easy to compare with other councils.

That cannot be said of the current format in which the sustainable communities spending reports are being published. I consider myself to be fairly adept with Excel, and those reports are a cautionary lesson in making information at best opaque, and at worst simply indecipherable. However, the key to making those council spending reports valuable as a means of scrutiny is our pledge to abolish the entire regional tier of government and repatriate power to democratically elected councils. That would solve at a stroke the problem of regional bodies not being covered by the 2007 Act.

Our approach of discharging as much power as possible to elected councils, rather than unelected quangos, will give real force to the power of publishing spending online. We would also go back to the source—the grant formula—and make it more transparent. That, along with the power of local referendums and our commitment to phasing out ring-fencing, would deliver a sea change in the way we do politics. We are intent on devolving real power to councils so that they can deliver on the priorities and needs of their communities.

That approach is best summed up in our policy of giving councils a general power of competence—a power to enshrine the presumption that councils could, and

should, be free to act in accordance with the wishes of the communities that they serve. However, in return, the communities deserve to be given the tools to hold those councils to account. They have to have at their disposal the information and the levers of power to challenge spending decisions and get things changed.

Is that not at the heart of the original motivation behind the spending reports that we are debating? It is a silver thread that has been running for some time in various incarnations but with very limited success—from local area agreements, to local strategic partnerships, the 2007 Act and, most recently, the Total Place initiative. Sadly, however, none of those manifestations has delivered what we need, which is why we find ourselves here today. We are in the early days of the Total Place pilots, and Conservative Members are watching with interest to see whether the Government can crack it.

It all goes back to the money, however. Bringing budget holders around the table can yield great results, but it is predicated on knowing what money is spent, by whom and on what.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again, and I am glad to tell her that this intervention relates to Dorset, rather than Cumbria. Does she think it as important as I do that the Secretary of State explains how, in the Total Place pilot in Dorset, all Government agencies have been able to reveal their figures—this time, not published—to the other partnership authorities in Dorset?

Mrs. Spelman: When the Secretary of State replies, he will have a golden opportunity to explain those discrepancies.

I shall draw my opening comments to a close, because I am keen that others have an opportunity to speak. It is an important debate because it goes beyond the subject of local spending reports and to the heart of what the public expect of us and how Parliament responds to them. The past year has been a deeply damaging one for this institution. We have been left with a clear, unambiguous instruction from voters that they are sick of public money being spent behind closed doors. They want to see where their money is going and whether it is being used efficiently. Politicians ignore that at their peril. The Government's desire to keep public spending under wraps is completely at odds with where the public are.

The organisation Unlock Democracy put the matter well when it said:

“With the current acute public disillusionment of politics it could not be more timely for the government to commit to publishing full Local Spending Reports, as already promised by” a previous Minister. As politicians, we are on notice that we have to live up to the high standards expected of us, which is why backtracking is so dangerous. The tide of public opinion has turned. It is unflinching and there is no going back. People are no longer content to defer to distant individuals or faceless organisations over how their money is spent. They are determined to know.

I firmly believe that Parliament, as with any organisation in receipt of public funds, has a moral and unquestionable duty to make public how it spends our money. To resist that will only foster more of the kind of distrust, cynicism and resentment that we have already seen

[Mrs. Spelman]

when taxpayer-funded organisations refuse to come clean on where the money is going. We have to show that we are better than that. Delivering in full on local spending reports would do that. With sadness, however, I say to colleagues that those reports have not been forthcoming in the way that hon. Members on both sides of the House had hoped. In recognition of that, I urge colleagues to support this motion so that we can go some way to restoring the House's integrity in the eyes of supporters of the 2007 Act.

1.49 pm

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr. John Denham): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and add:

"recognises the role of strong, accountable local government in delivering high quality local services and entitlements to services whilst ensuring value for money; welcomes Government investment, through local councils, in providing real help now to families; reiterates the importance of providing information about local spending and service quality to ensuring effective scrutiny and value for money; further welcomes the passage of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 and the Government's commitment to work with the Selector on its implementation, and believes that the first local spending reports published in April 2009 marked an important initial step in making local public spending more transparent; further welcomes responses to the consultation confirming the desire to see more data published; welcomes the Government's intention to extend local spending reports to cover all local public spending which can be readily provided in this format at reasonable cost; further welcomes the Government's proposals to extend local authorities' scrutiny of all local public service spending in their area; further welcomes the Total Place pilots mapping in detail all public spending in key services in 13 areas; further welcomes Sir Tim Berners-Lee's work advising Government on how best to make non-personal public data as widely available as possible; believes that these developments will enhance the Government's ability to provide local spending information in the most effective manner; and asks Ministers to report back to the House before the end of December 2009 on the next stages in developing local spending reports."

This is an important debate. I want to go through what has been achieved so far and what the next steps are. I did not think that the speech by the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) showed an enormous grasp of the nature of public data and how they are made available or of what has been done so far and what will be done in future. I regret that, because I believe that those public data are important. It is also important that we build on what has been done so far.

There are clearly some conceptual difficulties. Whatever the merits of, for example, the Infrastructure Planning Commission—I think that they are considerable, but that is a debatable point and has been debated in the House—it is a national body, as is the Supreme Court. It had not occurred to me to previously that the Supreme Court should be covered by local spending reports. Presumably the spending should be divided by the number of local authorities and put into a report, but would it really help to subdivide what are essentially national institutions into local reports? The hon. Lady told us that the IPC and similar bodies—presumably including the armed forces and so on—should be included in local spending reports. However, we need a bit of clarity about the purposes behind the legislation, because that will enable us to look at what can reasonably be done in future.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Does the Secretary of State not understand that councils, particularly during this recession, are trying to develop policies to help local people get back into jobs? The absence of figures for regional development agencies and Jobcentre Plus is not only a disincentive in itself, but fundamentally works against the notion of partnership that is needed for such activities.

Mr. Denham: I agree about the importance of such information. I was merely making the point that suggesting, as the hon. Member for Meriden did, that expenditure in institutions that operate at a national level should be covered in local spending reports is a misunderstanding of what the original 2007 Act was about. It would be better to concentrate on how we make relevant and timely information available on genuinely local public spending.

The ground that we are covering today has been fairly well trodden in recent weeks and months, but is no less important for that. There are two things that we should try to do in this debate. The first is to establish the importance of information on local spending in driving the delivery of effective, personal, high-quality and value-for-money public services. However, we also need to establish the deep divide that now separates the two major parties on the future of local government. Perhaps I could start by setting that scene first.

I recognise that there is a superficial rhetorical similarity between the commitments of the parties to decentralisation, but in practice they are a long way apart. Time and again in yesterday's Communities and Local Government questions, we saw Opposition Members lining up to remind us that their local government policy is against growth, against jobs, against homes, against sensible transport planning and against the regional development agencies, which have helped to support numerous businesses through the downturn.

Julia Goldsworthy (Falmouth and Camborne) (LD): Surely the help that local businesses have received via the RDAs is a classic example of regional spending having an impact at a local level, where it would be beneficial for the public to know the quantities of money being spent in their areas.

Mr. Denham: I will come to that point, although I am glad that the hon. Lady does not seem to share the desire of the Conservative Opposition simply to do away with those structures and pretend that nothing should exist between central Government and local expenditure. That is a huge gulf between us, and it puts the Opposition in a terribly weak position when they try to argue that they have policies that will help us come out of recession and deliver decent public services.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood) (Con): The Secretary of State is right that there is a gulf between the two sides on the future of regional development agencies, but what on earth does that have to do with local spending reports? While he is on his feet, could he address the issue in the Opposition motion? For example, how can we take the experience being developed in Leicestershire through the Total Place initiative, which focuses on drugs and alcohol and which the Government say they support, and use it outside Leicestershire if, say, the youth offending service or the probation service does not publish the information that would allow other local authorities to use that experience?

Mr. Denham: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. He says that the Government say that they support Total Place, but the Government invented it. We are driving Total Place forward, and I am grateful for his support for it.

I will come to Total Place, the lessons that we can learn from it and how it fits into the wider picture in due course. However, it is important in a debate on local government to set the policy scene behind the demand for local information. The hon. Member for Meriden wrote in August urging Conservative-controlled councils to go slow on making land available for housing and jobs. That was an act of gross and irresponsible economic vandalism, but it speaks volumes about the Conservative party's approach. Any discussion that we have about local spending information needs to set in that context.

Mrs. Spelman: Actually, the Secretary of State is going the right way about committing his own economic vandalism, by misrepresenting the policies of the Conservative Opposition and stoking unjustified fears about our clear plans to provide more housing and more jobs, which his Government have failed to provide.

Mr. Denham: Given the support that the hon. Lady gave to Conservative councils to resist attempts to provide land for housing, she has some difficulty in trying to explain how that would provide the land needed for housing.

The second point about local spending plans is that the Opposition would like there to be a lot less local spending. They are on record as saying that my Department should have its spending cut by £1 billion this year—not next year or when we look at deficit reduction, but this year. That is hugely damaging. I agree that making local spending information available is important, but it is also worth noting that the Conservative party fundamentally believes that there should be far less spending, although it has never been open and straightforward about its plan. The Opposition proposals are wrong, because they would damage recovery and lead to further huge cuts in housing, on top of their desire to block housing.

The background to this debate is that Government Members believe in strong, accountable and effective local government, able to influence the whole of public service spending in its area. We believe in devolution on principle, but we also believe in it for a purpose: to deliver high-quality public services while making each taxpayer's pound work as hard as it can. We see devolution as a way of entrenching people's entitlements to public services and ensuring that they are delivered. The proposals that I set out last July to extend the scrutiny power of local government will ensure that councils and councillors have the power to challenge how every pound of local public service money is spent.

The Conservatives couple the localisation of power with the abandonment of any concept of, or commitment to, the standards of service that citizens have a right to enjoy. That is throwing the baby out with the bathwater. It is a charter to make the postcode lottery the founding principle of conservatism in local government. The Conservatives have given the green light for "Ryanair councils", where people have to pay twice—once in tax and then in an extra tax—to get a decent service.

I make that point because although the hon. Member for Meriden spoke a great deal about local spending, she said almost nothing about information on the quality

of local services. That is not a surprise, because as part of their package, the Conservatives have promised to abolish targets, end standards and stop entitlements. They have also promised to stop inspections: they do not want to check on standards because there will not be any. Government Members support local spending reports, but I am sure that they agree that it is the outcome of the spending—the quality of service that our constituents receive—that matters most.

Mr. Dorrell: We can have a debate about local quality reports another day, but could we come to local spending reports—something to which the Secretary of State has so far made only glancing references? That is the subject of the motion on the Order Paper.

Mr. Denham: The Conservatives are uncomfortable when it is set out in front of them what their policies mean for the quality of local public services, so I am not surprised that I am being urged to move on. I will do so, but it is important to put this on record. There is a great deal of interest in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill outside this Chamber, and it is important to put on record the fact that there is no cosy consensus between us and the Conservatives on the future of local government and of local government services; there is in fact a big divide.

Before we knew the subject for today's debate, I had already arranged to speak at the Royal Society of Arts, and I gave a lecture there last Wednesday on the future of local government. If I may, I should like to read from the part of that lecture that is directly relevant to today's discussion. I said:

"Public data is an essential tool in creating pressure to drive improvements in public services—on the old principle that knowledge is power. It puts all the information, and therefore the power, in the hands of users, service providers and would-be providers—including social enterprises. People should be able to compare the outcomes and the costs for their own local services with the services delivered elsewhere, and suggest means of improving and driving change. An open data policy as part of our broader efforts towards democratic renewal is important for creating a culture in which Government information is accessible and useful to as many people as possible".

That is a statement of principle that I am happy to restate in this House. It is, of course, exactly what local spending reports are about.

I want to set out what we have done so far, what the next steps will be and, crucially, how the Government's wider policies for the reform of local government, local public spending and public data openness will continue to transform the availability of public data. As the House knows, we have completed the first stage of local public spending reports. There has been some suggestion in this debate that the Government have in some way significantly deviated from promises made at the time the Sustainable Communities Bill was being discussed, and that we have backtracked on them. In the debate on 2 May 2007, the Minister then responsible, my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas), rightly said:

"The local spending report would cover all public expenditure in each local authority area in so far as it is possible to define it."—[*Official Report, Sustainable Communities Public Bill Committee, 2 May 2007; c. 46.*]

In that same debate, which many hon. Members attended, he also entered a number of caveats—[*Interruption.*] This is relevant, because the suggestion has been made in this debate that the Government's response to that

[Mr. Denham]

legislation was dishonest or disingenuous. It is therefore important to remind the House of the reasonable and practical qualifications that the then Minister made when talking about the public expenditure reports.

Mr. Letwin: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Denham: I should like to make a little progress, then I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

My hon. Friend went on to say that he was talking about

“expenditure that can be easily identified as relating to a particular area”.

I have previously made the point about the desire of the hon. Member for Meriden to include the Infrastructure Planning Commission in this, but it would be difficult in an annual report to identify how much of that expenditure related to a particular area. My hon. Friend went on to say:

“We do not propose to create a new power to require additional information to be provided”.—[*Official Report, Sustainable Communities Public Bill Committee, 2 May 2007; c. 51.*]

He also said that the clause that was being discussed specified that the cost of producing the report must be limited.

I do not believe that what we have today represents the end of the process. I am simply making the point that it was clear from everything that my hon. Friend the Minister said at that time that there would be some limits on the data that were initially provided as part of this process. The important thing about today’s discussion is to determine how we move forward from where we are.

Mr. Letwin: It was in response to me that the then Minister made several of those remarks in that debate. The impression that he gave was very clear to all present, and it was confirmed in discussions outside the Committee room. It was that there would be detailed reports. There are detailed reports produced by others, which are based on Government information. That Government information has not been published. The Secretary of State cannot stand there and say that the Government have done what they committed themselves to do. I regret that, but that is the fact.

Mr. Denham: The Government made it clear at that stage that there were limits to what would be immediately provided, and that there were some absolute limits on what could be provided. This is an important point, and I will come in a moment to the case of Cumbria and to other examples. It is a completely wrong charge to suggest that what the Government have done so far represents a stepping back from the commitments that we made at that time. What we have now does not represent the complete process, but it does not represent a stepping back.

Julia Goldsworthy: Does the Secretary of State accept, given the large numbers of individuals and organisations that supported these measures, that this will have undermined their confidence in the process and made them less confident that it will be successful? Is not that the fundamental problem? If we are trying to encourage people to participate, will not this failure to meet their expectations undermine that?

Mr. Denham: When I was listening to the hon. Member for Meriden earlier, I certainly shared the concern that if that is what has been communicated outside the House about the reasonable expectations and the Government’s attitude, it might well have had that effect. I share that concern, and it is something that I wish to address. It is important for Members of the House to provide information to those outside in a reasonable and balanced way.

Mr. Dorrell: I want the Secretary of State to address his mind to a specific question. The list of institutions relating to practical objections to the publication of this information locally includes the probation service. Will he explain what the practical objections are to publishing local information about the cost in each locality of the probation service?

Mr. Denham: The right hon. Gentleman makes a very fair point, and it is one that I wish to pursue in suggesting that the House support my amendment proposing a further report in December. I do not believe that the job is yet done in a number of areas.

Let me refresh the House’s memory on where we had got to. The first stage of local spending reports was published on 29 April. The data that they contained were wider than those originally proposed in the first consultation. Although the House has been told the opposite this afternoon, they include data on spending by the Department for Work and Pensions. That was not on the list, and the House has been told that it is not on the list, but it is on the list. In addition to principal local government spending, the data include police, fire, waste disposal, passenger transport, park authorities, strategic health authorities, ambulance trusts, NHS trusts, primary care trusts and spending by the DWP.

That first stage covered the data that were held in Government at—or primarily at—principal local authority level, and which could be made available without incurring significant additional costs. There is an important point to be made here. It is at that local authority level that the focus of interest lies. The first port of call in the exercise involved the data that were already held in Government systems, aggregated at principal local authority area level, that could be made available.

It is clear to everyone that a great deal of local public spending is not covered by the first stage of the reports. That is why we are having the debate this afternoon. Given my commitment to openness of data—and the statement that I made last week, when I was unaware that this debate was going to take place—I want to share frankly with the House some of the challenges involved in moving to the next stage.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Do Ministers know what these data would reveal? Are they therefore embarrassed for others to know about them? Or do they want to be in ignorance?

Mr. Denham: If the right hon. Gentleman had waited for just a moment longer, he would have heard me explain that these are serious and practical issues that are worthy of a proper debate. Given the experience of right hon. and hon. Members who will speak later, I hope that they will also address them.

First, there is the question of how we characterise the spending that takes place physically in one area but serves a much wider area. Universities and prisons

would be two contrasting examples. In one sense, leaving them out of the picture entirely is unsatisfactory, but pretending that the universities of Southampton and Southampton Solent are properly to be included only in Southampton's local spending report would be equally unsatisfactory. Some very significant areas of public spending do not fit neatly into local spending reports. It would be useful to hear in our debate—I am genuinely interested in this point—whether the mood of the House is that it would be better for this to appear as expenditure on two major universities in Southampton's spending report and nowhere else in the country, or whether it should be shared.

The hon. Member for Meriden referred several times to quangos. One quango that has had its expenditure doubled in real terms under this Government is the Higher Education Funding Council; I used to be responsible for it. I was once, for my sins, a member of Hampshire county council's education committee in the 1980s when the then Portsmouth polytechnic and the Southampton institute of higher education were funded by local government. One of the best things that the previous Conservative Government ever did in education policy was to move those significant higher education institutions out of local government control in order to fund them centrally. We now have two significant additional universities in Hampshire that did not exist then, and they are much more successful because of the autonomy that they have gained.

I make that point because an argument running through this debate is that quango expenditure is by nature illegitimate, funds nothing of any great value and should simply be included in local public spending reports. [*Interruption.*] That was the gist of what the hon. Member for Meriden had to say. I do not accept that. When people outside hear the Conservative party attacking quangos in this way—[*Interruption.*] One of the reasons why the amount of money spent has gone up is because the Government have invested a lot extra in areas such as higher education. Of course the expenditure has gone up, but it is not a bad thing; this is what enables our constituents' children to go to university and benefit from it. I raise this as a serious issue for discussion: why should Winchester prison, or Southampton and Southampton Solent universities, for example, feature in a local spending report? I shall come on to some other examples in a few moments.

Mr. Letwin *rose*—

Mr. Denham: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman so that he can answer my question.

Mr. Letwin: I will, indeed. Let me give the Secretary of State a very comforting answer, which he could take back to the officials who, to our certain knowledge, have resisted this idea for three years. If he makes a judgment and states the assumption, we are happy. We are happy to have a public debate about whether the assumptions on which allocations are made are reasonable. It does not matter what they are to begin with, as long as they are open and public. Will the Secretary of State please just tell all the officials that what the House of Commons, across the parties, would like is the real McCoy on the basis of simplified assumptions, which are stated? The Secretary of State will then not have to worry about any of these questions, as they will be debated in public.

Mr. Denham: That would be one way of approaching it, although I fear that it might be misleading. The question of Cumbria has come up; indeed, the right hon. Gentleman himself may have raised it. There are two points to be made here—I shall come back to the second—and the one for this afternoon's debate, in which I have some interest, is that Cumbria's public spending includes expenditure at Sellafield. Everybody says that Cumbria has £7 billion of public expenditure—a figure that I have used myself in articles and debates. That appears to suggest, at face value, that public expenditure on public services in Cumbria is the same as in the city of Birmingham. I have to say that we must be careful in this process not to produce misleading results.

Mr. Letwin *rose*—

Mr. Denham: I think that the right hon. Gentleman accepts the point of principle that I am making, even if he disagrees with the conclusion I have reached.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, as this is now beginning to be a productive debate about the actual subject for discussion. If he looks at the Cumbria publication, he will discover that the population of Cumbria has been treated intelligently. The figures are presented first on the basis that the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority is included and, secondly, on the basis of excluding it. I recommend this further idea to the Secretary of State: where he has doubt, he should publish on two bases. We would be happy with that, too.

Mr. Denham: That is a possibility that we will certainly continue to explore. When I produce my report in December, I may well form a view on this. The idea, however, that expenditure on Southampton and Southampton Solent universities is a secret that our constituents would find enormously difficult to discover if they wanted to know how much money was involved, is also ridiculous. What I am most interested in doing here—I say this in all honesty—is producing data that meets the public need. An illusion is being pushed that vast areas of expenditure are somehow kept secret by the state, and that it is enormously difficult to find out about them—yet through a couple of clicks on the internet, it is actually not hard to find the published information available. My predecessors and I have taken this exercise as one of great importance for trying to produce genuinely relevant local spending information. That is what I would like to continue to do. Everything could be put in, but that would not necessarily advance the quality of information.

Julia Goldworthy: The line of argument that the Secretary of State is following assumes that local communities want this information to compare their spending with that of other local areas. Actually, this is all about feeding into a process of how to reprioritise funding within their own areas. For example, the right hon. Gentleman talks about university funding, but the local community may be saying, "We think that investing more in very young children might impact better on higher education participation than simply providing money for the universities. Can we have a discussion about a process for focusing our priorities in that way?" It is not just about comparing spending in one area with that of another area.

Mr. Denham: This is an important issue. In my area, people in Southampton would be able to have that discussion, but people in Eastleigh would not, as they do not have a university. People in Winchester could have that debate—they have a university, or bits of a couple of universities—but not those in Eastleigh. I think that the hon. Lady would accept that it is a bit of an illusion to think that having this information is particularly useful.

The right hon. Member for West Dorset put forward a proposition: include the items in the figures somewhere and do not worry too much about where they are—Winchester has its prison and poor old Eastleigh loses out again—as long as they appear somewhere in the data. That is one way of approaching it, but I am honestly not convinced that this will prove enormously useful. I do not rule it out, as it might provide one way of dealing with some of this expenditure, but let us acknowledge that there are problems with it.

I shall move on to an example that might find more common ground. The Court Service is another example of spending that serves a wider area, as is spending on skills in association with FE colleges and training providers. Those examples might be even more challenging for this process, because spending on skills, or on the criminal justice service, is spending in just the sort of areas where localities often argue that different priorities might be set. I accept that excluding those areas of expenditure in the long term is inherently unsatisfactory, which I believe was also the right hon. Gentleman's point.

The second issue to deal with is that some categories of organisation do not hold their data in a way that easily relates to local authorities. If we are talking largely about capital spending, it switches location from year to year. For example, one particular year's report that included Highways Agency spending might not provide a great deal of information about the annual revenue flow or inflow from that organisation into a particular area. Again, we have to make a judgment about the value of information that comes in that sort of lumpy and essentially variable-over-time quantity.

Mr. Letwin *rose*—

Mr. Denham: I will give way one more time to the right hon. Gentleman, but then I must make some progress.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful; the right hon. Gentleman has been extremely patient and considerate. What he has said throughout could be characterised in this way: he wants to manufacture information that he thinks will be valuable, but what we are arguing—collectively, I think, across the House—is that people as intelligent adults should be able to decide how to use the information in all sorts of ways that neither the right hon. Gentleman nor we can imagine. He does not need to worry about molycoddling or nannying people into having the information that they “ought to have”; he needs only to provide such information as there is and let them get on with it.

Mr. Denham: I would make two points. First, I am not anticipating the next stage of the process in detail. I want to commit the Government to taking this process forward today, which is why I am approaching the issue constructively. Secondly, there are some real issues of presentation and understanding, and the sort of information

that I am talking about is not hard to find. I am making what I think are reasonable points about the way in which we present data.

Mr. Dorrell *rose*—

Mr. Denham: No, I have already given way many times; I must make some progress.

Mr. Dorrell: I just want to be helpful.

Mr. Denham: None the less, why spoil the debate? Very well.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for allowing himself to be persuaded. He has said twice that the information is available, and he is right about that. Someone who explores the internet and employs a researcher will be able to find a fair amount of it. Part of the point of producing a local spending report, however, is to invite those to whom the necessary resources are available to take action on behalf of the public, so that those who are interested can obtain the information in a more easily accessible form. Will the Secretary of State take that point on board?

Mr. Denham: I entirely take the point, but the Opposition are so determined to be cynical that they are suggesting that I am giving reasons for not providing data, whereas I am actually exploring real issues relating to the effective production of local spending reports.

A third problem is caused by data not being held in a way that correlates easily with local authority areas. Parties that wish us to cut our budget, as the Conservative party does, will recognise that a reasonable limit must be placed on the expenditure required to produce that data. That is precisely what the Minister said at the time of the debate that I mentioned earlier. Fourthly, as I also said earlier—I realise that this point is not a show-stopper, but it is important—the data that we are discussing give no indication of the quality of services or the outcome of public spending. I think it important for debate to focus on those issues at local level as well. Fifthly, as many respondents to our consultation on the next step pointed out, what people often want is much more “micro-area” data. Spending in local communities, rather than at an aggregate local authority level, can highlight disparities in investment and outcomes.

Finally, the procedures laid down in the Act restrict us, essentially, to publishing data prepared and validated in line with the principles of the Office for National Statistics, which means that data that may be held by Government cannot be published until they meet that standard and may therefore be published some time after the event.

One of the reasons why comprehensive spending reports have been published in Bournemouth, Cumbria and Birmingham, for instance, is that information has been made available by local partners who hold the information and are free to make it available. However, it is not produced to the same standard as the ONS statistics produced by Government. We are effectively limited. As has been pointed out, the quality of some of the local public spending picture is higher than we have been able to produce. The issue here is the necessary obstacle presented by the ONS standards.

The consultation on the next stages received a somewhat disappointing response, mainly from local government. Only six non-governmental organisations responded, although they included Co-operatives^{UK}, the Public and Commercial Services Union and the National Housing Federation. However, there was a general desire for more information.

I suggest that we move forward in a number of ways. The first step will be to revisit Government Departments and agencies to find out what further information could be made available at reasonable cost to supplement the existing spending report. I hope to have completed that work by the time I report at the end of the year. Judging by today's debate, I think that it should include considering the issue of lumpy and localised spending, which is of national and regional importance. However, I have expressed concerns about the value of some of those data.

Secondly, we have received overwhelming support for our proposals to enable local authorities to scrutinise not just their own spending, but all local public service spending in their areas. Subject to detailed agreement across Whitehall, those plans will enable local authorities to scrutinise as much as £100 billion of public spending. Of course, they will be able to do so only if they have adequate spending information, and spending bodies will have to have a responsibility to co-operate with the scrutiny process. Local spending reports that we produce will support that process, but more and more immediate information should become available where it matters: in local areas. At present, because of the ONS issue, the sort of information that I expect to be made available to scrutiny committees may well be more up to date and comprehensive than any local public spending report would be at any particular time.

Thirdly—as has been recognised today—the Government have established 13 local authority-based Total Place pilots, which are examining in great detail current public spending across different agencies on particular services such as provision for the under-fives, drug and alcohol services and young people's services. That detailed mapping of public spending means that, for the first time, people can ask whether investing the money differently might produce not just better value for money, but better outcomes. They can consider the possibility that investment in, say, the prevention of unwanted teenage pregnancies might produce savings somewhere down the line in child care support, or that investment more generally in preventive health or substance misuse services might produce benefits down the line. We all want to see that happen.

Although Total Place is a pilot at present, many other areas are running similar initiatives. I believe that that approach—looking at every pound of public service spending in each area—is really gathering support. In many ways the Total Place was anticipated by the Sustainable Communities Act, but in many ways it is also potentially more comprehensive and more ambitious.

Part of our investment in Total Place is intended to enable local services to identify spending and outcomes at a much more detailed, and arguably more useful, level than the local authority level of local spending reports. It is often when one is able to identify the level of investment in a particular estate, community or target group of citizens that it is possible to identify whether public money is being used to best effect. One

of the things that we will learn through Total Place is how data of that kind could be made much more widely available.

A number of Members asked earlier how it had been possible to make such information available in Bournemouth and in the Birmingham area, where I believe it shows public expenditure of £7.2 billion. First, we have provided extra financial support for the Total Place pilots to enable them to identify the data. Secondly, the data are not readily held by central Government in every circumstance. They are held by local partners, which is not a bad thing. There has been a general desire to reduce the level of reporting to central Government. However, I believe that that illustrates that we need to build on the Total Place pilots and see what lessons can be learned about making the data more widely available.

I think Members will agree that that local overview of public spending should be made available to professional managers of services and policy makers at local level, and to councillors who are involved in scrutiny. I also believe, as I said at the outset, that it should be made available to the public. The challenge that we face is to find a way of making these much more comprehensive local area spending data more widely available.

That is where the fourth strand of reform comes in. As the House will know, the Prime Minister has asked Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the original developer of the internet, to lead a project on making public data more readily available. The opening of his terms of reference makes the aim of that work clear:

“the Government is committed to implementing and to extending to the wider public sector the principle that public sector information should be available under straightforward licences and in standard formats for others to re-use: the principle that public sector information should be public.”

The House will be pleased to learn that one of the key subsidiary aims of the project is to drive a culture change in Whitehall towards an assumption of total publication of anonymous data using open standards.

That work clearly does not just complement the local spending reports. I believe that it holds the potential to go much further, with Government and local government data becoming much more readily accessible on a much faster time scale and in a format that is more readily open to interrogation and investigation. That is relevant to a point made by the hon. Member for Meriden.

I have made it very clear that I want my Department and local government to participate enthusiastically in this important work. Sir Tim Berners-Lee is supported in it by Professor Nigel Shadbolt of Southampton university. I have met Professor Shadbolt, and hope to agree soon—certainly by the time of my progress report in December—on how we will participate.

Mr. Nick Hurd (Ruislip-Northwood) (Con): Is the Secretary of State telling us that local spending reports will be subsumed in the Total Place programme, or will they continue to have an independent life?

Mr. Denham: It would be premature to say that they should be subsumed into the Total Place report, but I think we should continue to publish and develop them, and to look at how they can be extended. However, it is only fair to say to the House that there are other processes of change around Total Place and the

[Mr. Denham]

Government's drive to put data on to the web will take the process further forward than could have been anticipated at the time when the legislation was piloted through the House. I hope that statement is helpful. Let me make it clear that this is not an attempt to use the potential development of Total Place or other mechanisms as a reason for not progressing our current commitment to local spending reports. It is instead based on an optimistic view that we can go even further and do even better, particularly if at local level the data we have been talking about is more routinely available as a matter of course in the publication of data by local government and other agencies, rather than through the procedure we have for local spending reports, where all that information has to be reported up the line and go through the Office for National Statistics and then back down again.

Mr. Redwood: The Secretary of State has just said something very encouraging: he says he wants to publish more information than he is currently able to publish. Why then does he not just get on and publish all the information on the basis set out by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin)? Is the Secretary of State not aware that if he is given a "Yes Minister" script by his officials he should tear it up and tell us what he is going to do and provide some leadership?

Mr. Denham: It is a great shame that the right hon. Gentleman has clearly not been listening to the debate, because those of his colleagues who have participated in it have understood that I have been setting out precisely how I want to take us forward from where we are today, both in terms of local spending reports and in drawing to the House's attention some broader moves to make local spending data more widely available. I had hoped that the House would welcome that, and I should point out that these steps are very much in keeping with the spirit of the original proposals of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you, at least, will be pleased to know that I have reached the point in my remarks that states: "So to summarise". Therefore, let me summarise for the right hon. Gentleman the points I have been seeking to make.

Mrs. Spelman *rose*—

Mr. Denham: I shall give way once more, but I would not mind being able to deliver one coherent set of paragraphs at some point in my speech; I have taken a lot of interventions.

Mrs. Spelman: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, and I think this latter part of the debate has been interactive and interesting.

Does the involvement in driving the Total Place agenda of the Treasury, which is essentially the largest cross-cutting Department, make it easier both to extract the information and to extract more clearly on a comparable basis how much public money is being spent, because the Treasury has an interest in knowing, as do the public, exactly how it is being spent? Is that the key detail in persuading the Secretary of State that the Total Place pilots have the potential he has been outlining?

Mr. Denham: I chair the cross-Government ministerial committee on Total Place. For me as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, it is enormously helpful to have the Treasury fully engaged in this project. Let me make the following important point, however. There are 13 formal pilots, but anybody who, like the hon. Lady, is out and about meeting people in local government or reading the local government press will know that many other projects are basically do-it-yourself Total Place pilots. That shows that the reality is that there is a deep understanding in many areas of the public services that the next great public service reform challenge is breaking down the barriers between different public services and then having the ability to switch investment from one area of spending to another in order to produce the best possible outcomes.

There is to some extent frustration. I can sense it from Opposition Members and I do not think it is misplaced. The frustration is that when partners voluntarily get together at local level, in the vast majority of cases they have the legal ability simply to share information—such as their current operating data, or their current financial systems—in order to come up with a total picture of what they are doing. We in central Government are constrained at present in respect of pushing out data because we all wanted ONS to be independent and our statistics to be verified and not to be used by Ministers for nefarious purposes—not that we would ever do so. Those partnerships are operating on real current financial operating data. At the risk of going slightly beyond any agreed Government policy, let me say that we must somehow find a way to get that much more timeous data out into the public domain at local level. I believe that in the time to come the framework we have for local spending reports will enable us to go further than at present, but I think we would probably all accept that in terms of the cutting-edge work that is taking place on mapping public expenditure at local level, some of the most interesting work is being done around the Total Place pilots. I am not putting Total Place to the House as an alternative to local public spending reports. I am, however, saying that we should acknowledge that there is some very interesting and exciting work taking place throughout the country which we should all want to build on in the future.

Let me now summarise. I share the belief that openness in public data is important to driving public service reform and improving the quality of local public services. We have made a good start in local public spending reports; I do not share the criticism expressed today of how far we have gone. I believe, however, that we can go further, even though there are some real issues to be tackled, and the Government amendment suggests I should report back to the House on this before the end of the year.

At the same time as reporting back on where we go next on local public spending reports, we should recognise three important developments since the passage of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 that have the potential to take this work much further forward: first, our proposals to extend widely the scrutiny powers of local government to cover local public spending areas; secondly, the development of Total Place, and the understanding it will give on how best to map spending and outcomes at local, including community, level; and thirdly, the Government's wider work to make public data available

to common standards on the internet. Taken together, I believe those areas of work will over time produce an outcome that exceeds the original ambition of the Sustainable Communities Act, but also one that is very much in keeping with it.

2.37 pm

Julia Goldsworthy (Falmouth and Camborne) (LD): At the start of the debate, there was talk about consensus on this issue, but the consensus has clearly broken down—although it may have started to return towards the end of the Secretary of State's remarks. I have been struck by the extent to which the debate has descended into a process-driven discussion. One reason why it is such a privilege for me to have another opportunity to discuss the Sustainable Communities Act 2007, which is dear to my heart, is that the matter is much more fundamental than that.

The Sustainable Communities Bill was the first Bill that I presented to Parliament after being elected. It carried on the work of Sue Doughty, a former Member for Guildford, who initially took the Bill forward. Ultimately, this legislation is on the statute book because of people power alone—the power of grassroots campaigning and local organisations in being able to vocalise the barriers to delivering what they consider to be the priority measures in their area. That is what the legislation is about.

I looked back at the remarks made by the Minister with responsibility for the matter in the final stages of the passage of the 2007 Act. He said that the 2007 Act would not necessarily catch the public's eye as had some private Member's Bills, such as one presented by David Steel, but that it was about fundamentally changing relationships and that it had the potential truly to affect the balance of power between central and local government. That is of particular importance to me, and it is the reason why I got involved in politics—I was frustrated that the voice of people living in my local community was not being heard, and I wanted to change that. What I have heard today from the Secretary of State is an argument that central Government know best, and from the Conservative Benches that local authorities know best. In fact, this is all about people knowing best and giving them the right channels to communicate that and to take control themselves.

I wonder whether the Government are slightly uncomfortable about dealing with this issue, because it is about a fundamental shift in power. It is for that reason that so many people had such high hopes for this legislation. It is important to remember that the local spending reports issue is about not only providing information, but enabling participation. We can put all the information that we like on the internet, but it is completely pointless if it is not a platform for allowing people to engage, to have input and to make a difference. That is the fundamental point to remember, and it is why so many people are so frustrated and disappointed with what we have seen so far.

Local spending reports are at the heart of the 2007 Act. They are based on the principle that people have a right to know not only what money is being spent, but how it is being spent, because once they have that information, they will have a view on how the money could be better spent addressing their priorities. From that flows the

whole process of enabling communities to make proposals to remove the barriers that have been preventing them from having a say in the process until now.

I was slightly bemused by the Secretary of State's characterisation that what is preventing local spending reports from being published at the moment is the fact that all the information has to be reported all the way up the line and back in order to be published in some kind of tabulated format, because that is not the case. My understanding of what is happening in the Total Place pilots is that the role of central Government is in twisting the arm of the local side of public service delivery—the agencies do not want to produce the information, which they have locally—to make the information available. There is no reason why local spending reports cannot be produced on exactly the basis that I am outlining.

Mr. Denham: I hope that the hon. Lady will deal with a point that I made. Government publication of statistics is now governed by procedures and rules, which have broadly been agreed with this House, about independent assessment by the Office for National Statistics. Most of the data that are made available in the Total Place pilots are perfectly good and usable at local level, but they are not of sufficient quality to enable the Government to publish them in the official form of spending reports. That is a frustration—it is not something that I welcome—but the House will understand the general concern about government use of public data, which led to the procedures. That is why we need to examine how more information could be made directly available locally.

Julia Goldsworthy: The Secretary of State makes a valid point. I am simply trying to say that although central Government have a role to play in enabling this information to be made available, they do not have to be the ultimate publisher of it all.

Mr. Letwin: That was an interesting exchange. We would be delighted if the Secretary of State were to make the next phase the universal publication of data on the same basis as occurs in the Total Place pilots. We would regard that as a sizeable step forward, regardless of whether the data did or did not meet ONS standards.

Julia Goldsworthy: I do not want this to be a debate about the best process for making this information available; the debate needs to be about agreeing that people have the right to see this information and then to have an impact on any decisions flowing from its being made available. I do not see any need for the Government to be the ultimate national publisher; they just need to unlock the information being made available locally, and nothing in the 2007 Act prevents that from being the case.

We need this information because of the complete lack of transparency in public spending at the moment, nowhere more so than in local government matters, as can be seen even if one looks simply at how money is raised and spent locally through council tax—about 80 per cent. of what councils spend is not raised through council tax. That confuses everybody, because people cannot understand why their council tax increases by more than inflation every year, yet it appears that council services are being cut. This is all to do with the confusion created by the system, which multiplies out to all aspects of local public service delivery.

[Julia Goldsworthy]

Anything that provides greater transparency is important. The issue is about more than just councils, because the most interesting thing is that the information provided at the moment through the local spending reports, which covers a large number of big-spending organisations locally, deals with so little spending; the reports do not cover the majority of public spending locally. Some 65 per cent. of the money spent locally is not included in the public spending reports, and that constitutes very large sums. If taxpayers' money is being provided to deliver these services, taxpayers have a right to know this information.

This is not just about some of the big quangos. Part of the frustration with quangos is their lack of accountability and transparency; the argument is not necessarily about whether they are the correct delivery vehicle, but about the fact that they are remote and unaccountable, and that nobody understands how they work. The same can be said of local arrangements—one of the most confusing things in Cornwall is the number of area-based initiatives. It is not just about what the regional development agency or the primary care trust spends; it is about the fact that lots of small initiatives are funded in a targeted way, each having their own administration. They probably have competing, conflicting and overlapping aims and objectives, and the situation results in a fragmented approach. Delivering local spending reports in a way that is meaningful to people could help to overcome that.

Local spending reports are intended to get all this information out into the open in a public format with which people can engage. They are about starting the process of breaking down silos. One of my concerns about the Total Place pilots, as they are at the moment, is that they are very much an internal process—they are about taking the lead with the local strategic partnership. This should be about trying to engage people, not about just getting the relevant civil servants at the local level sitting around a table discussing how their budgets could be better spent. This is about getting the consumers of public services to have a say in how the money could be better spent.

We are in different economic circumstances from the time when the 2007 Act was initially proposed, but all these issues are more important now, not less. I have heard several people say that producing this information will be expensive, but everything I have read about the Total Place pilots suggests that what is exciting Ministers so much about the pilots is their ability to reduce waste caused by duplication and to focus on priorities. I am confident that if the process is properly rolled out, it will more than pay its own way, as well as encouraging more participation locally, and it will also protect some of the multi-agency working that is done locally. My greatest fear is that as public services budgets get squeezed, as I am already seeing happen locally, the first thing to go will be cross-agency working, which delivers some of the most innovative projects that make the biggest difference to people's lives.

My concern is that when budgets are squeezed, public services retreat to their core; everything that is not considered to be core to the service is got rid of, and so the silos get reinforced again. Producing this kind of

information will be key to preventing that invidious move, which undermines the delivery of local public services. This speaks for itself—it is a no-brainer. Even the hon. Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas), who was the Minister when we debated that Bill, gave very good examples of how the least obvious thing could help to make a massive improvement to people's lives. I believe that he referred to the example of the Blackburn slipper, whereby a group of organisations locally agreed to buy every pensioner a pair of slippers. That saved the health service locally a fortune, because it prevented falls, and that would not have been achieved in any other way—other than by sitting down at a table and discussing it. It is exactly that principle that we should be following through.

It is because of all these potential benefits that people have been so disappointed. Let us consider the initial responses to the consultation. One response stated:

“What is now proposed in the consultation document falls short of the original intention.”

Another respondent said that they were

“concerned that these local spending reports do not go beyond what is already in the public domain and that local spend by central government...is conspicuously absent.”

There is real frustration that those expectations were not being met and that some key areas of local public spending were not being included.

The Secretary of State spoke about the challenges of trying to decide which information to include and which not to include, and he mentioned prisons and universities. I reiterate that the people who live in our areas have brains and are perfectly capable of deciding whether or not university spending will probably have an immediate, beneficial knock-on effect on the local economy, on jobs and on other public services. People need to be able to make their own judgments. It may well be that some local spending will be ring-fenced and people will say, “That was on a strategic transport route, so that is investment that you cannot have a say on, because it is part of the national infrastructure.” However, that does not mean that people should not have the right to see that that money has been spent in that way. No conflict is involved here, so we do not need to get worked up and have any angst about what we should include or exclude. The presumption should be to include everything but, if necessary, to add a caveat saying, “This can be a subject of scrutiny and debate, but not of reallocation.”

The fact that all this is so self-evident and obvious is why I feel so frustrated and mystified at the Government's response so far, and it seems to be the same at every stage of the process when we try to deal with the matter. It was frustrating when we tried to raise these issues in our debate on the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill the other week—one would think that that was the most appropriate place to raise precisely these issues—that the Government seemed intent that they were the last thing that they wanted to discuss.

We have had a written statement today that was not on the Order Paper and that so far still has not materialised. It would have been very helpful to the debate. We still do not have a clear timetable—we do not know whether we will have any kind of local spending report next year, and we will now have to wait until December. The Sustainable Communities Bill became an Act in 2007. It

is amazing that we have seen such progress on Total Place in such a short time, but such slow progress in the implementation of the 2007 Act.

What has been most frustrating is the complete failure of the Department to try to communicate with the thousands of people who have made a personal investment in the implementation of the 2007 Act. Ultimately, everyone in this Chamber wants to address the fundamental disconnect with politics and politicians, and people and organisations have put themselves forward and said, "This is something that we think can address this disconnect." The way in which they have been treated has made matters worse rather than improved them.

Those people feel that they are being treated in a way that borders on contempt—contempt for the legislation, for the campaigners and for the councils that have invested in this process to such a great extent so far. Let us consider the levels of participation from the councils that have put forward proposals at this date: 28 per cent. of English authorities are taking part in this process, which I think is amazing in such a short period of time for something that is not statutory. Some 42 per cent. of Lib Dem-led authorities are taking part, and there have been more than 100 proposals from different councils. The Government should be heartened by that and should be using it as a springboard to try to take things further, rather than saying, "That process was not invented here, so we will now come up with a parallel process that we like more, because we invented it rather than somebody else."

We also have to remember that a lot of councils will be waiting to see what will happen next. I remember speaking to one of my local councillors when the 2007 Act was being debated. A real paradigm shift is needed not just for central Government but for local government to understand the potential offered by the legislation. My local councillors could not get their head round the fact that they were entitled to have a view on aspects of public services that were not already their responsibility. An awful lot of councillors will be waiting to see what happens to the proposals that have been put forward, and that will spark off other ideas that will enable them to take more responsibility and to innovate in a way that has not been possible until now.

None of that will be possible unless we have local spending reports, in whatever shape or form—whether they look more like the Total Place pilots or are along the lines envisaged by the Secretary of State—and unless we have that financial information. Power cannot be transferred down if the opportunity to have a say about what happens to the money is not transferred down, too.

My greatest fear, which has unfortunately been reinforced by what I have heard today, is that the Government's attitude will remain that they have a problem with proposals because they were not invented here and because we cannot put them into a nice, simple, one-size-fits-all approach. There are real issues about relinquishing power and control, and I am not sure whether the Government are up for dealing with them. That was reinforced by the debate that we had and the debate that we did not have on the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill.

Ultimately, it seems that the Government's perception of participation is to set out in primary legislation how councils should respond to petitions, to create more

bureaucracy, quangos and unaccountable organisations, such as economic prosperity boards, to give more powers to regional development agencies and not to introduce devolution but, at best, to delegate more powers. That is not the same as devolution. It does not give communities greater decision-making powers but ensures that central Government decisions are implemented at a more local level. That is fundamentally different, and it is not localism. I hope that the rest of this debate will be an opportunity for the Government to prove me wrong for making these assumptions. I hope that they do, because the 2007 Act is really important to me, and it is really important to restoring people's faith in democracy more widely.

Will the Minister or the Secretary of State confirm that the December 2009 deadline for the next stages will be debated and voted on in this House, and that we will not simply get a statement? Will we get a timetable for action? Will they confirm that we will get local spending reports and details of their format annually? Will they confirm in December 2009 the ongoing implementation of the 2007 Act? Will the Minister be able to confirm that the benefits of the Total Place pilots will be opened up to other authorities—perhaps those adjacent to those which are taking part—that might want to participate and benefit? Will the Minister also commit to extending this process to the local authorities that are closest to their communities—that is, our town and parish councils?

Given that this has been a grass-roots campaign from the start, it is really important that anybody watching the debate—I am sure that many people who have supported the campaign will be watching it—is convinced that their voice counts. It is very important that the Government do that this afternoon, in order to restore faith in our democratic process.

2.55 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful that you have called me to speak in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Obviously, given the massed ranks of Labour Back Benchers, it has been difficult to find a slot in which I can deliver my speech. I notice that my two co-conspirators on the 2007 Act both sit on the Front Bench, whereas I sit in a lofty position on the Back Benches.

I feel some responsibility for the Act. I cannot pretend that I was its parent—that was the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Hurd)—but I like to think of myself as its uncle. The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Julia Goldsworthy) could be its auntie. I enjoyed the process so much that I tried to become a parent in my own right, by promoting the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 (Amendment) Bill. Sadly, I was not a very successful parent—it seems to have been stillborn—but I hope that if and when we move the 2007 Act forward, the Bill, which, importantly, clarifies the spending reports, tries to bring parish councils in and rolls forward how future programmes can operate, can be introduced.

I think that we have been a bit churlish. As someone who is not necessarily known as the most loyal Labour Back Bencher, I think that the Government have listened. The Department for Communities and Local Government, in particular, has made some moves. Obviously, it needs to go further and we will prompt and prod it to ensure

[Mr. David Drew]

that it does. However, it has made some moves, and although the Government's amendment to the motion is a bit overlong—as I said, it took me a long time to read it last night—the most important part of it is the last line, which states that the Government will produce their response by December. As the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne has said, we will hold the Government to that.

It would be nice to know how the Government—*[Interruption.]* Have I said something that I should not have? All the officials are going already. When the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett), sums up, she must make it clear how the Government intend to respond by December. It would be worthy of a debate, and perhaps even a vote—that would be revolutionary, would it not? We need to be clear about what stance the Government are taking and how they intend to inform us appropriately. I hope that my hon. Friend explains exactly how we can trust that the Government have moved, that they are listening and that they want to get away from an entirely process-driven arrangement to one that has some meat on the bones. I say that as a vegetarian; we all have to be vegetarians now, of course.

We need to be a bit more altruistic and to recognise that the arrangement has been a good one. Cross-party work is greatly underestimated. We were only the forebears, as the Local Works campaign was relentless in driving the legislation forward. I give credit where it is due: the campaign has made sure that we did not slip and it is reasonably happy with the compromises that are being made. However, it is up to all of us to make sure that those compromises do not become soggy and that they have some real bite. That is what I intend to do, and I shall continue to play that part in negotiations outside the Chamber.

I want to say a few words about the local spending reports, which have not really been mentioned so far. We have spent a lot of time talking about what we are trying to do, but the reports are the basis for this debate and for the implementation of the legislation—*[Interruption.]* I am getting worried now, as I see my friendly Whip has come to look at me.

I have gone through the reports, and the reality is that they range from the dotty, undeliverable and downright unfair on the one hand to the utterly inspiring and really exciting on the other. It is important that we do not lose track of the fact that the Local Government Association must do a good job as the selector, and that is a task that it needs to get on with. Those of us who have been engaged in the process, and the people in the Local Works campaign, have had to knock the door down from time to time, but I hope that the Minister summing up the debate will say something about how we can be used as a source of knowledge for making sure that selection is as transparent and meaningful as possible.

Julia Goldworthy: The hon. Gentleman is talking about the proposals put forward by councils, but 43 per cent. of the proposals that have gone forward to the LGA are related to devolving powers in respect of

finance and decision making. Does not that make it even more important that the local spending reports are meaningful documents?

Mr. Drew: Absolutely, and I take in good faith what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in that regard. We need to get this right, but that will not necessarily be that easy and we will not get it right first time. Let us be realistic: this is an evolving and complicated process. We are trying to force central Government to come to terms with giving out spending information. I think that the Department for Communities and Local Government understands that, but I am worried about other Departments. DCLG should be given every encouragement in this debate to poke and prod, and to ask, request and demand the necessary information, because without it the legislation will fall down. If we are not careful, we will encounter the usual reluctance—from the Treasury, dare I say it?—with the result that the information that we want will not be forthcoming.

I say let us get behind DCLG and give it every encouragement. Let us look at the new politics and make sure that the Department is given every opportunity to make this piece of legislation work.

Some of us are still struggling a little bit with how the Total Place campaign relates to the Sustainable Communities Act 2007. If someone could spell that out, it could not but help. If Total Place is a good model that we could extend and expand into the wider operation of the Act, we should get on and do it. We must make sure that there are not two processes that collide with one another and cause confusion. Some people are lucky enough to be in the pilot areas—and yippee for them—but it would not be right if the rest of us were to be merely marginal players and regarded as an afterthought.

Julia Goldworthy: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Drew: I will give way once more to my co-conspirator.

Julia Goldworthy: I am very grateful, and I hope that this intervention is helpful. One of the key issues raised by the Secretary of State was that the format under which the local spending reports were set up made it more difficult to provide the meaningful information that the hon. Gentleman wants. However, the legislation makes the position absolutely clear. Clause 6(1) of the 2007 Act states:

“For the purpose of assisting in promoting the sustainability of local communities, the Secretary of State must make arrangements for the production, by the Secretary of State or another person, of local spending reports.”

So the Department does not have to publish the reports, but merely has to enable their publication. There is therefore no reason why the remit of the Total Place pilots could not be expanded to include publication of the reports.

Mr. Drew: I take that as read. The hon. Lady is my hon. Friend in this respect, and the people involved in those pilots have to read the legislation just as she and I have to. As I said, the process will evolve: it will not necessarily be right first time, but we have to get it right because we have to make people confident that the process is meaningful. It must engender belief that there is trust between local government and national Government—and, more importantly, between other

players. We have not said an awful lot about the other agencies that we need to engage with, and I am talking, of course, about those in the voluntary sector.

If we get the process right, the greatest winners will be people in the voluntary sector. People in the statutory sector often say that an idea is great but that it cannot be done as there is no funding to lock it in place, but the legislation means that people in the voluntary sector will be able, for the first time, to insist on an examination of how public money is spent.

Passenger transport offers a real-life example. We all know that there are countless minibuses rushing around taking all sorts of people to different venues, but I am pleased to say that the local spending reports cannot but allow things to be done better, more effectively and in a fairer way. That is something that we need to get in place. We need to argue for it, and hope that the programme goes forward.

In this House, adversity and argument have their place but they are not always the best way to make progress. Sometimes we need to try and find compromise and consensus. In the end, we have to take a cross-party approach, as there are so many different elements involved. We all know that we cannot necessarily rely on our friends in local government to see things in exactly the same way that we, in our lofty position, see them. We have to work things out in a way that ensures that everyone gains.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke about the Regional Select Committees, which I think have been an interesting experiment. They can be a bit lonely, particularly when they are not quorate and people have to be dragged in. That is a pity, and there is nothing more to be said about that, but they can be interesting when people are brought in to give evidence. In areas such as transport and health, and certainly environmental protection, it makes a lot of sense to have a body that looks beyond immediate localities and considers an area which, whether we like it or not, could be called a region. We need a grown-up dialogue about how we can make sense of that and get some proper consultation—and more particularly some transparency when it comes to accountability—at that level.

I will support the Government tonight—*[Interruption.]* Or even this afternoon: it just feels like tonight, and I should not rush to the next debate. I believe that what those of us who have been involved in the campaign on this matter have done is negotiate, argue and persuade. We have tried to take the Government along with us.

I know that there has been consternation in some parts of the Government about the Sustainable Communities Act 2007, which they see as wishy-washy stuff. It has taken quite a lot of effort to persuade people that it is a meaningful bit of legislation and that it is not outwith other aspects of the Government's agenda. We believe that it could be central to many of the things that we want, and it is really exciting. That is something that I do not want to lose: the Act is really exciting and meaningful, and I hope that the debate will help us to make it more so. That is better than being distracted by churlish point-scoring, which is not at all helpful.

3.9 pm

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood) (Con): I want to begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member

for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) on introducing this subject. She has followed up the initiative of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Hurd) in getting this very important piece of legislation on the statute book, and making certain that the aspirations expressed in it are not allowed to rest on the shelf but are followed through.

The subject of the debate, local spending reports, sounds dry and bureaucratic, but it is nothing of the kind. It certainly is not a wishy-washy aspiration—the phrase which was not used by the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) himself, but which he reported as being used by others. This is a debate about access to and use of power. For that reason, it is hugely important.

In his closing passage, the Secretary of State referred to the importance of Total Place, which develops many of these ideas, as one of the major reform programmes for the future of public services. I entirely agree. This is a debate about power. When the Secretary of State moved off his introductory rant about planning policy and got on to the subject of the debate, what was revealed was an important consensus between those on the two Front Benches—a consensus of rhetoric and a consensus of aspiration—to ensure that information is made available about the level of spending in each locality, in order that we can embark on the kind of reform programme implicit in the Secretary of State's references to Total Place.

So far, so good. There is, across the party political divide, a shared aspiration. There is certainly shared rhetoric. The reason my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden was right to call the debate is that although there is shared rhetoric and shared aspiration, the Government must be accountable for the pace of advance towards achieving the aspiration set out in the 2007 Act, which we are impatient to see carried through.

When put under pressure on specific aspects of the delivery of local spending reports, the Secretary of State repeatedly retreated into the proposition, "This is a first step. We'll do better. There's a further report in December. Please refer to my lecture of last week. I'm on your side really. I'm in the jungle and lots of people are against me."

I suspect that that is an accurate description of the right hon. Gentleman's position. His predecessors signed up on behalf of the Government to making the information available in order to achieve a transfer of power and, surprise, surprise, when the Secretary of State now tries to deliver on that aspiration, by making the information available—in his own words, in a timeous fashion—he is encountering the classic Whitehall resistance programme: "It's frightfully difficult, old boy. We don't collect information in quite this form. It's terribly expensive. It would be very time consuming." Anybody who has spent any time in a Whitehall office has heard it before. It is like drawing teeth.

That is the central charge that my hon. Friend makes against the Government—not that there is not a desire in the fullness of time to see the reform as a good thing, but that from the outside there is a sense that the delivery of the aspiration is disappointing. Looking step by step at the stages that we are going through, and the arguments that are being used, it feels like drawing teeth against Sir Humphrey.

Julia Goldsworthy: Is that not disappointing, given the great opportunity to engage with the many thousands of people who want the process to work?

Mr. Dorrell: I could not agree more. It was the hon. Lady who stressed the importance of the programme as a power transfer. It is a power transfer in the spirit of the times, but it is a power transfer with which people in Whitehall do not feel very comfortable.

I want to substantiate my sense that the delivery of the aspiration is like drawing teeth. I accept that the Government are now on this square, but it was only at the second attempt that the Government included the Department for Work and Pensions budget in the local spending report. What on earth is the sense of trying to get the Government to look across departmental boundaries if we do not include the DWP budget in the project? But the Government did not get there the first time; they only got there the second time.

Then there is the list of exemptions that are still not included in the current proposals for local spending reports. In an intervention, I asked the Secretary of State about the probation service. He did not even try to defend its exclusion. He as good as said that he agreed with me and that it would not be on the list next time. Let us go through one or two of the others—for example, the Learning and Skills Council.

Why on earth is the Learning and Skills Council even claiming the right to exemption? It would be slightly different if it said, “Sorry, we are not here now, but we will be here in a couple of months when we have sorted out the practical difficulties”, but we are being asked to accept, at least on the face of it, that the LSC should not be part of local spending reports. I do not accept that. It is disappointing that the Secretary of State is not prepared to say on the record that he does not accept it, either.

Another offender on the list is an institution for which I used to be responsible a long time ago, the Arts Council. There is not a shred of a reason why the Arts Council England should claim an exemption from the process. I know exactly why it is on the list. It is because it is embarrassed about the scale of funding that goes to the Royal Opera House and the London symphony orchestras, and the focus on London. It has its own private reasons for not wanting to see that information revealed. Who does the Arts Council think it is kidding? We know who the recipients are of Arts Council funding. Why does it almost draw attention to that by claiming exemption from such a programme? I could go on through the list, but I will not detain the House by doing so.

We are embarked on something that is important. There is a genuine will—a genuine willingness, at least—on both sides of the House to see the programme pursued. What we looked for from the Government, and the reason why the Opposition motion is rightly critical of them, is not simply a feeling of good will towards something that is a good thing, like apple pie and motherhood, but a willingness to fight battles to achieve the publication, because what we are seeking to achieve is a transfer of information, and therefore of power, from central Government to local government, and a willingness on the part of the Secretary of State to recognise that that battle will not be fought and won without his full-hearted consent and willingness to engage on behalf of an important principle.

The Total Place initiative in my constituency, in Leicester and Leicestershire, which is led by David Parsons, focuses on drug and alcohol services. There is no better example of a set of services that have for a long time been the prisoner of interdepartmental barriers and the inability to use funds from one budget in support of a relatively small group of vulnerable people across departmental boundaries.

I am delighted that Leicester city council and Leicestershire county council are embarked on a Total Place project to try to break down those barriers, but that makes no sense if the probation service and the youth offenders service are exempt from the process of empowerment through publication of information and, more positively, because drug and alcohol services are not just about treating the immediate need; they are also about improving life chances. How is it possible to deliver improved life chances for people suffering from drug and alcohol problems if it is not permitted to look across the fence into the LSC, the youth sports council and other services of that nature?

The Leicester and Leicestershire Total Place project is a very good step in the right direction, but it is also a good illustration of what is wrong with the Government’s delivery of their promise on the publication of information. We look to the Secretary of State to read his own lecture, to believe his own rhetoric, and to fight battles on behalf of the people who will benefit from the improved delivery of public service that will result from the successful delivery of those aspirations.

3.19 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I think that I am the only hon. Member to speak who was not here when the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 was introduced. At that time, I was doing pioneering work as a county councillor in Oxfordshire to try to work out how spending could be allocated and understood in terms of my own division and the major settlements within it. Although that information was not readily available in the sense of being kept in that form all the time, it was not difficult to make that information available and to bring it together. That allowed me to look at how much was spent, particularly in the poorest village, and that was not simply to answer the question, “What do I get for my council tax?”, but to answer the question that others were asking, “Is the spend in the right place?”

When I listen to and read the statements from some of the agencies that have been too frightened to engage in the process, I imagine that the same arguments must have been run at the time of universal suffrage: do we trust the people enough to be able to grant them the vote? Exactly the same argument runs behind this: do we trust people to have the information? In the case of the information that I produced for my county council division and the conversations that I had, I had every right to trust people with that information. By and large they did not ask why they had or did not have a certain amount of money; they engaged in a much more intelligent debate about the priorities for the area and where was the best place for that money to be spent.

One of the issues that I had to deal with was raised by the Secretary of State—how to decide on the allocation of spending where it affected more than one area. The answer was simple. A judgment has to be made, the

criteria are decided and those are the criteria that are made available. The issue at that micro-level concerned bus subsidies. The subsidy on a bus route clearly benefits the length of the bus route and the people who live along it, whether they are in a state of need or not. I took the view that the bus subsidy should be allocated to the place where it had the most social effect, for which it was designed. Everyone understood that. It was understood by the richer neighbouring villages, and there was no disagreement.

Julia Goldsworthy: Again, the legislation makes it clear that the area covered can be one or more parts, whole local authority areas or any combination, and can include any other arrangements. There can be different arrangements for different reports. That is not excluded by the legislation.

John Howell: The hon. Lady is right. My point, to reinforce the comments that have been made, is that it is necessary to decide and to be open about the criteria that are used.

The need for such information is even more crucial in an age of partnership. Many of us who were in local government when the partnership regime came in were quite cynical about it and about the democratic deficit, but having lived with it and seen it, I appreciate the enormous advantages of being able to organise services on a much better basis. However, it can still be opaque. For example, the use of pooled budgets provides little in the way of transparency, both about what is sought to be achieved and about the money that goes into them. What is missing from that is not so much the idea of pooled budgets, but aligned budgets, which again comes back to transparency and the need to ensure that everyone understands that.

The Total Place experiment has been mentioned, and I was particularly interested in that. Criticisms of the programme have largely been seen as practical, but in evidence to the Public Bill Committee on the Child Poverty Bill, the leader of Kent county council says that while he is

“a great supporter of the Total Place concept, which is about joined-up public services looking at the totality of expenditure in any one area and sitting round and trying to go into solutions... there is still a silo mentality across the public agencies, which are acting in isolation and not in concert.”

So it is more than just a question of picking up the pragmatics of how Total Place works; it is also about getting to the concept of it and getting the agencies to agree that they are participating in a programme that is worth while.

Again, the Secretary of State mentioned on a number of occasions—I got the impression that this was his view of the main purpose of this measure—that this was all about allowing local government to scrutinise the amount of its expenditure. Scrutiny is a very important function. Local government is growing into it in a dynamic way, and it has the ability to achieve some important results and to take forward different initiatives. However, it is about much more than scrutiny; it is about the ability to reorganise services on the ground in a fundamental and practical way.

The leader of Kent county council made the point in a particularly fantastic way to the Public Bill Committee in relation to the Total Place experiment. He talked about his Margate renewal initiative, which relates to vulnerable families there, and he said:

“In one shape or form, the amount of public agency support going to those families is more than £100,000 or £150,000. When you then start to talk to the health economy and the educational economy through to special needs, all of them are acting in isolation. With the health economy, the special needs economy and the public agencies, if you looked at the totality of expenditure on those 15, 20 or 100 families—more than £150,000—and thought about that pooled resource, would you start to do things dramatically differently that would lead to much more positive outcomes for those vulnerable families?”—[*Official Report, Child Poverty Public Bill Committee*, 20 October 2009; c. 53-55, Q124 and Q126.]

That is the whole purpose of the measure. The 2007 Act allowed me to try to get to grips with the information in order to be able to do something with it. I have never liked to collect data just for the sake of it, but it can achieve a valuable purpose.

The debate very much goes to the nature of the relationship between central and local government. I have said on a number of occasions in the House that my experience over the past 12 years has been of the way in which the Government have treated local government merely as the delivery arm of Whitehall, unable to take its own initiatives. The way in which that has come through most often is with regard to the ring-fenced grants, of which a considerable number are not needed and should be brought back into the pool. The problem with the ring-fenced grants is that they take a Whitehall view of how the money should be spent. It is a fixed view and, by and large, there is no flexibility for it to be targeted on areas of greatest need, which can be appreciated only on the ground. That was my experience of how the ring-fenced system lent to that view of local government as just the delivery arm of Whitehall.

If we are to make something of the situation and release the potential of both Total Place and the spending statements, we need to make a fundamental change in the relationship between local and central Government. We talked earlier of trust, and central Government must place considerably greater trust in local government—in the idea that local government knows what it is talking about, and that there are reasonable people there who make rational decisions on the basis of evidence that they have and are well prepared to use.

The current situation is a shame, and I have noticed it during the progress of the Child Poverty Bill, which is now in Committee. That Bill goes back to the old ways of doing things, entrenched in the Government view that, “We have a problem, we have some targets and, right, we will pass it straight over to local government to deal with.” The Government do it with pooled budgets and there is no thought about how those should be dealt with or about the level of transparency, and no real acceptance of the need for targets other than central Government targets to ensure that a very important area of our society is dealt with constructively. Unless we ensure that these spending statements transform the way in which we deal with policy and with government, we will miss one of the greatest opportunities that we have to take this country forward in a partnership between central and local government.

3.30 pm

Mr. Nick Hurd (Ruislip-Northwood) (Con): We have had a rather good debate since we made it through the first 10 minutes of the Secretary of State’s speech. That 10 minutes was badly judged, because the subject of the

[Mr. Nick Hurd]

debate is legislation characterised by strong cross-party support. It was my privilege to be the promoter of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007, and, as I sense that it will probably represent the pinnacle of my usefulness in this place, I am obviously keen to see it implemented properly. However, I am not alone, because, as the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Julia Goldsworthy) put it very well, many people can claim credit for what is a genuinely cross-party Act.

The simple truth is that it is on the statute book for one reason only, and that is people power. It is a grass-roots Act, forged by a wide, deep and extremely determined coalition who want to change how the decisions that shape the future of their communities are made. They are disappointed, and their disappointment is reflected in early-day motion 1064, which has been signed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) said, by more than 250 Members, including more than 90 Labour Members. Feelings run strongly through all parts of the House.

This debate has delivered some very clear messages to the Government. First, the 2007 Act is an important law that deserves greater attention from the Secretary of State, and I think that we have secured it in the run-up to and during this debate. Secondly, there is a perception that the Government have not delivered their promises on local spending reports. Thirdly, now is the time to change that perception and send a much stronger signal that the Department is committed to making the Act work, not just paying lip service to it. That has been the key theme of a good debate.

I shall acknowledge in particular two contributions, not least because they come from new players on the Act's well trodden stage. On intervention and in a brief but telling speech, my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) drew on his considerable and relevant experience, not least as Financial Secretary to the Treasury. When he acknowledges that the importance of the Act is the transfer of effective power, we should listen. It was also useful of him to draw on his direct experience of Total Place in Leicester.

I also particularly welcomed the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell), not least because he was not a Member when the legislation was debated. He none the less drew deeply on his experience as a county councillor and on the direct experience of wrestling with the challenge of partnership working. He stressed the importance of words such as trust and transparency and, critically, the importance of the ability to change how things are delivered. Without that sense of the potential to change how services are delivered and who delivers them, we will not be able to make the progress that we need.

The theme is clear: the Government could and should do better. I should like to do two things: first, make it quite clear why we are disappointed; and secondly, try to persuade the Government to change gear. Critically, they should get over the "not invented here" syndrome and seize the opportunity that the 2007 Act provides to get people involved again in the decisions that shape their communities, and to transform the efficiency of public expenditure. Never has that need been more pressing, and the key word that will drive such transformation is "transparency".

So why are we disappointed? It is worth going back to what the Act set out to do. Its guiding principle was that local people know best, and that we should have much greater influence over the decisions that shape the future of the places where we live and work. To that end, the Act required the Government to seek proposals by local authorities for new policies and powers they needed to promote more sustainable communities. The Local Government Association would act as a selector, and the Secretary of State would have a duty to reach agreement on a shortlist of proposals. To assist local authorities in this process, the Government were required to produce local spending reports that would give local authorities and the communities they serve new information on public expenditure in the area, and local authorities would be free to challenge existing expenditure and make the case for the transfer of function and resource.

That goes to the heart of the response to the Secretary of State's concerns about the absence of quality of service from the debate, because the local spending reports are in fact a catalyst for challenging and driving up quality. The example that we used in Committee, as agreed by the then Minister, was that of Business Link. The scenario was one whereby a local authority had a locally set target about supporting local businesses. The provision of full, effective local spending reports would have shown the local authority what Business Link was spending in the area. If the local authority and the community that it serves felt that Business Link was not doing an adequate job, it could then, under the provisions of the Act, make representations to get the function and the budget transferred from Business Link.

If colleagues think through that example, they will see what potential the Act has to change the dynamics of how decisions are taken at a local level and to challenge whoever makes them. That could be a real motor for driving up quality and for asserting local priorities. As the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), the auntie of the Act, observed—I sincerely welcome his remarks—it is a wonderful opportunity for the voluntary sector. As shadow Minister for charities, social enterprise and the voluntary sector, I have said to people in the sector, "This Act is a great opportunity for you—seize it," and they recognise that fact.

The bottom line, as anyone who was involved in the long trench warfare over the Bill in Committee knows, is that local spending reports were always seen as the meat in the sandwich—the genuinely radical part of the Act, as it now is. My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden stressed that in her opening speech. It was also clear that the reports had to be as comprehensive as possible in order to be useful—a key word used by the Secretary of State. In the consultation response, the chief executive of Labour-controlled Gateshead said:

"Unless a comprehensive picture of expenditure is given within a specified spatial area, the reports could provide a misleading picture."

The then Minister "got" this. He was frank about complexity, as the Secretary of State said. Nevertheless, the direction of travel was clear. That May, the House was told that the local spending report would cover all public expenditure in each local authority—in so far as it is possible to define it—that it would cover both current and future spending, and that it would include all public agencies. That could not be clearer. Such transparency must be right, not only because it is

fundamental in giving local people meaningful influence, as the LGA put it recently, but because it is the natural bedfellow of efficiency and finding better ways of doing things.

There is a more fundamental point, which was made strongly by the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne. In 2009, surely we have a right to know what is being done in our name, in our area. We live in a world where we have so much information at our fingertips, yet it is almost impossible to find out what the state is doing in our name, in our area. I am a Greater London MP—or a Middlesex MP, as we prefer to say. I am told by London Councils that £74 billion of public money is being spent in London, £5.6 billion of which is being spent by 169 non-departmental public bodies, 15 of which spend about 80 per cent. of that money. I would like to know what they are doing in Hillingdon. How hard can it be to get that information? It is absurd that in 2009 my local authority does not know what the Metropolitan police are spending in the borough of Hillingdon, or how much flexibility the borough commander has over that budget: they need to be partners. There has to be a better way, and the public know it. This place should need no lectures about the public appetite for greater transparency. It is growing, and we must respond to it.

That is what the Act was intended to do, but what was actually delivered? One year after it was ratified it was formally launched at the LGA by the then Secretary of State, who had inherited it from her predecessor. Two things were clear to me as I sat in the audience. The first was that local spending reports were barely on her radar screen, and that she saw political risk in them because of the potential comparisons between areas. The second, which came from talking to officials, was that one year on, no real work had been done on making the local spending reports happen in a substantial way, even though they were due to be published six months later. That told me that there was no leadership or political will at the top of the Department, and that not enough time had been allowed to make the system work. Members can take their pick between cock-up and conspiracy. In my experience these things are normally cock-ups, but that is not the perception among supporters of the Act. The message that we received was that there was no political will at all driving the process.

I should say that it is not all bad news. As the hon. Member for Stroud said, we should take encouragement from how many councils responded to the Act despite wholly inadequate local spending reports. The LGA, acting in its role as selector, now has a large number of proposals to sift through, some of them very radical indeed. However, the LSRs were a big disappointment. The starting point was wrong, with the ambition limited to local authorities and primary care trusts, as the responses to the short consultation made clear. As the Secretary of State said, the Government responded and added lines of expenditure, but not enough. They did not even begin to engage with quangoland, and there were glaring exceptions, as my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden and my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood have ruthlessly exposed.

Moreover, the relevant information is quite hard to find, being tucked away in pretty impenetrable Excel spreadsheets in the bowels of the departmental website. People find it difficult to engage with them, and they are

given no prominence at all. Disappointingly, everything indicates that, as the LGA puts it, the first LSRs

“reflect a minimalist approach to the concept of, and commitments to, Local Spending Reports as discussed in Parliament during the passage of the Sustainable Communities Act”.

It states that they

“fall short of the ambitions for LSRs shared across all political parties at...local level.”

That sense of disappointment is shared by local authority leaders in Wealden, who have said that the LSRs

“fall significantly short of expectations and are of little or no value in developing proposals”.

According to Merton council,

“it is questionable about how useful this information is given that a great deal of it is already publicly available and that the data included is very high level”.

The truth is that the Government have simply repackaged information that, for those who could be bothered to look for it, was already in the public domain. The Secretary of State trotted out 96 different reasons why it was all so difficult, straight out of the Sir Humphrey playbook, but he did not convince us.

What makes the situation even more frustrating is that the Government actually appear to be committed to the mapping of expenditure. They have developed their own project, Total Place, which we have discussed at length, and they support it with taxpayers' money, but they drag their feet on local spending reports. That looks to me like a bad case of “not invented here” syndrome. [*Interruption.*] The Secretary of State groans, but that is our perception.

The hon. Member for Stroud made a good point about potential confusion in the marketplace between LSRs and Total Place, and how the two will be reconciled. The debate has been useful in giving us a sense of the Government's aspirations in that direction and highlighting the value of having the Treasury fully bound into the process, which we acknowledge. Still, the fundamental question is: if it can be done in Cumbria, why can it not be done elsewhere? I am not sure whether we have had sufficiently good answers to that. If part of the problem is that central Government do not hold the information, why can they not go and get it? If the problem is that the Department does not have the power of information gathering, we must consider what can be done to change that situation, and whether it is worth having that debate in public.

My concern is that local spending reports have not told local authorities' leaders anything that they could not have found out for themselves. For those who went ahead and submitted proposals there is no visibility to show when they will get a decision on them, and for those interested in making proposals at a subsequent phase, there is no visibility to show how that will work. The risk is that an already sceptical market of local authority leaders will shrug their shoulders and move on. That will frustrate the grass-roots campaign that believes in the process and wants change.

I think that the Government have misread the mood, and a large number of organisations feel the same way, including Unison, the Public and Commercial Services Union and the Federation of Small Businesses. A range of organisations have expressed disappointment and have urged the Government to do better.

[Mr. Nick Hurd]

The Government have set out their stall. They say, “Give us a chance. We’re getting there. As you know, government is terribly complicated and we’ve got to be careful about costs. There’s terrible inertia out there.” My response is that we will judge them by their actions, not their words. We have heard plenty of words, but they have not delivered.

I have three tests: first, let us hear a statement from the Department on how it intends to try to reach agreement with the LGA on submitted proposals. The Department is silent, and it should not be. Secondly, let us hear the Government make it clear that this process is not a one-off, and that local authorities will have the opportunity to submit new proposals in the near future. Thirdly, let us set a timetable for the delivery of effective local spending reports that include quangos—my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden made the very good point that it is actually in quangos’ interest to do more to explain to the public what they do, to justify their existence.

I am sure that government is complicated, but I am also sure that it is less so when people are clear about their priorities and really drive them. Effective LSRs cannot be that hard, because Total Place pilots seem to have the information. There will be costs, but they must be tiny compared with the efficiency savings that should be the dividend of greater transparency; that point was made by the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne.

Transparency must be a priority now. If the Minister has any doubts about that, I urge her to look at what is happening in the USA. Months, not years, after the election of President Obama, the default setting was changed from closed to open. Look at the Missouri accountability portal. It is not an obscure Excel file, but four buttons to click on. Look at SeeThroughNY, USAspending.gov or data.gov, the strapline of which is “Discover. Participate. Engage.” In America, they have been bold in opening the books, throwing open the doors and letting the light and the people in. They do it because they know that it will be the catalyst to engagement, efficiency and innovation; here, we continue to live in the dark.

That is not the future. The 2007 Act has wedged the door open and it will not close again. I urge the Government to listen to Parliament, embrace the future, change the default setting to open government, not closed government, start to treat people intelligently and commit now to full local spending reports that include quangos—and just get on with it.

3.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Barbara Follett): This has been a very important debate on a subject that, I believe, goes to the very heart of democracy and participation in our country. The quality of the contributions has been high, which I hope has made up for the rather disappointing quantity.

I was both disappointed and surprised, however, by the tone of some contributions. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a very real attempt to draw on the cross-party nature of the 2007 Act and to describe the progress made, and the process that we have gone through, in an open and fair fashion, but the right hon.

Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), despite his stated desire to be helpful, descended very swiftly—within seconds of starting his speech—into old-fashioned yah-boo politics. As a previous Culture Minister, I can assure him that I am very well aware how the Arts Council does its accounting. I can also assure him that we will be considering its inclusion in the December report, and also the inclusion of the learning and skills councils.

The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), who with my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) was one of the midwives of the original Bill, adopted a more helpful tone, but the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), made remarks about Government spending being veiled in secrecy, even though this Government introduced the Freedom of Information Act—some Members may wish at the moment that we had not done so. To suggest that this Government are not committed to transparency is ridiculous. I think that in her opening contribution, she established the suspicious and distrustful tone that permeated the debate in a rather silly and old-fashioned way.

Mr. Dorrell: I am sorry if the Minister felt that I was being overly partisan: I was simply seeking to put the Government under pressure to deliver shared aspirations. She said that she would look again at the Arts Council and, almost under her breath, that she would also look at the learning and skills councils to decide whether to include them in December. May we take that as a commitment that those exclusions will not be claimed by December? The Secretary of State virtually promised the inclusion of the probation service—can that be included in the list for which the exemptions will be withdrawn?

Barbara Follett: Those are good things to look at, but beware the yah-boo politics—you are at it again.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind the Minister about the need to use parliamentary language in this debate.

Barbara Follett: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker, for losing my temper.

The yah-boo politics were very obvious in the impassioned contribution from, and constant heckling by, the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Julia Goldsworthy). I admire her conviction and enthusiasm, and I enjoyed meeting her to discuss this subject recently. However, I did not admire her approach today. In fact, by the end of her contribution I began to feel a real need for a Relate counsellor in the Chamber. Her intervention was so filled with distrust and suspicion that I could not believe that I had spent half an hour talking to her about this previously.

Thankfully, Relate, in the form of my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), was present. His well-balanced speech poured oil—

Mr. David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): This is very partisan.

Barbara Follett: Yes, but it is not yah-boo. My hon. Friend’s well-balanced speech poured oil on troubled waters while simultaneously spurring the Government on to greater efforts.

The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) made a thoughtful contribution, and I especially liked what he said about the silo mentality of government at all levels. He is completely right, and his remark about the role of ring-fencing in reinforcing that mentality has been noted and received with sympathy by the Government and by this Department, which has made substantial progress in reducing the amount of ring-fencing.

John Howell: I thank the Minister for that remark, although I am not sure that praise from someone on the Government Front Bench has done my career any good. May we look forward to the abolition of as many of the ring-fenced grants to local government as she can achieve?

Barbara Follett: The hon. Gentleman may certainly look forward to us looking at them. We need to move away from the old ways of doing things, and the hon. Gentleman's call for the transformation of the relationship between local and central Government was a good one.

In response to the direct questions from the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne, we will—as I said earlier—produce a report in December on the next stages of developing spending reports. On her question about when the next round will take place, it will be—as I again said earlier—when we have assessed and appraised this round. We will certainly consider the role of parish councils in the process.

Julia Goldsworthy: My question was not only about the reports that will be produced in December, but about whether there will be a debate and a vote on them.

Barbara Follett: That is something that has to be decided by the House. Because I had left that out, I was going to come to it at the end of my speech. I heard what the hon. Lady said.

The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Hurd) gave a clear summary of the progress of the Act and described my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud as the auntie of the Act. I am not sure that everyone would agree. The hon. Gentleman also said that transparency is the bedfellow of efficiency, which echoed the Secretary of State's remark that knowledge is power. Like the hon. Member for Meriden, however, the hon. Gentleman seemed to think that information on local spending can be accessed only through the spending reports. As they know, that is simply not true. I am Regional Minister for the East of England, and the regional development agencies produce huge numbers of accounts and reports that are available to everyone. We have also looked at their value for money, and for every pound spent, we get £4.50 back. That information is available and is not collated in with the local spending reports, although I hope that eventually it will be—this is work in progress.

Mrs. Spelman: Does the hon. Lady accept that the problem is that the RDA spend is not broken down by constituency? From time to time, we get a letter from the chief executive telling us a bit of good news, but it is piecemeal. Does she accept that one of the reasons the debate at times has been tense—although I would not characterise it as yah-boo—is the absence today of the written ministerial statement promised on this very subject? That has coloured Members' stances. That statement is still not in the Library.

Barbara Follett: I apologise for that omission. I have been told that it is in the Library. I also apologise, like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did, for the fact that we did not extend the normal courtesies and give it to the Front-Bench team. I shall personally ensure that it never happens again.

As the hon. Lady said, the information needs to be disaggregated, but, as someone who has spent many years attempting to get Government statistics disaggregated by gender, I can tell hon. Members that it is difficult and extraordinarily expensive. However, the Government and I are committed to open and transparent disclosure of public spending. We share that principle with other hon. Members. However, we share another principle—public money, especially in these difficult times, has to be used for the benefit of the people from whom it has been raised.

Most importantly, each pound of that money has to work harder than ever before. No one entrusted with the care of public money takes its use lightly, and we firmly believe that those who have earned this money should have the right to see exactly how it is being spent. That is why we are developing the concept of local spending reports alongside the Total Place pilots. I hope that that transparency will permeate everything that the Government do in the future, and that we can work in more accord with Opposition parties on this extraordinarily worthwhile venture.

Question put (Standing Order No. 31(2)). That the original words stand part of the Question.

The House proceeded to a Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the No Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 234, Noes 289.

