



Liaison Committee

Oral evidence: [Evidence from the Prime Minister](#),
HC 939

Tuesday 14 January 2014

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Members present: Sir Alan Beith (Chair); Mr Graham Allen; Mr James Arbuthnot; Dame Anne Begg; Sir Malcolm Bruce; Mr William Cash; David T. C. Davies; Dr Hywel Francis; Miss Anne McIntosh; Andrew Miller; Keith Vaz; Joan Walley; Mr Tim Yeo

Questions 1-82

Witness: **Rt Hon David Cameron MP**, Prime Minister, gave evidence.gave evidence.

Q1 Sir Alan Beith (Chair): Welcome Prime Minister. We had anticipated that there might be a vote at or just before 4 o'clock, but things are dragging on a little. When that vote happens—I confidently expect there will only be one vote—I will suspend the sitting for the duration of that vote—for about 15 minutes. Today's session is devoted to two themes: violence against women and girls, and energy policy and environmental priorities. I want first to see whether any interests need to be declared.

Mr Yeo: I would draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and in particular to my interest in the transport and energy industries.

Mr Allen: May I draw attention to my interest as the chair of the Early Intervention Foundation?

Sir Alan Beith (Chair): In that case, confident in the knowledge that he will be interrupted at some point in his questioning, I call Sir Malcolm Bruce.

Q2 Sir Malcolm Bruce: Thank you, Sir Alan, and good afternoon Prime Minister. You were one of the three co-chairs of the UN High Level Panel on the post-2015 agenda. Can you confirm that on the basis of the panel's recommendations, the UK Government will make the agreement to target discrimination and violence against women internationally a key and specific priority for that framework? Can you ensure that that will be an explicit target?

Mr Cameron: Yes, absolutely. I would like to go further than that. I think there is a huge opportunity this year for Britain to lead the charge on women's equality, on women's empowerment and on the empowerment of girls and women worldwide because we have so many things coming together. We have William Hague's excellent work on preventing sexual violence in conflict, and the fact that I co-chaired

the High Level Panel, which gave women's empowerment and equality such a high profile. We have what the Development Secretary is doing on female genital mutilation and the fact that we are carrying forward an enormous commitment on helping on family planning.

I want to bring all these things together, adding in proper property rights for women worldwide, the right to inherit property, women's entrepreneurship—all these issues—and use the moral authority that Britain has got in the world, meeting our commitment to our 0.7% aid target, to say we really want to make huge strides forward right across these issues in the year ahead. I think we have every opportunity to do that.

Q3 Sir Malcolm Bruce: I do not think that anyone would doubt the commitment in terms of what has been expressed by the Government, but clearly what we need to know is what action will follow. In the particular post-2015 commitment, you and your fellow chairs of the panel talked about eliminating violence against women, yet there are discussions now suggesting that there should be a target for the percentage reduction in violence against women. Where do you stand on that? Is it elimination, or are we accepting something less—a percentage reduction?

Mr Cameron: I think we need to look at this. What we tried to do on the panel was to set goals that the world should be focused on that are achievable. For instance, eradicating extreme poverty worldwide, which is achievable by our world over the next few decades. We should be able to ensure no one has to live on less than a certain amount of money. There is then a question about whether you set interim targets, do you have years by which you want to reach certain goals? That is all up for discussion and we should discuss that in the months ahead.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Q4 Sir Alan Beith (Chair): We are slightly ahead of schedule, but we are anxious to take advantage of the time as much as possible. One Member had an interest which he did not remember to declare earlier.

Mr Arbuthnot: I am sorry, but I forgot to declare that I am an unremunerated member of the advisory board of the Electric Infrastructure Security Council.

Sir Alan Beith (Chair): Thank you.

Q5 Sir Malcolm Bruce: Just to clarify the point you were making before the vote, Prime Minister, there is a difference between elimination and setting a target and a time scale. The time scale for eliminating poverty is 2030. I have heard that people say that elimination means leaving perhaps 3% that you cannot reach. Is there some similar specific target in terms of violence against women?

Mr Cameron: I would have to check. As I say, the goals are as set out. They are advisory to the UN, which then has to decide what to take forward. It might make sense to have an aspiration and then you have some numerical targets underneath it.

The danger is that we get too complicated and people cannot remember what all the goals are. So this is a mixture: specific helps you be kept up to the mark but the more specific you are the more there will become an enormous mass of goals and no one will be able to remember quite what we set.

Q6 Sir Malcolm Bruce: I think what people will want to see is measurable targets and measurable progress. You have set out the leadership role you think the UK can play. May I turn to specific actions? For example, the International Development Committee, which I chair, recommended that violence against women and girls, or progress on dealing with that, should be a strategic priority in Afghanistan. In March last year, the Government said that they would be taking that forward. There has been no detailed announcement about what that will entail in terms of specific programmes—when we did our report there were virtually none—and specific funding. Our Committee took the view that the status of women in Afghanistan two or three years after troop withdrawal would probably be the definitive test of whether our intervention had really made a positive difference in terms of progress within Afghan society.