Division No. 232]

[3.58 pm

AYES

Afriyie, Adam	Burns, Mr. Simon
Ainsworth, Mr. Peter	Burrowes, Mr. David
Alexander, Danny	Burstow, Mr. Paul
Amess, Mr. David	Burt, Alistair
Ancram, Mr. Michael	Burt, Lorely
Arbuthnot, Mr. James	Butterfill, Sir John
Atkinson, Mr. Peter	Cable, Dr. Vincent
Baldry, Tony	Cameron, Mr. David
Barker, Gregory	Carmichael, Mr. Alistair
Baron, Mr. John	Cash, Mr. William
Barrett, John	Chope, Mr. Christopher
Beith, Mr. Sir Alan	Clappison, Mr. James
Bellingham, Mr. Henry	Clark, Greg
Benyon, Mr. Richard	Clegg, Mr. Nick
Beresford, Sir Paul	Clifton-Brown, Mr. Geoffrey
Binley, Mr. Brian	Conway, Derek
Blunt, Mr. Crispin	Corbyn, Jeremy
Bone, Mr. Peter	Curry, Mr. David
Boswell, Mr. Tim	Davies, Mr. Dai
Bottomley, Peter	Davies, David T.C.
Brady, Mr. Graham	(Monmouth)
Brake, Tom	Davies, Philip
Brazier, Mr. Julian	Davis, Mr. David
Breed, Mr. Colin	Djanogly, Mr. Jonathan
Brokenshire, James	Dodds, Mr. Nigel
Brooke, Annette	Donaldson, Mr. Jeffrey
Browne, Mr. Jeremy	M.
Browning, Angela	Dorrell, Mr. Stephen

Dorries, Nadine
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan, Alan
 Dunne, Mr. Philip
 Ellwood, Mr. Tobias
 Evennett, Mr. David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, Mr. Michael
 Farron, Tim
 Featherstone, Lynne
 Field, Mr. Mark
 Foster, Mr. Don
 Fox, Dr. Liam
 Francois, Mr. Mark
 Fraser, Christopher
 Gale, Mr. Roger
 Garnier, Mr. Edward
 Gauke, Mr. David
 George, Andrew
 Gibb, Mr. Nick
 Gidley, Sandra
 Gillan, Mrs. Cheryl
 Goldsworthy, Julia
 Goodman, Mr. Paul
 Goodwill, Mr. Robert
 Gray, Mr. James
 Grayling, Chris
 Green, Damian
 Greening, Justine
 Greenway, Mr. John
 Grieve, Mr. Dominic
 Gummer, rh Mr. John
 Hague, rh Mr. William
 Hammond, Mr. Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, Mr. Mike
 Hands, Mr. Greg
 Harper, Mr. Mark
 Harris, Dr. Evan
 Harvey, Nick
 Hayes, Mr. John
 Heald, Mr. Oliver
 Heath, Mr. David
 Heathcoat-Amory, rh
 Mr. David
 Hemming, John
 Hendry, Charles
 Herbert, Nick
 Hermon, Lady
 Hoban, Mr. Mark
 Hogg, rh Mr. Douglas
 Hollobone, Mr. Philip
 Holloway, Mr. Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Horwood, Martin
 Howard, rh Mr. Michael
 Howarth, David
 Howarth, Mr. Gerald
 Howell, John
 Hughes, Simon
 Hunt, Mr. Jeremy
 Hunter, Mark
 Hurd, Mr. Nick
 Jack, rh Mr. Michael
 Jackson, Mr. Stewart
 Jenkin, Mr. Bernard
 Jones, Mr. David
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Key, Robert
 Kirkbride, Miss Julie
 Knight, rh Mr. Greg
 Kramer, Susan

Lait, Mrs. Jacqui
 Lamb, Norman
 Laws, Mr. David
 Leech, Mr. John
 Leigh, Mr. Edward
 Letwin, rh Mr. Oliver
 Lewis, Dr. Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr.
 Ian
 Lidington, Mr. David
 Lilley, rh Mr. Peter
 Loughton, Tim
 Luff, Peter
 Mackay, rh Mr. Andrew
 Main, Anne
 Malins, Mr. Humfrey
 May, rh Mrs. Theresa
 McCrea, Dr. William
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 McLoughlin, rh Mr. Patrick
 Mercer, Patrick
 Miller, Mrs. Maria
 Milton, Anne
 Mitchell, Mr. Andrew
 Moore, Mr. Michael
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mundell, David
 Murrison, Dr. Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr. Brooks
 O'Brien, Mr. Stephen
 Oaten, Mr. Mark
 Öpik, Lembit
 Osborne, Mr. George
 Ottaway, Richard
 Paice, Mr. James
 Paterson, Mr. Owen
 Pelling, Mr. Andrew
 Penning, Mike
 Penrose, John
 Pickles, Mr. Eric
 Prisk, Mr. Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pugh, Dr. John
 Randall, Mr. John
 Redwood, rh Mr. John
 Reid, Mr. Alan
 Rennie, Willie
 Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm
 Robathan, Mr. Andrew
 Robertson, Hugh
 Robertson, Mr. Laurence
 Robinson, Mrs. Iris
 Robinson, rh Mr. Peter
 Rogerson, Dan
 Rowen, Paul
 Ruffley, Mr. David
 Russell, Bob
 Sanders, Mr. Adrian
 Scott, Mr. Lee
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, Grant
 Shepherd, Mr. Richard
 Simmonds, Mark
 Simpson, Alan
 Simpson, Mr. Keith
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Sir Robert
 Soames, Mr. Nicholas
 Spelman, Mrs. Caroline
 Spicer, Sir Michael
 Spink, Bob

Spring, Mr. Richard
 Steen, Mr. Anthony
 Streeter, Mr. Gary
 Swayne, Mr. Desmond
 Swinson, Jo
 Swire, Mr. Hugo
 Syms, Mr. Robert
 Tapsell, Sir Peter
 Taylor, Mr. Ian
 Taylor, Dr. Richard
 Teather, Sarah
 Thurso, John
 Timpson, Mr. Edward
 Tredinnick, David
 Turner, Mr. Andrew
 Tyrie, Mr. Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr. Edward
 Vara, Mr. Shailesh
 Villiers, Mrs. Theresa
 Walker, Mr. Charles
 Wallace, Mr. Ben

Waterson, Mr. Nigel
 Watkinson, Angela
 Webb, Steve
 Whittingdale, Mr. John
 Willetts, Mr. David
 Williams, Mark
 Williams, Mr. Roger
 Williams, Stephen
 Willis, Mr. Phil
 Willott, Jenny
 Wilson, Mr. Rob
 Winterton, Ann
 Winterton, Sir Nicholas
 Wright, Jeremy
 Yeo, Mr. Tim
 Young, rh Sir George
 Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bill Wiggin and
Mr. Stephen Crabb

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Ainger, Nick
 Ainsworth, rh Mr. Bob
 Alexander, rh Mr. Douglas
 Allen, Mr. Graham
 Anderson, Mr. David
 Anderson, Janet
 Armstrong, rh Hilary
 Atkins, Charlotte
 Austin, Mr. Ian
 Austin, John
 Bailey, Mr. Adrian
 Baird, Vera
 Balls, rh Ed
 Banks, Gordon
 Barlow, Ms Celia
 Barron, rh Mr. Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begg, Miss Anne
 Bell, Sir Stuart
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Benton, Mr. Joe
 Berry, Roger
 Betts, Mr. Clive
 Blackman, Liz
 Blackman-Woods, Dr.
 Roberta
 Blears, rh Hazel
 Blizzard, Mr. Bob
 Blunkett, rh Mr. David
 Borrow, Mr. David S.
 Bradshaw, rh Mr. Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr. Nicholas
 Brown, Mr. Russell
 Browne, rh Des
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Colin
 Butler, Ms Dawn
 Byrne, rh Mr. Liam
 Caborn, rh Mr. Richard
 Cairns, David
 Campbell, Mr. Alan
 Campbell, Mr. Ronnie
 Caton, Mr. Martin

Cawsey, Mr. Ian
 Chapman, Ben
 Chaytor, Mr. David
 Clapham, Mr. Michael
 Clark, Ms Katy
 Clark, Paul
 Clarke, rh Mr. Charles
 Clarke, rh Mr. Tom
 Clelland, Mr. David
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Mr. Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cohen, Harry
 Connarty, Michael
 Cook, Frank
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Crausby, Mr. David
 Creagh, Mary
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, Mrs. Ann
 Cummings, John
 Cunningham, Tony
 David, Mr. Wayne
 Davidson, Mr. Ian
 Davies, Mr. Quentin
 Denham, rh Mr. John
 Dhanda, Mr. Parmjit
 Dismore, Mr. Andrew
 Dobbin, Jim
 Dobson, rh Frank
 Donohoe, Mr. Brian
 H.
 Doran, Mr. Frank
 Drew, Mr. David
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eford, Clive
 Ellman, Mrs. Louise
 Engel, Natascha
 Ennis, Jeff
 Farrelly, Paul
 Field, rh Mr. Frank
 Fisher, Mark
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Mr. Robert
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul

Follett, Barbara
 Foster, Mr. Michael
 (Worcester)
 Foster, Michael Jabez
 (Hastings and Rye)
 Francis, Dr. Hywel
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, rh Mr. Bruce
 Gerrard, Mr. Neil
 Gilroy, Linda
 Godsiff, Mr. Roger
 Goggins, rh Paul
 Goodman, Helen
 Griffith, Nia
 Griffiths, Nigel
 Grogan, Mr. John
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hall, Mr. Mike
 Hall, Patrick
 Hamilton, Mr. David
 Hanson, rh Mr. David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harvard, Mr. Dai
 Healey, rh John
 Hepburn, Mr. Stephen
 Heppell, Mr. John
 Hesford, Stephen
 Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
 Heyes, David
 Hill, rh Keith
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodge, rh Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs. Sharon
 Hood, Mr. Jim
 Hoon, rh Mr. Geoffrey
 Hope, Phil
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr. George
 Howells, rh Dr. Kim
 Hoyle, Mr. Lindsay
 Humble, Mrs. Joan
 Hutton, rh Mr. John
 Iddon, Dr. Brian
 Ingram, rh Mr. Adam
 Irranca-Davies,
 Huw
 James, Mrs. Siân C.
 Jenkins, Mr. Brian
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Ms Diana
 R.
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr. Kevan
 Jones, Lynne
 Jones, Mr. Martyn
 Jowell, rh Tessa
 Joyce, Mr. Eric
 Keeble, Ms Sally
 Keeley, Barbara
 Keen, Alan
 Keen, Ann
 Kelly, rh Ruth
 Kemp, Mr. Fraser
 Kennedy, rh Jane
 Khan, rh Mr. Sadiq
 Kidney, Mr. David
 Kilfoyle, Mr. Peter
 Knight, rh Jim
 Kumar, Dr. Ashok
 Ladyman, Dr. Stephen

Lammy, rh Mr. David
 Laxton, Mr. Bob
 Lazarowicz, Mark
 Lepper, David
 Levitt, Tom
 Lewis, Mr. Ivan
 Linton, Martin
 Lloyd, Tony
 Love, Mr. Andrew
 Lucas, Ian
 MacShane, rh Mr. Denis
 Mactaggart, Fiona
 Mahmood, Mr. Khalid
 Malik, Mr. Shahid
 Mallaber, Judy
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr. Gordon
 Marshall-Andrews, Mr.
 Robert
 Martlew, Mr. Eric
 McAvoy, rh Mr. Thomas
 McCabe, Steve
 McCafferty, Chris
 McCarthy-Fry, Sarah
 McCartney, rh Mr.
 Ian
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr.
 Pat
 McFall, rh John
 McGovern, Mr. Jim
 McIsaac, Shona
 McKechin, Ann
 McKenna, Rosemary
 McNulty, rh Mr. Tony
 Meacher, rh Mr. Michael
 Merron, Gillian
 Michael, rh Alun
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Miller, Andrew
 Mitchell, Mr. Austin
 Moffatt, Laura
 Mole, Chris
 Moon, Mrs. Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Julie
 Morley, rh Mr. Elliot
 Mudie, Mr. George
 Mullin, Mr. Chris
 Munn, Meg
 Murphy, Mr. Denis
 Murphy, rh Mr. Paul
 Naysmith, Dr. Doug
 Norris, Dan
 O'Brien, rh Mr. Mike
 Owen, Albert
 Palmer, Dr. Nick
 Pearson, Ian
 Plaskitt, Mr. James
 Pound, Stephen
 Prentice, Bridget
 Prentice, Mr. Gordon
 Primarolo, rh Dawn
 Prosser, Gwyn
 Purchase, Mr. Ken
 Purnell, rh James
 Raynsford, rh Mr. Nick
 Reed, Mr. Andy

Reed, Mr. Jamie
 Riordan, Mrs. Linda
 Robertson, John
 Robinson, Mr. Geoffrey
 Rooney, Mr. Terry
 Roy, Lindsay
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell, Christine
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Sarwar, Mr. Mohammad
 Seabeck, Alison
 Shaw, Jonathan
 Sheerman, Mr. Barry
 Sheridan, Jim
 Simon, Mr. Siôn
 Skinner, Mr. Dennis
 Slaughter, Mr. Andy
 Smith, rh Mr. Andrew
 Smith, rh Angela E.
 (Basildon)
 Smith, Geraldine
 Smith, rh Jacqui
 Snelgrove, Anne
 Soulsby, Sir Peter
 Southworth, Helen
 Spellar, rh Mr. John
 Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
 Stoate, Dr. Howard
 Straw, rh Mr. Jack
 Sutcliffe, Mr. Gerry
 Tami, Mark
 Taylor, David
 Thomas, Mr. Gareth
 Thornberry, Emily

Timms, rh Mr. Stephen
 Tipping, Paddy
 Todd, Mr. Mark
 Touhig, rh Mr. Don
 Trickett, Jon
 Truswell, Mr. Paul
 Turner, Mr. Neil
 Twigg, Derek
 Ussher, Kitty
 Vis, Dr. Rudi
 Walley, Joan
 Waltho, Lynda
 Ward, Claire
 Watson, Mr. Tom
 Watts, Mr. Dave
 Whitehead, Dr. Alan
 Wicks, rh Malcolm
 Williams, rh Mr. Alan
 Williams, Mrs. Betty
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr. David
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
 Wood, Mike
 Woodward, rh Mr.
 Shaun
 Woolas, Mr. Phil
 Wright, Mr. Anthony
 Wright, Mr. Iain
 Wright, Dr. Tony
 Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:

**David Wright and
 Kerry McCarthy**

Question accordingly negated.

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31(2)),
 That the proposed words be there added.*

Question agreed to.

*The Deputy Speaker declared the main Question, as
 amended, to be agreed to (Standing Order No. 31(2)).*

Resolved,

That this House recognises the role of strong, accountable local government in delivering high quality local services and entitlements to services whilst ensuring value for money; welcomes Government investment, through local councils, in providing real help now to families; reiterates the importance of providing information about local spending and service quality to ensuring effective scrutiny and value for money; further welcomes the passage of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 and the Government's commitment to work with the Selector on its implementation, and believes that the first local spending reports published in April 2009 marked an important initial step in making local public spending more transparent; further welcomes responses to the consultation confirming the desire to see more data published; welcomes the Government's intention to extend local spending reports to cover all local public spending which can be readily provided in this format at reasonable cost; further welcomes the Government's proposals to extend local authorities' scrutiny of all local public service spending in their area; further welcomes the Total Place pilots mapping in detail all public spending in key services in 13 areas; further welcomes Sir Tim Berners-Lee's work advising Government on how best to make non-personal public data as widely available as possible; believes that these developments will enhance the Government's ability to provide local spending information in the most effective manner; and asks Ministers to report back to the House before the end of December 2009 on the next stages in developing local spending reports.

Future of the Territorial Army

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Will Members who are not staying for the debate please leave the Chamber as quickly and quietly as possible?

I inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.16 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House expresses its continued support for the role of the Territorial Army (TA); notes that the reserve forces have contributed some 20,000 personnel to operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Balkans since 2002, most of them from the Territorial Army, and that 14 Territorials have died on those operations; deplors the decision made to freeze TA training, contrary to the recommendations of the Cottam Report, of which all seven strategic recommendations were accepted by the Government in April 2009; further notes the adverse impact the decision would have had on the TA's war fighting capability and its ability to respond to natural disasters and other contingencies in the United Kingdom; considers that there will be an enduring threat to TA morale, recruitment and retention as a result of the Government's lack of support; notes the leadership displayed by the Leader of the Opposition in opposing the cuts to the TA; and calls on the Government urgently to take steps to mend the damaged morale of the TA.

Let me begin by paying tribute to Corporal Thomas "Tam" Mason of The Black Watch, 3rd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, who died from wounds at the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine in Selly Oak on Sunday, and also to Corporal James Oakland of the Royal Military Police, who was killed in central Helmand province on Thursday 22 October. While we think about the families of those who have been killed, we also think about the families of those who have been injured, whose lives will never be the same either.

Through good times and bad, the Territorial Army has given a proud 101 years of service to this country. Since 2002, reserve forces have contributed some 20,000 personnel to operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Balkans, most of them from the Territorial Army. Fourteen Territorials have died on those operations. Today we are debating the future of the TA because of the cuts that the Government proposed to TA training, which in the past 24 hours have been rightly and swiftly reversed.

All Governments make mistakes. All people make mistakes. Smart people recognise them and rectify them, and exhausted Governments dig in. What is worse, they tend to try to delude themselves that the bad decisions are actually difficult decisions with hidden virtue. Let us face it: we have seen it all before. Some of us have lived through it before. Here is the recipe. Typically, you take a relatively small sum of money to be saved and find the most politically costly way of doing it. Then, when you run into trouble, you backtrack and make concessions. When threatened with a Back-Bench revolt, you perform a spectacular U-turn, so that you actually save no money at all but spend the maximum amount of political capital. That is exactly what we have seen in recent days on the TA issue.

Although they were forced into it, the Government made the right decision by performing a U-turn on the shameful cuts in TA training, because the cuts would have had a long-term impact on recruitment and on the overall future readiness of the TA. Whether or not an individual is deployed on operations, regular and

routine training is required to ensure medium and long-term readiness levels for any future deployments, whether to Afghanistan or to another unforeseen destination.

Pre-deployment training is meant to augment, not supplant, routine TA training. The weekly and monthly training gives the TA the skills that are required to allow them to perform alongside their regular Army counterparts. It also gives our Territorials the esprit de corps and confidence to work together as a unit in challenging circumstances, whether at home or in Helmand. How can a Territorial who has not been to the range for six months, driven an armoured vehicle for six months or trained with his comrades for six months be expected all of a sudden to conduct several weeks of pre-deployment training and be ready for deployment on the front line? The answer is that no Territorial can be expected to do that, which is why the cuts were wrong in the first place.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it was right for the Prime Minister to intervene and overturn a decision by Land Command? Does he agree that the problem with Land Command is that it is easy to pick on the TA and never pick on the regulars?

Dr. Fox: And it is very easy to pick on the generals instead of the politicians, because if people are given a set of bad choices to choose from, they are likely to make unwelcome decisions.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend recognise the particular anger at the Government's recent TA policy that is felt by people such as a 20-year-old undergraduate constituent of mine who is due to go to Afghanistan next June and who relies on his TA pay for income?

Dr. Fox: Indeed I do, and I think that there is a degree of hurt and resentment that will not quickly go away in many of those who feel that they have been slighted by events of recent days.

Ann Winterton (Congleton) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that when the Army was asked to make cuts amounting to £43 million, the regular generals were rather Machiavellian in choosing to cut the TA budget, knowing that that would be very unpopular with the country and that it would probably be reversed? Is it not, however, also at a stroke a blow to the one Army concept, because what will the TA now think about the regular Army, and in particular the regular generals?

Dr. Fox: My hon. Friend puts her finger on the key point that there will be long-standing damage to morale as a consequence of what has happened in recent days, and that cannot easily be rectified by a U-turn by politicians.

As a result of all these points, one must ask why the Government considered such cuts to begin with, when almost all the advice they received runs against such a decision. On training, the Cottam report—whose seven strategic recommendations were accepted in full by the Government—said:

"Training is pivotal to the Proposition. The delivery of training should be overhauled to make it more relevant, consistent and correctly resourced."

The Government said these cuts would not have a long-term impact on providing Territorials for Afghanistan, but that is not the view of senior Army officers. According to the “Land forces in-year savings measure communication plan” dated 12 October 2009, the

“TA trained strength may fall from 20,000 to around 18,000 by 1 Apr 2010, putting at risk the TA’s ability to deliver 700-800 trained soldiers for Op HERRICK from 2012 onwards.”

The excuses given by the Government also need to be scrutinised. As always, there is more than meets the eye. We were told that money had to be found to fund new recruits. On Monday, the Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, the hon. Member for Harlow (Bill Rammell), said that

“recruitment to the Army has experienced a significant boost this year—over 1,000 more recruits are expected to complete training than did so last year—but those additional recruits need to be paid for.”—[*Official Report*, 26 October 2009; Vol. 498, c. 23.]

Because of this recession—the longest recession since records began, and longer than the Government expected—and the media recruitment drive of the past year, there are more recruits in the regular Army than there is money to train them from the Government budget. The Government have demanded savings from other areas of the Army to fund this, but the Government knew last year that regular Army recruitment was already taking off.

On recruitment, the Chief of the General Staff briefing team report of 2008 stated that

“We are making progress and the figures are showing early signs of recovery. The recession will also help but we must not be complacent and must continue to be innovative with recruiting methods, reduce waste in training, and retain those currently serving.”

Such a direct message from the head of the Army should at least have been a warning to the Government, so why did the Government not plan to fund their own target numbers for recruitment, especially when we are in a war? I understand that they probably believed that they would fail in this, as they have in so many other things, but why were no financial contingencies made?

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the case he is making on the Government’s proposed cut to the TA budget highlights the following point? The Government’s claim that they were not overstressing the Ministry of Defence with the demands that they placed on it in recent years and under-resourcing is completely contradicted by the fact that they felt that such a cut to the budget had to be implemented.

Dr. Fox: Indeed, and many of the myths the Government have been peddling in recent times have been blown apart by events of the past few weeks. If there really is a problem in funding all the new recruits, and if money was going to be diverted from the TA budget to address that but now that is not going to happen, where will the MOD find the money that will still be required to fund those extra recruits? What other areas will have to experience cuts because the Government failed to plan properly?

That brings me to the other excuse given by the Government—it is perhaps even more telling. The Secretary of State said in a recent debate:

“We are adjusting the core defence budget to reprioritise Afghanistan”.—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2009; Vol. 497, c. 469.]

Yet the Government have repeatedly told the House in recent years that they

“always finance our military commitments overseas out of the reserve”.—[*Official Report*, 5 February 2009; Vol. 487, c. 1083.]

It has always been the House’s understanding that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan would be funded from the reserve and would not have an impact on the core budget. If operations in Afghanistan are fully funded from the reserve, why does the Ministry of Defence need to adjust the core budget to reprioritise operations in Afghanistan? What is the MOD core budget paying for that the Treasury is not?

One of the most telling things that the former Prime Minister Tony Blair ever said was contained in one of his long farewell tour speeches. When speaking on one of Her Majesty’s ships he said, “Under Labour, we have kept spending on defence constant at about 2.5 per cent. of GDP, if you include Iraq and Afghanistan.” In other words, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan were being fought on a peacetime budget, and that has always meant that there would be some impact on the core budget. It is now clear that—as many Members of the House have said in many debates in recent times—all costs associated with operations in Afghanistan will not be paid in full above and beyond the core defence budget.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the key issue is that the Government, rather than feeling remorse or a sense of error in what they have done, have retreated due to political pressure? Does he agree that, as he rightly points out, the strategic imperative to invest in the Army is clear-cut, but the Government seem to be trying to make savings on a tactical basis and that that means there is a continuing danger?

Dr. Fox: That is a little unkind; a surrender is a surrender. We are always willing to accept one from the Government, especially when they have already got things wrong. This whole episode has taught us a number of things. The Secretary of State says that the Chief of the General Staff agreed to these cuts, but if someone is given bad options, they are likely, inevitably, to make unwelcome choices. This Government have shown that they do not understand the ethos of the TA and of volunteering; the MOD failed to prepare for the upshot in recruitment, even though it was warned a year ago by the head of the Army; and, finally, operations in Afghanistan are not fully funded from the reserve, as the Government wanted us to believe.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal) (Con): Has my hon. Friend noticed that whatever the mistake, the Government always blame someone else and never take responsibility? The Government asked for the cuts; the Government knew what cuts were proposed; the Government accepted those cuts; and the Government should be ashamed of themselves.

Dr. Fox: I must tell my right hon. Friend that inside this Government they play the blame game extremely well—now they are even blaming one another. No. 10 is briefing at this very moment that this was all the MOD’s fault and that No. 10 rode to the rescue of the MOD to save it from itself; our Prime Minister, the great champion of the armed forces and long-term advocate of their welfare, has come to the rescue of the Secretary of

[Dr. Fox]

State, who clearly does not understand these issues. After the shocking report that we saw this morning about the long-term consequences of what has happened with the cultural shift in the Government, the Prime Minister is not on a strong wicket when it comes to blaming anybody else for the state in which our armed forces find themselves.

The Cottam review acknowledged that reservists remain vital for supporting national resilience and recognised the very important role that they play in connecting the armed forces with the nation. I know that I speak for the vast majority in the House when I say that I could not agree more. The connection between each community and each local TA unit makes the TA worth its weight in gold, and it can never be taken for granted—I might suggest that after the past week's events, politically it might never be taken for granted in the same way again. The TA plays an important role in Afghanistan. The Secretary of State knows that, because he sees it on his morale-boosting tours there, one of which he recently completed with the Home Secretary—goodness knows how depressed one has to be before one's morale is boosted by the Home Secretary and the Defence Secretary on tour.

This whole episode that we have witnessed in recent days smacks of a Government who no longer make joined-up decisions and whose political instincts have gone walkabout. What do they cut to reprioritise MOD funds for Afghanistan? Do they cut waste, bureaucracy or inefficiency? No, in order to help the war effort, they reduce the training for the troops who may be needed for the war effort. The trouble is that the act of doing so means that many of those in the TA might be gone by the time that the Government need them. We could not make up this level of incompetence. The TA represents some of the bravest and best things about Britain; the Government represent some of the most pointless and useless. It is time to go.

4.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from the second 'operations;' to the end of the Question and add:

"welcomes the Government's additional £20 million ring-fenced by the Treasury for Territorial Army training; and further welcomes the Government's policy to ensure that TA members deployed to Afghanistan are fully and properly trained for their role and to ensure that, for all TA members, normal training will take place in the evening and at weekends."

The Territorial Army and the UK reserve forces make a vital contribution to keeping our country safe—to defending our citizens, territory, interests and national security. They also make a vital contribution to the fabric of our society as a whole. They represent important values: a strong volunteer ethos, a commitment to service, giving back to society and the values of community.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall give way in a moment.

Our reserves are no longer held in the role they served during the cold war, that is, for direct territorial defence. The TA has become an integral arm of the regular Army, supporting the operational commitments of regular forces as set out in the strategic defence review.

Almost 20,000 reservists have served on operations since 2003, including 15,000 members of the TA, and 650 reservists are serving in Afghanistan, some 7 per cent. of all of the forces deployed. As the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said, 14 members of the TA have died on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and more have been wounded, 31 returning with potentially life-changing injuries. Their sacrifice must not and will not be forgotten.

Mr. Hoyle: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: In a moment.

Against that sacrifice, and to ensure our essential national security, Afghanistan comes first for defence. It gets first call on money, first call on equipment and first call on training and support. We are spending increasing sums from the Treasury reserve and the defence budget to do that. Additional spending on operations in Afghanistan has risen from £700 million in 2006 to more than £3 billion this year.

Patrick Mercer (Newark) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: In a moment.

We have approved more than £3.2 billion of urgent operational requirements specifically for Afghanistan. That additional spending has allowed us to more than double helicopter capacity compared with 2006, to quadruple the number of mine-protected Mastiff and Ridgback vehicles compared with six months ago, to increase the number of specialised troops and equipment to target the improvised explosive device networks, to deploy about 1,000 more troops in a little over six months and to budget for a further increase of 500 if the conditions that we have set out are met.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall give way to a number of hon. Members in a moment.

Afghanistan First is not only a matter of drawing on the Treasury reserve. Many parts of the core defence budget contribute too, including spending on recruitment and basic training. We need to make tough choices with resources if we want to keep equipment, manpower and support flowing to Afghanistan. The hon. Member for Woodspring said that all we did was to give the Army bad options and bad choices, and that we should not have been entirely surprised when they came up with the decisions that we took. He also said that we failed to plan properly. One can plan all one likes and can come up with all the options that one likes, but who is coming up with the money? I am hearing people from the Liberal Democrat and Conservative Benches—

David T.C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall give way to hon. Members in a moment.

I am hearing Liberal Democrat and Conservative Members who agree that Afghanistan is the top priority, but whenever it comes to prioritisation they are not prepared to make the hard choices that are necessary in order to bring it about. I should like to hear a little more than, "Do a little more planning", or, "Give people

some different options.” What options? If people are saying that more money should be spent, let them say where it is to come from.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), and then to a selection of hon. Members.

Mr. Hoyle: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. The Government have a concept of one Army, made up of regulars and TA members. Will he use his offices and best endeavours to ensure that the Government’s commitment to rebuilding a unified TA will be at the top of his priorities?

Mr. Ainsworth: Yes, I want to do that, but there are people both inside and outside the House who criticise us because they believe that Afghanistan, where we have 9,000 people deployed, must be our main effort and priority. One cannot have more than one first priority. Afghanistan is my first priority.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Ainsworth: I give way to the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer).

Patrick Mercer: I am most grateful to the Secretary of State. He is making some extremely good points, but he keeps using one word that is wrong. He keeps referring to “operations”, but surely we have gone beyond that. What is happening in Afghanistan now is war, and the mistake is that, by trying to divide the Territorial Army from the regular Army, the Government will not be on the war footing needed to deal with a war situation.

Mr. Ainsworth: That is just semantics—*[Interruption.]* Yes, it is. I am saying that Afghanistan is the main effort. No one dares to disagree with that, but no one is prepared to make the choices necessary to deal with the problem.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Ainsworth: I give way to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier).

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): I am most grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. As chairman of the all-party reserve forces group, may I say, on behalf of the group’s members in all parts of the House, that we are delighted that the correct decision has now been taken? I know that both the right hon. Gentleman and the Minister for the Armed Forces have taken a considerable interest in this matter, but will they ensure that longer-term planning takes account of the fact that reserve forces, as the American experience has shown repeatedly, can play a much bigger part in making defence cost-effective?

Mr. Ainsworth: I accept that, and I know that the hon. Gentleman is aware that, like him, I have had a real interest in the Territorial Army for many years. In the long term, we have to sort this issue out.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall make some progress with my speech, and then I shall give way some more so that we can deal with the points that have been made about how to deal with the TA in the long term.

Before I turn to the TA itself, I shall set out the scale of the challenge. There are enormous pressures on the MOD budget in the short term that have been brought about by a number of factors. Those include the fact that we must ensure that operations in Afghanistan have the support required, not only from the Treasury reserve but from the defence budget as a whole, and the difficult fiscal situation that demands that each Government Department must live within its means. Other factors, as the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) pointed out, are the economic slow-down that has impacted on our planned revenue, such as that from the defence estate, the fall in the value of the pound against other currencies that has impacted on the costs of our overseas interests, and a boost in recruitment, to the Army in particular, that has exceeded expectations and requires additional investment.

That means that tough choices have to be made now. The Chief of the General Staff came forward with proposals from the Army for savings of £20 million in TA expenditure. Those were part of a package that included other measures such as saving money on the hire of civilian vehicles, clothing, entertainment, accommodation, and cadets. This was not one thing alone. Hard choices had to be made in order to deal with the issues that we are faced with, and to give the priority that we must and want to give, on which, in principle, we all agree.

I consulted closely with the Chief of the General Staff before approving these measures. In the Army’s view, there were no alternatives in the uncommitted in-year budget that would be less damaging. In the short term the Army has been clear that these proposals could be managed without impact on support to current operations. Let me be clear: no one deploys to Afghanistan without the required training. No TA soldier is deployed on operations unless the Army is satisfied that he is properly trained and prepared.

Dr. Fox: For the sake of clarity, we know that more recruits have come forward than expected, but the Army is still below the target level set by the Government. Is the Secretary of State telling us that the Army is not funded for its establishment figure?

Mr. Ainsworth: We have—I make no apologies for this—agreed not just with the Chief of the General Staff, but with all the single service chiefs, that we will ensure that Afghanistan is the main effort. In order to do that, nobody was prepared to say anything other than that when the opportunity to recruit to the Army was there, it should be taken, and it should be taken in full. There is no doubt that that, in part, caused the in-year problems, along with the other issues that I have spoken about.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (Lab): I wholly support what my right hon. Friend is doing, and understand the pressures that he is under and the messages given about Afghanistan First. I remind him that the last time we had a Tory Administration in this country, they came up with Front Line First, which halved the TA and stripped hundreds of millions of pounds out of the training budget for the Regular Army, which resulted in some of the problems that we inherited at Deepcut and elsewhere.

[Mr. Adam Ingram]

Mr. Ainsworth: I thank my right hon. Friend for pointing out the contrast between the record of the Opposition and that of the Government. The budget has increased over our period by 10 per cent. in real terms since 1997. As my right hon. Friend points out, that is in marked contrast with the last five years that the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) was in power. There were cuts of £500 million a year for the last five years of the last Tory Government. I shall give way to him so that he can explain why that happened.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal) (Con): First, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that under our Government, we were not at war, and we are now at war? Secondly, will he please explain in plain English the word “additional” in his amendment to the motion? Since when has replacing a cut been additional? Additional means more, not merely putting back what he has stolen.

Mr. Ainsworth: I have in this year’s budget an additional £20 million ring-fenced in order to restore the TA cuts. I am very grateful to the Treasury which, as we all know, has some difficulties itself, for providing those additional funds.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Ainsworth: Let me make some progress.

As I said, no TA soldier is deployed on operations unless the Army is satisfied that he is properly trained and prepared. I have listened to the comments and representations made by hon. Members in recent days, and I understand the concerns that have been expressed about the effect on retention in the TA. In the light of those representations, and with the assurances from the Treasury that additional ring-fenced money will be made available, we have decided to maintain the normal TA training regime. That will be restored as quickly as possible.

Looking forward, the Department undertakes an annual planning round in order to prioritise and allocate available resources for the next financial year. This process has not been concluded, but we will have to look at all parts of the budget in the round. Measures from across other parts of defence are being considered to bring budgets into balance and these will be set out as decisions are made. Such difficult decisions are being taken by working with the service chiefs, not against them.

I am determined to protect operations in Afghanistan. That is my bottom line. Tough choices cannot be made without consequences. The media and the Opposition have been calling for more focus on current operations. They cannot will the ends and oppose the means. The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) tries to have his cake and eat it. He cannot preach austerity, as the shadow Chancellor does, and then call foul on any measure that is proposed to relieve budget pressures.

I can assure the House of the Government’s continuing and long-term commitment to defence and to the UK reserve forces and the Territorial Army. After years of overall cuts under the Conservative party, this Government have increased spending on defence since 1997 by 10 per cent. in real terms. As part of that investment, we are seeking a better and more intelligent use of the reserve

forces to ensure that all parts of defence contribute to the whole in a way that is both efficient and effective.

On 28 April this year, I published a strategic review of reserves and I made a statement to the House. The MOD agreed the seven strategic recommendations made by the review and work is under way to implement 46 of the 89 detailed recommendations. Those include 10 of the 12 detailed recommendations related to training, all of which have been completed or are progressing. The reserves review was all about the long-term; about better management, better training and the integration of our reserve forces. It also established a mandate for change, in order to allow greater flexibility and utility in the employment of our reserves. It set in place a strategic framework for how we will integrate, train and support our reserve forces, and develop a strategy for the management of the volunteer estate.

The implementation programme—programme Citizen—is progressing well, but work on recommendations beyond those already endorsed will require additional resources; not planning, not options, not semantics, but additional resources. We are implementing as much as we can from the reserves review within the bounds of the resources currently available. Headquarters land forces is in the early stages of developing options for the shape of a future Territorial Army, but a defence review must come first and set the parameters for the use of our armed forces.

Mr. Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con): The Secretary of State speaks about additional resources. Why is it then that our soldiers, including members of the Territorial Army, are still making what our commanders describe as unnecessary road moves because of lack of helicopters? On 8 September, a private company went to the MOD and offered 12 MI-17s, 12 Bell 142s and one MI-26, which would have provided about 2,500 additional flying hours, fully weaponised and fully conditioned for theatre, flown by former RAF pilots. Why was £7 million a month, just over twice the housing benefit payments in my constituency, not spent in order to get our troops out of the danger of improvised explosive devices?

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman has just heard the figures on our increased spending in Afghanistan. He wants increased spending over and above that, on helicopters; he wants increased spending on the TA; he wants us out of Afghanistan—

Mr. Holloway: No, I do not.

Mr. Ainsworth: Well, the hon. Gentleman’s problem is that his hon. Friends on the Conservative Front Bench do not agree that there should be additional spending on defence—quite the reverse: they are planning cuts in defence. They cannot hide behind charlatan words, they have got to come to a point.

Mrs. Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for finding the additional funds for the Territorial Army and its training. That is important. However, I remind him of the consequences: when we had 17,000 troops in Northern Ireland under the previous Conservative Government, it damaged the concept of one Army. Will he make sure that work is done to rebuild that concept, and that the Chief of the General Staff is made responsible for ensuring that such work takes place?

Mr. Ainsworth: I say to my hon. Friend, who has taken an increasing interest in defence matters over a period, that I do not think that there was any work or planning on reserves during the Conservative party's period in office. We are trying to do that planning, but we have to do it realistically, and resources are a part of the issue.

At this point, we should not limit our options or be prescriptive on setting boundaries. Once the work is complete, and in the context of the defence review, we will have established a robust and agile framework through which the reserve forces' capability can meet the future demands of defence.

We can look forward, confident that UK forces will continue to be a force for good in the world. The UK's reserve forces, including the Territorial Army, are an integral part of that vision, playing an increasing role in defence both at home and on operations abroad.

4.52 pm

Willie Rennie (Dunfermline and West Fife) (LD): For the first time ever, I had the Defence Secretary on his knees. Before his speech, he was begging for forgiveness, but unfortunately it was only for the fact that he has to leave early for an appointment at 5 o'clock. I forgive him if he leaves, but I am sorry that he will miss the brilliant speech that I am about to give.

I associate myself with the remarks made by the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), who paid tribute to those who have fallen in recent weeks. I also make special mention of Corporal Tam Mason, who was brought up in Rosyth in my constituency. He is one of many from Fife, and particularly West Fife, who have fallen serving their country, and I pay tribute to him.

The hon. Member for North-East Milton Keynes (Mr. Lancaster) is not present, but I pay special tribute to him for the way in which he has gone about dealing with this matter, offering his advice and expertise to try to reach a sensible solution. He and I sat together on the Defence Select Committee for some time, and I am sure that other Committee members will attest that he was a valuable member.

I also wish to praise other hon. Members: the former Defence Secretary, the right hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (John Reid), and the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), who is present. There has been a truly cross-party effort, and it is a tribute to the House that we have come together to find a practical solution. That is why I was disappointed by the Conservative leadership, which has chosen to seek all the credit for the outcome. The overnight change in the motion, which praises the Leader of the Opposition, reveals the real motivation for the debate. Unfortunately, the Conservatives may be more interested in themselves than in the TA. We will not rise to the cheap political wheeze that they have undertaken overnight. We will vote for the motion because we believe in the TA, not because we believe in the attempts by the Conservatives or their leader to make cheap party political capital out of this debate. However, I do not want to be distracted by that cheap stunt.

Following the Government's welcome change of heart, we must examine the reasons why we are in this position in the first place. There were numerous reports about the potential effects of these cuts, including tanks not

being able to be driven more than 9 miles in any one month and having no live rounds on ranges. I am sure that the Defence Secretary would say that none of this was true because these decisions had not been made and it was up to local units to make them, but if the detail of those cuts had not been established, that would have been equally terrible. Ministers should have had some foresight about their potential effect. If they were working in the dark and had not done their homework on this last-minute cut, then that is irresponsible.

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): Given that these cuts have been reversed, is not the most damaging thing about all this its effect on the TA, as my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton) said? Those of us who served in the TA thought that we were part of one Army—that our training was as good as that of any regular officer or soldier standing alongside us, and we often did the same job that people are now doing in Afghanistan. Sadly, when it came to the crunch, Ministers gave the impression that senior officers in the Army were ready to ditch the TA. We do not know whether that is true, but it will undermine relations between the TA and the regular Army for years to come. That is the most damaging aspect of what has happened over the past few days, and it cannot be reversed.

Willie Rennie: Next time I make a speech, I will sit a wee bit further along so that the hon. Gentleman cannot read it. He makes exactly the points that I planned to make, and does so in a forceful and valid manner. The long-term damage that has been caused to the divide between the regulars and the reservists will take some time to recover. There will be a constant fear that next time the pressure comes, perhaps in less politically sensitive times, the TA may again be offered up for potential cuts. Having that hanging over the TA all the time will be extremely debilitating to its morale and operations.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. It will be debilitating to those seeking to join the TA and to those in the TA, but equally so to employers, who have recently been so patient so often in losing their employees. What message does he think that the Government's shenanigans and volte-face over the past 24 hours are sending to employers?

Willie Rennie: The hon. Gentleman is spot on. The 2006 National Audit Office report specifically referred to the fact that many of those in the TA—about one in three—reckoned that there was insufficient support for their employers. To make further cuts on top of that surely does not send the right message to employers that they should take seriously their contributions to the defence of the nation. That is causing even more damage.

When we have time to plan, we can often find innovative ways to do things, or see that the same job can be done with less money. However, that operation takes time. Emergency cuts such as these are rarely efficient and often destructive. What Department would be able to cope with this proportion—30 per cent.—of its budget going in one fell swoop? What Department would be able to cope with such a massive reduction with just a few weeks' notice? No Department would be able to cope with that—it would be absolute chaos. That is what would have happened to the TA had the cuts proceeded.

[Willie Rennie]

This is an indication that the MOD is in a financial hole that it has dug for itself. It shows that Ministers have lost control of their budget. Let me take as an example of that something that is close to my heart and that the Minister hears me going on about all the time—the aircraft carriers, which are finally going to be commissioned on Rosyth. There have been two incidents recently. The first is the last-minute two-year delay, which is putting an extra £1 billion on the budget, taking the costs from £4 billion to £5 billion. That has been planned for years, but suddenly, at the last minute, there is a change of tack and an increase in the time scale of two years, and it costs us an extra £1 billion. Secondly, there have been recent reports that the carrier spec will be changed so that one carries aeroplanes and the other carries helicopters. We do not know whether that is true, as Ministers have not told us, but if it is, it has again happened at the last minute. That is no way to run a defence budget, and such emergency cuts are having a huge impact on how we are running our defences.

In recent months, the Prime Minister has made great play from the Dispatch Box of Labour's desire to protect the front line and cut backroom bureaucracy. As the Secretary of State leaves the Chamber, I wonder whether he will appear on the next party political broadcast to use the cuts proposed for the TA as an example of how that has been achieved. This episode surely damages Labour's claim that it is protecting the valuable and slashing waste.

What message does the episode send to the TA? A former major, Mark Cann, who served for 12 years with the TA, recently said that the cuts would be a significant deterrent to new recruits and would send

"a message from the politicians at the top that 'we don't value you'."

There is already dissatisfaction. The 2006 NAO report showed that one fifth of TA members were not satisfied with the level of training that they were given. If cuts are made to a level of training that was already inadequate as far as TA members were concerned, surely that will cause the TA further damage.

It is often difficult to tell exactly what is going on in the MOD. It does not tell us an awful lot and its budgets are opaque. We found out about the cuts because the TA is in the community and we have friends and relatives who are part of it, but what else has happened? What other cuts have been made that we do not know about? Will there be a series of parliamentary statements over the coming weeks to explain what else is being considered? The Secretary of State enlightened us on some matters, but I presume that they are only part of what is being considered. We would like to know what else is going on so that we can help. We have helped on this occasion, with a cross-party effort to find a solution to the problem, and if Ministers trusted us a little more with information we could perhaps help them even more.

It is interesting that the RAF and the Navy have not come to the same conclusion as the Army about their reserves. Why is that, and did Ministers seek their advice before making their decisions about the TA? Perhaps the Navy and RAF are not as cunning as the Army. I suspect that, as was suggested earlier, the Chief of the General Staff knew that the cuts would create

huge uproar and would be reversed and that he would get his own way. If he is that cunning, that is interesting, and I wonder why the Secretary of State did not see it coming. Perhaps he is equally cunning and was trying to persuade the Prime Minister that the cuts were not palatable, and it has been an organised plan all along. I wish that the MOD could be so organised and well planned more often.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the role of special advisers? They are meant to spot these things coming, and there has been a 100 per cent. increase in their number in the Department since 1997. I wonder whether the taxpayer is getting value for money.

Willie Rennie: Point well made.

The situation calls into question the Government's judgment. It was already in question over the Gurkha situation, which they mishandled badly. For a long time they misread the mood of the public, who had great passion for the Gurkhas. Unfortunately, the same team of Ministers has made the same mistake again. They have misread the public mood, and I do not believe that they have the judgment that is required for such decisions.

We do not really know where the £17.5 million has come from. We understand that it is perhaps from the Treasury, but what is going to be sacrificed in return? It would be interesting to know what that sacrifice is, and we should be told in the interests of transparent government. The Prime Minister made great play of the power of this Parliament when he was first elected Prime Minister, but we have not heard an awful lot of that since and we do not have an awful lot of transparency. If we are to have power—if we are to be empowered in this Parliament—we need the information on which to make such judgments. In his summing up, will the Minister tell us what has been sacrificed in return for the £17.5 million or £20 million?

The cuts would have had significant consequences for morale, as we have heard, and for retention and recruitment—if the regular drill nights were not taking place, people would break the habit and no longer be hooked, exacerbating the reserve-regular divide. Having the one Army has been developing well in recent years, but unfortunately I think that this situation will do significant damage. Even mentioning cuts will have damaged the TA, which will be concerned that the cuts will be offered up in future.

As we all know, those in the TA are not amateurs just because they are part time; they are professionals—the Minister also believes that. There are numerous examples of heroic acts in the TA and people have been awarded the military cross or honoured for their bravery, such as Private Luke Cole and Lance Corporal Darren Dickson. A TA regiment protected a NATO headquarters following a car bombing. Those people were commended for their bravery and for their commitment to the TA. Unfortunately, even mentioning cuts does huge damage to the TA's morale and effectiveness.

The Minister will be pleased to hear that I have some praise for the Government. Back in 1998, they slashed the size of the TA from around 56,000 to 41,000 as part of the defence review. They were heavily criticised at the time and came under considerable pressure to change course. It took them about four years to recognise that

mistake, but it has taken them only 14 days to recognise this one, which is an incredible improvement. They should be commended for recognising their mistakes via a speedier process. Perhaps the NHS could learn a few things about reducing waiting times and recognising mistakes.

I also praise the Government for engaging with Members, listening to their advice and acting. It has not been a comfortable time for the ministerial team, but the way in which they have handled the concern deserves commendation. However, the original decision was suspect.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Frank Cook), I remind the House that at the moment there is 15-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches. Judging from the amount of interest that is being shown, it would be helpful—without me having to alter the limit—if hon. Members could try to keep well within it. In that way, everyone should be satisfied.

5.8 pm

Frank Cook (Stockton, North) (Lab): I first alerted Mr. Speaker that I would seek to catch his eye in this debate on Monday evening, after listening to the hon. Member for North-East Milton Keynes (Mr. Lancaster) and having had my own thoughts as I was doing so. However, developments have shot a major hole in the arguments that I had in my heart and mind at that time. Being a simple man—I am not stupid—I shall salvage what I was going to say and make a couple of simple points. I hope that it will take nothing like 15 minutes to do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Before those developments, I had intended to begin my speech by referring to a report entitled, “New Roles for the Reserve Forces” and I shall do so now. I wrote the report in November 1994 and presented it to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which accepted it in full. I pointed out a number of things in the report: that there were jobs that the reserves and Territorials could do that were not being done at the time; how they could fill in for the regular Army; the difficulty that reserve forces had in obtaining their release because employers were less than happy to let them go, for however short a period; and what a good job they could do. The report has been picked up over the years—not because I wrote it, but because it made sense. They have proved themselves well worth the confidence that has been placed in them.

At that time, there was a major gap between the Terriers and the regulars. Many regulars looked on them as part-timers who would be more of a liability than an asset. Many of the part-time commissioned ranks were not readily allowed to take command of regular units. That has all changed.

I have been to Afghanistan five times, and on three of those occasions the driving and protection units that took care of us were so-called part-timers, there for three or four months. They were so professional that it is difficult to describe. There was no difference between the full-time regulars and the Terriers. That happens because confidence has been built up throughout the units. It happens because those so-called part-timers have had the time to do the bonding necessary for the esprit de corps that we emphasise so strongly in all our regular units. They become regular units of their own kind.

When the suggestion was made to reduce the ability to continue that bonding, I thought that it was bordering on the insane. I received an e-mail today from a constituent. His name is Ken Milner. I do not know him, but he lives in Luton crescent in Billingham. He says:

“Dear Sir”—

I do not know why he calls me sir, as most people do not afford me that kind of courtesy—

“now the PM has done a u turn on this, if in fact he was ever driving it forward. You have to feel sorry for him at times? Could I ask you to still keep pushing the Government/MOD to be sensible!

The original decision affected 19,000 casual workers, if we were categorised as part time they would not have attempted it. But that will never happen, too expensive for the Country and then our Generals and Ministers would be restricted by employment Law.

We already do a lot in our own time at our own expense from the top to the bottom, from an Officer to a Recruit. But to expect a system to maintain a standard but not train is plain daft.”

He then makes a nice point, saying:

“A 5 a side football team would not lay off for six months and then be ready to play in a final.”

That is an effective way of describing the situation that we were facing.

I am pleased that the reversal has been made, but I want to consider why it came about. Who first dreamed up the idea, and for what motive? At first glance, it has the paw prints of accountants all over it—those who know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. For that reason, I look in the direction of the Treasury. Even if someone on the general staff made a detailed suggestion, it must have been motivated by pressure from elsewhere. That is not a healthy way to approach our defence.

I make an appeal for all these matters to be considered in a non-partisan fashion. Defence is not a party political issue. When we consider defence, we are talking about lives—the lives of those whom we send to do our bidding, whether in this country or someone else’s; the lives of those associated with them, their parents and kindred; and the lives of those with whom they might come into conflict.

Our whole consideration should concern the degree to which we incur the cost of life, the spending of life and the wasting of life. I know that the Secretary of State must consider the economics of the situation. He talked today about options, and I listened to him, but although cash considerations might be important, they must be secondary.

There is another matter that I must bring to the Government’s attention. It is not a personal matter, but I must put it in almost personal terms: we heard of the importance of Afghanistan, and it is important that we achieve our goal there, although I am not talking about victories; there will be no victory in Afghanistan. There might be gain, and we might allow the Afghan Government to get their security forces into such a position and state that they can look after their own affairs—and the sooner that we can do that the better—but we will not do that by cutting the dedicated resources that we put into it. We need to increase, rather than reduce.

We must ensure that we provide sufficient equipment and personnel. I had the privilege only five weeks ago of listening to Stanley McChrystal, who brought out his

[Frank Cook]

new ideas on how to attend to the Afghanistan problem. When he told me his ideas about treating the Afghan people, rather than the Afghan territory, and when he outlined the additional risk to our personnel that will be experienced there, I pointed out to him that I had been going there for some years and that I had heard David Richards, then McNeill when he took over from Richards, and then McKiernan when he took over from McNeill. I said, "Look General, it's all right you giving us this. You're selling this to me, and I can buy it. It makes sense. But what happens in 12 months' time when somebody else comes in with some new ideas?" He said, "No, that won't be the case. I'm going to be here in 12 months' time." I said, "But you've got a family to take care of." He said, "No, I'm here for as long as it takes, and so is Rodriguez,"—one of his No. 2s—and so was his civilian aide, apparently.

The whole situation there is changing in a crucial way. Initially, the risks will be higher. Our resources need to be stronger. More personnel are needed—and the determination must be more resolute. I tell the Ministry of Defence not to make again the same mistake it made this time. That mistake was in looking only at its fiscal assessments and what money it had to play with, rather than at the lives dependent on the money. Do not make that mistake. That is what accountants get paid for—and that is what they get cashiered for.

5.18 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater) (Con): I declare that I was a Territorial Army soldier. I was commissioned in 1980 and left in 1992 as a rifle commander. I was part of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and was incredibly proud of my time in the Territorial Army. I did not do it for money or because I wanted to become a major in the Army. I did not do it because I saw it as a grandiose way of furthering myself. I did it because I felt that it mattered. I had another life, and at the weekends I dropped my family and did my job. Two weeks of the year I went off and trained. I went to Germany, Gibraltar, America and Canada. What was I doing in these places? I was not on jollies; I was helping out the Regular Army. That is what the TA is.

When I joined, there was an A4 poster showing two soldiers in the old tin-pot helmets and with the old self-loading rifles and bayonets, and the slogan was, "If you were the Russians, could you tell which was the TA?" The answer is no, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you could not, any more than you can today. When those soldiers go out anywhere in the world, unless you know from the shoulder flash that they are from a Territorial unit, or unless you ask them, you cannot tell the difference, and the difference certainly does not bother the enemy, as has been proven time and time again.

However, the problem is that we have seen change being made to the TA, which has never been good. I remember my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), when he was a special adviser to the then Secretary of State, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Sir Malcolm Rifkind), changing the rules for employers so that people could be deployed. We have come an enormous way in getting the TA out, but the most crucial part of being in the TA was not being there for the weekends; rather, it

was that people could train with those men. What will disappear faster than anything else is the coherence of the formed unit.

The Rifles have just been out in Afghanistan. What made their tour successful was training together. The people in the Rifles joined together, commissioned together and went through the battle camps together. They were there together. I was interested to hear the Secretary of State say that the programme would be put back as quickly as possible, but we have troops training all the time to go. Even specialists in the Territorial Army train as formed units, and they go as formed units.

If we send a trooper out—I will give the Minister an example in a second—without knowing that unit or the blokes behind it, we will have problems. I have experience of that from 1990, when my regiment was in Germany, mech training—in other words, in armoured cars. The Gulf war came along, and the 3rd Battalion the Fusiliers was told that it was being deployed, but it did not have the men. We were in Aachen, where we were rung up and asked, "Could you supply a company of troops immediately?" The colonel came and said, "I need roughly 150 men to go to Iraq." We were only on a two-week camp. The blokes put their hands up almost to a man to go with the battalion—and the Minister will remember that that battalion had a friendly fire incident in the Gulf war.

Those men did not shirk; they went out. The reason why the colonel could do that was that the men in that unit knew each other. They could join the battalion because they knew what they would have to do. The company commanders who were there at the time said that they were superb. In fact, Lord Bramall recently quoted an officer who said at the time, "Thank goodness for the Territorial Army." We make the difference when the difference is required.

However, it goes beyond that. When we go to remembrance parades and see the lords lieutenant doing their thing, or when we see events in our constituencies—we all have the same thing—who is augmenting the regulars? It is the Territorials on parade, because we do not have the resources. Not only are the Territorials the public face of the military a lot of the time, because the troops are away doing other things, but they are the face of recruiting. Let us be honest: the reason why we are recruiting at the moment is the recession. That happened in the '90s, too, when recruiting went up. People will join because they cannot get jobs elsewhere, but that will not last.

Mr. Brazier: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: Of course I will give way to the Parachute Regiment.

Mr. Brazier: I am listening to my hon. Friend's excellent speech. On a longer-term issue, his vital point about formed units appears, to put it mildly, pretty thin in the Cottam review. Although there is much in the review, about properly-resourced individual training and so on, that we as a party welcome, if it is the blueprint for the future, would he join me in urging the Government and those on our Front Bench to look hard at getting the idea of formed units more firmly written into the Cottam review?

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He served honourably in Territorial units and he

knows exactly what he is talking about. What he has just described is one of the problems. There are now very few Members of the House who have had the time, or whatever it may be, to serve in the military. Those who have done so, as Territorials or as regulars, will know exactly what the background is, and why this is so important. The formed unit principle is the backbone of the Army. The Marines, the Navy and the Royal Air Force are slightly different, in that they have specialist units. The Marines go as battlefield replacements, which is very different. The Army does not do that; it goes as a unit, because of the strength of the regimental system.

The Territorial Army also takes a lot of boys—and now girls—who in other walks of life would be in prison, or at least in serious trouble. It gives those people respect, meals, a uniform and above all, discipline. That is never talked about, but it is the reality. Those young kids are given a chance. How many young kids get the chance to serve their country while trying to do something else at the same time? The answer is very few.

Mr. Blunt: That is why the cuts to Army cadet training are so appalling, too. Those cuts need to be restored at the same time as this problem is addressed.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I thank my hon. Friend, who served honourably in the cavalry. There is absolutely no doubt that the cadets feed the TA, which feeds the regulars. It is a top-to-bottom Army. Who trains the cadets? It is mainly ex-Territorials or ex-regulars, who have the necessary experience. If we do not have those people, they will not be able to do that.

The crux of the argument is that TA units can augment local situations as well. If we get rid of the TA through not training it, it will not be available for deployment. Unless the Government give a firm commitment, not only now but for next year and the year after, that they are not going to cut the TA—an organisation of people who do this because they want to, and that has augmented from Dunkirk until now, and given 100 years of unselfish service—this will be a poorer country, and we will certainly have a poorer military, and a poorer TA.

5.27 pm

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley) (Lab): It is pleasing that we are having this debate, which will allow us to express our views, and our commitment to and support for the Territorial Army. There is an issue here, and a lot of hon. Members on both sides of the House believe in the TA and want this money reinstated. There is a minority who want to make political gain from this, but the TA is not a political football and it ought not to be used in that way. We need to ensure that its future is safe for ever and a day, and that there will always be people in this House who are willing to stand up and be counted when pressure, cuts or the reorganisation of the TA are discussed. We must ensure that that voice remains.

I spoke about this on Monday, when the Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Bill Rammell) drew the short straw. I accused him of being an apologist, and very emotional language was used in that debate. He has now taken the right decision, after the matter was taken away and considered by Ministers. It took the involvement of the Prime Minister to sort it out, but we have got the money back. We have achieved our objective, and I thank the

Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for listening and for doing the right thing by the TA. That is what this is about.

Sir Robert Smith: It is important, in the follow-through, that the Treasury really delivers this as extra money for the defence budget this year and does not find a way of taking it back from that budget by the back door.

Mr. Hoyle: This commitment to the armed forces, and the expenditure, have continued to increase, and I want to see that continue, to ensure that these proposals do not return once we get into the next financial year. The challenge that we are now leaving with the Ministers and the Treasury is to ensure that that does not happen.

This was also a problem in the 1990s, and people might say that they did not like what happened in the '90s. This experiment was tried by the previous Government at that time, and it failed. It failed miserably because, as far as the TA is concerned, we cannot turn the tap on and off. To say, "We don't want you today, but we'll come back for you in six months" is totally unacceptable. We should have looked at the history and realised that, if the experiment did not work in the '90s, it will certainly not work now. There is a lesson for us all, especially the Ministers, to learn here. When these matters are put before us, let us just dust them down and remember what happened previously.

I will explain what happened previously. A colleague of mine, Major Tom Ronagan, who is retiring a week on Thursday is the longest-serving major in the British Army. He joined as a boy soldier in 1962; he served in Aden right through to the Balkans; he is a major of 64th Sea Squadron Chorley Medical Regiment, formerly the King's Own Borderers, which has a great proud history. He said, "I saw this happen in the '90s. It was decimation. When the notice went out to say the TA cut was taking place, you could not keep up with the kit that was being thrown through the door at us." The then Government said, "We have got this wrong. We are changing our minds. We are going to put the money back into the TA." They ended up getting on the phone, ringing round to say "Please rejoin. Don't give up on the TA." Mistakes have been made in the past; those mistakes must never ever be made again. That is what we have to learn from this exercise; that is why it is so important to overcome political points scoring.

I rightly challenged the Prime Minister to intervene personally; in fairness, the Prime Minister did. I pay my thanks to him, as he took the right decision. It is always interesting to look back in the light of mistakes. The late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century have seen the TA assume an exceptionally high profile. It has moved from being a force of last resort to becoming the reserve of first choice in support of the regular Army. That is the key. The support the TA gives to the regular Army makes the concept of one Army so important: there is no difference between the Army in uniform and others training side by side. That concept has been badly dented, although I do not say destroyed. It has been badly affected. That is why it has to be rebuilt. Land Command has to realise that it is not a cheap shot to take on the TA when tough decisions have to be taken; it must not take this easy option again.

Mr. Brazier: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to interrupt his really excellent speech. As a point of detail, the Government got one thing

[Mr. Brazier]

right by having a focus for reservist advice in the centre, but does he agree that it is extraordinary that the director general of the Territorial Army, with 33,000 people in his organisation, is still only a one-star officer?

Mr. Hoyle: I totally agree: promotion is wanting and it should be given. I wholly agree, and the higher up the ranking we can go, the better it will be. Not so long ago, it only went up to brigadier; at least we have now achieved a general—only for the second time, I believe, so we should of course go up to a two-star officer. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct about that.

We can all score points, but we should think about the effect on our armed forces. We all remember the Balkans. When the Cheshires were serving out in the Balkans with redundancy notices in their top pockets, it had a devastating effect on recruitment and the future of the Army—just as this recent episode has done. Please, Ministers, learn from this. It is crucial to do so.

Afghanistan has, of course, proved a major challenge to the regulars and the TA. Serving out there is without doubt a challenge for both of them. We pay tribute to those who have lost their lives and those who have suffered horrendous injuries. There is no doubt that the investment we have put into the medical services has been crucial to getting people badly injured on the front line back to Selly Oak and to ensuring that they get the best of treatment. We must recognise that lives are saved that would previously have been lost. We must ensure that we never lose that commitment.

I also lost a constituent, Royal Marine Holland, who tragically died in Afghanistan. We know the heartfelt experience of seeing a body coming back to this country for burial; there is nothing more moving than seeing someone come home in those circumstances after serving their country. It is a tragedy when we lose so many young lives. We have to invest: whatever the requirement, whatever the need, we must meet it. We can do so only through commitment—and not, as I say, by point scoring. I want to touch on another issue very close to my heart—the Royal Gibraltar Regiment, which is not allowed to serve in Afghanistan. Although it has served in both Iraq and Afghanistan in the past, for some unknown reason someone has decided that it is not insured to serve in Afghanistan, which is an absolute tragedy. We were promised that the bar would be reviewed and lifted, but—I do not blame Ministers for this, because the matter never reached them—someone somewhere in the chain of command prevented that from happening. The regiment contains both regulars and TA members, and it seems ridiculous that people who wish to serve cannot do so. I hope that the Minister will investigate, will shake people up within the command structure, and will ensure that the decision can be changed.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Bill Rammell): I have asked for a meeting with officials tomorrow to discuss that very issue.

Mr. Hoyle: I am in danger of always congratulating the Minister: I must do so once again now. I welcome the news of that meeting, and hope that he will secure the right decision for the Royal Gibraltar Regiment.

I sometimes turn up to join the medical squadron at Chorley, which, backing up the 5 GS Medical Regiment, has played its part in Afghanistan. This year it has been deployed in Germany. We have also been deployed during a training exercise in Jersey, and we have been out to Cyprus. The TA is not backfilling purely for Afghanistan; it is backfilling in other parts of the British Army. That is what we are good at. We roll into whatever the requirement is, whenever we are called upon. Of the 69 in our strength, 29 have served in deployment during the last 12 months. I think that it is good that we can call on the TA in that way.

Let me say this to Ministers, and to all other Members who are present. We have learned a lesson, and, as I have said, I believe that that lesson will not be repeated. I hope that Ministers will take on board the message that the TA is important not just to the House but to the country.

Ann Winterton (Congleton) (Con): The hon. Gentleman seems to be approaching the end of an excellent speech, but before he finishes, will he tell the House how he believes the dented one-army concept that he mentioned could be undented? What does he believe the Government, the MOD, the regular generals and everyone else must do to reassure the TA that it is very much part of the overall Army structure, and that we are very proud of it?

Mr. Hoyle: The first solution was to reinstate the money, and I think that that has gone furthest towards achieving the aim to which the hon. Lady refers. As for the second solution, I think that Land Command, along with Secretary of State, ought to issue a statement saying how valued the TA is, and that it will continue to be valued. I think that that is where the repair ought to start and that it is the way in which to remedy some of the damage that has taken place, but I am sure that the Minister will come up with some other great ideas.

Mr. Swire: Does the hon. Gentleman not think it would also be appropriate for the Secretary of State, or even the Prime Minister, to summon business leaders to reassure them of the Government's commitment to the reserves and the TA, and encourage them to continue to release them when they are needed?

Mr. Hoyle: Absolutely. We cannot give thanks enough to the businesses in this country that allow their employees to go out to Afghanistan, or wherever they may be deployed. It interrupts business, and puts a strain on small businesses in particular. I cannot give enough thanks to the businesses in our area in Lancashire, because without doubt we would not have been able to deploy the numbers that we have deployed without their support. I want to be able to reassure businesses—and I am sure that the Minister has taken this on board—that the TA has a future, that we welcome their commitment to the TA, and that there will be an equally strong commitment from the Government. We must retain that link, and ensure that it will never be destroyed.

It will be a privilege to walk to the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday with the TA, and we must give thanks to it now that it has passed its 100th birthday. We have already celebrated the centenary of what is a modern TA—a TA that we look forward to seeing

throughout the next 100 years. There are many tough decisions ahead, but this Government must never, ever make the wrong decision again.

5.39 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): This has been an unhappy day for the Ministry of Defence and the ministerial team. It started off with a statement on Nimrod that exposed institutional flaws in MOD culture, and now Ministers have had to come to the Front Bench to acknowledge a volte-face as a result of the Prime Minister's direct interference.

There has been much recent talk that this House should become more responsive to events and that topical debates should respond to the events of the day. If such proposals had been put in place, we probably would not be having this debate, as it was chosen at a time when the future of the Territorial Army was under greater threat, with the threat of withdrawing £20 million—then reduced to £17 million—from the training budget. None the less, we are where we are and most of us welcome the fact that the Prime Minister has intervened and instructed the Secretary of State for Defence to return us to the position we were in about three days ago.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point about topical debates. It is worth remembering that this debate was called by the Conservative Opposition—and also that we forced the Government to make their U-turn on the decision—in a week when the topical debate is on the safety of fireworks. That is what the Government believe to be important.

Mr. Swire: Indeed, and I asked in last week's business questions whether we could have a debate in Government time on the TA, and I was told that that was being looked at. This debate is not being held in Government time of course, but it is worth pointing out that when the recent announcement was made from No. 10, the Prime Minister said it was the right thing to do. Yes, it was the right thing to do, and therefore cutting the TA training budget was manifestly the wrong thing to do. I think Members of all parties can be united in agreement on that.

Mr. Hoyle: We must dismiss that last point. Members from both sides of the House came together. Rightly, Back Benchers went to see the Prime Minister and put on a lot of pressure. The House working together is what changed the decision, and we should acknowledge that instead of engaging in this cheap political points scoring.

Mr. Swire: Yes, as I said, we are where we are. I do not believe there has been much political points scoring from those on the Conservative Benches. Quite a number of my hon. Friends are actively serving in the reserve forces and the TA, and often are not here in the Chamber because they are deployed in Afghanistan. It is hard to claim that they are trying to score political points.

The Secretary of State's speech and the rest of the debate have highlighted the confusion as to whether the Army is at full strength. The Army is clearly not at full strength, but, by the Secretary of State's own admission, the Treasury has not provided sufficient funds if the Army were at full strength. In other words, the Army is—as it ever was, and as it will continue to be—reliant

on the reserves and the TA. As has been pointed out, this economic recession—in large part created by this Government—has driven up the number of men and women who are queuing up to join both the TA and, in particular, the Regular Army. That could, perhaps, have been anticipated.

I want to say again that the recent political events have caused huge upset in the TA. I am not sure that the Government fully recognise the damage that has been done, and I therefore draw their attention to some of the websites on Facebook and the Army Rumour Service web forums so that they can see for themselves how those involved in the TA feel about what is going on. The word “closed” has been put over the TA sign in many instances. Of course the TA is not closed—quite the reverse—but I think the Government need to reassure the TA that it is an integral part of one Army and that it is appreciated for what it does. As I will continue repeating, and as the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) mentioned, the Government must also reassure employers, and particularly small employers who suffer disproportionately when their employees are sent abroad on active service, that they too are playing an integral part in this war in Afghanistan.

It is a war in Afghanistan. It is not an operation or a deployment; it is a war, and if the Government were to admit that, we might not have the cheese-paring of the defence budget that has got us into this situation in the first place.

I wish to discuss one more thing about the TA: how we look after its members when they are not deployed. Those in the Regular Army are quite well looked after even after they leave it, although there is a lot more that we could do on issues of mental health; we had a debate about that the other day. The difference is that when those in the TA return from active service they are, often within 48 hours or just a little longer, back to where they had left—in their regular jobs—without the supporting infrastructure of the regimental family, which can so often look out for those suffering mental distress as a result of having served. A disproportionate amount—I believe it is the majority—of those in the TA are serving, particularly in Afghanistan, as medics and come across far more horrific incidents than many of those in the regular forces. We need to examine what is being done should they encounter problems when they get home.

The reserves mental health programme, which has been available to TA and regular reservists since January 2003, is doing a good job. It is a helpful programme, but it does little to overcome soldiers' reluctance to come forward to discuss mental health issues. Again, it is much easier if problems can be identified within the regimental family or the unit, but it is much more difficult when people have disappeared back into the society from which they came. A Royal British Legion survey of 500 general practitioners conducted in spring 2009 across England and Wales found that 85 per cent. knew nothing about the programme. That is a completely unacceptable figure, and I ask the Minister to see what he can do to increase awareness of the programme for the TA when its members are not serving.

Mr. Brazier: My hon. Friend is making a very powerful point. Would he like to endorse remarks made by an individual from the King's centre, which is working on military mental health? It said that when the Territorials

[Mr. Brazier]

go as part of a formed unit with their own mates and their own officers the incidence of these problems is very much the same as in the Regular Army, but when they are taken off as individual reinforcements—this is for exactly the reasons that my hon. Friend has described—the incidences are much higher.

Mr. Swire: Yes, of course I do. That is why I welcome what the shadow Secretary of State has said about mental health follow-up telephone calls, as are made in America, to all those who have served in the forces, be they TA or Regular Army, for some years after they have been deployed and when they return.

I do not wish to detain the House for longer than I have to, because this debate almost need not take place now. I conclude by saying that on 8 November there will hardly be a Member from either side of this House who will not be taking part in Remembrance Sunday, honouring those who have given their lives for this country. When we stand in front of our Cenotaphs—I shall be in Exmouth, where we maintain that we have more wreaths than anywhere else, save the Cenotaph in London—we will not be remembering the gender or age of those who have died, we may not even be remembering the unit in which they served and we certainly will not be remembering whether they were in the regular forces, in the TA or in the reserve forces; we will be honouring them equally, because they have paid the ultimate price in giving their life for this country. If they are treated equally by us in death, so they should be treated in life by the Ministry of Defence.

5.48 pm

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North) (DUP): I wish to speak briefly on behalf of my party on this extremely important matter, which I and a number of other hon. and right hon. Members have raised at business questions over the past few weeks.

I very much welcome the Government's reversal of their original decision on this £20 million cut. In this short debate, we have listened to some very powerful speeches, particularly from Members who have served or are serving in the Territorial Army. It is important to hear their contribution because, as the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) has rightly said, we should be listening carefully to those Members who have first-hand experience and who know what it is all about.

I also respect the views expressed by other Members, such as the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), who spoke powerfully, too. Members of parties have taken a common position of great concern and anger, reflecting the views of our constituents and of those who have served and are serving in the reserve forces, at the decision that was originally announced by the Government a number of weeks ago.

Among Labour Back Benchers and in the ranks of the official Opposition, the Liberal Democrats and the minority parties, there is a common view that that was the wrong decision. I welcome the fact that the Government have taken that on board and have come forward quickly to reverse that decision. We know, as has been spelled out, the damage that would have been done to recruitment, retention and morale—I do not want to rehearse all those arguments. The important issue that has been

rightly highlighted and emphasised today is the longer-term damage that has been done. We can reverse the financial cut and restore the training and so on, which is quite right, but damage has been done, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton) and others, to the concept of one Army.

Morale and the difficulties that it will cause for the future will need to be addressed. The Government, those in charge of the Territorial Army and others in the regulars need to turn their minds to how they will tackle that issue. They must make it clear, as the hon. Member for Chorley said, that they will not repeat this mistake ever again. We must recognise the extremely valuable and important part that the Territorial Army plays in our armed forces and that we cannot turn on and off the training and all that goes with it and expect things to carry on as normal. If the men and women are needed, they should be there and able to respond with the necessary degree of preparedness.

I want to comment on an issue raised by the hon. Member for Bridgwater. The Territorials are the public face of the military in our constituencies. They are the face of recruiting and the men and women who will be seen on parade at Remembrance day events in the run up to Remembrance Sunday.

In my part of the world, Northern Ireland, we have the military band of the Territorial Army, which is now the only band in Northern Ireland that represents the armed forces. I received a number of representations, as did a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends, from members of the Territorial Army who were very concerned at the fact that they were being asked to come along to events to commemorate the service of so many in Northern Ireland over the years—the sacrifice that has been made by so many in our armed forces—but were being told, “If you're going to go along, you're not going to get paid. Indeed, you might not be given permission to go along at all.” That was extremely detrimental, demoralising and a terrible blow to those men and women. It would be a terrible signal to send out to the people in Northern Ireland, given the fantastic and gallant service and great sacrifice of our armed forces in Northern Ireland over the years.

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I attended a concert recently where the band of the Royal Irish Regiment was playing in aid of the Army Benevolent Fund. Is it not the case that if bands are cut back and are unable to perform in such a way, it affects not only the public face of the Army through the Territorial Army bands but the ability to raise money through the Army Benevolent Fund and other charitable organisations that supplement what the Government do for those who have paid a very high price, either through death or serious injury, and to help their families? For that reason, we should continue to support the bands and what they do.

Mr. Dodds: My right hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. The Royal Irish Regiment band has raised a tremendous amount of funds and resources, and he is right to highlight that important aspect of the debate.

It is right to put on record again the thanks of the whole House to the men and women of the Territorial Army for their sacrifice and work over the years on

behalf of our country. More than 1,000 men and women from Northern Ireland have been in operational deployment in Afghanistan and Iraq, and that is a significant proportion of the reserve force in Northern Ireland. They go willingly, but they deserve the full support of the Government and the Ministry of Defence.

They need to know that they will have the training that they need to achieve the necessary degree of preparedness. We have heard all sorts of elaborate and Machiavellian conspiracy theories in this debate about who might have been responsible for the cuts proposal in the first place. Whoever they are—whether they are in the Ministry of Defence or among the generals—they must learn the lesson from this episode, and from the strong feelings represented on both sides of the House this afternoon. That lesson is that never again can such an approach be taken, and that the Territorial Army and the reserve forces must get our full support as an integral part of the Army.

5.56 pm

Chloe Smith (Norwich, North) (Con): I rise to speak on behalf of the 20 members of A Company Third Royal Anglian Regiment who are being deployed to Afghanistan from my constituency. Previously, more than 100 members of that company have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, and a further 150 from the overall regiment will be going to Cyprus in 2011. That serves to underline the need for ongoing training, as I am sure that hon. Members from all quarters of the House agree. I join the tributes paid by this House at Prime Minister's Question Time and on other occasions to the work of our armed forces. I know that all hon. Members agree with me in that regard, too.

This political fiasco has rolled on for 48 hours, during which time I have been touch with the captain of A Company Third Royal Anglians. He is based locally in Norwich, and I want to highlight to the House a number of the things that he told me. Other hon. Members know far more about battlefield activities than I do, so my intention is to speak about the other activities that my local troops tell me that Territorial Army members undertake for their country.

Members of the Territorial Army devote a huge amount of unpaid time to their country. For example, they prepare lessons during the week, outside the training hours that we have been debating. They also make phone calls to troops and their families, and write endless e-mails—we all know how much time e-mails take up every day.

Not only do Territorial Army members run training, take part in training and see action on the battlefield, but they provide welfare for troops on deployment and for those troops' families. The Territorials' work includes running the family coffee mornings and doing the small but essential things that I hope that colleagues with more direct experience than me acknowledge have to take place.

My contact with troops in my constituency, and the political fiasco that has taken place here, have made it clear to me that the unpaid time that troops put in, and the good will that they commit, are not the only things that we must acknowledge. We must also be aware of the vulnerability that they suffer if they do not receive the training that they need, and of the fact that they need time and resources to carry out the welfare work for troops and families that I have described.

Of course, I join other hon. Members in welcoming the reinstatement of the training budget. I am sure that no one here would disagree with that, but the Government must take further steps to put matters right. It is not just a public relations disaster: it is also, as other hon. Members have made very clear, a disaster for morale, recruitment and retention. It is also a potential disaster for the future safety of our troops and our country if it is considered acceptable for a Government to execute such a U-turn when it comes to our troops' welfare.

The Government should be ashamed of themselves. If they are not ashamed already, I shall finish by quoting one further point from the A Company captain:

"We will have no formal representation at the Norwich Remembrance Parade as I won't insist that troops attend when they are getting no financial compensation (even travel expenses) and I am not authorised to spend money on fuel to run the Company minibus from Aylsham Road to the City Centre and back."

I see that hon. Members are shaking their heads at that. To me, that is shocking and something of which the Government should continue to be ashamed, even after the U-turn that they have made this week.

I welcome the constructive tone of the rest of the debate. There is much good feeling in the Chamber that should be built upon for the future, but there is still something rotten in the state of the MOD, if it is considered acceptable not to support troops, whether part-time or full-time, in getting to a Remembrance day ceremony. Many Members, myself included, are wearing poppies today, to show our support for the Royal British Legion and the work that goes into the run-up to 8 November this year and Remembrance day every year. Will the Minister—and, indeed, the now absent Secretary of State—join me by putting his hand in his pocket and giving 20 quid to my Norwich heroes?

6 pm

David T.C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): I begin by paying tribute to Rifleman Jamie Gunn, Private Kyle Adams and Private Richard Hunt, who lost their lives in Afghanistan. I spoke to some of their parents this morning. The experience of attending their funerals and meeting their families has made me realise beyond any doubt that the real cost of the war in Afghanistan is not measured in money. That is irrelevant. The cost is in human lives. That is one lesson that we should all remember.

My own military experience is far more humble than that of those soldiers or of many hon. Members. I spent 18 months in the Territorial Army in 104 Air Defence Regiment in Newport back in the 1980s, at a time when the TA was seen in a very different light from the way it is seen now. We were not seen as being quite the same as Regular Army troops, and we were often jokingly referred to as the SAS—the Saturday and Sunday soldiers, or in terms rather less polite than that.

However, I learned quite a few lessons from the experience. Perhaps the most important was this. We used to train in three different ways. We would turn up every Tuesday night, every other weekend and for two weeks at the annual camp. I presume that the training schedule is fairly similar today. The one thing that I knew even at the age of 18, without a lot of experience of life, was that that weekly training session, the so-called drill night, was extremely important.

[David T.C. Davies]

I do not know what was going through people's minds when they thought it would be a good idea to get rid of that training. Did they think that drill night meant just a number of people marching up and down, and that that was not important? That is not the case, and it has not been the case for any unit, as far as I am aware. Drill night consisted of a little bit of drilling, yes, but also vehicle maintenance, weapons training, fitness training, map reading—a host of activities, all of which are vital soldiering activities. More than that, there was something else going on that may not have been quite so obvious to us at the time. We were knitting together and becoming cohesive as a unit. It is very important that people who are full-time civilians and part-time soldiers think of themselves as soldiers on a regular basis. That is what that one night a week enabled us to do.

The amount of money that we were being paid was very small. At that time of my life, I was doing manual jobs, but I did not think the money was particularly great. Nobody was doing it for the money. It was not about the money and never has been for TA soldiers, because any one of them could go and earn far more doing something else if they wanted a part-time job. But the money is important, because it sends out a message to people who are willing to give that commitment. It sends a message that the state respects them and wants to thank them for the time that they are giving up.

I can speak from personal experience only about the late 1980s. It is quite different now. The level of commitment is much greater. I never thought for one minute that by joining the TA in Newport, I would ever be sent off to war. It is highly unlikely that I would have been, and in fact I never got beyond Salisbury plain, but people who join the Territorial Army these days know that it is very likely indeed that they will end up in a war zone. The regiment that I represent, the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers, has sent dozens of soldiers out to Iraq, where they have performed brilliantly. They will be deploying to Afghanistan later this year. These are people who have comfortable civilian jobs back in Monmouthshire, yet they are willing to spend six months of their life in a war zone for very little reward.

Dr. William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman accepts that many of the members of the TA have served with great distinction in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and that the Government need to show that they are a cherished part of Her Majesty's forces.

David T.C. Davies: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. This is about showing the Territorial Army that we respect its commitment. At least three TA soldiers have lost their lives already in the conflict in Afghanistan.

It is astonishing that anyone thought that it would be a good idea to save £20 million by scrapping the drill nights. The Secretary of State, who sadly is no longer in his place—perhaps he has other things to do—asked for suggestions for saving money, and I tried to intervene. If he wanted such suggestions, they are easy to find. The MOD spent more than 100 times that £20 million cut refurbishing its own offices at a cost of about £2.4 billion. It has spent millions of pounds on consultants during

the last few years. Presumably they are helping the equally well-paid MOD officials who cannot do their jobs properly without the consultants. Perhaps we could get rid of some of those consultants, or get rid of some of the MOD officials who cannot do their jobs without them. I am pretty certain that there is £20 million saving to be made there without affecting anybody's life. The MOD was even able to spend £250,000 on a work of modern art, because its spokesman said that they did not want pictures of dead admirals hanging around in the MOD headquarters.

I am pretty confident that, humble Back Bencher that I am, if I were given an afternoon in the Treasury I could come up with £20 million of cuts for the Government. I would start off by going through the back pages of *The Guardian* jobs section for the past 12 months, find everyone who got the jobs that were advertised and fire them all. Then I would look at anything with the word "equality" in it, because there would be a saving there as well.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk) (Lab): I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman has just said, but does he think, as he has just implied, that expenditure in the MOD should be led by the Treasury?

David T.C. Davies: If the hon. Gentleman goes back to what I said earlier, I do not believe that we should be thinking about money at all here. We are at war at the moment. My hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) made the point that we are at war, and he has more experience of the armed forces than any other hon. Member.

Many people have concerns about the operations that we are undertaking in Afghanistan, and many of those are not willing to express them too publicly because they greatly respect the valour and commitment of our armed forces out there. But it would be helpful if the Government could be a little more clear about what we are setting out to achieve. One moment they tell us that it is all about solving the drugs problem. Yet, as I know from my own work as a special constable, we do very little about drug dealers and drug users on the streets of this country. If we were serious about tackling drugs, it would be far better to put those drug dealers in jail for a long time than send young men and women out to Afghanistan. They say that it is about bringing democracy to Afghanistan, yet it has never had democracy. There is no culture of democracy there. I do not think that it is all that likely that we will build some kind of a liberal democrat paradise in the Hindu Kush overnight. Even if it were possible, I would have to ask why we are not trying to do that everywhere else in the world. Then they say that it is about al-Qaeda. It is perfectly legitimate for us to deal with that, but if it is about dealing with al-Qaeda training camps, why cannot we do what we did in Iraq for 10 years, when we simply used air strikes to bomb the bases that were causing us all of the problems, with very little loss of life? Unlike many hon. Members I am not a military expert and I do not have the answers, but many people are asking me the questions and they are difficult to answer, because the Government are not willing to put them over themselves.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Bill Rammell): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm whether, like his Front-Bench spokesmen, he believes that we should be in Afghanistan?

David T.C. Davies: The Minister has been a Member for longer than me, and he knows that as a Back-Bench Member, I do not have to follow the party line. I am not the sort of person who slavishly follows party lines; I am perfectly able to put over an opinion myself. He will be intelligent enough to realise that I have some concerns about his Government's policy.

Bill Rammell: And Conservative Front Benchers' policy.

David T.C. Davies: I have concerns about the Government's policy. My Front Benchers are not in government yet, but I am sure that they will be shortly.

Although I may have doubts about some aspects of Government policy, I have no doubt about this, and I do not think that anyone else will: if we are going to fight a war of any sort, we ought to ensure that the personnel are properly equipped; that there is enough manpower to see that when they have done their six-month tour of duty, they have enough time off for their family and are not simply sent out to another war zone a few months later; and that they are properly and adequately paid. They are not paid anything like enough for the work that they do and the sacrifice that they make. When I see money being wasted in other Departments, I am irritated that the first place to which the Government turn to look for cuts is the one place where all the money ought to be ring-fenced.

Mr. Donaldson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the issue is about not just how we look after our soldiers while they are on the field of battle, but how we look after them and their families at home and in their barracks? Is it not true that there is pressure on the budget to improve the infrastructure for military families, and that it is being cut? He referred to the huge amount of money spent on refurbishing the MOD building. Is it not unfair that soldiers and their families face the prospect of living in sub-standard accommodation because of further cuts?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I was beginning to feel that the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T.C. Davies) was enlarging the scope of the debate, and I am quite sure that he would be if he followed the line suggested to him by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson). I need to nudge the hon. Member for Monmouth back to the terms of the motion and the amendment.

David T.C. Davies: The right hon. Gentleman speaks sense on many occasions, and I have no need to elaborate.

Will Ministers look into the fact that many members of the Taliban are in this country, claiming asylum and getting houses while British soldiers live in substandard accommodation? I join colleagues who are incredulous that the Government considered making the TA cuts in the first place. I therefore welcome the fact that they have gone into reverse gear, and I hope that the Minister will be able to state that for the little time that he has left in office, he will never, ever again consider cutting funding for the Territorial Army or any other branch of the armed services while we remain at war.

6.12 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I add my contribution, as the chairman of the all-party Army group, to the very many magnificent speeches that we have heard, from all parts of the House, praising the

fantastic work that the Territorial Army has done and will do, not only on deployment in Afghanistan and Iraq but here at home. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (David T.C. Davies), who most recently did precisely that. His regiment, the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers, has the distinction of being the only regiment in the British Army to have "Royal" in its name twice. That is very unusual. It claims to be the senior regiment in the Territorial Army—outdone, of course, only by my regiment, the Honourable Artillery Company, which is many hundreds of years older than his.

David T.C. Davies: My hon. Friend will know that the Royal Monmouthshire Royal Engineers is a militia, and the militia usually takes precedence over the volunteers. Of course, my father served in his regiment, so I have no axe to grind either way.

Mr. Gray: The whole House will have the opportunity to thank the Territorial Army soldiers who are currently deployed in Afghanistan, when the all-party Army group next welcomes the brigade returning from that country. That is on Tuesday 18 November, at 3.30 pm, when soldiers will march once again through Carriage Gates, by kind permission of Mr. Speaker. I very much hope that hon. Members will join me there to thank those soldiers for all that they have done.

However, the important point is that many soldiers in that body of 120 people, or thereabouts, will be Territorial Army soldiers. I strongly support the concept of one Army and the fact that one cannot tell the difference between a regular soldier and a TA soldier. I differ slightly from my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire), who said that the TA should be deployed only as formed units. The one-Army concept means that most of the 20,000 TA soldiers who have been deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan have been trickle-deployed, not deployed as formed units. Nowadays, it is much better that our TA soldiers should be ready to be deployed individually in regular units rather than necessarily as formed units.

Mr. Brazier: That is not the view taken by the vast majority of TA officers. In practice, it means that lance corporals and privates get creamed off, and most places that are available to officers do not involve command and are of a fairly lowly nature.

Mr. Gray: My own experience of the TA and the contacts I have with TA personnel very much confirm what my hon. Friend says. It is of course true that soldiers of all kinds, whether regular or territorial, would much prefer to be deployed with their mates—with their battalion or unit, or whatever it may be. However, most of the brigades currently deployed in Afghanistan are very mixed, hybrid brigades—there is almost no regular battalion that will be deployed as a formed unit with nobody else attached to it. I am afraid that the days are long gone when we would like to think of our TA units as battalions marching out of the front gates of the drill hall, marching into battle, and coming back. I am not sure that that is a correct part of modern warfare.

There is an aspect of the debate with which I am a little uneasy. There has been almost a feeling of collective relief at the astonishing U-turn that the Government have performed in recent days, with praise for Ministers

[Mr. Gray]

for being so wise as to undertake it. There has been lots of talk about how it is a cross-party matter, and how it was really to do with the Army: "It was those funny generals—they did it. We Ministers went along with it for a bit, but now we have seen through it, and because we are wise Ministers we have reversed it and said, 'Please don't do that again, you naughty generals, because we're clever Labour Ministers and we're going to reverse it.'" I am sorry to bring an element of party political disagreement into the debate, but the fact is that this was done by a Labour Government.

Only two days ago, the Minister for the Armed Forces came along to the all-party group on reserve forces and told us how important it was that these cuts should go ahead. Then, under pressure, he said: "Well, all right, I'll tell you what we'll do. We won't cut this £20 million out of the TA budget, we won't close the TA down—we'll allow the boys to get together one Wednesday a month. Won't that help you? That will cost us £2.5 million. Aren't I being a nice Minister?" These cuts were made by the Government. If the Minister did not know about them, he jolly well should have done, and he must take responsibility for them. It was he and his colleagues who decided that the TA would effectively be closed down for six months from today. The notion that people could come back after that and go through their pre-deployment training, as the Minister kept saying, is absolutely nonsensical. The TA would effectively have been destroyed by the action that this Government took.

It is only because the Conservative party called today's debate and tabled this motion that the Government Whips, no doubt correctly, told their bosses that they were going to lose. They knew that there were plenty of Labour Back Benchers who would either vote with us or abstain, with the Liberal Democrats and the minor parties voting with us too. The Chief Whip got in touch with the Prime Minister and said, "You are going to lose a vote on Wednesday. You are going to be humiliated over this ridiculous decision you've taken about the TA, just as you were humiliated over the ridiculous decision you took about the Gurkha pensions. You, Mr. Prime Minister, are going to lose, and therefore we've got to find an extra £20 million. We're going to turn this round, not because we think it's the right thing to do but because we're yet again afraid of being humiliated in the House of Commons." That is a disgrace. This Government chose effectively to close down the TA for six months, and then, under pressure, they came back and said, "We're worried about this. We've suddenly realised that an awful lot of TA people will complain about it, so we'll give you one night a month back for training."

The decision was taken completely against the advice of the two-star generals and other senior people in the TA who advise the Government on this matter. They did not like it at all, but none the less went along with it. A two-star general, Major-General Simon Lator—a first-class general he is too—came along to the all-party group on Tuesday and was not permitted to speak by the Minister, who insisted that he should speak, that it was a political matter, and that he should take the decision. The generals and others who were at that meeting were not allowed to speak. It was interesting to see that they were totally opposed to it. This Government

decided to do this. They gave in very briefly with their one-night-a-month concept; now they have been forced, through straightforward political realities, to reverse their disgraceful decision.

I hope that when the Minister comes to the Dispatch Box, he will not palm us off with platitudes about how wonderful the Territorial Army is or say that he is somehow all in favour of it. I hope that he will apologise for the ridiculous decision that was taken and for being humiliated and having to turn it around.

6.19 pm

Mr. Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I am pleased to have the opportunity in the final stages of this debate to make a modest contribution about some aspects of the TA that have not been covered in depth. I should perhaps declare that as a schoolboy I was a cadet in the school cadet force, and at university I was a member of the air squadron reserve. I am told that had there been a war in the 15 years after I left the air squadron, I would have had a military role of air taxi to senior VIPs such as Government Ministers or generals. I am sure that that is not the only reason why people are hugely relieved that we did not have to go to war.

I wish to touch on aspects of the TA's functions that seem to have fallen out of the equation. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Chloe Smith) mentioned in her excellent contribution that the TA's role in support of the regular forces under the one-Army notion takes place not just in active theatre but in other operations beyond UK territory. For example, I understand that the commitment of British forces in Operation Tosca, the UN peacekeeping mission in Cyprus, is now entirely staffed by a TA company. Its strength varies according to circumstances, but up to 100 members of the TA are on duty in Cyprus at any time, more or less unsupported by regular forces. There are TA contributions to Operation Fingal, continuing contributions in Kosovo, and the much more commented-on contributions in Afghanistan and, in recent years, Iraq.

Had the cut in training gone through as proposed, the Government indicated that there would not be any shortfall in training for deployment into active theatre. However, it was not made at all clear whether it would affect deployment to other theatres and peacekeeping missions internationally. That aspect had been forgotten.

Secondly, I wish to mention the role that the TA plays in supporting the civilian powers. The green goddesses are no longer in commission, but the TA has a clear and distinct role in supporting the civilian powers' response to emergencies. That cannot be done without a degree of training. It is all very well to have bodies of men and women called up to provide support in an emergency, but they will be of no use whatever unless it is quite clear what their function will be. Providing clear instruction and direction during an emergency obviously requires training.

In recent times, the TA has been on stand-by and at the Government's disposal, although it has not been called up, to respond to flooding incidents all round the country. In 2007 in my own area, it was on stand-by to assist during the flooding in Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire.

The Government have had to contend with significant animal health challenges and emergencies in recent years, such as foot and mouth and the threats posed by

bluetongue, which thankfully has not materialised, and H1N1. On all those occasions, the Government had the resources of the TA at their disposal. The Royal Irish Regiment, which is based in Tern Hill in Shropshire, in my constituency, was tasked with a bluetongue response a very short time after coming back from active duty in Afghanistan. That may or may not have been an appropriate military decision, but with a fully functioning TA the Government had the option of using alternative forces had an emergency arisen. The idea that the TA would still have been available to help with civil contingencies if it had lost the ability to train for the period that was intended is simply not right.

The third aspect of the TA's role that I do not think has been properly expressed hitherto this evening is the link between the Army and civil society. The TA plays a considerable role in representing the Army and the other armed services in engagement with the public. Colleagues have discussed the role that it will play at Remembrance services over the next couple of weeks, but there is a continuous programme of education, and visits to schools, clubs and sports clubs for recruitment purposes. Many of us will have seen vans turning up in shopping centres and high streets in our constituencies on Saturdays. The people manning them and banging the recruitment drum are typically TA volunteers.

Regular units recruit from the TA, as a direct consequence of the exposure to the Army that the TA provides. In my own area, the Mercian Regiment has a current strength of 80, out of which, in the past 12 months alone, three officers and 11 soldiers were recruited directly into the regular forces. That is a very cost-effective recruitment method for the regular forces, and it simply would not happen if the TA did not meet regularly, and if TA members did not have the spirit, bonhomie and cadre that they get from their regular training.

The considerable anxiety that was expressed across the House by Members who have TA units within their constituencies was to do with that corps esprit. If there was no regular weekend connection between units in the TA, as appropriate each month, there would simply be no rationale to continue to turn up. The idea that the training tap can be switched on and off, as the Government seemed to indicate, was so far removed from the reality of what was happening on the ground as to stretch belief that the Government have any idea what the TA does on training nights.

In my area, there was a suggestion that people were thinking about their futures. Their families will already have had considerable concerns about the degree to which individuals commit themselves to the TA, which they do for very little monetary reward. If people were asked to volunteer for no reward at all, without any contribution to travel costs, or without confidence that anything would actually be happening if they turned up at the drill hall, another pressure would be brought to bear on them not to bother any longer and to go off and do their volunteering where it would be properly valued. That is another social factor that the Government completely failed to grasp.

I encourage the Minister to step forward to the Dispatch Box in a different spirit from that which he has had to have in the last 48 hours. He has had the most hapless task. During the excellent Adjournment debate on Monday evening, he listened to a very thoughtful contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for

North-East Milton Keynes (Mr. Lancaster), who speaks with considerable knowledge given his experiences on active duty with the TA, but was unable to offer any kind of defence for the Government proposals. He then had to spend Tuesday being berated—I presume with senior colleagues—by Labour Back Benchers, and by all accounts, generals. Later, he had to front up to the Prime Minister and tell him that he must change his mind. I suspect that that is not a task that any junior Minister relishes in the dying days of this Government. However, he is now in a position, in his response to the debate, to make a positive statement of the Government's commitment to the TA, which I sincerely hope he does.

6.29 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury) (Con): We have had an extremely good debate, with 10 speeches from Back Benchers. Most of them have been concise and to the point, and we must be grateful for that brevity. It was a debate of high quality—one speaker from the Democratic Unionist party, two Labour and seven Conservative speakers, but no Liberal Democrat Back Benchers.

I declare my interest, as entered in the register, as a medical officer in the Royal Naval Reserve. I also wish to express some sadness that so much grief could have been caused by an attempt to squeeze just £17.5 million from the Territorial Army. Ministers enthuse over the so-called one Army concept, and we have heard a lot about that this evening, as well as talk of reservists being twice citizens. Words are cheap, and I fear that Ministers' rhetoric has not necessarily been matched by their actions over the past two weeks.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Willie Rennie) wondered how the Secretary of State had got himself into such a mess. The hon. Gentleman was also uncharacteristically churlish about our motion, which my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) and I hastily crafted late last night when the Minister effected his U-turn. I did not see the Liberal Democrats in the Table Office, and it would of course have been open to them to have tabled an amendment.

As a regular and a reservist, I have seen just how easy it is to plunder the territorial, whether that be the TA, the special constabulary or the retained fire service. There is an almost institutional tendency for the top brass to recommend savings from reservists or part-timers. Territorials are caught in a sort of pincer movement between the generals and the accountants, with the budgeteers knowing full well that cuts to the TA produce immediate savings, while cuts to the regulars do not. I fear that Ministers have been badly advised throughout this, and it is a pity that they took the advice that they were being offered.

The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Frank Cook) was typically eloquent, but he is not in his place, so I shall not spend too much time praising him. He is a veteran of five parliamentary tours of Afghanistan and spoke passionately in support of the reserves and in favour of the one Army concept. He saw the paw prints of accountants over the past couple of weeks and he said, rightly, that those who know the price of everything often know the value of nothing. He doubted that there would be victory in Afghanistan, and by that I think that he meant victory in the classic sense. He thought

[*Dr. Andrew Murrison*]

that more resources should be given to our military and, in particular, to our reserve forces, and that accountants should be put in their place. There are plenty of accountants in this House who would probably disagree.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) is an ex-Territorial. He spoke extremely well about training and operating as one Army, and in favour of formed units, which come up in debate a lot in connection with the TA. We appreciate their importance, and my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) has been especially strenuous in his support for them and for command opportunities for people in the TA. We are grateful to him for that, and he is, of course, absolutely right.

It is difficult to serve in a formed unit if those involved do not train together, as I know full well. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater feared that the events of the past few days would cause lasting damage, and I think that we are all agreed, to a varying degree, that there will be a residue from how this has played out over the past four weeks or so.

In a typically impassioned contribution, the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) talked about the lessons of the past not being learned, and if that is the case it is a great pity—although the circumstances of today are very different to those that applied in the 1990s. He also talked about the one Army concept being badly dented by the past few days and hoped that Ministers would do what they can to restore the confidence that the Territorials have in his Government, which has been so seriously damaged.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) raised the important point about employers, who will have looked at what has happened over the past few days and wondered whether they were right to be helpful to those employees who are Territorials or reservists. Employers will reason, “Well, if the Government do not hold reservists in the esteem that they should, why should we go to the effort of sparing them and sustaining real cost in many cases?” That is an important point to make, and I hope that Ministers will send out the clear message to employers who might be tempted to think along those lines that, in fact, Territorials are an essential part of our military capability. I also hope that they will do what they can to repair any damage that might have been done by what has happened over the past fortnight or so.

My hon. Friend also talked about reservists’ mental health. It is important to reflect that Territorials in particular are at risk from mental health problems attributable to service. The reasons are very complex and have a great deal to do with the fact that regulars come back and are still part of a unit, whereas very often Territorials—in particular, augmentees—are not, and so are especially at risk. It is important that we look after them. He also pointed out rather poignantly that on Remembrance Sunday we will be remembering reservists and regulars equally. Again, he used that comment to demonstrate the importance of the one Army concept applying in reality. I should add that there is a naval equivalent—the concept of being all of one company.

The hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) commended the Government on reversing their position. I think that he was very generous in his remarks. He

pointed out what is obviously right—that the reversal of the Government’s position was the result of pressure from all directions. He also emphasised the importance of the one Army concept and talked about the damage to morale that the threat to funding causes, with particular reference to military bands and the unique circumstances and contribution of the men and women of Northern Ireland.

The offending in-year savings measures emerged in a Headquarters Land Forces letter dated 12 October. We should bear in mind that despite the largesse that emerged last night, the leaked cuts to the officer training corps, cadet forces, Army recruiting, capital work on soldiers’ accommodation and service schools endure. I hope that the Minister will touch on those matters when he responds.

On 14 October, the Prime Minister, when questioned on the TA cuts contained in the 12 October briefing note, gave every appearance of not having a clue what was going on. On Monday, we were then treated to a grudging one-night-a-month concession costing £2.5 million before the final climbdown on the TA, but not on the rest of the leaked cuts, including—this is the context of today’s debate—those to the OTC and Army cadets. That deeply worrying episode suggests two things. The first is that the Government simply did not understand the impact that the cuts might have had on the TA, and the second is that all rational thought has gone from the MOD ministerial corridor in the last days of this Administration.

The October Public Accounts Committee report on support to high-intensity operations noted that training for regulars for contingent operations was entering what was referred to as “hibernation” to fund deployment-related training—“hibernation” is a horrible term, but it appears to have crept into the military lexicography in recent years. The PAC expressed the fear that we would not be

“able to regenerate such capabilities...after hibernation.”

We might be able to tuck up regulars in a warm box, with plenty of straw, and wake them up in the spring, but Territorial soldiers do not “hibernate”. Without training, they will go and find something else to do, and they will never look back. Why has it taken two weeks of muddle for Ministers to accept something that, on the Conservative Benches at least, was blindingly obvious?

Ministers have told us that regulars are now being recruited to strength. They asserted that this triumph prompted the cuts that have caused so much heartache. The implications are quite staggering. They are saying that financial balance at the MOD has up until now assumed an under-strength Regular Army at a time when we are heavily engaged in conflict in Afghanistan. However, the Opposition try to be helpful when we can, so let us see whether we can help Ministers out of the financial conundrum that they are left to struggle with after the Government’s U-turn. Against their regular counterparts, Territorials are as cheap as chips. The National Audit Office has pointed out that non-deployed TA soldiers cost £10,000 a year, against £55,000 for a regular. The deployed costs will be lower too, given superannuation and the fact that in practice reservists do not have access to many of the regulars’ benefits.

The calculation has also been done by our allies, who, unlike us, have acted on it. One quarter of Britain’s total strategic forces is provided by the reserves. In the US,

Canada and Australia, the figures are 53, 42 and 41 per cent. respectively. Volunteer reservists, for example, make up 18 per cent. of trained strength in the UK, compared with at least 25 per cent. among our principal allies, yet this cost-effective force is set to decline even further, both in raw numbers and as a proportion of our overall strength. As we have heard, the note of 12 October says that TA trained strength was predicted to fall from 20,000 to 18,000 by April 2010, putting at risk the TA's ability to deliver 700 to 800 soldiers for Operation Herrick from 2012 onwards.

How could Ministers even contemplate such a thing? Although last night's spectacular U-turn is welcome, much irreparable damage will have been done. I expect that the Minister of State will have received sackloads of similar protests from Territorials and those who support them, not least from among his constituents in Harlow. We have certainly received such protests, but unfortunately time does not allow me to read them out, much as I would like to.

In April, the then Secretary of State endorsed each of the seven strategic recommendations in General Cottam's report on the strategic review of reserves. It is worth reminding ourselves of the central proposition, with a capital P, given in the report:

"Defence will offer the challenge and reward which attracts people to volunteer, and undertakes to train and support them throughout their Service, including when mobilised and recuperating." The report asserts in recommendation 3, which let us remember was accepted by the Government, that

"Training is pivotal to the Proposition."

Indeed, the Secretary of State endorsed that at the Dispatch Box on 28 April. How is it that the Government considered driving a coach and horses through a blueprint for the reserves that they signed up to just six months ago?

The latest wobble was the result of the Government's stated desire to focus all our efforts on Afghanistan, but expeditionary warfare has historically been the province of regular armies. Big state-on-state conflicts are inevitably the domain of irregulars. In presenting Territorials as second-class soldiers, Ministers are recklessly discounting unforeseen generic conflict or catastrophic civil contingency. May I remind Ministers that the Government's first priority is the defence of the United Kingdom? Important though a successful outcome of Operation Herrick undoubtedly is, nothing should divert us from that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Chloe Smith) made an excellent speech. She drew attention to A Company Third Royal Anglian, which is about to deploy, and we wish it well. She spoke powerfully about the cheese-paring that is so demoralising to both part-time and full-time troops. It also demoralises me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (David T.C. Davies), who is also an ex-Territorial, made an excellent contribution. He emphasised how much training fosters cohesion, and he was right to do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) engaged in typically fighting talk. He mentioned that he was a veteran of the Honourable Artillery Company, and he rightly highlighted its antiquity. May I gently point out to him that the Royal Navy was funded by King Alfred in the 9th century? My hon. Friend praised augmentees versus formed units. That is a debate for another day, but as an augmentee, I have a great deal of sympathy with what he said.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Dunne) also talked about the one Army concept. He rightly mentioned Operation Tosca, which I fear is often forgotten, but which is very important in the context of the Territorial Army.

I hope that the Minister will answer the points so comprehensively put by hon. Members. Let me add a few of my own. Will he comment on the Territorial Army civil contingencies reaction force, which was launched in 2002 with great fanfare, but which was never funded? Is it safe to assume from the Secretary of State's prevarication when challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on 28 April that that tasking is now defunct?

Will the Minister elaborate on the remarks made in April about the use of niche reservist skills and support for stabilisation operations and the Department for International Development? Will he also say what funding transfer will take place to permit such employment, a point that was ducked in the response to my hon. Friend on 28 April? What timeline exists for the Cottam review implementation team? When will the detailed single-service analysis required by General Cottam and accepted by Ministers be reported to the House?

Let me gently remind the Minister of the fate of the last Government who tried to short-change the militia. Let me also express the hope that he will prove equal to the task of regaining the trust of the men and women of the Territorial Army, who have been so badly served over the past fortnight.

6.44 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Bill Rammell): We have had a genuinely good debate today, and I would like to thank all Members for their contributions. I will start on a note of consensus, and we shall see how long I can keep that going. The arguments in the debate have revealed that there is palpable consensus across all parties on support for the Territorial Army. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the decision-making process have been over recent weeks, I acknowledge, on behalf of the Government, that the cross-party support for the TA has been clear, consistent, important and influential. I wish to pay tribute to the work of the TA, without whose efforts, dedication and professionalism our defence capability in this country would be much, much weaker.

I should like to respond directly to the point raised by the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) about the structural disbandment of the civil contingency reaction force. The decision to remove the requirement for the reserve forces to train the CCRF was taken in line with the recommendation of the reserves review, which received significant cross-party support when it materialised. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 placed a much greater emphasis on the civil authorities providing resilience in times of emergency, thus removing some of the liability that had previously been held by the reserve forces. The removal of the requirement to train the CCRF did not affect the size of the reserve forces, and the entire UK reserve forces remain ready to support UK resilience operations in times of emergency. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be reassured by that.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Clearly, everyone welcomes the rethink on the £20 million for TA training. The armed forces review has caused some pain in the TA in my constituency, however, because it

[Paul Farrelly]

has led to the disbanding of the 58th Signals Squadron. That has clearly been the result of an Army decision to reorganise its signals function. However, the base in Cross Heath in Newcastle is used not only by the TA but by Army and Air Force cadets. Can my hon. Friend give me an assurance that that building will not close, and that the team at the Ministry of Defence will liaise with the cadets to ensure that they have a base from which to operate? The cadets are the recruits of the future.

Bill Rammell: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. The decision involving the communications-driven exercise to which he refers has affected a number of regiments across the country, and I believe that it was the right decision. However, we do not intend to close TA bases as a result of it. I hope that that gives him some reassurance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Frank Cook) demonstrated his long-standing commitment to the Territorial Army. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) on his 12 years' experience as a member of the TA. I pay tribute to the commitment of my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) and to his dedication to defence matters, particularly those involving the TA. He referred cogently to his and his constituents' experience of the real TA cuts under the last Conservative Government in the 1990s. He made that point very powerfully. He also asked me about the Gibraltar Regiment—an issue about which I know he is concerned. There is a moratorium on deployment at the moment because of concerns about the applicability of the armed forces compensation scheme and the way in which that relates to the Gibraltar Regiment. I understand my hon. Friend's concern and, as I said to him earlier, I am meeting officials tomorrow and I will try to come back to him on that as quickly as possible.

The hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) made a number of criticisms about the in-year measures, particularly about what he described as the cheese-paring of the defence budget. I would simply say to him that, at just under 2.5 per cent. of gross domestic product, UK defence spending is high by international standards—[*Interruption.*] This is a serious point. In cash terms, we spend more on defence than any country except the United States of America and China. In that context, I want to ask for some realism in our debates about what we can afford for defence.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about mental health issues. Let me reassure him that the reserves mental health programme is an important strand of our work. It has been well addressed in the MOD, and includes the setting up of helplines and the provision of staff to support it. There is a need, as he said, to ensure that it is communicated across the TA, which is what we are determined to do.

The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Dunne), in what I thought was a measured and good contribution, made a number of important points. He asked me about the previous changes that we had announced and their impact on pre-deployment training. Let me be clear that, even though we are now in a different position, those changes would not have affected pre-deployment training—to Afghanistan, or indeed to any other deployment.

I was going to pay tribute to the work of the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) in the all-party group—until I heard what he had to say. Nevertheless, I will pay tribute—[*Interruption.*] “They don't like it up 'em,” he says, but I will pay tribute to the work he does. On the decision making, it is a reality that this proposal was recommended by Land Forces and endorsed by the Chief of the General Staff. Nevertheless, we—Ministers and the Secretary of State—accept responsibility for it. That is where I have to say that I found the hon. Gentleman's attack on my role in coming to the all-party group on Monday a little wide of the mark. I deliberately took responsibility, instead of the general, for responding to the debate and to questions at the all-party group meeting because the decision was a political one, for which I felt responsible.

Mr. Brazier: May I endorse the point that the Minister has been extremely generous in giving his time to the all-party group? We all welcome the frank exchanges there.

Bill Rammell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that; I know about the incredibly good work he does on behalf of the Territorial Army.

The hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) made an important contribution about the TA's role in his constituency. I would genuinely like to congratulate the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Chloe Smith), who I know is new to the House, on her speech. She made a trenchant criticism of the Government—and in that, she is following in the footsteps of her predecessor, who was both an honourable and a genuine friend of mine.

The hon. Member for Monmouth (David T.C. Davies) made a number of criticisms. Through an intervention, I was able to make clear to him that his view of our role in Afghanistan differs not only from that of the Government, but from that of his own Front-Bench team. It is important to underline that despite the difficulties in Afghanistan, there is a clear and vast majority of MPs across the parties in support of what we are doing. That point should be made clear.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Willie Rennie), who leads for the Liberal Democrats, started very well, decrying the fact that the official Opposition had engaged in a cheap stunt by altering their motion overnight to refer to the role of the Leader of the Opposition. Despite that, however, and despite the fact that £20 million is on the table from the Treasury to reverse the initial decision, the hon. Gentleman says that he is nevertheless going to vote with the Conservative Opposition this evening. I have to say that that is an even more confusing Liberal Democrat policy formulation process than is usually the case.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife also asked the Government to trust him and the House to be more involved in the decision-making process. Let me be clear that we face difficult challenges, and that I would like to do that. If we are going to do it, however, he and his party will have to face up to reductions in spending as well as increases, as that is the only realism that will allow us to move forward. In that regard, I have to say that I am not holding my breath.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me what would be sacrificed because of the changes announced in the last 24 hours, and what impact they would make on the

Ministry of Defence. Let me be clear again that there will be no impact on the Ministry of Defence, as we have been able to manage the change through £20 million of additional funding from the Treasury—no ifs, no buts: this is additional money.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) started by saying that he welcomed the Government's decision, which he felt was the right one. He then talked about regular Army recruitment, which clearly costs more in training, saying that we should provide that money. I agree, but his argument is, of course, fatally undermined by the fact that he proposes not one penny extra in defence expenditure on top of what the Government are proposing. The immediate slashing of public spending to deal with the public deficit would make the job of any Government in managing our defence expenditure that much more difficult. I know that in private the hon. Gentleman shares that view, but he is hamstrung by the views of his Front-Bench colleagues. He is also holed below the water by the fact that people judge politicians not by what they say, but by what they do. Under this Government, defence expenditure has increased by 11 per cent. in real terms. In the last five years of the Conservative Government there were half a billion pounds' worth of cuts in defence each year. That is the reality, and I think it should be proclaimed loud and long.

Neither I nor the Government will take lectures from the Conservative party on the TA. I say that very clearly and very precisely, because it was the last Conservative Government who cut Territorial Army liability numbers by a third in four years, from 90,000 to just over 60,000, at the same time as cutting the TA training budget. As I said earlier, the fact is that if we started slashing expenditure now to tackle the deficit, as the hon. Gentleman and his Front-Bench colleagues would have us do, none of this could be achieved without cuts significantly worse than those that were considered, and it is dishonest to suggest otherwise.

Some criticisms have been made of the decision-making process. It has been said that we have performed a U-turn. Again, I will not take lectures on U-turns. A few weeks ago the shadow Chancellor, the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), told *The Times* that he would engage in £30 billion-worth of defence cuts to the A400M aircraft programme, which involves two aircraft carriers. The following day, he was forced to retract that statement.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): I must tell the Minister that that is an untruth. *The Times* printed an untruth. That is not what the shadow Chancellor said.

Bill Rammell: It was clearly printed as a result of discussion in which the shadow Chancellor had engaged, and I know for a fact that the Tory Front Benchers were very concerned about that commitment.

The hon. Member for Westbury made a number of stringent attacks on me and on my ministerial colleagues. I understand his frustration. If the leader of my party had told General Dannatt that our defence team lacked expertise in defence matters, I would be frustrated as well. That is, of course, what the Leader of the Opposition told General Dannatt about the Conservative Front-Bench team.

Let me conclude by making very clear that the Territorial Army and the UK reserve forces are an absolute credit to this country. In the last decade they have proved their worth as never before. As we speak, they are serving alongside our regular forces in Afghanistan, and Afghanistan must come first in terms of defence. That means not only drawing on the Treasury's reserves for the operations themselves, but looking across the defence budget to prioritise the activities that support our efforts in Afghanistan. It means that we must make tough choices on resources, and that is the reason for the process of decision-making in which we have engaged in recent weeks.

Nevertheless, I think it right and proper for any Government who make a decision to listen to criticism and to concerns. We have heard representations from across the House. We understand the concerns that have been raised, particularly with regard to Territorial Army retention. We have now received assurances from the Treasury that this year additional ring-fenced money will be made available to ensure that the measures on TA training are no longer required, and the normal TA training regime will be restored as quickly as possible. That is important.

As for the future, the Department undertakes an annual planning round in order to prioritise and allocate available resources for the next year. I can confirm today not only that we are making those changes, but that we do not plan to reduce levels of training available to members of the Territorial Army as part of the process. Perhaps Opposition Members would indicate whether they support that approach.

Let me make it clear that we are absolutely right to put Afghanistan first. It is not possible to preach austerity, as the Opposition do, and then call foul whenever a measure is proposed to relieve budget pressures. We have listened: responsive government is right. There are those who will criticise us for changing our minds, but there are those who would have criticised us for obstinacy and irresponsibility had we done the opposite. That is politics. We were determined to do the right thing, that is what we have done, and I urge my colleagues to support me in the Chamber this evening.

Question put (Standing Order No. 31(2)), That the original words stand part of the Question.

The House divided: Ayes 213, Noes 293.

Division No. 233]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Afriyie, Adam	Boswell, Mr. Tim
Ainsworth, Mr. Peter	Bottomley, Peter
Alexander, Danny	Brake, Tom
Amess, Mr. David	Brazier, Mr. Julian
Ancram, Mr. Michael	Breed, Mr. Colin
Arbuthnot, Mr. James	Brokenshire, James
Atkinson, Mr. Peter	Brooke, Annette
Baldry, Tony	Browne, Mr. Jeremy
Barker, Gregory	Browning, Angela
Baron, Mr. John	Burns, Mr. Simon
Barrett, John	Burrows, Mr. David
Beith, Mr. Sir Alan	Burstow, Mr. Paul
Bellingham, Mr. Henry	Burt, Lorely
Benyon, Mr. Richard	Butterfill, Sir John
Binley, Mr. Brian	Cameron, Mr. David
Blunt, Mr. Crispin	Carmichael, Mr. Alistair
Bone, Mr. Peter	Cash, Mr. William

Chope, Mr. Christopher
 Clappison, Mr. James
 Clark, Greg
 Clifton-Brown, Mr. Geoffrey
 Cox, Mr. Geoffrey
 Curry, rh Mr. David
 Davies, David T.C.
 (Monmouth)
 Davies, Philip
 Djanogly, Mr. Jonathan
 Dodds, Mr. Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Mr. Jeffrey M.
 Dorrell, rh Mr. Stephen
 Dorries, Nadine
 Duddridge, James
 Dunne, Mr. Philip
 Ellwood, Mr. Tobias
 Evennett, Mr. David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, Mr. Michael
 Featherstone, Lynne
 Foster, Mr. Don
 Fox, Dr. Liam
 Francois, Mr. Mark
 Fraser, Christopher
 Gale, Mr. Roger
 Garnier, Mr. Edward
 Gauke, Mr. David
 George, Andrew
 Gibb, Mr. Nick
 Gidley, Sandra
 Gillan, Mrs. Cheryl
 Goodman, Mr. Paul
 Goodwill, Mr. Robert
 Gove, Michael
 Gray, Mr. James
 Green, Damian
 Greening, Justine
 Greenway, Mr. John
 Grieve, Mr. Dominic
 Gummer, rh Mr. John
 Hague, rh Mr. William
 Hammond, Mr. Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, Mr. Mike
 Hands, Mr. Greg
 Harper, Mr. Mark
 Harris, Dr. Evan
 Harvey, Nick
 Hayes, Mr. John
 Heald, Mr. Oliver
 Heath, Mr. David
 Heathcoat-Amory, rh
 Mr. David
 Hemming, John
 Hendry, Charles
 Herbert, Nick
 Hermon, Lady
 Hoban, Mr. Mark
 Hollobone, Mr. Philip
 Holloway, Mr. Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Horwood, Martin
 Howard, rh Mr. Michael
 Howarth, Mr. Gerald
 Howell, John
 Hughes, Simon
 Hunt, Mr. Jeremy
 Hunter, Mark
 Hurd, Mr. Nick
 Jack, rh Mr. Michael
 Jackson, Mr. Stewart

Jenkin, Mr. Bernard
 Jones, Mr. David
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Key, Robert
 Kirkbride, Miss Julie
 Knight, rh Mr. Greg
 Laing, Mrs. Eleanor
 Lait, Mrs. Jacqui
 Lamb, Norman
 Laws, Mr. David
 Leigh, Mr. Edward
 Letwin, rh Mr. Oliver
 Lewis, Dr. Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr. Ian
 Lidington, Mr. David
 Llywd, Mr. Eifyn
 Loughton, Tim
 Luff, Peter
 Mackay, rh Mr. Andrew
 Main, Anne
 Malins, Mr. Humfrey
 Maples, Mr. John
 Maude, rh Mr. Francis
 May, rh Mrs. Theresa
 McCrea, Dr. William
 McIntosh, Miss Anne
 McLoughlin, rh Mr. Patrick
 Miller, Mrs. Maria
 Milton, Anne
 Mitchell, Mr. Andrew
 Moore, Mr. Michael
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mundell, David
 Murrison, Dr. Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newmark, Mr. Brooks
 O'Brien, Mr. Stephen
 Öpik, Lembit
 Osborne, Mr. George
 Ottaway, Richard
 Paice, Mr. James
 Paterson, Mr. Owen
 Penning, Mike
 Penrose, John
 Pickles, Mr. Eric
 Prisk, Mr. Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pugh, Dr. John
 Randall, Mr. John
 Redwood, rh Mr. John
 Reid, Mr. Alan
 Rennie, Willie
 Robathan, Mr. Andrew
 Robertson, Hugh
 Robertson, Mr. Laurence
 Rogerson, Dan
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rowen, Paul
 Ruffley, Mr. David
 Russell, Bob
 Sanders, Mr. Adrian
 Scott, Mr. Lee
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, Grant
 Shepherd, Mr. Richard
 Simmonds, Mark
 Simpson, Mr. Keith
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Sir Robert
 Soames, Mr. Nicholas
 Spicer, Sir Michael
 Spring, Mr. Richard

Steen, Mr. Anthony
 Streeter, Mr. Gary
 Stuart, Mr. Graham
 Swayne, Mr. Desmond
 Swinson, Jo
 Swire, Mr. Hugo
 Syms, Mr. Robert
 Taylor, Mr. Ian
 Taylor, Matthew
 Teather, Sarah
 Thurso, John
 Timpson, Mr. Edward
 Tredinnick, David
 Turner, Mr. Andrew
 Tyrie, Mr. Andrew
 Villiers, Mrs. Theresa
 Walker, Mr. Charles
 Wallace, Mr. Ben
 Waterson, Mr. Nigel
 Watkinson, Angela
 Webb, Steve

Whittingdale, Mr. John
 Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
 Willetts, Mr. David
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mark
 Williams, Mr. Roger
 Williams, Stephen
 Willis, Mr. Phil
 Willott, Jenny
 Wilson, Mr. Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Winterton, Ann
 Winterton, Sir Nicholas
 Wright, Jeremy
 Yeo, Mr. Tim
 Young, rh Sir George
 Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bill Wiggin and
Mr. Stephen Crabb

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Ainger, Nick
 Ainsworth, rh Mr. Bob
 Alexander, rh Mr. Douglas
 Allen, Mr. Graham
 Anderson, Mr. David
 Anderson, Janet
 Armstrong, rh Hilary
 Atkins, Charlotte
 Austin, Mr. Ian
 Austin, John
 Bailey, Mr. Adrian
 Baird, Vera
 Balls, rh Ed
 Banks, Gordon
 Barlow, Ms Celia
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begg, Miss Anne
 Bell, Sir Stuart
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Benton, Mr. Joe
 Berry, Roger
 Betts, Mr. Clive
 Blackman, Liz
 Blackman-Woods, Dr. Roberta
 Blears, rh Hazel
 Blunkett, rh Mr. David
 Borrow, Mr. David S.
 Bradshaw, rh Mr. Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr. Nicholas
 Browne, rh Des
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Colin
 Burnham, rh Andy
 Butler, Ms Dawn
 Byrne, rh Mr. Liam
 Cairns, David
 Campbell, Mr. Alan
 Campbell, Mr. Ronnie
 Caton, Mr. Martin
 Cawsey, Mr. Ian
 Chapman, Ben
 Chaytor, Mr. David
 Clapham, Mr. Michael

Clark, Ms Katy
 Clark, Paul
 Clarke, rh Mr. Charles
 Clarke, rh Mr. Tom
 Clelland, Mr. David
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Mr. Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cohen, Harry
 Connarty, Michael
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Crausby, Mr. David
 Creagh, Mary
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, Mrs. Ann
 Cummings, John
 Cunningham, Mr. Jim
 Cunningham, Tony
 David, Mr. Wayne
 Davidson, Mr. Ian
 Davies, Mr. Dai
 Davies, Mr. Quentin
 Dean, Mrs. Janet
 Denham, rh Mr. John
 Dhanda, Mr. Parmjit
 Dismore, Mr. Andrew
 Dobbin, Jim
 Dobson, rh Frank
 Donohoe, Mr. Brian H.
 Doran, Mr. Frank
 Drew, Mr. David
 Eagle, Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Efford, Clive
 Ellman, Mrs. Louise
 Engel, Natascha
 Ennis, Jeff
 Farrelly, Paul
 Field, rh Mr. Frank
 Fisher, Mark
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Mr. Robert
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Follett, Barbara
 Foster, Mr. Michael
 (Worcester)

Foster, Michael Jabez
(*Hastings and Rye*)
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Mr. Bruce
Gerrard, Mr. Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Mr. Roger
Goggins, rh Paul
Goodman, Helen
Griffith, Nia
Griffiths, Nigel
Grogan, Mr. John
Gwynne, Andrew
Hain, rh Mr. Peter
Hall, Mr. Mike
Hall, Patrick
Hamilton, Mr. David
Hanson, rh Mr. David
Havard, Mr. Dai
Healey, rh John
Hepburn, Mr. Stephen
Heppell, Mr. John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs. Sharon
Hood, Mr. Jim
Hoon, rh Mr. Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Mr. George
Howells, rh Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Mr. Lindsay
Humble, Mrs. Joan
Hutton, rh Mr. John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Mr. Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
James, Mrs. Siân C.
Jenkins, Mr. Brian
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Ms Diana R.
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr. Kevan
Jones, Lynne
Jones, Mr. Martyn
Jowell, rh Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keeley, Barbara
Keen, Alan
Keen, Ann
Kelly, rh Ruth
Kemp, Mr. Fraser
Kennedy, rh Jane
Khan, rh Mr. Sadiq
Kidney, Mr. David
Knight, rh Jim
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, rh Mr. David

Laxton, Mr. Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Mr. Ivan
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Mr. Andrew
Lucas, Ian
MacShane, rh Mr. Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Mr. Khalid
Malik, Mr. Shahid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Mr. Gordon
Marshall-Andrews, Mr. Robert
Martlew, Mr. Eric
Mason, John
McAvoy, rh Mr. Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCarthy, Kerry
McCarthy-Fry, Sarah
McCartney, rh Mr. Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFadden, rh Mr. Pat
McFall, rh John
McGovern, Mr. Jim
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, rh Mr. Tony
Meacher, rh Mr. Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, rh David
Miliband, rh Edward
Mitchell, Mr. Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moon, Mrs. Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Julie
Morley, rh Mr. Elliot
Mudie, Mr. George
Mullin, Mr. Chris
Munn, Meg
Murphy, Mr. Denis
Murphy, rh Mr. Paul
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, rh Mr. Mike
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pelling, Mr. Andrew
Plaskitt, Mr. James
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Bridget
Prentice, Mr. Gordon
Primarolo, rh Dawn

Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Mr. Ken
Purnell, rh James
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, rh Mr. Nick
Reed, Mr. Andy
Reed, Mr. Jamie
Riordan, Mrs. Linda
Robertson, Angus
Robertson, John
Rooney, Mr. Terry
Roy, Lindsay
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Christine
Ryan, rh Joan
Sarwar, Mr. Mohammad
Seabeck, Alison
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Mr. Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Mr. Siôn
Skinner, Mr. Dennis
Slaughter, Mr. Andy
Smith, rh Mr. Andrew
Smith, rh Angela E.
(*Basildon*)
Smith, Geraldine
Smith, rh Jacqui
Snelgrove, Anne
Soulsby, Sir Peter
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh Mr. John
Spink, Bob
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Mr. Jack
Sutcliffe, Mr. Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari
Taylor, David

Taylor, Dr. Richard
Thomas, Mr. Gareth
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Mr. Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mr. Mark
Touhig, rh Mr. Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Mr. Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond
Turner, Mr. Neil
Twigg, Derek
Ussher, Kitty
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Joan
Waltho, Lynda
Watson, Mr. Tom
Watts, Mr. Dave
Weir, Mr. Mike
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, rh Malcolm
Williams, rh Mr. Alan
Williams, Mrs. Betty
Wilson, Phil
Winnick, Mr. David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, rh Mr.
Shaun
Woolas, Mr. Phil
Wright, Mr. Anthony
Wright, David
Wright, Mr. Iain
Wright, Dr. Tony
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Steve McCabe and
Mr. Bob Blizzard

Question accordingly negated.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31(2)),
That the proposed words be there added.

Question agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House expresses its continued support for the role of the Territorial Army (TA); notes that the reserve forces have contributed some 20,000 personnel to operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Balkans since 2002, most of them from the Territorial Army, and that 14 Territorials have died on those operations; welcomes the Government's additional £20 million ring-fenced by the Treasury for Territorial Army training; and further welcomes the Government's policy to ensure that TA members deployed to Afghanistan are fully and properly trained for their role and to ensure that, for all TA members, normal training will take place in the evening and at weekends."

Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority

7.15 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Barbara Keeley): I beg to move,

That Sir Stuart Bell, Liz Blackman, Nick Harvey, Mr Don Touhig and Sir George Young be appointed under Schedule 3 to the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009 as members of the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority until the end of the present Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, this motion, tabled in the name of my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House, has been brought forward at your request. It sets out the nominees for membership of the new Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliament Standards Authority. It will follow similar lines to the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, and its composition and functions are defined in the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the Deputy Leader of the House, but this is an important matter. There might be a debate on it after the Minister has spoken, so it would be appreciated if hon. Members who do not want to take part in it could please leave the Chamber quickly and quietly.

Barbara Keeley: As I was saying, the Committee's composition and functions are defined in the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009.

There are five nominees who will sit alongside three ex officio members. The first of the ex officio members is you, Mr. Speaker. The others are my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House of Commons and the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) in his new capacity as Chairman of the Standards and Privileges Committee. At your request, Mr. Speaker, the three Front Benches have put forward names, and I therefore see no reason why those names should not be acceptable to all sides of the House.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Barbara Keeley: No. My comments will be very brief, and there will be opportunities—

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Will the Minister give way?

Barbara Keeley: No, I will not give way at the moment.

The Parliamentary Standards Act gives the Speaker's Committee two functions: to ratify the nomination of the Parliamentary Standards Authority chair and board members before they are put before the House, and to approve the estimate for the Parliamentary Standards Authority—in other words, its funding.

The motion asks the House to appoint the remaining five members of the Committee. On behalf of the Government, and I hope the whole House, I commend it to the House.

7.17 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire) (Con): I want to add a brief footnote to what we have just heard from the Deputy Leader of the House, and to

speak in favour of the motion. It appeared rather suddenly on today's Order Paper, but I hope that it is non-controversial.

We on this side of the House support the creation a Speaker's Committee on IPSA, in accordance with the Act that was passed in July, with my party's support. We supported the Act because we strongly believe that MPs should no longer be placed in a situation where they determine their own allowances. We now look forward to the report from Sir Christopher Kelly to provide a blueprint for IPSA to work from. The leak of some its recommendations is extremely regrettable.

The Parliamentary Standards Act specifies the membership of the Speaker's Committee and the names now appear on the Order Paper. I welcome those names, and I look forward to working with them.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that I should not put this question to you, but I shall put it to my right hon. Friend. Does he think that the Committee is broadly enough based, and that it reflects the views of relatively new and young Members of the House? Their future is important to the House, and to the Government of the country, so should not the Committee be slightly more representative of the House as a whole, rather than of the great and the good?

Sir George Young: I imagine that, if my hon. Friend felt that the names before the House were not appropriate, he could have tabled an amendment proposing alternatives more in keeping with his views. Speaking for myself, I find the names on the Order Paper perfectly acceptable. I declare an interest, and I look forward to working with the people proposed in the motion.

Bob Spink (Castle Point) (Ind): How can the right hon. Gentleman expect the public to have confidence in a so-called independent Committee that is made up of the usual suspects who have so patently failed to carry public confidence with them over the years? They also failed to accept the reforming suggestions to sort out the allowances contained in the early-day motion tabled two years ago by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Davies) and myself.

Sir George Young: The answer to the hon. Gentleman is that IPSA is independent. All we are doing this evening is appointing a Committee to oversee the appointment of the chairman and the members of the committee. If the hon. Gentleman wants an assurance that IPSA will be independent, I hope that he got that in the debate that we had in July when IPSA was set up—an organisation for which I think he voted in the Lobby.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): My right hon. Friend repeated what the Deputy Leader of the House said about the limited role of the Committee, but does he not see that it would also have a role under section 5(4)(d) of the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, which provides that

"In preparing or revising the scheme"—
for MPs' allowances—

"the IPSA must consult . . . any committee of the House of Commons nominated by the Speaker".

Is that not the same Committee that we are discussing this evening?

Sir George Young: Yes, but if my hon. Friend looks at that list, he will see that it is a very comprehensive list indeed, including Members of the House of Commons. I cannot think of a more embracing category than that. The fact that IPSA will also consult the Committee that is being constituted this evening is in no way exclusive and does not preclude other Members from giving their views.

It is up to you, Mr. Speaker, to nominate both the membership of the board of IPSA and the Commissioner for Parliamentary Investigations—

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: May I make a little progress?

It is up to the Speaker's Committee to discuss and agree on those nominations. It would be helpful if the Minister could tell us where we have got to with the nominations that will come before the Committee, in particular the nominations for the Chairman. It would be helpful if she could shed some light on the time scale.

The Committee will also have an audit function, reviewing the Government's estimate and satisfying itself that the allocated funds are not at odds with the need for IPSA to be a cost-effective body. Of course, IPSA needs the resources to do the job that Parliament has asked it to do, but at a time of constraint on public expenditure, it must be efficient and cost-effective, not least where the salaries are concerned. During the Committee stage of the Bill, the Justice Secretary said that the Government had considered the experience of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission. We hope that they paid particular attention to the controversy over the remuneration of those appointees. Some figures have been bandied about, and we should note that the House will take a keen interest in these matters.

Finally, the debate gives us an opportunity to ask the Deputy Leader of the House what progress has been made on establishing IPSA. When do the Government imagine that IPSA will be operational? Is it envisaged that it will start at the beginning of the new Parliament, or on a fixed date such as the beginning of the financial year? What arrangements have been made on staffing, in particular with respect to those currently employed in the Department of Resources? She will know that there is deep concern in that Department about their futures. If she was able to shed any delight in her concluding remarks, those who work in the Department of Resources may find that reassuring.

7.22 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): As the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) said, the appointment of the Committee is part of the process that all sides of the House agreed by means of the Act setting up IPSA. The Committee will advise you, Mr. Speaker, in the appointments that you make, and it will deal with consultations, as has already been suggested, and with audit of the IPSA functions, when they are in place.

It is essential that we get IPSA in place because we cannot effect the long-term reform of the system of allowances and expenses until it is in place. A great deal of publicity has, quite reasonably, been given to Sir Christopher Kelly's report, which was leaked. I agree

about how unfortunate it is that the report was partially leaked. Partial information is the worst sort of information, because it makes people assume all sorts of things which may not be justified once they see the narrative and the text in the round. The Kelly report on its own is not a proposal for the regulation of the House. It is a proposal for the framework that IPSA will then set up, so IPSA's role is crucial.

I agree absolutely with the right hon. Gentleman when he asks what the timetable is expected to be. The Members who are being asked to sit on the Committee will have their work cut out if we are to see a Chairman and a board in place in a reasonable time scale that will enable them to do the work that is set out in statute. I have my doubts whether the timetable will be such as to see real and effective change before the expiry of this Parliament. That means that we may find ourselves in difficulties with either a dying Parliament in its last days setting up structures that will then not apply to it, or a new Parliament without experience having to grapple with this as the first matter on its agenda. There is concern about the time scale and any advice that the Deputy Leader of the House can give would be extremely helpful.

The other point that the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) rightly made and that I shall repeat concerns the audit function of this body in terms of the total package of costs for the organisation, but also more specifically the remuneration of board members, for instance. As an example to everybody else we need total transparency, and it is important that we and the public outside know exactly what considerations are being taken into account in setting up the new body, how it is to be set up, what remuneration levels will be, what funding levels will be, and how those funding levels will be justified. I look to the Committee when it is set up to ensure that transparency.

Members' interventions have suggested a certain familiarity with some of the names that have been put forward, and it is hard to argue with the fact that they are rather familiar names. I suspect that the argument for that is continuity from what has existed before. At some stage we need to make a break, and there is some justification for saying that. But this Committee will have a limited lifetime. It will exist only until the end of the Parliament. It has a very limited framework of work. The motion plainly says

"until the end of the present Parliament."

So this membership is for a limited time and we need to look afresh in a new Parliament as to who are the right Members, how they will represent all parts of the House—both in terms of party political representation and their experience in the House—and at their outlook and what they can bring to this. We should look at that carefully immediately following a general election.

I will certainly support the proposal in order to get the body up and running and doing its work, because there is some urgency. I hope, however, that the Deputy Leader of the House will hear in what I have said at least some caveats for the future, which I hope we will be able to take into account.

7.28 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): I shall be brief. However, I am not at all happy with the way in which we are going about matters. I would not dream of

[*Mr. David Winnick*]

saying a word against any of the Members who are mentioned on the Order Paper—not my hon. Friends of course, and not the other Members either. But that does not alter the fact that we are starting afresh. The reputation and integrity of the House has been much damaged. There is no doubt about it. You nod your agreement, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure that we would all agree that there is a need to restore public confidence as quickly as possible.

The new body that has been set up—the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority—is a move in the right direction, but when it comes to the names, inevitably the question will arise: why these people? Who nominated them? Do I take it that they have been nominated in the usual way by the Whips, and accordingly they are before us for approval? It is in no way to criticise those hon. Members when I say that I would be far happier if there was some sort of system whereby we could elect the Members involved, embracing, of course, the three political parties. I see no reason why not. You are in the Chair, Mr. Speaker, because you have been elected to the Chair, and it is your policy, as you have told the House, that the Deputy Speakers be elected. That is the right move, so, when it comes to what we agree is a fresh start to try to restore public confidence in allowances, expenses and all the rest of it, why do we have these names on the Order Paper? We have not been consulted. No one has consulted me, and if they have not consulted me, presumably no one else has been consulted apart from the usual channels. However, we are now expected to nod our approval.

I shall not cause a Division over the matter, but I shall be very surprised if I am the only Member to hold this view. It is only right and proper to state clearly that, if we are to appoint such people, they should be subject to an internal election, which would give the matter far more legitimacy. It is for those reasons that I have made this brief speech.

7.31 pm

Mr. Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): I am hugely impressed by the names that have been put forward for the Committee. It is a smorgasbord of big cheeses. However, I am concerned that there are not younger, thrusting and less experienced Members on it. I should not speak in my own cause, but I regard myself as young and thrusting; and I may raise this point light-heartedly, but I have a serious love for this place. The past two years have been traumatic for all Members, but the measures that Kelly and others have taken will impact on the next generation of young Members starting their parliamentary careers. I should very much like to champion their cause and colleagues' causes, and I should like to bring an innovative approach—a new approach—to the Committee. I have not sought high office in this place, and I shall never get high office, but that is not a shame, because I love and take pride in being a Back Bencher, and Back Benchers are important to this place and to our constitutional settlement.

Mr. Speaker, I shall not try your patience, but let me give you one example of the innovative thinking that I shall bring to the role. Let us do away with paperwork and forms; let us take the personal additional accommodation expenditure allowance and make it

subject to income tax at a Members' higher rate. Then, of course, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs would become the regulator of the scheme, the public would have confidence in it and we would be able to shed the civil servants who oversee the PAAE. Mr. Speaker, I see that you are about to rise, so I shall move on.

Mr. Speaker: To the Committee.

Mr. Walker: I shall move on and conclude with this plea. The Committee would certainly benefit from having a young, dynamic Member on it. That young, dynamic Member may not be me; it may be another Member. But it is not too late to add a name to the great list—the smorgasbord of big cheeses—in front of us. What harm could we do by looking at that?

7.33 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr. Walker). He, like other hon. Members and, obviously, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) on the Front Bench, will have been taken by surprise by the motion suddenly appearing on the Order Paper today. This meant that the only opportunity to table an amendment that would add my hon. Friend's name in place of somebody else's was behind the Speaker's Chair last night, when today's proceedings became apparent.

That is odd, because the way in which the matter has been dealt with is in stark contrast to, for example, the motions on the Order Paper relating to membership of Select Committees, when a lot of notice about proposed members is normally given and people have the opportunity to object or to table amendments. Indeed, I can remember, as can my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire, the appointment of members of the Draft Constitutional Renewal Bill Joint Committee. I objected repeatedly to that motion, and then in the end found myself being appointed to the Joint Committee, which was a great privilege.

Like the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), I think that it is unhealthy, in principle, that these appointments should be made by collusion between the Front Benches. Why can appointments not be made more openly by election? That has been a very successful process in relation to the Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, which I hope will bring forward important recommendations at the beginning of the new Session.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The content of the hon. Gentleman's speech is naturally, and entirely, a matter for him. I am not certain in my own mind whether he is seeking to move a manuscript amendment, but there would not be a bar to his doing so if he wished.

Mr. Chope: I am very grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for making that clear. I look to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne to decide whether he wishes to put forward a manuscript amendment in his own name that could then be put before the House.

Mr. Walker: I am no great expert on parliamentary procedure, but if I am called by the House of Commons to serve, of course I will accept that offer.

Mr. Chope: I think that the process that my hon. Friend needs to go through is to demonstrate a willingness to serve. I suspect that there are sufficient Members in the Chamber willing him to put his name forward and therefore prepared to sign up to a manuscript amendment for his name to go forward in substitution for one of the other names on the Order Paper. In order for that to happen, my hon. Friend—although I know that it would offend against his innate modesty—would have to take the initiative by demonstrating to his hon. Friends, and perhaps to Labour Members such as the hon. Member for Walsall, North, his willingness to serve and the fact that he would be happy to see a manuscript amendment put forward suggesting that his name be added.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr. Walker) is mouthing the word, “How?” Can my hon. Friend help him by explaining how he does that?

Mr. Chope: Usually the advice that hon. Members receive from Mr. Speaker is that if they wish for some assistance in drafting or presenting an amendment, they should speak to the Clerk at the Table, who I am sure would, as always, be more than willing to assist. *[Interruption.]* While my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne goes and carries out that process, I shall address my remarks further to the issues before us.

The suddenness of the motion's appearance on today's Order Paper has meant that we have not had the chance for proper amendments to be tabled or the opportunity to hold elections. I hope that the Deputy Leader of the House will ensure that she responds fully to the points made in this debate, because although it has been allotted one and a half hours, I do not anticipate that we will speak for anything like that amount of time. She will probably say that the reason for the motion's sudden appearance, without any notice, is the extreme urgency of the matter.

Barbara Keeley *indicated assent.*

Mr. Chope: The Minister is nodding in agreement with that proposition, so I look forward to hearing her expand on it.

How is this Committee, when appointed, going to interact with the Kelly committee's recommendations? As you know, Mr. Speaker, earlier today I raised a point of order about the extraordinary announcements leaked from the Kelly committee. There are conflicting opinions as to where those leaks came from. Apparently one of my hon. Friends has been told on good authority by the BBC that the leak came from Sir Christopher Kelly's committee itself. That might put him in a rather difficult position, given that he is meant to be in charge of maintaining high standards in public life. I cannot see how leaking such information complies with that role, but I shall leave that to one side.

Other conjecture has it that the information was leaked by the right hon. Gentleman who leads the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Heath: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has one scintilla of evidence for that suggestion, because I can categorically say that it is not true.

Mr. Chope: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has been able to remove that possibility, but I spoke to a senior Member of the House this morning about the matter. I will not disclose his name, because he is not in his place at the moment, although I can say that he is among those whose membership of the Committee we may vote on later. He assured me on good authority that he thought that the details had been leaked by the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I am listening closely to the hon. Gentleman's arguments. Will he define how one becomes and remains a senior Member of the House?

Mr. Chope: It is rather like the definition of an elephant—when one sees one, one knows one. When we look at the right hon. Gentleman, we know that he is a senior and respected Member of this House, but I assure the House that he is not the person to whom I was referring in my remarks about the alleged leak by the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

That takes us to another possibility that is being speculated on, which is that the document was leaked by the Prime Minister and No. 10 to try to divert attention from the climbdown over the Territorial Army and the embarrassment over the Nimrod report. I shall not embark further into that territory, because it is speculation. However, I emphasise that, as I raised with you in my point of order earlier, Mr. Speaker, the Kelly report has now effectively been published. A large number of Members are facing questions from their employees, the press and their families about the implications of that report for them.

Mr. Brooks Newmark (Braintree) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman seeks to intervene, I want to call the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) to order. I know that he will not want, for any length of time, to dilate on the matter of the Kelly committee or the recommendations flowing therefrom, but that he will want immediately to focus specifically on the subject of the Speaker's Committee.

Mr. Chope: Exactly, Mr. Speaker, and what we are talking about tonight is the membership of that Committee and how qualified it will be to deal with its functions. I therefore wish to address some of my remarks to those functions, and I hope that the Deputy Leader of the House will tell us about the interaction between the Committee members and their role in dealing with recommendations from the Kelly committee.

Mr. Newmark: May I correct my hon. Friend? I do not believe that the Kelly report has actually been published yet. It is not due out for another week or so. There have been rumours and innuendo, but no report has actually been published.

Mr. Chope: It has not been officially published as a document, but the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Sir Stuart Bell), who serves on the Members Estimate Committee, said on the radio this morning that there had been an authorised disclosure of it. Although it has not been published officially, there seem to be a large number of people who know about its contents. That is causing a lot of problems for Members and their staff.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I say again to the hon. Gentleman that, as he knows, this is a debate on motion 3? It is not a leak inquiry, or indeed a debate on a leak inquiry.

Mr. Chope: Absolutely, I agree with you on that, Mr. Speaker—I am certainly not qualified to carry out a leak inquiry. I am trying to ask the Deputy Leader of the House, who has admitted that this is an urgent issue and that that is why the motion is on the Order Paper at such short notice, to assure us that the Committee will be up and running in time to make the necessary appointments to IPSA. That will ensure that IPSA is in a position to take on board the recommendations of the Kelly committee as soon as they are published, so that there is not a period between the publication of those recommendations and the deliberations of the IPSA committee that will discuss them in accordance with the responsibilities placed upon it by the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009.

Mr. Walker: Is it not the case that IPSA will regard the Kelly report as purely advisory?

Mr. Chope: IPSA will certainly do so, if it is advised by the contents of the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, which makes it quite clear that

“IPSA must...prepare the scheme”

for MPs allowances and

“review the scheme regularly and revise it as appropriate.”

I am sure that IPSA's work will be informed by the Kelly Committee report, but I do not think that it will be dictated to by it, in accordance with the 2009 Act. Perhaps the Deputy Leader of the House will be able to give us a bit more information about that when she responds to this short debate.

The question that you, Mr. Speaker, suggested I raise with the Leader of the House tomorrow at business questions was whether it would be possible to get the Kelly report published sooner. It has gone to the printers. It could be published before next Wednesday so that everybody is on a level playing field in terms of information about it.

Mr. Walker: Surely it could go on the parliamentary intranet tomorrow.

Mr. Chope: Of course it could, if there was the will on the part of the Government. I hope that the Deputy Leader of the House will accept that, given the reality of the situation, it would be desirable and fair for the Kelly report to be published this week, rather than delayed until Wednesday of next week. In that way, we would not get more speculation—it keeps coming out gradually, in leaks, and no doubt that will be added to in this weekend's press if the report is not published now.

Mr. Speaker: Order. In addition to the right hon. and learned Lady the Leader of the House and me, the hon. Members for Middlesbrough (Sir Stuart Bell), for Erewash (Liz Blackman) and for North Devon (Nick Harvey), and the right hon. Members for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig) and for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), are proposed for membership of this Committee. I am looking forward with eager anticipation to the comments of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on the suitability or otherwise of those individuals to be members of the Committee.

Mr. Chope: Perhaps I could start off with my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire. He has been a loyal servant of the House for many years. The work he did from the Back Benches as Chairman of the Standards and Privileges Committee was of immense value. It was authoritative and earned him great respect from all his colleagues.

My only concern about his name being on the Order Paper is that he is no longer a Back-Bench Member; he is a shadow Minister. I hope that he will soon be the real thing—a real Secretary of State or the real Leader of the House. Schedule 3 to the 2009 Act, which sets out the terms of the membership of your Committee for IPSA, Mr. Speaker, states, in paragraph 1(d) that there should be

“five members of the House of Commons who are not Ministers of the Crown, appointed by the House of Commons.”

It is possible to argue that, inherently, those people should not really be shadow Ministers of the Crown either. They should be proper Back Benchers, like my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury) (Con): Surely my hon. Friend heard the comments of the Deputy Leader of the House. She said that our right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), who has now succeeded our right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) as Chairman of the Standard and Privileges Committee, will ex officio be a member of the Speaker's Committee, and therefore the voice of Back Benchers will indeed be strongly represented.

Mr. Chope: That may be incidental. I am sure that my hon. Friend is right that our right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) is a worthy champion of Back Benchers' interests, but he is taken account of under paragraph 1(c) of schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, along with you, Mr. Speaker, under paragraph 1(a), and the Leader of the House of Commons under paragraph 1(b).

My point is that in terms of the spirit of paragraph (d), when it refers to five Members of the House of Commons who are not Ministers of the Crown, my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne, is a Back Bencher who is youthful and energetic—and the other expressions that he used—whereas my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire would be bound to concede that he does not share those qualities, because he is inevitably tainted by being a shadow Minister, rather than a free spirit on the Back Benches, as he was for such a long time.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order to use the word “tainted” about someone who takes on a position of responsibility in a party in Parliament?

Mr. Speaker: I shall exercise my discretion and say that nothing disorderly has happened so far, but I am all agog.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire and I go back many years, and I shall not explain to the House the way in which we have interacted in various posts. He knows that the

comments that I make are not directed at his integrity, which is 100 per cent. absolute, but at the fact that inevitably, by becoming a shadow Minister, he has become separate and apart from those of us who are not on the Front Bench.

At the beginning, Mr. Speaker, you said that this is an important debate, and I am glad that we are having it now. It is very timely, for the reasons that I have already set out in relation to the need for clarification of the interaction between what Sir Christopher Kelly recommends and the work of the IPSA, especially the Speaker's Committee that we are appointing this evening.

I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne has decided whether to put his name forward—

Mr. Walker: I have decided not to put my name forward, because I would not want to bump any of the excellent people on the Committee off it. In future, I would like to be considered for Committees of the House, because they are often far too establishment, and that is the point that my hon. Friend is making.

Mr. Chope: If this debate has achieved nothing else, it has enabled my hon. Friend to make a strong case for being the first natural choice for membership of Committees such as this. I hope that it will be with a certain amount of remorse that my Front-Bench colleagues will say that they are sorry that they did not think of my hon. Friend for membership of this Committee. If my hon. Friend is not willing to put his name forward, we have a choice between all the people on the Order Paper or none of them.

As the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has said—I share his reservations—we face a difficult choice. Either we vote against the lot or we allow matters to proceed. In anticipation of what I hope will be the Minister's response, I confirm that I would not be minded to vote down this list of worthy nominees. However, I would wish to have some hard evidence from the Minister of the urgency of this and how it will lead into the early appointment of the members of the IPSA and an early start to their work, perhaps before the turn of the year, so that they can get to grips with the recommendations that Sir Christopher Kelly has made and about which I hope we will learn more by the end of the week.

7.54 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Barbara Keeley): We have had some interesting bids. Let me turn first to the question of Committee membership, given that it seems to have been a preoccupation of much of this short debate. It was raised by the hon. Members for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) and for Castle Point (Bob Spink), my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr. Walker), who made a bid.

Stephen Pound (Ealing, North) (Lab): May I just say that, if nominated, I will not run, and if elected, I will not serve? That should be widely accepted by the House.

Barbara Keeley: I thank my hon. Friend for that point.

We have had this debate a number of times. I think it came up when we considered the nominations to the Parliamentary Reform Committee. I do not want to intrude on the Conservative party's obvious grief, but it is up to it to decide how it does this. It was open to it to have an election, and the hon. Member for Broxbourne could have put his name forward. That would have been fine. But it does not seem to have done that.

Some points were made about the great and the good, cheese, a smorgasbord and all kinds of other things. My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman)—we will all have to get our heads around her constituency name—is no longer in her place, but she looked rather surprised to find herself so elevated, if being a smorgasbord or cheese is an elevation. This Committee is not exactly the same as previous Committees with similar functions, and I am sure that she will relish the task before all members of the Committee.

Mr. Winnick: I said earlier that I did not intend to press this matter to a Division, and I normally keep my word, so I shall not do so. However, may I press my hon. Friend? I am sure this was not her intention, but we should not dismiss the legitimacy of voting. It is very important. Obviously, she will not misunderstand me again when I say that this matter is not quite within her responsibility—it goes to a more senior level, as is bound to happen in government and the rest of it. I hope, therefore, that she will communicate with her senior colleagues on this matter. If it were put before the parliamentary Labour party, I believe that there would be a very strong case for this particular Committee to have the legitimacy of elections.

Barbara Keeley: Indeed. I am sure that all hon. Members' points about the method of nominating Members to Committees have been heard and will be taken into account. The Labour party held an election on the Parliamentary Reform Committee, and it will be open in the future to the hon. Member for Broxbourne and his hon. Friends to nominate him, to have an election and to go forward on that basis.

Mr. Walker: I am sure that there could be elections in the future. The point I was trying to make is that these Committees tend to be made up of establishment figures. The hon. Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman) is a former senior Government Whip. Newish Members never seem to get a look-in.

Barbara Keeley: That is a comment from the hon. Gentleman to his own Front-Bench colleagues, so I shall leave them to deal with it.

Mr. Heath: The hon. Lady is right—that was a comment to the hon. Gentleman's Front-Bench colleagues. However, this evening we have heard a degree of frustration that the same names crop up time and again on these so-called in-House Committees. There is a feeling that perhaps, sometimes, the advice of some of those Members has not been of the best quality.

Barbara Keeley: Those points have been aired well in this short debate, and I am sure that they will be taken on board. I do not know exactly how the process was gone through, but it might have been thought that, at this difficult and turbulent time—again, today, we find

[Barbara Keeley]

ourselves in such times—it was a fair idea to have people with experience of what has been happening and of the different schemes put together. However, I do not know, because I was not involved in the discussions.

Mr. Walker: The problem is that often it is people with experience who get us into a mess in the first place. That is a problem with which many of my in-take—from 2005—on both sides of the House have to wrestle.

Barbara Keeley: I cannot help any further on that point. I am sure that all points have been made as well as possible.

Let me turn to some of the other questions that have been asked in this debate. If there are any points that I cannot answer this evening, I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House will touch on them tomorrow or that we will be able to deal with them in the next few weeks.

I understand that the recruitment of the chair and members of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority is expected soon. In fact, a substantial part of the reason for our urgency in moving this evening's motion is that we need the Committee to be on board with the functions that I touched on earlier, in order to ratify the nomination of the chair and board members before they are put to the House. The Speaker's Committee will be a key part of that process.

I was asked whether I could “shed any delight” on the timetable, which I thought was interesting for this time of day, although I assume that what was meant was “light”. As far as I understand the progress on setting up the new authority, it has an interim chief executive, whom Mr. Speaker appointed. Tonight we are discussing the establishment of the Speaker's Committee, and very soon—once the Committee is convened—we would expect the board to be convened, also with its chair and members. All that work will go forward.

Mention was made of remuneration. I am aware of some discussion about that. Points were also made about transparency. The 2009 Act specifies that Mr. Speaker will determine the terms and conditions for the chair and ordinary members, who will later be appointed by Her Majesty, on an address to the House. I am sure that the points that have been made about transparency have been well received this evening.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Is the hon. Lady saying that members of the Committee are shortly to be appointed—in other words, that she knows who they are—or that she does not yet know who they are and neither does anyone else?

Barbara Keeley: The hon. Gentleman refers to members of the Committee, but the nominations for the Committee is what we are discussing this evening.

Mr. Turner: I am sorry, I meant the board.

Barbara Keeley: The answer is yes. Advertisements have been placed, so the process of recruiting the chair and board members is going ahead. That is very much the reason for the urgent need for the Committee to interact with the process.

Some other points have been raised, about interaction with the Kelly report. We do not have the Kelly report, and I very much regret its leaking, as I am sure everyone else in the Chamber does. The leaking of matters to do with the House and MPs is despicable, but leaked it seems to have been. On interaction with Kelly, let me remind hon. Members that the new Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority's primary functions include determining and administering an allowances scheme, so clearly there needs to be some interaction with the Kelly report.

A key function of the new Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority is to prepare any scheme and to review and revise it as appropriate. In doing so, it must consult a wide range of people, as set out in the 2009 Act, including the Committee on Standards in Public Life, so there will be that interaction backwards and forwards.

Peter Bottomley: Could the Deputy Leader of the House confirm that we are talking about an independent body that will be supervised by the members of the Committee that we are discussing and that it would be open to them not to change, or indeed to change, any recommendations that Kelly makes?

Barbara Keeley: I think that the answer is yes. The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority is clearly an independent body—it has the word “independent” in its title. That is the key reason for moving to the new scheme and for our working so hard a couple of months ago to get the 2009 Act through. There will be consultation, but one of the new authority's key functions, as we recognised in setting it up, is to prepare, review and revise schemes of allowances.

Bob Spink: Does the hon. Lady think that the public will be greatly impressed by the word “independent” in the title, given that the chairman will be selected by the usual suspects from this House, who have patently failed the public in not controlling Members' allowances in the past?

Barbara Keeley: That is a matter of opinion, although I do not share the hon. Gentleman's view.

Mr. Chope: The Deputy Leader of the House has not yet told us when the board will start its work. I wonder whether she could tell us that and, at the same time, perhaps answer the question that I put earlier about whether there is any possibility of the Government ensuring that the Kelly report is published sooner. It is already at the printer's and could be published before this week is out.

Barbara Keeley: I do not think that it is our function this evening to discuss the Kelly report, but as I understand it, the report is due to be published next Wednesday. Its publication obviously involves outside printers, and there is a certain amount of work to be done. I have heard the points that have been raised this evening, but it is not a matter for this debate to do anything about that.

On the timetable, I have laid out that there has been substantial movement. We are recruiting the board of IPSA; that is going ahead after you placed the adverts, Mr. Speaker. The new Committee, if we agree it this evening, will be able to go forward. The timetable,

however, is not exact because we cannot set out a timetable for a board that does not exist yet. It will exist fairly soon, however, and we shall be able to make progress from there. There is now also an interim chief executive.

A point was raised about staffing, and I understand the concerns that have been expressed by the staff of the House. I have met the unions representing all the staff of the House, and I know that there have been other meetings, and all their concerns are being taken on board. I think that that covers most of the questions—

Peter Bottomley: I am not sure who is advising the Leader of the House or the House authorities, but can we have an assurance—if not now, in a written statement later—that what would be required of an employer elsewhere in terms of the interests of the staff will be fulfilled here?

Barbara Keeley: I can do no more than say that I have been working on this, along with other people. An implementation team in the Ministry of Justice was working on setting up IPSA over the summer, and meetings and discussions have also been held with the trade unions. We had a lengthy meeting in which we discussed and noted all the concerns, but the difficulty that I have in dealing with them is that, until the board of the new authority is established, there is little that can be said about what it will do. It would not be right to hamper the setting up of the new authority or to constrain what it can do, but it will clearly move forward.

Mr. Chope: Is it the Minister's hope and desire that the board will be up and running before the end of this calendar year, so that it can deal with these important, urgent matters?

Barbara Keeley: All we can say on this is that everything will move as fast as it can. Given that we only debated this in the summer, the fact that we have worked across the summer and are now appointing the board and the Committee demonstrates that we have made very good progress.

I want to conclude now, as that would be fair to Members—

Mr. Andrew Pelling (Croydon, Central) (Ind): Will the Minister give way?

Barbara Keeley: I shall not take any more interventions.

On the matter of urgency, I do not feel that I need to come back to this matter. We moved the Bill through Parliament and decided to create the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority because it was the view of Members on both sides of the House, as the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) said, that it was no longer acceptable to the public that Members should set and pay their own allowances. That is a continual matter of urgency—

Bob Spink: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There is still quite some time to run in this one-and-a-half-hour debate. Since the advertisements for the board and the chairman have already gone out, is it in order for the Minister not to inform the House of the salary levels that have been set for those posts?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is experienced enough a Member of the House to know perfectly well that that is not a point of order. What the Minister chooses to tell the House is a matter for the Minister. The hon. Gentleman has registered his views with his usual force and alacrity.

Peter Bottomley: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yes must be the House's response to what you have said. That might not be a point of order under this motion, but to make a point of order to the occupant of the Speaker's Chair about the salary of the chairman of the board is probably covered, because it is part of the arrangements for the salary of the chairman of IPSA, which is in the hands of the occupant of the Chair.

Mr. Speaker: There is a statutory duty involved here, but questioning me on the matter in the way that the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) just attempted to do does not, in my judgment, constitute a point of order.

Barbara Keeley: I want to bring this to a conclusion now.

Mr. Pelling: Will the Minister give way?

Barbara Keeley: No, I have said that I am not accepting any more interventions. I have touched on the fact that the terms and conditions for the chair and ordinary members are by statute—yours, Mr. Speaker, to decide and determine, as you have done. Hon. Members have raised a number of points about that, and I am sure that they have been listened to.

The House is asked to appoint the remaining five members of this Committee. On behalf of the Government—and, I hope, the House—I commend this motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That Sir Stuart Bell, Liz Blackman, Nick Harvey, Mr Don Touhig and Sir George Young be appointed under Schedule 3 to the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009 as members of the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority until the end of the present Parliament.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

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

INCOME TAX

That the draft Offshore Funds (Tax) Regulations 2009, which were laid before this House on 13 October, be approved.—*(Mr. Watts.)*

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEE ON ISSUE OF PRIVILEGE RELATING TO POLICE SEARCHES ON THE PARLIAMENTARY ESTATE AND INTERNAL PROCESSES OF THE HOUSE ADMINISTRATION FOR GRANTING PERMISSION FOR SUCH ACTION

Resolved,

That the Order of the House of 13 July 2009 relating to the Committee on issue of privilege relating to police searches on the Parliamentary Estate and internal processes of the House

Administration for granting permission for such action be amended in line 16 by leaving out '31 December 2009' and inserting '31 March 2010'.—(*Mr. Watts.*)

REGIONAL SELECT COMMITTEE (WEST MIDLANDS)

Motion made,

That Mrs Janet Dean be a member of the West Midlands Regional Select Committee.—(*Mr. Watts.*)

Hon. Members: Object.

Motion made,

That Dr Richard Taylor be a member of the West Midlands Regional Select Committee.—(*Mr. Watts.*)

Hon. Members: Object.

REGIONAL SELECT COMMITTEE (YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER)

Motion made,

That Mary Creagh be discharged from the Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Select Committee and Mr Austin Mitchell be added.—(*Mr. Watts.*)

Hon. Members: Object.

REGIONAL SELECT COMMITTEE (SOUTH WEST)

Motion made,

That Linda Gilroy be discharged from the South West Regional Select Committee and Roger Berry be added.—(*Mr. Watts.*)

Hon. Members: Object.

Support for UK Investors

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Mr. Watts.*)

8.11 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity of using a short period of the House's time to talk about something that this country is very good at, which is invention and inventors. It has often been said that Britain is brilliant at invention, but it is sometimes said that Britain is not quite so good at the commercialisation of invention. I want to touch on that, but not from the point of view of large industry research and development, or the people engaged in scientific support for industry, but in support of individual inventors, by which I mean the people working in their garden sheds, their garages and their upstairs bedrooms in order to bring an idea they have fostered to the point at which it can become a reality.

My interest in this subject was sparked by a visit I made a few weeks ago to an organisation called the south west inventors club, which I strongly recommend. It is a group of inventors, as the name says, from the south-west. They meet to exchange information and support each other; they help each other in the gradual development of their individual projects. When I was invited to go, I did not really know what to expect. I suspected that I would not see the caricature of the lone inventor—the sort of slightly distressed gentleman emerging from a shed with a blackened face and hair awry, or, in short, an eccentric. I knew that these were serious-minded people who were very different from that in their attitude.

I was not disappointed. I met a variety of people. Some had a high level of scientific qualification and background; others did not, but had spotted an opportunity that they thought capable of being brought into reality. Some of the things developed in that club—sometimes by my constituents, sometimes not—had already been brought to market. A gentleman had invented a device for fitting to the filler caps of diesel cars to prevent people from inadvertently putting lead-free petrol into the tank. Anyone who has done that knows that it has a disastrous effect on the car and, in due course, on the pocket. The simple device he invented prevented that from happening. Incidentally, it cannot happen the other way around; one cannot put diesel into a lead-free car because the nozzle prevents it being done. I think that that invention is likely to become a big seller and a standard fitting on a lot of cars. I am very pleased that the inventor is a gentleman who lives in Podimore in my constituency.

Another gentleman was demonstrating what he called a multi-stride tool, for use by carpenters, fitters and do-it-yourself enthusiasts to ensure the correct fitting of screws, handles and so forth to doors. He had devised it because he had realised that it was a tool that he himself needed. He had then brought it to market, and it is now being sold not just in Britain but in America, in major do-it-yourself stores. He had cracked it: he had reached that point of departure. I recall that some years ago a gentleman from Bower Hinton, also in my constituency, invented a completely new set of spanners. Working on a farm, he too had realised that such an invention was needed.

What unites so many inventions is that once we have seen them, we think “How obvious”, and wonder why on earth they have not always been there. The answer is that it was necessary for someone to have the necessary spark to invent them. As I have said, I was very impressed by many other inventions that I saw that evening, but I cannot speak about them because the intellectual property rights have not yet been ascertained, and they must therefore remain secret. What I can say is that I witnessed a display of mutual support and mutual giving of information. I also realised that there was a capacity problem, and also a problem with advice and support.

I do not have up-to-date figures, but the figures that I have suggest that between 2002 and 2005 the number of patents filed fell from 20,000 to 17,000, which is a 15 per cent. drop. The patents that were filed must have been of better quality, because the number of patents granted increased by more than 13 per cent. Up to a fifth of all the patents filed were granted during that period. A quarter of the applications were made by lone inventors, which means that a large proportion of the inventions were developed not by big business or industry, but by the individual.

What problems do inventors face? There is the problem of getting their ideas to the point at which they can be marketed successfully, part of which involves understanding the market itself: understanding what the market wants, and how their ideas fit into what is already there. Another problem is understanding what investors seek from a person whom they do not know and who wants to promote an idea. Inventors also sometimes have problems in filtering their ideas in order to identify the runners and the non-runners. That too may seem obvious, but it is not, and it requires expert help.

Inventors often need advice on strategy: on the analysis of the market, competitors, and the skills that are required to enable them to take their inventions to market. Then they hit the big barrier of patenting and the legal issues associated with protecting their intellectual property rights. That involves expense, but it also involves expertise. They must know how to set about the process, and how to protect themselves from the rather better-equipped lawyers acting for businesses that might want to exploit their inventions. Then there is the development of a prototype. That too needs initial investment, which will often be hard to come by. They must get the invention off the drawing board and turn it from something built with string and plasticine into something that can be demonstrated to work, and demonstrated to work to the satisfaction of the partners that they will need in order to proceed.

In some parts of the country there is a lack of support schemes, although in other parts there are good ones. The south west inventors club is an example of a good one, but provision is patchy. Support schemes are helpful in several ways, such as in pointing to those who offer genuine help and in warning against those who fraudulently offer support in order to steal ideas.

There is also a problem in getting big business interested in the amateur, because it is often not interested. It works by looking at its own products and development streams. If someone has an idea that is of relevance, it can be hard for them to identify who in the corporate structure might listen and be willing at least to take them to the next step.

What are the remedies? I do not pretend that I have all the answers, and nor do I pretend that nothing has been done before now to meet some of the demands. I have mentioned inventors clubs; I would like there to be many more of them. They should be promoted. The peer review that is inherent in such clubs' activities is of great benefit, as is the mutual support they offer.

Organisations such as Business Link and the regional development agencies must be fully engaged. Business Link is very good in terms of what it makes available online—it has comprehensive website support. In some other areas, too, it provides exactly the sort of help that people need for the initial stages. Again, however, this support is patchy; it is not consistently provided across the country as that very much depends on the enthusiasms of local organisations. I do not think that RDAs do nearly enough on this, however. They do not recognise the huge potential economic benefit in seeing such ideas brought through the stages of development to eventually creating jobs and wealth. RDAs are simply not set up to identify these opportunities, but they should be.

The British Library is also enormously valuable in this regard. I was not previously aware of that. Shortly after I discovered that I had secured this debate and it was advertised, I was contacted by the public affairs manager at the British Library, who said, “You do know what we're doing already, don't you?” I am a great fan of the British Library. I visited it to attend an exhibition only a few months ago, and I think it does a great job. In 2006, it set up the British Library business and intellectual property centre, which provides a lot of support to those businesses who can find their way there—that is the critical factor, of course. It says it has welcomed 100,000 businesses since it opened. Interestingly, it also said it had recently experienced a marked increase in the number of people finding their way there, particularly among people who are unemployed. Perhaps one reaction to the recession is that people who have been nursing an ambition for a long time are thinking, “Now is the time. I'm going to do something about this”, and they are trying to make use of the support that is on offer.