Mr Cameron: I think the test for our presence in Afghanistan overwhelmingly has to be what the National Security Council set out, which is whether when we leave, Afghanistan is capable of maintaining security and preventing the re-emergence of terrorist training camps without the presence of foreign troops. I think that is the top line of what we are trying to achieve in Afghanistan. That is what we should measure overwhelmingly. Underneath that, I absolutely agree with you. The role of women in Afghan society, the number of children going to school, the accessibility of medicine and access to health centres: all of that is important, but as Prime Minister I would want to say that I will judge things above all by that first part.

Q7 Sir Malcolm Bruce: I think people would understand that, Prime Minister, but if I took an extreme view: if they had order and they had managed to maintain peace but we had a situation that prevailed before where no girls went to school, that would be a pretty poor achievement.

Mr Cameron: Of course, that would not be a good outcome, but if you are asking me as Prime Minister, “How are you going to judge the success of what we are doing in Afghanistan?” I am giving you as clear an answer as I can which is that the first and overwhelming test must be a test of security. Is this country capable of delivering its own security and preventing the re-emergence of terrorism and terrorist training camps without the presence of foreign soldiers? That is what the National Security Council agreed. That is what I said to Parliament. I want to be absolutely clear that that is test No. 1. I completely agree with you that if underneath that you haven’t got girls going to school, you haven’t got access to health centres, the Afghan economy goes backwards and all the rest of it, that would be a bad outcome—absolutely—but we need to rank these things very clearly. Otherwise it is not really fair on our soldiers and diplomats and everybody else. We need them to know exactly what the priority is.

Q8 Sir Malcolm Bruce: To come on to the National Security Council, there is evidence that societies which treat their women with some degree of respect are less violent. The counter to

that is the other way round: if violence against women is the norm there is a more violent society.

Mr Cameron: I do agree with that. That is why I am saying that this year, Britain should lead the charge on women's equality, women's empowerment, and the empowerment of women and girls, not only because it is a good thing in and of itself, but because if you look at why countries don't develop or why countries develop slowly, if they exclude women from the work force, if they do not give them equal rights, if there are not proper systems in place for maternal mortality and for safe childbirth, if you don't have family planning, that country will be held back. I totally agree with that. We are going to drive that agenda very vigorously. I just wanted to give you an accurate answer on Afghanistan. We must prioritise safety and security because, after all, that is why we committed troops there in the first place.

Q9 Sir Malcolm Bruce: So who leads on the violence against women and girls agenda in the National Security Council?

Mr Cameron: The Development Secretary, Justine Greening, has responsibility for our aid programmes and budgets and leads on that issue. What is interesting is the extent to which the Foreign Secretary is taking a very strong leadership role on the issue of preventing sexual violence in conflict.

Q10 Sir Malcolm Bruce: A final point on that: will the successor to the Conflict Pool—the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund—have a specific commitment to tackle violence against women and girls as part of that fund, and provide funding towards it?

Mr Cameron: That is a very good question. I will have to write to you about that. One of the purposes of this Committee, as you were saying Sir Alan, is to understand the Prime Minister's role in this. We are trying to use the National Security Council better to co-ordinate cross-departmental work when it comes to things such as preventing sexual violence, women's empowerment or our aid budget. We are using the National Security Council to bring those Departments together, and the conflict fund is a good example of that. I will check specifically whether it has an individual target for that.

Q11 Mr Arbuthnot: Prime Minister, do you think there is a greater role for the UK armed forces to play in the work they do in training overseas forces, for example in Afghanistan, about violence against women?

Mr Cameron: Yes, one of the great strengths of our engagement in countries such as Afghanistan is the extent of the training that we are doing and the expertise that we bring. We cannot ask our soldiers, sailors and airmen to do too many different things. They need clear instructions and a clear goal, but, yes, that can be part of it.

Q12 Mr Arbuthnot: Have you discussed that with the Chief of the Defence Staff?

Mr Cameron: I have discussed their role in training in broad terms, but I am not sure I have discussed that specific element with him.

Q13 Mr Arbuthnot: Have you had any discussions with non-governmental organisations about whether there is anything further that they think that we might be able to do to reduce the violence against women in those countries where we play an important part?

Mr Cameron: Yes, we are having discussions both within Government and from Government with voluntary bodies and charities. As I said, the Foreign Secretary is leading the charge on the whole initiative of preventing sexual violence, particularly sexual violence in conflict. You know as well as anyone that if you look at the appalling things that have been done against women and girls in conflict situations from Kosovo and Bosnia to the Congo, there has been an unbelievably ghastly and depressing drumbeat through the history of the past 20 to 30 years.

It is full credit to the Foreign Secretary that he has decided to use Britain's diplomatic, military, Foreign Office, aid budget—everything—to corral all of this together, to raise the profile of the issue. That means not just talking about it but getting 138 countries to sign up to a declaration, then using what we do have in terms of action as well as words to send teams of experts into situations such as Kosovo and Bosnia and the Congo to try to have an effect on the ground. We are trying to marshal everything we have got to deliver that vital agenda.

Q14 Mr Arbuthnot: Changing the subject to sexual harassment within the armed forces, there have been serious problems in the United States and Australia. What has been done in this country to look at that? Have any recent surveys been done? How are we getting on top of it?