The centre at the British Library offers some of that support, but—and it is a big “but”—it could do more if it had a little more investment and connection with the rest of the country. The British Library is a national resource, but it is in London. It is online, so it is available to everyone via the web, but there is a difference between getting information online and actually going and talking to someone face to face. I therefore wonder whether we need a greater ability to use the facilities of the British Library in other parts of the country in order to provide support.

The key issue is so often funding and finding the right business partner—business angel—to take a project forward. I have a pedantic issue with the popular TV series “Dragons' Den”—its name. Dragons do not live in dens; however alliterative that may be, they live in lairs. That puts me off, but it is a very good and entertaining programme, and it provides a real connection between people with money and people with ideas, so that the money supports the ideas. We need more dragons' dens; we need an easily available one in every part of the country, rather than just having a television programme. We need something that puts people with money in contact with people with ideas and enables them to come to local agreements.

[Mr. David Heath]

My final point perhaps deals with a much bigger issue, although I am unsure whether it falls directly within the context of this debate I wonder whether it is time that we should start to think in terms of local—regional—stock exchanges. We are used to the investment money that flows through London, but London is not the country as a whole. I would love to see a stock exchange in Bristol or Bath, in Cardiff and in the cities of the north of England. That would provide the opportunity for local people to invest in local entrepreneurs and provide that sort of funding. This is an idea whose time has perhaps come, and I impress it on the Government as something that should be examined.

In summation, I am saying that there are people with great ideas who have a problem: they often face so many barriers in taking those ideas forward to the point at which they go into production and start creating jobs and wealth. A relatively small amount of support, in addition to what is being supplied, could unlock a huge amount of capacity for innovation and invention across the country. I am inviting the Minister to agree with that proposition and to take away the thought that this is something that the Government can usefully do, not just centrally—not just here in the capital—but across the country, so that all those people with their bright ideas in their garden sheds end up with the factories producing the goods, which will help us through the current economic problems and to a much brighter future.

8.27 pm

The Minister for Higher Education and Intellectual Property (Mr. David Lammy): I congratulate the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on securing this debate and on the manner in which he put his remarks. I hope that he will also allow me a moment to congratulate a native of Frome, Jenson Button, on becoming Formula 1 world champion. If we praise Mr. Button's success, we must also recognise that it was made possible by the inventiveness of his British-based team, so, I welcome the hon. Gentleman's choice of subject for this debate.

Invention is an important subject in a country whose competitiveness in world markets, no less than on the race track, depends increasingly on its ability to make technological breakthroughs and put them to good use. Sometimes those breakthroughs are the product of big-money investment by big business, sometimes they are the result of practical applications being found for discoveries made in our universities and sometimes they happen just because the proverbial lone inventor has a bright idea—the hon. Gentleman has elucidated that—while doing the washing up, for example.

For many inventors there is often a missing link somewhere in the chain. Whether we are talking about funding at an early stage, protecting their intellectual property, developing a prototype, finding the right partner or bringing the product to fruition and to market, we need to create an environment in which innovation can thrive. The Government recognise that, which is why we and our partners have a raft of ways to help inventors bridge those gaps.

The hon. Gentleman is right. We have traditionally been very good at invention in this country, but we have been far less good at commercialisation. Many of the

new industries and technologies that we now rely on, particularly those to do with the internet, were born out of the previous recession in California. We need to get better, and all our policies are aimed at ensuring that.

Any inventor's first port of call for advice should be the excellent Business Link website. It offers a wealth of advice, including tips on commercialisation and legal issues, and contains links to other sources of local and regional support for inventors. However helpful the advice on offer is, finances will undoubtedly, of course, be one of any inventor's chief concerns. This is an area where I hope that our record of investment is beginning to bear fruit. Since 1997, public spending on the UK science base in particular has more than doubled. Although much of that money has been spent in universities and research institutes, it has undoubtedly helped to bolster sectors of the economy that will drive future growth. They include life sciences, low-carbon technology, digital media and advanced manufacturing.

Focusing investment in invention and innovation on areas where we have existing strength and potential future competitive advantages makes sense at any time, but it is more important than ever as we begin to emerge from recession into recovery. Help is available in the form of grants for research and development. They provide funding which can be used to fund proof of concept, research, prototyping, patenting and product development costs.

The grant for research and development is a Solutions for Business product, which can help to introduce technological innovation in businesses. The grant provides finance to individuals and small and medium-sized businesses in England to research and develop technologically innovative products and processes. It is a national scheme that is run and funded by the regional development agencies and the budget for the grants available to inventors in the south-west is £1.5 million this year.

In previous years, that money has supported a number of individuals and small companies in the south-west in taking their product to market, such as the grants that went to Fluvial Innovations, a multi-award-winning company that provides functional and economical solutions against the risk of flooding, and Xintronic, a high-tech semiconductor company that was supported by UK Trade and Innovation and the South West of England Regional Development Agency. These companies are two of a number of companies that had just one employee at the time of application.

I recognise that some call for full funding through the grant for research and development, but that is not right in principle. We cannot fully grant inventors the whole cost of their inventions, as all serious inventors need to share the risk of their inventions. Beyond that, there are state aid rules that preclude 100 per cent. support for any inventions.

Collaborative research and development is another Solutions for Business product that provides grants to help cut the cost burden associated with bringing research to market. The grants are delivered as part of the activities of the Technology Strategy Board. We have also introduced innovation vouchers to enable small and medium-sized enterprises to buy support from knowledge-based institutions so that they can explore potential opportunities for collaboration in developing new products. Innovation vouchers are being piloted

nationally, and the pilot will start in the south-west region in April 2010. The hon. Gentleman will want to ensure that the inventors whom he has met recently are able to access those innovation vouchers.

A number of other agencies around the UK fund innovation. Time prevents me from mentioning them all, but they include the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, the Design Council and the 10 EU-funded business innovation centres. In addition to grants, many inventors will need some form of equity finance if their inventions are to be realised commercially. The British Business Angels Association and the British Private Equity and Venture Capital Association provide help with all aspects of business angel and venture capital support.

This is a tough time for venture capital, but the support is there. Business Link also has a comprehensive guide to equity finance that explains the Government grants available to help finance parts of projects.

Funding can be a key issue, and as the hon. Gentleman said, other aspects of inventing can be complicated, too. Most inventors are looking for quality intellectual property advice, and the Intellectual Property Office and its partners have developed a suite of products to guide them through the process. There are online databases, such as the one run by the British Library and the European Patent Office to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Inventors can search them for patent documents for free, and I hope that many of the applications are granted as a result of the advice that is available.

There is also an intellectual property tool online, known as the IP Healthcheck, which is free to use and helps inventors answer questions about intellectual property. It is broken down into the four elements of patents, trade marks, designs and copyright, each of which should take no more than 20 minutes to complete. Advice and help on searching patents, designs and trade marks is also available through the network of 13 patent information libraries, two of which are in the hon. Gentleman's area, at Bristol and Plymouth.

The IPO also runs a programme of free intellectual property awareness seminars across the UK, aimed at businesses that want to find out more about the benefits of using intellectual property. The IPO also produces a guide to the advantages and disadvantages of seeking patent protection, and it also offers help with the use of trade marks. For the past 10 years, the IPO has supported the ideas21 network for inventors, which enables successful inventors, business and intellectual property professionals to help would-be inventors through the complex process of turning an idea into a commercial success.

Among many other initiatives, the IPO is currently working with partners to develop a standard for invention promoters. Most invention promotion or marketing companies are perfectly reputable, but I know, as was said earlier, that too many inventors have fallen foul of unscrupulous operators in that area. I hope that the new standard will help inventors to market their ideas with more confidence.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the effects of fees for patents on inventors. Although patents do entail an outlay, the fees chargeable for an initial patent remain well below cost price. Indeed, the real cash price of a patent is lower now than it was 150 years ago—notwithstanding the involvement of lawyers in this area.

The Government encourage and support invention, but we do not pick winners. Instead, we want to create the right environment for invention and innovation to thrive. When inventors are ready to take their invention to market, we help them identify the best way to find a potential licensee. We also offer guidance about the non-disclosure agreement process by which they can secure a confidentiality agreement before revealing their idea.

We also encourage collaboration with business or universities. I particularly mention universities. There are so many spin-outs coming out of our universities for inventors to be plugged into what is happening in that hub in their local area. Business Link does what it can to ensure that right from the beginning, all the advice is available. It will be regional and it will be different in different contexts. We know that it is not perfect, and we want to make it better. I hope that in my short contribution I have set out all that is available.

Regional development agencies are important in this context. The overall spend on innovation is £260 million across the region. It must be for RDAs to determine local priorities, but I know that that is understood in the south-west. It is an area where creative businesses have been at the hub of activity, not just locally, but nationally. I commend the hon. Gentleman for bringing the matter to the House, and I hope I have set out how we are attempting to provide support. We can get better and we must do so. We must be in a position to commercialise invention and bring to full fruition the innovation nation that the Government have always said we must be.

Question put and agreed to.

8.40 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 28 October 2009

[MR. JOE BENTON *in the Chair*]

Death Penalty (Global Abolition)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(Mr. Watts.)

9.30 am

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve again under your chairmanship, Mr. Benton. It is also a particular pleasure and something of a novelty—perhaps it is even the first time—that I have obtained an Adjournment debate on a topic on which I can speak almost entirely positively about Government policy.

The Minister for Europe (Chris Bryant): Come over here!

Mr. Carmichael: The Minister is very kind, but I shall resist the temptation.

It is a matter of some pride for me, as a British national, when I travel to different parts of the world, to be part of a country that has not used the death penalty for the past 40 years and whose policy today is to oppose its use wherever it happens in the world. That is a significant policy, and I commend the Government for their adherence to it and, as I have learned in recent years, promotion of it. I appreciate the assistance of embassy and consular staff in different parts of the world who are, as I have seen, active in promoting Government policy. Earlier in the year, I travelled to Seoul, where the embassy had organised a seminar or conference encouraging local politicians to abolish the death penalty, or at least to maintain the moratorium. The assistance that I received from staff there and in Tokyo, and most recently in Washington DC and from the consul general in Atlanta, was first rate and not to be faulted.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on obtaining the debate. Will he mark, in his speech, the passing a few days ago of Ludovic Kennedy, whose 1961 book, “10 Rillington Place”, about the hanging of the backward, illiterate Timothy Evans for the murders that John Christie had committed, led ultimately, at least in part, to the 1965 abolition? Ludovic Kennedy played a major part in that, did not he?

Mr. Carmichael: Yes, the late Ludovic Kennedy did indeed play a leading role in the case for abolition. I was fortunate as a teenager to meet him a couple of times. I was trying to persuade him to stand for rector of the university of Glasgow. He had sufficient judgment not to rely on my campaigning skills and he politely declined the invitation, but he was a truly inspirational character. He took the view—I know because I heard him speak on the matter many times—that, in the terms that Amnesty International uses, the use of capital punishment is the ultimate denial of a human right. He was motivated

ultimately by justice. Even after the abolition of capital punishment in this country, he maintained an active interest in the issue. He also maintained an interest in campaigning on other miscarriages of justice, especially in this country. I was most intimately familiar with his involvement with the Paddy Meehan case in Scotland, but he also took an active interest in the Guildford four and the Birmingham six.

All those cases serve to remind us how right we are to have maintained our opposition to capital punishment in this country as an instrument of domestic policy. A thread running through the use of capital punishment, wherever it happens in the world, is the fact that criminal justice systems are fallible. They are run by people for people, and people can make mistakes, as happened recently in the state of Texas in the case of Todd Willingham. It is now accepted that an innocent man was executed.

Once we have accepted in this country that our system has got things wrong, as happened with the Guildford four and the Birmingham six, we can at least turn the key in the door and let those who have been wrongly imprisoned walk free. That cannot happen to Todd Willingham in Texas, where even now the government are not prepared to allow further ventilation of the issues. That is the one argument that those in favour of the death penalty can never refute: the opportunity for mistakes, and the finality of that. Whether one takes my view that it is morally wrong for the state to take a life, or a more pragmatic one, the case against the use of the death penalty is substantial and unanswerable.

I remind hon. Members of my entry in the Register of Members' Interests about various campaign visits that I have made on this subject. I am also a member of Amnesty International and a patron of an organisation called Amicus—a charity operating in this country to provide legal representation for people facing the death penalty in America. I want to mention my appreciation of the efforts of the campaigning and legal organisation Reprieve, with which I have also worked closely.

There are three headings on which I want to speak this morning. First, I want to mention a couple of specific current cases involving United Kingdom nationals. Then I will touch briefly on the question of countries where the death penalty is used for juveniles. Finally, I shall deal with a few bilateral issues—in particular, matters affecting our relations with Belarus, Japan and the United States of America.

Perhaps the most pressing—and indeed most publicly commented on—of the cases involving UK nationals at the moment is that of Akmal Shaikh. The Government are engaged in his case and some hon. Members may be aware that he is awaiting execution in China. He is a 53-year-old British man from London. His appeal before the Urumqi high court was denied in August, although I am told that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was not informed of that until earlier this month. His sentence is now to be reviewed by the People's Supreme Court, and if that is not successful, he will be executed.

The concerns that I and many others have about Akmal Shaikh's case include his apparent mental health difficulties. He has always maintained that he went to China to start a career as a pop star. He met a group of men in Poland who persuaded him to travel with them to China via Tajikistan. Upon arrival in the airport

[*Mr. Carmichael*]

there, he was told that he would have to travel to China alone, as there was only one seat left on the flight. His companion gave him a bag to take with him and said that he would be on the next flight. He was then arrested with 4 kilograms of heroin at Urumqi airport. He told the officials that the suitcase did not belong to him and that he did not know anything about the drugs. We are told that no intimation of the death sentence was given to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office until some months after it had been passed. That is indicative of the extreme secrecy that shrouds the use of the death penalty in that country.

Reprieve is actively engaged in Akmal Shaikh's case and has sought permission for Dr. Peter Schaapveld—a clinical psychologist—to visit him and make a proper assessment. To date, Dr. Schaapveld has not been allowed access to see Akmal Shaikh, but there is already substantial evidence in the public domain that he suffers from significant mental health issues. I am told that, on the last appeal hearing on 26 May, he insisted on reading a long, rambling and often incoherent statement to the court, notwithstanding advice to the contrary from his legal representatives. Embassy staff at that hearing were not allowed to take notes, and Dr. Schaapveld was of course denied access to his patient. I am told that the Foreign Office produced a number of the e-mails that Akmal sent to the embassy in Poland while living there. It perhaps gives a flavour of the man's state of mind that they were written in a 72-point font, and they were described to me as being rambling and incoherent.

I have some questions for the Minister on Akmal Shaikh's case. For the benefit of hon. Members and those outside who are watching the case with interest, will the Minister outline how the Government plan to intervene in the People's Supreme Court? We know that it now automatically reviews every death sentence. However, we do not know the timings, so there is clearly an element of urgency about the representations that the Government should be making.

The Minister's Department was asked to file an *amicus curiae* brief with the People's Supreme Court outlining its opposition to the death penalty and, in particular, addressing the question of mental health. I am told that the Foreign Office replied that it would prefer to write to the court, rather than enter a formal *amicus curiae* brief. I would be interested to hear the Minister's explanation, not least because China has been known to use *amicus curiae* briefs when its nationals have been involved in legal proceedings in other parts of the world. It is difficult to see what objection there could have been to that more formal route being followed.

The other case to which I shall refer briefly is that of Naheem Hussain and Rehan Zaman—two British nationals facing execution in Pakistan. The background to their case is that they were subject to a significant degree of torture following their arrest. The history of the case is fairly well in the public domain. Early consular intervention could have made a significant difference. It is a matter of regret that early intervention was not as vigorous as it might have been. If the Pakistani authorities failed to make a meaningful investigation or to take other steps to rectify the situation in a reasonable time, what will the Government do to preserve their position? Will they

consider instigating legal proceedings against the Pakistan Government pursuant to the UN convention against torture?

A number of issues relating to consular involvement have been raised with me, but I do not feel able to explore them today. However, I should be grateful if the Minister were to indicate a willingness to engage with me and other members of the all-party group on the death penalty and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Clare Short), who is representing Hussein and Zaman and who has been vigorously involved in their case from the start.

On the question of juveniles being the subject of capital punishment, I have been campaigning with Amnesty International, most recently in the case of Delara Darabi. So far in 2009, six juvenile offenders have been executed, four of them in Iran and two in Saudi Arabia. Last year, Iran executed eight juveniles. It is clearly prohibited under international law, as stated in article 6.5 of the international covenant on civil and political rights and the convention on the rights of the child. Iran is a party to both treaties, Saudi Arabia to the latter only. Neither country should be executing children under the age of 18.

Will the Minister continue to urge the Iranian and Saudi Arabian authorities to uphold their international obligations, calling an immediate moratorium on the execution of juvenile offenders as a step towards the ultimate abolition of the death penalty in those two countries? Will the Government continue to make representations to the relevant authorities whenever a juvenile is scheduled for execution there?

The position of Belarus should concern the Government on a bilateral basis. It is the last country in Europe to continue to use the death penalty. We do not know much about the country's use of the penalty, but I understand that four people were executed there in 2008. Belarus is one of those countries—Japan is another—where condemned prisoners are given no warning that they are about to be executed; they are usually executed within minutes of being told that their appeal for clemency has been rejected. Their families are generally told days or weeks after the execution that it has been carried out.

In June, the Parliamentary Assembly to the Council of Europe voted to restore special guest status to the Belarusian Parliament, but under certain conditions. One was that it should instigate a moratorium on the death penalty. Notwithstanding that, two people there have been sentenced to death this year. Their appeals have been turned down by the Supreme Court and the prisoners are now appealing for clemency. On 12 October, the UN Human Rights Council called on the Belarusian Government not to execute Vasily Yuzepchuk until it had also considered the appeal of Andrei Zhuk.

Will the Government continue to call for the moratorium required under the Parliamentary Assembly's resolution No. 1671 of 23 June, which deals with the status of the Belarusian Parliament? Will the Government press the Belarusian Government to uphold their obligations as a party to the international covenant on civil and political rights and to respect the decisions and recommendations of the UN Human Rights Council? Will they continue to press for clemency in the other two cases to which I have referred?

Japan is now one of the top 10 killing states in the world. Having been in Japan earlier this year, I formed the impression that the country is sensitive to its standing in the world. It is a global trading nation, and people understand that it does Japan no good to be in a position that puts them in the company of nations such as Iran, North Korea and Zimbabwe.

David Taylor: One of the most egregious cases is that of Hakamada Iwao, who was sentenced to death in 1968 and has been on death row ever since. He has been in solitary confinement for 29 years, and is exhibiting symptoms of mental illness. He confessed under duress, but withdrew his confession at his trial. Could not the Minister urge the Japanese ambassador at the very least to offer the man a pardon or a retrial?

Mr. Carmichael: The hon. Gentleman anticipates what I was about say. I, too, have been engaged in that case. When I was in Japan, I was privileged to meet a number of those campaigning in support of him. I also met his sister and one of the three trial judges that presided at Hakamada's trial. In my experience as a lawyer and politician, Hakamada's case is unique. In addition to all the compelling evidence to which the hon. Gentleman referred, one of the three judges who presided over the trial has now said that he was never persuaded that Hakamada was, in fact, guilty. If that is not what we in this country would regard as a reasonable doubt, I do not know what is. If our commitment to international standards of procedure in criminal justice means anything at all, the Minister should take on board the hon. Gentleman's suggestion. Hakamada has been in detention for 43 years, 29 of which were spent in solitary confinement. As a consequence, there are, unsurprisingly, substantial concerns about the mental health of Hakamada Iwao. To execute a man in such circumstances falls well below the standards of basic decency and humanity that we are entitled to expect of those countries that, along with us, are part of the international community of nations.

The one bright spot in relation to Japan is the recent change of Government. I understand that the new Justice Minister is an abolitionist, so we may have got to a position in which there is a de facto moratorium in Japan. That remains to be seen, but I hope that the Government here will take the opportunity to push the case for a moratorium in Japan, because the standard of care for those on death row in that country is probably among the worst in the world. When one considers some of the other countries involved in such a practice—China, North Korea and others—it is quite a damning indictment.

Finally, I should like to bring to the Minister's attention the position of the United States of America. The USA is one of the largest users of the death penalty in the worldwide community. It is one of those countries that is most frequently cited as the reason why countries such as Japan, Saudi Arabia, China and others feel that what they are doing cannot be that bad because they are only doing what the United States does. It frustrates me that there is real opportunity for the United States to give a positive lead, which would make a tremendous difference to its standing in the world community, but it refuses to do so.

I visited the United States last month. Along with members of Amnesty International, I visited Troy Anthony Davis, who is on death row in the state of Georgia. I

could probably talk for 90 minutes about the experience of being on death row, which is a truly awful phenomenon. Anybody who thinks that death penalties are justifiable or in some way workable should experience it for themselves. The consulate in Atlanta was exceptionally helpful in its dealings with us. It was able to facilitate our visit to Mr. Davis on death row. Although this is not a case that involves a British national, it is one that should cause us concern.

There are substantial issues involving the apparent innocence of Troy Davis. Seven of the nine witnesses who gave evidence against him have subsequently revised or recanted that evidence, which brings me back to my earlier point about the fallibility of criminal justice systems. Had Troy Davis been prepared to roll over and let the system take its course, he would have been killed by now. He told me how, one day, he came within two hours of his execution. At one stage, he was taken into the room and made to stand no more than 2 feet away from the gurney to which he would, later that day, be strapped for the lethal injection to be administered.

Such an experience is a very chilling illustration of just why it is wrong to use the death penalty, and why it is right for our Government to speak against it wherever they see it. We should continue to promote the view that the British Government and the British people do not want to be associated with such a barbaric practice.

9.55 am

Stephen Pound (Ealing, North) (Lab): May I add to the comments made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) and say what a pleasure it is, Mr. Benton, to serve under your wise leadership today?

I congratulate the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland on bringing such an extraordinary combination of skills, abilities and personal qualities to this debate and to his parliamentary work. He is a lawyer, and a man of forensic intelligence and great humanity. The work that he undertook in the case of Samantha Orobator at very short notice might have saved—did save, in my opinion—the young woman's life. If any of us can look back on our parliamentary careers and say as much as that, we will have reason to be proud.

I should also like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister, who has visited one of my constituents in Bangkok. As a Foreign Office Minister, he has been assiduous in visiting, assisting and advising, and prompting action throughout the world.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland mentioned something that goes to the very heart of our debate: if a miscarriage of justice occurs, a person can be released from prison—they may be broken, but they are free—but if a person is executed, there is no release or redemption. He mentioned the Guildford four and the Birmingham six. It is perhaps appropriate to remember that one of the Birmingham six, Giuseppe Conlon, died in prison. He was not executed, but because he died in prison, there was no release for him. No one can say whether or not he would otherwise have died at that point, but I think that the facts suggest one interpretation.

The case of Timothy Evans of Rillington place was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor), who rightly commemorated the life and work of Ludovic Kennedy, who was a man

[Stephen Pound]

of extraordinary qualities. I found Kennedy slightly difficult to come to terms with because his passion for shooting animals appeared to be somewhat at odds with the humanity that he expressed, but we must allow Liberals their foibles. Timothy Evans was hanged for murders that were certainly committed by John Reginald Christie. Those of us who were brought up in west London remember the pub, the Kensington Park Hotel, which was at the end of the road that I lived on. I recall the dark shadow that that case cast over us in west London.

When we consider issues such as the death penalty, we come at them from various directions. There may be a consensus in most of Europe, outside Belarus, that the death penalty is a mediaeval barbarism, anti-Christian and something that goes against the principle of redemption, and that it is something that belongs to a dim and distant past and that should rightly be consigned to that bloody past. However, that is the ideological and sometimes theological argument; there is also a criminological argument. We all know that the murder statistics in executing Texas are higher than those in non-executing New York, and there is very little evidence to suggest that the death penalty is a deterrent. Many people have tried to use the deterrent effect as justification, but Amnesty International has completely refuted that theory.

In the summer of 1959, when I was 11 years old, a man called Gunter Podola was arrested very close to where my parents and I lived. He was one of the many people swept up in the detritus of war. He had been a member of the Hitler youth, and his father had been a barber who had fought and died with the German army on the Russian front. He emigrated to Canada, where he became a petty criminal and was promptly deported from Montreal to what was then West Germany. Those who say that border controls are lax today should note that Podola was then able to fly from Düsseldorf to London Heathrow with no problem at all. He went to west Kensington and started a career of petty crime and blackmail. He was arrested in Onslow square in west London, having shot Detective Sergeant Purdy. When we talk about the death penalty, we should never forget the victims, but I do not think that putting someone to death benefits the victim in any way, and it certainly does not bring them back to life.

Podola's case was heard over a few months during the late summer and early autumn of 1959. As an 11-year-old boy living in London at that time, I knew that the clock was ticking. Even though Podola had not appealed against his sentence, the Home Secretary called the case in, set up a medical tribunal to examine Gunter Podola's state of mind, and decided that he was fit to be hanged by the neck until he was dead. Although Mr. Podola claimed that someone else was his double and was acting in this strange way, the Home Secretary decided that he should hang, and hanged he was at Wandsworth prison. What I recall most vividly was the utterly dehumanising feeling that so many of my colleagues experienced.

Let us be honest: some people find a sort of vicarious thrill in the death penalty. Some people are death-penalty junkies and actually find something exciting about it. When I went to Mountjoy prison, I was one of the last

people to visit what was called the "hang house", where not only Kevin Barry but 27 other people were put to death. I found it extraordinary that there were death tourists. There are people who have a fascination with executions, but I think that that says more about their own sad, sick and sorry souls than it does about the issue and principle that we are discussing.

Podola was a man whom I had never met and with whom I had nothing in common. He was a petty thief, a drifter and what we in those days called a "displaced person". However, his being put to death went against everything that I was brought up to believe in—that all people are capable of, and carry within them the seed, germ and hope of, redemption. How could the execution possibly be justified? Seeing that case made me realise how utterly dehumanising putting a citizen to death is. A state or society that kills its own is somehow less humane, less decent and—I make no apologies for saying this—less Christian. I am sorry if that offends some people, but that is an issue, and such issues mean a lot to me.

Why are we having this debate? If it is now accepted that the death penalty is of the past, should we not simply say that we are pleased with the actions that the Government and all parties in the House are taking? We can congratulate the Minister on the work that he has undertaken personally—I repeat that the Minister has been extraordinarily assiduous in this matter—but the death penalty has not gone away. The death penalty, that dark shadow, is creeping up on us from other parts of the world. Virtually all countries of the English-speaking Caribbean have refused to agree to a moratorium on the death penalty. We know the situation in St. Kitts and Nevis and in Trinidad. Those people are close to us in many ways. The death penalty—judicial murder, execution; call it what you will—has not gone away; it is here. Amnesty International has produced figures stating that 2,390 people were put to death in 25 countries around the world. That was over how many decades? None; it was over one year. In 2008, more than 2,000 people were put to death. We also know that children are put to death.

As part of a country that I still hope can call itself civilised—I think that we are a civilised country as part of a civilised European Community—can we be silent while children are put to death? In Iran, children are swung off the end of cranes with wire around their necks. How utterly obscene is that? I do not say that there is a good or a bad death. Some poets may say that there is such a thing as a good death, but what is as vicious, vile and dehumanising as those deaths of juveniles? And what is the crime? In some cases, someone is killed in public for being gay. To paraphrase the former Prime Minister, that is a scar on the earth, not just on one region.

We have come a long way. It is salutary to remember that when the London underground system was opened in the 1860s, the first ever excursion train on the old Metropolitan line took passengers to a public execution—tickets were sold. That was in the 1860s, which is not that long ago. People queued up and took the family, including the children, for a day out to see a human being—one of God's creations; a living, breathing person—hanged. Therefore, we cannot be complacent about this

in any way. We cannot stand back and say that civilisation has marched on, because the problem still exists throughout the world.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire mentioned the Hakamada case in Japan, which has thrown up all sorts of horrors. There is something called *daiyo kangoku*, which is a system of substitute prisons. Someone is arrested in Japan and they are held in a non-prison prison, where they have to sit in the same position for a long period of time and are subject to sleep deprivation.

In many ways, Japan is an admirable country. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland quite rightly said that it is conscious of its public image. However, how can it possibly allow that image to be projected around the world? Do the Japanese people want to be seen as a country that has shadow prisons, sleep deprivation and psychological torture of that nature? I cannot believe that to be the case. Therefore, an occasion such as this, which provides the opportunity to ventilate such cases, is welcome. Again, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman not only on securing the debate, but on his extraordinary energy in travelling the world and working in an area that some of his constituents—and some of mine—will be completely unable to understand as a subject of such passion and importance. What he has done might not make him massively popular in his constituency, but the fact that he has chosen to do it is much to his credit. I offer him my admiration and respect.

If we are faced with a world in which the death penalty is coming back, why are people talking about it? I would say that putting a human being to death is the ultimate admission of failure in society, in the judiciary and in the whole jurisprudential system. If society's problems cannot be solved through civilised methods, the solution is to kill the problem. However, that is not the solution and does not solve the problem. It simply sets a standard of retribution. We all know the oft-quoted "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" from the Bible. However, if we read on, it ends up with a world where no one has any eyes or any teeth. The idea of God-ordained judicial retribution was nonsense then, and is nonsense now. It must be exposed widely throughout the world.

Without question, we live in a world of increased violence. That is partly because there are more of us, we live closer together and we are more acquisitive. There are many reasons for that increase in violence, and many ways of addressing it. One idea that we should immediately park and decide not to progress with is the suggestion that killing fellow humans somehow stops other crimes from being committed and somehow makes society a better place. It does not; it makes for a sadder, sicker society.

The work of Amnesty International is exemplary. I am a proud member of Amnesty International, although I am not sure whether I have to declare that—it is certainly not a pecuniary interest because I pay it money and it has never paid me anything. I hope that this debate will establish a few things: first, that judicial murder does take place, is taking place and could take place in countries that we thought had turned their backs on it; and, secondly, that Amnesty International has by far the best track record of any organisation working in this area, and nobody challenges the evidence that it produces. Many countries are so terrified by the appearance of some innocent young lawyer or activist

from Amnesty International that they will turn them away at the airport, call the riot police or move people from prison to prison rather than have that person turn up, let alone the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland—they probably close down the entire airport system when he arrives. *[Interruption.]* Well, I know that they have tried it. Amnesty's work is important, and it must continue to be publicised and ventilated. The case of Samantha Orobator, to which I referred earlier—it occurred only at the beginning of this summer—is another example of action being taken quickly and a life being saved.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland has done the House a great service. At the risk of sounding too florid, I think that he has done humanity a great service, not just in his work day by day, but by putting down a marker today to say that whatever we in this country and on the continent of Europe are—for all our faults, warts and all—we are still a people who do not slaughter our own judicially. We do not take someone in the cold morning of Wandsworth prison and put them to death while crowds gather outside. We are not a country that allows the sick, vicarious thrill of judicial murder to permeate our social life—let us put that down as a marker today. Let us resolve collectively, as this Government have done and, I hope, all parties in the House will continue to do, that we in this country will continue to make the strongest possible case against this appalling crime that does not solve crimes, but creates further ones—this inhumanity that is the death sentence.

10.11 am

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): I endorse everything that the previous two hon. Members have said, and I will not seek to repeat it, as they said it extremely well. I wanted to take part in this debate for two reasons. First, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) and my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) recently asked me to take on the task of chairing the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission. Also, I am and have been for some time one of the vice-chairs of the all-party group on China.

China alone is responsible for almost three quarters of the world's executions. Amnesty International's last report indicated that China carried out nearly 2,000 executions in 2008, although the figure is believed to be much higher, as statistics on death sentences and executions remain state secrets.

I turn the House's attention to process. I have three points to make about China that are well echoed in a recently published book by Martin Jacques entitled "When China Rules the World". The first point is that we are all going to have to get used to dealing with a country and a power that is growing exponentially. Martin Jacques makes it clear in his book:

"According to projections by Goldman Sachs... the three largest economies in the world by 2050 will be China, followed by a closely matched America and India some way behind, and then Brazil, Mexico, Russia and Indonesia. Only two European countries feature in the top ten, namely the UK and Germany in ninth and tenth place respectively. Of the present G7, only four appear in the top ten."

In other words, according to present projections, by 2050, China as a global power will be well ahead of the United States, India, Brazil, Mexico and indeed much of the European Union. That says to me that we are

[Tony Baldry]

going to have to recognise that we must manage many issues at a much more European level. We cannot presume that each member state within the European Union can take them on its own.

For a long time, the UK Government have been managing a UK-China human rights dialogue. I commend Ministers and officials for their work on that, but as any Minister who has taken part in it will acknowledge, it has taken on a slightly ritualistic dimension. Ministers give our line to take and then the Chinese give their line to take, and one wonders to what extent the Chinese officials are actually entering into the dialogue.

That brings me to my second point. Although China is theoretically a politically communist state, it is actually based on Confucian principles. Confucianism is essentially a set of precepts of what is right and wrong and prescriptions for appropriate forms of behaviour. The Chinese have a strong sense of what they think is right and wrong, which is reflected in their criminal justice system. It is not just about engaging China at a political level; it is about engaging Chinese society on what it believes to be right and wrong.

The third point about China that Martin Jacques makes—I think that we could all make it—is that China sees human rights very much in terms of the collective rather than the individual. What is important is for the state to ensure that people do not starve and have sufficient food and employment. Therefore, the rights of an individual are subordinate to the rights of the community. I certainly find—I do not know whether other hon. Members do—that when one engages in dialogue with the Chinese ambassador in London or with Chinese politicians, one almost has to start by finding a political vocabulary with which to examine such concepts, because their understanding of human rights is different from ours. One must find a common dialogue.

China practises judicial execution on far more people than any other country. If we are going to tackle the issue—I think that we would all endorse what the Minister said recently on world day against the death penalty:

“we continue to call for an end to the use of capital punishment around the world”—

we will have to tackle it with China. However, we will also have to recognise that China is beginning to feel itself to be much more influential in the world, so we will have to act at the European Union level.

That creates an issue for the House. All too often, when things happen at a European level, it effectively means that they are taken over by Ministers, whether in the Council of Ministers or acting collectively, by the Commission or by our colleagues in the European Parliament. The danger with that is that we as Members of the UK Parliament, if we are not careful, will be marginalised on human rights issues, whether they relate to capital punishment or something else. We will have to start working out how we can work much more constructively with colleagues in other national Assemblies and Parliaments in Europe to bring collective pressure on countries whose human rights records are not all that they might be, from Colombia to Zimbabwe to North Korea or wherever. It will require collective action.

The complexities of negotiating, influencing and hoping to change policy in China demonstrate the need for us to work more constructively together. I suspect that if all of us try to do it individually, we will find it difficult to bring about real and lasting change on this particular issue in China. To be candid, if one cannot bring about change in China, which is far and away the largest perpetrator of judicial executions, it will be much more difficult to bring about change elsewhere. If we can start to effect change in China, it will hopefully be possible to effect change elsewhere. I hope that the Foreign Office and Members of Parliament can give some thought to how more can be done at a European level while still actively engaging Members of this House.

Mr. Joe Benton (in the Chair): Before I call the next speaker, I ask hon. Members to bear in mind that the winding-up speeches will start at 10.30 am. A couple of hon. Members wish to speak.

10.20 am

Mr. Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Benton. I will keep my remarks brief. I congratulate the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) on securing this debate.

I will begin with the areas on which I presume there is unanimity in the House and further afield. We have heard of appalling instances of juveniles being put to death in various nation states. There have been various early-day motions and campaigns on that issue. I pay tribute to the work of the hon. Gentleman on that issue. There are appalling statistics on the number of juveniles and individuals with learning difficulties who have been subjected to legal systems that result in capital punishment. It is obvious to us in the west that such things should not happen. I am totally and utterly in agreement with that aspect of the global abolition argument. That is paramount.

Setting that aside, there comes a time when we have to say what we think. I am not convinced by the case for total and utter abolition of the death penalty in all cases and for all people, however ruthless and repeated their crimes. Over the years, I have followed with interest those who argue that, even if a small number of people were spared who were guilty of vicious crimes such as repeated murder, total abolition would be worth it because many others would be spared who did not deserve such a fate.

The problem with that argument is that not much research has been done on the small number of serial killers who treat the prospect of redemption with utter contempt. There is still the prospect that one or two killers internationally, after being detained in jail, could commit another crime against an innocent person on release. Unfortunately, not as much research has been done to protect innocent people from the brutality and viciousness of the small number of serial killers.

I understand the point made by the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Stephen Pound) on the need for a society to be able to call itself civilised in the way in which it treats those who are guilty of serious crimes. I believe that a society that calls itself civilised must take account of the infinitesimal number of people who, despite all that the legal system offers in terms of appeal, the

chance to reform their ways and to make amends for their actions, decline or defy our best endeavours. There must be some form of radical response by a civilised society to protect the innocent.

Mr. Carmichael: Serial killers generally suffer from a psychiatric disorder. In my experience, such people are never allowed back on to the streets, even after they have gone through the criminal justice system. Surely even such people should be subject to the same protection as everybody else. That relates to my earlier point about mistakes being made.

Mr. Campbell: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point of view on the mental capacity of a number of serial killers. However, if a person with such a criminal record is not released, but escapes from detention and commits another violent crime that results in the death of another innocent person, is that not the result of the lenient treatment of a serial offender?

The more I listen to the debate, the less convinced I am of the case for a total and utter abolition in all conceivable circumstances. I am not convinced that it is the correct way to ensure that society is a safer place. I emphasise the caveats that I have given about juveniles and so forth. In nation states such as Japan and the United States, there have been many indefensible cases of people being on death row and ultimately paying the last possible penalty. With those caveats, I am simply not convinced of the case for the total abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances.

10.27 am

Greg Mulholland (Leeds, North-West) (LD): I will keep to the time that you have set, Mr. Benton. I add my appreciation for the work and leadership of my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) on this issue.

Within 18 months of being elected to this place, I dealt with the family of a constituent who faced the death penalty in Pakistan. I pay tribute to colleagues from all parties who have been vocal on this issue. However, only a few of us have dealt with a constituency case of this nature. I have always been a vocal opponent of the death penalty, but it is something else to sit with the family of somebody who faces the death penalty and to look into the eyes of people who face the prospect of a state deciding to use its might, authority and legal system to kill in cold blood. Mirza Tahir Hussain was a dual citizen, so Pakistan would have been killing one of its citizens as well as ours. It was a strange case because he had not been in this country for 18 years by the time he was finally released.

I again pay tribute to Amnesty International, Reprieve and Fair Trials Abroad for their support in that case. I also thank the Prince of Wales for his support and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the work that it did behind the scenes. However long or short my political career, I will always remember the moment when I met my new constituent, Mirza Tahir Hussain, for the first time at Heathrow airport after his release, when justice was done. He was not guilty, yet he languished for 18 years with the death penalty hanging over his head.

I could not possibly mention that case without mentioning the heroic contribution of his brother, Amjad Hussain. Since then, he has not disappeared into the

shadows, but taken up the case of the global moratorium. He campaigns on Muslim nations in particular. My question for the Minister is therefore whether he can update us on discussions with Pakistan and other Muslim nations. There has been a change of Government in Pakistan and there is an opportunity to move this issue forward.

Finally, I must disagree profoundly with the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell). I have seen the effect of the death penalty on an individual and a family. It brutalises society and dehumanises the justice system. In the case of Northern Ireland, even if we had had the death penalty—understandable as it may be for the people who have suffered the horrific crimes carried out there to want it—would it really have taken the Good Friday peace process forward, which I think we all agree has been a good thing?

I agree with the hon. Gentleman when he says that we must have real justice and clear life without parole for the worst offenders—there is no question about that and we must make that clear—but how many innocent people would have to die if we had a so-called perfect system where we could kill the worst offenders? It just does not make sense. It is simply wrong for any state to kill its citizens in cold blood in the name of justice. I hope that Amnesty's continued campaign is a great success.

10.30 am

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Benton. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) on getting the debate on to the agenda and on the way in which he opened it. He is hugely knowledgeable on the subject and has a strong record of campaigning on the issue around the world. I know that partly because he is my colleague and we have discussed these issues, and partly because, like him, I am a member of Amnesty International. When Amnesty's magazine comes through the letter box every few months, although I often find it difficult to read because of the horrors within, from time to time, there is a piece about his work on these important issues.

I reiterate and add my voice to my hon. Friend's congratulation of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Government on their work on the issue. As he mentioned, it is rare for most of us to be in agreement in this House, but I think this is one of those matters on which the vast majority of hon. Members come to the same conclusion. It is good to know that our Government take forward these issues on the international stage.

This is a timely debate because it comes so soon after the world day against the death penalty. Sadly, it is also timely because, last Tuesday, we had the news about the three Tibetans executed in Lhasa. News of such executions punctuate our news media regularly. In some ways, it can be said that we are making progress on the international campaign to achieve global abolition. Although there are worrying trends in some states, in 2008, 106 countries voted in favour of a worldwide moratorium on executions and 46 voted against in the UN General Assembly. That was clearly progress on what happened in 2007, when 104 voted in favour, with 54 against. We should take some comfort and inspiration from that.

[*Jo Swinson*]

Although global abolition must remain our ultimate goal, in the meantime, we should do all we can to seek a reduction in the number of executions that happen in countries around the world. That is partly why the work of the many organisations campaigning against the death penalty is so important, particularly those that take up cases to stop individual executions. Even reducing the number of executions by one in an individual country has a huge value, and I pay tribute to the work that is done. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Greg Mulholland) set out well the impact that such work can have on an individual basis. I congratulate him, his constituent, his constituent's family and all who were involved in that successful case, which happily ultimately had a good outcome.

I disagree with the argument of the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) that the death penalty is an appropriate action for the state in some cases. I have found no evidence in the research that the death penalty acts as a deterrent and makes us safer. In fact, countries that have the death penalty, such as the United States, have incredibly high homicide rates and a correlation can often be seen in relation to that. In any case, the worst serial killers and murderers do not commit such crimes rationally and often do not think through the consequences.

I accept that there are some serial killers and horrific cases in relation to which there is very little or no possibility of redemption, but I put it to the hon. Gentleman that it does not follow that the only solution is the death penalty. True lifetime imprisonment could also keep society safe and, indeed, in various cases in the UK—for example, that of Ian Brady—that was ultimately the decision made.

Mr. Gregory Campbell: I have a simple question. If we have lifetime imprisonment but a person who is guilty of committing murder breaks out and commits it again, what then?

Jo Swinson: We have incredibly high security in the places in which these people are held, and that is not something that happens. A tiny minority of cases would fall under the category that the hon. Gentleman is outlining but, given the extreme security we have, we are effectively talking hypothetically about that scenario.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) has described a scenario, but he has not given us any actual examples of notorious serial killers who have either been released and killed other people, or escaped. He is giving us Hollywood fantasy scripts; he has given us no concrete examples.

Jo Swinson: I concur with the hon. Gentleman. I am certainly confident that, in those tiny minority of cases, the state has secure institutions available to ensure that the public are kept safe, without resorting to state-sponsored murder or compromising our humanity in that way.

Some countries carry out a huge number of executions, and 93 per cent. of all known executions last year took place in just five countries: USA, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. In an eloquent contribution, the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) mentioned

the situation in China. I agree with him on the importance of working collectively through organisations such as the EU, so that we can have greater influence on the issue. Where there is agreement across the EU, by speaking together we can often have a stronger and louder voice.

As I mentioned, the case of the Tibetans who were executed is of great concern. I welcome the visit of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), to Tibet last month. I hope that he will have spoken to Chinese officials about those Tibetans and others who have been executed—indeed, some people are still facing execution. My hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland raised the case of Mr. Akmal Shaikh. I echo his concerns and I hope that the Government are doing absolutely everything they can to raise the issue at the highest levels within China.

Despite the place of the US on the global stage and the fact that it argues for human rights in many circumstances, those efforts are entirely undermined by having the death penalty. Some 52 people have been executed in the US since this time last year. I would like to raise the horrific recent case of Romell Broom, who is a man from Ohio who spent two hours waiting to die as technicians looked for a suitable vein through which to administer a lethal injection. He helped them to try to find the vein and in the end the execution could not happen and he was taken away. We need only consider such cases to find a clear reason why the death penalty should be abolished in its entirety.

Of course, there is also always the prospect of executing an innocent person. In America, there was a recent report about the case of Cameron Tod Willingham, who was put to death in 2004 for apparently murdering his three daughters in a house fire. At the time, it was said to be arson, but a recent report published in August by nine investigators has shown that the prosecution of the case was fatally flawed. We can see that such events and innocent cases still happen in all such countries. As mentioned, if the US stopped the death penalty, it would act as a beacon for other countries to stop hiding behind the excuse that because the US does it, they can too.

The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Stephen Pound) made a powerful speech about Iranian executions for homosexuality. Since 1979, more than 4,000 people were killed just for being gay. Although we have generally had a fairly consensual debate, I shall introduce a small note of discord by saying to the Minister that the UK Government need to consider again their policy of deporting gay Iranians despite the fact that they risk imprisonment and potential execution at home. There may not be a good or bad death, but in Iran the methods of execution are particularly harsh and death by stoning still takes place.

In summary, there are myriad reasons why the death penalty is wrong: there is the moral case, the human rights case and the absolutely unanswerable case that mistakes will be made. People are human and mistakes happen in our criminal justice system. Therefore, the state will murder innocent people if there is a death penalty.

The UK Government must be a passionate advocate of ending the death penalty around the world. I appreciate that in many ways we are preaching to the converted

because the Minister is in agreement and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has a strong record on this issue. However, I hope that today's excellent debate will act as further encouragement to the Minister by reinforcing that the FCO's work on raising this issue with Governments around the world is important.

10.40 am

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) on securing the debate and on the fluent and learned way in which he introduced the subject. I was also impressed by the passion with which the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Stephen Pound) spoke.

I had better declare my credentials. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), I have voted for the abolition of capital punishment in this country. I have also, like him, argued that case in front of Conservative party meetings and even Conservative party selection committees when that was not the most fashionable or popular cause to adopt. However, I was glad that the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Campbell) spoke, because it is important when we debate capital punishment that we do not give the impression of having got together into a political class that is dismissive of what is still a majority view among the British public. The most recent opinion research that I have seen shows that a majority of the public—fewer than 50 per cent., but still a majority—favour the restoration of the death penalty in this country. That should put us on our guard when we debate how to engage with other sovereign nations that have decided, for reasons of their own, to retain the death penalty.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury said when he talked about China, there is little to be gained from the ceremonial recitation of opposing lines if no real discussion, engagement or persuasion takes place. I suggest that the Government should focus on three specific ways of seeking to influence countries that retain the death penalty. The first way is to persuade them to reduce the range of offences that are subject to the capital penalty. As others have said, it is obscene that countries such as Iran still have the death penalty for apostasy and for consensual sexual intercourse between adults.

Secondly, I hope that the Government will focus strongly on securing due process where it is absent. It is plainly wrong for capital trials to be held when the accused person is unable to understand the charges against them, or for such trials to be held in secret or without independent observers. Hon. Members have discussed the execution of juveniles in Iran and elsewhere. One might talk about the barbarism of methods of execution such as stoning that are still used in some countries. An important theme to pursue in discussions with China is that it should live up to its declared policy of having all capital cases reviewed by the Supreme Court, but it is far from clear whether that was done in the case that the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) mentioned that involved the three Tibetans.

Thirdly, I hope that the Government will focus on the argument that Governments who retain the death penalty should have regard to mitigating circumstances, particularly to the concept of mental illness being a mitigating

factor. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland talked about the Akmal Shaikh case, which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition raised directly with State Councillor Dai Bingguo at their recent meeting. Let me also mention Japan. As recently as 2008, the Japanese executed a man who had been receiving psychiatric treatment in custody for more than a decade. I hope that the Government will pursue those themes both bilaterally and through international forums such as the United Nations Human Rights Council. I look forward to the Minister's response.

10.45 am

The Minister for Europe (Chris Bryant): I am grateful to be serving under your chairmanship, Mr. Benton.

It is ironic that we are having this debate in Westminster Hall, which was for many centuries the place where state trials were held. I believe that the first execution ordered from just outside this Chamber was in 1295, when Thomas de Turberville was sent off to be executed, oddly for spying against the French—I do not know why we were concerned about that. Ten years later, William Wallace was executed, as I am sure our Scottish colleagues would be more than keen to point out. Charles I was executed following his trial in Westminster Hall, and after that, Oliver Cromwell's head stood on a pike outside this building for some 35 years. As I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Stephen Pound) would remind us, Thomas More's trial took place just outside this Chamber, as did Cardinal Fisher's and Edmund Campion's. All of them were executed, as were many others.

Stephen Pound: Saint Thomas More.

Chris Bryant: Sir Thomas More. I am still an Anglican, even though the blandishments of the Bishop of Rome are tempting to others who do not want women bishops. I, however, am very happy to have women bishops.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) on securing this important debate. Given the history of Westminster Hall, perhaps we should have an annual debate in the hall itself on the death penalty around the world. I intend to write to the Speaker and to the Leader of the House to suggest that we should do so on the day that is set aside by many organisations such as Amnesty International—of which, I, too, am a member—so that we can showcase our work on this issue. The Government are passionately against the death penalty around the world. Indeed, I think that view is shared by most political parties, if not all.

My arguments against the death penalty are very simple. First, all too often, sentences are wrong. We have heard about such cases today, and tribute has been paid to Ludovic Kennedy. We have heard about people in British cases who were sentenced to death and executed, whom we now know could not possibly have committed the crimes for which they were sentenced. That has happened even in this country, which has a robust judicial system, but the numbers are much higher in countries in which many people do not have access to a fair trial and due process.

Secondly, the death penalty undervalues life. I am a Christian. I know that not all Members of the House are, but I believe that God gave us life so that we should respect it, not so that we should take it away. There is

[Chris Bryant]

absolutely no evidence that the death penalty has a deterrent effect. As several hon. Members have already pointed out, states in the United States of America that have the death penalty often have a higher murder rate than states that do not. The same is often true of countries around the world. The Bible is quite clear. "Vengeance is mine" does not mean mine as a Minister, the state or humanity; it means that vengeance is God's, and we should not use the justice system to perpetrate vengeance.

I also believe that human rights are a seamless garment. I am sorry to keep using all this biblical language. We cannot say that we will stand up for women's rights in Iran, but that we will not stand against the death penalty. We cannot say that it is wrong for people in Britain to be murdered for their sexuality, but that it is not wrong for people in Iran to be executed for their sexuality. It is particularly poignant that in the past couple of weeks, a man—Ian Baynham—was murdered about 300 yards up the road in Trafalgar square for being gay and that only last weekend a police community support officer was attacked in Liverpool because of his sexuality.

Both I and this Government believe that human rights are a seamless garment, and we will always take up these issues, wherever they apply, in every country in the world. That is a passionate campaign for us politically, because 2,390 people were executed in 25 countries in 2008—a shocking figure, even if it was in only 25 countries—and 8,864 people were sentenced in death in 52 states. As we have heard today in several hon. Members' passionate speeches, the whole process of being on death row and waiting for a sentence that might or might not be executed and of people being taken to the moment of execution and then taken back is barbaric.

When women are stoned to death in places in Iran, the pit is dug deep enough that they cannot raise their arms to protect themselves so their deaths will be swifter, but the pit is dug relatively shallow for men so that they will try to protect themselves and the execution will take longer. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North said, in Iran people can be strung up to the back of a lorry that suddenly moves away, and that takes place in main squares with everyone watching, cheering and jeering. One could talk about the methods of execution used in the United States of America, as sometimes it is impossible to find a suitable vein and the execution cannot proceed. Whatever type of execution one looks at, the whole process of being on death row is inhumane and every bit as wrong as the death penalty itself.

We fight politically on that issue around the world, but we will also take up representation wherever we possibly can, case by case, and I pay tribute to the consular staff who work in our embassies around the world, because they are absolutely unstinting in that work. Of course, we must always be intelligent, clever, sage and wise in the precise way that we deploy our diplomatic activity on behalf of an individual, as steaming in with the British diplomatic cavalry will not necessarily achieve our objectives in particular cases. Those consular staff work hard and deal with many complex cases, from child abduction to British people being sentenced to death, so I pay tribute to them.

In many parts of the world, simply ensuring that there is a decent prison in which people can serve their sentences is another part of the diplomatic effort that we have to engage in. I was in Peru three weeks ago but unfortunately was unable to visit Callao prison, which I had wanted to do because of the horrific experiences many British people have had there. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North referred to my visit to Thailand and Laos earlier this year to see Samantha Orobator. I am absolutely delighted that we were able to bring her back to serve her sentence in a British prison. I am passionately concerned about another British prisoner in Laos—John Watson—and desperate to ensure that he, too, is able to serve his sentence in this country, because the conditions in Thai and Laos prisons do not allow for a justice that we would want to be proud of.

We use three main vehicles, the first of which is the European Union. As the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) said, it is absolutely vital that we deploy our EU membership to greater effect. I would argue that that is one of the reasons why we need the Lisbon treaty. I hate to enter into difficult territory today, because that is an argument not with the hon. Gentleman but with his party leader, but I will say that we need the EU to be far more effective on a diplomatic and political level around the world. By bringing the roles of the higher representatives together into one figure who would report to the Council and Commission, we could be more effective in that area, particularly in relation to Belarus. Our work to try to persuade Belarus to move towards a moratorium and abandon the death penalty can be done most effectively both bilaterally and through the EU, and that is what we will strive to do.

The second vehicle is the UN. I was delighted that the 2007 resolution was passed and that the 2008 resolution was passed with a bigger majority and included a call for a moratorium. To those who have referred to the US, the matter is still a stain on the American reputation on human rights around the world. I wholly agree with Bill Richardson, the Governor of New Mexico, who said that there is absolutely no reason why the US should be behind the rest of the world on that, as he has abolished the death penalty in his state, and we will continue to make that point. Those in Washington are in absolutely no doubt about the British position on that, not least because the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland went there to tell them so. I was delighted that our embassy was able to facilitate his meetings. He has paid tribute to the support he received from many embassies around the world, and I pay tribute to the sustained campaign that he has run.

In response to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington)—I was about to call him my hon. Friend, because I think of him as an honourable, friendly person, although he sits on the opposite side of the Chamber. We have the Buckinghamshire mafia here today.

Mr. Lidington: Oxfordshire.

Chris Bryant: Oh, I am sorry—Thames valley.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we need to focus our efforts in the three ways to which he referred. I do not differ with him to any degree in that regard. We also must focus on specific countries, and some of them have been mentioned, such as China,

Japan, the US and Belarus. There has been scant mention of Caribbean countries, but obviously, we have a particular relationship with the Caribbean, where there are both overseas territories and Commonwealth countries. It is still a problem for us that there are countries that retain the death penalty even though they may not use it. We would prefer them to move to a situation where there was no death penalty.

The first person to hold the post that I now hold was Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who was a playwright among other things, but also Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office. He said:

“The surest way to fail is not to determine to succeed.”

We in the Foreign Office are absolutely determined to succeed in the campaign to bring an end to the death penalty everywhere in the world.

I will allude as quickly as I can to the specific comments that have been made. We have raised the case of Akmal Shaikh at the highest level. On 14 October a letter from the Prime Minister was presented to the Chinese authorities. The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Bill Rammell), the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis) and Peter Mandelson have all raised that issue directly. In particular, we have raised the issue of Akmal Shaikh’s mental health. In fact, the Prime Minister raised the issue again with the Chinese authorities on 19 October. There was an EU *démarche* last year, and we hope that there will be another one in the very near future.

On the suggestion of an *amicus curiae* brief, strong legal advice has confirmed that there is no such provision in Chinese law, despite the fact that the Chinese have used it in other countries. However, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland is absolutely right that we need to find other means by which we could make effective representations directly to the People’s Supreme Court in China.

With regard to Naheem Hussain and Rehan Zaman, I am more than happy to have a meeting and hope that we will be able to put that together as soon as possible. The hon. Gentleman referred to the delay at the beginning of that case. There was a complexity that related to how we used to work in those days, in August 2004. At first

we did not believe that they wanted us to make representations on their behalf, and we certainly did not have clear instructions from them in the first meeting. Then their lawyer said that they did not want us to act on their behalf. We have changed the way we work, so we would now almost certainly take that as the final statement. We will certainly raise the allegations of torture, because we are always opposed to torture in all cases—full stop.

Several hon. Members mentioned the execution of juveniles in Iran and Saudi Arabia, and there have been six such executions this year. Iran is a signatory to the UN convention on the rights of the child, so there is absolutely no reason why it should not follow its own treaty obligations. There have been 45 juvenile executions in Saudi Arabia since 1990, and we will work as hard as we can to ensure that there are no more.

I have already referred to Belarus in general, and we will continue to call for a moratorium on the death penalty. Spain does not have representation in Belarus, so during the Spanish presidency of the EU, we will take on that responsibility and ensure that it is one of our top four priorities in the first six months of next year. That relates to the two cases the hon. Gentleman raised—those of Andrei Zhuk and Vasily Yuzepchuk.

Several hon. Members mentioned Japan, and exactly the same issues apply. We constantly take up those issues, including the case of Mr. Hakamada. We believe that that is an extraordinary case in which the mental health of that gentleman has never been taken properly into consideration.

I have referred briefly to the issues in the US, which we try to raise regularly. We believe that the treatment of Troy Davis was unusually cruel. We note that 41 people have been executed this year in the US, 18 of them in Texas. I think that it will be difficult for me to win an argument with the politicians in Texas on that point; but none the less, we will continue to keep up the pressure.

The hon. Member for Banbury said that China sometimes sees issues—

Mr. Joe Benton (in the Chair): Order. We must move on to the next debate.

Wareham Railway Station

11 am

Annette Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole) (LD): I am grateful to have secured this debate. The proposed closure of the Wareham station pedestrian level crossing was devastating news for my constituents. The situation is complex, so I shall aim to describe it for the Minister as simply as I possibly can.

Wareham is an attractive small market town in my constituency. The 2001 census figures showed that its population was around 5,600. Sandford to the east, with a population of 2,000, is strongly linked to the town, and obviously the population levels will be higher now.

The town is fortunate in being on the main London to Weymouth line, but, as a consequence, it has a barrier that could split the town in two. The closure would have a disastrous impact on the vitality of the town, the business community, social activities and the whole wider community, so I am pleased to be able to raise the issue directly with the Minister today. There are several players in the decision making that is taking place: Network Rail, the Office of Rail Regulation, Dorset county council, and, I would think, South West Trains, although I have not yet been able to track down its involvement. The people who are affected fall into two categories—my constituents and rail users—which, of course, overlap. Clearly, safety is paramount—I would not argue anything else—but I am not convinced that the full interests of my constituents and public transport users are being taken into account when looking for a solution, which is why I hope that the Minister is in a position to give an overview of the situation.

I believe that the crossing dates back to 1847, since when there has been a road and pedestrian route crossing the railway. There is a footbridge over the railway that reminds me of the old film, “The Railway Children”—it clearly is not compliant with any disability legislation.

The station has two platforms. The London train to Weymouth comes in on the station side, where there is a considerable amount of car parking, which facilitates park-and-train, and taxis are available. Currently, tickets are sold only on this side. Trains to Poole, Bournemouth, Southampton and London depart from the platform to the east. There is access to bus services to Poole and Swanage on that side, but no car parking.

An agreement dated 1 December 1978 was made between the British Railways Board and Dorset county council for the building of a road bridge over the railway. In the lease, clause 3 states that the

“closure and stopping up of the public highway”

over the railway was authorised by the Wareham Bypass Scheme (Side Roads) Order 1973, and that the board was entitled to abolish the road crossing on completion of the bridge, provided that the existing footways were retained. Therefore, the crossing that I am talking about today was retained. It was subject to a lease dated 17 November 1975, which terminated on 24 June 1980. The lease states:

“on this date the Board shall either renew the lease or negotiate with the Council the provision of alternative facilities for pedestrians”.

Clause 24 of the lease states:

“the Council shall in the future provide a pedestrian footbridge over the railway but the date on which the footbridge is provided shall be entirely at the discretion of the Council in agreement with the Board”.

That raises an interesting point: does the council have a legal obligation to provide a decent footbridge close to the existing pedestrian crossing?

A further agreement between the board and the council was made on 25 March 1988 which, in effect, permitted the use of the original crossing for 25 years. There is a pedestrian sign by the crossing pointing to the town centre half a mile away.

The lease goes on to state that the council shall have an option to enter into a new agreement for a further period of 25 years, with such option to be exercised within three months of the expiry of the agreement. Terms and conditions were to be agreed between the board and the council. A further passage states that any dispute between the board and the council about the agreement shall be referred to and determined by an arbitrator. Given the way things are going, I am beginning to feel that an arbitrator of some description might be needed.

The lease specifically states:

“the Board will permit the general public on foot with perambulators and cycles as may be necessary at all times of day or night to use the new crossing”.

The only exceptions refer to the passage of trains and for engineering works. Many residents are saying that there must surely be an established right of way over the railway. However, does a permissive use by agreement create a public right of way? I understand that the consent of the Secretary of State is required, in accordance with section 41 of the Road and Rail Traffic Act 1933. It would be helpful if the Minister could clarify that point for my constituents.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Mole): May I advise the hon. Lady that there was a communication with the Dorset county council chief executive this year, which outlined that the 25-year legal agreement to which she refers with British Railways, as it then was, also led to the extinguishing of all public rights over the crossing in 1980?

Annette Brooke: I thank the Minister for that, because it provides clarity in the ongoing debate among residents.

Clause 11 of the lease is particularly relevant to the current situation. It states:

“if at any time the Board are required as a result of any change in the law or any direction or requirement of the Railway Inspectorate of the Department of Transport to alter or modify the controls or any part of the new crossing the Council shall pay the Board such charges incurred by the Board in complying with such changes in the law direction or requirement”.

The county council is thus potentially facing a big bill, and perhaps that is why we find ourselves in this crisis situation today. There has been no clear planning by the council over the past few years, during which time the problems have been identified.

The Wareham road bridge was built over the railway in the 1980s, and a decision was taken not to provide a footway because the former level crossing was available for pedestrians. It gave an easier route to town and was segregated from the main road. It is easy to be clever

with hindsight, but it seems absolutely incredible, looking back, that part of the main road network made no provision whatsoever for cyclists.

Problems seem to have surfaced around 2004, and from 2006 there has been pressure to take action to resolve the matter. There have been three campaigns at the crossing, where leaflets were handed out, and there has been press coverage.

Network Rail tells me that, over the years, it has worked with the council to try to address safety issues. It has undertaken work looking at alternatives to the crossing, including options such as an underpass, lifts and ramped bridges, and it has offered to undertake the work to implement a solution. However, it has told me that, thus far,

“we have been unable to agree a solution with Dorset County Council”.

I feel that it is because a big bill is looming that hard negotiations are taking place.

Network Rail has also independently installed a CCTV camera at the crossing, and there are voice announcements as well as a red light that warns users to stand clear of the crossing when it is in use. Misuse at the crossing received national media coverage after Network Rail released CCTV footage showing a young mother with her baby running across the crossing and ignoring the red light. Network Rail says that there have been 25 incidents at the crossing in the past 12 months when the driver has had to apply brakes, and that there are more than 80 recorded misuses at the crossing over the past four years. It says that that is more than three times the number of incidents at any other crossing in the south-west area and that it represents one of the worst records in the country. I do not believe that my constituents are particularly disregarding of regulations and laws, so this is a strange situation.

The matter has been brought to a head by the Office of Rail Regulation, with the threat of what is known as an improvement notice being issued to both the council and Network Rail. It requires steps to be taken to remove risk at a crossing that is considered to be dangerous, as we have heard. The latest news is that the crossing could be closed at the beginning of December.

Local residents need a presentation from Network Rail to be convinced of the level of abuse. Network Rail has been invited to a public meeting tomorrow night and I can only hope that it turns up, because it really will help to facilitate the discussion. Just imagine how the vast majority are feeling at the prospect of this important route to and from the town being closed. Why should they be punished for the actions of a few? What exactly constitutes a near miss? Network Rail has a duty to my constituents, so I really look forward to its presence at that meeting.

Right now, very short term, short term and long-term decisions have to be made. In the very short term, since 16 September, the crossing has been policed up to 7.30 pm at the latest—so not for 24 hours. I have tried to get figures of any misuse witnessed, but unfortunately there does not appear to be a comprehensive report. The initial cost of policing was £1,400 per week, but there has been a shift to a slightly cheaper private security firm. Originally, the county council used this mechanism to buy time to get alternative measures in place and proposed a follow-up short-term solution to

provide transport for all those who are mobility impaired and cannot use the adjacent footbridge. Cyclists would presumably be required to use the road footbridge, which does not even have a footway between the road and crash barriers.

My constituents were singularly unconvinced that a bus service to take prams, mobility scooters and people who had a proved disability to the other side of the railway line would be practical. They were right; already there is a change of plan for the very short term. The reason for this change of mind is that the detailed work to identify a public transport solution is proving unlikely to provide a sufficiently robust solution for the public. Also, the cost would be more than £100,000 per year, compared with £65,000 for the security presence.

I hear that the debate has moved on and that just policing is not acceptable to Network Rail. I am particularly concerned about whether any alternative will clearly be compatible with disability discrimination legislation, because there is a real issue that there should be access at all reasonable times over the railway line for disabled people.

The idea was that these short-term arrangements would last until Dorset county council secured funding for its long-term preferred solution of building a footpath-cycleway alongside the A351 Wareham bypass. My constituents' first preference is for electronically locked gates, but that is being dismissed on cost grounds over time from the county council and on safety grounds, I think, from Network Rail. I want to be assured that a full risk assessment has been undertaken. There is a busy vehicular and pedestrian crossing at Wool, which is electronically controlled, and an incredibly busy pedestrian crossing in Poole High Street, which is also electronically controlled. There is always the chance of somebody scaling the gates or rushing through, but surely there must be greater risks at those two points. I am looking for a proportionate response.

There is a lease issue, because Network Rail has to renew it in 2013. The original lease says that Dorset county council has the option to extend, but I understand that there would be a monitoring issue in respect of electronic gates when signal boxes change in 2012. Dorset county council tells me that Network Rail proposes charging it £100,000 per year for monitoring. However, there are only two trains an hour, so perhaps there is some bargaining to be done.

My constituents need to know in some detail why electronic gates are not being considered. The ORR letter to the chief executive of Dorset county council dated 1 September states that safety could be improved by the provision of supervised locking barriers or gates linked to the signalling system, although there was a preference for a bridge. It appears that the revenue cost of the additional supervision is the main obstacle to this proposal, which would have the full support of local residents.

Clearly, the type of gates used at Elsenham, where there was a double fatality in 2005, is not suitable. I suggest that we need a gate that is mechanically locked so that it cannot be forced open, with a safe refuge on the rail side for those who are crossing at the time the gates are locked. An additional gate could be provided immediately adjacent to the track that could be opened only to exit to a safe waiting area. I am sure that the

[Annette Brooke]

monitoring arrangements could be discussed further. Surely it is possible to find a safe solution if there is a will to meet what constituents want.

If my constituents were convinced that locking gates were not a safe option, there would be other options to consider: a disability-compliant bridge at the station, and the county council's proposal to put in a pavement and a cycleway alongside the road crossing. Residents need to be consulted, but Dorset county council is just saying that the latter is the best option. The fact that only in the 1980s was a road crossing constructed without pedestrian or cycling facilities shows how important it is to get the decision right. I have been informed that Network Rail offered to procure a new modular footbridge at Wareham for Dorset county council, but that was turned down. I am calling for openness, consultation and respect for my constituents' views. My constituents are certainly not responsible for the lack of preparation by Dorset county council before this crisis came upon everybody.

I have outlined some big issues today that involve compliance with disability discrimination legislation for elderly and disabled pedestrians and users of mobility scooters, and provision for mums with pushchairs, for people accessing and leaving the town centre, and for rail users. The existing footbridge is a nightmare. When I had a bad injury two years ago, I could not have used the bridge. I still cannot manage it with a suitcase. People with heart and lung conditions cannot cope with the bridge. People coming in from London have to cross the railway to catch a bus to Swanage. This will deter people who are not young and mobile from using public transport. The heavy pedestrian use of the crossing now reflects the fact that people are walking into town, which is great, so where are the other policy objectives to be considered: walking, cycling and public transport?

The longer route proposed by Dorset county council will mean that older people, and many others, will just get into their cars to go into town, perhaps going to Poole rather than Wareham. The county council route has the advantage of contributing to the strategic cycle network, but that is not my constituents' concern. The proposal by DCC will probably add an extra 300 metres on to the walk into the town centre. It is estimated that the county council's proposed solution will cost £2 million, although no money for that is currently allocated to any budget, and it is anticipated that it will take at least 30 months to construct. Forward planning and consultation does not seem to have been the name of the game.

Wareham is a vibrant town with many restaurants, pubs and individual shops. Recently Sainsbury's joined the Co-op in the town centre which is, of course, suffering from the recession. My constituents from the far side of the railway bridge walk and cycle into town now for many activities. A recent survey showed that more than 1,200 people used the crossing on just one day. My constituents' quality of life must be a consideration. I should like to ask the Minister whether, if this dispute carries on, there is any way in which he could intervene.

Finally, I should like to read some comments of a resident who does not use a car:

"I have lived here for 23 years...and have therefore used the crossing a few thousand times...I will point out some of the consequences of closing the crossing. Without level passage across

the railway it will be either impossible for many to cross or far more dangerous than the status quo. I am 76 and visually impaired, go at least once a week from Northmoor into Wareham, riding gently or pushing as safety demands, mainly to fill the pannier-bags with food-shopping. I could neither heave the bicycle up the steps of the footbridge nor easily and safely lower it on the other side. The alternative would be either to ride or push it round by the main road, exactly the kind of route I do not now use on SAFETY grounds. Other elderly people have powered buggies, for which these alternatives are equally (or more) impractical.

Then 'early-birds' tell me that school-children using the route include many on bicycles, more able physically to cope with the bridge but chattering groups are likely to trigger falls on the descent, potentially serious. As for the thought of Northmoor kids weaving their way through rush-hour traffic on the A351, even the most bone-headed official should manage to see that it will end in tragedy and 'this must never happen again'. Yet do we want all these children to be conveyed in cars or buses, rather than get healthy exercise between home and school?

Finally, there are all the good people who are neither children nor pensioners, but just as deserving of a safe, direct and convenient route between the two parts of Wareham, on foot or bicycle, in buggy or with pushchair. We are all human beings with needs, and a huge majority of us use the present crossing responsibly."

11.20 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Mole): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Annette Brooke) for securing this debate on the pedestrian level crossing at Wareham, Dorset. She asked me for an overview, and she has provided a good one. I will try to address as many of the issues as possible in the time that she has left me.

This is an issue on which my Department has received significant correspondence from local residents recently, so I welcome this opportunity to update the hon. Lady on behalf of her constituents, particularly as I understand that a town meeting is being held in Wareham tomorrow to discuss the issue. The matter has arisen as a result of recent activity to consider the future of Wareham level crossing following increasing safety concerns.

The Government treat railway safety seriously, and an important aspect is safety at level crossings. Railways are one of the safest forms of transport and continue to improve. Changes to rail safety within the past 10 years—for example, the introduction of train protection systems, new rolling stock and better management of the infrastructure—have resulted in the UK having a rail safety record comparable to other western European countries. Previous primary rail safety risks, such as signals passed at danger, have fallen significantly owing to such mitigation measures to the point that, according to figures compiled by the Rail Safety and Standards Board, level crossings now represent the largest category of catastrophic risk to train passengers. Fourteen motorists and pedestrians died at level crossings last year, and I am sure that we are all aware of the tragic triple fatality at Halkirk level crossing only last month.

The day-to-day running of the railways and their safety is a matter for rail operators and the Office of Rail Regulation, as the independent rail safety regulator. My Department shares their concern about the risks at level crossings, but are mindful, as the hon. Lady outlined, of the impact that their closure may have on local communities. The conflicting needs for safety and access at level crossings are one reason why my Department, in partnership with the ORR, asked the Law Commission

to undertake a wide-ranging review of level crossing issues. The review is under way, and my officials have forwarded details of the case at Wareham to the Law Commission as an example of the conflicting pressures that occur in practice at level crossings.

Analysis of incidents shows that 96 per cent. of the risk at level crossings is due to accidental or deliberate misuse by pedestrians and road users. Considerable time and money is being spent by the rail industry to understand why that is so, and to improve facilities, equipment and education—for example, Network Rail’s “Don’t Run the Risk” advertising campaign to raise safety awareness. I am sure that the hon. Lady is aware that the incident to which she referred is one of the examples in the campaign’s material.

The crossing at Wareham has red and green warning lights to show when it is safe to cross. In addition, Network Rail has put in place measures such as audible warning messages and CCTV. The latter captured the image that has had much coverage in the media of a young woman with a pushchair using the crossing when it was clearly not safe to do so. However, despite those efforts, problems and incidents persist, including regular near misses at Wareham. I understand that 25 incidents have occurred at the crossing when the train driver has had to apply the brakes, and more than 80 misuses at the crossing have been recorded over the past four years. That is more than three times the number of incidents at any other crossing in the south-west and is one of the worst records in the country.

I understand that British Transport police have agreed to maintain a temporary presence at the site, for which I am grateful, but clearly that is not sustainable. Against the background of persistent abuse, both Network Rail and the ORR have raised concerns regarding the ongoing safety of users of the Wareham pedestrian level crossing, highlighted by risk modelling, which suggests that the risk of a fatality is very high. It is clearly imperative that action is taken to improve safety at Wareham. No one wants a tragic accident, such as that in a similar situation at Elsenham in 2005.

In dispensing its legal duties as the independent rail safety regulator, the ORR is considering formal enforcement action in the form of improvement notices requiring better protection and safety at the crossing. For historic reasons at Wareham, those improvement notices will be directed at both Dorset county council and Network Rail. The ORR believes that improved safety at the crossing could take a number of forms, including the provision of suitable barriers or gates, but it believes that the provision of ramps to the existing footbridge and closure of the crossing would represent the most effective risk control and efficient use of public funds over the long term. The decision on which option to pursue is ultimately for Dorset county council in conjunction with Network Rail.

I am told that Dorset county council has sought advice from Network Rail on the cost and feasibility of installing barriers at the site, but that future signalling changes in the area complicate monitoring by staff, and discussions are ongoing on that point. I can only encourage Network Rail to examine fully the option of barriers. I understand that ORR would be willing to consider supervised magnetic gate locks, as fitted at Elsenham,

but would have reservations about automatic locking of gates with an emergency release, which could be subject to abuse and might lack a means of checking that they close and lock for each train.

Dorset county council has also been investigating both short and long-term opportunities to secure safety and accessibility at the crossing. I understand that possible closure of the crossing has indeed been proposed for early December and that Dorset county council considered that on the basis of alternative robust accessible arrangements being in place. It investigated a public transport solution in the event of closure—putting on buses to connect the crossing to the town—but now believes that that is not a feasible alternative. Any infrastructure solutions that meet all requirements, such as accessible foot and cycle routes, are by their very nature a longer-term option. Network Rail is considering plans to make it easier for cyclists to use the adjacent footbridge.

I understand that the council is continuing to discuss options with Network Rail, including whether temporary measures such as an official presence at the crossing would help to tackle the safety risk in the interim, while longer-term, more permanent solutions are investigated. Any decisions arising from those discussions will have to satisfy the safety requirements of the ORR.

Apart from the obvious safety issues, I understand that the railway divides large residential areas from Wareham town centre and that the crossing is a key link between them. Although alternative pedestrian access is provided, I am advised that it is unsuitable for older people, people with restricted mobility, wheelchairs and scooters, people with small children, those with heavy baggage and cyclists, as the hon. Lady said.

Representations made to me by local residents have suggested that closure of the crossing without adequate provision for those groups would effectively divide the town and isolate communities—something that we would be keen to avoid. I am confident that the safety issues at the Wareham crossing are being handled appropriately by the ORR. When making the final decision, Dorset county council and Network Rail must consider, as well as safety, the impact of any closure on local communities, including accessibility requirements of the groups to which I referred. When considering that, I am sure that the council will be mindful of its obligations under equality legislation.

Safety concerns are of great importance, but the severance of communities and reducing accessibility to key transport routes are no less so. On that basis, I encourage Dorset county council, in conjunction with Network Rail, to ensure that all appropriate options, in both the short and longer term, are considered for the future of the crossing and that the safety, accessibility and community needs of Wareham are appropriately provided for. I hope that tomorrow’s town meeting, to which I understand key stakeholders have been invited—I hope that they will attend—successfully contributes to the ongoing debate on the future of the Wareham crossing.

11.28 am

Sitting suspended.

Sri Lanka (IDP Camps)

[DR. WILLIAM MCCREA *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North) (Lab): Just over a year ago, hon. Members on both sides of the House, many of whom are here again this afternoon, spoke in a debate in this Chamber on the grave humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka. At that time, the Government of Sri Lanka were pursuing a brutal military campaign, in which thousands of innocent civilians lost their lives, tens of thousands were injured and hundreds of thousands were displaced and left without access to shelter, sanitation, water, food or medical facilities. The conduct of that war—the use of heavy artillery, multi-barrel rocket launchers and white phosphorus in densely populated civilian areas—was brutal, inhumane and almost certainly illegal, so all of us took some comfort in the cessation of hostilities, but although the guns may be silent in Sri Lanka for the first time in 26 years, the price of peace could not be higher.

Nearly 300,000 civilians are being detained in camps in the north-east of Sri Lanka. The Government of Sri Lanka call them “welfare camps” and in the controlled images that they release to the international media, we see benevolent Ministers dispensing supplies to grateful, smiling Tamil families. The reality, though, is camps surrounded by barbed wire and armed soldiers, where latrine pits overflow and children fight for water, where emaciated pensioners lie in cramped tents and where thousands of young men disappear without trace. If the Government of Sri Lanka had even one ounce of regard for the welfare of the civilians held, they would be released without any further delay.

My hon. Friend the Minister saw for himself just how grim the conditions are, and I commend him for visiting Sri Lanka just a few weeks ago, yet since March 2008 the Government of Sri Lanka have confined virtually everyone displaced by the conflict to detention camps.

Susan Kramer (Richmond Park) (LD): I thank the right hon. Lady very much for outlining these circumstances. Will she comment on the fact that the Sri Lankan Government frequently use the argument about land mines and use the need for demining as their reason for not releasing people from the camps? Surely that is an area where the international community could ensure that there was no question but that demining capacity was provided rapidly.

Joan Ryan: The hon. Lady makes a valid point, and I will say a few words about the issue of mines.

The numbers in the camps swelled as the conflict intensified this year and more and more civilians were forced to flee their homes. By the time that formal hostilities drew to a close in April, some 300,000 civilians, including 50,000 children, were being held in 41 camps across four districts, but the end of the war did not mean liberty for the camps’ inhabitants. Even though the Government readily declared that the war was over, they are still not ready to let people leave, so for the civilians kept in the camps, the peace dividends that the Government of Sri Lanka promised in their victory declarations have failed to materialise.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on obtaining the debate, which is on a very important subject. I have Tamil constituents who are still seeking information about loved ones in that country and about where they are today. Does she agree that we now need publication of the names of everyone who is being detained in the camps and that those people should get the legal access and support that they ought to have, so that they can challenge the Government’s decision to keep them in detention?

Joan Ryan: I absolutely agree. In fact, not to publish the names of exactly who is in the camps is against all the human rights legislation and international commitments that Sri Lanka has.

For hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilians, six months on from the end of the conflict, life in the camps is worse than ever. Quite how bad life is in the camps is difficult to establish. We know that it is bad. We know that there are severe water shortages. We know that whole families are forced to share 20 litres for a couple of days, that there is not enough water to drink and that civilians who have struggled out of battle zones are now forced to bathe in the water alongside the buffaloes.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the right hon. Lady agree that, if the Sri Lankan Government are so confident that everything in the camps is going as well as they suggest, they should allow the international media in so that they can see for themselves whether what the Sri Lankan Government are saying is true?

Joan Ryan: We all agree with that point, and throughout the duration of the conflict we made the same point. At no time over recent years have the international media been able to gain access to the areas where Tamil people predominantly lived or to what was happening in the conflict, and now the same is true of the camps.

There is not enough food. We know that not just from the haunting images of malnourished children and pitifully thin old men and women that recall camps of an earlier age, but from reports from local hospitals. Their records show us that since May alone, more than 1,000 civilians have died from malnutrition-related complications. We know that sanitation facilities are primitive. Elderly women are forced to crouch over latrine pits, and families share stinking, overflowing toilets. We know that health facilities are under-resourced, overstretched and totally incapable of meeting the needs of the people detained in the camps, so people die of treatable diseases and women are forced to give birth under the trees and in front of strangers.

Therefore, we know that the conditions in the camps are bad and getting worse. Indeed, the Secretary-General of the United Nations—a man not known for hyperbole—said:

“I have travelled around the world and visited similar places, but this is by far the most appalling scene I have seen.”

That echoes what I have been told by my constituents whose friends and families are trapped in the camps. Just yesterday, I spoke to a woman whose sister and three nephews are, she believes, being held in the camps. She could not tell me for sure because she has not heard

from them since last January, when Government forces took control of the village where they lived. Since then, there has been nothing—not a single phone call or letter. There has been no information whatever. Her voice broke as she described her sister and her nephews, the youngest of whom she has never met. A man from my constituency told me about his five-year-old niece and 18-month-old nephew, who recently left a camp. I am talking about a little girl who had to help to dig her father's grave with her bare hands, because her family had to flee before they had time to bury him properly, and a little boy who spent his second summer fighting the malaria that he caught in the Government camp.

Therefore, we know that things are bad, but we cannot know exactly how bad because, as we have already said, the Government of Sri Lanka will not let independent monitors or aid agencies into the camps. This Minister is therefore part of a select group of people who have been granted permission to visit the camps—so select, in fact, that even the International Committee of the Red Cross, for instance, has not been allowed in since July. Nor are the opposition parties. On Monday, I and other hon. Members met Professor Jayawardena, a Member of the Sri Lankan Parliament. He told me that members of opposition parties in Sri Lanka have been denied permission to visit the camps. He is not a Tamil. He does not have a large Tamil electorate. He is deeply concerned about human rights.

Mr. Andrew Pelling (Croydon, Central) (Ind): The right hon. Lady mentions constituents both here and in Sri Lanka, but it can sometimes help to give the view of Sinhalese constituents. Although it is a challenging question, it is worth asking. An e-mail criticising what I said at the rally last weekend, stated:

“All you care about is the nearly 50,000 Tamil votes in Croydon.”

The right hon. Lady gives a stark picture of the situation in Sri Lanka. Will she take this opportunity to say that we do care and to explain what our motivation is?

Joan Ryan: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We need to stress time and again that it is about human rights. When the human rights of one are threatened, the human rights of all are threatened. It is right that we should raise our voices on behalf of those whose human rights are being ridden over roughshod. That is so whether they are Tamil, Sinhalese, Muslim or whatever. The point is well made. Indeed, Professor Jayawardena, in saying that he is not a Tamil and does not have a large Tamil electorate, is pointing out that this is about the human rights of Sri Lankan people who are Tamils.

The humanitarian situation has worsened, and ever more people are having to rely upon international agencies and NGOs for the most basic of needs. The Sri Lankan Government are denying them that lifeline. They are denying people food, medical treatment and sleeping mats. The Government of Sri Lanka tell us that certain agencies are allowed in—but only the agencies that they choose and only on the terms that they dictate. In addition to their vital humanitarian functions, those agencies are indeed the eyes of the world. The Sri Lankan Government have deliberately prevented outside scrutiny of the camps, leaving camp residents vulnerable to abuse. Reports from the camps of abductions, disappearances, extra-judicial killings and intimidation continue.

Even more worrying than conditions in the camps that we know of are those in the camps that we do not—the secret camps, whose existence the Sri Lankan Government refuse to confirm, whose conditions are impossible to monitor and whose detainees are held incommunicado and without access to family members or legal advice. We know that the danger of serious human rights violations increases substantially when detainees are held in locations that are not publicly known, and where proper legal procedures and safeguards are not in place. Even a cursory glance at the history books shows that.

Amnesty International believes that there could be as many as 10 unofficial and unacknowledged detention sites in the country, although the number could of course be much higher; we simply do not know. However, we know that the camps are illegal and a crime against humanity. Let us be in no doubt on that point: civilians have an unambiguous and unqualified right to free movement, and a right to liberty now and not when the Sri Lankan Government get around to it.

The reasons that the Sri Lankan Government give for such detention are simply a smokescreen—an excuse for the collective punishment of the Tamil people. The Government say that they need to screen the Tamils to ensure that none of them are members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Why is it that six months on from that screening process only 5,000 civilians have been released? Why are the Government continuing to incarcerate pregnant women, small children and the elderly?

The Sri Lankan Government say that it is unsafe for the Tamils to leave because many of the areas they came from are mined, as we heard from the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Susan Kramer). That is simply not true; not all the areas were mined, and many of those detained in the camps could stay with friends or relatives far from any mined areas. Those who genuinely have nowhere to go could choose to stay in the camps, but that choice would be theirs. The Government of Sri Lanka must give the Tamil people their freedom—and they must give it to them now.

Time after time, the Government of Sri Lanka have promised to release civilians, but their promises come to nothing. In May, President Rajapaksa said that 80 per cent. of civilians held at the camps would be released within 180 days. Six months on, and about 5,000 civilians have been released. The Government of Sri Lanka tried to inflate the figure by transferring people to other camps and classifying them as having been released. However, the reality is clear: only a tiny fraction of those detained in the camps have been released.

Mr. David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I thank the right hon. Lady for giving way, and I apologise for not being here at the start of her speech. It was due to commitments that I had with an all-party group.

The right hon. Lady is speaking about the Sri Lankan Government honouring their commitments. Will she say how important it is that they do not simply shift their goals from 180 days to the end of the year, with only 100,000 being resettled by the end of the year? There needs to be a firm commitment not only to their own version of resettlement; they need to make a commitment that people will be able to go back to their homes as soon as possible.

Joan Ryan: I agree. I was about to make that point. Indeed, this month the Minister for Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services cut the estimate in half, saying that the Government plan to release only 100,000 by Christmas.

The Government of Sri Lanka say that they are doing their best, but their best is not nearly good enough. I say that enough is enough—enough of the Sri Lankan Government's evasions and half-truths; enough of their inaction and obfuscation; and enough of the suffering of the Tamil people. The longer that they are detained in those inhuman prisons, the more difficult it will be to achieve what every Sri Lankan—Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim alike—wants: a lasting peace in Sri Lanka.

Each extra day that the Tamil people are forced to live in those camps will serve further to alienate the Tamil community and exacerbate divisions; it will create bitterness at a time when reconciliation is more important than ever. As frustration grows and tensions rise, conflict is already beginning to break out in the camps. Report after report over the past few weeks have detailed the escalating conflict between the inhabitants of the camps and the military guards. As the camps grow ever more crowded, and as the monsoon season arrives, the conditions will worsen and the habitants will become ever more desperate.

If the monsoon brings water pouring into the tents, it will be an entirely man-made disaster. It was the Government of Sri Lanka who built the camps on flood-prone areas. It was the Government of Sri Lanka who rounded up hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children and imprisoned them in camps designed to be only a temporary shelter, and built to hold only half the number of people that currently live there. Lest we forget, it is the Government of Sri Lanka who refuse to let them leave.

However, if the fault lies with the Sri Lankan Government, so too does the solution. They have it within their power to release the civilians and begin a process of reconciliation that will build a peaceful and just Sri Lanka. It is the responsibility of the British Government to do all that they can to encourage that process, so I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. I can tell him that the Tamil community know that our Government have led and are leading international efforts to secure a just and lasting solution in Sri Lanka. I welcome the fact that the Government did not support Sri Lanka's application for a \$2.6 billion loan from the IMF. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to give us a little more detail about the nature of those efforts, particularly about the work of our officials in Brussels, who are currently considering Sri Lanka's access to the EU market.

While Sri Lanka so brazenly abuses the rights of its citizens, it is inconceivable that the EU should renew GSP plus—the generalised system of preferences. It is surely time for Sri Lanka to be suspended from the Commonwealth and removed from the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group when it next meets in November.

Simon Hughes (North Southwark and Bermondsey) (LD): As always, I appreciate the right hon. Lady's efforts and the fact that she is specific about some of the solutions. Will she join me in asking Ministers to be really clear over the next few days, before the Commonwealth conference next month, that the British

will not support Sri Lanka as a host country for the conference to be held in two years' time? We should make that clear in advance, saying that it would be unacceptable to many of our Commonwealth colleagues. We cannot set human rights standards and invite people to promote them when some in our own backyard clearly have a bad record.

Joan Ryan: I am sure that the Minister heard what the hon. Gentleman said, but I agree that it is completely incompatible to hold a Commonwealth conference in Sri Lanka given all that has been said, and the situation that exists.

We need to send a clear message to the Government of Sri Lanka that the continued detention of Tamil civilians will have serious consequences for Sri Lanka's relationship with the international community. However, we must have a united front. The whole House must speak with one voice in its condemnation of the treatment of Tamil civilians and in its appeal for their immediate release. The number of Members present this afternoon demonstrates the level of concern felt on both sides of the House, which is why so many of us were disappointed by the comments that were made last week in the House by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), when he appeared to support the Government of Sri Lanka's application for preferential access to our markets.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Joan Ryan: I will, but just let me finish my point.

On that precise point, I hope that we can be clear. The EU extends preferential access to its markets to developing countries under a number of very clear conditions. Beneficiary countries must comply with 27 international agreements on human rights issues. Sri Lanka does not meet those conditions and is, therefore, not eligible for GSP plus. I sincerely hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able to clarify the position of the Conservative party on that matter.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I congratulate the right hon. Lady on securing this debate. She and her colleagues must be very careful about calling for the Sri Lankan Government to be punished by the ending of trade preferences with Europe, because she will have to explain how the Sri Lankan Government will be able to afford to rebuild the infrastructure to enable the Tamils to return. If they cannot afford it because they are bankrupt, she is punishing both the Government and those who have been hurt by the dispute, and she must be able to explain that.

Joan Ryan: I regret the fact that the hon. Gentleman did not take the opportunity to state his party's support for ending GSP plus status to Sri Lanka and to condemn its human rights record. I can explain why I call for the preferential status to end. There is a line to be drawn, and that line stands when human rights are being trashed and people are losing their lives. People are subject to abductions, rape, torture, extra-judicial killings and the most appalling living circumstances. They are in camps that are surrounded by armed guards and barbed wire. That is where I draw that line.

The hon. Gentleman is concerned that the Government of Sri Lanka should be able to afford to restructure and resettle Tamil communities. However, they are able to do that because the solution lies in their hands. They can stop the abuse of human rights and then they will not be subject to calls for the ending of GSP plus and for other sanctions to be taken. The solution lies with the Government of Sri Lanka, and not with them having preferential access to our markets when their human rights record is appalling.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): It is exactly as my right hon. Friend is saying. When everything else fails—exhortations, appeals to humanity and international representations—there is nothing left for us but economic sanctions. The Sri Lankan Government seem to think that they can act with impunity, so let us send them a message: “Release the people from the camps, end the human rights abuses and we will assist in the rebuilding of the country.”

Joan Ryan *rose*—

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Joan Ryan: I will.

Siobhain McDonagh: Does my right hon. Friend agree that over the past few weeks, we have seen an increasing number of abusive phone calls and e-mails precisely because of the report on GSP plus? For the first time in more than six months, the Sri Lankan Government are on the run on this one, thus providing real leverage to achieve progress for the people in the camps in Sri Lanka.

Joan Ryan: I absolutely agree with the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). I should like to pay tribute to both of them for their commitment on this issue over a long period of time. I am sure that the Minister and everyone else have heard what they have had to say.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am sorry that the right hon. Lady is trying to play politics in the way that she is. All parties condemn all the human rights abuses; it is a question of how we achieve our ends. I say to her again that if the Sri Lankan Government's economy is completely bankrupt, how will the country be able to afford to rebuild the infrastructure? She must explain that if she is going to accuse us of asking such questions of her Government. How will the Sri Lankan Government be able to afford the infrastructure?

Joan Ryan: I will always give way on such issues, but the hon. Gentleman has not added anything to what he first said, and that speaks volumes about his position. Others in his party do not take his position, but he speaks from the Front Bench, and it is most regrettable that he is not able to join all of us, across the parties, in saying, “GSP plus should be withdrawn because of the human rights situation in Sri Lanka.” He heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington had to say about how we would seek to respond should the Government of Sri Lanka do something about the camps and the situation in which the Tamils find themselves.

Barry Gardiner (Brent, North) (Lab): My right hon. Friend makes an exceptionally compelling case. Does she not think that if one compares the amount of military money that the Government of Sri Lanka have spent on fighting this war over the past few years with the peace dividend that they promised would come from fighting that war, there is, by their own rubric, enough money to deal with the dispersal and the rehabilitation of the people in those camps?

Joan Ryan: I think that we all—or most of us—take my hon. Friend's point.

Simon Hughes: The right hon. Lady is right to say that GSP plus is very important. No one is arguing that Sri Lanka should be treated differently in that regard. There are rules for compliance and rules for preference. If a country does not meet the rules, they do not deserve the scheme. It is not our particular local position; it is an international one. Sri Lanka has just had a big loan from the International Monetary Fund, which Britain voted against. It is not as if it does not have access to other resources. It can comply with the rules by opening up to journalists and independent agencies so they can see that human rights are being complied with.

Joan Ryan: That is absolutely right. As the Conservative Front-Bench position is something that many of us would find very difficult to support, perhaps we should all—and I hope all—disassociate ourselves from those such as Lord Naseby in the other place and Geoffrey Van Orden in the European Parliament who have, over a number of years, sought to defend the indefensible and given succour to precisely those forces that all of us here oppose. Either we believe in human rights or we do not. There can be no halfway house on human rights. Either we all have them, because we are all equally human, or none of us has them.

The situation in Sri Lanka is dire. Hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilians are being unlawfully detained in internally displaced persons camps. Those camps are besieged by flooding, outbreaks of contagious diseases, and inadequate supplies of food, shelter and sanitation. People are desperate to leave, and there is an urgent humanitarian need to ensure that they are allowed to do so.

There is also a broader political reason why the freedom of the Tamil people and a just and peaceful Sri Lanka are inextricably linked. The Sri Lankan Government appear to believe that if they can physically contain the Tamil people, they will put an end to the conflict in Sri Lanka. However, the only long-term solution to conflict in Sri Lanka will be a political one that is achieved by inclusive political negotiations. The Sri Lankan Government cannot keep the Tamil people imprisoned for ever, and neither can they ignore those people's legitimate aspirations. The longer the Tamil people are denied their freedom, and the worse the conditions in which they are forced to exist become, the more difficult it will be to achieve any lasting peace. The Government of Sri Lanka must accept that and give the Tamil people their freedom now.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Dr. William McCrea (in the Chair): Order. Many hon. Members have asked to participate in this debate. We will start the Front-Bench speeches at 3.30 pm. I would

[Dr. William McCrea]

like to call as many hon. Members as possible, so I ask each speaker to be sensitive to the needs of others, and I will work with you.

3.1 pm

Mr. Lee Scott (Ilford, North) (Con): Let me start by congratulating the right hon. Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) on securing the debate. I will not repeat anything that has already been said, as I would like to talk about this subject from a personal perspective, before making some suggestions.

Last Thursday, together with three other hon. Members, one of whom is in the Chamber, I visited Auschwitz concentration camp. We saw what man's inhumanity to man can do, and where things can end. That most emotional trip affected and upset me greatly. I am still thinking about what we saw last week, partly because my own grandparents came from that area, and I might not have been born had the Nazi regime had its way.

In 2009, the position is simple: these camps should not exist; they should not be there. I remember—as I am sure anyone who knows their history will know—that the Nazi regime put up Theresienstadt as a model. They said, “This is where we will let the media in and this is what we will allow people to see. We will create the façade that people are happy, being resettled and getting what they want.” We know what a myth and a lie that was, and how many millions of men, women and children lost their lives.

I have been criticised by the Sri Lankan high commission for making that comparison, and I am pretty certain that I will be criticised again after I have finished speaking today. However, I do not know what is going on in the camps. My constituents do not know what is happening to their relatives, because no one is allowed in to see. They are allowed to see only a sanitised version of what is going on. Therefore, if I am making certain comparisons that are not true, I challenge the Sri Lankan Government to allow people in to see.

Mr. Burrows: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and his long-standing campaign on behalf of the Tamil community and on the importance of respect for human rights. A cross-party campaign has existed for some years both inside and outside the House, and I pay tribute to Rachel Joyce, Andy Charalambous and others. The Foreign Secretary said that this was a war without witness, but the danger now is that any peace will also be without witness. There is an urgent need not only for the International Red Cross to maintain its presence, but for proper United Nations monitoring and freedoms, not least for the press.

Mr. Scott: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments—I agree totally. We must let people from the International Red Cross and from third sector and humanitarian organisations in to see what is happening. Most importantly, let us not talk about 100,000 people, let us not say Christmas or next year, and let us not use excuses that there might be mines. I am sure that if the Sri Lankan Government asked the international community, everyone would help to clear those mines, should they be there. Therefore, the camps should be closed down now, this second, however many there are.

I cannot remember how many debates we have had in Westminster Hall and the main Chamber on this subject, but it strikes me that the Sri Lankan Government could not care less what we say. I do not think that they are listening to anything we say—they do not give a damn. I think that they will pay lip service which, forgive me, is irrespective of whatever the Government might say and whatever the political persuasion of that Government is. The Sri Lankan Government have their own agenda. Without any question, they have arrested people on suspicion of being in the LTTE who are in fact children and pregnant women—it is absolutely outrageous. If Sri Lanka will not stop its behaviour, the only way forward is its suspension from the Commonwealth with immediate effect. As I have said, I believe that the camps should be closed.

I have taken on board your comment about many Members wishing to speak, Dr. McCrea, so I will finish quickly. If we do not protect innocent Tamil people, we should hang our heads in shame because we are not doing what we were elected to do. I say that from the position of not having a vast Tamil community in my constituency that could affect the election one way or another. I am speaking as one human being, about a group of other human beings. Lest we forget what happened; it can happen again.

3.6 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent, North) (Lab): It is good to see you in the Chair, Dr. McCrea; I can think of no hon. Member who is more fitting: you have lived through a situation in Northern Ireland, and many people have gone from there and spoken at various stages with the Sri Lankan Government. They have tried to use the benefits of knowledge accrued in Northern Ireland to help with the peace settlement in Sri Lanka.

I remember the day when President Rajapaksa came to Northern Ireland as the new President of Sri Lanka, to try learn from that peace process. What an absolute betrayal of everything that the people in the Northern Ireland Assembly and the politicians at the time tried to teach him about the way to achieve peace. What we have seen over the past few years has been abhorrent to the international community.

I will respect your injunction about time, Dr. McCrea, but I want to make a couple of brief points. My right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) has eloquently said what most of us in the Chamber believe. I pay tribute to her for her speech, for securing the debate and for her long-standing commitment to fighting the injustice perpetrated by the Sri Lankan Government.

The other day, I was with a delegation of Chinese parliamentarians. Ostensibly, I was speaking to them in a meeting about climate change. However, the most important dialogue that we had was about the Chinese role in supporting and funding the Sri Lankan Government, their part in funding the military hardware that was used to secure the defeat of the LTTE and the way that they have propped up Rajapaksa's regime. We need to see increasing pressure from our Government on China and on those in the region who support the Sri Lankan Government.

My second point was touched on by my right hon. Friend and is that when the fighting stops, it is even more important to have political dialogue that is genuine

and can sustain the transition through to peace. We clearly do not have the preconditions or circumstances for that at the moment, and as my right hon. Friend said, even if people were doing their best, it would not be good enough. Sadly, nobody in the international community thinks that they are doing their best.

The Sri Lankan Government therefore have to give an indication that they are prepared to embark on a political process. All hon. Members present suspect that they will move towards a process of elections within the next few weeks. In those elections, they will emphasise the need for a strong mandate and they will no doubt use their defeat of the LTTE and the resulting popularity—as they see it—to rally people to vote for them. They will then try to secure a strong mandate and say that they will use it to try to give devolution to various parts of the country, but how can anybody believe them, when that is what has been fought over for so long?

This debate is about one thing and one thing only: the right of the Tamil people to live equally on the island—the right to self-determination and to secure a homeland called Tamil Eelam. I speak as a Scotsman who is proud to represent a constituency in London and who is proud to be, first and foremost, British. However, I am also proud of my Scottish national identity, and I recognise that such a right obtains for a Tamil in Sri Lanka as much it does for a Scotsman in England. Unless the Sri Lankan Government understand the Tamils' genuine aspiration to self-determination and a national homeland, there is absolutely no prospect of a transition from the bloody awful war that we witnessed, through the detention camps and on to a peaceful political solution.

3.11 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) on securing the debate. I consider myself a bit of a veteran of Westminster Hall debates, and I see a few others, such as the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn). What is significant about this debate, however, is that 22 Members of Parliament are, or have been, present, and that reflects the importance that Parliament gives to this subject.

I have been working closely on this issue with my Tamil community for a number of months, not because I am pro-Tamil or anti-Sinhalese, but because I am pro-human rights, and the human rights of the Tamil community are being grossly infringed and are under a sustained onslaught in Sri Lanka. The Tamils do not have access to life's simple pleasures, and I am struck by the contrast between the conditions that we have been debating and the event that I have just come from in my constituency—I was just able to get here in time to take part in the debate. Representatives of a number of different religious communities were celebrating the 20th anniversary of Holy Trinity's luncheon club. Our communities have such rights, but the same rights are being denied to the Tamil community in Sri Lanka.

My local Tamil community has made a number of simple, straightforward requests to the Sri Lankan Government, and I want briefly to list them to show how reasonable they are. No one, including the Sri Lankan Government—or their more responsible members—could suggest that these requests are unreasonable.

The first request is that the Sri Lankan Government free the people who have been illegally detained and let them go to their homes. The second is that they allow back to their homes the many thousands of people who were forced out of residential areas that were turned into high-security zones and who are now held in camps in other parts of the island. The third request, which other Members have mentioned, is that the Government publish the details of all those detained as suspects and treat them according to appropriate international standards.

The fourth request, which other hon. Members have also mentioned, is that the Sri Lankan Government allow free media access to the camps, so that we can corroborate, or otherwise, what the Government are saying about conditions in those camps. The fifth request is that the Government allow legal representation and access by the International Committee of the Red Cross to those who are detained as suspected members of the LTTE or their alleged supporters. The sixth request, which I support entirely as a long-standing member of Amnesty International, is that if the Government believe that people are guilty of something, they should press charges against them and bring them before an internationally recognised court, so that their cases can be heard.

The seventh request is that the Sri Lankan Government work towards a political solution. We in this Chamber know very well that such situations are resolved only through a political solution that allows different communities to live together in peace and dignity. The eighth request is that the Sri Lankan Government investigate human rights violations, and the ninth and final request is that they investigate war crimes. On those last two points, it is important that we show balance. If an investigation into human rights violations and war crimes is carried out, as it should be, it will clearly need to look at allegations on both sides of the conflict. It should not focus exclusively on what has happened on the Sri Lankan side, but should also focus on what happened on the Tamil Tigers' side.

I have one slight disagreement with the right hon. Member for Enfield, North. My Tamil community does not endorse the UK Government's actions as wholly as she has done, and it feels that the Government could press harder. I understand the sensitivities that are involved, given the UK's past involvement in Sri Lanka, but my Tamil community certainly feels that the Government could take more action. Many Members have outlined what action could be taken in relation to the Commonwealth, GSP plus and so on. We hope that such action will be taken and that the Minister will be able to reassure us that the Government are pushing at all the vulnerable points to secure an outcome that helps the Tamils and brings longer-term peace and stability to Sri Lanka as a whole.

I am not taken in by what the Sri Lankan high commission has said. I, too, had meetings with its representatives earlier this year in which I was told that 80 per cent. of people would be freed—I think that I was told that that would happen by the end of the year. Clearly, that is not going to happen. There has been no explanation of why the Sri Lankan Government are making such slow progress towards releasing people from the camps, and I query whether they are likely to honour any commitment unless the international

[Tom Brake]

community takes overwhelming, co-ordinated action to exert as much pressure on them as possible, using any avenue available.

On that point, I will complete my remarks. I hope that we will hear a very strong statement from the Minister, so that we can all go back to our communities and reassure people that the UK Government are taking every possible action to resolve this matter.

3.17 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): We all agree that it is wrong to keep people encased in barbed wire and to take away their freedom of movement, and we all agree that it is wrong not to give access to journalists—that is the easy stuff. The political issue is what we do about that. We can stand here all day making speeches and feeling better about ourselves, but where, in the end, is the political clout that will make a difference? That is the question that separates the Labour party from the Conservative party, because Labour Members believe that we must use any leverage that we can to promote what we want to happen.

In 2008, EU imports from Sri Lanka under GSP plus totalled €1.24 billion. GSP plus saved Sri Lanka €78 million in import duties. If we are not prepared to use that as leverage to get people released, we are simply posing, we are simply pretending and we are simply playing at tackling these issues because we think that that will put us in a good political light.

We have been here before. We were here on South Africa. We were here over apartheid. Was it warm words and the hand of friendship that released Nelson Mandela and tore down that regime? No, it was individual Governments and people making their views known and spending their money in the way that they thought most appropriate that effected the change in that regime.

There is no support in warm speeches and warm words—the only support that we can give is in real action. The removal of GSP plus gives us huge leverage to encourage the Sri Lankan Government to do what they should be doing.

3.19 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) (PC): I shall be brief. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). I agree with everything that she said. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) on securing time for this important debate.

We are currently reminded daily, by the proceedings in the Hague, of the inhumanities and terrible occurrences in the Balkans. In the meantime, the international community seems to be standing by while similar things go on in Sri Lanka. It causes despair in anyone with any regard for human rights. I do not know whether I have a single Tamil constituent. However, I have several Tamil friends and am a friend of anyone whose human rights are degraded in the terrible manner that is causing the suffering in Sri Lanka. We know of the camps and that there is apparently a process under way to weed out the Tamil Tigers. No one knows how it works. The Red Cross is not allowed to go there. Still, after months of the process, there have been few, if any, releases. We now

know that the Government will allow some day passes, in a limited area, in Mannar. Surely, someone who can be given a pass can be out for the rest of his life, not just a day.

Awful things are transparently happening, and we in the international community are expected to swallow that nonsense. We know about arbitrary detention, and I shall not deal with that. We also know about the inability to trace relatives and the lack of protective mechanisms in the camps. The whole scenario, and the fact that it is allowed to happen in a Commonwealth country, is a disgrace. The situation in the camps is getting worse by the day, and we should bear in mind the onset of the monsoon period. The lack of access to proper medical care grieves me as well.

I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Mr. Scott) said about the horrible acts under the Nazi regime. Events in Sri Lanka are not quite on the same level, but they are fast getting there, and the international community should say enough is enough. It should be baring its teeth to that evil Government who are acting in a way that is totally incompatible with anyone's notion of human rights. It is high time that we used every possible diplomatic avenue that is open to us. I agree that, as the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) wisely said, GSP plus should be the first thing to go. Let us go for that without delay. In the meantime, let us urgently suspend the Sri Lankan Government from the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth is meant to be one of nations that observe standards. The things that are happening are not the standards of the Commonwealth.

3.22 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) (Lab): I apologise for missing the first few minutes of the debate, Dr. McCrea; I was tied up on constituency matters. If the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) had any Tamil constituents, they would have been in touch. They are the most communicative community that this country has, and that is what is brilliant about them. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) for what she has done and does, and for obtaining today's debate, which has provoked a flurry of briefings and advice, not least from the Sri Lankan high commission, which has once again furnished us with its version of the current situation and facts pertaining in Sri Lanka.

I shall be very brief, so that others get to speak. I was first elected to the House in June 1983. In July 1983, there were riots in which many Tamil people ended up in refugee camps. There was terrible bloodshed and an outbreak of the fighting that has, essentially, gone on ever since. One could read in this Chamber now the debate that took place in the House in July 1983, and, sadly, it would not sound out of place; it would sound much the same as what hon. Members have been saying this afternoon. I have watched the situation and worked with many people from Sri Lanka over many years, and I have constantly been appalled at the level of violence, the amount of displacement and the killings. Huge efforts were made, particularly by the Norwegian Government, to bring about a long-term sustainable peace. Unfortunately, those efforts were not successful. Many others have tried to bring about such a peace, without success.

Not so long ago, we all witnessed on global television the final acts, when the Sri Lankan military moved in on the Tamil positions: brutality and killings, a huge number of deaths, the displacement of large numbers of people and the destruction of their homes. Then followed the triumphalism of the Sri Lankan army and the declarations of a national victory. That is not a good sign for reconciliation or a harmonious island of Sri Lanka in the future. The presence of large numbers of people in the refugee camps is frankly horrific. They are not in refugee camps; they are in prison camps. That is what those places are in reality. They cannot leave or be communicated with unless they have permission, and the sense of displacement and anger in the Tamil community around the world is palpable. It must be addressed.

So what do we do? Sri Lanka is a member of the Commonwealth and a trading partner. It seems to carry on getting tourists and all the trade that it wants. I recognise that sanctions cause people hardship, but if that is the only instrument that is left to bring recognition of and reasonableness towards the Tamil people, it is a policy that we must pursue. I therefore have no hesitation in supporting that approach. In the humiliation of the Tamil people in the camps, their poverty and displacement and all the privations that they now suffer lie the seeds of tomorrow's conflict, and the one after. All that will be created by the present policy is another version of the LTTE. It is utterly counter-productive, apart from being illegal in human rights law. I have also been looking at the convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide. It is regrettable that the United Nations Human Rights Council could not see that when it voted at the special meeting on this subject in September.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. It is not a question of being anti-Sri Lanka. It is a question of being pro-human rights, pro-peace, pro-justice and ensuring that the Tamil people have their place, their rights, their language and their identity. That is what brings harmony. Denial of that identity brings tomorrow's death and conflict.

3.27 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow) (Lab): The debate is coming towards its end and it is difficult not to repeat some of what has been said, but, like my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn), I have been involved in issues to do with Sri Lanka since I was first elected in 1992 and I cannot remember in all that time a worse year than this for what has happened there: the fighting at the beginning of the year, and having people coming to see me whose families, friends and relatives were trapped in Wannai, and who did not know what was happening to them. Many still do not know what is happening to them. The point has been made already that we do not have, but should have, information about who is in the camps.

I want to emphasise a point about conditions in the camps, which has been mentioned, but perhaps was not stressed as much as it should have been, and that is what will happen very shortly when the monsoon arrives. We are rapidly heading for a humanitarian disaster in the camps. If the monsoon rains arrive and there is flooding in the camps, so that latrines are flooded, there will be disease and people will die in significant numbers. There

is a disaster on the horizon if the camps are left in their present condition, with the number of people currently in them.

There has already been discussion in this debate about what the Tamil people ask for, and the response of the Sri Lankan Government. No Government who claim to be democratically elected, a member of the Commonwealth and the United Nations, and to be signed up to international conventions should be able to ignore international opinion, as the Sri Lankan Government have been doing. It is not anything new. Over the years people have been arrested or have disappeared and there have been emergency regulations to allow detention without trial. Those things, we know, have gone on for years. That is what astonishes me about the reaction from the Conservative Front Bench this afternoon and the suggestion that we should not use pressures such as GSP plus. If we are not prepared to use such tactics—

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gerrard: The hon. Gentleman will have his opportunity to speak in a moment; I want to conclude. If we do not use what pressures we can with the Government of Sri Lanka—not allowing preferential trade, stopping arms sales and all the sorts of thing that we have used with other regimes—we will not see the political progress that every one of us wants. Only with that political progress will we reach a solution.

Dr. William McCrea (in the Chair): I will give one minute to Tom Clarke before we start the winding-up speeches.

3.30 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): Thank you, Dr. McCrea. I shall choose two points from the speech that I was going to make. Incidentally, many of them have been covered in the excellent introduction. My right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) set the tone, and it is fair to say that it is a tone of anger. We are angry about what is going on and that it has taken so long even to get where we are.

I will make two points before I sit down in the minute that I have. Even ignoring the terrible problems in Sri Lanka—the poverty, the fact that women are not free in any sense, the sex attacks on children and so on—it is a country that is supposed to be conducting an election in 2010. I put it to the Opposition spokesman as well as my hon. Friend the Minister that we must beware of those elections and ensure that they are free, fair and transparent. Nothing else will be acceptable to the international community.

3.32 pm

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West) (LD): It has been an excellent debate, with contributions from all parties. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan), who opened with a powerful speech containing moving examples of detainees' life in the camps. I will not go through each of the contributions, but some have been excellent.

[John Barrett]

I will, however, pick out the contribution of the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Mr. Scott), who mentioned Auschwitz. Like him, I visited Auschwitz and Birkenau this summer. The visit made me particularly aware that one key problem was that people at the time did not have a full grasp of exactly what was happening. The Government of the day made propaganda films giving a generous view of what was going on in the camps, but an example of what was happening in one camp was in no way a summary of what was happening in all the other camps. I know that the Minister was in Sri Lanka recently with the BBC, but whatever he saw, it is vital that what happens in every single camp is exposed. If there were nothing to hide, journalists and politicians from all parties out there, including the opposition, would get into every camp.

More recently, I went to visit the camps in Darfur at Nyala. At that time, the Sudanese Government were also saying that there was absolutely nothing to worry about in certain camps, but when individuals saw the facts on the ground, it was easy to see that there was. Women were being abused in the camps, torture was being carried out by—

Loirely Burt (Solihull) (LD): I apologise for arriving late; I had another engagement that I could not get out of. I met with Tamils from my constituency and the west midlands with my hon. Friend the Member for North Southwark and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) a week or so ago. The state of the camps—flooded now, let alone when the monsoon comes—was absolutely shocking. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is appalling that Sri Lanka, once one of the most respected members of the international community, is keeping 260,000 people in what are effectively Government-run internment camps?

John Barrett: I certainly agree. We have all, no doubt, had an update from the Sri Lankan high commission, but on one hand we have its response, and on the other—I admit to an interest as a fully paid-up member and supporter of Amnesty International—we have a completely different point of view. We also have first-hand evidence of exactly what has happened from people with family and friends detained out there.

When the Minister sums up, will he address the questions raised by many people, including at Amnesty? The camps remain overcrowded and lacking in basic sanitation facilities, with water cascading through tents and sewage overflowing. Will he give us a report of what he saw and what can be done to ensure, as we hope, that people will be released in the immediate future, and that they have access to basic facilities and humanitarian rights until that time?

There have been reports that the military are blocking release attempts by the civilian Administration, as well as reports of torture. Has the Minister had any evidence of that, and what pressure can his Government apply to end it? There have also been reports of releases from the camps that were in fact transfers to other, unnamed camps where displaced people have been subject to re-screening by local authorities. Will he enlighten us about what he believes to be the numbers in the camps, how many camps there are and exactly where those people are who have been allegedly released? Have they just been transferred?

With the monsoon season approaching, we are at a critical time. It is right that we are having this debate to ask what more can be done to avoid a humanitarian disaster following the political upheaval. This debate is not about the justification for the Sri Lankan Government's action against the Tamil forces, or the future political settlements that will be essential for a long-term restructuring of the country. Of more immediate concern is the fate of those 250,000-plus refugees still detained in Government-run internment camps.

It has now been almost five months since the war's end. It is unacceptable that so many people are still essentially prisoners of war when the war is supposed to be over. Even now, the Government continue to restrict access for aid organisations and impose strict limits on what work they can do in the camps. Journalists are not allowed into many camps, with only the rarest of exceptions. Anyone looking at the official Government photographs of the camps could be forgiven for thinking that living conditions were of the highest standard.

I notice that the Sri Lankan high commissioner's statement said that the President had written a letter to the Tamils calling this

“an important time”

in their lives, when they were

“on the threshold of a new beginning in life.”

At Auschwitz and Birkenau, people walked into the gas chambers with a letter promising them a hopeful future. I hope that what is happening in the camps does not mirror what happened in Poland. We must have immediate, open and free access for politicians and journalists in order to know that that is not the case.

Based on other reporting and inside information from the camps, a picture emerges of chronic overcrowding, fraying tents and latrines not up to the task. During late September, visiting UN Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe expressed strong concern about how few of the displaced had been able to return home and the fact that the rest are detained against their will. Despite their internationally recognised right to leave the camps, they are not simply displaced; they are detained.

I know that the Minister was recently allowed access to the camps, and I look forward to his assessment of both the humanitarian conditions in the camps and the political likelihood of resettlement being allowed in line with the agreed time scale, which already seems to be slipping. President Rajapaksa has reiterated his plans to resettle 70 to 80 per cent. by the end of the year, but I think that we can all agree that that looks highly unlikely given the slow progress to date.

Mr. Pelling: The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) said that it was important that we also discuss what sanctions and leverage we have. Again to use my constituent as a proxy to argue the Sinhalese case:

“Hasn't the British Government learnt we don't care about you? We have wealthy and powerful friends all over the world.”

What leverage does the hon. Gentleman think we as a nation have over the Sri Lankan Government?

John Barrett: I think that we have economic leverage. The GSP plus has already been mentioned as one lever that can be pulled. I think that we can press at every level to ensure that both economic sanctions and pressure

can be used in all international bodies, so that people get their human rights. It is not just an argument about what might be happening to individual constituents. As has been mentioned, there are constituencies, such as mine, with very few Tamils. It is a question of international human rights.

I am sure that other hon. Members would agree with the statement of the Minister with responsibility for Africa, Asia and the UN last month that there would be no more aid for displacement camps apart from emergency funding. However, with the monsoon season fast approaching, it looks as though many civilians will face the rains in the camps. Will the Minister comment on the tents provided by the UN, which are not up to standard, unlike those provided by the Chinese Government? Tents that will withstand the rains are needed.

I will draw my remarks to a close because I want the Minister to have ample time to deal with my questions and those of other hon. Members. Although we may be able to appreciate the Sri Lankan Government's desire to identify former Tamil Tigers, who may stay in the camps, we must make it clear to them that detaining thousands of innocent people is not an acceptable way to achieve any security goal. The Sri Lankan Government may have inflicted defeat on the Tamil Tigers, but Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic country and the Tamil population must be part of its future. The danger is that the treatment of Tamils in the camps will undermine the prospect of a long-term peaceful settlement in a country where peace has been sadly lacking.

3.41 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) (Con): I welcome you to the Chair, Dr. McCrea, and I welcome the Minister to our debate. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) for securing this important and timely debate.

The events in Sri Lanka since its Government launched the final stages of their major assault have been truly appalling, as all who witnessed them would testify. It is a war marked by the ferocity of its violence and by its propaganda. I join Stephen Rapp, the US ambassador at large for war crimes issues, in calling for all humanitarian abuses by both sides to be fully and independently investigated as part of the reconciliation process. It is clear from today's debate that any investigation into the deaths and disappearances of internally displaced persons inside the camps must be full, open, transparent and internationally monitored.

There has been intense interest in this subject in the House. A look at *Hansard* reveals that there was a topical debate on 5 February, an Adjournment debate secured by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on 24 March, a debate in the Chamber on 20 April and a Conservative Opposition day debate on 14 May. I can think of few conflicts in which we have had no military involvement that have prompted so much impassioned and constructive debate in the House.

Tragically, the end of hostilities has not resulted in the end of suffering. On 27 August, to mark 100 days after the end of the fighting, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), the shadow Foreign Secretary, declared:

"We have repeatedly urged the Sri Lankan government to take all possible measures to prevent further suffering by allowing UN and relief organisations full and unrestricted access to provide shelter, food, water, medicine, and to oversee the screening process. With the onset of the monsoon season, it is vital that conditions in the camps are improved as soon as possible."

That is absolutely right. We have heard appalling reports of the conditions in the camps. The shortage of water, the lack of proper tents, the lack of food and the random disappearances have been mentioned today. I agree that we need a transparent register of all those who are in the camps and unrestricted access for journalists and Opposition parties. That would go a long way towards ensuring that what is happening is transparent.

Last week, we heard from the Minister that he has had access to the camps. He has first-hand knowledge of them. A press release from the Sri Lankan Government this week stated that there were still 205,179 people in the camps. It is still a serious situation, given the situation in the camps. Will he explain what discussions he has had with the Sri Lankan Government on ending the situation?

Last Thursday, the Minister said that the Department for International Development

"would no longer be funding aid for closed camps and that our aid would be directed towards facilitating movement from the camps."—[*Official Report*, 21 October 2009; Vol. 497, c. 895.]

We applaud that, but how will it be carried out? What help does he expect to give to displaced people who return home? Given the Sri Lankan Government's commitment to return 80 per cent. of those who are detained in the camps to their places of origin by the end of the year, that approach seems sensible. However, is it plausible? Obviously the camps should provide all the essentials of life, but steps to make them more permanent would make the goal of returning people home more difficult.

There are two clear obstacles to the return of the IDPs. The first is demining, which has been mentioned. As we have seen elsewhere in the world, demining is time consuming and dangerous. I have discussed the matter with the Sri Lankan high commission and the difficulty of knowing where the mines are is an obstacle to the IDPs returning home. It is essential that they return to a safe and secure environment. Will the Minister go into more detail about his understanding of the timetable for demining? If it cannot be completed to a satisfactory level by the end of the year, how can 80 per cent. of the IDPs be expected to return home?

The second and equally important factor, which has not been mentioned in this debate, is the condition of the housing and infrastructure to which the IDPs will return. The scale and intensity of the fighting caused great devastation. Perhaps the Minister can shed some light on these issues. What percentage of houses are fit for habitation? What medical facilities remain? I raised with him in Question Time the hospital at Vavuniya that was bombed. What damage has been caused to water and sanitation facilities? I fully share the desire of the IDPs to return to their homes and that is fully endorsed by the diaspora in this country. However, we must be certain that they do not return to areas that lack the fundamentals of life.

I did not say that we should not use European Community trade as a lever, as some Labour Members are claiming in order to play politics. Of course we

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

should use it as a lever. However, if the Government are going to support the European Union in ending trade preferences, they must explain how they will use that with the Sri Lankan Government to achieve the ends that we all want—to see the IDPs return. They must also explain how the cost of the infrastructure building will be met. It is no good Labour Members criticising me when they cannot show where the will and the means are by which this can be done.

Barry Gardiner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: No, I have given way enough on this issue.

What assessment has the Minister made of the capacity of the Sri Lankan Government to afford the necessary rebuilding? If there is a shortfall, will he explain how the British Government will assist in overcoming the funding gap? Furthermore, what assessment has he made of the potential need for his Department to intervene to provide assistance when the rations and grants that the Sri Lankan Government are promising run out?

There is a huge will in this country to assist. Do the British Government support the idea of my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) of an internationally managed development fund to channel assistance to Tamil areas? Does the Minister agree that, through that mechanism, the Tamil diaspora around the world could offer constructive support and contribute financially to the rebuilding of their country?

What discussions has the Minister had on voter registration within and outside the camps to ensure that next year's general election and potential presidential election are free and fair and involve all sectors of society equally? That is vital to the reconciliation process. The suggestion of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) was sensible. As so often happens in such debates about violations of human rights around the world—which are often attended by none of the Labour Members who are present—there is complete agreement about what we want to see in these countries. One of the best ways to help human rights is to have a properly democratic society.

The final issue I would like to raise is the return of Muslims and other displaced people, which has not been mentioned today, although it touches on the remarks made by the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Pelling). What discussions has the Minister had with the Sri Lankan Government about that issue? Some of the Muslim communities in the camps in Puttalam have been there for several decades. That is a serious issue that the Sri Lankan Government must address.

Barry Gardiner: Will the hon. Gentleman please simply clarify what the position of the Conservative Front-Bench team is? Does he think that the privileges that go with the generalised system of preferences plus should be withdrawn unless the IDP camps are dispersed?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: We have said a great deal about that already. The issue is clear. It is up to the hon. Gentleman's Government to explain in negotiations

with the European Union what leverage they are going to adopt if they support the measures. It is up to the Government to do that; we, the Opposition, are merely asking questions.

The ending of hostilities has created the opportunity to improve the lives of all those innocent Sri Lankans caught up in the civil strife. While the appalling conditions continue in these camps, bitterness and division will remain. Unless a lasting reconciliation process takes place, the only result will be the return of further suffering and increased violence.

3.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Michael Foster): I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Barry Gardiner) about how appropriate it is that you are in the Chair, Dr. McCrea, for this debate. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) for securing the debate, which is not only timely but incredibly well attended. I also thank colleagues from all parties for their excellent contributions and for showing the passion and deep commitment that they have to human rights and the plight of the people who are in the IDP camps.

I should like to make a few remarks that have been informed by observations made during my visit earlier this month. I will try to address as many of the questions that were put to me as I can, but given the large quantity of questions that came in a flurry from the Opposition spokesman, it may take me more than just 10 minutes to reply to them all. I will reply in writing to those points I do not deal with today.

I went to see the camps at Manik Farm and then had meetings in Colombo with Government Ministers, UN agencies, the Red Cross and non-governmental organisations. During my visit, I made it absolutely clear that the United Kingdom's priority is to secure freedom of movement for the civilians who are currently detained in the camps. I accept that that is not something that the United Kingdom alone can achieve, which is why it is so important for all donors, Governments and UN agencies to have concerted and co-ordinated advocacy with the Government of Sri Lanka. It is also important that all parties send a clear message. I do not think we have heard a clear message from all hon. Members today, and I regret that deeply.

If the Government of Sri Lanka granted freedom of movement, frankly, the humanitarian implications of the forthcoming monsoon could easily be avoided. My right hon. Friend gave a good description of the experiences of people in those camps. I can tell her that that is nothing compared with what will happen when the monsoons hit, because the locations of those camps are totally inappropriate for withstanding heavy rain—it is as simple as that.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has estimated that at least 70 per cent. of the civilians could find accommodation easily with host families. That is a clear indication of the potential for freeing up people from the camps. Notwithstanding the recent progress on returns, which I warmly welcome—I am genuinely grateful for the work that has been done—the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) asked what the numbers were that we could talk about. The latest figures, which

are from 24 October, show that 35,822 people have been transferred to their home areas, principally in Jaffna, and that 16,490 vulnerable people have been released to institutions or host families but were unable to return to their homes. That is a total of some 52,300 people. In addition, about 3,000 people have been transferred to new closed camps. Those figures show the scale of the transfers that have taken place so far.

The Government of Sri Lanka have recently announced that 60,000 IDPs will be released in the next month. So, on top of the 30,000 who have been released since my previous visit, there is the potential for the Government to meet their 80 per cent. release within their 180-day framework. However, it is important to recognise that, even if those 60,000 are released on time, it will still leave 170,000 civilians detained in the camps. It has been more than five months since the conflict ended, which is more than enough time to screen the majority of people in those camps. Frankly, the entire population does not have to be screened before the first people are released. The freedom of movement for those who have been screened and shown not to have close links to the LTTE could have happened some time ago. That has been demonstrated by the speed of the returns that have been taking place over the past couple of weeks.

Much has been made in the debate about whether mining prevents the speedy return of people to their homes. I went to one of the minefields in the Mannar area, where the mines action group project to clear the mines, which is funded by the Department for International Development, is taking place. Mines are a real threat—we should not underestimate the scale of the mining operations—but the work that those people do and the speed at which land can be cleared gives us the confidence that there is the scope and the capacity for people to come out of those camps and go back to their towns and villages.

Last week, I announced that a further grant of £500,000 will be given to a specialist de-mining organisation called the HALO Trust, which is based in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Mr. Brown), for mine mapping and heavy mines clearance in the Mullaitivu area. Again, that will enable a speedy return for people from the camps.

Much has been said about the generalised system of preferences plus argument—much of the debate and many of the exchanges have centred around that issue. May I just put on the record what GSP plus is all about, because I think that there is a bit of a misunderstanding about the consequences of the European Union not carrying on with the process that it has embarked upon with GSP plus? The scheme incentivises and assists vulnerable economies to achieve standards in sustainable development, human rights, labour standards and good governance. Countries apply to join the scheme—it is not forced on them—and in doing so, they commit to implementing 27 UN conventions in the areas that I have just mentioned.

We treat all countries in the GSP plus scheme objectively. The integrity of the scheme demands that that takes place. Failure to maintain the integrity of the scheme has an impact not only on Sri Lanka, but on the other 14 countries that benefit from the scheme, whose people benefit from improved human rights. With all due respect to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), I think that he has just made the wrong call on this one.

So the Opposition Front Bencher needs to go away and look again at the consequences of what he was suggesting would happen if the GSP plus scheme is not seen through and the integrity of the scheme is not maintained—not just for Sri Lanka, but for the 14 other countries, as I have mentioned.

Mr. Burrowes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Foster: I want to make a bit more progress. I have only a couple of minutes, but I will try to get through my points as quickly as I can.

It is clear that the monsoon has the potential to wreak huge damage to the sanitation systems in the camps that are, at best, described as fragile. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West spoke about the tents. Yes, they are in poor condition, because they have been up for six months under the burning sun and are rotting away under ultraviolet light. That is the consequence of having camps that have been there for far too long.

We have heard a number of exchanges today about the situation in the camps and the need to get people speedily removed from them. The key is that people should have the choice, which is why the freedom of movement from the camps is so important. If conditions are not right in the towns and villages from where people came, the choice can be exercised by the people themselves, if they so wish.

3.58 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.13 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Michael Foster: This is a little like playing Manchester United—you get a couple extra minutes when you play them.

I remind hon. Members that humanitarian funding is provided by DFID to neutral and impartial agencies and that none of its funding goes directly to the Sri Lankan Government themselves. The hon. Member for Cotswold asked what DFID was doing to facilitate movement out of the camps, and I remind him of my announcement last week of two grants: one to the International Organisation for Migration to assist with the safe and dignified transport of people from the camps in Vavuniya to their areas of origin and the other to the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation to provide three bushels of rice seeds to every one of 8,800 returning families in the west Vanni region, providing them with the wherewithal to look after themselves for at least one year. That is the right direction of our aid. I repeat what I said when I was in Sri Lanka: we will not give further humanitarian aid, barring extraordinary circumstances, to the closed camps once the monsoon season is over. It is important that that is recognised as the UK's position, and I hope that the international community will join us in agreeing that that is the direction in which to move forward.

The hon. Gentleman raised a couple of other issues. I say to him that being in Government means making judgment calls and being clear where we stand on the fundamental issues, such as humanitarian needs and human rights. Preparing for Government also makes

[Mr. Michael Foster]

demands on any Opposition to spell out exactly where they stand on those fundamental human rights. On the evidence of last week, repeated in today's debate, I say to the hon. Gentleman with all respect that the Conservative party has failed to measure up to that duty.

Pudsey (Transport)

4.15 pm

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve for the first time under your watchful eye, Dr. McCrea. It is in the nature of Westminster Hall debates that Members take on the role of parliamentary Oliver Twists in pleading with Ministers, "Please Sir—or Madam on some occasions—can I have some more?" I regret that I do not intend to depart from that noble tradition, but I appreciate how tall an order it is in the present economic climate.

West Yorkshire has a population of 2.1 million, making it the third largest metropolitan area in England outside London. Leeds and Bradford are significant centres in their own right, and my constituency of Pudsey is positioned midway between the two. There are more than 100,000 daily commuting trips to Leeds city centre. Although the recession has led to a reduction in traffic flows, forecasts of housing and employment growth indicate that congestion will continue to worsen. Those dynamics intimately affect the communities in my constituency: they have an adverse impact on the environment, road safety and labour market accessibility for my constituents and will continue to do so unless substantial investment is made in alternatives.

Everyone has to accept that there have been substantial, real-terms increases in transport funding in the Yorkshire and Humber region under this Government, which is to be applauded. However, it remains an inescapable fact, which I hope my right hon. Friend the Minister will not attempt to contradict, that the region has missed out when compared to others. For example, the latest Treasury figures show that total transport spend per head in Yorkshire and Humber is £239, compared to £826 in London. Of course, London is the nation's capital and can be considered a special case, but Yorkshire and Humber fares less well than all other regions. For example, the north-west and the west midlands received per head £309 and £269 respectively.

It hardly requires a crystal ball to anticipate that transport will not remain unscathed in difficult future public spending decisions, but on the basis of the historical funding deficit highlighted by the Treasury figures which I have just quoted, I submit that there is a powerful argument that Yorkshire and Humber should not be further disadvantaged in comparison to other regions.

Many of my previous debates on transport, and there have been many, have focused to a great extent on bus services, so I will start by referring to them. Bus patronage across west Yorkshire is broadly stable at the moment, but the growth in concessionary travel as a result of the Government's very welcome free English concessionary travel scheme masks a decline in fare-paying passengers. The largest bus company in Leeds, First, has reduced mileage by around 5 per cent. in 2009, which is a significant figure. The company has blamed that reduction on the recession, but the local integrated transport authority, Metro, believes that two fare increases of 8 per cent. in January and July 2008 have also had a significant adverse effect on demand.

As one of those Members who have campaigned for years with a handful of colleagues, I very much welcomed the Local Transport Act 2008, which at long last provided practical powers for local authorities to introduce bus

quality contracts and protect passengers from the worst excesses of the deregulated bus system. I have said it before, will say it again and will repeat it for ever: deregulation has totally failed my constituents, just as it has failed the constituents of many other Members. Services have been chopped and changed almost at will, and where they do exist, they are often missing or late. Many of the communities in my constituency have lost their services or key transport links altogether as routes have been whittled down to a profitable core.

There is increasing concern about the large taxpayer subsidy that is paid to the bus industry for running tendered services, which I understand has increased by about £1 billion over the past five years. There is little evidence in west Yorkshire, and certainly not in my area, that we are getting true value for money, because so many of the contracts had only one tender.

Metro, like many ITAs, I suspect, will be considering whether to develop bus quality contracts as a response to the current lack of integration, and continual above-inflation fare rises and reduction in service levels. It has to be said that one of the great risks of embarking on protracted and detailed work to introduce such contracts is the stated intention of the Conservative party, often articulated by the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond), to repeal the relevant provisions of the 2008 Act. It amazes me that the Conservatives continue to believe that deregulation has worked, because that view is not shared by anyone who depends on bus services in my constituency or, I suspect, the rest of the country.

Rail services play a vital role in supporting the social, environmental and economic interests of major cities such as Leeds. Over the past decade or so, Leeds and the three lines through my constituency have seen the highest rate of growth in rail commuting anywhere in the country. Unfortunately, inadequate investment in additional rail carriages has led to severe overcrowding problems on commuter services, examples of which are reported to me regularly by constituents.

As I said earlier, all is not doom and gloom, but, unfortunately, we are working from a low starting point. In my constituency, we have seen investment in new rolling stock on the Wharfedale line, where excellent 333-class rolling stock replaced 40-year-old, slam-door cast-offs from the south-eastern commuter belt. As a regular passenger, I used to marvel at the decrepit windows that were held in place by what appeared to be a type of Polyfilla. We have seen additional capacity recently on the Harrogate and Caldervale lines and, less recently, the £250 million upgrade of Leeds station and the refurbishment of all three stations in my constituency: New Pudsey, Horsforth and Guiseley. Following the Hatfield disaster, there was also substantial investment in maintenance and safety measures, which are largely invisible to passengers but essential to their safety and the service.

Metro continues development work on the Leeds rail growth package, which includes the introduction of two new rail stations at Apperley Bridge and Kirkstall Forge, the former of which will definitely serve my constituents when and if it is built. I understand that the business case for the £23 million scheme has recently been re-endorsed by the region and is due to be submitted to my right hon. Friend and his colleagues at the Department for Transport shortly. I hope that he can give me some

commitment or indication that they will give it a fair wind, and that the stations will be ready to open by 2012.

All I have just described is in stark contrast to the Tory legacy, under which the first act of the original franchisee was to shed 70 or 80 drivers in order to stay within its bid. The result, of course, was the chaos of constantly cancelled services, loss of passenger confidence and patronage, and a shortage of drivers, all of which took several years and later franchisees to redress.

Rail use in west Yorkshire has, however, recovered from that crisis and has increased by 54 per cent. over the past 10 years. Peak patronage into Leeds has doubled in the past 10 years, and between 7.30 and 9 am, more than 90 per cent. of trains have standing passengers, with some trains carrying up to 200 per cent. of seated capacity. A 2008 survey found that the 17.13 Leeds to Knaresborough service, which runs on the Harrogate line through my constituency, had around 270 passengers travelling on a three-car train with only 157 seats—it often has 110 standing passengers. The train operates at around 120 per cent. of total capacity, that being DFT capacity, which also includes some standing passengers. The DFT franchise capacity for the train is 222, which includes provision for 65 people standing, so the train already exceeds that by 50 standing passengers.

There are particular concerns about overcrowding in the morning peak hour between 8 and 9 am on several routes, on which trains consistently operate at more than 90 per cent. capacity. As my right hon. Friend will know, when trains operate at more than 70 per cent. of DFT capacity, passengers have to stand to be carried on them. Harrogate line trains from Harrogate and Knaresborough through Horsforth in my constituency operate at 96 per cent. capacity on average.

My right hon. Friend will know that the current Northern Rail franchise was awarded on a no-growth basis, despite the substantial increase in passenger numbers to which I have referred. Fortunately, Metro, Northern Rail and Yorkshire Forward have worked together to secure 37 extra carriages. That is welcome, as it represents an increase of one third for the lines served, but passenger numbers have doubled, and that puts it into context. That is why overcrowding is so acute, and why a sustained increase in carriages is essential.

The 2007 rail White Paper and the high-level output specification for the railways recognised the problem in Leeds and set out proposals for investing in additional carriages. Subsequent plans, which were welcome, proposed 182 extra carriages for Northern Rail services, including some new-build diesel and electric trains. Unfortunately, following the DFT's embargo on ordering new-build diesel trains, Northern will now have to make do with substantially fewer carriages than was originally promised, and all of them, I regret, will be older-type carriages handed down from elsewhere on the network.

The Wharfedale rail users group has highlighted the concerns of passengers, but those concerns are shared across all the lines that run through my constituency. In a thoughtful submission to the Yorkshire and Humber route utilisation strategy, WRUG called for a mix of additional, retimed and longer peak-hour trains for Leeds to reduce overcrowding, for more early morning trains at weekends, for improved frequency of trains on Sundays and for simple improvements to signalling on the line to improve flexibility and reliability.

[*Mr. Paul Truswell*]

Unfortunately, the only improvement that was accepted—this is welcome—is the lengthening of four peak-hour trains in each direction by the addition of two coaches to increase them to six coaches, but none of the other improvements was accepted. Of course, that one is to be welcomed, and it is far better than what we inherited from the previous Government, but, as WRUG rightly says, if growth continues at even half the current level, the trains will be as crowded as ever within just a few years.

To run longer trains, the platforms between Guiseley and Ben Rhydding must be lengthened. Network Rail says that that will not happen until 2012-13. That will obviously not tackle today's overcrowding, so there is a much greater sense of urgency about what is needed.

There is also clear disappointment that the line will receive second-hand trains that do not meet modern access requirements for older people or people with disabilities. The trains will have limited space, with tip-up seats for pushchairs and bicycles, and no advanced information systems or air conditioning, which are currently enjoyed on most of the rolling stock on the Wharfedale line. While any additional carriages will be welcome, it is vital that the DFT commits more firmly to a second phase of rolling stock for Northern that includes high-quality and, dare I say it, preferably new rolling stock for the region.

I want to say a few words about Leeds Bradford airport, to which transport links are extremely poor. A recent planning application to improve and expand the terminal was opposed by many of my constituents. I stress that they are not nimbys—they accept the airport as a fact of life and moved into their houses knowing full well of its existence—but they genuinely feared that the application was a precursor to future unsustainable growth.

When the council recently privatised the airport—it was controlled by five west Yorkshire authorities—and gave up total control over its development, I anticipated that we would quickly have a debate of that kind. It is ironic that, having let the genie out of the bottle, the council is now trying to make a virtue of putting it back in. The surrounding communities—my constituents—have been badly let down by the council's having earmarked little or none of its £60 million share of the proceeds from the privatisation for any measures to mitigate the impact of the airport's operation.

The new terminal would allow the airport to cater for 5 million passengers a year. Although that level of patronage and more is projected in the airport's master plan, such growth has enormous implications for local environmental issues, including air quality, transport and road safety, as well the broader challenge of climate change. Without a major modal shift, which will require support from the Government, the impact on local communities is likely to be substantial, since the surrounding highway network cannot absorb even present traffic levels, let alone the projected ones.

Although the airport's financial contribution to bus services is to be welcomed, that is unlikely to be sufficient to address the access problems. Setting aside land for a potential tram-train link is also welcome, but unless there is a much clearer commitment at an earlier stage from stakeholders such as the airport owners, the council

and Metro—supported, I hope by the Minister's Department—to make such a link happen, it will continue to be aspirational and will not be introduced to meet the challenges that I have mentioned.

Leeds is the largest city in the UK without a rapid transit system. The Minister will be relieved because I do not intend to mention the history of Supertram, but in the wake of the Supertram bid, Metro and Leeds city council are continuing to work in partnership to develop a high-quality rapid transit system for Leeds, known as new generation transport, which is effectively a trolleybus system. The NGT project is seeking to provide a high-quality transport system that will help to support the growth of Leeds' economy and improve the local environment by helping to tackle congestion. I hope that Leeds will, at long last, get its fair share of major infrastructure investment.

Although neither the Supertram nor the new trolleybus system bid that has been submitted would directly serve my constituency and its communities in the first instance, each would have major social, environmental and economic benefits and could eventually provide options for links through Pudsey and west Leeds to both Leeds and Bradford.

Following the submission of the major scheme business case, it is hoped that the DFT will provide a decision on whether the project will, by the end of this year, be given programme entry—perhaps the Minister can provide a bit more information on that—which I understand is the first stage in the Government's approvals process. The Minister's view on that would be appreciated.

We also need the Government to support the delivery of the city region transport strategy and give a long-term funding commitment that reverses the historic underfunding that I have mentioned. The city region has just published its refreshed 20-year city region transport strategy in line with the Government's new approach to strategic transport planning beyond 2012, incorporating the Eddington and Stern recommendations regarding the economics of transport and climate change. The strategy focuses on the current and future demands on the transport network in the city region, with particular focus on jobs and housing growth and the transition to a lower carbon economy, which I regard as vital. The strategy defines spatial priorities and transport interventions to deliver sustainable economic growth.

I cannot apologise for being somewhat parochial in looking through the plan, because elements of it are particularly relevant to my constituency: improved rail services between Leeds and Bradford; expanded park and ride facilities in the New Pudsey area; comprehensive bus priority for the A647; new rapid transit corridors between Leeds and Bradford; possible tram-train options to the airport; the A65 quality bus corridor; and new rail stations at Kirkstall Forge and Apperley Bridge.

Westminster Hall, and Westminster as a whole, is obviously a place for special pleading. As Members of Parliament, we all want the best for our constituents and our constituencies, but I am pleading not just for Pudsey, Leeds and west Yorkshire, but for the whole region, because our social, environmental, and economic interests are so closely interconnected and have not, under the previous or current Government, been properly addressed.

4.35 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr. Sadiq Khan): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell) on securing this Adjournment debate. He began his excellent speech by comparing himself to a parliamentarian Oliver Twist, and although my knowledge of Dickens is not very good, I know that he is different in a number of ways. First, he keeps coming back for more—again and again—in that I think that this is the fourth debate on transport in Pudsey that he has secured in the last four and a half years. Secondly, he actually gets more when he asks for it. His track record over the past few years—I will mention aspects of it during the course of my short speech—shows what an effective parliamentarian and Member of Parliament he has been.

My hon. Friend was right to say that the context of his contribution was choice. The choices are between making the investment that we have put in place over the recent period—yes, of course there should be more—and making savage cuts today, which is what other parties wishing to form a Government seek to do.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend on being an advocate for not just Pudsey, but the region as well. I hope that those who read his speech will see that he has been arguing not simply for his own back yard, but for other parts of the region, which will benefit from investment. Indeed, the country has benefited from the investment that has been secured for his region.

I agree that good transport facilities are a vital factor in the drive for more sustainable communities. My hon. Friend is right to say that transport contributes to a wide range of policy agendas, including achieving stronger and safer communities, improving the health of children and young people, promoting equality and social inclusion, improving and looking after the environment, and facilitating economic growth. When transport fails, those aspirations are put at risk, which is why he is right to keep coming back for more.

What is the importance of transport in local communities? The local transport planning process is bringing about a step change in the way in which local authorities plan strategically for transport in their areas. Each local transport plan is a vital part of the work that local authorities undertake with their stakeholders to strengthen their place-shaping role and the delivery of services to their communities. Local authorities are ultimately accountable to their communities, rather than to the Department for Transport, for both the quality of their transport strategies and for ensuring effective delivery.

This Government have shown, and will continue to show, their commitment to investment in sustainable transport in Yorkshire and Humber. My hon. Friend was fair in making that point in his speech.

The regional capital allocation for local road and transport schemes this year alone is £254 million. My hon. Friend will remember that representations were made to the Government last year to make immediate cuts to try to ensure that the deficit did not grow, but we chose not to do so. Direct DFT spending, in addition to the £254 million on road and rail in the Yorkshire and Humber region, was £636 million in 2007-08, and it has doubled in the six years from 2001-02. My hon. Friend will recall that another political party wanted us to

share the proceeds of growth instead of investing in Yorkshire and Humber. I am sure that his constituents will appreciate the choice that we made.

Future planning for investment in transport must recognise the realities of building a low-carbon economy and supporting sustainable transport solutions. My right hon. Friend rightly mentioned funding for the Yorkshire and Humber region. In no period in recent times has more money been invested in that region than in the recent period. Substantial investment is going into the region, including the £771 million of funding over three years that was announced in November 2007 to invest in highway maintenance and small schemes, such as public transport projects and town centre improvements, and £47 million has been transferred within the regional funding allocation to integrated transport and maintenance for the current financial year. He is right to say that that will have an implication for residents in Leeds and West Yorkshire, and we know that bus patronage has risen. Metro's partnership investment in free city bus services for Leeds and Wakefield, and more latterly Bradford and Huddersfield, has been extremely popular and well received. The A65 quality bus corridor has received £21 million for the Kirkstall road in Leeds to speed up journey times, which will lead to even more people using buses.

I am pleased that Metro and Leeds city council are building a brand new town centre bus station at a cost of £3 million to provide new, high-quality and fully accessible facilities. It is more than just a place to catch a bus. It will enhance the town centre, make it more attractive, and provide other benefits for the community, such as 24-hour monitored CCTV and real-time departure information.

My hon. Friend referred to new generation transport. I saw in today's edition of *The Daily Telegraph* coverage of the fact that his region will put in the application to which he referred. He is right to say that we are working with Leeds and Metro to develop a high-quality bus rapid transit network for the city, involving complementary measures such as park and ride. A trolley bus has emerged as the preferred option and will be known as NGT—new generation transport. It will run mostly on the old supertram alignments, and £250 million of funding has been set aside in the regional funding allocation for Yorkshire and Humber. My hon. Friend asked us to consider the matter swiftly when the business case has been received, and I have undertaken to do so to allow the decision to be made as soon as possible. He is right to plead for his community and to make his argument.

An important point that I want to deal with before I run out of time concerns the deregulation of buses. Let me make it clear that privatising the buses in the mid-1980s created serious adverse consequences. We want people to use buses at similar levels as back then, but it has taken us some time to achieve that. The Local Transport Act 2008 has given local authorities the necessary tools to deliver better and more integrated transport services. Under the Act, local authorities have greater local freedom and choice, with increased flexibility and powers, so that they can deliver a tailored transport system that is better suited to local needs. It gives local authorities the right mix of powers to improve the quality of local bus services, ranging from voluntary partnership schemes to quality partnership schemes through to quality contract schemes—the London-style model of bus contracts.

[Mr. Sadiq Khan]

We have seen that bus services can work well where there are good relations between bus operators and local authorities, and each is prepared to invest—the local authority in effective bus priority, traffic management and other infrastructure, and operators in offering more attractive services that the public want to use. If partnerships do not work, another tool is needed in local authorities' armoury.

My hon. Friend has made representations about, and commented on the need for, additional tools in local authorities' armoury, and I am pleased to say that the Government have consulted on draft regulations. That consultation closed on 7 October, and the responses are being considered. I hear his argument that we must respond quickly, and I expect to be able to finalise the regulations and guidance by the end of the year. Authorities such as his, which want control and another tool in their toolkit, will have that.

My hon. Friend also mentioned rail and High Speed 2. He will be aware that some parties that want to form a Government want a high-speed line from London to just Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds—and that is it. We see the benefits for regions such as his from High Speed 2 going to other parts of the country. His regional Minister has been a powerful advocate for that, and he will be pleased to know that that Minister met my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Adonis and Sir David Rowlands, the chair of HS2, to make those representations as robustly as possible.

During his excellent speech, my hon. Friend also referred to Leeds-Bradford international airport. He was right to say that the new owners face challenges, but they have ambitious plans for growth, and that will provide local people with a greater choice of travel opportunities.

It has been difficult to respond in 10 minutes to all the excellent points that my hon. Friend made. If I have not covered any of those points, I shall write to him, but I hope that he accepts that the Government have an ambitious agenda for improving transport in not only Pudsey, but West Yorkshire and the wider Yorkshire and Humber region. We have invested in transport and will continue to do so. We will, with regional and local partners, tackle congestion, provide high-quality public transport and improve access to jobs and choice. My hon. Friend is right to continue to exert pressure on the Government, and I hope that his constituents will see some of the benefits and fruits of his lobbying, with even more investment in Pudsey and his region.

Dartford River Crossing

4.44 pm

James Brokenshire (Hornchurch) (Con): I am grateful for this opportunity to highlight the continuing delays and hold-ups experienced by many of my constituents when trying to use the Dartford river crossing. The Minister will be aware that I have been highlighting the issue for some time, and the frustrations of regular users of the crossing have not diminished during that time. Indeed, various motoring organisations have reported that congestion has increased following the introduction of the increased tolls 12 months ago.

Anyone who uses the Queen Elizabeth II bridge on a Friday night heading into Kent will confirm the miles and miles of queues, with pollution and lost income arising from the hold-ups. It is not only my constituents, or indeed the constituents whom I hope to represent after the next general election in Old Bexley and Sidcup, who recognise the issue. The Department for Transport acknowledges that there is a serious problem. Its press release of 20 April 2009 noted that the route incorporating the Dartford river crossing

“is one of the routes with the highest levels of delays nationally and this level of service is experienced by around 40 to 45 per cent. of Crossing users.”

According to the Department, nearly half of all motorists experience delays at the crossing, and the cost is significant at around £40 million a year.

What is the cause? One might think that the worsening delays are caused by increasing traffic, but that is wrong. In the year ended March 2009, just over 51.5 million vehicles used the crossing, which was around 1.5 million fewer than the previous year, with an average of 141,500 movements a day—the lowest for a decade. If increased vehicle movements are not the problem, what is the cause? The answer is simple—the tolls, and the toll plaza arrangement.

Ministers have argued consistently—the Minister may do so this afternoon—that the purpose of the crossing tolls is to manage congestion. The reality is that they have been maximising congestion. The Department for Transport commissioned a study by consultants, Parsons Brinckerhoff, which was released earlier this year. They investigated the causes of the delays, and noted that the toll plaza lay-out was the primary constraint on vehicles using the crossing. It is right and proper that longer-term capacity across the Thames is examined—I shall come to that—but in the light of decreasing vehicle numbers using the Dartford crossing and increasing delays, the most pressing need is to examine options to maximise efficient use of the crossing.

Mr. David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. He will understand that there is real anger and concern in my constituency about the recent developments with tolling at the Dartford crossing, which he highlighted. Does he agree that residents believe that the Government have let them down by not dealing robustly and consistently with the matter earlier?

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend has championed the cause several times, and I appreciate how strongly he feels about it. There are relevant factors for his

constituents, including, for example, unavailability of the discount scheme to Bexley residents. I will come to that, as well as to the general issues of delays and congestion. We do not want the tunnels to become a glorified underground car-park, or the bridge to become an aerial sight-seeing spot for hours on end. Sadly, that has become the reality for motorists, as the Department for Transport's studies show. That is why I welcome the current "better use" review of the crossing.

In a letter to me dated 25 September 2009, the Minister confirmed that the Department was considering two options as part of that review. The first scenario would maintain the two toll plazas, but seek to increase the use of newer technology and new plaza lay-outs. The second option could see the removal of the southbound charges with the installation of a larger northbound plaza through a redesigned lay-out, located in such a way that issues of weaving on the approach to the northbound tunnels could be addressed.

As the Minister is probably aware, I am rather sceptical about the requirement for charges at all. Therefore, the potential for at least the charges across the bridge into Kent being lifted is certainly welcome. I look forward to hearing more from him on that issue.

However, we are told that the better use review and, indeed, the wider review will take approximately 18 months to conclude. Can the Minister confirm when he expects the review to report to him? If it recommends that the southbound toll charges can be withdrawn safely—I appreciate the need to focus on safety issues and the fact that any changes should not add to problems or cause increased dangers to motorists—when can hard-pressed motorists expect any changes to the arrangements to be implemented?

Given the clear recognition by the Department of the congestion and delays, I urge the Minister to speed up the review, so that we can take some positive steps to speed up the traffic generally. If there is a way of decoupling the better use review from the wider aspects of the review of capacity more generally, I urge him to take that option. I appreciate that there may be arguments about the interconnectivity between the two, but as he will recognise, the clear indication from his own Department is that the problems that motorists are experiencing require that the issue of short-term capacity and better use of the existing crossing be expedited, so that motorists can see that there is some prospect of improvement taking place in the near term.

Let me move on to the wider review. Will the Minister provide an update on work on the lower Thames crossing capacity study? The initial report was released in January, setting out a number of potential options, some of which had significant environmental sensitivities attached to them. There has been no new information released since the initial capacity study, or detail as to whether the options explored comprise a potential bridge, a tunnel or both. Will the Minister explain what the milestones are in taking that programme forward and when he expects to present more detailed options for consultation? A number of stakeholders, including local residents and other groups, are keen to understand how the process is intended to move forward and how they can become involved in it as it progresses.

In looking to the future, we come to the issue of the Government's most recent announcement about the Dartford crossing. In the past few weeks, we have had

the news that the Government plan to sell off the crossing to raise about £3 billion in total, as part of the wider package of potential asset sales that they have said they are considering. It is clear that some value or price range has been put on the crossing to reach the headline figure of £3 billion. I appreciate that the Minister may feel constrained in sharing the Treasury's valuation with us this afternoon, but he can share the assumptions made in estimating that indicative amount.

What level of charges has been assumed? How many vehicle movements have been allowed for? What assumptions have been made on investment in new technology for administering the tolls? Over what period was the income stream from the tolls allowed for? Most particularly, does the valuation take account of the outcome of the better use review? Clearly, if toll charges into Kent were scrapped, that would have an impact on the financial modelling. I am concerned about whether the Department has determined the outcome of the review in advance, even before the report has landed on Ministers' desks. The Minister needs to give a clear and unequivocal answer this afternoon that any proposed sale will not fetter the implementation of the recommendations of the better use study as and when it reports.

In addition, what assurances can the Minister give that, if the crossing were sold off, charges would not be ramped up by a private sector owner, as part of a deal with the Treasury to maximise the capital value, but only through the exploitation of motorists for years to come? Then there is the issue of the level of charges. The crossing generates about £50 million of income for the Department for Transport each year. The Government took away the ring-fenced investment in local transport projects. That was about 12 months ago. Therefore, there is absolutely no guarantee that any of the moneys raised by the tolls will be spent on transport infrastructure in the vicinity of the bridge.

It is quite unusual, in a congestion management concept, that the money is not reinvested in public transport or other mechanisms that would see people using different routes in order to reduce congestion. In London, the congestion charge is used to fund bus services and other means of public transport in order to reduce reliance on the car. It is interesting to note that that does not apply to the Dartford river crossing. The historical justification was that the money would pay for the cost of the bridge—the cost of the building and of maintenance. That no longer applies, so there are continued questions about what the justification is if it is not congestion management, for the reasons that I have highlighted. The Government need to consider the whole issue of the charges that are being applied. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) is not present at this debate, but he has raised the legality of the charges overall. It would be interesting to hear whether the Minister has any views on the rationale and justification for retaining the charges.

What the Government have done, though, is created a scheme for residents living in the areas of Thurrock and Dartford councils to receive discounts for using the crossing. It would be interesting to hear from the Minister how successful that has been. What has the take-up been? How many residents have sought to apply for one of the permits?

[James Brokenshire]

Equally, it would be interesting to hear the latest information on take-up of the DART-Tag. Previously, the DART-Tag had a facility whereby there were dedicated lanes, but with the introduction of the new toll charges, the dedicated lanes were scrapped, so what might have been seen as one benefit of having the DART-Tag—being able to speed through the toll plaza—was removed, albeit registering for a DART-Tag gives people certain benefits in the form of discounts. However, it would be interesting to drill down on the local discount scheme. How many people have registered? How much money have residents in those areas saved by registering for the discounts since the scheme was introduced?

More generally, there is the basic issue of the scheme's fairness. This is a relevant issue for people living in the vicinity of the crossing. Someone can be living nearly 13 miles away from the bridge in Thurrock and receive the benefit of the discount scheme, yet if someone is a resident of Wennington village in Havering, which is in my constituency, or of Crayford in Bexley—in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Evennett)—and therefore lives much closer, the discount scheme simply does not apply. That appears to residents of my constituency and, I am sure, of my hon. Friend's constituency as perverse and unfair.

It would be possible to operate a scheme based on post codes within a certain geographical area around the crossing. That could be administered. I appreciate that there is a need to consider something that is practical and does not create a new burdensome bureaucracy, but at least that approach would be more equitable and logical. It would certainly be fairer. Therefore, will the Minister commit at least to a review of the discount arrangements, based on the experience that he will have received information about in the past 12 months, so that those basic issues of fairness can be addressed?

Anyone who uses the Dartford crossing regularly will appreciate the sheer frustration of being stuck in miles and miles of jams. The Department for Transport needs to get on with its review of the need for additional road capacity across the Thames and, in particular, better use of the existing crossing. The current tolling arrangements appear—motoring organisations suggest this as well—to be adding to the delays and congestion, and motorists certainly should not be seen as a soft target.

I therefore trust that the Minister will assure us that his Department is committed to measures that will help to beat the queues, such as scrapping the tolls into Kent. I trust also that he will help drivers who are driven to distraction by delays and that he will help businesses to keep on moving in these times of continuing recession. The crossing and those who use it should not be seen merely as a cash cow for the Treasury.

5 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Mole): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hornchurch (James Brokenshire) on securing this debate. The Dartford crossing is a heavily used piece of the strategic road network, with about 150,000 vehicles using it every day. The crossing brings huge benefits to

users. After the construction of the M25, the crossing became a key part of the strategic road network, and the Government decided to promote the construction of the Queen Elizabeth II bridge. A concession was let for the building of the bridge, which opened in October 1991. Under the concession, tolls were charged to pay for building costs.

The substantial growth of traffic that we saw in the 1990s had two effects. First, it increased the revenue collected—thus the bridge would be paid for sooner than might have been expected. Secondly, and more significantly, it raised concerns about what might happen if the tolls were removed. A study in 2001 indicated that, without a charge, traffic would increase by 17 per cent. Against that background, we replaced the tolls with a charge. The hon. Gentleman spoke of increased delays, but the response to recent parliamentary questions shows that delays of more than 15 minutes have remained relatively stable over the past year or so.

The Transport Act 2000 requires that revenues from charging schemes are invested in transport. Revenues come directly to the Department for Transport, not the Treasury, and add to what is available for investment in transport projects across the country. That includes projects of direct benefit to users of the crossing, such as enhancements to the trunk road network on either side of it.

Given the prospect of increasing traffic, we were keen to target the charge better. In our 2006 consultation, we proposed removing all charges between the hours of 10 pm and 6 am, when traffic is lightest, and to increase the charge for cars to £1.50. We also proposed allowing those opting to pay using an electronic DART-Tag to continue to cross for the old £1 cash rate. Electronic payment has two advantages: it is more convenient, and it saves time at the barriers. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the figures that I have seen suggest that, since the introduction of the revised charging rate, the take-up of the DART-Tag is increasing monthly.

As a result of the 2006 consultation, a substantial number of representations were made in favour of discounts for local residents. We agreed to work up a local resident discount scheme, so that the people most affected would be included. The changes were introduced in November 2008. Some 20,000 local residents accounts can be added to the generality of DART-Tag accounts, which number 87,000.

I shall now address some of the arguments most often raised about the Dartford crossing. The one that I hear most often—to an extent, the hon. Gentleman repeated it—is that the barriers cause the congestion and that, if we were to take them away, the queues would disappear. The evidence suggests that the real problem is the volume of traffic and that, even if the toll plazas were removed, there would still be queues. The crossing was designed to handle up to 135,000 vehicle movements each day, but it is not uncommon for there to be 160,000 vehicle movements.

The crossing is a bottleneck. Not only is traffic coming from the M25, but traffic going northbound from Kent and south-east London joins the M25 traffic, and there are some busy local junctions. The tunnels are a particular problem, and the barriers fulfil an important traffic management function. Not to have them could have significant safety implications. Removing the charge

and taking the barriers away altogether is not the answer. It would be irresponsible, and would have a negative impact people's safety.

James Brokenshire: I recognise what the Minister says about toll charging being a means of controlling traffic going into the two tunnels and about the road layout, the weaving of traffic and the safety implications that may exist in such circumstances. His arguments are predicated on the increased traffic of the 2001 study to which he referred, yet experience over the past 10 years shows that traffic has declined. The average is now at its lowest for 10 years. Will he reflect on his comments in the light of reducing traffic, particularly—sadly so given the recession—given that we are likely to see a further reduction? The question of tolls is less relevant in relation to the bridge, as I am sure that he will agree.

Chris Mole: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman is right about the overall quantum of traffic. In evidence to the Transport Committee recently, we set out our view of the trends: we accept that there has been some decline as a result of the economic downturn, but anticipate that we will return to continued growth.

Another argument that we often hear is that people have no choice about the journeys that they make and that the charge therefore makes no difference. The evidence does not bear that out. Since removing the night time charges, we have noticed that some journeys are being made earlier. We also noticed higher traffic levels when local retail centres were running promotions. That implies that there is some discretion about the journeys that people make. The real problem is too much demand and not enough capacity.

In recognition of the increasing growth in demand, the then Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) announced that the Department for Transport would embark on a study to consider the long-term capacity issues at the crossing and to look at possible options for addressing rising demand. In April 2009, the Department published its initial analysis of current and possible future capacity constraints at the crossing, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. That analysis brought together the most recent information on the current performance of the crossing. It also provided forecasts of its future performance. That gives us the best evidence base for assessing what needs to be done.

The Government are clear about the fact that we need to address both the short to medium-term issues faced by our national transport networks. We must plan for the transport network that we want for the future. Based on findings and conclusions of that analysis, we announced in April that further work should be undertaken to investigate what can be done in the short to medium term to improve the service provided by the existing crossing. We recognise that options for improvements in the short term may be limited by physical constraints at the existing crossing. However, we consider that more could be done to improve users' crossing experience.

As for making better use of the crossing, our recent study recommended further work on two possible scenarios. It recognised that each had the potential to generate some benefits by increasing throughput, while avoiding an impact on safety. The first scenario would maintain the two toll plazas but would seek to increase their efficiency by using newer technology and new plaza

layouts. The second scenario proposed the removal of the southbound charges and the installation of a larger northbound plaza in a redesigned layout, located in such a way that the weaving of traffic on the approach to the northbound tunnels could be addressed.

The initial study also considered major infrastructure options that would provide additional capacity, and it produced a high-level assessment of their impact. The three options for a new crossing identified in the study are at the site of the existing crossing, between the Swanscombe peninsula and the A1089, and from the east of Tilbury to the east of Gravesend and the M20. We intend to consider the merits of the better-use options, as well as the options identified for the provision of possible additional crossing capacity. There are some clear synergies in the work involved, particularly in the assessment of benefits and impacts.

The hon. Gentleman has urged the Government to ensure that the consideration and implementation of a one-way tolling regime should be completed as soon as possible and should not depend on the timing of any consideration of the case for additional crossing capacity. It is not possible to divorce those two pieces of work as suggested—indeed, he made some of my argument for me, particularly on the possible sale of the bridge—given the linkages between them and the need to derive the most suitable combination of options. We need to understand the implications of one-way tolling, but we expect work to consider making better use of the crossing to take between 12 and 18 months. We therefore expect the review to be finalised in mid to late 2010. If there are opportunities to implement measures safely, we will of course do so, but we will need to understand the potential costs and benefits of any proposals.

Finally, to be clear about the potential sale of the crossing, it was announced in the 2009 Budget that further work to assess future capacity requirements for the Dartford crossing would be undertaken with a view to bringing forward proposals to realise value by the Budget of 2010.

On 12 October, the Prime Minister announced the Government's plans for the sale of assets over the next period. Included in the list of assets to be sold was the Dartford crossing. The Department is currently considering the various commercialisation options for the existing crossing and funding for any additional capacity in the future. The options are being considered alongside the initial analysis of the further capacity options, and the exact nature of any concession sale will be influenced by the outcome of that study.

The options currently being considered include letting a long-term concession to operate and maintain the current crossing, letting a concession for the period prior to new capacity being constructed, letting a concession with the option to add new capacity as required and letting a concession incorporating the design, build, finance and operations of a new crossing. Any option will need to support the crossing's long-term capability as part of the strategic road network.

In a parliamentary answer to the hon. Gentleman, the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Khan), said:

"No estimate of the saleable value of the Dartford River Crossing has been made. Any such valuation would depend on the nature of any commercial agreements for a sale, including, but

[Chris Mole]

not exclusively, the length of those arrangements, the level of future charges and forecast future traffic volumes. The assumptions made around those issues are the same as those which would be made for normal business planning purposes.”—[*Official Report*, 21 October 2009; Vol. 497, c. 1444W.]

Given the monopolistic nature of the Dartford crossing, the charging regime under any concession will need to be set within a contractual framework to protect users. As a result, charges will be set at a level that is appropriate

for both users and any potential concession owner, and that will be consistent with economic efficiency and the Government’s policy objectives for managing congestion.

The Department plans to provide initial views from its analysis of capacity options in early 2010 and the timing of the necessary further steps needed to reach final conclusions on the provision of additional capacity.

Question put and agreed to.

5.12 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 28 October 2009

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Copyright Strategy

The Minister for Higher Education and Intellectual Property (Mr. David Lammy): My right hon. Friend the First Secretary of State, Lord Mandelson, has made the following statement:

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, together with the Intellectual Property Office, is today “© The Way Ahead: A Strategy for Copyright in the Digital Age”.

This report set out the policies which will drive the UK approach to copyright in the digital age, reflecting how the UK is working to deliver the right solutions at a domestic level and to help drive the agenda on copyright issues in Europe and internationally.

The core objective of “© The Way Ahead: A Strategy for Copyright in the Digital Age” is to ensure the copyright system supports creativity and promotes investment and jobs while also ensuring that consumers are able to act with certainty and clarity.

Building on the framework for supporting the creative industries set out in the “Digital Britain Report and Creative Britain”, its ambition is to set out a copyright roadmap determining the lessons policy makers should take from the present to help decide where we should go in the future.

This copyright strategy will support fair treatment for creators; secure a viable future for rights holders; allow consumers to benefit from the digital age; and create a simpler system for businesses to operate in.