Mr Cameron: One of the things we are doing is to look at the evidence. We collect the figures and the most recent ones have seen a drop in the number of complaints. We now have more female two-star officers in the UK armed forces for the first time. We had the review that was commissioned by the previous Government in 2009 that looked at this. There is more work to be done, but we are making progress.

You would know with your Committee's work that there were quite ingrained problems that needed to be addressed. I would say that a lot of work is being done. There is a big question for us for the future about the issue of an ombudsman, which I am taking some personal interest in. It is interesting that the British Legion has taken up the issue. It cannot be claimed that the British Legion is a charitable organisation divorced from our forces that doesn't understand how they work—quite the opposite.

I will listen to the arguments the military make about the importance of the chain of command and how it is difficult to put any other structures into this, but I will also be listening to the Legion and the arguments it makes about an ombudsman. That could be one way of taking forward some of these issues, but we do not have to wait for that discussion to be had. Sexual harassment and bullying is wrong. It should be driven out of every area of our national life—that should include the armed forces. Progress has been made, information is being collected, but there is more work to be done.

Mr Arbuthnot: I am pleased that you are sounding open-minded on the issue of the ombudsman.

Q15 Sir Malcolm Bruce: Our inquiry looked at the issue of female genital mutilation. Evidence was presented to us that 20,000 girls living in the United Kingdom are at risk of this; indeed, we had evidence to say that some of them had suffered this within the United Kingdom. It has been illegal since 1985, yet there has never been a prosecution. Why not?

Mr Cameron: I have been asking this question myself. First of all, let us be clear: this is an absolutely unacceptable practice. It is illegal in the UK and it is illegal for anyone in the UK, no matter their background, culture or anything else. It is illegal—full stop; end of story.

You know all this, but I was interested in the figures. The NSPCC set up a helpline. Since it was set up, they have had 132 contacts; 55 of them were referred to the relevant police force. The CPS is currently considering six cases. My understanding is the problem is not that it is not clear in the law, as it is; not that the police do not understand the importance of this, as they do; and not that the CPS are not trained, as they are. It is actually getting people to come forward and give evidence: that is the problem.

But it is not an acceptable situation. We know this is taking place. We know that we have a problem. We have passed a law, but we haven't had a prosecution. So I think we need to keep working at this and to understand what more we can do to encourage people to come forward. But the work your Committee has done, I am sure, will be very helpful in giving us some ideas.

Q16 Sir Malcolm Bruce: Apart from being specifically against the law, it does constitute child abuse, does it not? Aren't there other ways that it could be tackled? Not only that, quite often it is women who are perpetrating it on women, because that is part of the social and cultural environment. But if we do not have any prosecutions, the examples are not very convincing.

Mr Cameron: I agree with that, but surely the best way to get a prosecution is for people to co-operate with the prosecuting authorities and to take it forward in that way. If there is more that can be done in terms of educating and training—spreading information—I think that is absolutely vital.

If behind the question is, “Are the Government doing enough to try to help this process along?” as far as I can see, the answer is, yes, the Government are doing quite a lot. There was a report in 2007. We have commissioned a new study about prevalence rates in England and Wales that is going to be completed by March this year. The NSPCC helpline is up and running. There is a leaflet about FGM and 37,000 copies were distributed in November 2012. I think all the different Departments are doing what they should be doing, but we need results.

Sir Alan Beith (Chair): We will explore that a bit more in a moment.

Q17 Sir Malcolm Bruce: The point is that we are spending £35 million on trying to eliminate this practice across the globe. This is a UK initiative, and that is highly commendable, but unless we demonstrate that we are dealing with this at home, it does rather undermine our credibility. Do you agree with that? And can you also ensure that the health authorities, who clearly get presented with evidence, are recording that and ensuring that that is fed into the system so that we can get the communities to be part of the process to help us eliminate this practice worldwide?

Mr Cameron: I would agree with both of those points. We have to be effective at home as well as abroad. We need the Department of Health to be playing its role, as well as the Department for Education and the Home Office.

I think, though, if you look at the scale of the problem overseas, it is of a totally different order. I was looking at the figures in, for instance, Egypt, where FGM is practised on 90% of women—that is over 27 million people. So, going back to the big picture of where should Britain be putting its effort in terms of our aid budget, our diplomacy and our standing in the world, I think, actually, squarely saying this year is about women's empowerment and women's rights and the right of girls not to be violated in this way is a good use of Government resources, money, time, effort and everything else.

Q18 Keith Vaz: Prime Minister, the commissioner says that what we need, as far as FGM is concerned in this country, is a shake-up of the whole system. He is worried that there are not enough referrals coming from health agencies and the education sector, because people are culturally sensitive and do not want to step on the toes of communities. Do you think that this might be one of the barriers, and that what we need to do is engage the diaspora community and getting them involved in reporting these crimes?

Mr Cameron: The short answer is yes. Having looked at the figures, as Prime Minister, the questions I have been asking are: are all the Departments joined up and taking the action they should to try to root out this terrible practice in Britain? The answer, I think, is yes. Are the police properly trained and the CPS aware of this problem? I think, yes. Is it clearly against the law and we don't need to change the law? I think, yes. So you are left with, "Why aren't people coming forward?" The answers I have been given when I've asked this question are cultural sensitivities and people not wanting to come forward and give evidence. I think that goes absolutely to your suggestion. The answer to that is to get into diaspora communities and talk to them about how awful this practice is, and how they should be helping to try to drive it out. That is long-term, difficult and hard work, but we need to do it.