This copyright strategy highlights three principles that need to be kept in mind in order to create a positive environment for copyright owners, consumers and business.

First, copyright is harmonised at a European level and any action pursued domestically needs to be understood within this context;

secondly, a pragmatic recognition that intervention from Government will not be the most useful action in all areas requiring attention, with it being more beneficial for business and copyright owners to pursue many solutions; and

finally, recognition that Government have a responsibility to serve the interests of all participants in the copyright framework.

The strategy develops a number of policy announcements in the “Digital Britain Report”, as well as encouraging domestic and international actions, which satisfy these three principles. The strategy states that the UK will:

Enable a system of copyright licensing on an opt-out rather than opt-in basis, as is successfully practised elsewhere in Europe.

Take powers to allow “orphan works” that have no clear owner to be used without fear of criminal liability.

Act to monitor the behaviour of collecting societies.

Encourage creative industries to employ standard contract terms and licences that give creators more control over their work.

Enable business to continue to develop new business models, products and services that better meet customer expectations on utility and price, including making it easier to license copyright works.

Ensure consumers respect copyright by encouraging the development of attractive legitimate services and tackling illicit peer-to-peer file-sharing.

Signal its readiness to consider sympathetically Europe-wide moves to let non-commercial users use copyright works without fear of legal complications.

Inevitably there will be some questions about how this work links in with what we are going to do about tackling unlawful peer-to-peer file-sharing. On unlawful file-sharing I am intending to make clear our intention to go ahead with legislation in this area which will establish a proportionate, but effective, way of reducing significantly the level of online infringement which is causing such damage to our creative industries. The approach of requiring internet service providers to send notifications to subscribers identified by rights holders as unlawfully file-sharing, and collecting data on the number of notifications sent to each subscriber which the rights holder can obtain via a court order, has been debated for some time, as has the imposition of technical measures should that approach not produce the results anticipated.

What I will also make clear, however, is that temporary account suspension could be included in the measures taken, something that we floated as part of a Government statement on 25 August 2009. Additionally I will make it clear that we are not expecting the whole cost to fall on internet service providers, but on the basis of a flat fee approach costs will be shared so that both sides can plan and budget. The full details of what we are intending, and the official response to the consultation that closed on 29 September 2009 will be made clear when the legislation is published next month.

The two policies are complementary. It is right for Government to intervene on unlawful file-sharing to help create the space in which innovative business offerings can emerge. But it is also right that this should be done against the background of a fair deal for all parties. Creators and those who invest in creativity must receive a fair reward—the creative industries are built on that precept—but we also need to move to reinstate the respect that copyright should command from reasonable law-abiding people. Without that respect we—and the creative industries—face a much harder struggle.

Copies of the “Copyright Strategy” will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

TREASURY

ECOFIN (20 October 2009)

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Alistair Darling): The Economic and Financial Affairs Council was held in Luxembourg on 20 October 2009. The following items were discussed:

Preparation for the G20 finance ministers’ meeting

Ministers received an update on process going forward to St. Andrews. The Council agreed a terms of reference on climate finance, exit strategies and the framework for strong, sustainable and balanced growth which the Swedish presidency will take forward to the G20 meeting as the European contribution.

Preparation for the October European Council

a) Exit strategies

ECOFIN agreed a set of conclusions outlining the principles for design of fiscal exit strategies, reiterating that continuing support for the economy was essential until recovery was established. Ministers also agreed on the need for comprehensive structural reforms to provide the right framework for future sustainable growth and for strengthened national budgetary frameworks.

b) Financing of climate change

Ministers held a discussion on financing aspects of climate change. This will be further discussed by the October European Council.

c) Financial supervision

Ministers took stock of the significant progress made in negotiations on the creation of a new regulatory and supervisory architecture for the European Union. ECOFIN agreed that ongoing national

parliamentary procedures must be respected, and concluded that the EU should continue to aim for agreement on the complete supervision package by the end of 2009 in order to have the new system in place as soon as possible.

The Government recognise the benefits of this new system, as set out by the June European Council, for Europe to improve regulatory and supervisory systems for the future and to provide a global lead on regulatory reform. The Government will work to ensure agreement by the end of the year.

European Systemic Risk Board

Ministers then discussed the draft regulation establishing a European systemic risk board (ESRB) and the draft Council decision entrusting the European Central Bank with specific tasks in relation to the ESRB. The UK maintained its Parliamentary scrutiny reserve on the proposals. The presidency concluded that there was broad agreement on the substance of the proposal of the regulation and would take further steps on the Council decision. ECOFIN will return to this in its meeting in December, when Ministers will also address the proposals for the new micro-supervisory structures.

Strengthening EU financial stability arrangements

ECOFIN agreed Council conclusions on the strengthening of EU arrangements to ensure financial stability and provide crisis management in the event of a future financial crisis. ECOFIN will consider this further in its meeting in December.

Taxation: Anti-fraud agreements with third countries

The Council discussed a draft anti-fraud agreement with Liechtenstein and a draft mandate for the Commission to open negotiations with Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and Switzerland. The Council broadly agreed on the substance while noting political reservations by Austria and Luxembourg. Discussions will continue at working group level before coming back to ECOFIN in December.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Spending Reports

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Barbara Follett): The Government have today published the summary of responses to the second phase of our consultation on local spending reports. The Sustainable Communities Act 2007 (“the Act”) places a requirement on the Secretary of State to make arrangements for the production of local spending reports and to consult those likely to be affected before making them. The document has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and is available on the Communities and Local Government website at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/about/sustainablecommunitiesact>

The aim of local spending reports is to assist local authorities, their partners and the community to promote the sustainability of local communities by providing more information about the public money that is spent in their area.

Considerable interest was shown by respondents in the potential that the mapping of local public spending offers in support of partnership working, the delivery of efficient and high quality local services and local transparency and accountability. We recognise the clear expectation of the majority of respondents that the

local spending reports should, over time, include more information, from a wider range of public bodies. However, the responses to the consultation which dealt with the purpose and content of future reports did not provide a great deal of information on the likely costs and benefits of developing the reports and the precise way in which they could be used.

The Government remain committed to the provision of information on local spending although we must ensure this is useful, to local authorities, their partners and the community they serve and that the cost of producing this is justified by its benefit.

We, therefore, will be considering the findings of this phase of the consultation in more detail together with evidence from the Total Place initiative, Sir Tim Berners-Lee’s work on how Government can use the internet to make non-personal public data as widely available as possible, and the responses to the Strengthening local democracy consultation. Once this is completed we will consult on the proposals that arise from the exercise, as required by section 6(10) of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007. We will report back to the House before the end of December 2009 on the next stages in developing local spending reports.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Sale of Nuclear Decommissioning Authority Land

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Mr. David Kidney): Today my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Energy and Climate Change, Lord Hunt, made the following ministerial statement:

I would like to inform the House that the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) is close to concluding its sale process for the disposal of land adjacent to Sellafield in Cumbria.

I hope to be able to announce the successful bidder—who intends to develop the site for new nuclear power generation—shortly.

Proceeds from the sale of this site will be used by the NDA to offset the cost of decommissioning and to further its core mission. A successful outcome of the sale process will further demonstrate that major energy companies are gearing up for significant investment in low carbon energy in the UK.

I will place details of the outcome of this sale process, including the sum raised and the identity of the bidder in the Libraries of both Houses.

Any new nuclear power station development will be subject to the regulatory and other consenting processes.

The land to be sold has been nominated into the Government’s strategic siting assessment process which assesses sites for their suitability for new nuclear power stations. The Government will be consulting on their assessment of the sites that are potentially suitable for new nuclear power stations as part of their consultation on the draft “National Policy Statement for Nuclear Power Generation” which will be published this autumn.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

St. Helena

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Douglas Alexander): I announced on 16 March, *Official Report*, column 40WS, a public consultation on options for access to the island. The consultation has now been completed. A report summarising the responses

that were received is now available on the Department for International Development website: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/>.

We will consider carefully the views submitted in the consultation, taking into account the current economic conditions.

JUSTICE

Crown Court Means-Testing

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Bridget Prentice): My noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Bach, has made the following written ministerial statement:

On 14 July 2009, the Government announced the beginning of a consultation exercise on draft regulations to support the introduction of means-testing in the Crown Court in January 2010. On 8 June 2009, the Government had announced their intention to extend means-testing to defendants and appellants appearing in the Crown Court.

The consultation exercise on the draft regulations concluded on 6 October 2009, and a Response to Consultation on the draft Regulations and Supplementary Impact Assessment on Crown Court means-testing is today being published by the Ministry of Justice. I am also taking the opportunity today to lay the draft regulations before Parliament. Those that are subject to affirmative resolution will be debated in due course.

Copies of the Response to Consultation and Supplementary Impact Assessment have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Department for Transport (Central)	0	156,918	188,144	208,126	353,758	220,352	219,380
Executive Agencies	1,045,417	1,806,204	2,002,484	1,966,637	2,385,202	2,467,707	2,756,202

It is not possible to provide costs for the Department for Transport or for the Driving Standards Agency in 2002-03 because the information is not available in a comparable format.

Improving Access to Taxis

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr. Sadiq Khan): The Department for Transport has today published the results from a consultation paper which explored ways of improving access to taxis by disabled people. The analysis summarises the responses to the consultation and has informed the way in which the Department will take this work forward.

The purpose of publishing the results of the consultation is to provide transparency to the Department's policy and to ensure that it is easily understood. We acknowledge and welcome the input provided by the respondents to the consultation.

The Department will take the opportunity presented by the passage of the Equality Bill to ensure there are regulation making provisions to allow duties to be

TRANSPORT

Correction to Written Answer

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Mole): I regret to inform the House that some of the figures in the answer given to Parliamentary Question 276453 on 2 June, *Official Report*, column 298W, to the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs. T. Villiers) about how much (a) the Department and (b) its agencies spent on car hire in each year since 2001 were incorrect.

When preparing an answer to a current question it has come to light that there are some discrepancies with the data submitted for the previous answer given due to two errors in the transposition of data. The Government Car and Despatch Agency (GCDA) has also provided data for the last three financial years, whereas none was given by them for the previous question. They advise that figures are now available following improvements in record keeping and their undertaking of a contract to maintain vehicles on behalf of the Olympic development authority has resulted in an increase in car hire.

The figures have been checked and the correct answer is below.

imposed on drivers of taxis and private hire vehicles designated as accessible by the local authority, to assist wheelchair passengers and carry them in safety and comfort. This largely replicates the duties contained in what was section 36 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which has been carried across into the Equality Bill.

The Department will also be undertaking demonstration schemes in three licensing authority areas, to research the needs of disabled people when using taxis and private hire vehicles, how to tailor the fleet to demand and use patterns and how driver training can assist disabled passengers. The demonstration schemes will provide the basis on which the Department will be able to issue comprehensive guidance to licensing authorities to assist them with improving the availability of taxis and private hire vehicles for disabled passengers.

The Department is also considering the wider legislative framework governing taxis and private hire vehicles to see whether there are any changes which could be made with the objective of enhancing provision for disabled people.

The document summarising consultation responses is available on the Department's website. Copies have been placed in the House Library.

Driving Disqualifications (UK and the Republic of Ireland)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Paul Clark): The United Kingdom has taken the formal legal steps, along with the Republic of Ireland Administration, to mutually recognise driving disqualifications issued to either UK or Irish drivers. This will mean that a UK driving-licence holder disqualified for an offence in Ireland will no longer escape that punishment when they return home. Likewise, a disqualification earned by an Irish driver while in the UK will have their disqualification enforced on their return to Ireland.

The UK has one of the best road safety records in the world and this co-operation between the administrations in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland will improve it further.

The UK and Ireland are the first to apply the terms of the 1998 European Convention on driving disqualifications. Following completion of the legal

requirements to adopt the 1998 European Convention on driving disqualifications, there now follows a 90 day period after which the law will come into force. This will be on a date early in February 2010, to be notified by the European authorities on receipt of our respective national declarations.

Regulations to bring the agreement into law in Great Britain, The Mutual Recognition of Driving Disqualifications (Great Britain and Ireland) Regulations 2008 (SI.2008/3010), were laid before the House on 25 November 2008.

WALES

Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill (Framework Powers)

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): I am pleased to inform the House that the explanatory memorandum explaining the Government's proposal for a framework power in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill are available in the Vote Office, Library and the Printed Paper Office, and on the Wales Office website (www.walesoffice.gov.uk).

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 28 October 2009

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Air Pollution

Graham Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 26 March 2009, *Official Report*, columns 697-8W, on air pollution, if he will indicate the increased morbidity and mortality levels assumed behind each of the six monetised social health costs in 2020 listed in the table. [296192]

Jim Fitzpatrick [holding answer 27 October 2009]: The six scenarios discussed in the answer of 26 March 2009 were compared with a 'business as usual' scenario, during the development of the Renewable Energy Strategy to assess the additional air quality impacts of possible approaches to biomass heat uptake. It was found that the impact on concentrations of nitrogen dioxide was negligible on a national basis.

The impacts on morbidity resulting from the uptake of biomass as a renewable energy source were not assessed during the analyses.

The initial analysis of mortality for scenario 1 and 2 used an alternative approach to valuing the air quality impact which was not directly comparable in its intermediate assessment of mortality although the resulting monetised health costs are comparable.

An intermediate stage in the analysis of scenarios 3 to 6 was the calculation of the mortality resulting from the increment in particulate matter (PM₁₀) concentrations in ambient air. The results of this stage of the analysis are shown in the following table. The analysis is subject to considerable uncertainty in the underlying assumptions. Including the time delay between the exposure to the air pollution and the resulting health impact. The values presented for Scenarios 3 to 6 represent the central case within this uncertainty. Other uncertainties include the biomass emissions, the spatial distribution of biomass uptake and the valuation methodology. The results presented are for the whole of the UK and are given in their raw output form.

Scenario	Life years lost over a 100 year period	Life years lost in 2020	Annualised health costs (£ million)
1	728,086 to 1,389,577	—	731
2	2,766,736 to 5,280,418	—	2,803
3	—	452,554	189
4	—	1,748,651	732
5	—	339,861	142
6	—	1,331,693	557

Departmental Drinking Water

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much his Department has spent on bottled water in each of the last five years. [292110]

Dan Norris [holding answer 12 October 2009]: The core-department and its catering services provider has not supplied bottled water for meetings since 19 February 2007. In the years 2005, 2006 and 2007 the core-Department purchased 9848, 12948, and 1969 litres respectively of bottled water at an average price of £1.72 per litre, a total cost of £42,595.80.

Departmental Rail Travel

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much his Department spent on first class rail travel for officials in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [293332]

Dan Norris: From information held centrally, the core-department's expenditure on first class rail travel for officials in each of the last three years and the current financial year to date is:

	£
July 2006 - March 2007	817,167
April 2007 - March 2008	853,334
April 2008 - March 2009	668,733
April 2009 - August 2009	249,680

Travel by civil servants is undertaken in accordance with Section 8 of the Civil Service Management Code and the principles set out in Managing Public Money. Staff are expected to use the most efficient and economic means of travel.

Food: Packaging

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations he has received on the formulation of the Courtauld Commitment Mark II; and if he will make a statement. [295591]

Dan Norris: During the past year the Waste and Resources Action programme (WRAP) has worked closely with Government and signatories on the development of a successor to the original Courtauld Commitment, which finishes in spring 2010. The 'next phase' of the Courtauld Commitment, or 'Courtauld 2' (it has yet to be officially named), which includes more sophisticated and ambitious targets on packaging and food waste, is due to be launched in the new year. WRAP is currently discussing the shape of the targets with the four UK Administrations and signatories and is not yet in a position to release further information.

Lorries

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect on the environment of the operation of lorries weighing over 44 tonnes; and if he will make a statement. [292665]

Paul Clark: I have been asked to reply.

In order to be better informed about the likely consequences of allowing longer and/or heavier goods vehicles on the English road network, the Department for Transport commissioned a study which reported in 2008. The report of this study: "Longer and/or Longer and Heavier Goods Vehicles (LHVs) - A study of the likely effects if permitted in the UK" (reference: TRL Report PPR 285), concluded that allowing longer and/or heavier vehicles onto the network could lead to an increase in CO₂ emissions. The report also concluded that there would be a limited impact on the structural performance of pavements and bridges but did not cover the specific issue of the likely effect on the annual cost of maintaining the road network.

National Bee Unit: Qualifications

John Penrose: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many staff of the National Bee Unit have qualifications in bee biology at postgraduate level or above. [294990]

Dan Norris: The National Bee Unit (NBU) is part of the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) where approximately 150 staff comprising bee inspectors, scientists, policy specialists and other staff have an input into the bee health programme. Many of these staff have post graduate degrees in subjects related to, but not specifically in, bee biology. For bee inspectors, practical knowledge of beekeeping is an essential requirement of FERA's job specification and some Inspectors have over 30 years experience in this field.

Recycling: Leeds

John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will make an assessment of the environmental effects of the separated refuse recycling scheme in use in Leeds; and if he will make a statement. [295420]

Dan Norris: No such assessment has been made by DEFRA. The Government believes that local authorities are best placed to make decisions on the waste management strategy for their communities and therefore DEFRA does not interfere in these matters.

Rural Areas: Advertising

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance his Department has issued on the use of mobile advertising billboards in rural areas; and if he will make a statement. [295312]

Mr. Ian Austin: I have been asked to reply.

Guidance on advertisements alongside motorways and trunk roads, including guidance on advertisements on vehicles parked in fields, verges or in lay-bys is provided in paragraphs 147-148 of CLG Circular 03/2007, "Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007".

Outdoor advertisements are controlled by these regulations. Generally, mobile advertising billboards will require the express consent of the local planning authority before they can be displayed. It will be for the relevant local planning authority to determine whether

a particular advertisement should be permitted and the most appropriate course of action to take when an advertisement is displayed in contravention of the regulations.

Waste Management

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what his policy is on the national adoption of a zero waste standard. [295427]

Dan Norris: Building on the success of the original zero waste places initiative, which developed innovative best practice in sustainable waste management, the Government have developed a new Zero Waste Standard. This seeks to provide recognition of, and stimulation to, the work of local authorities in their efforts to minimise waste and maximise the use of resources in their communities.

We hope that local authorities across England will seek to meet the new standard and realise the benefits of adopting the zero waste concept

Wind Power: Floods

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent guidelines his Department has issued on the construction of wind turbines on flood plains. [295260]

Mr. Ian Austin: I have been asked to reply.

The Government's spatial planning policies relevant to new wind turbines are set out in Planning Policy Statement 22 (PPS22), 'Renewable Energy', while policies on development in flood risk areas are contained in Planning Policy Statement 25 (PPS25), 'Development and Flood Risk'.

On 11 August 2009, Communities and Local Government issued for consultation proposals to amend PPS25 to clarify certain aspects of the policy. This includes clarification of how the policy should be applied to proposals for new wind turbines in flood risk areas, including flood plains, taking account of the policy in PPS22. The proposed amendment would clarify that wind turbines can be constructed in flood risk areas, subject to demonstrating that the turbines would be safe, without increasing flood risk elsewhere and, if proposed for a functional flood plain, would be designed to remain operational during a flood, result in no net loss of flood plain storage and not impede water flows.

The consultation period for the proposed amendments to PPS25 closes on 3 November.

Wind Power: Somerset

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the need for new pylons to service the wind turbines across the Somerset Levels proposed by EDF Energy. [295259]

Mr. Kidney: I have been asked to reply.

I understand that the hon. Member's question relates to the proposed wind farm at Withy Farm, Puriton near Bridgewater. I have been asked to respond as renewable energy falls within my Department's responsibilities.

As you may be aware, I am unable to comment on any aspect of a wind farm proposal that is currently in the planning system as that is a matter for the relevant local planning authority. This would include any assessment of the need for new pylons.

A report by the Electricity Networks Strategy Group¹ 'Our Electricity Transmission Network: A Vision for 2020' published in March 2009, set out the potential transmission investments needed to connect large volumes of onshore and offshore wind generation across the UK required to meet the 2020 renewables target, while, at the same time, facilitating the connection of other essential new low carbon generation.

A copy of the report is available at

<http://www.ensg.gov.uk/index.php?article=126>

¹ The Electricity Networks Strategy Group (ENSG) is a senior industry group chaired by DECC and Ofgem

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect the proposed construction of nine wind turbines on the Somerset Levels as proposed by EDF Energy would have on the environment; and if he will make a statement. [295261]

Mr. Kidney: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave today to his parliamentary question, number 295259, regarding wind farm proposals that are currently in the planning system.

The Government have made clear that wind farms should be located in appropriate places and that local concerns should be listened to. We recognise the need to ensure that all renewable energy developments take place within the formal planning procedure, which allows all relevant stakeholders, including members of the public, to put forward their views on the likely impact of any proposal on the environment and the local community.

Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 22 on renewable energy highlights the need to take account of environmental impacts in terms of landscape and visual effects, which will vary on a case by case basis according to the type of development, its location and landscape setting.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Portcullis House: Smoking

Mr. Hoban: To ask the hon. Member for North Devon, representing the House of Commons Commission how much the smoking shelter constructed between Norman Shaw North and Portcullis House is expected to cost. [296230]

Nick Harvey: The smoking shelter is forecast to cost £49,000.

Recruitment: Pay

Mr. Hayes: To ask the hon. Member for North Devon, representing the House of Commons Commission what process the House of Commons Service follows to establish salaries for new posts; and which new posts have been established at each pay band since 1997. [296177]

Nick Harvey: Nick Harvey: New posts are evaluated using the House of Commons pay band guidance which sets out the criteria for allocating posts in the pay band structure and gives examples of the typical tasks and demands of the work expected at each pay band level. New posts within the Senior Commons Structure are reviewed using the Job Evaluation for Senior Posts (JESP) methodology. Each pay band has a defined salary range.

The House of Commons Service manages its workforce numbers by budget and not by complement. Staffing levels are controlled through the annual business planning process and monitored on the basis of actual headcount and full-time equivalency, not in terms of a number of established posts. Records reflecting the number of new posts created over the period requested are therefore not maintained and cannot be produced retrospectively for the period requested. Staff figures are published each year in the Commission's annual report, which is available in the Library and at

www.parliament.uk.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Attendance Allowance: Bedfordshire

Nadine Dorries: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was paid in attendance allowance to residents of Mid Bedfordshire constituency in (a) 2001, (b) 2005 and (c) 2008. [295407]

Jonathan Shaw: The information is in the following table:

Attendance allowance expenditure for mid Bedfordshire parliamentary constituency

<i>Period</i>	<i>Amount (£ million) (nominal terms)</i>
2001-02	3.20
2005-06	4.70
2008-09	5.80

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £100,000.

2. Tables containing benefit expenditure by benefit, departmental strategic objective, local authority and parliamentary constituency can be found at the following URL:

http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd4/medium_term.asp and a copy has been placed in the Library.

Source:

DWP Statistical and Accounting Data

Carer's Allowance: Bedfordshire

Nadine Dorries: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Mid Bedfordshire constituency (a) are entitled to and (b) receive carer's allowance. [295404]

Jonathan Shaw: The available information is in the following table.

Carer's allowance—mid Bedfordshire constituency: February 2009

	<i>Number</i>
Entitlement only	500
Receiving benefit	470

Notes:

1. Caseload totals show the number of people who are entitled to receive carer's allowance, including those who receive no actual payment.
2. Carers entitled to receive carer's allowance may not be paid it because they receive an overlapping benefit equal to or greater than their weekly rate of carer's allowance.
3. Caseload figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
4. Figures are published on the DWP website at:
www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/tabtool.asp

Source:

DWP Information Directorate: Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study

Carers' Benefits

Mark Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Government plan to initiate the review of carers' benefits outlined in her Department's carers' strategy. [295233]

Jonathan Shaw: The Government acknowledged in the revised National Carer's Strategy, published in June 2008, that the current system of carers' benefits is not flexible enough to adapt to the wide variety of circumstances, responsibilities and needs that carers face.

This is a 10 year strategy with a long-term commitment to review the structure of benefits available to carers in the context of wider reform.

Reviewing carers' benefits is a complex subject that requires careful consideration which cannot be conducted in isolation if we are to ensure that any changes are properly thought through, sound and lasting. We are continuing to develop our thinking on longer term benefit reform within the context of our plans for simplifying the benefit system as a whole taking account of the review of the care and support system which is currently underway.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr. Neil Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are in receipt of benefits as a result of a diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis; and what information her Department holds on the medical conditions of such benefit claimants. [295588]

Jonathan Shaw [holding answer 26 October 2009]: Benefits are not paid to customers as a result of a diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalitis. Entitlement is based on the disablement that results from it and the effects of that disablement.

The Department holds case specific information on the medical conditions of people who have made claims on the basis of a disability or illness. The information can be gathered from a number of different sources including the claimant, health care professionals involved in their care and departmental medical advisers.

Decision makers consider all the available evidence before deciding on entitlement to benefit.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr. Harper: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the main disabling conditions are of claimants of employment and support allowance who have been placed in (a) the support group and (b) the

work-related activity group; and how many and what proportion of claimants fall into each group of the main disabling conditions. [294743]

Jonathan Shaw [holding answer 21 October 2009]: The information requested is not available.

Employment Services: Disabled

John Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what impact assessment she plans to carry out in respect of the effects on disabled people of the implementation of recent changes to arrangements for specialist disability employment services. [294765]

Jonathan Shaw: An Equality Impact Assessment was published online in December 2008 on initiatives covered in the White Paper 'Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future'. This included a focus on disability in the new specialist disability programme replacing WORKSTEP, Work Preparation and Job Introduction Scheme from October 2010—to be known as Work Choice.

We are currently undertaking the procurement process for the delivery of Work Choice and when contracts are awarded in April 2010, an updated Equality Impact Assessment will be produced.

Social Security Benefits

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what change there has been in the Government's latest published tax/benefit tables in the number of people with withdrawal rates of between 60 per cent. and 70 per cent.; and if she will make a statement. [295497]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

An update on the number of people facing withdrawal rates between 60 and 70 per cent. will be provided in the pre-Budget report.

Winter Fuel Payments: Birmingham

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Birmingham, Northfield constituency received a winter fuel payment in the latest year for which figures are available. [296269]

Angela Eagle: For winter 2008-09, the number of people who received a winter fuel payment in the constituency of Birmingham, Northfield was 14,240.

Notes:

1. Figures rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Parliamentary constituencies are assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant ONS postcode directory.

Source:

DWP Information Directorate 100 per cent. data.

Winter Fuel Payments: Fife

Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people over the age of (a) 60 and (b) 80 years have claimed a winter fuel

payment in North East Fife constituency in each year since 2001-02; and what estimate she has made of the number of people in North East Fife constituency who will receive winter fuel payments in 2009-10. [296126]

Angela Eagle: The number of winter fuel payments paid to individuals aged (a) 60 and over and (b) 80 and over in the North East Fife constituency in each year since 2001-02 are as follows:

	<i>Number of individuals aged 60 and over</i>	<i>Number of individuals aged 80 and over</i>
2001-02	16,310	n/a
2002-03	16,660	3,525
2003-04	16,875	3,565
2004-05	16,870	3,525
2005-06	18,280	3,850
2006-07	18,700	3,990
2007-08	19,390	4,070
2008-09	19,830	4,100

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest five, for years 2001-02 to 2004-05 inclusive, and to the nearest 10 for years 2005-06 onwards.
2. Data are not available for the number of individuals aged 80 and over that received a winter fuel payment in 2001-02 for the North East Fife constituency.
3. Parliamentary constituencies are assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant ONS postcode directory.

Source:

DWP Information Directorate 100 per cent. data.

Forecast benefit caseloads are not produced at constituency level, however we expect similar numbers as in 2008-09 to receive the winter fuel payment in 2009-10 in the North East Fife constituency.

TREASURY

Child Trust Fund: Birmingham

Richard Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many children in Birmingham, Northfield constituency have received child trust fund payments since the scheme was introduced. [296270]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The most recent published constituency level statistics on child trust fund accounts can be viewed on the HM Revenue and Customs website at:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/ctf/cons-stats-oct08.pdf>

and show that 4,527 children born before 5 April 2007 in the Birmingham, Northfield constituency have a child trust fund account.

Departmental Postal Services

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which companies are under contract to his Department to provide mail services; and when each such contract expires. [296091]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: Royal Mail provides external mail services to HM Treasury. This is not a tendered service and therefore there is no formal expiry date.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what training is available to (a) Ministers and (b) officials in his Department in respect of the delivery of value for money savings following the recommendations of the Operational Efficiency Programme. [296003]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The Treasury offers a range of internal training courses for officials to meet organisational priorities and which form part of the Professional Skills for Government (PSG) framework.

Any bespoke training that Ministers require is made available as necessary.

Due to delegated team budgets for training spend it is not possible to report on specific training relating to the Operational Efficiency Programme; this information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Government Departments: Public Appointments

David Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the procedures used by Government departments to make appointments to their boards; and if he will make a statement. [295983]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The effectiveness of procedures used by Government Departments to make appointments to their boards is currently under review in the context of the Treasury's review of the code of good practice on corporate governance in central Government Departments, which is due to report in 2010.

Housing: Greater London

Robert Neill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 1 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 194W, on housing: construction, which local authorities in London provide details of (a) building control commencement lists and (b) building control completion notices to the Valuation Office Agency; and which such authorities use the Valuebill/e-BAR interface to provide such information. [295844]

Ian Pearson: A table showing which local authorities within the London region of England have provided building control commencement lists and building control completion notices to the Valuation Office Agency is shown as follows.

The Valuebill/e-BAR interface is not used for the submission of building control commencement lists or building control completion notices.

<i>Billing Authority</i>	<i>Commencement Notices</i>	<i>Completion Notices</i>
Bexley	No	Yes
Bromley	Yes	Yes
Croydon	Yes	Yes
Greenwich	No	Yes
Lewisham	No	Yes
Sutton	No	Yes
Lambeth	No	Yes

<i>Billing Authority</i>	<i>Commencement Notices</i>	<i>Completion Notices</i>
Southwark	Yes	No
Kingston	Yes	Yes
Merton	Yes	No
Richmond	Yes	Yes
Wandsworth	Yes	Yes
Brent	Yes	Yes
Ealing	No	No
Hounslow	Yes	Yes
Havering	No	No
Barking and Dagenham	Yes	No
Redbridge	No	No
Newham	Yes	No
Waltham Forest	Yes	No
Haringey	No	No
Enfield	No	No
Barnet	No	No
Harrow	No	No
Hillingdon	No	No
City of London	No	No
City of Westminster	Yes	No
Kensington and Chelsea	Yes	No
Hammersmith and Fulham	No	No
Tower Hamlets	No	No
Hackney	No	No
Islington	No	No
Camden	Yes	Yes

Insurance: Travel

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the insurance industry on reducing the cost of travel insurance for (a) older people and (b) older people with health problems. [296280]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: Treasury Ministers and officials have discussions with a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors as part of the process of policy development and delivery. As was the case with previous Administrations, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of all such representations.

Local Government: Assets

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the Government's proposed sale of assets on local government; and what assumptions about the sale of assets held by local authorities will be made to inform the next local government finance settlement. [294888]

Mr. Byrne: The £11 billion of UK local authority asset sales assumed over the period 2011-12 to 2013-14 are based on historic performance by the sector and forecast recovery in prices and transactions following the downturn local authorities remain free to determine which assets they sell and when local government revenue finance settlements beyond 2010-11 will be determined in the normal way at the next spending review.

Local Government: Bank Services

John Mann: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what timetable has been established for the repayment to local authorities of monies deposited with Icelandic banks. [296283]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: Some local authorities are creditors of the failed Icelandic banks. Those creditors of UK subsidiaries of the failed Icelandic banks will be paid out in accordance with UK insolvency law. We understand that the administrations of Heritable Bank plc and Kaupthing Singer and Friedlander are progressing. However, the timetable for the administration process is a matter for the administrators. Creditors of the banks in Iceland will make recoveries from the winding up of those banks in accordance with Icelandic law. The timetable for creditor payouts is governed by the process that has been adopted in Iceland for those institutions.

Met Office

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 15 July 2009, *Official Report*, column 482W, on the Operational Efficiency Programme: Meteorological Office, which further public bodies the Operational Efficiency Programme is consulting as part of the next phase of its review of the Meteorological Office; and if he will make a statement. [295287]

Mr. Byrne: The Operational Efficiency Programme continues to analyse opportunities to work more collaboratively across Government, in preparation for wider consultation. An update on the progress of the review will be provided around the pre-Budget report.

Presbyterian Mutual Society

Lady Hermon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what (a) representations and (b) evidence the Prime Minister's working group on the Presbyterian Mutual Society has received in its investigation. [295809]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The Ministerial Working Group on the Presbyterian Mutual Society has received representations from a range of stakeholders. It is not the Government's practice to disclose details of all such representations.

Revenue and Customs: Manpower

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were employed by HM Revenue and Customs and its predecessors in each year since 1997. [295656]

Mr. Timms: The number of staff in HM Revenue and Customs and its predecessor departments (HM Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue) for each year since 1997 is shown in the following table.

<i>As at 1 April</i>	<i>HMCE</i>	<i>Headcount</i>	
		<i>Inland Revenue</i>	<i>Total</i>
1997	24,509	53,315	77,824
1998	25,115	53,163	78,278

<i>As at 1 April</i>	<i>HMCE</i>	<i>Inland Revenue</i>	<i>Headcount</i>
			<i>Total</i>
1999	24,019	61,339	85,358
2000	23,036	67,347	90,383
2001	23,387	68,292	91,679
2002	23,073	70,103	93,176
2003	23,364	78,456	101,820
2004	23,859	82,151	106,010
2005	—	—	104,674
2006	—	—	100,738
2007	—	—	96,511
2008	—	—	90,961
2009	—	—	88,875

Taxation: Self-Assessment

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many attempts made by HM Revenue and Customs and its predecessors to collect tax payments outstanding under the self-assessment system resulted in complaints from members of the public in each year since 1997. [295660]

Mr. Timms: HM Revenue and Customs' central complaints database cannot provide the disaggregated data on complaints raised for this reason.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many attempts have been made by HM Revenue and Customs to collect tax payments outstanding under the self-assessment system in each year since 1997; how many such attempts resulted in the collection of (a) the full and (b) part of the payment outstanding; and how many such attempts did not recover any outstanding payment. [295661]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available. HMRC uses a range of interventions to collect unpaid tax. Successful collectors of debt cannot normally be attributed to one specific action.

VAT

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how long on average it took to complete a registration for value added tax in the latest period for which figures are available. [295860]

Mr. Timms: In 2008-09 the average time taken to complete a registration for VAT was 19.7 days. The figures for recent months are provided in the following table.

	<i>Average number of days taken</i>
April 2009	17.7
May 2009	29.0
June 2009	23.0
July 2009	27.7
August 2009	23.1
September 2009	27.1

The difference in average processing times is due to an increase in the number of potential suspect cases which required further risk checks Processing of these

higher risk cases often takes longer as the necessary checks are made. HM Revenue and Customs remains committed to improving processing times, and is working with professional bodies, agents and other stakeholders to tackle the level of incomplete and/or inaccurate applications.

OLYMPICS

Olympic Games 2012: Wales

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Minister for the Olympics how many contracts related to the London 2012 Olympics have been awarded to businesses and organisations in Wales; and what the total value is of those contracts. [291214]

Tessa Jowell [*holding answer 16 September 2009*]: Welsh business is playing a vital role in helping to deliver the venues and infrastructure for the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. The Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) do not have a central record of supply chain contracts and their value, but they estimate the overall spend in Wales to be in the tens of millions of pounds. Examples include:

Euroclad, based in Cardiff, supplying the rainscreen cladding for the Olympic Stadium

Rowecord, from Newport, manufacturing the steel for the roof of the Aquatics Centre

Rhino Doors, from Port Talbot, providing security doors for the Olympic Park construction site

In addition the ODA has contracted directly with Welsh companies in a series of small corporate and administrative contracts worth £5,615.

TRANSPORT

A14: Road Traffic

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what the most recent traffic flow data are for each section of the A14. [296039]

Chris Mole: A table providing the 2008 estimated annual average daily flows (AADFs) for each section of the A14, has been deposited in the Libraries of the House.

These figures give estimates of the number of vehicles travelling along individual sections of road on an average day of the year.

AADF data for individual motorway and TV road links for 1999 to 2008 are available on the Department for Transport website at:

www.dft.gov.uk/matrix

A14: Suffolk

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many road traffic (a) accidents and (b) fatalities there have been on the A14 in Suffolk in each year since 1999; and how many of those involved drivers under the age of 21 years in each case. [296040]

Paul Clark: The information requested is given in the following tables:

Number of reported personal injury road accidents and fatalities on the A14 in Suffolk: 1999 to 2008

	(a) Accidents	(b) Fatalities
1999	122	8
2000	138	8
2001	138	10
2002	157	5
2003	128	3
2004	143	5
2005	150	4
2006	119	6
2007	126	6
2008	126	0

Number of reported personal injury road accidents involving drivers under the age of 21 and resulting fatalities on the A14 in Suffolk: 1999 to 2008

	(a) Accidents	(b) Fatalities
1999	21	1
2000	22	0
2001	26	1
2002	27	1
2003	29	0
2004	28	0
2005	28	0
2006	28	0
2007	19	3
2008	30	0

Biofuels

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport pursuant to paragraph 4.150 of the UK Renewable Energy Strategy 2009, what assessment he has made of (a) increases in commodity prices and (b) effects on food security consequent upon using food crops for fuel. [295778]

Mr. Khan: The Government are assessing the combination of factors associated with the global food commodity price spike in 2008, and intends to publish the results early in 2010 as part of a food strategy package.

The relationship between biofuels and international food security is also being assessed through research focused on how to increase food production and access in an environmentally sustainable way, which will inform next year's food strategy package; and longer term through the Government's Foresight project on global food and farming futures, which is due to produce its final report in October 2010.

The EU Renewable Energy Directive requires the European Commission to monitor impacts of this policy on commodity prices and food security and the Commission shall, if appropriate, propose corrective action. The UK Government will continue to contribute to the EU policy debate. In addition, the UK is working in the Global Bioenergy Partnership to help develop voluntary sustainability criteria and indicators for bioenergy and biofuels, including for potential impacts on food security.

Bournemouth Airport: Roads

Mr. Ellwood: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport whether the Highways Agency has plans for the construction of a new road linking Bournemouth Airport and the A338. [295684]

Mr. Khan: The A338 is not a Highways Agency trunk road. The Highways Agency have no plans to construct a new road linking to it.

Furthermore, the South West region has not identified such a link as a regional priority within its regional funding allocation advice to Government.

Departmental Motor Vehicles

Andrew Stunell: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how much his Department spent on hire vehicles in each of the last five financial years. [291608]

Chris Mole: The Department for Transport and its Executive Agencies spend on vehicle hire is set out in the following table:

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
	£				
Department for Transport (Central)	188,144	208,126	353,758	220,352	219,380
Executive Agencies	2,002,484	1,966,637	2,385,202	2,467,707	2,756,202
Total	2,190,628	2,174,763	2,738,960	2,688,059	2,975,582

Driving Offences: Speed Limits

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many vehicles identified by (a) mobile and (b) static speed cameras as driving in excess of the speed limit were not pursued for prosecution purposes because the licence plates indicated that they were not UK-registered in the most recent year for which figures are available. [295577]

Mr. Alan Campbell [holding answer 26 October 2009]: I have been asked to reply.

Information available on the Court Proceedings Database held by the Office for Criminal Justice Reform on offences involving vehicles does not identify those cases that are not pursued for prosecution.

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what his policy is in respect of the (a) identification by (i) mobile and (ii) static speed cameras and (b) prosecution of motorists driving vehicles in excess of the speed limit where the vehicles in question are non-UK registered. [295578]

Mr. Alan Campbell [holding answer 26 October 2009]: I have been asked to reply.

Foreign drivers are subject to the provisions of the Road Traffic Acts at all times when driving on British roads. They are therefore liable to prosecution for contravention of the legislation. It is for individual chief officers of police to decide what action should be taken against foreign drivers detected speeding by mobile or static speed cameras.

We have taken a number of measures to improve enforcement action against the drivers of non UK registered vehicles. These include a provision in the Road Safety Act 2006 which will allow the exchange of driver licensing and vehicle registration information with other countries.

Further help will be provided by the European Framework Decision on the Mutual Recognition of Financial Penalties, which will allow penalties imposed by courts in one member state to be enforced in another and by the International Convention on the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications. The growing use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras, is also helping enforcement against foreign offenders detected speeding and jumping red lights, since a person who succeeds in leaving the country without being dealt with for such an offence can have their vehicle's number-plate recorded on a database and so be detected and dealt with on return here.

Driving Offences: Working Hours

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many drivers' hours offences were detected in respect of (a) UK-registered and (b) overseas registered drivers in each year since 1997. [295009]

Paul Clark: The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) do not record the nationality of drivers, the following table sets out the number of drivers' hours offences from the drivers of foreign registered vehicles by type since 2003-04 when VOSA was formed.

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
<i>HGV UK</i>						
Offence Prohibitions at Roadside	4,636	5,416	6,182	4,901	7,339	9,158
Offences (at Roadside)						
Drivers' Hours	381	518	586	618	1,040	1,267
Tacho and Records	5,073	5,772	6,726	5,274	7,644	9,794
Total	5,454	6,290	7,312	5,892	8,684	11,061
Prosecutions—presented						
Drivers' Hours	4,021	2,952	3,121	2,783	2,056	4,180
Tacho and Records	4,820	4,220	3,850	3,336	2,218	2,621
Total	8,841	7,172	6,971	6,119	4,274	6,801
Prosecutions—convicted						
Drivers' Hours	3,629	2,679	2,821	2,515	1,806	3,913
Tacho and Records	3,861	3,063	3,108	2,693	1,714	2,046
Total	7,490	5,742	5,929	5,208	3,520	5,959
<i>HGV Non-UK</i>						
Offence Prohibitions at Roadside	2,282	3,255	4,403	6,376	7,329	9,913

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Offences (at Roadside)						
Drivers' Hours	1,430	2,342	3,095	4,801	4,915	5,937
Tacho and Records	1,037	1,335	1,800	2,253	2,894	4,719
Total	2,467	3,677	4,895	7,054	7,809	10,656
<i>PSV UK</i>						
Offence Prohibitions at Roadside						
Offences (at Roadside)	364	439	483	464	1,349	1,405
Offences (at Roadside)						
Drivers' Hours	18	27	23	24	125	133
Tacho and Records	340	470	541	525	1,419	1,532
Total	358	497	564	549	1,544	1,665
Prosecutions—presented						
Drivers' Hours	201	425	235	315	78	253
Tacho and Records	279	561	311	439	274	453
Total	480	986	546	754	352	706
Prosecutions—convicted						
Drivers' Hours	133	204	191	211	57	219
Tacho and Records	212	286	263	276	138	326
Total	345	490	454	487	195	545
<i>PSV Non UK</i>						
Offence Prohibitions at Roadside						
Offences (at Roadside)	22	39	30	67	113	91
Offences (at Roadside)						
Drivers' Hours	8	21	15	34	37	35
Tacho and Records	15	17	22	34	62	47
Total	23	38	37	68	99	82

Further information is available on VOSA's Effectiveness report which has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Driving: Licensing

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect of Commission Directive 2009/113/EC on the eligibility criteria for a UK driving licence; and if he will make a statement. [296041]

Paul Clark: This Directive provides minimum standards of physical and mental fitness for driving. We are considering what differences there are between the Directive and the standards currently applied in the UK and what legislative changes will be required to accommodate at least the revised minimum standards. In conjunction with the medical experts on the Secretary of State for Transport's Honorary Advisory Panels, we are considering what to do in those cases where the revised standards

are lower than those currently applied in the UK. In these cases we must determine whether the stricter standards should remain in force, in the interests of road safety. Once the experts provide their advice we intend to issue a public consultation.

Lorries: Accidents

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many personal injury collisions involved (a) left and (b) right hand drive

heavy goods vehicles in each year since 1997; and in how many in each category vehicle blind spot was found to be a contributory factor. [295008]

Paul Clark: Information concerning the steering position of vehicles in reported personal injury road accidents is only available for foreign registered vehicles. Data in reported road accidents are only available since 2005. The available information requested is given in the table:

Reported personal injury road accidents involving HGVs, by steering position, and whether vehicle blind spot was attributed as a contributory factor¹, Great Britain, 2005-08

	Foreign registered HGVs				UK ² registered HGVs		Total HGVs	
	Left hand drive		Right hand drive		Total accidents	Vehicle blind spot	Total accidents	Vehicle blind spot
	Total accidents	Vehicle blind spot	Total accidents	Vehicle blind spot				
2005	1,014	291	85	6	10,063	341	11,162	638
2006	952	259	91	5	9,423	360	10,466	624
2007	858	193	63	3	8,908	359	9,829	555
2008	760	182	78	10	7,577	331	8,415	523

¹ Includes only accidents where a police officer attended the scene and in which a contributory factor was reported.

² Left or right hand side drive is not recorded for UK registered vehicles.

Lorries: Agriculture

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what his policy is on the requirement of registration as heavy goods vehicles of agricultural motor vehicles other than agricultural and forestry tractors regardless of weight for use on public roads. [295063]

Paul Clark: Vehicle registration and licensing is determined by a vehicle's construction and how it is used on the public road. In addition to agricultural and forestry tractors, light agricultural vehicles and agricultural engines also fall outside the heavy goods vehicle class.

Lorries: Costs

Bob Spink: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what estimate he has made of the annual cost of maintaining the road network arising from its use by lorries weighing more than 44 tonnes; and if he will make a statement. [292963]

Chris Mole [holding answer 14 October 2009]: In order to be better informed about the likely consequences of allowing longer and/or heavier goods vehicles on the English road network, the Department for Transport commissioned a study which reported in 2008. The report of this study: "Longer and/or Longer and Heavier Goods Vehicles (LHVs) - A study of the likely effects if permitted in the UK" (reference: TRL Report PPR 285), concluded that allowing longer and/or heavier vehicles onto the network could lead to an increase in CO₂ emissions. The report also concluded that there would be a limited impact on the structural performance of pavements and bridges but did not cover the specific issue of the likely effect on the annual cost of maintaining the road network.

Lorries: Safety

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the results of his Department's trial of Fresnel window lenses for improving heavy goods vehicles sightlines. [295011]

Paul Clark: A copy of the report on Fresnel window lenses for improving heavy goods vehicles sightlines has been placed in the Libraries of the House. A copy is also available on the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency's website:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/vosa/publications/consultationsandresearch/researchanddevelopment/researchanddevelopment.htm>

Railways: East Midlands

Graham Stringer: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what plans he has to improve the East Midlands peak time train service between Manchester and (a) Merseyside and (b) South Yorkshire. [295582]

Chris Mole [holding answer 26 October 2009]: On 23 July the Government announced a major £1.1 billion programme of rail electrification, including the electrification by 2013 of the line between Liverpool and Manchester via Newton-le-Willows.

Electrification of the Liverpool-Manchester route via Newton-le-Willows will enable the operation of high-capacity four-carriage electric trains transferred from the cross-London Thameslink route. These trains will be completely modernised before they are transferred, including the installation of air-conditioning.

This additional capacity on the Liverpool-Manchester line running via Newton-le-Willows will relieve pressure on the other Liverpool-Manchester line running via Warrington.

The diesel trains currently operating on the Liverpool-Manchester line via Newton-le-Willows will be transferred onto other routes, delivering much needed additional capacity.

In the meantime, the Department for Transport is in discussion with train operating companies about delivering additional capacity. This includes discussions with Northern Rail about a first phase of additional rolling stock. The Government will publish an updated rolling stock plan taking account of electrification and setting out a revised strategy this autumn.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghan Aid

John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much funding his Department has allocated to the organisation Afghan Aid in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [295350]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development (DFID) has not allocated any funds directly to Afghan Aid in the last five years.

Between 2003 and 2009, DFID provided £430,000 to the British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG), of which Afghan Aid is a member.

Afghanistan

Mr. Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many members of his Department are based at Kandahar air base; and what their function is. [295176]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development (DFID) no longer publicises staff numbers for country offices, following an assessment of DFID's work in insecure environments by the National Audit Office in October 2008, and a range of improvements to our security policies and procedures.

Mr. Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many officials of his Department are based in each district of Helmand province. [295179]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development (DFID) no longer publicises staff numbers for country offices, following an assessment of DFID's work in insecure environments by the National Audit Office in October 2008, and a range of improvements to our security policies and procedures.

Afghanistan: Overseas Aid

Mr. Bone: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much his Department has budgeted for aid to Afghanistan in 2009-10; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's provision of aid to Afghanistan in the last 12 months against its objectives. [294773]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development (DFID) has budgeted £127.5 million for Afghanistan in 2009-10. This forms part of a £510 million commitment for 2009-13.

DFID's latest Afghanistan Country Programme Evaluation was published in May 2009 and is available on the DFID website:

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Where-we-work/Asia-South/Afghanistan/>

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations he has received on the delivery of the Government's humanitarian aid to Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [295426]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department for International Development (DFID) is in regular consultation with development agencies, donors and others on the delivery of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. These include the Government of Afghanistan, the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN World Food Programme (UN-WFP) and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA).

DFID monitors closely the effectiveness of the delivery of humanitarian aid through assessments made by agencies who deliver aid on the ground such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UN-WFP.

Afghanistan: Schools

Mr. Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many schools in Helmand province are (a) open and (b) in operation. [295178]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: 93 Government-funded schools are both open and operational in Helmand province, compared to 34 in 2006. School enrolment in Helmand has risen from 50,000 in 2006 to 64,500 today.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department is taking to implement the efficiency recommendations of the Operational Efficiency programme relating to his Department; and what training is available to (a) Ministers and (b) officials in his Department in respect of the delivery of value for money savings. [296057]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Department for International Development (DFID) is committed to implementing the recommendations of the Operational Efficiency Programme (OEP). DFID is currently exploring savings across the full range of back office functions identified in OEP. We are engaging actively in the OEP benchmarking exercise and I have been appointed Value for Money Minister.

There are a wide range of learning and development opportunities available in DFID, many of which are focused on driving VFM.

Ethiopia: Human Rights

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what his most recent assessment is of the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia. [296279]

Mr. Thomas: A humanitarian assessment carried out by the Government of Ethiopia and international partners released last week indicated that 6.2 million people in Ethiopia will need emergency assistance until the end of the year.

The prospects for 2010 are also a cause for serious concern. An assessment of the November harvest will provide a clearer picture of likely future humanitarian needs. If this harvest does fail, a significant scaling-up of efforts by the Government of Ethiopia and the international community will be needed to prevent the current crisis becoming a catastrophe in 2010. DFID has contributed £54 million to the humanitarian response in Ethiopia in 2009 and will continue to closely monitor the situation with regard to future support.

I also refer my hon. Friend to the written ministerial statement on Ethiopia made on 19 October 2009, *Official Report*; column 47WS.

India: Tuberculosis

Mr. Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of his Department's support for the national tuberculosis programme in India. [295000]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Department for International Development's (DFID) support to India's National Tuberculosis Control Programme has been highly effective. The programme has averted an estimated 180,000 deaths a year since 2005. That is around 500 lives saved in India every day. DFID's support has helped put 1.5 million TB patients on treatment every year in India.

Our support has ensured that India has faced no drug shortage, despite having the most rapidly expanding TB programme in the world. By March 2006 the programme had been scaled up to cover the entire country. Since 1997 the success rate for TB treatment has tripled from 25 per cent. to 86 per cent. and TB deaths rates have been cut seven-fold from 29 per cent. to 4 per cent.

International Assistance: Tuberculosis

Mr. Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of his Department's contribution towards global and regional progress on Millennium Development Goal 6 in relation to tuberculosis. [294999]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Department for International Development (DFID) contributes to the Global Plan to Stop Tuberculosis (TB) 2006-15, which aims to save 14 million lives, with substantial support through country programmes, multilateral organisations, global partnerships and research. Examples include the following:

Commitment of £1 billion to the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) for 2008-15. The GFATM estimates that it has supported the additional detection in and treatment of 5.4 million people with TB.

A 20-year commitment of up to €60 million per year by 2010 to UNITAID, which by 2011 is aiming to triple access to rapid tests for multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB and reduce the price MDR-TB medicines-by 25 per cent.

DFID support to focus states in India on TB funds the purchase and reliable supply of high quality anti-TB drugs. This has contributed to a reduction in TB mortality from 0.35 million to 0.28 million—a saving of 36,000 lives each year during 2005-07.

This year DFID has undertaken an extensive review of its health portfolio, including our work on TB, publication of which is forthcoming.

Pakistan: Overseas Aid

Mr. Dai Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much humanitarian aid the UK has provided to Pakistan in each year since 1998. [294841]

Mr. Michael Foster: Details of UK aid expenditure is published in 'Statistics on International Development' which is available online at

www.dfid.gov.uk

and in the Library of House. The relevant figures for Pakistan are reproduced in the following table.

UK gross public expenditure on development to Pakistan

	Bilateral	Imputed multilateral share
		£000
1998-99	26,937	21,175
1999-2000	23,472	2,105
2000-01	15,890	3,072
2001-02	44,838	25,623
2002-03	46,852	39,756
2003-04	66,299	14,787
2004-05	55,278	15,091
2005-06	97,688	58,671
2006-07	118,150	22,675
2007-08	88,145	58,547
2008-09	129,713	n/a

CABINET OFFICE

Social Enterprise

10. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment she has made of the contribution of social enterprise to the economy. [295987]

Angela E. Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz).

Population

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the population of the UK is; how many UK citizens there were in (a) 1992, (b) 1997, (c) 2002 and (d) 2007; and how many citizens there were

of (i) another EU member state, (ii) Australia, Canada or New Zealand, (iii) the USA and (iv) other countries who did not also hold UK citizenship were resident in the UK in each such year. [295951]

Angela E. Smith: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Jil Matheson, dated October 2009:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question concerning what the population of the UK is; how many UK citizens there were in (a) 1992, (b) 1997, (c) 2002 and (d) 2007; and how many citizens of (i) another EU member state, (ii) Australia, Canada or New Zealand, (iii) the USA and (iv) other countries, who did not also hold UK citizenship, were resident in the UK in each such year. (295951)

Table 1, attached, gives mid-year population estimates in 1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007. Tables 2, 3 and 4, attached, give the UK population broken down by nationality groupings in 1997, 2002 and 2007 respectively. No data is available for 1992.

These figures are based on survey data and as with any sample survey are subject to margins of error which are shown on the tables. A person's nationality is self-defined and may not coincide with administrative definitions of citizenship. It is not possible to identify which residents hold dual nationality, as the Labour Force Survey on which the figures are based records only the first nationality given by the respondent.

Please note that the number of people of all nationalities in these tables will not sum to the mid-year population estimates in Table 1, as the survey excludes people in most types of communal establishment.

Table 1: Mid-year population estimates: United Kingdom; estimated resident population

	Thousand
Mid-1992	57,584.5
Mid-1997	58,314.2
Mid-2002	59,323.5
Mid-2007	60,975.4

Note:

Figures for the United Kingdom do not include the population of the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man.

Sources:

Office for National Statistics, General Register Office for Scotland, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Table 2: Estimated population resident in the United Kingdom, by foreign nationality—1997

Nationality	Estimate	Thousand CI +/-
All nationalities	57,537	471
British	55,420	462
European Union (EU15) ¹	834	57
Australia, Canada or New Zealand ²	127	22
United States of America ²	102	20
Rest of the world	1,054	64

¹ Estimates are shown for the European Union 15, that is: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Republic of Ireland, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. Those with British nationality are not included in this grouping, but are shown separately in this table.

² Statistical Robustness—Estimates are reasonably precise

Note on Statistical Robustness:

Sample surveys have a necessary margin of error. CI +/- gives the range in which it is possible to be 95 per cent. confident the true value lies.

Notes:

1. It should be noted that the LFS:

excludes students in halls who do not have a UK resident parent
excludes people in most other types of communal establishments (eg hotels, boarding houses, hostels, mobile home sites, etc.)

is grossed to population estimates of those living in private households that only include migrants staying for 12 months or more.

2. The LFS weighting does not adjust for non-response bias by the nationality variable.

Source:

Labour Force Survey (LFS), ONS

Table 3: Estimated population resident in the United Kingdom, by foreign nationality—2002

Nationality	Estimate	Thousand CI +/-
All nationalities	58,261	303
British	55,585	296
European Union (EU15) ¹	890	37
Australia, Canada or New Zealand ²	147	15
United States of America ²	104	13
Rest of the world	1,535	49

¹ Estimates are shown for the European Union 15, that is: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Republic of Ireland, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. Those with British nationality are not included in this grouping, but are shown separately in this table.

² Statistical Robustness—Estimates are reasonably precise

Note on Statistical Robustness:

Sample surveys have a necessary margin of error. CI +/- gives the range in which it is possible to be 95 per cent. confident the true value lies.

Notes:

1. Estimates are based on the Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey (ALALFS) which is the Labour Force Survey (LFS) plus various sample boosts.

2. It should be noted that the LFS:

excludes students in halls who do not have a UK resident parent
excludes people in most other types of communal establishments (eg hotels, boarding houses, hostels, mobile home sites, etc.)

is grossed to population estimates of those living in private households that only include migrants staying for 12 months or more.

3. The LFS weighting does not adjust for non-response bias by the nationality variable.

Source:

Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey (ALALFS), ONS

Table 4: Estimated population resident in the United Kingdom, by foreign nationality—2007

Nationality	Estimate	Thousand CI +/-
All nationalities	60,145	318
British	56,192	307
European Union (EU15) ¹	1,588	52
Australia, Canada or New Zealand	193	18
United States of America ²	137	15
Rest of the world	2,036	58

¹ Estimates are shown for the European Union 27, that is: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Republic of Ireland, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania. Those with British nationality are not included in this grouping, but are shown separately in this table.

² Statistical Robustness—Estimates are reasonably precise

Note on Statistical Robustness:

Sample surveys have a necessary margin of error. CI +/- gives the range in which it is possible to be 95 per cent. confident the true value lies.

Notes:

1. Estimates are based on the Annual Local Area Labour Force Survey (ALALFS) which is the Labour Force Survey (LFS) plus various sample boosts.

2. It should be noted that the LFS:

excludes students in halls who do not have a UK resident parent
excludes people in most other types of communal establishments (eg hotels, boarding houses, hostels, mobile home sites, etc.)

is grossed to population estimates of those living in private households that only include migrants staying for 12 months or more.

3. The LFS weighting does not adjust for non-response bias by the nationality variable.

Source:

Annual Population Survey (APS)/Labour Force Survey (LFS), ONS

SCOTLAND

Christmas

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Christmas functions arranged by his Department (a) he and (b) officials of his Department (i) hosted and (ii) attended in 2008; and if he will make a statement. [295448]

Ann McKechin: The Scotland Office hosted one Christmas function in 2008.

Departmental Postal Services

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which companies are under contract to his Department to provide mail services; and when each such contract expires. [296082]

Ann McKechin: The Royal Mail provides a range of mail services under contract to the Scotland Office. The services are subject to annual renewal.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan, Peacekeeping operations

Mr. Scott: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the procurement of tank chassis based on those used for heavy armoured personnel carriers. [295209]

Mr. Quentin Davies: We are not currently procuring any new battle tanks. However we are engaged in competitions for the upgrade of the Warrior fighting vehicle and for the procurement of a new Reconnaissance vehicle which will replace CVRT. We hope to have announcements on these two programmes before too long.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for UK security policy in Afghanistan of the report on NATO operations in that country by ISAF Commander General Stanley McChrystal. [295388]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: As I told the House on 15 October 2009, *Official Report*, column 463, we share much of General McChrystal's thinking. Together with NATO allies and ISAF partners, we are now in the process of assessing the implications of the general's report.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what leaflet drops UK forces have undertaken in Afghanistan in the last three years; and if he will place in the Library a copy of each such leaflet. [295435]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: As of 21 October 2009, UK forces have undertaken 18 Airborne Delivery leaflet drops in Afghanistan over the last three years. Leaflets are distributed in a variety of ways, both by the UK and other coalition nations. I will place examples of leaflets designed by the UK in the Library of the House.

Armed Forces: Young People

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements he has made for civilian inspectorates to scrutinise elements of the Service Justice System in order to meet his commitment to implement recommendation 26 of the Blake Review; what the timetable for such inspections is; what recommendations have been made arising from those

inspections that have been completed; and if he will place a copy of the summary of findings and recommendations of inspections in the Library. [295196]

Mr. Kevan Jones: In line with the Government's response to the Blake Review recommendations 24 and 26, arrangements have been made with each of the relevant inspectorates to ensure that all elements of the Service Justice System are inspected regularly. Information about completed and scheduled inspections are provided below:

Service Police—Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary conducted its first full inspection of Royal Military Police Special Investigations Branch in June 2006; a second inspection is planned for 2011. It inspected the RAF Special Investigations Branch this year for the first time, and the first inspection of the RN Special Investigations Branch is scheduled for 2010. Inspections of the wider single service police forces are currently being considered;

Military Court Service—Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration is currently conducting its first inspection, and is scheduled to report in April 2010. The inspection will also include legal aid and probation services;

Service Prosecuting Authority—Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate published its report of its inspection of the Army Prosecuting Authority in June 2007. The new tri-Service Service Prosecuting Authority having only been created in 2009, its first inspection is not expected before late 2010 at the earliest;

Military Corrective Training Centre, Colchester—Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons first conducted a full inspection in 2004. It reported on its latest inspection in January 2009, and is scheduled to carry out its next inspection in 2012.

The precise dates of inspections are dependent on inspectorates' programmes and priorities. Full inspections are scheduled to take place approximately every two years, approximately every three years for Military Corrective Training Centre, with unannounced or follow up inspections taking place in between if considered necessary.

Each inspectorate publishes its findings on its website found at the following links:

HMIC: <http://inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic/>

HMICA: <http://www.hmica.gov.uk/>

HMCPSP: <http://www.hmcpssi.gov.uk/>

HMIP: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/inspectorates/hmi-prisons/>

Chinook helicopters

Mr. Scott: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the HC3 Chinook helicopters to enter operational service with the Royal Air Force; and how many such aircraft are involved. [295211]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The first of eight reverted Mk3 Chinooks will be made available to the Joint Helicopter Command before the end of this year, with the remaining seven being delivered by the end of 2010.

Czech Republic: Motor Vehicles

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many vehicles his Department has purchased from Tatra Trucks in the Czech Republic in the last five years. [295882]

Mr. Quentin Davies: MOD has not purchased any vehicles from Tatra Trucks in Czech Republic in the last five years.

Members: Correspondence

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to reply to the letters of 27 July 2009 and 31 August 2009 from the hon. Member for Moray on Court of Appeal costs incurred by his Department. [295389]

Mr. Kevan Jones: I will be writing shortly in response to the hon. Member's letters.

Trident

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the initial gate decision on Trident replacement has been delayed until after the forthcoming Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference; and if he will make a statement. [295105]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Defence Board will consider the work required during the Concept Phase work later this year. There has been no decision to delay Initial Gate because of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in May 2010.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE**African Union**

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made representations to the government of Uganda on its invitation to Omar Bashir of Sudan to attend the African Union meeting in Kampala; and if he will make a statement. [295479]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Our high commissioner discussed the issue with senior officials at the Ugandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who indicated that President Bashir would not be attending the AU summit on refugees in Kampala. He has not done so.

We have made clear our expectation that all countries cooperate with International Criminal Court (ICC) investigations on events in Darfur, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1593 of 2005. States party to the ICC, such as Uganda, have particular legal obligations.

Colombia: Foreign Relations

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the Answer of 7 July 2009, *Official Report*, column 625W, on Colombia: foreign relations, on how many occasions the British Ambassador in Bogota has met the Colombian Foreign Minister to discuss (a) bilateral relations and (b) broader global issues in the last 12 months. [296010]

Chris Bryant [holding answer 27 October 2009]: Our ambassador in Bogota meets the Colombian Foreign Minister on a regular basis in the course of his duties.

Conflict Prevention

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) which countries the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Conflict Resolution Mechanisms has visited in an official capacity since February 2009; and what the costs of such visits were; [295391]

(2) which non-governmental organisations the Prime Minister's Special Representative for Conflict Resolution Mechanisms has met since February 2009; and what issues were raised in each meeting; [295392]

(3) on which dates since February 2009 the Prime Minister's Special Representative for Conflict Resolution Mechanisms has visited (a) the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and (b) 10 Downing Street; and what the purpose of each visit was; [295393]

(4) what representations of each type the Prime Minister's Special Representative for Conflict Resolution Mechanisms has received as part of his dialogue with (a) the United Nations, (b) the EU, (c) the African Union and (d) others; and on which dates each such representation was received; [295394]

(5) when the Prime Minister's Special Representative for Conflict Resolution Mechanisms last reported to the Prime Minister; and what issues were discussed. [295395]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The right hon. Jack McConnell MSP, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's Special Representative for Conflict Resolution Mechanisms, was appointed in October 2008 and reports to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs, Defence and International Development. He has made a valuable contribution to advancing the UK's peacebuilding objectives. He has in particular engaged with the UN Secretariat and key stakeholders around the world to press for an ambitious UN Secretary-General report on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict.

Mr. McConnell's expenses are funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Department for International Development (DfID) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD). Travel and approximate costs of visits since February 2009 are as follows:

In Bosnia (February 2009) he met representatives of the EC Delegation and the International Commission for Missing Persons—£1,500.

In Ethiopia (February 2009) Mr. McConnell met with representatives of the African Union; Africa Commission; UN Economic Commission for Africa, Institute for Security Studies; Centre for Policy Research and Dialogue; Ethiopian Institute for Peace and Development—£3,000.

In Uganda (March 2009) he met representatives of various UN agencies—£2,100.

In the USA (April 2009) he met representatives of the International Monetary Fund; World Bank and the UN—£5,900.

In Egypt (May 2009) he met representatives of the UN; Africa Society and International Crisis Group—£4,000.

In Japan (May 2009) he met representatives of the Japan International Co-operation Agency; Peace Winds; Nature Japan; The Japan Foundation; the Association for Aid and Relief; the Japan Centre for Conflict Prevention; the Graduate Institute for Policy Studies—£4,600.

In the USA (June 2009) he visited the Stanley Foundation Retreat—£1,700.

In Brazil (July 2009) he met representatives of Mendes University; Viva Rio; GAPCon; Brazilian Youth Council; University of Brasilia—£8,650.

Mr. McConnell travelled to West Africa in August 2009. In Liberia he met representatives of the UN Development Programme; Committee on Peace and Reconciliation. In Sierra Leone he met representatives of the Gola Forest Programme and G&G Manager Exploration. In Ghana he visited the Kofi Annan Centre for Peacekeeping and met representatives of the Legon Centre for International Affairs—whole visit £5,000.

In Chile (September 2009) he attended a meeting of the UN Peacebuilding Commission—£3,540.

Mr. McConnell travelled to Belgium (October 2009) and met with a range of EU interlocutors from the Presidency, Commission and Council Secretariat on EU/UN relations, civilian capability development, and EU civilian/military cooperation—£1,130.

Mr. McConnell visited East Africa (Rwanda, Burundi and Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo) (October 2009). In Burundi he met representatives of International Alert, Kamenge Youth Project, EU members and the UN Integrated Office (BINUB). In Rwanda he visited the Motobo Camp, met with members of the UN and representatives of the Clinton Hunter Development Initiative, Search for Common Ground and the Mines Advisory Group. In the DRC he met representatives of the UN, the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, International Committee of the Red Cross and Oxfam. This visit has only just been completed and the final cost is not yet available.

Whilst in London Mr. McConnell has met with representatives from the World Child Cancer Foundation and Pumpaid.

Some of Mr. McConnell's time is spent in London to meet or receive briefings from senior FCO, DfID and MOD officials and to see London-based experts on conflict.

Mr. McConnell has recently met the Prime Minister, and visited the Foreign and Commonwealth office on 1 February 2009, 15 February 2009, 3 March 2009, 5 March 2009, 9 March 2009, 23 March 2009, 9 April 2009, 19 April 2009, 11 May 2009, 9 June 2009, 28 June 2009, 7 July 2009, 18 August 2009, 10 September 2009, 12 October 2009, and 26 October 2009.

Counter-Terrorism: International Cooperation

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much of the \$750 million pledged by the UK to the Global Threat Reduction Strategy under the Global Partnership has been spent; and what the budget allocation is for each year up to 2012, broken down by project. [295334]

Mr. Ivan Lewis [*holding answer 26 October 2009*]: As detailed in the published Sixth Annual Report of the Global Threat Reduction Programme (GTRP) (2008), of the \$750 million pledged by the UK in 2002 to the Global Partnership fund, £270 million had been spent by the end of 2008. Figures for 2009 will be published in the 2009 annual report. At the last comprehensive spending review, the GTRP budget was set at £36.5 million per annum for the three years 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11.

In a speech earlier this year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stated that funding would remain at this level for 'the foreseeable future'. A breakdown of expenditure to the end of 2008 in the key project areas, also detailed in the Sixth Annual Report, is set out in the following table. An update of spending by project will be provided in the 2009 annual report. The GTRP Ministerial Oversight Board meeting in November is scheduled to approve budget allocations for future years.

<i>Project</i>	<i>£ million</i>
Chernobyl Shelter Project	36.668
Nuclear Safety Programme	23.256
Physical Protection of Proliferation of Sensitive Nuclear Materials	25.161
Decommissioning in CEE/FSU	7.86
Closed Nuclear Cities Partnership	28.28
North West Russia	97.088
KEDO	4.44
UK Support for Decommissioning BN350 Reactor, Aktau, Kazakhstan	5.736
Social and Economic Consequences of Nuclear Power Plant Closure	4.234
Information Dissemination and Programme Publicity	0.295
Plutonium Reactor Closure Project	10.93
Chemical Weapon Projects at Shchuch'ye	16.20
Contractor Project Management and Set-up Cost	2.62
Support to Green Cross Office, and Other Projects	0.64
Biological Projects	2.04
C WD Project Management and Support	3.38
Biological Project Management and Support	1.41
Global Threat Reduction Programme Expenditure total	270.238

The full report is available to download at:

http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/what_we_do/uk_supply/energy_mix/nuclear/nonprolif/global_threat/annual_report/annual_report.aspx

Departmental Motor Vehicles

Andrew Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spent on hire vehicles in each of the last five financial years. [291610]

Chris Bryant: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and FCO Services, a trading fund of the FCO, spend on hire vehicles in each of the last three financial years is as detailed in the table. We do not have figures for earlier years.

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Spend (£)</i>
<i>Coaches:</i>	
2008-09	60,026.41
2007-08	95,274.76
2006-07	18,794.17
<i>Hired Cars:</i>	
2008-09	160,316.00
2007-08	121,011.77
2006-07	130,770.60

Departmental Postal Services

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which companies are under contract to his Department to provide mail services; and when each such contract expires. [296088]

Chris Bryant: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Services has a logistics contract that covers diplomatic mail services with DHL Global Forwarding (UK) Ltd. Their current contract expires on 1 October 2010.

Departmental Telephone Services

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many helplines his Department operates; and how much his Department has received from the operation of such helplines in each of the last three years. [294980]

Chris Bryant: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) operates a travel advice telephone information line and does not receive any financial gain from this service.

In addition, in a consular crisis overseas the FCO can release an emergency telephone number for members of the public to use to report the possible involvement of friends or relatives. The FCO does not charge for this service.

Embassies

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which consulates he has visited in the last six months. [296229]

Chris Bryant: The Cabinet Office produces an annual list of overseas travel by Ministers. A list of all overseas visits undertaken by Ministers costing £500 or more during the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009 was published in July and copies of the list have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Travel undertaken by Ministers in the last six months will be included in next year's list.

Horn of Africa: EU

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 14 September 2009, *Official Report*, column 2172, on the Horn of Africa: United Nations, what the outcome was of the European Union discussions in September on the appointment of a Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa. [293765]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: A final decision has not been made on the appointment of an EU special representative to the Horn of Africa, but the issue was discussed briefly within the wider Somalia context at EU working group level on several occasions in September 2009. EU member states continue to endorse the conclusions from the General Affairs and External Relations Council of July 2009 and the possible appointment of a special representative continues to be viewed positively.

Turks and Caicos Islands: Politics and Government

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how soon he expects good governance to be achieved in the Turks and Caicos Islands; and what steps he is taking to support this. [294941]

Chris Bryant [*holding answer 26 October 2009*]: A UK-funded governance adviser has been involved in a major review and restructuring of the Turks and Caicos Island's public service. Work is underway to strengthen a number of areas of public sector delivery including establishing the right balance between ministries and

independent public boards to conduct the government's business, and identifying technical expertise necessary to make the administration fit for purpose. The Government have also funded the National School of Government to provide Senior Leader Development training.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures his Department has put in place to ensure sound financial management in the Turks and Caicos Islands following the publication of Sir Robin Auld's final report on alleged corruption in that country. [294942]

Chris Bryant [*holding answer 26 October 2009*]: A range of UK-funded advisers have been appointed, including an economist, an auditor and two public financial management experts. They have worked with Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) public servants to carry out a full review of the TCI Government's finances. Measures have been put in place to limit public expenditure, increase revenue and bring the Islands' debt under control. These have been included in a new budget which also reflects the restructuring of the public service. The rationale behind the new budget is to provide breathing space for the introduction of the more fundamental reforms needed to ensure transparency, accountability and sustainability in the management of public finances.

Uganda: Armed Conflict

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the districts where troops of the Lords Resistance Army are operating. [292519]

Chris Bryant: According to reports that we have recently received, the Lords Resistance Army's main areas of activity are in Southern Sudan (mostly in Western Equatoria State), the Democratic Republic of Congo (the Haut-Uele in the Orientale province) and the Central African Republic (Haut-Mbomou prefecture).

United Nations: Festivals and Special Occasions

Mr. Dai Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what events in (a) the United Kingdom and (b) overseas territories took place on 24 October 2009 to celebrate United Nations Day. [295663]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is not informed of all events commemorating UN day across the UK or in the Overseas Territories. However, to mark UN Day 2009, my noble Friend Baroness Kinnock, FCO Minister for the UN, will host a reception for members of the UN Association-UK's young professionals network at the FCO on 28 October 2009. The reception will give young professionals from across the vocational spectrum the opportunity to hear about the ways in which the UK supports the work of the UN. Baroness Kinnock has also paid tribute to the UN and its staff by posting a message on the FCO website.

UN Association—UK have marked UN Day through a range of activities. These included fundraising events to support the UN's humanitarian work, UN flag-raising ceremonies, conferences and speaker events, as well as

the launch of its annual lobby of Parliament which aims to promote dialogue between voters and MPs on UN issues. Other events across the country include, UN 'flag day' collections (London and the South East of England), Celebration of UN Day and the International Year of Astronomy (Northern Ireland), UN Day talk on Israel and Palestine (Warwick), UN Day service (Shropshire) and UN Day ceremony (Harpenden).

HOME DEPARTMENT

62 South Eaton Place

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 14 July 2009, *Official Report*, column 310W, on 62 South Eaton Place, how many viewings of 62 South Eaton Place there have been since the property was placed on the market. [294362]

Mr. Woolas: There have been 78 viewings since 62 South Eaton Place was placed on the market.

Alcoholic Drinks: Crime

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drink banning orders had been made on the latest date for which figures are available. [294425]

Alan Johnson: Drinking banning orders (DBOs) on application were commenced on 31 August 2009. Official statistics for 2009 are planned for publication in autumn 2010.

Animal Experiments: Primates

Ms Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many procedures carried out on animals in Scotland in 2008 under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 involved (a) New World primates and (b) Old World primates; and what the primary purposes of those procedures were. [295693]

Meg Hillier: The total number of scientific procedures started using New World Primates in Scotland in 2008 was 37, of which the primary purpose was fundamental biological research for 29 procedures and applied studies—human medicine or dentistry for eight procedures. The number of scientific procedures started using Old World Primates was 1,277, for all of which the primary purpose was applied studies—human medicine or dentistry.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders: Bassetlaw

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued on application from (a) the police force and (b) registered social landlords in Bassetlaw constituency. [296285]

Mr. Alan Campbell: The information requested is not available centrally.

Information collected centrally by the Ministry of Justice on the number of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) issued is not broken down by individual applicant and not available below criminal justice system (CJS) area level.

The total number of ASBO issued on application in the Nottinghamshire CJS area from 1 April 1999 to 31 December 2007 (latest available) is 158.

Crime: West Yorkshire

John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of (a) alcohol- and (b) drug-related crime were recorded in (i) Leeds West constituency, (ii) Leeds City and (iii) West Yorkshire in each year since 2005. [295361]

Mr. Alan Campbell: The data requested on incidents are not collected centrally. However, the British Crime Survey provides figures for violent incidents where the victim believes the offender was under the influence of alcohol or drugs. This information is provided in the following table.

Violent incidents where the victim believed the offender(s) to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, 1995 to 2008-09

Percentages and numbers (thousand)—BCS

Statistically significant change

<i>Offender(s) perceived to be under the influence of:¹</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>2001-02</i>	<i>2002-03</i>	<i>2003-04</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2005-06</i>	<i>2006-07</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>	<i>1995 to 2008-09</i>	<i>2007-08 to 2008-09</i>
<i>Proportion of all violent incidents²</i>												
Alcohol	41	43	48	45	51	49	45	46	46	47	**	—
Drugs	16	18	21	20	20	18	23	17	19	17	—	—
Unweighted	1,078	915	1,285	1,397	1,398	1,455	1,512	1,658	1,477	1,449	—	—
<i>Number of violent incidents (thousand)</i>												
Alcohol	1,656	1,457	1,244	1,177	1,299	1,105	1,023	1,087	971	973	**	—

Violent incidents where the victim believed the offender(s) to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, 1995 to 2008-09

Percentages and numbers (thousand)—BCS
Statistically significant change

Offender(s) perceived to be under the influence of: ¹	1995	1997	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	1995 to 2008-09	2007-08 to 2008-09
Drugs	655	603	549	544	474	390	531	398	390	334	**	—
Unweighted	16,348	14,947	32,824	36,479	37,931	45,120	47,729	47,138	46,903	46,220	—	—

¹ Questions asked only if the victim was able to say something about the offender(s), and if there was more than one offender, victims were asked if any of the offenders were perceived to be under the influence. Questions were not asked if any offender(s) were perceived to be under school age.

² 'All violence' includes wounding, assault with minor injury, assault without injury and robbery. See section 5 of volume 2 for more information.

Notes:

For an explanation of year-labels see 'Conventions used in figures and tables' at the start of this volume.

Taken from table 3.16 at the following link:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/09/hosb1109chap3.xls>

Entry Clearances: Overseas Students

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many private colleges of further education have been denied registration for the purpose of student visas since the introduction of the points-based scheme. [294011]

Mr. Woolas: In total 188 educational establishments have been denied registration under tier 4 of the points based system, with only one being a private college of further education.

Entry Clearances: Pakistan

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets apply for timescales for processing visa applications at the British consulate in Islamabad. [293611]

Mr. Woolas [holding answer 16 October 2009]: The UK Border Agency's agreed target times for processing visa applications, including those received by the Visa Section in Islamabad, are published on its Visa Services website:

www.ukvisa.gov.uk.

They are:

To complete 90 per cent. of straightforward, non-settlement applications in not more than a week, 98 per cent. in not more than two weeks, and 100 per cent. in not more than 12 weeks.

To complete 90 per cent. of non-straightforward, non-settlement applications in not more than three weeks, 98 per cent. in not more than six weeks and 100 per cent. in not more than 12 weeks.

To complete 95 per cent. of applications for settlement visas in not more than 12 weeks and 100 per cent. in not more than 24 weeks.

The quarterly performance against these targets of each visa processing centre is also published on the website.

We are aware that these targets are not being met in respect of applications made in Islamabad and are therefore taking urgent action to rectify this.

Firearms: Essex

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many (a) handguns, (b) sawn-off shotguns and (c) unmodified shotguns were

(i) used in crimes and (ii) confiscated in the Essex Constabulary area in each of the last five years. [295313]

Mr. Alan Campbell: Available data relates to crimes recorded by the police in Essex in which handguns, sawn-off shotguns and long-barrelled shotguns were reported to have been used, from 2003-04 up to and including 2007-08 and are shown in the following table.

Information on confiscated firearms is not available centrally.

Firearms are taken to be involved in a crime if they are fired, used as a blunt instrument, or used as a threat.

Crimes recorded by the police in Essex in which handguns, sawn-off shotguns and long-barrelled shotguns were reported to have been used, 2003-04 to 2007-08—
Number of offences

Principal weapon	Recorded crime				
	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Handgun	84	37	76	86	66
Sawn-off shotgun	6	3	4	8	7
Long-barrelled shotgun	18	5	13	11	14

Forensic Science Service

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions have been held between his Department, the Forensic Science Service (FSS) and chief constables on the proposed closure of FSS centres. [295988]

Mr. Alan Campbell: Such discussions have been a matter for FSS Ltd. The FSS is moving to the new structure in response to the requirements of customers, in line with the new National Forensic Procurement Framework. Consequently, it has consulted closely with customers. This has included corresponding with all chief constables in England and Wales to keep them informed of progress. With a number of chief constables, there have also been informal discussions, at the invitation of the then executive chairman.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria have been taken into account when assessing the costs and benefits of closing forensic science centres. [295990]

Mr. Alan Campbell: The new national structure will be based around four primary sites and a number of factors were carefully considered when selecting the sites to support this structure.

One of the main considerations was the co-location of body fluid examination with DNA analytical facilities to meet the FSS' customers' needs. DNA analytical facilities are currently based at Huntingdon, London, Trident Court and Wetherby.

Other considerations include: available laboratory space; ability to deliver National Framework; resilient team sizes; response to scenes; mix of skills, alignment to the new structure and the presence of a business stream on at least two sites.

Identity Cards

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many identity card readers he expects to be provided for use by the general population; what estimate he has made of the cost of such readers; and what plans he has to determine the location of such readers. [294290]

Alan Johnson: Identity cards issued to British citizens can be used for travel in the European Economic Area, and so can already be read, in the same way as machine readable passports, at border controls at all significant points of entry to the United Kingdom. While identity card readers are likely to be used very widely eventually, there will need to be a critical mass of identity cards in use before this becomes feasible.

However, we have published information on how to recognise the new identity cards, and their security features and so anyone presented with an identity card will be able to verify the card by conducting a visual or tactile check of the card, without the need to invest in specialist equipment. As the number of identity cards in circulation builds up, we will continue to explore opportunities with the commercial sector and Government agencies for reader based identity services.

Motorcycles: Registration

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment his Department has made of the adequacy and effectiveness of the regulatory regime affecting off-road bikes. [295920]

Mr. Alan Campbell [*holding answer 27 October 2009*]: No assessment has been made of the adequacy and effectiveness of the regulatory regime affecting off-road bikes. There is a range of powers available to tackle the misuse of off-road bikes, such as restrictions on legal use, warnings from a police officer for riding antisocially, and seizing and crushing bikes if riders ignore warnings.

Three independent reports have confirmed our approach to tackling antisocial behaviour is working. The National Audit Office reported that two thirds of people stop committing ASB after one intervention rising to nine out of 10 ceasing after three interventions. The Home Office has commissioned an evaluation of the comparative effectiveness of ASB interventions. It is expected to report in the spring.

North Yorkshire Police: Expenditure

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the North Yorkshire police authority has spent in (a) cash and (b) real terms in each year since 1996-97. [295226]

Mr. Hanson: The information requested is shown in the following table.

	<i>North Yorkshire police authority expenditure</i>	
	<i>Gross expenditure (£ millions)¹</i>	
	<i>Cash terms</i>	<i>Real terms</i>
1996-97	69	52
1997-98	74	57
1998-99	79	62
1999-2000	82	66
2000-01	89	72
2001-02	101	84
2002-03	100	85
2003-04	106	93
2004-05	118	107
2005-06	139	128
2006-07	158	150
2007-08	154	150
2008-09 ²	150	150

¹ Figures quoted from CIPFA statistics 1996-97—2008-09

² Estimate

Offences Against Children

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what treatment programmes are made available to those convicted of offences of child abuse. [288879]

Maria Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

The National Offender Management Service delivers a broad range of interventions to address the particular risks and treatment needs of offenders that may benefit those convicted of offences of child abuse, depending on the circumstances of the particular case.