Q19 Keith Vaz: But is it also about the fact that the agencies are not themselves reflective of communities? If you look at the police, the health service and the education sector, there are not enough black and Asian people at the very highest levels, enabling them to be able to engage in a crime that is being perpetrated against members of their own communities.

Mr Cameron: I think that is part of it. If you compare this with the issue of forced marriage, it is not dissimilar, in a way—a problem in particular communities that has not been dealt with enough because sometimes people in those communities have not addressed it, and also because people outside those communities have been a bit too sensitive about saying, "This is wrong." You need to do both. I suspect the same is the case here.

Q20 Keith Vaz: And the same is probably the case for child exploitation. There was concern about the large number of children who are being exploited either through the internet or by being groomed by gangs and a failure of the authorities to prosecute—100 prosecutions in Lancashire, but no prosecutions in south Yorkshire. Are you now seized of this, and do you think we will get more prosecutions?

Mr Cameron: Yes, I think we are. You have seen, for instance, Operation Bullfinch in Oxfordshire, which I have been following as a local MP, and the prosecutions in Rochdale and elsewhere. I think the publicity around these cases would have drawn attention to other forces, prosecutors and others the extent of the problems. There is an important question we have to answer about whether we are drawing together all the lessons across the country about what appears to be happening.

Q21 Keith Vaz: Would you like to see more data being collected?

Mr Cameron: The concern I have, and we are acting on it, and I think we are putting everything in place, is that you have this operation in Oxfordshire—there are still elements of it under way, so you have to be careful with what you say about it—and what happened in Rochdale. In every area, you will have serious case reviews to look into what happened, and they will bring together all the authorities—social services, police, local authorities and the like.

Then I think it is important that, in central Government, we are drawing together the lessons and working out, well, given that, what needs to change in the practice of the police, prosecutors, local authorities or social services. Damian Green is doing that work for me across Departments, but we need to make sure that, as you say, data is collected and that we do a good job of it.

Q22 Keith Vaz: One of the things we want to see happen in the Home Affairs Committee—we recommended this—is the Education Secretary, Michael Gove, once a year writing to all head teachers to remind them of their responsibilities to look for the tell-tale signs: young girls suddenly going missing in the summer term, when they get to 15 or 16 years of age. That actually meshes in with what you have been saying about forced marriages. Do you think that, as far as education is concerned, we need to be doing much more?

Mr Cameron: Particularly with forced marriage, I think there is a need for schools to check those that disappear off the register aged 12, 13, 14 or 15. We need to make sure all schools are doing that. The only reason I am sounding hesitant is that there is a danger of schools getting a letter on every single issue every day of the week. We really have to try to target and get the right way of raising each issue with schools. I will give that a bit of thought.

Q23 Keith Vaz: And as far as prosecutions are concerned, I know that in Oxfordshire you have had a pilot study going on. As far as barristers becoming a little bit too excited when they are questioning young people who have been the victims of crimes, do you think we need to look at that to enable them to do more of their evidence through video links and by ensuring that they are not put through the hot house of going to a court hearing?

Mr Cameron: Well, we've made some progress on that, on children giving evidence by video. I think we are considering what further steps can be taken, but I think the picture is quite different to what it was five or 10 years ago, and we need to keep working on that.

Q24 Keith Vaz: Finally, on human trafficking, I went to see “12 Years a Slave” last week. I do not know whether you have got the time to go and see films, but I recommend you go and see it.

Mr Cameron: Not yet; it is on my list.

Q25 Keith Vaz: Good. It actually dealt with slavery in 1843, but of course we now have 880,000 people living in the EU in slave conditions. You must have been shocked when you found out that there was a case of somebody who was living in London who had been a slave for 30 years, and because of the passage of time, they were discovered. What do you think your Modern Slavery Bill will achieve?

Mr Cameron: I think, first of all, it is genuinely shocking, and I think Parliament, and the House of Commons specifically, has done quite a good job of raising the profile of the issue and opening people's eyes to the problem of modern-day slavery. There is a far greater understanding about it now than there was perhaps three or four years ago. My experience was not going to see "12 Years a Slave"; it was walking past an exhibition in Trafalgar Square that Emma Thompson was involved in. Her showing me round the experience of someone who was trafficked and then meeting some of the people who had been affected—this was several years ago—totally opened my eyes to the extent of the problem. So the aim of the Modern Slavery Bill is to try to bring the laws together, so they are in one place, about all the crimes we should be pursuing, and also establishing the commissioner for modern slavery and making sure that we look after victims properly. I am obviously not allowed to say what is in the Queen's Speech, but there is all-party agreement. This is a good idea. This Government have taken some big steps forward. I look forward to the Bill coming in.

Q26 Keith Vaz: Would it deal with the issue of 60% of child victims of trafficking going missing from local authority care and the need to watch what happens to them? It is an astonishing figure, isn't it? Over half the children who are trafficked into this country just disappear.

Mr Cameron: It is. There are some absolutely hideous statistics in this area. As it stands, we are still looking at exactly what needs to go into the Bill, as I said: definitely an anti-slavery commissioner role; we are going to have the slavery and trafficking prevention orders; and it will consolidate into the Act the offences that we use today to prosecute slave-drivers. On the issue of children and how the care system interacts, that is all up for discussion, because we have not yet finished what will be in the Bill. I think that actually there will be a statutory duty for local authorities to report potential victims of modern slavery, so that might cover the issue you just raised.

Q27 Dr Francis: Prime Minister, may I ask you some questions on UK implementation of international agreements in relation to violence against women and girls, and begin with the Istanbul convention—the Council of Europe's convention on preventing and combating violence against women? It was opened for signature in May 2011. The Government have signed it, but are yet to ratify it. My Committee—the Joint Committee on Human Rights—has written to the Government asking about that and asking for a timetable. Could you give us a timetable and any suggestions on changes to domestic law and any reservations you might have in relation to the implementation of it? I understand that you have committed yourself to ratifying it.

Mr Cameron: Yes, I think I can satisfy you on this one. We signed the Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and

domestic violence—the Istanbul convention. As you know, we already have in place in this country probably some of the most robust legal protections in the world against violence towards women. We then had to go through the convention and obviously check we had every aspect done: forced marriage, female genital mutilation, stalking, physical and psychological violence, sexual violence. We already comply with the vast majority of the articles. The criminalisation of forced marriage is a vital component of our compliance and that has been an initiative of this Government—something that I specifically pushed very hard.

Lots of people argued against criminalising forced marriage and said it would drive it even more underground and you would get fewer people to co-operate. I actually think you have to take a clear stance that forced marriage is wrong. It is a crime and we should legislate, so I can tell you that the provisions are in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Bill, and as soon as that is passed and becomes law, we will be able to ratify the convention. So the ratification is subject to Royal Assent of the Bill. That should take place in the next few months, all being well, and then we can ratify the convention.

Q28 Dr Francis: Those are changes to domestic law. Are there any reservations that you have?

Mr Cameron: Not that I am aware of. If I have got that wrong, I will let you know, but not that I am aware of.

Q29 Dr Francis: Can I turn, then, to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women—CEDAW? It has been making some observations and recommendations, particularly in relation to the impact of the austerity programme on women and services provided to women. To begin with, can I ask you about the concrete measures the Government have to mitigate the impact of the austerity programme, especially with regard to women's services delivered locally? Hitherto, many services were provided and were ring-fenced. Frequently, that has now ended. What are you doing to avoid women suffering as a consequence of that?

Mr Cameron: Well, I would answer that in two ways. First, obviously, the law that we have, now being strengthened by criminalising forced marriage, provides a framework within which local authorities have to act. That is important. We have also taken some specific steps on issues that are clearly important, for instance, rape crisis centres. We wanted to make sure that the network of rape crisis centres was properly maintained, so we have announced some specific Government money for that purpose. These are important issues.

We have tried to de-ring-fence money generally across the piece. I think there was quite a lot of all-party support for trying to give local authorities greater discretion in how they spent their money. So a legal framework, a clear set of statutory obligations and local authorities should be able to manage, but then in some specific areas, like rape crisis centres, we have intervened.

Q30 Dr Francis: If women's organisations can provide you with evidence of where they would be severely affected as a consequence of this, would you contemplate reintroducing ring-fencing?

Mr Cameron: I will always look at the arguments. That is the best thing I can say to that. We have had to make difficult decisions. We have had this discussion before in this Committee. We have had to make very difficult funding decisions that have affected the police and local authorities. We have protected the health service, relatively. We have had to make difficult decisions and tried to accompany that with sensitive and careful understanding of potential problems. We might come on to domestic violence, so with the changes to legal aid, we have tried to make sure that the definition of domestic violence is as broad as possible, so that we provide some protection there. If women's organisations have particular arguments and points, we are very happy to look at them.

Sir Alan Beith (Chair): We need to move on.

Q31 Mr Allen: Prime Minister, we could pre-empt much domestic violence, and its intergenerational transmission through families, by intervening early. What can the Government do to develop high-quality training across the public services about domestic violence so that we can tackle it in a coherent way?

Mr Cameron: I think a huge amount has been done and that a huge amount still needs to be done. If you take a big picture view of domestic violence and take a 10 or 20-year view, there was an enormous amount of it happening. The police were not properly trained to identify it, people were very nervous about coming forward to talk about it, local authorities did not sufficiently understand it and society had not properly confronted it. Compare that with where we are today, where I think there is far greater understanding. I see in my own constituency that the police are far more aware of it and that prosecutors are more understanding. The situation has been transformed, but there is a lot more to be done and training is a key part of that. It is ongoing work. If you look at what training is being done now in the police, the prosecuting services and elsewhere, it is of a pretty good quality. The Government are trying to add to that, in particular through the publicity campaign and by making people aware of domestic violence, but there is always more work to be done.

Q32 Mr Allen: We have to fire fight and deal with the cases, but can we put a little more emphasis on the prevention and pre-emption side? Are there central resources within government to support the work on domestic violence? Which Department takes the lead on this?

Mr Cameron: The lead for this is the Home Office, and specifically the Home Secretary, who brings together a Committee in Whitehall of all the relevant Departments. It is doing well.