For those offenders convicted of child abuse, including sexual abuse, there are accredited programmes to address their offending behaviour, provided the offenders are assessed as suitable for participating in the programmes. In addition, there are accredited programmes and other interventions to address factors which may contribute to offending behaviour, such as alcohol or drug problems.

The responsibility for the commissioning of services including offending behaviour programmes now rests with the Directors of Offender Management. It is for them to commission services which meet the need to address the offending behaviour of offenders and the requirements of sentencers in their area.

Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006

Tom Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the merits of reducing from 16 to 14 the age at which section 27 of the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 applies. [295164]

Mr. Alan Campbell: The current age limit on directions to leave significantly limits their effectiveness as a tool for preventing alcohol related crime and disorder because it prevents the police from dealing with groups of young people of mixed ages. Clause 31 of the Policing and Crime Bill reduces the minimum age at which directions to leave can be issued from 16 to 10 so that the police can deal with all young people who are likely to be involved in crime and disorder and not just older children.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate Change

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change which (a) UK Ministers and (b) Ministers from devolved administrations, will be included in the UK delegation to the UN framework convention on climate change conference in Copenhagen. [293422]

Joan Ruddock: The Department has not yet determined the full composition of the UK delegation, so we cannot say with certainty how many Ministers or officials will be included. This will depend largely on the state of international negotiations at the time of the conference. However, we would anticipate that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will attend.

Ministers from devolved Administrations will not be attending as part of the UK delegation, though they have been invited to nominate an official to join the delegation if they wish to.

Power Factor Correction: Capital Allowances

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change for what reasons Power Factor Correction is not included in the Enhanced Capital Allowance Scheme; and whether he plans to include Power Factor Correction in the scheme. [293823]

Mr. Kidney: Power Factor Correction (PFC) was considered for the Enhanced Capital Allowance scheme (ECA) in 2006, but not included because it was concluded that existing instruments provided a more effective incentive for the use of PFC.

We do not have plans to include PFC equipment in the ECA scheme, but if a new application to add PFC to the scheme were made, the Carbon Trust would reassess its suitability before advising DECC.

WALES

Christmas

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Christmas functions arranged by his Department (a) he and (b) officials of his Department (i) hosted and (ii) attended in 2008; what the cost to the public purse was; and if he will make a statement. [295451]

Mr. Hain: My predecessor the right hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) hosted one Christmas function at a cost of £1,054.05. Officials did not attend this reception.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Police

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he plans to take to assess public opinion on the adequacy of police coverage across the district command units of Northern Ireland. [293654]

Paul Goggins: A key role for the Policing Board and District Policing Partnerships is to engage directly with the public on policing matters, and to gauge public views on policing. This includes surveys on satisfaction levels with police patrols in local areas. In April 2009 the Policing Board published results of its Omnibus Survey 'Public perceptions of the police, DPPs and the Northern Ireland Policing Board'; this survey found that 42 per cent. of respondents were very/fairly satisfied with the levels of police patrols in their local area.

Police Service of Northern Ireland: Recruitment

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans the police in Northern Ireland have to inform persons interested in applying for police careers that from 2011 all applicants are to be treated on their merits alone. [295925]

Paul Goggins: The temporary 50:50 recruitment provisions will remain in force until the Government's target of 30 per cent. Catholic composition within PSNI regulars has been achieved. It is anticipated that this will occur before March 2011. After the provisions have ended, recruitment to the PSNI will operate on the same legal basis as to other occupations. It will be for the Chief Constable and the recruitment agent to decide how this message will be communicated to potential applicants in the future.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Cultural Heritage

Mr. Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much has been spent from the Exchequer on (a) heritage, (b) sports and (c) the arts in (i) cash and (ii) real terms in each year since 1997. [296282]

Mr. Bradshaw: The following table shows funding by the Exchequer for the arts, sports and heritage sector in cash and real terms since 1997.

	£ million					
	<i>The arts sector including support functions</i>	<i>Real terms 2008-09</i>	<i>The sports sector including support function</i>	<i>Real terms 2008-09</i>	<i>Heritage sector including support functions</i>	<i>Real terms 2008-09</i>
1997-98	196.4	255.5	50.1	65.2	182.3	237.1
1998-99	199.7	254.4	49.4	62.9	169.4	215.8
1999-2000	229.8	287.0	51.6	64.5	171.1	213.8
2000-01	238.8	294.4	52.6	64.8	175.8	216.7

	£ million					
	<i>The arts sector including support functions</i>	<i>Real terms 2008-09</i>	<i>The sports sector including support function</i>	<i>Real terms 2008-09</i>	<i>Heritage sector including support functions</i>	<i>Real terms 2008-09</i>
2001-02	252.9	305.1	63.9	77.0	184.9	223.0
2002-03	301.5	352.2	109.8	128.2	186.1	217.4
2003-04	367.6	417.8	78.9	89.7	383.6	435.9
2004-05	398.2	440.2	111.5	123.3	196.7	217.4
2005-06	410.6	445.6	117.5	127.6	196.1	212.8
2006-07	430.4	453.7	169.5	178.7	208.0	219.3
2007-08	425.9	436.3	193.9	198.7	211.7	216.9
2008/09	435.8	435.8	215.8	215.8	221.6	221.6

These data have been drawn from the published DCMS Appropriation Accounts and Resource Accounts, which are audited by the National Audit Office.

Departmental Telephone Services

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will consider the merits of securing accreditation of his Department's helplines to the Helplines Association's quality standard; and if he will make a statement. [295728]

Mr. Simon: My Department does not directly operate any helplines.

National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills: Thurrock

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills during the summer adjournment on funding provision for the National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills in Thurrock; and if he will make a statement. [295802]

Mr. Simon: My hon. Friend the member for Stevenage, then Minister for Culture and Tourism, discussed the Creative and cultural National Skills Academy with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West during the recess.

The discussion highlighted the National Skills Academy's importance both to the cultural sector and to the regional and national economy.

My Department is working closely with colleagues at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to ensure that the skills needs for this important sector are met.

Olympic Games 2012: Culture

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps the Cultural Olympiad is taking to celebrate the British cultural contribution to sport and the Olympics. [292333]

Margaret Hodge: The Cultural Olympiad Board is working with the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) and partners throughout the cultural sector to deliver the Cultural Olympiad.

This is a great opportunity to celebrate the best of our British culture. We are doing so in a number of ways, putting culture at the heart of the London Olympic and Paralympic Games. There are 10 proposed major national projects, which will form the backbone of our London 2012 cultural activities, encompassing everything from art to music to theatre. The Olympic Lottery Distributor recently announced a grant of £15.6 million to support these projects.

There is also a UK-wide programme for cultural projects that have identified their own funding. LOCOG estimates that over £5 million has been raised by these projects. Over 100 cultural organisations have successfully applied to be part of the Cultural Olympiad UK-wide programme and they demonstrate that link by being given the LOCOG Inspire Mark.

Overseas Visitors

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what effect his Department estimates the reduction in VisitBritain's budget will have on international visitor numbers to the UK in 2010. [293122]

Margaret Hodge: VisitBritain's budget was set in 2007, in the context of expected efficiencies through increased and better use of technology, changing priorities with new and emerging markets, internal restructuring and more focused marketing. The Department does not therefore believe there has been a direct impact from this on international visitor numbers. Visitor numbers have, however, been affected by the global downturn as they have in other countries.

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation estimates that total global arrivals will decline by between 4 and 6 per cent. in 2009, and VisitBritain has forecast that the number of international visitors to the UK could decline by up to 5 per cent. in 2009. In the first eight months of 2009, 9 per cent. fewer overseas visitors came to the UK compared to the same period in 2008. However, overseas visitors' spend over this period is only 1 per cent. lower than in 2009.

VisitBritain invested £3.5 million in a 'Value for Money Campaign' during the spring and summer of 2009 to encourage more inward bound tourism. The campaign emphasised favourable currency exchange rates and the very high quality of the tourism offer in this country.

Sports: Clubs

Andrew Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many and what proportion of sports clubs were eligible to participate in the community amateur sports club scheme in each local authority area in the North West in each year since the scheme was introduced; and how many and what proportion of eligible sports clubs joined the scheme in each such year. [296437]

Mr. Sutcliffe: It is not possible to determine how many sports clubs could be eligible for participation in the Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASC) scheme. Neither do Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), who administer the scheme, separately identify CASCs

by local authority area. A list of registered clubs, and their addresses, is published on the HMRC website at:

www.hmrc.gov.uk/casc/

and is updated on a monthly basis.

To the 5 October 2009, 5456 clubs had registered as CASCs. The yearly breakdown since the scheme was introduced is in the following table.

	<i>New clubs registering</i>	<i>Total registrations</i>
2003	557	557
2004	1447	2004
2005	1500	3504
2006	637	4141
2007	387	4528
2008	550	5078
2009	378	5456

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

Apprentices: Industrial Health and Safety

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the application of health and safety requirements on apprentices under the age of 18 years. [295998]

Mr. Iain Wright: The health and safety of young people in the workplace is one of the foremost concerns of the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and Learning and Skills Council (LSC) when considering the suitability of training providers and employers in receiving financial support through our Apprenticeships programme. These duties are specified in all contracts with training providers and supporting guidance. The LSC and NAS are responsible to my Department and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills for ensuring these contractual duties are carried out and that young people entering the workplace are properly protected. Employers remain subject to their legal responsibilities for Apprentices as they do for other employees.

Children In Care

Mr. Vara: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how many cases of residents absconding from children's care homes there have been in each local authority area in each of the last five years. [294772]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 12 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 1069W. Figures for 2009 will be available by the end of the year.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how many special guardianship orders have been granted in (a) England and (b) Essex in each year since their inception. [295304]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Member to the reply given on 9 February 2009, *Official Report*, column 1733W.

National level figures for 2009 can be found in table D1 of Statistical First Release "Children Looked After in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2009", which is available on the Department's website via following link:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000878/index.shtml>

Local authority figures for 2009 will be available by the end of the year.

Children: Human Rights

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families if he will commission research to establish the lawfulness of practices used by institutions to restrict the freedom of movement of children. [289214]

Dawn Primarolo: All institutions are inspected by the relevant inspectorate. Where the inspectorate has reason to believe that the institution is using unlawful practices to restrict the movement of young people they will take appropriate enforcement action. We do not currently plan to commission research into the practices used by institutions to restrict the freedom of movement of children.

Family Intervention Projects

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families (1) what steps his Department may take to deal with families which refuse to enter into a Family Intervention Project contract agreement; and if he will make a statement; [295338]

(2) how many families have refused to enter into a Family Intervention Project contract agreement; and if he will make a statement. [295344]

Dawn Primarolo [*holding answer 27 October 2009*]: While a family's initial involvement in a Family Intervention Project is voluntary, the projects draw on and drive home the implications of sanctions that a family or family members may already be facing. These include seeking possession of a family's tenancy, a parenting order, antisocial behaviour order, proceedings to take children into care and juvenile specific orders.

Provisional data from the Family Intervention Project (FIP) online monitoring information system, maintained by the National Centre for Social Research, shows that as at 31 March 2009 of the 2,295 who have been offered a Family Intervention Project only 70 refused outright to enter into a contract and another 114 refused to enter into a contract after initially accepting the offer.

GCSE: Disadvantaged

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families in what proportion of schools in each index of multiple deprivation decile fewer than 30 per cent. of pupils obtained five A* to C GCSEs including English and mathematics in (a) 2008 and (b) 2009. [295244]

Mr. Coaker: For 2008 figures I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 17 March 2009, *Official Report*, columns 1050-52W. School level figures for 2009 are currently being checked by schools as part of the annual results checking exercise prior to publication in the Achievement and Attainment Tables in January 2010. The requested information will be available shortly afterwards.

Schools: Sports

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families (1) when he plans to publish the School Sport Survey for 2008-09; [293879]

(2) how many schoolchildren participated in (a) two, (b) four and (c) five or more hours of sport each week in the latest period for which figures are available. [293882]

Mr. Iain Wright: The 2008/09 School Sport Survey was published on 14 October. It can be found at:

www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR168.pdf

The 2008/09 survey is the sixth undertaken by the Department on PE and Sport, but for the first time we have moved away from measuring two hours of PE and Sport each week, which 90 per cent. of pupils participated in last year. Instead, as part of the strategy's overall move towards offering five hours of PE and Sport for young people in schools and other settings, the survey measured participation in at least three hours of PE and out of hours sport each week in schools for the first time. The survey found that 50 per cent. of pupils in Years 1-13 (including 6th forms) participated in at least three hours of high quality PE and out of hours school sport.

Schools: Vetting

Mr. Andy Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families what progress has been made in his Department's Review of the definitions of frequency and intensity in the vetting and barring process; and if he will make a statement. [295377]

Dawn Primarolo: The Secretary of State has asked Sir Roger Singleton, chairman of the Independent Safeguarding Authority and the Government's Chief Adviser on the Safety of Children, to check whether the Government have drawn the line in the right place in relation to the degree of contact with children which should trigger the requirement to register with the new scheme. The Secretary of State's letter of 14 September 2009 to Barry Sheerman (copies of which are in the Libraries of both Houses) sets out the context of the issue Sir Roger has been asked to consider. Sir Roger has been asked to report to Ministers by early December.

JUSTICE

Community Orders: Females

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many women received community sentences with requirements in relation to (a) compulsory unpaid work, (b) participation in any specified activities,

(c) prohibition from certain activities, (d) curfew, (e) exclusion, (f) residence, (g) mental health treatment, (h) drug rehabilitation, (i) alcohol treatment, (j) supervision and (k) attendance centres in (i) 2007, (ii) 2008 and (iii) 2009. [295213]

Claire Ward: The following table shows the number of each of the requirements started by women under community orders in 2007 and 2008 who started probation service supervision in England and Wales. 2008 is the latest complete year for which published information is available.

<i>Number of requirements started by women under community orders</i>		
<i>Requirements¹</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>
Supervision	13,498	13,950
Unpaid work	8,509	8,791
Drug treatment	2,483	2,799
Accredited programme	3,199	2,794
Curfew	1,753	2,298
Specified activity	1,647	1,937
Alcohol treatment	541	785
Exclusion	128	163
Residential	160	157
Mental health	119	149
Prohibited activity	105	118
Attendance centre	43	40
Total	32,185	33,981

¹ The figures show the number of requirements started by women under community orders. There were 18,287 women who started these orders in 2007, and 19,191 in 2008.

Note:

The figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

Criminal Proceedings: Ex-servicemen

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, (1) what recent steps his Department has taken to assist armed forces veterans in the criminal justice system; [294505]

(2) what recent estimate he has made of the number of armed forces veterans who are in the criminal justice system. [294506]

Maria Eagle: The National Offender Management Service, the Ministry of Defence and third sector partners, have made significant progress in further developing the range of services and support available for veterans who have offended. New posters and leaflets have been distributed in order to promote the support that is on offer to veterans in prison and after release. Prison officers have been given access to the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency website and, where Governors allow, prisoners have direct access to their free helpline. Charities providing support have access to veterans for welfare visits which do not count against prisoners' personal visits allowance.

A guide for prison officers working with veterans is under development this has been informed by good practice in existence in a number of prisons and work is in progress to prepare instructions for probation staff supervising ex-service personnel, in the community.

New IT based offender assessment procedures include questioning to identify offenders who have served in the

armed forces. This is in the early stages of roll out across the prison estate and will be fully implemented by May 2010.

While we acknowledge that we are currently unable to identify all of those prisoners who are veterans, we are confident that assessment at induction will signpost offenders, according to need, to the range of generic interventions that are available. This will include mental health in-reach, referral to the Medical Assessment Programme at St. Thomas' Hospital providing specialist health assessment for veterans and referral to Combat Stress Treatment Centres for help with anxiety management, post traumatic stress, sleep disorder and grief. To complement this, the Prison Service provides a range of 14 Offending Behaviour Programmes, six Drug Programmes and a therapeutic community at Grendon prison.

Work is ongoing to quantify the numbers of armed forces veterans in the criminal justice system. Data matching will begin during November and we will disseminate the numbers identified by December. Discussions are underway with a view to extending this

to encompass offenders serving community sentences. We anticipate that the data will enable us to examine some of the paths into offending, make decisions about whether more specific services need to be developed and provide more targeted support.

Custodial Treatment

Chris Huhne: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many people (a) of each sex and (b) in each age band were sentenced to immediate custody for non-violent and non-sexual offences in each year since 1997; [295819]

(2) how many people (a) of either sex and (b) in each age band were in custody for non-violent and non-sexual offences in each year since 1997. [295820]

Claire Ward: The information requested for how many people of each sex and in each age band were sentenced to immediate custody for non-violent and non-sexual offences in each year since 1997 is shown in table 1.

Table 1: Number of people sentenced to immediate custody, by sex and age for non violent and non sexual offences since 1997

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<i>Male</i>											
10-17	4,009	3,991	4,055	3,747	3,676	3,439	2,896	2,815	2,619	2,681	2,522
18-20	8,853	9,381	9,669	9,776	9,121	8,519	7,065	6,718	6,255	6,116	6/412
21 and over	38,150	41,228	42,557	43,105	42,842	46,387	45,186	43,901	41,607	39,158	39,367
Total	51,012	54,600	56,281	56,628	55,639	58,345	55,147	53,434	50,481	47,955	48,301
<i>Female</i>											
10-17	132	148	222	228	193	235	179	173	191	153	176
18-20	418	617	687	822	765	751	681	507	535	507	417
21 and over	3,545	4,221	4,860	4,920	5,112	5,585	5,664	5,646	5,134	4,953	5,026
Total	4,095	4,986	5,769	5,970	6,070	6,571	6,524	6,326	5,860	5,613	5,619

Source:

OMS Analytical Services, Ministry of Justice

These figures are based on published figures Sentencing Statistics 2007 pivot tables at;

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/sentencingannual.htm>

they include all categories in published figures except totals for violence against the person, robbery, and sexual offences, and summary offences.

The table shows the number of persons sentenced to immediate custody for non violent and non sexual offences, by sex and age. The data is presented on the

principal offence basis: where an offender has been sentenced for more than one offence the principal offence is the offence for which the heaviest penalty was imposed; where the same sentence has been imposed for more than one offence the principal offence is the one for which the statutory maximum is most severe.

Table 2 shows the prison population in all prison establishments in England and Wales sentenced for non-violent and non-sexual offences, in each year since 2003, the earliest available year.

Table 2: Prisoners sentenced for non violent and non-sexual offences

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<i>Male</i>							
15-17	936	876	929	882	857	844	633
Young adults (18-20)	3,272	3,075	2,843	2,744	3,023	3,018	3,012
Adults (21 and over)	25,836	26,351	26,209	26,076	25,654	26,572	25,605
Total	30,044	30,302	29,981	29,702	29,534	30,434	29,250
<i>Female</i>							
15-17	26	37	16	23	23	26	17
Young adults (18-20)	209	185	157	158	132	169	111
Adults (21 and over)	2,299	2,207	2,285	2,297	2,145	2,219	2,028
Total	2,534	2,429	2,458	2,478	2,300	2,414	2,156

These figures are based on those published at the following websites:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/prisonandprobation.htm>

and

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/populationincustody.htm>

where sub-totals for violence against the person, sexual offences, and robbery have been excluded. Excludes juveniles in Secure Training Centres and Local Authority Secure Children's Homes.

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

Electoral Register

Steve Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice for how many years the data gathered on electoral registers is retained; whether such data is retained centrally; and if he will make a statement. [295677]

Mr. Wills: There is no specific legislative provision that specifies that data gathered on electoral registers may only be retained for a set period. It is for electoral registration officers to determine how long the information should be retained having regard to relevant principles, including those set out in the Data Protection Act.

The Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001 (S.I.2001/341), and the Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations 2001 (S.I.2001/497), as amended, and the Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2008 (S.I.2008/1741) set out the regulatory regime governing access to the electoral register.

Data gathered on electoral registers is not retained centrally. However, under the regulations, relevant parts of the full register may be supplied by an electoral registration officer to certain persons and bodies for use for specific purposes, including statistical and crime prevention purposes. It is for each organisation to determine how long they wish to retain the electoral register for, and I understand national libraries retain them indefinitely.

Homicide: Prisoners Release

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people convicted of murder have been released from prison in each of the last 10 years; what their original prison sentence was in each case; how much time in prison each served; and if he will make a statement. [295346]

Claire Ward: The Courts must impose a mandatory life sentence on any individual convicted of murder. This is the only sentence available for such a conviction.

The following table gives the numbers of such prisoners first released in each of the last 10 years from all prison establishments in England and Wales, and the amount of time served at point of release. It is clear there are fewer offenders serving longer sentences.

<i>Year of first release</i>	<i>Number of mandatory lifers</i>	<i>Average time served (years)</i>
1999	110	13
2000	101	13
2001	111	13
2002	117	14
2003	185	15
2004	152	14
2005	156	14
2006	100	14
2007	90	16
2008	98	16

This table is taken from table 9.5 in Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2008, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library and which can also be found at the following website:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/prisonandprobation.htm>

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

Human Trafficking: Compensation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many compensation orders against convicted human traffickers there have been in each of the last three years; and how much money has been realised as a result. [294867]

Maria Eagle: According to the Ministry's court proceedings database, there were no offenders ordered to pay compensation for offences relating to human trafficking in the years 2005-2007, the latest three years for which data are available. Data for 2008 will be available when 'Sentencing Statistics 2008' is published.

Injunctions

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) what information his Department holds on the number of non-reportable injunctive orders each judge of the High Court has issued in each of the last five years; [295031]

(2) if he will (a) collate and (b) publish statistics on the numbers of injunctions issued in the High Court in the last five years where the claimants have been granted anonymity in the listed name of the case. [295034]

Mr. Straw: Information on injunctions granted and the judges who made them is held on the court file relating to the relevant case. Although the High Court in England and Wales collects figures on applications generally, applications relating to injunctions are not separately identifiable, and there are currently no plans to amend databases to make them so. Only if an inquiry is made with the relevant details of the case would it be possible, by reference to the case file, to ascertain if a non-reportable injunction had been made and the identity of the relevant judge.

Legal Aid

Nadine Dorries: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many legal aid lawyers (1) dealt with (a) housing cases, (b) employment cases and (c) family cases in (i) Mid Bedfordshire constituency, (ii) the East of England and (iii) England in each of the last 10 years; [295412]

(2) dealing with immigration and asylum cases there were in (a) Mid Bedfordshire constituency, (b) the East of England and (c) England in each of the last 10 years. [295413]

Bridget Prentice: Figures are only available for the last nine years, since the Access to Justice Act came in. Information is not held on the number of practitioners at each firm and instead shows the number of solicitor offices providing legal aid services each year.

Prior to the introduction of the civil unified contract in April 2007 and criminal unified contract in July 2008, legal aid providers delivering services in more than one office would hold separate contracts for each of those offices. The Legal Services Commission (LSC) now contracts with legal aid firms but each firm may have several offices. The office then holds a schedule or schedules that enable it to undertake work in each category of law. Therefore, from the introduction of the unified contracts, the total figures do not represent the total number of offices.

Over the period there has been a downward trend in the overall number of solicitor offices dealing with legal

aid. This is because there has been a continuing process of offices that do only small amounts of legal aid work leaving the market or merging with other offices, so that the work is done in larger volumes at fewer offices. In addition, the Legal Services Commission has over time sought to terminate dormant accounts where no work was being done.

The figures requested are available in the following tables.

<i>England and Wales</i>				
<i>Financial years</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Housing</i>	<i>Employment</i>	<i>Immigration asylum¹</i>
2000-01 (Start)	4,593	799	384	458
2000-01 (End)	4036	673	300	482
2001-02 (Start)	3,819	614	256	438
2001-02 (End)	3,757	585	240	514
2002-03 (Start)	3,645	563	218	500
2002-03 (End)	3,591	531	212	555
2003-04 (Start)	3,369	504	194	521
2003-04 (End)	3,270	471	187	513
2004-05 (Start)	3,072	450	163	380
2004-05 (End)	3,115	455	164	393
2005-06 (Start)	2,967	422	151	327
2005-06 (End)	2,881	420	136	264
2006-07 (Start)	2,784	410	128	239
2006-07 (End)	2,719	387	126	214
2007-08 (End)	2,679	370	114	182
2008-09 (End)	2,658	381	126	176

¹ The immigration/asylum categories were split in 2004 so we can only provide information on immigration and other after this point.

Local authority—mid Bedfordshire

	<i>2000-01</i>	<i>2001-02</i>	<i>2002-03</i>	<i>2003-04</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2005-06</i>	<i>2006-07</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>	<i>2009-10</i>
Employment	—	—	—	—	2	2	2	1	1	1
Housing	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	—
Immigration	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Immigration Asylum	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Immigration Other	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Family	8	7	8	8	7	6	5	5	5	4

Procurement area—east of England

<i>Category of law/ Procurement area</i>	<i>2000-01</i>	<i>2001-02</i>	<i>2002-03</i>	<i>2003-04</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2005-06</i>	<i>2006-07</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>	<i>2009-10</i>
<i>Employment</i>										
Bedfordshire	5	3	3	3	5	5	6	2	5	5
Cambridgeshire	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	1	3	3
East Essex	9	7	6	5	4	5	4	3	6	6
Norfolk	12	8	6	6	5	5	5	1	2	2
North Hertfordshire	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	1	1
South Hertfordshire	1	1	1	1	1	—	—	1	1	1
Suffolk	4	3	3	3	2	2	1	—	2	2
West Essex	4	4	2	2	6	5	6	2	7	7
<i>Housing</i>										
Bedfordshire	9	8	9	9	7	6	6	5	8	5
Cambridgeshire	7	5	6	4	5	5	6	3	6	5
East Essex	11	9	8	7	8	6	5	3	7	7
Norfolk	13	11	9	6	8	9	8	3	5	5
North Hertfordshire	3	2	3	2	2	2	1	—	1	1
South Hertfordshire	2	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	4	4
Suffolk	4	4	4	4	5	4	3	3	4	4

Procurement area—east of England

Category of law/ Procurement area	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
West Essex	7	5	4	3	5	5	6	3	8	8
<i>Immigration</i>										
Bedfordshire	6	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	6	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Essex	2	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Norfolk	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Hertfordshire	1	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Hertfordshire	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Essex	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Immigration Asylum</i>										
Bedfordshire	—	—	6	5	3	3	3	2	3	3
Cambridgeshire	—	—	3	1	—	1	1	2	4	3
East Essex	—	—	2	2	2	—	—	—	—	—
Norfolk	—	—	2	1	1	1	1	1	—	—
North Hertfordshire	—	—	2	1	1	1	1	1	—	—
South Hertfordshire	—	—	1	1	1	1	1	—	—	—
Suffolk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Essex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Immigration Other</i>										
Bedfordshire	—	—	6	6	4	4	4	2	3	3
Cambridgeshire	—	—	5	3	3	5	4	2	4	3
East Essex	—	—	2	2	2	—	—	—	—	—
Norfolk	—	—	1	1	1	1	—	1	—	—
North Hertfordshire	—	—	3	2	1	1	1	1	—	—
South Hertfordshire	—	—	1	1	1	1	1	—	—	—
Suffolk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Essex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Family</i>										
Bedfordshire	42	38	38	35	34	31	30	30	27	25
Cambridgeshire	51	46	46	43	44	37	36	29	31	31
East Essex	44	41	40	32	31	29	27	22	24	24
Norfolk	69	61	53	48	50	44	42	41	39	37
North Hertfordshire	39	34	31	25	21	19	18	16	13	13
South Hertfordshire	43	37	36	30	27	24	17	23	25	23
Suffolk	55	48	47	46	46	43	41	41	40	38
West Essex	64	55	53	52	49	46	45	43	47	47

Legal Aid: East of England

Nadine Dorries: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many applications for legal aid from residents of (a) Mid Bedfordshire constituency and (b) the East of England there have been in each of the last five years. [295414]

Bridget Prentice: Applications for civil legal aid advice are made to individual providers, and LSC records the number of instances of advice provided, rather than the number of applications made. Applications for civil legal aid representation are made to the Legal Services Commission. Not all applications are granted. The applications received for representation for the last five years in the requested areas is as follows:

Financial year	Mid Bedfordshire constituency	East of England	England
2004-05	173	15,732	180,591
2005-06	187	15,498	182,187
2006-07	151	14,935	177,309
2007-08	114	13,365	161,206
2008-09	130	13,670	171,492

Legal Aid: Immigration

Frank Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice for what reasons the Legal Services Commission does not allow consortium bids for funding on immigration cases. [294862]

Bridget Prentice: Following consultation, the LSC proposed that consortium arrangements should only be permitted for core social welfare law categories such as debt, housing and welfare benefits. This was in order to ensure that integrated services can be provided for people who will often have multiple problems. In immigration cases, the necessary services are capable of being delivered by single providers; therefore there is not the need to allow consortium bids.

Providers will be able to bid for asylum and immigration new matter starts as part of the 2010 process and the number of starts available will vary from area to area according to demand. Providers will be required to do a minimum volume of cases in each area of law (except in Devon where only non-asylum starts will be made available).

Members: Correspondence

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice when he plans to reply to the letter of 15 September 2009 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard Mr. D Smith. [296118]

Mr. Straw: I replied to the right hon. Member on 21 October. I apologise for the delay.

Prisoners Release

Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many prisoners released in each year since 2000 for which figures are available had already completed (a) a community sentence, (b) one custodial sentence, (c) more than one custodial sentence and (d) more than five custodial sentences. [295843]

Maria Eagle: The following table shows actual reoffending rates and frequency of reoffending per 100 offenders who were discharged from custody in the first quarter of each year from 2000 to 2007 (latest available data), broken down by the number of previous custodial sentences. Information is not available for the number of community sentences that an offender has previously received.

Further information on the one year rates of reoffending can be found in:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/reoffendingofadults.htm>.

Table 1: Actual reoffending rates and frequency per 100 offenders for those discharged from custody, by number of previous custodial sentences, 2000, 2002-07 cohorts

Number of previous custodial sentences	Cohort year	Number of offenders released from custody	Actual reoffending rate	Number of offences per 100 offenders
No previous custodial sentences	2000 Q1	5,657	28.8	108.2
	2002 Q1	5,134	30.8	122.7
	2003 Q1	4,610	26.7	99.0
	2004 Q1	4,773	25.1	85.9
	2005 Q1	4,500	22.4	75.4
	2006 Q1	4,637	21.5	67.8
	2007 Q1	3,939	22.7	72.3

Table 1: Actual reoffending rates and frequency per 100 offenders for those discharged from custody, by number of previous custodial sentences, 2000, 2002-07 cohorts

Number of previous custodial sentences	Cohort year	Number of offenders released from custody	Actual reoffending rate	Number of offences per 100 offenders
One previous custodial sentence	2000 Q1	2,475	50.8	220.5
	2002 Q1	2,342	51.6	236.3
	2003 Q1	2,039	50.4	214.4
	2004 Q1	2,232	45.2	202.0
	2005 Q1	2,000	42.0	164.2
	2006 Q1	1,927	39.4	153.1
	2007 Q1	1,767	41.3	146.0
Between two and five previous custodial sentences	2000 Q1	4,612	63.8	319.3
	2002 Q1	4,739	66.9	361.9
	2003 Q1	4,337	65.0	336.4
	2004 Q1	4,760	61.1	286.7
	2005 Q1	4,315	58.7	256.3
	2006 Q1	4,015	54.4	226.0
	2007 Q1	3,534	53.8	237.4
More than five previous custodial sentences	2000 Q1	2,973	75.4	413.4
	2002 Q1	3,350	77.8	473.4
	2003 Q1	3,360	78.9	491.2
	2004 Q1	3,984	76.8	441.6
	2005 Q1	3,764	73.8	413.9
	2006 Q1	3,785	72.3	390.2
	2007 Q1	3,570	70.8	413.9
Total	2000 Q1	15,717	51.4	245.6
	2002 Q1	15,565	55.0	288.1
	2003 Q1	14,346	53.9	279.0
	2004 Q1	15,749	51.9	253.1
	2005 Q1	14,579	49.1	228.5
	2006 Q1	14,364	46.5	208.4
	2007 Q1	12,810	47.2	223.2

Note:

Please note that data is not available for 2001 due to a problem with archived data on court orders. Since it will not substantially increase the knowledge on the current progress on reoffending, no resources have been allocated to fix this problem.

Prisoners: Drugs

Chris Huhne: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people were found guilty of (a) possession of and (b) drug dealing offences involving (i) cannabis,

(ii) ecstasy, (iii) cocaine, (iv) crack cocaine and (v) heroin in each year since 1997; and how many received (A) a custodial sentence, (B) a community sentence, (C) a treatment order, (D) a fine and (E) another punishment. [295898]

Claire Ward: The number of defendants found guilty at all courts for possession of, and dealing in, certain drugs, by sentence, England and Wales, from 1997 to 2007 (latest available) is shown in the following table.

The statistics given relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. For example, when a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences the principal offence is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

Court proceedings data for 2008 are planned for publication at the end of January 2010.

The number of defendants found guilty at all courts for possession of, and dealing in, certain drugs, by sentence, England and Wales 1997 to 2007^{1, 2, 3}

<i>Period</i>	<i>Offence description</i>	<i>Found guilty</i>	<i>Total sentenced</i>	<i>Immediate custody</i>	<i>Community sentence⁴</i>	<i>Drug treatment and testing order⁵</i>	<i>Fine</i>	<i>Otherwise dealt with</i>
1997	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	17,275	17,227	268	1,505	n/a	11,890	3,564
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	2,499	2,475	1,129	917	n/a	212	217
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cannabis and cannabis resin.	1,414	1,400	650	493	n/a	145	112
	Having possession of a controlled drug: MDMA.	1,048	1,049	62	282	n/a	564	141
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: MDMA.	544	537	410	89	n/a	15	23
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : MDMA.	310	301	228	53	n/a	9	11
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cocaine.	1,050	1,046	70	237	n/a	624	115
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cocaine.	291	287	228	32	n/a	10	17
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cocaine.	137	134	102	24	n/a	4	4
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Crack cocaine.	195	194	20	38	n/a	104	32
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Crack cocaine.	38	37	32	3	n/a	1	1
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Crack cocaine.	66	67	57	4	n/a	4	2
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Heroin.	3,248	3,250	319	1,078	n/a	1,138	715
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Heroin.	744	726	604	83	n/a	8	31
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Heroin.	789	779	659	90	n/a	11	19
Total		29,648	29,509	4,838	4,928	n/a	14,739	5,004
1998	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	22,643	22,616	410	2,042	n/a	15,503	4,661
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	2,648	2,713	1,284	990	n/a	244	195
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cannabis and cannabis resin.	1,442	1,458	656	509	n/a	155	138
	Having possession of a controlled drug: MDMA.	753	743	51	185	n/a	408	99
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: MDMA.	304	291	217	51	n/a	11	12
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : MDMA.	246	249	179	46	n/a	5	19
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cocaine.	1,644	1,642	103	349	n/a	1,003	187

The number of defendants found guilty at all courts for possession of, and dealing in, certain drugs, by sentence, England and Wales 1997 to 2007^{1, 2, 3}

Period	Offence description	Found guilty	Total sentenced	Immediate custody	Community sentence ⁴	Drug treatment and testing order ⁵	Fine	Otherwise dealt with
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cocaine.	334	332	260	48	n/a	9	15
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cocaine.	223	213	161	30	n/a	14	8
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Crack cocaine.	369	361	48	91	n/a	192	30
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Crack cocaine.	88	85	73	8	n/a	3	1
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Crack cocaine.	91	84	68	7	n/a	6	3
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Heroin.	4,331	4,311	500	1,493	n/a	1,505	813
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Heroin.	822	830	656	131	n/a	13	30
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Heroin.	892	903	737	119	n/a	7	40
	Total	36,830	36,831	5,403	6,099	n/a	19,078	6,251
1999	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	22,623	22,672	451	2,148	—	15,215	4,858
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	2,246	2,316	1,112	789	—	197	218
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cannabis and cannabis resin.	1,168	1,209	573	438	—	116	82
	Having possession of a controlled drug: MDMA.	1,262	1,253	69	344	—	681	159
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: MDMA.	451	454	338	84	—	16	16
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : MDMA.	231	227	173	39	—	6	9
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cocaine.	2,039	2,035	146	409	—	1,243	237
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cocaine.	346	345	282	42	—	8	13
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cocaine.	322	310	262	29	—	10	9
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Crack cocaine.	491	483	50	119	—	246	68
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Crack cocaine.	74	72	62	6	—	2	2
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Crack cocaine.	116	122	107	10	—	2	3
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Heroin.	4,814	4,836	591	1,626	3	1,660	956
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Heroin.	883	912	741	117	—	18	36
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Heroin.	1,144	1,126	953	126	1	6	40
	Total	38,210	38,372	5,910	6,326	4	19,426	6,706
2000 ⁶	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	20,602	20,676	361	1,967	1	13,539	4,808
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	1,802	1,859	808	725	2	150	174
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cannabis and cannabis resin.	842	870	405	318	—	68	79

The number of defendants found guilty at all courts for possession of, and dealing in, certain drugs, by sentence, England and Wales 1997 to 2007^{1, 2, 3}

<i>Period</i>	<i>Offence description</i>	<i>Found guilty</i>	<i>Total sentenced</i>	<i>Immediate custody</i>	<i>Community sentence⁴</i>	<i>Drug treatment and testing order⁵</i>	<i>Fine</i>	<i>Otherwise dealt with</i>
	Having possession of a controlled drug: MDMA.	1,955	1,978	108	568	1	1,014	287
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: MDMA.	736	736	520	162	—	20	34
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : MDMA.	327	335	234	78	—	10	13
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cocaine.	1,875	1,884	140	418	—	1,117	209
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cocaine.	364	350	295	34	1	10	10
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cocaine.	258	246	193	32	—	8	13
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Crack cocaine.	502	506	63	124	—	265	54
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Crack cocaine.	90	90	83	3	—	1	3
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Crack cocaine.	98	109	95	10	—	1	3
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Heroin.	5,068	5,082	605	1,698	18	1,703	1,058
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Heroin.	921	943	792	102	3	8	38
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Heroin.	1,229	1,279	1,069	169	3	6	32
	Total	36,669	36,943	5,771	6,408	29	17,920	6,815
2001	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	20,752	20,736	290	1,993	21	12,960	5,472
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	1,358	1,401	618	535	8	100	140
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cannabis and cannabis resin.	613	623	265	241	2	60	55
	Having possession of a controlled drug: MDMA.	2,493	2,485	151	796	7	1,201	330
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: MDMA.	960	982	690	231	4	20	37
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : MDMA.	376	377	252	87	1	14	23
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cocaine.	1,968	1,977	147	468	21	1,107	234
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cocaine.	456	444	359	53	8	9	15
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cocaine.	300	288	235	32	6	5	10
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Crack cocaine.	633	626	75	170	13	281	87
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Crack cocaine.	121	118	93	12	2	5	6
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Crack cocaine.	134	136	117	13	4	—	2
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Heroin.	5,411	5,436	635	1,651	154	1,856	1,140
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Heroin.	1,004	1,023	848	99	20	24	32
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Heroin.	1,203	1,216	1,000	130	39	5	42
	Total	37,782	37,868	5,775	6,511	310	17,647	7,625

The number of defendants found guilty at all courts for possession of, and dealing in, certain drugs, by sentence, England and Wales 1997 to 2007^{1, 2, 3}

Period	Offence description	Found guilty	Total sentenced	Immediate custody	Community sentence ⁴	Drug treatment and testing order ⁵	Fine	Otherwise dealt with
2002	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	23,655	23,627	241	2,674	28	14,123	6,561
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	1,388	1,383	547	631	1	103	101
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cannabis and cannabis resin.	592	598	258	226	3	51	60
	Having possession of a controlled drug: MDMA.	2,165	2,170	100	629	7	1,078	356
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: MDMA.	830	843	578	212	3	22	28
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : MDMA.	365	364	216	113	4	13	18
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cocaine.	2,230	2,233	142	469	10	1,332	280
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cocaine.	554	538	430	73	4	13	18
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cocaine.	371	367	311	32	4	8	12
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Crack cocaine.	802	786	87	181	7	394	117
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Crack cocaine.	179	161	131	24	1	2	3
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Crack cocaine.	142	133	116	13	4	—	—
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Heroin.	5,042	5,040	560	1,434	150	1,758	1,138
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Heroin.	962	945	774	87	30	9	45
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Heroin.	1,234	1,243	1,044	111	38	4	46
Total	40,511	40,431	5,535	6,909	294	18,910	8,783	
2003	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	25,714	25,665	288	3,103	55	15,172	7,047
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	1,470	1,462	475	748	15	111	113
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cannabis and cannabis resin.	522	514	222	213	4	33	42
	Having possession of a controlled drug: MDMA.	2,009	2,001	81	569	7	1,023	321
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: MDMA.	746	743	461	212	7	24	39
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : MDMA.	219	218	127	62	4	10	15
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cocaine.	2,448	2,455	153	528	18	1,411	345
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cocaine.	687	682	564	63	11	19	25
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cocaine.	456	468	409	38	3	5	13
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Crack cocaine.	868	862	109	226	11	381	135
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Crack cocaine.	238	235	195	27	5	2	6

The number of defendants found guilty at all courts for possession of, and dealing in, certain drugs, by sentence, England and Wales 1997 to 2007^{1, 2, 3}

Period	Offence description	Found guilty	Total sentenced	Immediate custody	Community sentence ⁴	Drug treatment and testing order ⁵	Fine	Otherwise dealt with
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Crack cocaine.	227	211	180	8	13	2	8
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Heroin.	4,556	4,563	484	1,173	191	1,541	1,174
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Heroin.	1,100	1,121	884	142	50	12	33
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Heroin.	1,308	1,350	1,095	126	83	7	39
	Total	42,568	42,550	5,727	7,238	477	19,753	9,355
2004 ⁷	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	13,320	13,302	161	2,390	45	6,972	3,734
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	1247	1210	420	604	8	79	99
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cannabis and cannabis resin.	456	444	156	204	5	43	36
	Having possession of a controlled drug: MDMA.	1,853	1,849	60	598	7	840	344
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: MDMA.	603	603	394	166	10	10	23
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : MDMA.	172	165	100	54	2	5	4
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cocaine.	2,740	2,737	132	571	35	1,516	483
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cocaine.	792	796	658	92	12	14	20
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cocaine.	446	442	371	49	13	3	6
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Crack cocaine.	862	846	79	202	39	328	198
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Crack cocaine.	247	232	190	31	7	3	1
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Crack cocaine.	266	239	196	25	8	—	10
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Heroin.	4,256	4,258	428	1,113	238	1,405	1,074
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Heroin.	1,175	1,145	913	125	64	3	40
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Heroin.	1,415	1,409	1,164	121	94	7	23
	Total	29,850	29,677	5,422	6,345	587	11,228	6,095
2005	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	12,095	12,050	136	2415	17	6316	3166
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	993	950	272	513	13	62	90
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cannabis and cannabis resin.	393	367	135	153	6	25	48
	Having possession of a controlled drug: MDMA.	1,677	1,672	61	513	18	761	319
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: MDMA.	557	551	342	156	9	8	36
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : MDMA.	187	172	91	50	9	7	15
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cocaine.	3,183	3,161	154	727	43	1,731	506

The number of defendants found guilty at all courts for possession of, and dealing in, certain drugs, by sentence, England and Wales 1997 to 2007^{1, 2, 3}

Period	Offence description	Found guilty	Total sentenced	Immediate custody	Community sentence ⁴	Drug treatment and testing order ⁵	Fine	Otherwise dealt with
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cocaine.	956	930	748	104	25	14	39
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cocaine.	490	451	316	62	32	14	27
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Crack cocaine.	925	921	107	228	34	386	166
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Crack cocaine.	318	303	246	22	14	7	14
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Crack cocaine.	276	265	198	30	27	1	9
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Heroin.	3,955	3,943	384	1,026	215	1,230	1,088
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Heroin.	1,123	1,118	848	146	79	5	40
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Heroin.	1,305	1,252	902	156	145	5	44
	Total	28,433	28,106	4,940	6,301	686	10,572	5,607
2006	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	12,536	12,452	141	2526	1	6368	3416
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	957	884	240	378	—	29	237
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cannabis and cannabis resin.	385	352	101	118	—	21	112
	Having possession of a controlled drug: MDMA.	1,539	1,524	62	478	—	672	312
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: MDMA.	434	419	256	77	1	10	75
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : MDMA.	169	164	81	45	1	14	23
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cocaine.	4,001	3,981	187	981	3	2,055	755
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cocaine.	1,006	986	774	92	2	9	109
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cocaine.	502	502	358	65	4	12	63
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Crack cocaine.	975	973	86	290	2	392	203
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Crack cocaine.	300	298	231	44	1	3	19
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Crack cocaine.	278	272	202	37	—	4	29
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Heroin.	3,961	3,939	370	1,200	8	1,159	1,202
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Heroin.	1,103	1,101	847	150	5	8	91
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Heroin.	1,181	1,166	810	192	18	—	146
	Total	29,327	29,013	4,746	6,673	46	10,756	6,792
2007	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	14,073	14,004	162	3,009	—	6,839	3,994
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cannabis and cannabis resin.	958	910	232	340	—	32	306
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cannabis and cannabis resin.	367	354	101	120	—	29	104

The number of defendants found guilty at all courts for possession of, and dealing in, certain drugs, by sentence, England and Wales 1997 to 2007^{1, 2, 3}

Period	Offence description	Found guilty	Total sentenced	Immediate custody	Community sentence ⁴	Drug treatment and testing order ⁵	Fine	Otherwise dealt with
	Having possession of a controlled drug: MDMA.	1,590	1,571	70	505	—	618	378
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: MDMA.	513	509	276	87	—	7	139
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : MDMA.	169	158	73	34	—	2	49
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Cocaine.	4,901	4,882	213	1,350	—	2,307	1,012
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Cocaine.	1,171	1,165	837	119	—	19	190
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Cocaine.	542	526	353	70	—	6	97
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Crack cocaine.	1,236	1,211	106	368	—	409	328
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Crack cocaine.	369	364	276	45	1	3	39
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Crack cocaine.	255	261	206	28	—	1	26
	Having possession of a controlled drug: Heroin.	4,664	4,628	416	1,428	1	1,335	1,448
	Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply: Heroin.	1,144	1,138	877	136	3	6	116
	Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug, (or being concerned in) : Heroin.	1,178	1,159	829	149	—	4	177
	Total	33,130	32,840	5,027	7,788	5	11,617	8,403

¹ These data are on the principal offence basis

² Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

³ The 'total sentenced' column may exceed the 'found guilty' column, as it may be the case that a defendant was found guilty in one year and sentenced in the following year.

⁴ Excludes Drug Treatment and Testing Order which is given separately.

⁵ Following a pilot study, rolled out across England and Wales from October 2000.

⁶ Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

⁷ Cannabis was re-classified to a class C drug in January 2004. Re-classification to class B was made in January 2009.

n/a not available.

Source:

Office for Criminal Justice Reform - Evidence and Analysis Unit

Prisoners: Food

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much was allocated for prison food on average per prisoner per day in the last 12 months. [296225]

Maria Eagle: For the current financial year the National Offender Management Service introduced a benchmark of £2.10 food costs per prisoner per day. Many establishments already operate below this level and provide acceptable meals. Those operating above the benchmark are working towards reducing their costs with appropriate support.

Evidence and experience has proven that acceptable healthy meals can be provided in prisons within this level of funding by carefully managing menu content and using key messages from the Department of Health about promoting a healthy diet.

The average public sector Prison Service daily food cost per prisoner includes all food and beverage requirements. Prisons provide breakfast, midday and evening meal and a supper snack together with all condiments and beverages.

Menu requirements vary between establishments and are based on the prisoner population, local regimes and seasonal availability.

Prisoners: Suicide

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what mechanism is in place to assess the compliance of prison establishments with suicide watch monitoring standards. [295478]

Claire Ward: The National Offender Management Service's (NOMS') Standards Audit provides assurance to the Director General and senior managers on the management of risk throughout the service. This is done through objective measurement of performance against standards in establishments and courts. This process supports continuous improvement and informs the issue and review of standards, the dissemination of good practice and implementation of policy.

The standards which establishments are required to meet are specified in Performance Standard 60, Suicide and Self Harm Reduction. Auditing of establishments'

performance against Standard 60 is carried out independently by NOMS' Standards Audit.

NOMS has a broad, integrated and evidence-based prisoner suicide prevention and self-harm management strategy that seeks to reduce the distress of all those in prison. This requires proactively identifying prisoners at risk of suicide and self-harm. At-risk prisoners are cared for using Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) procedures.

Prisons: Mother and baby units

Chris Huhne: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many children born in custody were subsequently taken away from their mothers while in custody in each of the last 10 years. [295826]

Maria Eagle: Figures on the number of children born and subsequently separated from their mother while in custody are not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mothers who have their children with them in custody will be located in a Mother and Baby Unit (MBU). Babies can remain with their mothers on an MBU up to the age of 18 months, and a condition of admission to an MBU is that a separation plan is agreed between the mother and the care team. The child will leave the MBU when it is considered to be in their best interest. Ideally the process of separation will be voluntary, gradually staged and, wherever possible, conducted over a period of time known and clearly understood by all parties involved. The desirable scenario is that a mother and child will leave an MBU together when the mother is released from prison.

Not all mothers who give birth in custody keep their children with them. This may be because Social Services have made the decision in the child's best interests that mother and child should be separated at birth, or because the mother has decided that the child should be cared for by a relative or friend. It may also be because the mother has been refused a place on an MBU, and if this is the case the application process will have involved Social Services and liaison will be maintained with them and the family in determining the future care of the child.

Remand in Custody

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many people were remanded in custody in each of the last five years. [295681]

(2) how many people have been given bail by the courts in each year since 2006. [295705]

(3) what proportion of requests for remand made by the Crown Prosecution Service were granted by the courts in the latest period for which figures are available. [295757]

Claire Ward: The estimated number of persons remanded in custody at all courts in England and Wales in each year throughout the period 2003-07 (latest available) is shown in the table following table.

The estimated number of persons granted bail by all magistrates' courts and the Crown court in England and Wales during 2006 and 2007 (latest available) was and 493,800 and 485,200 respectively.

During 2007, an estimated four percent of all defendants proceeded against at magistrates' courts and the Crown Court were remanded in custody at some point during proceedings. Remands data held on the Office for Criminal Justice Reform Court Proceedings Database do not include information on the reasons for remanding a defendant in custody and do not identify the entity responsible for bringing the prosecution.

These figures are taken from data on the use of court bail and remand presented in Chapter 4 of the publication *Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 2003 to 2007* and include those also held in custody for some but not the whole period of the proceedings. Data for 2008 are planned for publication at the end of January 2010.

The estimated numbers¹ of persons remanded in custody at magistrates' courts or the Crown Court², England and Wales, 2003-07

	Thousand				
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Number of persons remanded in custody ³	106.7	907	82.2	76.7	74.5

¹ Includes estimates for those offences omitted from data supplied.

² Crown Court cases are not necessarily concluded in the same year as the committal therefore the figures presented may include cases where defendants were remanded in custody during earlier years than under which they are presented in this table.

³ Includes those remanded for part of the time in custody and part on bail.

Notes:

1. Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

2: For Magistrates' courts cases, the number of remands and more importantly, the number which are in custody, are believed to be under-recorded in total. The extent of under-recording is not known, as only limited checks are available with independently collected data. However, it is clear that the breakdown of remands into bail and custody cases is not accurate for a number of forces. The accuracy of data about Crown Court remand decisions has improved as a result of data being returned directly from the Crown Court computer system.

Source:

OCJR Court proceedings Database.

Trafigura: Injunctions

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the Prime Minister's Answer of 14 October 2009, *Official Report*, column 204, what steps he plans to take to assess the implications of the injunction obtained in the High Court by Trafigura in the case listed as (1) RJW (2) SJW-and-(1) The Guardian (2) Persons unknown for (a) parliamentary privilege, (b) investigative reporting and (c) legislative safeguards for whistleblowers. [294858]

Mr. Straw: I have asked senior officials at the Ministry of Justice to meet representatives of the national press and to consult the judiciary to assess the situation. I will then consider the situation in the light of these discussions and will make a statement in due course.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Construction: Procurement

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many contracts for construction works his Department has put out to tender and then withdrawn in each of the last three years. [292974]

Mr. McFadden: This Department and its predecessors have not withdrawn any contracts for construction works put out to tender during the period covered by the question.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Philip Davies: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how much it cost to establish his Department following the machinery of government changes in June 2009. [296338]

Mr. McFadden: The costs of the merger to date are £160,000, primarily on changes to accommodation and building signage, offset by savings from removing duplication.

Higher Education: Admissions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many people aged (a) 21 years and under and (b) over 21 years old in each socio-economic group resident in (i) Twickenham constituency, (ii) Richmond-upon-Thames, (iii) London and (iv) England attended university in each of the last five years. [294755]

Mr. Lammy: The latest available information from the Higher Education Statistics Agency is shown in tables 1 to 4. The figures are for full-time undergraduate entrants as socio-economic class information is not available for part-time higher education students.

Figures for the 2008/09 academic year will be available from the Higher Education Statistics Agency in January 2010.

Table 1: Full-time undergraduate entrants¹ from Twickenham parliamentary constituency by age and socio-economic classification², UK higher education institutions, academic years 2003/04 to 2007/08

Socio-economic classification	2003/04		2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		2007/08	
	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21
Higher managerial and professional occupation	170	10	205	10	185	5	185	5	205	5
Lower managerial and professional occupations	155	20	205	20	200	10	195	15	230	15
Intermediate occupations	90	10	80	10	85	10	85	10	95	15
Small employers and own account workers	25	0	40	0	35	5	30	0	40	5
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	10	0	20	0	15	0	10	0	20	0
Semi-routine occupations	35	10	40	10	45	10	35	15	55	5
Routine occupations	10	0	10	5	15	5	10	5	10	5
Never worked and long-term unemployed ³	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	495	50	600	55	585	45	550	55	655	50
Missing ⁴	110	90	120	80	200	85	170	80	150	115

¹ The table does not include entrants where the constituency of the student cannot be established due to missing or invalid home postcodes.

² This field collects the socio-economic classification of students participating in HE if 21 or over at the start of their course or parental classification if under 21.

³ Information is not comprehensively collected on the "Never worked and long-term unemployed" category for students: Students who fit this group are usually classed as having missing information.

⁴ Covers students whose socio-economic classification was missing or not classified: not classified includes occupations which were inadequately described, not classifiable or unstated.

Note:

Figures are based on a HESA standard registration population and have been rounded up or down to the nearest five, therefore components may not sum totals.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

Table 2: Full-time undergraduate entrants¹ from Richmond Upon Thames local authority area by age and socio-economic classification², UK higher education institutions, academic years 2003/04 to 2007/08

Socio-economic classification	2003/04		2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		2007/08	
	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21
Higher managerial and professional occupation	320	10	350	15	325	15	320	10	370	15

Table 2: Full-time undergraduate entrants¹ from Richmond Upon Thames local authority area by age and socio-economic classification², UK higher education institutions, academic years 2003/04 to 2007/08

	2003/04		2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		2007/08	
Lower managerial and professional occupations	285	40	335	35	330	20	325	25	370	30
Intermediate occupations	140	15	130	20	130	20	130	15	140	25
Small employers and own account workers	50	5	55	0	55	5	45	5	60	10
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	20	0	25	0	20	0	15	0	25	0
Semi-routine occupations	55	15	55	15	70	15	50	20	90	25
Routine occupations	20	5	15	5	25	10	15	10	20	5
Never worked and long-term unemployed ³	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	885	95	960	90	955	85	905	90	1,070	100
Missing ⁴	185	155	205	165	310	150	260	150	230	200

¹ The table does not include entrants where the constituency of the student cannot be established due to missing or invalid home postcodes.

² This field collects the socio-economic classification of students participating in HE if 21 or over at the start of their course or parental classification if under 21.

³ Information is not comprehensively collected on the "Never worked and long-term unemployed" category for students: Students who fit this group are usually classed as having missing information.

⁴ Covers students whose socio-economic classification was missing or not classified: not classified includes occupations which were inadequately described, not classifiable or unstated.

Note:

Figures are based on a HESA standard registration population and have been rounded up or down to the nearest five, therefore components may not sum totals.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

Table 3: Full-time undergraduate entrants¹ domiciled in Greater London by age and socio-economic classification², UK higher education institutions, academic years 2003/04 to 2007/08

	2003/04		2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		2007/08	
	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21
Socio-economic classification										
Higher managerial and professional occupation	6,595	450	10,125	335	10,140	370	9,690	275	10,695	345
Lower managerial and professional occupations	8,520	1,350	10,750	925	10,780	910	10,155	775	10,730	865
Intermediate occupations	4,550	1,130	4,520	745	4,595	800	4,200	635	4,475	750
Small employers and own account workers	2,265	225	2,075	150	2,095	165	2,095	165	2,250	205
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	1,215	95	1,395	110	1,545	95	1,505	105	1,490	100
Semi-routine occupations	3,850	1,230	2,730	795	3,035	910	2,885	815	3,200	1,035
Routine occupations	1,325	270	945	190	1,095	225	1,140	255	1,165	270
Never worked and long-term unemployed ³	10	10	20	5	15	10	10	10	25	10
Total	28,335	4,760	32,560	3,255	33,310	3,485	31,680	3,040	34,035	3,575
Missing ⁴	12,145	11,420	7,560	6,330	9,980	6,090	8,495	6,235	8,735	6,185

¹ The table does not include entrants where the constituency of the student cannot be established due to missing or invalid home postcodes.

² This field collects the socio-economic classification of students participating in HE if 21 or over at the start of their course or parental classification if under 21.

³ Information is not comprehensively collected on the "Never worked and long-term unemployed" category for students: Students who fit this group are usually classed as having missing information.

⁴ Covers students whose socio-economic classification was missing or not classified: not classified includes occupations which were inadequately described, not classifiable or unstated.

Note:

Figures are based on a HESA standard registration population and have been rounded up or down to the nearest five, therefore components may not sum totals.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

Table 4: Full-time undergraduate entrants¹ domiciled in England by age and socio-economic classification², UK higher education institutions, academic years 2003/04 to 2007/08

Socio-economic classification	2003/04		2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		2007/08	
	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21	21 and under	Over 21
Higher managerial and professional occupation	45,215	1,905	45,400	1,725	45,735	1,955	44,625	1,635	48,435	1,790
Lower managerial and professional occupations	57,135	5,800	58,895	5,640	60,395	6,400	57,855	5,265	60,635	5,660
Intermediate occupations	24,715	5,395	25,370	4,990	26,295	5,520	24,885	4,385	26,285	5,105
Small employers and own account workers	13,185	1,045	13,425	895	13,965	1,155	14,260	890	14,870	1,090
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	9,355	600	9,000	575	9,630	750	9,310	560	9,605	725
Semi-routine occupations	20,210	5,470	20,260	5,260	22,505	6,155	22,085	5,585	24,065	6,845
Routine occupations	9,270	1,700	9,165	1,515	9,975	1,865	10,340	1,820	10,840	2,175
Never worked and long-term unemployed ³	120	35	110	30	165	100	155	60	635	350
Total	179,210	21,945	181,630	20,625	188,665	23,895	183,515	20,200	195,370	23,740
Missing ⁴	54,980	46,725	56,710	47,855	66,745	46,515	60,780	44,570	62,010	45,630

¹ The table does not include entrants where the constituency of the student cannot be established due to missing or invalid home postcodes.

² This field collects the socio-economic classification of students participating in HE if 21 or over at the start of their course or parental classification if under 21.

³ Information is not comprehensively collected on the "Never worked and long-term unemployed" category for students: Students who fit this group are usually classed as having missing information.

⁴ Covers students whose socio-economic classification was missing or not classified: not classified includes occupations which were inadequately described, not classifiable or unstated.

Note:

Figures are based on a HESA standard registration population and have been rounded up or down to the nearest five, therefore components may not sum totals.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

Higher Education: East of England

Mr. Spring: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many people aged (a) 21 years and under and (b) over 21 years old in each socio-economic group resident in (i) West Suffolk constituency, (ii) Suffolk and (iii) the East of England attended university in each of the last five years. [296062]

Mr. Lammy: The latest available information from the Higher Education Statistics Agency is shown in

Tables 1 to 3. The figures are shown for full-time undergraduate entrants as socio-economic class (SEC) information is not available for part-time higher education students. Figures are provided for entrants aged under 21, and 21 and over as the socio-economic class data have a different basis for these two distinct age groups. Socio-economic class is based on occupation information: those aged under 21 provide their parent's occupation, and those aged 21 and over provide their own occupation.

Figures for the 2008-09 academic year will be available from the Higher Education Statistics Agency in January 2010.

Table 1: Full-time undergraduate entrants from West Suffolk parliamentary constituency¹—UK higher education institutions²: Academic years 2003-04 to 2007-08

Socio economic classification	2003-04		2004-05		2005-06		2006-07		2007-08	
	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over
Higher managerial and professional occupations	55	5	50	5	50	0	55	5	55	0
Lower managerial and professional occupations	55	5	80	5	70	5	85	0	100	15
Intermediate occupations	30	5	25	5	35	5	30	5	45	10
Small employers and own account workers	10	0	20	0	30	0	20	0	20	0
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	10	0	15	0	15	0	20	0	20	0

Table 1: Full-time undergraduate entrants from West Suffolk parliamentary constituency¹—UK higher education institutions²: Academic years 2003-04 to 2007-08

Socio economic classification	2003-04		2004-05		2005-06		2006-07		2007-08	
	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over
Semi-routine occupations	20	5	30	5	30	10	30	5	35	5
Routine occupations	5	0	15	5	15	0	15	0	20	10
Missing ³	60	40	50	55	65	55	70	35	85	30

¹ The table does not include entrants whose constituency cannot be established due to missing or invalid home postcodes.

² Excludes the Open University due to inconsistencies in their coding of entrants across the time series.

³ Includes those classified as "Never worked and long-term unemployed", "Not classified" and "Missing".

Note:

Figures are based on a HESA standard registration population and have been rounded to the nearest five.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

Table 2: Full-time undergraduate entrants from Suffolk local authority¹—UK higher education institutions²: Academic years 2003-04 to 2007-08

Socioeconomic classification	2003-04		2004-05		2005-06		2006-07		2007-08	
	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over
Higher managerial and professional occupations	530	20	515	25	565	20	550	20	665	25
Lower managerial and professional occupations	645	45	725	35	745	40	740	35	855	100
Intermediate occupations	245	35	265	30	285	35	255	30	340	70
Small employers and own account workers	140	10	160	10	170	15	190	10	200	20
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	105	5	105	10	115	5	95	5	165	20
Semi-routine occupations	165	30	185	30	195	45	205	45	275	80
Routine occupations	90	15	120	10	90	20	105	15	170	55
Missing ³	430	315	420	330	570	285	480	285	655	375

¹ The table does not include entrants whose local authority cannot be established due to missing or invalid home postcodes.

² Excludes the Open University due to inconsistencies in their coding of entrants across the time series.

³ Includes those classified as "Never worked and long-term unemployed", "Not classified" and "Missing".

Note:

Figures are based on a HESA standard registration population and have been rounded to the nearest five.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

Table 3: Full-time undergraduate entrants from East Government Office Region¹—UK higher education institutions²: Academic years 2003-04 to 2007-08

Socioeconomic classification	2003-04		2004-05		2005-06		2006-07		2007-08	
	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over	Under 21	21 and over
Higher managerial and professional occupations	4,230	225	5,375	265	5,470	275	5,230	245	6,040	165
Lower managerial and professional occupations	5,970	715	6,110	535	6,305	635	6,050	575	6,905	530
Intermediate occupations	2,195	575	2,510	480	2,735	500	2,515	400	2,850	400
Small employers and own account workers	1,370	135	1,360	105	1,460	120	1,425	105	1,615	95
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	1,115	90	885	85	925	75	930	70	1,090	60
Semi-routine occupations	2,280	745	1,700	440	1,905	595	1,845	500	2,165	575
Routine occupations	1,375	280	745	130	765	180	875	185	985	190
Missing ³	5,285	5,545	4,495	4,780	5,315	4,580	4,805	4,245	6,010	4,090

¹ The table does not include entrants whose Government office region cannot be established due to missing or invalid home postcodes.

² Excludes the Open University due to inconsistencies in their coding of entrants across the time series.

³ Includes those classified as "Never worked and long-term unemployed", "Not classified" and "Missing".

Note:

Figures are based on a HESA standard registration population and have been rounded to the nearest five.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

Higher Education: Student Numbers

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many of the 10,000 additional student places available in 2010-11 have (a) already been assigned to existing initiatives and (b) been reserved for (i) strategically important and (ii) vulnerable subjects. [296244]

Mr. Lammy: The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has allocated 7,604 (full-time equivalent) additional student numbers (ASN) for 2010-11 to institutions to support existing initiatives such as those supported by the Strategic Development Fund. This allocation protects and enhances existing projects already being funded by the council. The remainder are the subject of a bidding process. The priorities for these places are Strategic and Vulnerable Subjects, and Health. The balance between the two groups is not yet known.

Internet

Mr. MacNeil: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what estimate he has made of the proportion of internet users in each local authority area whose internet access is via (a) dial-up modem, (b) asymmetrical digital subscriber line and (c) cable in 2008-09. [293017]

Mr. Timms [holding answer 27 October 2009]: This Department has made no estimation of the proportion of internet users in each local authority area whose internet access is via (a) dial-up modem, (b) asymmetrical digital subscriber line and (c) cable in 2008-09. However, figures from Ofcom indicate that in Q1 2009, 70 per cent. of UK homes had connection to internet with 65 per cent. having fixed broadband connection. Cable connections constituted 21.5 per cent. of fixed broadband connections, with 5 per cent. of total internet connections being through dial-up modem, mobile broadband, satellite and ISDN lines.

National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills: Thurrock

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what progress has been made during the summer recess on securing the funding package for the National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills in Thurrock; and if he will make a statement. [295804]

Kevin Brennan: My officials have been working with officials from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) over the summer to secure a way forward for this and other National Skills Academy capital proposals. On 9 September, Geoff Russell, Acting Chief Executive of the LSC, wrote to all National Skills Academies, setting out a process for taking capital proposals forward. Since then, the NSA Creative and Cultural proposal was approved by the LSC Regional Committee on 14 October and is due to be assessed by the LSC's national Capital Committee on 2 November; if successful, it would then be able to proceed to implementation.

I and colleagues from the Department for Communities and Local Government believe that the NSA Creative and Cultural has a key role to play in the regeneration

of the Thames Gateway through transforming the delivery of skills to meet business needs in this important sector. It will play a valuable role in the development of technician skills in the Performing Arts in the run up to the 2012 Olympics and will provide a centre of excellence in these skills not available elsewhere.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on the funding provision for the National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills in Thurrock; and if he will make a statement. [295805]

Kevin Brennan: I can confirm that I had representations from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr. Malik) during the summer recess in relation to the National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural.

I and colleagues from the Department for Communities and Local Government believe that the NSA Creative and Cultural has a key role to play in the regeneration of the Thames Gateway through transforming the delivery of skills to meet business needs in this important sector. It will be playing a valuable role in the development of technician skills in the Performing Arts in the run up to the 2012 Olympics and will provide a centre of excellence in these skills not available elsewhere.

Party Conferences

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills whether any of his Department's non-departmental public bodies sent representatives to attend one or more political party conferences in 2009. [293484]

Mr. McFadden: The following non-departmental public bodies have sent representatives to the political party conferences listed in the following table:

<i>RDA</i>	<i>Liberal Democrat party conference 2009</i>	<i>Labour party conference 2009</i>	<i>Conservative party conference 2009</i>
Hearing Aid Council	Yes	Yes	Yes
Consumer Focus	Yes	Yes	Yes
Construction Industry Training Board	Yes	Yes	Yes
UK Commission for Employment and Skills	Yes	Yes	Yes
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council	Yes	Yes	Yes
Design Council	Yes	Yes	Yes
NESTA	Yes	Yes	Yes and also the SNP
East Midland Development Agency	Yes	Yes	Yes
North West Development Agency	Yes	Yes	Yes
South East England Development Agency	Yes	Yes	Yes
South West Regional Development Agency	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yorkshire Forward	Yes	Yes	Yes

Public Sector: Construction

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps his Department has taken to facilitate the tendering of public sector contracts for construction works. [292973]

Mr. McFadden: This Department sponsors Constructionline, which is a pre-qualification database of construction contractors to be used by public sector buyers when looking for potential tenderers for construction works. Further information on this can be found on our web site at:

www.constructionline.co.uk

Royal Mail: Industrial Disputes

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what estimate he has made of the cost to the economy of industrial action at Royal Mail in 2009 to date. [295883]

Mr. McFadden: It is clear that postal disruption will have an impact on those businesses and services that heavily rely on Royal Mail services.

We continue to maintain regular contact with both the management and the union about the dispute. Our message to them is that, in the interests of Royal Mail, the CWU's members and the country, they should sit down and resolve this dispute through talks.

Vetting

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills when he expects to publish regulations to outlaw blacklisting; if he will ensure that they (a) make it unlawful for companies to provide information to be used for the compilation of blacklists and (b) establish the right to damages for those named on any such lists; and if he will make a statement. [295707]

Mr. McFadden: The Government have received 52 responses to this summer's consultation on draft regulations. Many points for consideration were raised, but it firmly remains our intention to finalise the regulations as speedily as possible. The draft regulations published in the consultation already make it unlawful for a party to compile a list and they contain provisions for those suffering a loss to claim compensation for the damage inflicted.

HEALTH**Bolton and Wigan Primary Care Trust: Managers**

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department holds on the number of senior managers (a) employed by Bolton and Wigan primary care trust and (b) who were employed by Bolton and Wigan strategic health authority in its final year of existence. [295504]

Ann Keen: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Bolton Primary Care Trust: Public Relations

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the proportion of the management costs of Bolton Primary Care Trust spent on public relations activities in the latest period for which information is available. [295307]

Ann Keen: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Care Homes: Standards

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of care homes did not meet the National Minimum Standard for Care Homes in 2008-09. [295607]

Phil Hope: We are informed by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) that, when inspecting care homes against the National Minimum Standards (NMS), CQC rates their performance using a four point system:

- standard not met with major shortfalls
- standard not met with minor shortfalls
- standard met
- standard exceeded

The tables show ratings against the NMS by number and percentage of care homes for younger adults and older people for the year ending 31 March 2009—the latest year for which information is available.

Score against NMS for care homes for younger adults as at 31 March 2009

NMS		Standard not met with major shortfalls		Standard not met with minor shortfalls		Standard met		Standard exceeded	
		No. of services	% of all scores	No. of services	% of all scores	No. of services	% of all scores	No. of services	% of all scores
1	Information	94	1	1,301	19	5,172	75	375	5
2	Needs assessment	55	1	427	6	6,244	84	745	10
3	Meeting needs	117	2	556	9	5,301	84	349	6
4	Introductory visits	28	0	179	3	5,802	90	412	6
5	Contract	155	2	1,067	17	5,048	79	140	2
6	Service user plan	107	1	1,397	19	4,778	64	1,227	16
7	Decision making	35	0	542	7	5,881	78	1,047	14
8	Participation	52	1	486	8	5,235	83	554	9
9	Risk taking	81	1	962	13	5,691	76	769	10
10	Confidentiality	50	1	489	8	5,371	89	109	2

Score against NMS for care homes for younger adults as at 31 March 2009

NMS		Standard not met with major shortfalls		Standard not met with minor shortfalls		Standard met		Standard exceeded	
		No. of services	% of all scores	No. of services	% of all scores	No. of services	% of all scores	No. of services	% of all scores
11	Personal development	50	1	421	7	5,084	81	723	12
12	Education and occupation	35	0	467	6	5,669	76	1,332	18
13	Community links and social inclusion	26	0	404	5	5,915	79	1,158	15
14	Leisure	61	1	680	10	4,895	73	1,066	16
15	Relationships	4	0	133	2	6,547	87	816	11
16	Daily routines	26	0	351	5	6,095	81	1,021	14
17	Meals and mealtimes	25	0	462	6	6,200	83	809	11
18	Personal support	32	0	366	5	6,121	82	986	13
19	Healthcare	54	1	571	8	5,916	79	966	13
20	Medication	130	2	1,591	21	5,467	73	319	4
21	Ageing and death	70	1	628	11	4,664	83	261	5
22	Concerns and complaints	40	1	526	7	6,530	87	417	6
23	Protection	117	2	922	12	6,146	82	328	4
24	Premises	156	2	1,612	21	4,968	66	786	10
25	Space requirements	51	1	430	7	5,531	86	427	7
26	Furniture and fittings	74	1	806	12	5,193	80	399	6
27	Toilets and bathrooms	147	2	1,006	16	4,977	78	290	5
28	Shared space	59	1	679	11	5,267	82	397	6
29	Adaptations and equipment	77	1	592	10	5,050	85	220	4
30	Hygiene and control of infection	55	1	670	9	6,301	84	490	7
31	Roles	72	1	419	7	5,397	90	133	2
32	Qualities and qualifications	62	1	893	12	5,630	75	889	12
33	Staff team	181	3	1,333	20	4,845	72	346	5
34	Recruitment	193	3	1,102	15	5,814	78	344	5
35	Training and development	95	1	1,220	16	5,485	73	671	9
36	Supervision and support	143	2	1,148	17	5,047	76	324	5
37	Day to day operations	103	1	1,066	14	5,328	71	1,012	13
38	Ethos	93	1	430	7	4,933	80	747	12
39	Quality assurance	132	2	1,352	18	5,291	71	720	10
40	Policies and procedures	90	1	1,141	19	4,678	78	104	2
41	Record keeping	208	3	1,511	25	4,275	70	146	2
42	Safe working practices	129	2	1,428	19	5,617	75	335	4
43	Conduct of the service	171	3	917	16	4,533	79	93	2

Note:

Figures are based on the most recent score for each standard as at 31 March. The year shown is not necessarily the year of inspection - not every standard is inspected against every year and not every service is inspected annually.

Source:

CQC database

Score against NMS for care homes for older people as at 31 March 2009

NMS		Standard not met with major shortfalls		Standard not met with minor shortfalls		Standard met		Standard exceeded	
		No. of services	% of all scores	No. of services	% of all scores	No. of services	% of all scores	No. of services	% of all scores
1	Information	161	2	1,504	15	7,621	78	444	5
2	Contract	123	1	1,099	12	7,684	85	126	1
3	Needs assessment	112	1	871	8	8,667	84	728	7
4	Meeting needs	254	3	1,059	12	7,057	81	376	4
5	Trial visits	16	0	197	2	8,272	95	250	3

Score against NMS for care homes for older people as at 31 March 2009

NMS		Standard not met with major shortfalls		Standard not met with minor shortfalls		Standard met		Standard exceeded	
		No. of services	% of all scores	No. of services	% of all scores	No. of services	% of all scores	No. of services	% of all scores
6	Intermediate care	77	4	160	7	1,841	84	104	5
7	Service user plan	269	3	2,990	29	6,259	60	892	9
8	Healthcare	168	2	1,338	13	7,934	76	968	9
9	Medication	397	4	2,752	26	6,973	67	286	3
10	Privacy and dignity	85	1	762	7	8,568	82	988	9
11	Dying and death	58	1	826	10	6,941	83	489	6
12	Social contact and activities	171	2	1,906	18	6,585	63	1,749	17
13	Community contact	18	0	230	2	9,150	88	1,008	10
14	Autonomy and choice	64	1	685	7	8,751	84	899	9
15	Meals and mealtimes	73	1	1,039	10	7,818	75	1,481	14
16	Complaints	92	1	754	7	9,133	88	432	4
17	Rights	40	1	280	4	7,571	95	66	1
18	Protection	199	2	1,293	12	8,629	83	286	3
19	Premises	198	2	2,117	20	6,867	66	1,227	12
20	Shared facilities	107	1	984	11	7,205	80	689	8
21	Lavatories and washing facilities	223	2	1,623	18	6,715	75	410	5
22	Adaptations and equipment	192	2	1,632	18	6,737	76	293	3
23	Space requirements	48	1	569	7	7,573	88	450	5
24	Furniture and fittings	131	1	1,461	16	6,973	76	576	6
25	Heating and lighting	301	3	1,802	20	6,527	73	291	3
26	Hygiene and infection control	147	1	1,413	14	7,918	76	926	9
27	Staff complement	208	2	1,412	14	8,228	79	558	5
28	Qualifications	102	1	1,154	11	7,660	74	1,453	14
29	Recruitment	359	3	1,779	17	7,903	76	356	3
30	Staff training	183	2	1,782	17	7,507	72	928	9
31	Day to day operations	221	2	1,521	15	7,252	70	1,403	13
32	Ethos	199	2	822	9	6,691	76	1,037	12
33	Quality assurance	243	2	1,808	17	7,375	71	965	9
34	Financial procedures	164	2	697	9	6,795	88	76	1
35	Service user money	57	1	535	5	9,442	92	214	2
36	Staff supervision	438	5	2,297	25	6,403	69	207	2
37	Record keeping	415	5	2,494	29	5,617	65	158	2
38	Safe working practices	272	3	2,214	21	7,460	72	462	4

Note:

Figures are based on the most recent score for each standard as at 31 March. The year shown is not necessarily the year of inspection - not every standard is inspected against every year and not every service is inspected annually.

Source:

CQC database

Dental Services: York

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent in (a) cash and (b) real terms on NHS general dental services in York in each year since 1996-97. [295227]

Ann Keen: Information is not available in the format requested.

Since 2006-07, data on primary dental care expenditure can be derived from primary care trust (PCT) accounts. Expenditure on primary dental care services in the North Yorkshire and York PCT in the last three years is

shown in the following table. The PCT's accounts do not separately distinguish between expenditure in North Yorkshire, and York City.

Financial year	Expenditure type	Gross expenditure (£000)	Dental charges paid by patients (£000)	Net expenditure (£000)
2006-07	Actual	32,165	8,875	23,290
	At 2008-09 prices	33,906	9,355	24,551
2007-08	actual	32,089	8,879	23,210

Financial year	Expenditure type	Gross expenditure (£000)	Dental charges paid by patients (£000)	Net expenditure (£000)
	At 2008-09 prices	32,876	9,097	23,779
2008-09	Actual	39,241	10,358	28,883

Notes:

1. As the data reflect the contract framework for primary dental care services introduced from 1 April 2006, it includes all relevant service costs, and is based on the PCT areas introduced from 1 October 2006, it is not directly comparable with the available pre-2006 data.

2. Actual expenditure figures have been converted into 2008-09 prices using the gross domestic product deflator index as at 29 September 2009.

Source:

Calculated from details of gross primary dental care expenditure, and income from dental charges, recorded in the notes to the PCT's accounts.

Prior to April 2006, most primary dental services were provided under former general dental service (GDS) arrangements. These were demand-led services where the pattern of dental expenditure was largely determined by where dentists chose to practice and how much national health service work they chose to undertake.

The Information Centre for health and social care holds local-level information on the expenditure for NHS primary dental care under the former GDS and personal dental service arrangements. The Information Centre for health and social care published the following report on 26 March 2008: 'NHS Expenditure for General Dental Services and Personal Dental Services: England 1997/98 - 2005/06'. This report has already been placed in the Library and is also available on the Information Centre website at:

www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/dentalexpend1997to2006

The report includes information on primary dental care expenditure in cash terms by parliamentary constituency for 1997-98 to 2005-06 in Tables A3 and B3 of Annex 3. Further notes to aid interpretation of the information are shown in the 'Contents and Notes' page of Annex 3.

Departmental Postal Services

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which companies are under contract to his Department to provide mail services; and when each such contract expires. [296087]

Phil Hope: The Department uses a number of companies for different mail delivery services.

External mail is collected and delivered by Royal Mail. This is an on-going rolling arrangement.

For urgent deliveries of documents and for deliveries between buildings alternative suppliers are used. These are:

Urgent motorcycle or van deliveries by Point to Point under contract to April 2011;

and

Inter-Office deliveries by arrangement with Government mail services operated by Government Car and Despatch Agency, a part of Department for Transport. This is subject to an annual service level agreement renewable each October.

Departmental Telephone Services

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consider the merits of securing accreditation of his Department's helplines to the Helplines Association's quality standard; and if he will make a statement. [295723]

Phil Hope: The Department's Communications Directorate 0800 helpline numbers are accredited, when it is considered appropriate, with The Helplines Association via the Central Office of Information who manage them on our behalf.

Information on any other telephone services that may be run on behalf of the Department is not held centrally and cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

East of England Strategic Health Authority: Finance

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost of running the East of England Strategic Health Authority was in each year for which figures are available. [296162]

Phil Hope: Figures published in the East of England Strategic Health Authority's (SHA's) annual reports show the following total management costs:

	£ million
2005-06	15.719
2006-07	30.577
2007-08	12.373
2008-09	13.636

It should be noted that the 2005-06 figures are the combined management costs of three distinct SHAs—(i) Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, (ii) Essex, and (iii) Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, which officially merged to form the East of England SHA in July 2006. The 2006-07 management costs reflect non-recurring costs involved in the merger of the three existing SHAs into a unitary body in July 2006.

General Practitioners: Leeds

John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners were providing NHS services in Leeds West constituency on the latest date for which figures are available. [295345]

Ann Keen: The information is not available in the format requested. The following table shows the number of general practitioners (GPs) excluding retainers and registrars for Leeds Primary Care Trust (PCT) as at 30 September 2008.

	Number of GPs
Leeds PCT	518

Notes:

1. Figures are not available at constituency level. Leeds West is contained within and served by Leeds PCT.

2. Data include all GPs who were attached to an active GP Practice on 30 September 2008. The annual GP census does not contain data on NHS walk-in centres, asylum seeker and refugee health centres or homeless shelters, where GPs may also be practising on a part-time or locum basis.

3. GP Locums are not included in the data.

4. Work force statistics are compiled from data sent by more than 300 national health service trusts and PCTs in England. The Information Centre for health and social care liaises closely with these organisations to encourage submission of complete and valid data and seeks to minimise inaccuracies and the effect of missing and invalid data. Processing methods and procedures are continually being updated to improve data quality. Where this happens any impact on figures already published will be assessed but unless this is significant at national level they will not be changed. Where there is impact only at detailed or local level this will be footnoted in relevant analyses.

Source:

The Information Centre for health and social care—general and personal medical services statistics

Health Services: York

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many finished consultant episodes there have been (a) in total and (b) in each speciality at York Hospitals NHS Trust in each year since 1996-97.