I would divide up what we need to do into prevention, protecting victims and raising awareness. On prevention, obviously introducing Clare's law and rolling it out across the country, so that people can get information about previous violent offending by new or existing partners, is a big breakthrough and an important preventive measure. In terms of protecting victims, we obviously have the domestic violence protection orders, so it is using that part of law rather than just the more blunt instrument of the criminal law. They are very helpful.

On raising awareness, the “This is Abuse” campaign—I asked to look specifically at how many different adverts we were running and where were running them—has been very good at raising awareness about what domestic violence consists of so that people understand that this is a crime, and it should be taken seriously and acted on.

Q33 Mr Allen: The violence against women and girls action plan is very welcome from my point of view, Prime Minister, but if it transpires that it is not specific enough and that we are not holding people to account sufficiently, what mechanisms exist to assess it rigorously on its evidence, and to review and change it if necessary?

Mr Cameron: That is a good question, and first it is about collecting the data—

Sir Alan Beith (Chair): The answer is being handed to you.

Mr Cameron: I am not sure it has been, actually.

There is an action plan that we are putting in place, but your question is: how are we going to follow through the results? The best way to do that is to try to improve the quality of the data—I have been asking for that before coming in front of the Committee. You have to look at what is happening to the level of domestic violence, and then at how many cases are reported, how many cases are referred from the police to the CPS, how many prosecutions are undertaken and what the rate of conviction is. That is the evidence base, and you should judge—whether that is your Committee, the Home Affairs Committee or the PAC, or though any of the other ways we are held to account—the work of Theresa’s cross-departmental Committee against those figures.

There is a difficulty, which you probably understand better than I do. If you look at rape, for instance, it is almost easier, because rape is a specific crime and you have a specific number of crimes and the specific number reported, referred and convicted. Domestic violence is more difficult because you are dealing with a whole set of different classes of offences, so getting hold of the actual figures for domestic violence in any one year to compare against the referrals and the prosecutions is a bit more difficult. One thing that we might want to look at—I have talked to Theresa about this—is whether we can try to get a clearer data set against which we can be judged.

Q34 Mr Allen: A last one on education, Prime Minister. First, congratulations to you personally on the lead that you have taken on tackling online abuse. Domestic violence takes many forms and it changes, as we know. Learning at school about healthier relationships is the key to tackling domestic violence. You will remember that the House came very close to updating SRE—sex and relationship education—in 2010. Do you think now, in this new modern setting, that it is about time that we had another look at that and at how we teach it in schools, as a way of ending domestic violence, by having more rounded and fully emotionally developed children?

Mr Cameron: I am going to give one of those infuriating politician answers—a sort of yes and no. Yes, I think we can do better in terms of sex and relationship education. All sex education, in my view, must have healthy relationships at its heart—it does now—and I think we can add into the guidance that is produced better guidance on,

for instance, the modern problems of cyber-bullying and sexting. We need to deal with that.

On the no bit of the answer, if you are asking me whether I want to open up the whole of sex and relationship education and have a mega-debate about every single aspect of it, I am not sure. I think we would then get immediately into all the theocratic arguments between left and right, localist and centralist, abortion and all the rest of it. As a practical person, I would rather add some sensible bits of work to what we have, and I think we can work with some of the charities on this, rather than open up the whole Pandora's box.

Sir Alan Beith (Chair): An interesting answer that we will explore another time. I omitted to call Mr Cash to make a supplementary point.

Q35 Mr Cash: Thank you very much, Chairman. On the United Kingdom's implementation of international agreements on violence against women and girls, the UN committee recommended that the Government encourage Parliament to implement its international treaty obligations and the recommendations of the UN treaty bodies. You emphasised the empowering of women and the protection of them, and you may recall the private Member's Bill that I am putting through Parliament at the moment, with Government support, for gender equality in relation to international development. It is strongly supported by organisations such as the GREAT Initiative, Water Aid, Plan UK, the VSO and so on, and also particularly by Justine Greening, the Secretary of State—and, if I may say, also by yourself, with the help that has been given so far. Assuming that we continue to get the Government's support, which I take to be more than likely now, do you agree that by putting these provisions into effect, we will be establishing a statutory benchmark for other countries so that we will be able to promote the ideas internationally in what is effectively an incredibly important part of the agenda that you set out when you first came into this room?

Sir Alan Beith (Chair): This is a yes or no.

Mr Cameron: It is an absolute yes, because this is another brick in the wall of the whole argument that this should be the year when we really deliver a massive joined-up agenda on women's empowerment and women's equality all across the world. This helps us because the Bill will make Britain have a leading role in examining gender equality before we deploy aid and other resources, so I think it is part of the same picture.

Inevitably, whenever you make a statement that we should really deliver on these issues, people will ask, "Are you doing everything at home that you should?"—we have talked about FGM—and, "Have you solved all the problems of pay equality in Britain?", and we haven't. There are lots of gender equality issues in Britain that we still need to tackle, and we should go on tackling them. We do not come into this saying that we have sorted out every problem at home, but this Bill will help to put another brick in the wall.

Sir Alan Beith (Chair): Dr Francis wanted to come back quickly on this.

Q36 Dr Francis: Prime Minister, given your warm words on the Istanbul convention, do I take it—you missed the question that I asked at the beginning—that you will be implementing that convention and ratifying it now?

Mr Cameron: My understanding is that we will ratify it once we have passed the antisocial behaviour Bill, because in that Bill is the criminalisation of forced marriage. That is part of the convention, so we cannot ratify it until we have done that, but my understanding is that we will ratify it once we have done that.

Q37 Dame Anne Begg: I hope you will agree, Prime Minister, that women's refuges play a vital role in providing a safe haven for women and children fleeing domestic violence. I do not know whether you are aware of what I hope we all agree are the unintended consequences of some of the housing benefit reforms. Women's refuges, like many other forms of accommodation, include some care element, and are classed as supported accommodation. Many of them are exempt from the housing benefit rules, particularly the benefit cap, because they are obviously more expensive. Some women's refuges fall into that category, but most do not fit the definition of exempt supported accommodation. Is that something that you would take a personal interest in? If refuges have to close because they are no longer economically viable, it will obviously create a huge gap in the ability of women to escape their violent partners.

Mr Cameron: My understanding is that we promised to protect residents of supported exempt accommodation, including refuges that met certain criteria, so they are exempted from the benefit cap, size criteria and the funding effects of direct payments. The point you make is: what about other organisations?

Q38 Dame Anne Begg: Basically it is the ones that are owned by local authorities. If the care is provided by the local authority, they are not exempt, but everything else—

Mr Cameron: My understanding is that Ministers have said, I think, that they are committed to extending that short-term protection to other supported accommodation that is not formally exempt, and the amending regulations are expected to be published in due course. Raising this gives me the opportunity to discuss it with the DWP and make sure that it happens.

Q39 Dame Anne Begg: About a year ago, Lord Freud said it was his intention to do that, but it hasn't happened as yet, and the organisations working in the field are particularly concerned that it is not going to happen.

Mr Cameron: Okay. I will check up.

Dame Anne Begg: Thank you.

Sir Alan Beith (Chair): Thank you very much indeed. On that positive note—something you are going to do very soon—

Mr Cameron: All positive.

Sir Alan Beith (Chair): We will move on to energy policy issues. I should like Mr Yeo to open the questioning.

Q40 Mr Yeo: Prime Minister, security of electricity supply is a key aim of energy policy. We now have Ofgem warning that only two winters from now, the surplus of electricity generating capacity will be down to only 4%. Historically, that is extremely tight. We know that new nuclear cannot contribute until the 2020s, we know that coal-fired power stations are running down as a matter of law, we know that at the moment no new gas investors are coming forward, because they are waiting to see the details of the capacity payments—they are perhaps waiting to game the system a little bit—and we know that investors in renewables have been rather spooked by what seem to be some mixed messages coming out of different bits of the Government. Are you worried that the coalition’s legacy at the end of this Parliament might be that the first winter of the next Parliament is when power cuts become the norm?

Mr Cameron: First, security of supply is the most important part of energy policy. Making sure that we have sufficient supplies of energy and electricity to power our economy comes before anything—I am absolutely clear about that.

I would take you up on a couple of the points you made. The idea that there has been some hiatus in investment in renewable energy under this Government is completely untrue. I have here the list of the £33 billion of renewable energy investments that have gone ahead since 2010. It is £33 billion of investment; the figure in 2012 was, I believe, over £12 billion, compared with £6 billion in 2010. The run rate of the previous five years was about £3 billion a year, so there has been a massive increase, with no sign of a hiatus.

Frankly, I believe that energy investors now have all the information that they need. If you want to invest in renewable energy, you can see what return you will get and what money you will be paid for the next 20 years. There isn’t a country in the world that has as clear a system in place as we have—those are not my words, they are those of Ernst and Young.

Returning to the issue of energy security, I absolutely share your concerns, which was why I held the meeting around the Cabinet table with Ofgem, the national grid and the leading players, and I sought assurances—“Is there anything we need to do to make sure that there is no realistic prospect of this happening?” The information I have is that now we have put in place the Energy Act, now we have the capacity mechanism and, crucially, now we also have the ability to use short-term mechanisms such as taking plants out of mothballs, if necessary, and bringing them back online, there is no danger of that happening. I looked them in the eye and asked them the questions, and I will get them back in again, if necessary, because this is a risk that Britain cannot afford to take. I have given it my personal attention, but I am above all very satisfied that, now that we have the Energy Act in place, we have a really good framework for sorting out our energy needs for the future.

Q41 Mr Yeo: I certainly warmly welcome the levy control framework, which was set in place last year. That is a very helpful context. It was more recent events that I was really referring to. Lord Stern said on 5 November that “quarrelling in the coalition” undermines confidence and that “government-induced policy risk” is a “serious obstacle to investment”. He means future investment, not the figures that you have quoted.

Mr Cameron: Yes, but the point I would make is that not only have you got the £33 billion, but you have got a lot of plans coming forward. You also now have the strike prices published for wind, anaerobic digestion, biomass, energy from waste, geothermal and hydro. This is on a chart for inward investment into the UK. There are not many industries for which I can say to you, “If you come and invest now, I’ll tell you what money you’ll be paid for the next 20 years.” There is always a danger of politicians talking themselves into difficulties. Now that the Energy Act has cross-party consent, we all need to get together and promote Britain as a great base for energy investment. Also, for the first time in my political lifetime, there is all-party agreement about the future of nuclear, which is extremely positive. We see Hinckley Point going ahead and obviously the developments at Wylfa on Anglesey are very positive.