[295231]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Count of finished consultant episodes there have been in total and in each main speciality at York Hospitals NHS Trust (RCB) from 1996-97 to 2007-09 activity in English national health service hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector

<i>Main speciality description</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2006-07</i>	<i>2005-06</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2003-04</i>	<i>2002-03</i>	<i>2001-02</i>	<i>2000-01</i>	<i>1999-2000</i>	<i>1998-99</i>	<i>1997-98</i>	<i>1996-97</i>
Total	78,310	80,936	81,586	75,531	69,699	64,015	63,032	61,827	61,758	64,367	60,536	60,404
General surgery	9,880	10,102	9,512	8,972	8,727	8,034	7,440	7,493	7,620	7,618	6,929	7,290
Urology	6,155	6,434	6,244	5,326	5,345	4,817	4,719	4,860	4,432	4,441	4,319	4,390
Trauma and Orthopaedics	4,277	4,887	5,371	5,548	5,566	5,158	4,649	4,660	4,468	4,560	4,274	4,375
Ear Nose and Throat (ENT)	2,039	2,111	2,181	2,075	2,041	2,050	2,301	2,193	2,166	2,134	1,833	2,211
Ophthalmology	3,290	3,258	3,509	3,134	2,534	2,290	2,272	2,253	2,288	2,175	1,885	1,923
Oral surgery	1,702	1,756	1,574	1,491	1,409	1,354	1,223	1,244	1,368	1,351	1,268	1,215
Restorative Dentistry	—	—	—	—	—	—	339	336	333	364	397	422
Plastic surgery	—	—	—	—	—	*	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cardiothoracic Surgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*	—	—
Accident and Emergency	1,568	1,546	1,693	356	7	29	*	—	134	460	731	1,361
Anaesthetics	1,946	2,043	2,018	1,900	1,879	1,882	1,918	1,906	2,292	2,469	2,345	1,174
General Medicine	17,656	19,276	20,389	18,003	16,536	15,561	14,076	12,888	12,002	11,592	10,961	10,604
Haematology (clinical)	917	1,650	1,206	991	684	667	824	938	1,391	1,310	1,043	814
Dermatology	29	*	*	49	62	75	103	127	148	170	113	132
Genito-urinary medicine	—	—	—	—	*	—	—	—	—	—	*	—
Medical oncology	459	221	225	166	165	190	269	348	126	*	*	—
Neurology	409	453	468	508	670	520	510	429	397	404	409	441
Clinical Neurophysiology	—	*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rheumatology	828	753	568	233	256	172	184	190	265	318	351	290
Paediatrics	7,075	7,080	4,835	4,898	4,651	4,124	4,158	3,908	4,168	3,741	3,321	3,291
Geriatric medicine	10,089	9,501	9,193	9,316	7,756	6,160	5,448	5,216	5,021	5,254	4,561	4,311
Obstetrics	4,265	4,055	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gynaecology	3,295	3,384	9,199	10,664	9,738	9,310	9,463	9,312	9,306	13,257	13,471	13,572
Midwife episode	1,996	1,855	2,998	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
General Medical Practice	—	—	—	1,687	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
General practice with maternity function ¹	—	—	—	—	1,631	1,581	1,359	1,648	1,737	493	125	201
General Practice other than maternity ¹	—	—	—	—	—	—	370	411	437	480	522	519

Count of finished consultant episodes there have been in total and in each main speciality at York Hospitals NHS Trust (RCB) from 1996-97 to 2007-09 activity in English national health service hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector

Main speciality description	2007-08	2006-07	2005-06	2004-05	2003-04	2002-03	2001-02	2000-01	1999-2000	1998-99	1997-98	1996-97
Mental Handicap	—	—	—	—	—	—	*	35	*	38	42	76
Mental Illness	—	—	—	—	—	—	614	686	694	904	874	993
Child and Adolescent Psychiatry	—	—	—	—	—	—	53	50	48	42	44	53
Old Age Psychiatry	—	—	—	—	—	—	612	616	685	663	643	677
Clinical oncology (previously Radiotherapy)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Radiology	—	*	*	—	*	*	—	—	*	*	—	—
Chemical Pathology	435	544	376	214	40	38	80	80	190	121	72	*
Histopathology	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*	—	—	—

¹ These fields were only available up to 2003-04.

Note:

To protect patient confidentiality, figures between one and five have been suppressed and replaced with “*” (an asterisk). Where it was possible to identify numbers from the total due to a single suppressed number in a row or column, an additional number (the next smallest) has been suppressed.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), The NHS Information Centre for health and social care.

Hospitals: Food

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what surveys of patient satisfaction with hospital food the NHS has undertaken in the last 12 months; [295301]

(2) what recent progress his Department has made in improving the quality of food served in NHS hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [295302]

Ann Keen: National health service acute trusts have undertaken the Care Quality Commission’s annual in-patient survey of patients (2008), which includes questions relating to; patients’ rating of the food, whether they were offered a choice and whether they received help to eat meals. The most recent survey (2008 national adult inpatients survey [published May 2009]) results show a positive improvement in patient satisfaction with hospital food, i.e. a two-percentage point increase in food rated “very good”, and a fall in the number who rate the food as “poor”. Also, it shows a three-percentage point increase in patients stating that they always received “enough help from staff to eat meals”. The Care Quality Commission’s mental health acute inpatient service users’ survey (2009), also asks respondents how they rate the hospital food.

The importance of good quality food for patients is recognised, both in terms of improving their health and in relation to their overall experience of services.

The Better Hospital Food programme focused on ensuring the consistent delivery of high quality food and food services to patients and its key outputs include; best practice guidance and detailed information to support the delivery of food in the NHS. Although the Better Hospital Food programme has now closed, the resource is still available via the Hospital Caterers’ Association website:

www.hospitalcaterers.org

The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA), is also working with stakeholders in the development of a toolkit to assist NHS organisations in the implementation

of the “10 Key Characteristics of Good Nutritional Care”. The factsheets support good nutritional care and were published by the NPSA earlier this year.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was allocated in NHS hospitals for food on average per in-patient per day in the last 12 months. [296226]

Mr. Mike O’Brien: There is no national health service daily allocation as such so this information is not collected in the precise format requested. However, information provided to the Department shows that in 2008-09 the average cost of feeding one patient per day was £7.53.

This cost relates to the average daily cost for the provision of all meals and beverages fed to one patient per day, across all NHS trusts in England. The cost should include all pay and non-pay costs, including provisions, ward issues, disposables, equipment and its maintenance.

The information has been supplied by the NHS and has not been amended centrally. The accuracy and completeness of the information is the responsibility of the provider organisation.

Kidney Patients: Dialysis Machines

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a system to ensure that NHS patients requiring kidney dialysis may receive dialysis through the NHS while staying temporarily outside their primary health care area in the UK without additional charge. [295163]

Ann Keen: The National Service Framework for Renal Services emphasised that for reasons such as work, education, holidays and family visits, it is important that patients can dialyse away from home. We are working with specialised renal commissioners to identify ways in which we can improve the availability of dialysis for patients away from home.

The introduction of a standard tariff for dialysis, initially on a non-mandatory basis, will help to reduce the variations in the charges for people who wish to dialyse away from home.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any NHS counselling services have been discontinued as a result of the implementation of his Department's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Programme. [296286]

Phil Hope: Primary care trust (PCT) commissioners are responsible for assessing local need and deciding the types and amounts of various national health service psychological therapy services required in their area.

However, the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) Programme envisages a long term need for counselling services and has, therefore, not issued guidance encouraging decommissioning of counselling services or recommending that counsellors should retrain.

The funding committed for IAPT services by the Government, is in addition to those counselling and talking therapy services locally funded and delivered. Some PCTs have moved to invest further in IAPT services and to use IAPT as a method of broadening the range of therapies offered to local people.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to increase access to NHS counselling services during the economic downturn. [296287]

Phil Hope: In March 2009 a package of measures to help people who are experiencing emotional problems linked to employment or debt issues linked to the downturn was announced by the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Specifically the aim was to help people overcome the negative psychological impact of job loss or debt, so that they can better tackle their financial issues. The package also included greater provision of talking therapies and a new network of employment support workers.

Investment of an extra £13 million has been made available to fund:

a faster roll out of talking therapy services around the country throughout 2009 with services beginning to be available in every area by 2010;

employment support workers linked to every talking therapy services, providing job support for people with common mental health problems to help people back to work;

health advisers on a dedicated NHS Direct phone line being trained to spot people who might be experiencing depression because of economic problems and refer them to help; and

better online advice and information about the availability of services near to people's homes through NHS Choices.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what timescale his Department proposes for the introduction of statutory regulation of counsellors and psychotherapists. [296288]

Ann Keen: The Health Professions Council (HPC) has recently been consulting on its proposals for the regulation of psychotherapists and counsellors. It is

envisaged that the HPC will deliver its recommendations to the Government by the end of this year. Following this, the Government will consider next steps, including timescales. Full consideration will be given to the outcome of the HPC consultation in taking forward any proposals for regulation.

NHS Connecting for Health: Marketing

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department has spent on (a) advertising and (b) public relations for Connecting for Health in the last five years. [295499]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Expenditure information for the last five financial years is in the following table.

	Public Relations	Advertising
2004-05	121,737	—
2005-06	1,618	—
2006-07	455,782	3,450
2007-08	1,280,796	2,450
2008-09	88,091	9,675

Note:

Accounting information does not permit differentiation of public relations and press-related expenditure. The figures cover both, and exclude VAT.

NHS: Finance

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the percentage of central Government funding to primary care trusts in (a) Bolton and (b) England which is spent on management costs. [295306]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The management costs of Bolton Primary Care Trust (PCT), as published in its 2008-09 audited accounts, represent approximately 1.7 per cent. of its net operating costs. This excludes any management costs incurred by the providers of the health care that is commissioned by the PCT.

Bolton PCT's main provider is Royal Bolton Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. NHS foundation trusts have independent status in the national health service and are free from the Department's powers of direction. They are not required to complete information data requests that do not fit with mandatory requirements, which includes management costs.

The management costs of the NHS organisations that report to the Department represent approximately 3 per cent. of the overall NHS expenditure.

NHS: Information and Communications Technology

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the most recent annual benefits statement for the National Programme for IT; and for what reasons he has not yet published it. [295498]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: In response to a recommendation of the Public Accounts Committee in its report on the National Programme published in January 2009, the Department has agreed to consider producing an annual report of the Programme's progress against published

timetables and expenditure forecasts. Consideration is being given to publication, from 2009-10, of a single document combining the annual report with a restructured statement of the costs and benefits of the programme.

NHS: Pensions

Steve Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to amend the NHS Pension scheme entitlements of NHS employees on high salaries.

[295680]

Ann Keen: Pension scheme provisions are kept under review to ensure they are appropriate and sustainable at all levels.

NHS: Procurement

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to the Answer of 7 January 2008, *Official Report*, columns 126-7W, on NHS procurement, if he will place in the Library a copy of the procurement capability review team's report on his Department.

[295651]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The report and associated documents are entitled:

Procurement Capability Review Programme—Department of Health

Procurement Capability Review Programme Improvement Plan—Department of Health

OGC Procurement Capability Reviews Tranche Three Overview report

Copies of these have been placed in the Library.

NHS: Public Holidays

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional expenditure the NHS incurred in ensuring continuous staffing levels (a) over bank holidays and (b) over the Christmas period in the last 12 months.

[296227]

Ann Keen: This information is not collected centrally.

Nurses: Pay

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average starting salary of an NHS nurse was in (a) cash and (b) real terms in (i) 1996-97 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available.

[295229]

Ann Keen: The average estimated starting salary of an NHS nurse in cash and real terms in 1996-97 and 2008-09, the latest year for which figures are available, is shown in following the table.

Qualified nurse	Starting salaries (£)	
	Cash	2008-09 prices
1996-97	11,895	15,470
2008-09	20,225	20,225

Notes:

1. In the context of this answer the term "NHS Nurse" has been interpreted as a qualified nurse.

2. 1996-97 figures are based on the Whitley D Grade minimum starting salary. Source: Pay circular 1997-98.

3. Figures have been expressed in 2008-09 prices using the HM Treasury gross domestic product deflator index where appropriate.

4. 2008-09 figure is the Agenda For Change band five minimum salary. This figure is available for 2009-10 (£20,710) but the deflator index is unavailable for comparison in real terms.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average pay of an NHS nurse was in (a) cash and (b) real terms in (i) 1996-97 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available.

[295230]

Ann Keen: The average pay of an NHS nurse in cash and real terms in 1998-99 and 2008-09 the latest year for which figures are available is in the table. No comparable figures are available prior to 1998-99 as this was the first year in which the NHS staff earnings survey was undertaken.

Qualified Nurse	Average earnings (£)	
	Cash	2008-09 prices
1998-99	19,600	25,000
2008-09	29,900	29,900

Notes:

1. In the context of this answer the term "NHS Nurse" has been interpreted as a qualified nurse.

2. 1998-99 figures—Source: NHS Earnings Survey 1998-99 (available at www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Pressreleases/DH_4005045).

3. Figures have been expressed in 2008-09 prices using the HM Treasury gross domestic product deflator index where appropriate.

4. 2008-09 figures—Source: NHS Information Centre NHS Staff Earnings January to March 2009 (available at www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/workforce/nhs-staff-earnings/nhs-staff-earnings-january-march-2009). The figure for April to June 2009 is available (£30,900) but the deflator index is unavailable for a comparison in real terms.

5. Figures have been rounded to the nearest £100.

Nurses: Training

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many student nurses there are in (a) England and (b) Bassetlaw constituency.

[295655]

Ann Keen: This information is not collected in the manner requested.

In 2008-09 there were 20,664 nurse training places commissioned for the whole of England. Due to the length of nurse training and attrition rates, this does not give a true picture of the exact number of student nurses currently in training across England and represents only the number of places commissioned for one year.

It is not possible to report on the number of student nurses in the Bassetlaw constituency.

Nutrition: Standards

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will request the Care Quality Commission to take account in its work of the findings of the report commissioned by the Healthcare Commission on a scoping exercise to identify priority topics for national audit on the Essence of Care, published by the Royal College of Nursing in February

2008; what the cost was of producing the report; and what steps he is taking to ensure the Care Quality Commission will incorporate the quality of nutritional care in its service reviews. [295683]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Care Quality Commission has informed us that it has taken into account the findings of the scoping work undertaken by the Royal College of Nursing. The findings have been particularly important in considering how the Care Quality Commission will assess compliance with the new registration requirements and in the development of its reviews and studies programme.

The new registration system will mean that all providers of regulated health and adult social care services will need to register with Care Quality Commission in order to operate. Registered providers will have to comply with specific requirements for hydration and nutrition. The Care Quality Commission will be able to take appropriate action if providers are found not to be compliant. This could include undertaking inspections, issuing warning notices, or suspending registration. The Care Quality Commission will issue guidance explaining how providers can meet these requirements.

The Care Quality Commission has also informed us that it will look at nutrition and hydration issues in any special reviews that it undertakes, for example, this year it is undertaking a review of health care needs in care homes and a study of stroke care pathway. The Care Quality Commission is currently considering whether it needs to undertake a special review into nutrition and hydration.

The Care Quality Commission has informed us that it is also linked in with the Royal College of Nursing on their "Nutrition now" campaign and other programmes around improving skills for workforce in this area.

The scoping exercise by the Royal College of Nursing was commissioned by the Healthcare Commission and the Care Quality Commission does not possess information on the cost of producing the report.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what data the Care Quality Commission plans to use to assess adherence by (a) NHS trusts, (b) care homes and (c) other regulated providers to the registration requirement entitled Making sure people get the nourishment they need. [295788]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has informed us that it is currently developing the methods it will use to implement the new system of registration for health and adult social care providers. It has recently consulted on its guidance about compliance and intends to publish it later this year. It will use information from a range of sources including the CQC's own site visits and information provided by third parties.

Office of the Health Professions Adjudicator

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the Office of the Health Professions Adjudicator will commence operations. [295606]

Ann Keen: The current planning assumptions are that from April 2011, the Office of the Health Professions Adjudicator will begin to make decisions on fitness to practise cases brought before it by the General Medical Council and subsequently on a date yet to be confirmed the General Optical Council.

Pain: Health Services

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS has spent on tackling chronic pain in patients in (a) Essex and (b) Castle Point constituency in the latest period for which figures are available. [295671]

Ann Keen: The information requested is not held centrally.

Patients: Public Transport

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has considered the effect on patients of (a) King's College hospital and (b) South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust of proposed reductions to rail services on the South London Line; and if he will make a statement. [295782]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Department has not independently investigated the effect to patients of proposed reductions to rail services on the South London Line. It is the responsibility of Transport for London to ensure that its services adequately meet the needs of the local population.

Patients: Safety

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the Answer of 16 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 230W, on patients: safety, how many nutrition-related adverse incidents have been recorded by the National Patient Safety Agency in each month since it was established. [295650]

Ann Keen: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 16 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 230W. Information on the number of nutrition-related adverse incidents that have been recorded by the National Patient Safety Agency in each month since it was established in 2001 can still be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Social Services

Mike Penning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 12 October 2009, *Official Report*, column 758W, on social services, whether he proposes that funding for the service will be drawn entirely from his Department's budget; what mechanisms he intends to use to ensure that joined-up services are delivered; and what changes to existing arrangements for delivery of care services he envisages. [295615]

Phil Hope: The Green Paper says that we want to build a system that is universal, fair, affordable, clear and helps people to live their lives the way they want to. We need to look at a range of different ways to bring more funding into the care and support system. Exact

details of future funding arrangements will depend on which funding option is chosen as the basis of the new Care and Support system.

The Green Paper set out three ways in which we might fund a new system:

partnership—the Government covers some care costs, more if you have a low income;

insurance—the Government covers some care costs, and helps you take out insurance for the rest, if you want it; and

comprehensive—everyone over retirement age who can afford it would pay into a state insurance scheme, so that everyone who needs care and support will receive it free. We would look at having a free care and support system for people of working age alongside this.

The Green Paper states that all the services that you need should work together. People should be able to expect that the professionals who work with them will work together, particularly when needs are assessed. The Government will tackle the obstacles to partners working together nationally so that local services are freer to make their own choices about how they can improve joined-up working. We will develop a coherent strategy centred on patients, care-users and their carers, to support local leaders to make sure that joined-up services are delivered.

Social Services: Finance

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have taken up (a) a direct payment and (b) an individual budget in each local authority area; and what targets have been set for the take up of each programme in each local authority area. [295604]

Phil Hope: Following the end of the Individual budgets pilots project in December 2007, the Department announced a programme to introduce personal budgets which comprise social care funding only. As part of the Welfare Reform Bill, the 'Right to Control' work is building on the learning from the individual budget pilots, to take forward the principles of choice and self-directed support through a range of income streams.

Information on what targets have been set for the take up of direct payments and individual budgets by each local authority is not collected centrally. The available information has been placed in the Library.

Suffolk Primary Care Trust: Finance

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by Suffolk Primary Care Trust on salaries and wages for (a) general and senior managers, (b) nurses and midwives and (c) administrative and clerical staff in each year since its creation. [296169]

Phil Hope: The following table shows data for 2002-03 to 2008-09, which are the only years for which this information is available by individual organisation. Suffolk Primary Care Trust (PCT) was reconfigured as part of the national restructuring process in October 2006. For 2005-06 and previous financial years, the figures in the table represent the sum of the relevant figures across the four predecessor PCTs—Suffolk Coastal PCT, Ipswich PCT, Central Suffolk PCT and Suffolk West PCT.

The figures provided are for total expenditure on staff and include social security costs, pension contributions and early retirement costs. It is not possible separately to identify salaries and wages. Redundancy costs are not included.

The figures for 'Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting Staff' and 'Admin and Clerical Staff' include non-NHS staff, e.g. staff employed via an employment agency.

Information is from the financial returns for NHS bodies. The data are not audited but are validated to the audited summarisation schedules.

Suffolk Primary Care Trust 2002-03 to 2008-09

	Managers and senior managers	Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	Admin and clerical
2008-09	8,014	23,961	6,406
2007-08	7,661	22,434	5,500
2006-07	5,421	23,200	5,288
2005-06	5,461	23,461	5,782
2004-05	5,618	19,860	5,213
2003-04	3,880	16,915	3,878
2002-03	2,425	15,159	3,202

Source:

Financial Returns 2002-03 to 2008-09

Swine Flu: Prisoners

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prisoners have been diagnosed with swine influenza. [296174]

Phil Hope: The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) receives from each prison in England and Wales a weekly report on the number of swine flu cases. To date there have been 130 cases confirmed by laboratory analysis since 13 July when data collection began.

The data shows that NOMS' strategy for managing swine flu in prisons has been effective in preventing the spread of swine flu among prisoners.

These data have been drawn from administrative information technology systems. Although care is taken when processing and analysing returns the detail is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system. The data are not subject to audit.

Swine Flu: Vaccination

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of likely take-up rates of swine influenza vaccine (a) amongst different age groups, (b) amongst people with different vulnerabilities to the illness and (c) by geographic area. [294358]

Gillian Merron: The Department has estimated a national uptake rate of 70 per cent. for all the priority at-risk groups, based on the uptake rate of 74 per cent. for seasonal flu vaccine among the over 65s. Based on previous data on seasonal influenza vaccine uptake, there is little reason to believe that there will be significant regional variation in this estimated uptake rate.

This estimate is for planning purposes only and is not a target. We recommend that all people in the priority groups receive the vaccine.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the cost to the public purse of each swine influenza vaccination. [295884]

Gillian Merron: The swine flu vaccination programme will be administered by general practitioners (GPs) following successful negotiations between the Department, General Practitioners Committee of the British Medical Association and NHS Employers.

The deal will mean that GP surgeries will receive £5.25 per dose of vaccine given. This £5.25 payment will pay for the extra staff and non-staff resources that practices will need to vaccinate their at-risk patients. At the same time it will ensure other services provided by the practices do not suffer while practices are vaccinating large numbers of patients. The £5.25 does not include the cost of the vaccine itself. The price we pay for the vaccine is commercially confidential information.

Thalidomide

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has funded research into the potential effectiveness of the use of Thalidomide in the treatment of certain illnesses. [295438]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am told that the Department has not funded research into the effectiveness of thalidomide in the treatment of illnesses.

Thalidomide was licensed in June 2008 for the treatment of multiple myeloma—or for those ineligible for high dose chemotherapy. Thalidomide UK and other stakeholders both here and in Europe were consulted throughout the licensing process and I understand that they have acknowledged the benefits of thalidomide for the treatment of multiple myeloma.

West Suffolk Hospital NHS Trust: Finance

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by (a) West Suffolk Hospital NHS Trust and (b) Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust on salaries and wages for (i) general and senior managers, (ii) nurses and midwives and (iii) administrative and clerical staff in each year since 1999. [296170]

Phil Hope: The following tables show data for 2002-03 to 2008-09, which are the only years for which this information is available by individual organisation.

The figures provided are for total expenditure on staff and include social security costs, pension contributions and early retirement costs. It is not possible separately to identify salaries and wages. Redundancy costs are not included.

The figures for “Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting Staff” and “Admin and Clerical Staff” include non-national health service staff—e.g. staff employed via an employment agency.

Information is from the financial returns for NHS bodies. The data is not audited but is validated to the audited summarisation schedules.

West Suffolk Hospital NHS Trust 2002-03 to 2008-09

	£000		
	<i>Managers and senior managers</i>	<i>Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff</i>	<i>Admin and clerical</i>
2008-09	2,415	22,735	5,328
2007-08	2,839	25,783	6,077
2006-07	3,730	29,346	6,884
2005-06	3,758	28,731	6,916
2004-05	476	28,765	10,772
2003-04	720	30,279	11,542
2002-03	709	32,963	13,433

Source:

Financial returns 2002-03 to 2008-09

Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust 2003-04 to 2008-09

	£000		
	<i>Managers and senior managers</i>	<i>Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff</i>	<i>Admin and clerical</i>
2008-09	3,758	26,842	8,002
2007-08	4,462	29,826	9,031
2006-07	4,750	34,506	10,568
2005-06	5,786	34,980	11,431
2004-05	5,906	34,425	11,338
2003-04	4,264	35,656	14,361
2002-03	4,477	38,278	15,343

Source:

Financial Returns 2002-03 to 2008-09

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Building Regulations: Energy

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has to amend building regulations to encourage a reduction in energy consumption through heating and lighting controls. [293822]

Mr. Ian Austin: Part L of the Building Regulations, ‘Conservation of fuel and power’, sets minimum energy efficiency standards for buildings and fixed building services, including heating and lighting controls. My Department has recently consulted on proposed amendments to Part L that would strengthen these standards and that are planned to come into effect in October 2010 (see

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/partl2010consultation)

Buildings: Standards

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) what guidance his Department has issued to local planning authorities in relation to the provisions of (a) building controls and (b) planning regulations in respect of the minimum number of (i) male and (ii) female lavatories to be provided in new premises with a use class of (A) A1, (B) A3, (C) A4, (D) C1, (E) D2 and (F) sui generis; [292693]

(2) pursuant to the answer to Baroness Greengross of 21 July 2009, *Official Report*, House of Lords, columns 305-6WA, on building regulations, what minimum levels of provision of (a) male and (b) female toilets are required in (i) new licensed premises and (ii) other new non-domestic premises. [293230]

Mr. Ian Austin: No guidance regarding the number of lavatories to be provided in new buildings has been issued specifically to local planning authorities and planning regulations do not cover this area. However, current Building Regulations, in Part G (Hygiene), require that “adequate sanitary conveniences” are provided in new buildings. The accompanying guidance contained in Approved Document G draws attention to the fact that the number of appliances may be subject to other legislation, for example, on workplaces, but that British Standard 6465, Part 1: 1984 also provides a basis for showing compliance with the requirement.

Changes to Part G of the Building Regulations will come into force on 6 April 2010 and draft guidance has been issued. The revised guidance, in reference to buildings other than dwellings, states that the minimum number of sanitary conveniences for staff in workplaces, including separate provision for men and women, should be in accord with the Approved Code of Practice that supports the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992. The Approved Document also refers to the alternative guidance set out in BS 6465:2006 for those building types not covered by the Approved Code of Practice or in workplaces where the applicant wishes to provide more than that minimum level.

Our Strategic Guide on “Improving Public Access to Better Quality Toilets” (March 2008) provided general guidance to local authorities for managing and improving public toilets. Local authorities have powers under Section 20 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 to require toilets to be provided and maintained for public use in any place providing entertainment, exhibitions or sporting events, and places serving food and drink for consumption on the premises, but it is for each authority to determine how these powers should be applied according to the circumstances of each case.

Central Manchester Development Corporation: Archives

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to answer to the hon. Member for Vauxhall of 20 July 2009, *Official Report*, column 809W, on the Central Manchester Development Corporation: archives, who authorised the secure disposal of the records of the Central Manchester Development Corporation; and whether any consideration was given to donating the records to (a) the municipal records office, (b) the National Archives or (c) an educational institution. [294532]

Barbara Follett: Further to the answer given on 20 July 2009, *Official Report*, column 809W, the Government Office for the North West records about the Central Manchester Development Corporation were destroyed in accordance with the disposal agreement approved by the departmental records officer. These records were not considered appropriate for transfer to the National Archives or presentation to another place of deposit under the terms of the Public Records Act 1958.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to answer to the hon. Member for Vauxhall of 20 July 2009, *Official Report*, column 809W, on the Central Manchester Development Corporation: archives, what his Department’s policy is on the disposal of (a) records and (b) other archived material of each development corporation. [294533]

Barbara Follett: The Department’s policy for the management of all public records follows the responsibilities set out in the Public Records Act 1958 and subsequent guidance and advice from the National Archives. As non departmental public bodies development corporations have responsibility for their own records management policy.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Vauxhall of 20 July 2009, *Official Report*, column 809W, on the Central Manchester Development Corporation: archives, what arrangements there are for archiving historic records of the (a) London Thames Gateway, (b) Thurrock Thames Gateway and (c) West Northamptonshire Development Corporation; and what disposal authorities are in place for the records of each body. [294534]

Barbara Follett: The Development Corporations will have arrangements for the records they hold. All records in the Department, including those relating to the London Thames Gateway, Thurrock Thames Gateway and the West Northamptonshire Development Corporations, are managed in accordance with existing policies and procedures.

There are appropriate arrangements in place for retention and disposal.

Community Infrastructure Levy

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what assessment has been made of the likely effect of the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy on (a) the cumulative burden of regulation on developers and (b) the quantity and quality of new development. [294524]

Mr. Ian Austin: The Government have made an assessment of the impact of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) upon landowners and developers, in preparing its impact assessments on CIL, which have accompanied the different legislative stages of the passage of the Planning Act 2008 and the ongoing development of CIL regulations.

The most recent assessment was published on 30 July and can be found at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/infrastructurelevypartial>.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the revenue generated by the Community Infrastructure Levy in each of the first three years of its operation; and whether such revenue will be classified as tax revenue for the purposes of the National Accounting rules. [294526]

Mr. Ian Austin: The Government published their estimates of anticipated revenues from CIL, within the impact assessments that have accompanied the different legislative stages of the Planning Act 2008 and the ongoing development of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) regulations. The latest assessment was published on 30 July to accompany the publication of the draft CIL regulations. The assessment is available at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/infrastructurelevypartial>.

Once the Government's proposals for CIL have been finalised the Office for National Statistics will classify the levy for National Accounts purposes.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether new (a) nuclear power stations and (b) wind turbines are liable for community infrastructure levy. [294661]

Mr. Ian Austin: The draft community infrastructure levy (CIL) regulations, published on 30 July 2009 and available on the CLG website, propose (at Regulation 5(3)) that CIL should not be levied on buildings into which people do not normally go; or on buildings into which people go only intermittently for the purpose of inspecting or maintaining fixed plant or machinery.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/communitylevyconsultation>

Council Housing: East of England

Nadine Dorries: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many council tenants there were in (a) Mid Bedfordshire constituency, (b) Bedfordshire and (c) the East of England in each year since 1997. [295368]

Mr. Ian Austin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 12 October 2009, *Official Report*, column 310W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn).

Council Housing: Lone Parents

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what additional funding his Department plans to provide to implement the policy of placing teenage single mothers in supervised residential accommodation; how many places will be provided each year; what role local authorities will play in the scheme; and what the timetable is for its implementation. [292998]

Mr. Ian Austin: My Department has provided £30 million capital funding over three years (2009-10; 2010-11; 2011-12) to provide new places in Foyers and other specialist supported accommodation through the National Affordable Housing Programme. Housing Associations and other affordable housing providers will be invited to bid in a process to be administered by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

Council Tax: Valuation

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether the E-BAR/Valuebill interface for council tax reports established by

the Valuation Office Agency includes the transfer of personal data. [293371]

Barbara Follett: A Billing Authority (BA) council tax report can contain contact details including name, address (if different from the property address), telephone number and email address. The electronic BA reports data transfer takes place through a secure password restricted website with 128 bit encryption.

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what account (a) the Valuation Office Agency and (b) the Valuation Tribunal Service takes of increased levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in a specific locality when assessing material changes for the purpose of council tax revaluations. [294901]

Barbara Follett: There is no council tax revaluation taking place. However, in the event of any future revaluation, the banding of properties by the Valuation Office Agency would be based on the open market value as it was on the relevant date. The Valuation Tribunal Service would have no direct role in compiling lists in any such future revaluation.

Departmental Billing

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to page 17 of his Department's Resource Accounts for 2008-09, HC 449, for what reasons 13 per cent. of invoices submitted to his Department were not paid on time. [294664]

Barbara Follett: Until July 2008, the Department operated a decentralised payment processing model, with business areas processing supplier invoices independently of each other and the "centre". This arrangement was inherently inefficient, allowing delays and errors in the processing of payments, which in turn contributed to a low performance against Whitehall prompt payment targets.

In July 2008 the Department introduced centralised processing of invoices, resulting in a more effective and efficient means of handling, authorising and paying supplier accounts rendered. This change in approach had an immediate positive impact on performance, which improved steadily through the reporting year. Clearance of an inherited backlog of unpaid invoices had an impact on payment performance. The introduction across Whitehall of a 10 day prompt payment policy in December 2008 provided a further impetus for improvement, and processes were further automated and streamlined to meet the new challenges.

In the current financial year these process enhancements have continued and the further exploitation of technology continues to generate improvements against the Whitehall 10 day prompt payment target, raising current performance to above 90 per cent. of valid invoices being paid within 10 days of receipt. The comparable figure for the resource account in the current financial year is above 95 per cent.

Departmental Data Protection

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to page 30 of his Department's Resource Accounts for 2008-09, HC 449, for what reason the sensitive documents on housing were carried on a flight from Heathrow to Copenhagen. [294656]

Barbara Follett: The documents were carried by an official whilst on an authorised business trip in order to make productive use of the time spent travelling.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to page 76 of his Department's Resource Accounts for 2008-09, HC 449, whether the stolen unencrypted laptop was stolen from the premises of the Government Office for the North West. [294659]

Barbara Follett: There is a reference on page 29 of the Department for Communities and Local Government's Resource Accounts that identifies an unencrypted laptop was stolen from the premises of the Government Office for the North West.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for what reasons policy advisers are recruited on terms and conditions different from those of other civil servants. [294596]

Barbara Follett: Policy advisers are civil servants and as such are recruited under the same terms and conditions. These can include fixed term appointments where appropriate.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what analysis of his Department's expenditure by local authority area has been undertaken in the last 12 months. [295697]

Barbara Follett: No analysis of the Department's expenditure by local authority area has been undertaken in the last 12 months.

Departmental Responsibilities

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what consideration

he has given to the application of the precautionary principle in relation to the development of public policy. [294521]

Barbara Follett: People's perceptions of public risk often differ from actual levels of risk. These distorted public perceptions may encourage poor policy-making and unnecessary laws, leading people to feel that Government is interfering too much in their lives. Strong leadership from the Government is necessary to counter these trends and to help foster a more considered approach to risk and public policy making. In handling public risk, Communities and Local Government follows the guidance of the Risk and Regulation Advisory Council by placing emphasis on understanding the risk in context, actively engaging with a broad community, and effective communication.

Departmental Staffing

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) what expenditure was incurred on recruitment agency fees in respect of staff recruited to work in (a) his Department's Housing Directorate, (b) the Tenant Services Authority, (c) the Homes and Communities Agency, (d) the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit, (e) Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment and (f) the Homes and Communities Agency Academy in the last five years; [294953]

(2) how much was paid in external consultancy fees by (a) his Department's Housing Directorate, (b) the Tenant Services Authority, (c) the Homes and Communities Agency, (d) the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit, (e) the Homes and Communities Agency Academy and (f) the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment in each of the last five years; [294954]

(3) how much was paid in staff costs by (a) his Department's Housing Directorate, (b) the Tenant Services Authority, (c) the Homes and Communities Agency, (d) the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit and (e) the Homes and Communities Agency academy in each of the last five years. [295096]

John Healey: The following tables provide the financial data requested subject to the following caveat:

Where a cell is blank, no expenditure in the categories specified was incurred;

The "Housing Directorates" lines cover a combination of directorates across the years in question as a result of CLG organisational structure changes.

Table A: PQ 5490—recruitment agency fees

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Housing Directorates ¹	—	—	—	—	63,100
Tenants' Services Authority	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	30,300
Homes & Community Agency	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	152,200
Homes & Community Agency Academy	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	38,000
National Housing and Planning Advice Unit ²	—	—	91,300	—	—
CABE	62,600	25,300	72,100	85,100	46,900

¹ Relates to the recruitment of HCA Board members.

² Relates to the recruitment of NHPAU Board members.

Table B: PQ 5491—external consultancy

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Housing Directorates ¹	863,800	903,800	462,700	337,700	3,886,300
Tenants' Services Authority	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,486,400
Homes & Community Agency ²	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	² —
National Housing and Planning Advice Unit	—	—	3,200	6,600	10,600
CABE	536,500	818,800	463,900	619,800	612,600
Homes & Community Agency Academy	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,056,000

¹ Expenditure inflated by one-off items: HCA set-up and homeowner mortgage support scheme.

² The HCA can be answered only at disproportionate cost.

Table C: PQ 5493—staff costs

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Housing Directorates	9,837,300	10,330,400	10,842,500	10,649,500	10,644,200
Tenants' Services Authority ¹	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	¹ —
Homes & Community Agency ¹	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	¹ —
Homes & Community Agency Academy ¹	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	¹ —
National Housing and Planning Advice Unit	—	—	68,500	579,000	606,000

¹ For HCA and TSA 2008-09, information on expenditure on staff will be included in the annual reports and accounts which will be published shortly. Prior to 2008-09, neither organisation was in existence.

English Partnership Public Relations Panel

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what companies and individuals were on the English Partnership Public Relations Panel in each year since the Panel was set up; and what expenditure has been incurred on each (a) corporate and (b) individual member of the Panel to date. [292558]

Mr. Ian Austin: Since 1 December 2008, English Partnership's (EP) functions have passed to the Homes

and Communities Agency (HCA). The following table provides a list of the organisations that have formed the membership of the EP/HCA Public Relations Panel since it was established in 2006, and also the net and gross breakdown of expenditure, by panel member.

Public relations spend across the HCA incorporates a wide and varied range of activities, with a particular focus on disseminating news and information on HCA's work to business and local stakeholders, the media and to the general public.

For 2008-09, such costs represented 0.02 per cent. of the HCA's total annual expenditure of £3.9 billion.

Summary of net and gross spend by former EP and now HCA against each supplier on the PR Panel by financial year (2009 split into EP and HCA spend)

Supplier name		EP				HCA		Grand total
		Jan 2006-Mar 2006	Apr 2006-Mar 2007	Apr 2007-Mar 2008	Apr 2008-Nov 2008	Dec 2008-Mar 2009	Apr 2009 to date	
Brahm Limited	Net	—	—	14,755	31,230	9,325	68,306	123,616
	Gross	—	—	17,337	36,695	10,724	71,241	135,998
Camargue	Net	18,001	61,095	35,867	6,781	2,255	3,000	126,999
	Gross	21,151	71,787	42,144	7,968	2,613	3,450	149,112
Communications Management	Net	—	124,883	85,628	3,135	—	—	213,646
	Gross	—	146,737	100,613	3,684	—	—	251,034
Communique	Net	—	52,893	123,348	28,334	5,702	5,808	216,083
	Gross	—	62,149	144,933	32,774	6,587	6,679	253,122
Creative Concern Ltd	Net	—	2,487	—	—	17,170	33,284	52,941
	Gross	—	2,922	—	—	17,170	33,284	53,376
Destination Marketing UK Ltd	Net	—	73,102	109,300	34,313	14,892	469	232,076
	Gross	—	85,864	128,427	40,318	17,298	539	272,446

Summary of net and gross spend by former EP and now HCA against each supplier on the PR Panel by financial year
(2009 split into EP and HCA spend)

Supplier name		EP				HCA		Grand total
		Jan 2006- Mar 2006	Apr 2006- Mar 2007	Apr 2007- Mar 2008	Apr 2008- Nov 2008	Dec 2008- Mar 2009	Apr 2009 to date	
Fleishman-Hillard Group Ltd	Net	—	—	—	3,500	—	—	3,500
	Gross	—	—	—	4,113	—	—	4,113
ING Media	Net	—	33,000	150,131	133,508	59,796	23,716	400,151
	Gross	—	38,775	176,404	156,872	68,771	27,273	468,095
Phoenix	Net	—	29,668	61,240	53,068	24,447	22,146	190,568
	Gross	—	34,860	71,957	62,354	28,320	25,468	222,959
Staniforth Communications	Net	3,369	92,454	93,695	26,287	13,443	16,981	246,229
	Gross	3,959	108,633	110,092	30,887	15,497	19,528	288,596
Staniforth Public Relations	Net	16,178	—	926	2,256	—	—	19,361
	Gross	19,010	—	1,088	2,651	—	—	22,749
The Communication Group plc	Net	—	3,266	152,894	—	—	—	156,160
	Gross	—	3,838	179,650	—	—	—	183,488
Willoughby PR	Net	10,469	34,399	49,518	33,942	34,752	77,996	241,077
	Gross	12,301	40,418	58,184	39,882	40,003	89,696	280,484

Environmental Health: Manpower

John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many environmental health officers have been recruited to work in Leeds in each year since 2001. [295362]

Barbara Follett: This information is not held by my Department.

Home Information Packs

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer of 16 June 2009, *Official Report*, columns 201-202W, on home information packs, what the evidential basis was of the value for money assessment undertaken in respect of the contracting out of public relations work in relation to home information packs. [295862]

Barbara Follett: Agencies on the Central Office of Information public relations framework participate in an open tender process conducted by COI officials to select those agencies best able to provide value for money to public purse. More information about COI procurement policy is available here:

<http://www.coi.gov.uk/suppliers.php?page=63>

In relation to Home Information Packs, the Department ensured value for money by using an agency from this framework.

Homes and Communities Agency

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much was spent on (a) consultancy fees, (b) recruitment agencies and (c) staff costs by each of the regional offices of the (i) Homes and Communities Agency and (ii) Tenant Services Authority since December 2008. [295095]

John Healey: The amount spent since December 2008:

(a) on consultancy fees

(i) by the Homes and Communities Agency would be available only at disproportionate cost;

(ii) by the Tenant Services Authority was £1,486,400. It is not possible to disaggregate these costs by region.

(b) on recruitment agencies

(i) by the Homes and Communities Agency's regions (not including corporate staff) was as follows:

	Spend (£)
London	4,400
South East (inc. Milton Keynes Partnership)	12,900
North West	7,000
West Midlands	2,900
Other regions' spend	0

(ii) by the Tenant Services Authority was £30,300. It is not possible to disaggregate these costs by region.

(c) Information on expenditure on staff will be included in the annual reports and accounts of both the Homes and Communities Agency and the Tenant Services

Authority 2008-09, which will be published shortly. Both agencies will publish further detail on staff costs in due course.

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much has been spent on corporate branding by the (a) Homes and Communities Agency and (b) the Tenant Services Authority since its establishment. [295097]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 2 April 2009, *Official Report*, columns 1501-2W. There has been no further spend on branding.

Housing

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer of 20 July 2009, *Official Report*, column 814W, on housing, for what reasons the letter for local newspapers was distributed via the Central Office of Information; what the cost to the public purse was of its distribution; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter. [295856]

Barbara Follett: Communities and Local Government has a retainer contract with the Central Office of Information to support the work of CLG press office in communicating and explaining the Department's policies through local and regional media channels. One way in which COI's network of regional News and PR teams supports this objective, under the terms of the contract, is to use its knowledge of and contacts with local newspapers to help place and tailor ministerial articles on issues relevant to their readerships.

The distribution of the article that is the subject of this and previous related questions tabled by the hon. Member was undertaken as part of this retainer arrangement.

Housing: Construction

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many homes have been built in (a) the East of England and (b) Suffolk in each of the last five years; and what proportion of such properties have been classified as affordable housing. [294603]

Mr. Ian Austin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 14 October 2009, *Official Report*, columns 969W for figures showing new affordable homes built as a proportion of all homes built, by county.

Nadine Dorries: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many affordable homes have been built in (a) Mid Bedfordshire constituency, (b) Bedfordshire and (c) the East of England since 1997. [295367]

Mr. Ian Austin: Information on new affordable homes built is not available by constituency.

The following table shows the number of new affordable homes (social rent, intermediate rent and low cost home ownership) built in mid Bedfordshire local authority, Bedfordshire, the East of England Region, and England in each year since 1997-98.

	Mid Bedfordshire	Bedfordshire	East of England GOR	England
1997-98	210	410	2,840	28,210
1998-99	150	480	2,990	26,550
1999- 2000	40	330	2,020	22,360
2000-01	60	190	2,250	20,940
2001-02	50	220	2,360	21,740
2002-03	70	230	2,460	21,100
2003-04	110	250	2,760	23,890
2004-05	80	430	3,140	26,930
2005-06	60	300	4,160	33,260
2006-07	70	220	5,020	36,260
2007-08	80	440	6,260	43,560

Note:

Figures are estimates, and have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Not all affordable housing is provided by new build completions, as some supply can come from acquisitions. For example, in 2007-08, a total of 90 additional affordable homes were provided in mid Bedfordshire local authority (new build and acquisitions), 530 in Bedfordshire, 7,200 in the East of England Region, and 53,730 additional affordable homes were provided in England (new build and acquisitions).

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) for what reasons the Homes and Communities Agency has revised downwards its targets for rural affordable house building; [296159]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Commission for Rural Communities on the decision by the Homes and Communities Agency to reduce its target for rural affordable housing. [296160]

John Healey: Market conditions have made delivery of affordable housing much more challenging. The HCA's Corporate Plan (published at the end of September) announced their rural target is 8,500, in line with the reduction in their overall affordable housing targets in response to current market conditions. My officials have met with the Commission for Rural Communities to discuss these and other matters.

Housing: Energy

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many accredited energy assessors there are in each region. [292465]

John Healey: The total number of accredited energy assessors recorded, in the National Energy Performance Certificate Register, for each region up to and including 10 October 2009 is as follows:

	Number
Registered non-domestic assessors by GOR 9 October 2009	
Unmatched	176
North West euro region (all areas)	474
Scotland euro region (all areas)	52

	<i>Number</i>
South West euro region (all areas)	304
Eastern euro region (all areas)	222
London euro region (all areas)	373
East Midlands euro region (all areas)	216
West Midlands euro region (all areas)	546
North East euro region (all areas)	112
Wales euro region (all areas)	152
South East euro region (all areas)	608
Yorkshire and the Humber euro region (all areas)	381
Total	3,616
<i>Registered domestic assessors by GOR 9 October 2009</i>	
Unmatched	421
North West euro region (all areas)	1456
Scotland euro region (all areas)	238
South West euro region (all areas)	1098
Eastern euro region (all areas)	979
London euro region (all areas)	1,118
East Midlands euro region (all areas)	733
West Midlands euro region (all areas)	2,380
North East euro region (all areas)	407
Wales euro region (all areas)	663
South East euro region (all areas)	1648
Yorkshire and the Humber euro region (all areas)	867
Total	12,008
Grand total	15,624

Note:

Unmatched totals are where the assessor postcode could not be matched to a Government Office Region (GOR) using data mapping

Housing: Floods

Mr. Dai Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what research his Department has evaluated on the effect of the height of electricity sockets in walls on the length of time it takes householders to return to their repaired homes following evacuation after flooding; and what guidelines are provided to builders of new homes in flood-risk areas on the matter. [293620]

Mr. Ian Austin: We are not aware of research that looks at how the height of electricity sockets specifically impacts on the time it has taken to repair flooded homes. However, Communities and Local Government published joint guidance with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Environment Agency entitled Improving the flood performance of new buildings—Flood resilient construction in May 2007. The document provides guidance to developers and designers on how to improve the flood resilience of new properties in low or residual flood risk areas by the use of suitable materials and construction details. To

help achieve resilient design it suggests that, for ground floors, electrical sockets should be installed above flood level to minimise damage to electrical services.

Housing: Lighting

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether his Department has issued recent guidance to local trading standards authorities on prosecutions for the sale of imported incandescent light bulbs. [294627]

Dan Norris: I have been asked to reply.

Following a public consultation which closed on 4 September 2009, the National Measurement Office has taken on the role of enforcing the requirements on products, including lamps, set out in EU Regulations under the Eco-design of Energy-using Products Directive. It will also ensure labels on products required by the Energy Labelling Directive are accurate.

Housing: Low Incomes

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his most recent estimate is of the average cost of building a new unit of (a) social housing and (b) affordable housing. [294902]

Mr. Ian Austin: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps) on 13 May 2009, *Official Report*, columns 817-818W.

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much central Government expenditure there has been on the Social Homebuy scheme. [295653]

John Healey: Social HomeBuy is a voluntary demand-led shared ownership scheme for social tenants. Registered social landlords who choose to offer the scheme to their tenants bid to the Homes and Communities Agency for grant to cover the discount offered to the tenant under the scheme. From April 2006 to end of September 2009, spend for this purpose through the National Affordable Housing programme totalled £3.6 million.

No funding has been provided to local authorities offering the scheme other than £132,770 given to help early pilots with development and set up costs in 2006-07.

Housing: Standards

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what percentage of homes in each region met the Decent Homes standard in each of the last five years. [294951]

Mr. Ian Austin: The English House Condition Survey reports nationally on the percentage of decent homes. However the size of the sample size limits the extent to which it can provide robust results for each year at lower levels of geography.

The survey can provide estimates at broad regional groupings (Northern includes North West, North East and Yorkshire; South East includes South East and London and the Rest of country includes Eastern, East

Midlands, West Midlands and South West) which are provide in table below, but not for each region in England due to sample size.

Percentage of homes meeting the decent homes standard in the last five years (2003-07)

	Original definition			Updated definition		
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2006	2007
Northern regions	68.7	70.2	72.7	73.9	64.3	64.3
South East regions	68.0	69.3	70.7	71.9	66.2	66.1
Rest of England	69.3	72.4	73.7	73.7	64.5	65.5
All dwellings	68.7	70.8	72.5	73.2	65.0	65.4

Note:

Base: all tenures

The Decent Homes standard was updated in 2006 when the introduction of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System replaced the Fitness Standard (original definition) as the statutory tool for assessing housing conditions. Figures based on the updated definition from 2006 are not comparable with those based on the original definition.

Institute for Public Policy Research and New Local Government Network

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what payments his Department made to the (a) Institute for Public Policy Research and (b) New Local Government Network in the last three years; what the purpose of such payment was in each case; and if he will make a statement. [294462]

Barbara Follett: No payments have been made to the (a) Institute for Public Policy Research. Payments have been made to the (b) New Local Government Network in connection with a secondment to the Department in the annual pay range of £43,836 to £57,110.

INTERREG Programme

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what projects in the UK have received funding under the Interreg (a) IVA and (b) IVB programme. [293107]

Barbara Follett: This information is not held centrally by the Department and it could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

Land: Databases

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what provisions regulate the sharing of data in the joint Ordnance Survey-Land Registry data centre; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the shared service agreement. [294891]

Mr. Ian Austin: The Data Centre Shared Service agreement which Ordnance Survey and Land Registry have recently concluded is concerned only with buildings, information technology infrastructure and with associated security and business continuity provisions. It is not concerned with data or the sharing of data.

Under the agreement Ordnance Survey has signed a five-year lease for 219 square metres of serviced and managed space from Land Registry, within its secure

data centre in Gloucester. This dedicated and discrete accommodation will house a proportion of Ordnance Survey's IT infrastructure, as well as supporting the launch of a new database management system. It will enable essential IT Business continuity services, in conjunction with facilities at Ordnance Survey's new head office, which is currently being built in Southampton.

A copy of the Shared Service Agreement has today been placed in the Library.

Local Government Information Unit

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer of 6 May 2009, *Official Report*, column 247W, on the Local Government Information Unit, (1) which official was seconded by the Local Government Information Unit to the office of the then Secretary of State; for what reason that secondment was terminated; and when that secondment (a) began and (b) ended; [292993]

(2) for what reasons the Local Government Information Unit incurred legal costs in relation to the termination of a secondment to the office of the then Secretary of State; for what reasons his Department paid those costs; and whether compensation payments were made to any individual in relation to the termination of the secondment. [292994]

Barbara Follett: Edward Cox from the Local Government Information Unit was seconded to the Strategy and Performance Directorate within Communities and Local Government (and not to the office of the then Secretary of State) for one year, from 7 January 2008 to 6 January 2009. The secondment ended early as, following discussions with the Department and the LGiU about the possibility of extending the secondment, Mr. Cox opted to leave the LGiU and to join the Department on a fixed-term contract, which began on 1 January 2009.

The legal costs incurred by the LGiU relate to legal advice they obtained in the course of the discussions about the possibility of extending the secondment about the different options which might be pursued. The Department had previously agreed to reimburse all reasonable costs incurred by the LGiU in connection with administration of the secondment, and in line with that agreed to reimburse these specific costs. No compensation payments were made to any individual in relation to the termination of the secondment.

Local Government: Bank Services

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the amount of money deposited with Icelandic banks by local authorities which has not yet been recovered. [296284]

Barbara Follett: CLG has not made any such estimates. The Resolution Committee for Landsbanki and Glitnir and the UK administrators of Heritable and Kaupthing, Singer and Friedland Ltd., have published information on likely rates of return.

Local Government: Equality

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Peterborough of 12 May 2009, *Official Report*, column 659W, on equality: regulation, what additional funding has been given to local authorities under the new burdens doctrine in relation to equality and diversity. [295896]

Barbara Follett: The Government are committed to ensuring that all new burdens falling on local authorities, whether from equality and diversity policies or any other, are fully and properly funded so that there is no upward pressure on council tax bills. Where appropriate, funding is provided through the formula grant system or through specific grants.

Local Government: Pay

Steve Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the average salary of the highest earning 10 per cent. of local government employees is; and how many employees he estimates have received salaries in this category in each of the last five years. [295675]

Barbara Follett: The information requested is not held centrally.

Local Government: Pensions

Steve Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the (a) mean, (b) median and (c) mean per decile annual pension was of local government pension scheme members claiming a pension for the first time in each of the last five years. [295674]

Barbara Follett: This information is not collected centrally.

Maps: EU Law

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will place in the Library a copy of the conclusions of his Department's consultation on the transposition of the EU INSPIRE directive. [294622]

Dan Norris: I have been asked to reply.

The report on consultation was published on the Department's website in July:

www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/inspire/summary-responses.pdf

in line with my Department's normal practice. I am arranging for copies of it to be placed also in the Library.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he expects to announce his decision on whether to build a national geo-portal as part of the implementation of the INSPIRE directive. [294651]

Dan Norris: I have been asked to reply.

My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Ogmere (Huw Irranca-Davies) replied to the hon. Member on 4 February 2009, *Official Report*, column 1281W explaining that decisions on the implementation of INSPIRE will be taken by the location council. At its meeting on 18 September the location council endorsed the Conceptual Design for the Location Programme, including the development of a UK Geo-Portal. The decision will be communicated on the programme website at:

www.defra.gov.uk/location

Mortgages: Government Assistance

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has to provide mortgage help to those who are eligible for shared ownership housing but who cannot find appropriate funding. [296161]

John Healey: There are 18 lenders who currently offer mortgages to shared ownership purchasers. The Government have provided help to potential shared ownership purchasers by introducing Rent to HomeBuy. This enables potential purchasers to benefit from an affordable rent for up to five years, enabling them to save for a deposit to purchase a share during or at the end of that period.

Multiple Occupation: Licensing

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, (1) on what date the Building Research Establishment submitted to his Department the second stage of its review of the licensing regime for houses in multiple occupation; [294946]

(2) on what date the Building Research Establishment was commissioned to conduct the review of the effectiveness of the new licensing regime for houses in multiple occupation; [294947]

(3) when he expects to publish the review commissioned by his Department from the Building Research Establishment on the new licensing regime for houses in multiple occupation; [294948]

(4) how much his Department has paid to the Building Research Establishment for the research commissioned on the effects of the new licensing regime for houses in multiple occupation. [294949]

Mr. Ian Austin: The Building Research Establishment (BRE) was commissioned to conduct a review of the effectiveness of the new licensing regime for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) in March 2008 and the final Report was received in April 2009. We propose to publish the Report shortly. The BRE were paid £89,591.59.

National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills: Thurrock

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what discussions he had with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills during the summer adjournment on funding provision for the National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills in Thurrock; and if he will make a statement. [295801]

Mr. Malik: I have raised this issue with Kevin Brennan, the Further Education Minister over the recess and we are hopeful that following approval by the LSC Regional Committee on 14 October and due assessment by the LSC's national Capital Committee on 2 November, if successful, the National Skills Academy will proceed to implementation.

Furthermore, CLG officials have been in discussion with BIS and LSC throughout the recess to progress the National Skills Academy in Thurrock which will be a key strand of the Government's wider investment in the £60 million Royal Opera House Production Park, developing technical skills in the performing arts in the run up to the 2012 Olympics.

Non-Domestic Rates: Parking

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether hereditaments which are levied on a workplace parking levy will receive any reduction in the rateable value calculated for their business parking spaces for business rates purposes. [293418]

Barbara Follett: Rating is a tax on the rental value of non-domestic properties. If the imposition of a workplace parking levy in a town causes the rental values of affected hereditaments to fall then it is likely rateable values will be reduced by a similar amount.

Non-Domestic Rates: Ports

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby of 16 September 2009, *Official Report*, column 2219W, on non-domestic rates: ports, how many of the 154 settled appeals resulted in a lower rateable value; and how many and what proportion of the other outstanding appeals have been settled. [295813]

Ian Pearson: I have been asked to reply.

Of the 154 appeals settled at 9 September 2009, 48 were settled by agreement resulting in a lower rateable value.

As at 21 October 2009; the Valuation Office Agency has settled 417, or 56 per cent. of appeals against rating assessments subject to the fast track arrangements.

Non-Domestic Rates: Religious Buildings

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer of 3 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 591W, on non-domestic rates: religious buildings, for which faith communities and religions the Valuation Office Agency has determined that their premises, where used for public religious worship, may be eligible for exemption from non-domestic rating. [295853]

Barbara Follett: Places of Public Religious Worship which belong to the Church of England and Church in Wales and all other religions certified under the Places of Worship Registration Act 1855 where there is an open invitation to the public to attend services are exempt from NNDR under the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The exemption does not extend to

organisations which practice a philosophy or where the invitation and access is restricted to certain members of the congregation.

Parking: Planning Permission

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on influencing levels of (a) car ownership and (b) car use through the planning system. [294879]

Mr. Ian Austin: Planning policy influences car ownership by requiring maximum car parking standards to be applied to both residential and commercial developments, as described in Planning Policy Guidance Note 13: Transport (PPG 13).

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer of 11 February 2009, *Official Report*, column 2070W, on planning permission: parking, whether following the revision of Planning Policy Statement 3 the maximum parking standards for residential parking introduced in Planning Policy Guidance 13 are (a) guidelines for or (b) binding on local authorities. [295850]

Mr. Ian Austin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) on 16 October 2009, *Official Report*, columns 1136-37W.

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer of 11 February 2009, *Official Report*, column 2070W, on planning permission: parking, what maximum parking standards for residential parking are in place in each of the regional spatial strategies. [295851]

Mr. Ian Austin: Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) asks Local planning authorities to develop residential parking policies for their area. pps3 does not require regional spatial strategies to set residential parking policies for their area and there are no maximum standards in place in regional spatial strategies other than in London. In London, maximum parking standards for residential parking are in place as follows:

<i>Predominant housing type bed units</i>	<i>Car parking provision</i>
4+1 bed units	2-1.5 spaces per unit
3 bed units	1.5-1 space per unit space
1-2 bed units	1 to less than 1 per unit per unit space per unit

Party Conferences

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether any of his Department's non-departmental public bodies sent representatives to attend one or more political party conferences in 2009. [293482]

Barbara Follett: Representatives from the Community Development Foundation and the Standards Board for England sought, and were granted, permission to attend the main political party conferences. Given its particular status and remit, representatives from the Audit Commission

attended all three main political party conferences with the permission from my Department. A representative from the Tenant Services Authority attended all three major political party conferences. The Homes and Communities Agency sent no staff representatives to any political party conferences but a member of its Board attended two party conferences in her capacity as Rural Housing Advisory Group chair.

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) in respect of which local plans in which Government Office regions he and his predecessors have made a direction under paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 not to retain a local plan policy to protect agricultural land; [293004]

(2) with reference to the answer to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar of 17 October 2007, *Official Report*, column 1338W, on planning: agriculture, in respect of which local plans, broken down by Government Office region, the Secretary of State has made a direction under paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to not save a local plan policy of protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land since October 2007. [293225]

Mr. Ian Austin: Local planning authorities apply to the Secretary of State where they consider it necessary for the Secretary of State to save policies under paragraph 1(3) of schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. In the following cases the Secretary of State declined to save a policy relating to agricultural land:

East Midlands

Northamptonshire County Council Waste Local Plan

South East

Bracknell Forest

Buckinghamshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan

Chiltern

Crawley

East Hampshire

Eastleigh

Elmbridge

Guildford

Hart

Medway

Mid Sussex

Milton Keynes Minerals Local Plan

Runnymede

Tandridge

Wycombe

South West

North Dorset

Torbay

Planning Permission: Advertising

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what representations he has received on the procedure by which appeals against a decision by a local authority to

refuse an advertisement application are considered by the Planning Inspectorate in accordance with the advertisement regulations and without taking into account the planning policies of the relevant local authority; and if he will make a statement. [294364]

Mr. Ian Austin: The Secretary of State has received representations from the Chair of Birmingham City Council's Planning Committee through correspondence from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Clare Short) and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Simon). In considering an advertisement appeal an Inspector from the Planning Inspectorate would have regard to all the evidence presented, including any relevant policies in the development plan of a local authority.

Planning Permission: Parking

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst of 5 February 2009, *Official Report*, column 1437W, on planning permission: parking, (1) what planning guidance on car park charges was in force prior to 2001; and when such guidance was issued; [294431]

(2) what guidance has been issued to regional planning bodies on policies on car parking charges in regional transport strategies. [294432]

Mr. Ian Austin: Prior to 2001 paragraph 4.7 and 4.8 of the 1994 version of Planning Policy Guidance Note 13: Transport (PPG 13) provided planning advice on car parking charges. Paragraph 4.7 advised that:

"The level of car parking charges may also be used as an instrument to encourage the use of alternative modes... Authorities should seek to agree appropriate levels and charges for parking broadly to maintain existing competitive positions between competing local centres... Income from parking charges can be used not only for providing off-street parking facilities, but also to support public transport and highway improvements..."

Paragraph 4.8 stated

"Parking charges... Should not appear in development plans as policies (except in so far as the authority proposes to secure levels of charges... through agreements) but they should be mentioned in the reasoned justification in support of the relevant land-use policies and proposals for the management of traffic."

Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) and Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs), which apply at the regional and local level, should be read as a suite of documents. Planning Policy Statement 11: Regional Spatial Strategies (PPS 11) contains advice on Regional Transport Strategies, which set the context for car parking standards and charges. Paragraph 35 of PPS 11 states,

"RPs should have regard to the guidance in PPG13 in setting parking standards appropriate to their region or parts of the region."

Planning: Local Government Finance

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether additional funding is being provided to local authorities in relation to additional functions and roles resulting from the establishment of the Infrastructure Planning Commission. [294905]

John Healey: The provisions of the Planning Act 2008 do not place any additional requirements on local government, but instead give councils a much clearer statutory role in the process to ensure that proper regard is given to their views.

The Government do not intend to provide additional funding to local government, who already:

look closely at any major infrastructure projects proposed in their area;

engage with developers on potential applications and enforce subsequent consents; and

bear their own costs for their involvement in any inquiry held by the Planning Inspectorate.

Property Development

Tom Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the number of approved planning developments which have not proceeded pending resolution of applications to register land as a town or village green in the last five years. [295165]

Mr. Ian Austin: This information is not collected centrally. While we do not have evidence that this is a widespread problem, we are aware of specific cases where this has occurred and the impact it can have on development. My officials are currently working with those in DEFRA to consider what changes to the current system may be required

Property Development: Floods

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what recent representations he has received on Planning Policy Guidance 25. [296007]

Mr. Ian Austin: No recent representations have been received about planning policy guidance note 25.

Regeneration: Finance

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst of 3 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 591W, on regeneration: finance, which independent audit authority will carry out the programme of audits of expenditure through the lifetime of the European Regional Development Fund programmes. [292851]

Barbara Follett: The independent Audit Authority for the ERDF programme is the Internal Audit Service of Communities and Local Government. CLG Internal Audit is functionally independent of the European Policy Division in CLG that is responsible for the overall management of the programme.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst of 3 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 591W, on regeneration: finance, if he will place in the Library a copy of the independent scrutiny report commissioned into explaining the management and financial control systems used by the regional development agencies and by his Department. [292852]

Barbara Follett: The independent, final opinion by the Audit Authority of the management and control systems used by the Regional Development Agencies and by the Department for Communities and Local Government which endorses each RDA and my Department has been placed in the Library of the House.

Repossession Orders

Nadine Dorries: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many homes have been repossessed in (a) Mid Bedfordshire constituency, (b) Bedfordshire, (c) the East of England and (d) England in each year since 1997. [295370]

Mr. Ian Austin: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on 12 October 2009, *Official Report*, column 351W.

Shops: Planning Permission

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps his Department is taking to support small shops through the operation of the planning system. [294878]

Mr. Ian Austin: Policy EC6 of Draft PPS4 supports small shops proposing that local planning authorities should recognise that such shops can significantly enhance the character and vibrancy of centres and make a valuable contribution to consumer choice.

Draft policy EC 13 also requires local planning authorities to protect and strengthen local and village shops ensuring that their importance to the local community is taken into account when assessing proposals that would result in their loss.

We will publish the final PPS4 by the end of the year.

Shops: Valuation

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when the Valuation Office Agency's Zone of Shops Valuation Handbook was last updated. [292894]

Barbara Follett: The Valuation Office Agency's zoning of shops handbook guidance, "It's All a Question of Zoning" has not been updated since 2000.

Social Rented Housing

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) what assessment he has made of the likely effects in allocation of social housing on (a) A8 nationals on the Worker Registration Scheme and (b) A2 nationals on the Worker Authorisation Scheme of giving greater priority to local people; [295695]

(2) what assessment he has made of the likely effects of giving greater priority to local people in allocation of social housing on (a) new age Travellers, (b) Irish Travellers and (c) Gypsies with no local connection to the area in which they are applying for accommodation; [295696]

(3) what assessment he has made of the likely effects of giving greater priority to local people in allocation of social housing on (a) migrant workers from member states of the EU prior to 2004 and (b) refugees; [295698]

(4) what assessment he has made of the likely effects of giving greater priority to local people on allocation of social housing on non-EEA nationals with (a) indefinite leave to remain and (b) limited leave to remain. [295699]

Mr. Ian Austin: The draft new guidance on the allocation of social housing published for consultation on 31 July was accompanied by a draft impact assessment

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/allocationimpactassessment>

Social Rented Housing: Rents

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much was spent on new social housing for rent in (a) England and (b) the City of York in each year since 1997-98. [295284]

Barbara Follett: The following table shows the grant funding through the Homes and Communities Agency's Affordable Housing Programme for social rent in each financial year in the City of York local authority area. This includes both new build and acquisition and refurbishment. This does not include expenditure through the Affordable Housing Programme for Low Cost Home Ownership (LCHO) homes.

Period	£ million	
	City of York	England
1997-98	1.00	456.47
1998-99	1.42	446.51
1999-2000	1.06	522.79
2000-01	2.25	575.66
2001-02	1.91	646.53
2002-03	1.46	760.23
2003-04	2.43	1,171.00
2004-05	3.13	1,050.04
2005-06	0.87	933.19
2006-07	0.83	1,432.55
2007-08	2.44	1,552.32
2008-09	6.36	2,038.13

Source:
Homes and Communities Agency

Social Rented Housing: Suffolk

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many properties were added to the stock of social rented housing in Suffolk through (a) construction and (b) purchase in each of the last five years; and how many he expects to be added in each of the next five years. [296134]

Mr. Ian Austin: The following table shows the number of new social rented homes built and acquired in Suffolk in each of the last five years.

	New build	Acquisitions	Total social rent
2003-04	380	60	440
2004-05	230	30	260
2005-06	430	20	440
2006-07	540	10	540
2007-08	670	40	710

Source:

Homes and Communities Agency Investment Management System (IMS), and local authority returns to CLG. Figures have been rounded to nearest 10 units.

Total affordable housing supply includes intermediate rent and Low Cost Home Ownership, as well as homes for Social Rent. In 2007-08, a total of 1,160 affordable homes were completed in Suffolk through new build and acquisitions.

Total affordable housing supply statistics for 2008-09 will be released by CLG in December 2009.

Information on the number of homes completed for social rent under the NAHP for April to September 2009 will be released by the HCA later this year.

As set out in the Homes and Communities Corporate Plan for 2009-10 we are aiming to deliver in England 55,000 affordable homes in 2009-10 and 56,000 in 2010-11. Future estimates levels of expenditure and outputs beyond 2010-11 will be dependent upon the next spending review.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what timetable has been set for (a) the revised edition of Planning Policy Statement 4 and (b) the introduction of a competition test in retail planning. [294884]

Mr. Ian Austin: The final version of Planning Policy Statement 4 will be published by the end of the year.

On 2 October 2009, the Competition Commission recommended the introduction of a competition test into the planning system for planning applications by grocery retailers as a remedy to the adverse effect on competition it had identified. If adopted this would apply not only to England but to the devolved administrations. The Government has 90 days to respond to the Commission's report from the date of its publication.

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what definition of consumer choice his Department plans to use in its revision of Planning Policy Statement 4. [294892]

Mr. Ian Austin: Policy EC6 of Draft PPS4 requires Local Planning Authorities to support the diversification of uses in town centres and plan for a strong mix of retail uses, recognising that smaller shops can significantly enhance the character and vibrancy of a centre.

We will publish final PPS4 by the end of the year.

Tenant Services Authority: Marketing

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much the Tenant Services Authority has spent on branded bags

since its establishment; and how many such bags have been produced. [294952]

John Healey: Since its establishment, the TSA has bought 3,000 branded bags which it has used at conferences and exhibitions. The bags formed part of the promotional materials purchased to help increase the profile of the TSA as the new independent regulator for social housing. The cost of these was £3,541 which equates to £1.18 per bag.

Tenants Rights

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the annual cost to the public purse of National Tenant Voice; and whether it will be located apart from the Tenant Services Authority. [294904]

John Healey: The National Tenants Voice has been allocated a budget of £ 1.5 million per annum under current comprehensive spending review plans.

A Project Group is leading development of the National Tenant Voice, and no decision has yet been reached on location.

Valuation Office: Data Protection

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether (a) HM Revenue and Customs and (b) the Valuation Office Agency will have access to records held on the national register of private landlords. [294509]

Mr. Ian Austin: Proposals to create a national register of private landlords include that it would be available to other Government organisations, including those with an enforcement role within the private rented sector.

These proposals have been to public consultation and responses are being considered.

Valuation Office: Local Government

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer of 3 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 593W, on the Valuation Office: local government, which local authorities have sent data from building control departments to the Valuation Office Agency via the e-BAR/Valuebill facility in the last 12 months. [295838]

Ian Pearson: I have been asked to reply.

The sources of information vary from billing authority to billing authority. The Building Control Department will be a source for some billing authorities. The data that some billing authorities gather from their building control departments are not sent via the e-BAR/Valuebill facility although information derived from it may inform the billing authority and may result in an electronic billing authority report.

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer of 3 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 593W, on the Valuation Office: local government, which version of the Valuebill Scheme the Valuation Office Agency's e-BAR facility uses. [295839]

Ian Pearson: I have been asked to reply.

The Valuation Office Agency's e-BAR facility uses (b) the current version 4.1 of the scheme, as shown on http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/govtalk/schemasstandards/xmlschemas/schemalibrary/local_government_services/valuebill_schema_v41.aspx

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 28 October 2009

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Housing: Construction

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many residential new build planning applications were granted in each of the last five years; and what estimate his Department has made of the proportion of residential new build sites with planning permission which have not been developed. [292694]

[Official Report, 16 October 2009, Vol. 497, c. 1120W.]

Letter of correction from Mr. Ian Austin:

An error has been identified in the written answer given to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) on 16 October 2009. The figure given for the number of

planning applications granted on residential dwellings for the year 2004-05 was incorrect and should read 52,600. I have notified the MP of the error.

The correct answer should have been:

Mr. Ian Austin: The number of planning applications for residential developments that have been granted for last five years is set out in the table:

<i>Planning applications granted on residential developments in England¹</i>	
	<i>Applications granted on residential dwellings</i>
2003-04	49,500
2004-05	52,600
2005-06	51,300
2006-07	49,500
2007-08	50,500

¹ England figures have been rounded to the nearest 100 and include estimates for non-responding authorities.

Notes:

Information for 2008-09 to be published on 29 October 2009.

Source:

Communities and Local Government General Development Control Returns

Information on whether planning applications have been developed or not is not held centrally.

ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 28 October 2009

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
DEFENCE	267	DEFENCE—continued	
Bogus Charitable Collections	271	Social Enterprise	273
Charities (Recession)	274	Third Sector (Recession)	268
Charities (Regulatory Burden)	270		
Contingency Planning (Floods)	276		
List of Ministerial Responsibilities	272	PRIME MINISTER	276
Operation Miser	267	Engagements	276

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Wednesday 28 October 2009

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS	13WS	TRANSPORT	18WS
Copyright Strategy	13WS	Correction to Written Answer	18WS
		Driving Disqualifications (UK and the Republic of Ireland)	19WS
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	15WS	Improving Access to Taxis	17WS
Local Spending Reports	15WS		
		TREASURY	14WS
ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE	16WS	ECOFIN (20 October 2009)	14WS
Sale of Nuclear Decommissioning Authority Land	16WS		
		WALES	20WS
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	16WS	Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill (Framework Powers)	20WS
St. Helena	16WS		
JUSTICE	17WS		
Crown Court Means-Testing	17WS		

WRITTEN ANSWERS

Wednesday 28 October 2009

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS	423W	COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT— continued	
Construction: Procurement	423W	Departmental Billing	458W
Departmental Public Expenditure	423W	Departmental Data Protection	459W
Higher Education: Admissions	424W	Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers	459W
Higher Education: East of England	427W	Departmental Public Expenditure	459W
Higher Education: Student Numbers	431W	Departmental Responsibilities	459W
Internet	431W	Departmental Staffing	460W
National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills: Thurrock	431W	English Partnership Public Relations Panel	461W
Party Conferences	432W	Environmental Health: Manpower	463W
Public Sector: Construction	433W	Home Information Packs	463W
Royal Mail: Industrial Disputes	433W	Homes and Communities Agency	464W
Vetting	433W	Housing	465W
		Housing: Construction	465W
CABINET OFFICE	372W	Housing: Energy	466W
Population	372W	Housing: Floods	467W
Social Enterprise	372W	Housing: Lighting	468W
		Housing: Low Incomes	468W
CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES	393W	Housing: Standards	468W
Apprentices: Industrial Health and Safety	393W	Institute for Public Policy Research and New Local Government Network	469W
Children: Human Rights	394W	INTERREG Programme	469W
Children In Care	393W	Land: Databases	469W
Family Intervention Projects	394W	Local Government: Bank Services	470W
GCSE: Disadvantaged	394W	Local Government: Equality	471W
Schools: Sports	395W	Local Government Information Unit	470W
Schools: Vetting	395W	Local Government: Pay	471W
		Local Government: Pensions	471W
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	454W	Maps: EU Law	471W
Building Regulations: Energy	454W	Mortgages: Government Assistance	472W
Buildings: Standards	454W	Multiple Occupation: Licensing	472W
Central Manchester Development Corporation:		National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills: Thurrock	472W
Archives	455W	Non-Domestic Rates: Parking	473W
Community Infrastructure Levy	456W	Non-Domestic Rates: Ports	473W
Council Housing: East of England	457W	Non-Domestic Rates: Religious Buildings	473W
Council Housing: Lone Parents	457W		
Council Tax: Valuation	457W		

	<i>Col. No.</i>
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT—	
<i>continued</i>	
Parking: Planning Permission	474W
Party Conferences.....	474W
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004	475W
Planning: Local Government Finance	476W
Planning Permission: Advertising	475W
Planning Permission: Parking	476W
Property Development.....	477W
Property Development: Floods.....	477W
Regeneration: Finance	477W
Repossession Orders	478W
Shops: Planning Permission.....	478W
Shops: Valuation.....	478W
Social Rented Housing.....	478W
Social Rented Housing: Rents.....	479W
Social Rented Housing: Suffolk	479W
Sustainable Development.....	480W
Tenant Services Authority: Marketing	480W
Tenants Rights.....	481W
Valuation Office: Data Protection	481W
Valuation Office: Local Government	482W
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	390W
Cultural Heritage.....	390W
Departmental Telephone Services.....	391W
National Skills Academy for Creative and Cultural Skills: Thurrock.....	391W
Olympic Games 2012: Culture	391W
Overseas Visitors.....	392W
Sports: Clubs	392W
DEFENCE	375W
Afghanistan, Peacekeeping operations.....	375W
Armed Forces: Young People.....	375W
Chinook helicopters.....	376W
Czech Republic: Motor Vehicles	376W
Members: Correspondence	377W
Trident	377W
ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE.....	389W
Climate Change	389W
Power Factor Correction: Capital Allowances	389W
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	349W
Air Pollution.....	349W
Departmental Drinking Water.....	350W
Departmental Rail Travel.....	350W
Food: Packaging.....	350W
Lorries	350W
National Bee Unit: Qualifications.....	351W
Recycling: Leeds	351W
Rural Areas: Advertising.....	351W
Waste Management.....	352W
Wind Power: Floods	352W
Wind Power: Somerset.....	352W
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	377W
African Union	377W
Colombia: Foreign Relations	377W
Conflict Prevention.....	378W
Counter-Terrorism: International Cooperation.....	379W
Departmental Motor Vehicles.....	380W
Departmental Postal Services.....	380W
Departmental Telephone Services	381W
Embassies	381W
Horn of Africa: EU	381W
Turks and Caicos Islands: Politics and Government	381W
Uganda: Armed Conflict	382W
United Nations: Festivals and Special Occasions	382W
HEALTH	434W
Bolton and Wigan Primary Care Trust: Managers.....	434W
Bolton Primary Care Trust: Public Relations	434W
Care Homes: Standards	434W
Dental Services: York.....	437W
Departmental Postal Services.....	439W
Departmental Telephone Services	440W

	<i>Col. No.</i>
HEALTH—continued	
East of England Strategic Health Authority: Finance.....	440W
General Practitioners: Leeds.....	440W
Health Services: York.....	442W
Hospitals: Food	443W
Kidney Patients: Dialysis Machines	444W
Mental Health Services.....	445W
NHS Connecting for Health: Marketing.....	446W
NHS: Finance.....	446W
NHS: Information and Communications Technology.....	446W
NHS: Pensions.....	447W
NHS: Procurement	447W
NHS: Public Holidays.....	447W
Nurses: Pay	447W
Nurses: Training	448W
Nutrition: Standards.....	448W
Office of the Health Professionals Adjudicator.....	449W
Pain: Health Services	450W
Patients: Public Transport.....	450W
Patients: Safety	450W
Social Services	450W
Social Services: Finance	451W
Suffolk Primary Care Trust: Finance	451W
Swine Flu: Prisoners	452W
Swine Flu: Vaccination	452W
Thalidomide	453W
West Suffolk Hospital NHS Trust: Finance	453W
HOME DEPARTMENT	383W
62 South Eaton Place.....	383W
Alcoholic Drinks: Crime.....	383W
Animal Experiments: Primates.....	383W
Antisocial Behaviour Orders: Bassetlaw.....	384W
Crime: West Yorkshire	384W
Entry Clearances: Overseas Students	385W
Entry Clearances: Pakistan	385W
Firearms: Essex.....	385W
Forensic Science Service.....	386W
Identity Cards.....	387W
Motorcycles: Registration	387W
North Yorkshire Police: Expenditure	388W
Offences Against Children	388W
Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006	388W
HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION	353W
Portcullis House: Smoking.....	353W
Recruitment: Pay	353W
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	369W
Afghan Aid	369W
Afghanistan	369W
Afghanistan: Overseas Aid	369W
Afghanistan: Schools	370W
Departmental Public Expenditure.....	370W
Ethiopia: Human Rights.....	371W
India: Tuberculosis	371W
International Assistance: Tuberculosis.....	371W
Pakistan: Overseas Aid	372W
JUSTICE	395W
Community Orders: Females	395W
Criminal Proceedings: Ex-servicemen	396W
Custodial Treatment	398W
Electoral Register.....	399W
Homicide: Prisoners Release.....	399W
Human Trafficking: Compensation.....	400W
Injunctions.....	400W
Legal Aid	401W
Legal Aid: East of England	403W
Legal Aid: Immigration	404W
Members: Correspondence	405W
Prisoners: Drugs	406W
Prisoners: Food.....	419W
Prisoners Release	405W
Prisoners: Suicide.....	420W
Prisons: Mother and baby units	421W
Remand in Custody	421W
Traffigra: Injunctions	422W

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
NORTHERN IRELAND	390W	TREASURY—continued	
Police	390W	Departmental Postal Services.....	357W
Police Service of Northern Ireland: Recruitment	390W	Departmental Public Expenditure.....	358W
OLYMPICS	362W	Government Departments: Public Appointments	358W
Olympic Games 2012: Wales	362W	Housing: Greater London.....	358W
SCOTLAND	374W	Insurance: Travel.....	359W
Christmas	374W	Local Government: Assets	359W
Departmental Postal Services.....	375W	Local Government: Bank Services	360W
TRANSPORT	362W	Met Office.....	360W
A14: Road Traffic	362W	Presbyterian Mutual Society	360W
A14: Suffolk	362W	Revenue and Customs: Manpower.....	360W
Biofuels	363W	Taxation: Self-Assessment.....	361W
Bournemouth Airport: Roads.....	364W	VAT	361W
Departmental Motor Vehicles.....	364W	WALES	389W
Driving: Licensing	366W	Christmas	389W
Driving Offences: Speed Limits.....	364W	WORK AND PENSIONS	354W
Driving Offences: Working Hours.....	365W	Attendance Allowance: Bedfordshire	354W
Lorries: Accidents.....	367W	Carer's Allowance: Bedfordshire.....	354W
Lorries: Agriculture	367W	Carers' Benefits.....	355W
Lorries: Costs	367W	Chronic Fatigue Syndrome	355W
Lorries: Safety	368W	Employment and Support Allowance	355W
Railways: East Midlands.....	368W	Employment Services: Disabled	356W
TREASURY	357W	Social Security Benefits.....	356W
Child Trust Fund: Birmingham	357W	Winter Fuel Payments: Birmingham	356W
		Winter Fuel Payments: Fife	356W

MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Wednesday 28 October 2009

	<i>Col. No.</i>
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	3MC
Housing: Construction	3MC

Members who wish to have the Daily Report of the Debates forwarded to them should give notice at the Vote Office.

The Bound Volumes will also be sent to Members who similarly express their desire to have them.

No proofs of the Daily Reports can be supplied, nor can corrections be made in the Weekly Edition. Corrections which Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked in the Daily Report, but not telephoned, and *the copy containing the Corrections must be received at the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Wednesday 4 November 2009**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF THE VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their Speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), on application to the Stationery Office, c/o the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons, from whom the terms and conditions of reprinting may be ascertained. Application forms are available at the Vote Office.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY PARTS

Single copies:

Commons, £5; Lords, £3.50.

Annual subscriptions:

Commons, £865; Lords, £525.

WEEKLY HANSARD

Single copies:

Commons, £12; Lords, £6.

Annual subscriptions:

Commons, £440. Lords, £225.

Index—Single copies:

Commons, £6.80—published every three weeks

Annual subscriptions:

Commons, £125; Lords, £65.

LORDS CUMULATIVE INDEX obtainable on standing order only. Details available on request.

BOUND VOLUMES OF DEBATES are issued periodically during the session.

Single copies:

Commons, £105; Lords, £40.

Standing orders will be accepted.

THE INDEX to each Bound Volume of House of Commons Debates is published separately at £9.00 and can be supplied to standing order.

WEEKLY INFORMATION BULLETIN compiled by the House of Commons, giving details of past and forthcoming business, the work of Committees and general information on legislation, etc. The Annual Subscription includes also automatic despatch of the *Sessional Information Digest*.

Single copies:

£1.50.

Annual subscriptions:

£53.50.

All prices are inclusive of postage

CONTENTS

Wednesday 28 October 2009

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 267] [see index inside back page]

Minister for Cabinet Office
Prime Minister

Nimrod Review [Col. 287]

Statement—(Mr. Bob Ainsworth)

Rentcharges (Notification) [Col. 299]

Motion for leave to introduce Bill—(Andrew Gwynne)—agree to
Bill presented, and read the First time

Opposition Day [20th allotted day]

Local Spending Reports [Col. 302]

Motion—(Mrs. Spelman)—on a Division, negatived
Amendment—(Mr. Denham)—agreed to
Motion, as amended, agreed to

Future of the Territorial Army [Col. 349]

Motion—(Dr. Fox)—on a Division, negatived
Amendment—(Mr. Bob Ainsworth)—agreed to
Motion, as amended, agreed to

Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority [Col. 397]

Motion—(Barbara Keeley)—agreed to

Support for UK Investors [Col. 414]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Death Penalty (Global Abolition) [Col. 71WH]

Wareham Railway Station [Col. 93WH]

Sri Lanka (IDP Camps) [Col. 101WH]

Pudsey (Transport) [Col. 126WH]

Dartford River Crossing [Col. 134WH]

Debates on motion for Adjournment

Written Ministerial Statements [Col. 13WS]

Written Answers to Questions [Col. 349W] [see index inside back page]

Ministerial Correction [Col. 3MC]