Q42 Mr Yeo: I certainly welcome those, too. Moving on to the price of energy, which seems to have crept on to the agenda in the past four months by some means or other, why is the Government’s response focused almost entirely on the social and green levies, which account for about 10% of a typical electricity bill, when transmission and distribution costs, for example, account for about 20%? Those are functions supplied by monopoly companies that don’t face even the somewhat limited competition that the big six suppliers have, and that certainly aren’t regulated or scrutinised in any effective way by Ofgem.

Mr Cameron: I will answer that in two ways. First, we are not simply focusing on the levies and charges. We want a more competitive energy market. The number of people not using the big six has doubled and the number of entrants into the industry has increased. I want to see that go further and faster. I don’t want a big six; I want a big 60. I want a big expansion of providers and a big expansion of competition. I have here somewhere the figures on how many people switched their energy in November, and they are pretty remarkable. It is not right to say that we are focused only on the levies and charges, but I think it sensible for a Government to say that if we are responsible for levies and charges, which we are, when you are looking at prices, you should have a good look at the levies and charges, and see what you can do.

Q43 Sir Alan Beith (Chair): You are also responsible for the existence of a monopoly that charges a lot of money for transmission.

Mr Cameron: Absolutely, and if you look at the £50 reduction in bills we have managed to achieve, it includes some cost saving on the transmission side as well, so we are not exempting that. Also, it is not entirely accurate to say that transmission is just something that happens over here and has nothing to do with the Government. The previous Government and this Government have wanted to see the transmission infrastructure updated, not least so that you can connect up offshore wind and other systems. So you have had to put in quite a lot of transmission infrastructure, which you know very well.

The point is that you want a more competitive market. You want to encourage entrants into the market, you want to encourage switching and you want to make the market work better but, yes, you should also look at the Government-imposed charges and costs on people’s energy bills, and what you can do about them. We have done something about them to cut people’s bills by £50, partly by moving the warm home discount on to the Government balance sheet, rather than the bills that people pay and,

secondly, by reforming the energy company obligation—ECO—which I have thought for a long time has required attention and potentially some cost saving, which is what we have done. So £50 off bills is a good start but, as you say, the competitiveness of the market is vital for the future.

Q44 Mr Yeo: I warmly welcomed your acknowledgment the other day that the recent extreme weather events could be linked to climate change. If that is the case, they may recur more frequently in future than they have done in the past. Over Christmas, as you are well aware because you visited some of these unfortunate people in Kent, thousands of consumers were without power, in some cases for several days, at a time of year when people are very dependent on it. Do you think that the response of some of the distribution companies to that crisis was rather inadequate, and do you think the compensation that is paid to families who may be left unable to cook, heat or even wash at home is a bit low?

Mr Cameron: On the first point, what I was trying to say in the House of Commons—it is always difficult to say these things in the heat and dust of Prime Minister’s questions—is that it seems to me that there are more extreme weather events happening around the world. The scientists seem to be advising us that there may well be a link between more extreme weather and climate change. I was slightly surprised, when I said something that I thought was pretty unremarkable, that we had a day when I had somehow discovered a new relationship in the world. The next day the climate scientists all came out and said that saying “you suspect” was a sensible way of putting it. That is the way I would explain it. You cannot point to one weather event and say, “Aha! That is climate change.” What I think you should do is just look at the fact that there are more extreme events. Our scientists are advising us that there may be a link to climate change. The point I was really trying to make is that, whatever you think—even if you think that it is mumbo-jumbo—because these things are happening more often, it makes sense to do all you can to mitigate, to prevent and to invest to make people’s lives better and to prevent these floods affecting so many people, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Coming on to the network operators, yes, some of them responded well, and some did not. Some of them have been pretty frank about the fact that they did not. I have asked Ed Davey to conduct a review of what are the rules, regulations and compensation payments, and whether we need to change any of that. It is good to note that some of the network operators actually pay higher than the regulated minimum for people who have been cut off—I thought that was promising. Basically, you are meant to be reconnected within 48 hours and then there is a level of payment for every subsequent period of 12 hours. Some of these companies have been paying considerably more than that. Anyway, Ed Davey is going to have a look at that and report back to the Cabinet, and we shall then make some announcements.

Q45 Mr Yeo: I think your comments about climate change may have raised hopes that the advice given by the Climate Change Committee—the statutory Committee—about the fourth carbon budget review, which is about to take place, might be accepted and that you might agree with it that the fourth carbon budget should not be altered.

Mr Cameron: This is the issue: everything you say about climate change is leapt on by people who want tougher carbon budgets, and by people who don’t want any carbon budgets at all. That is why one should tread in this area with great caution. The

point I would make is that I support the carbon budgeting process and the Climate Change Act, which I think is a good framework. My nervousness about being too frank about the future is simply down to the issue about carbon capture and storage and the role that gas will play in future. I see some in the green movement who seem so keen to nail down a decarbonisation target, irrespective of whether carbon capture and storage works, but I think that would be unwise, to put it mildly.

We have a lot of supplies of gas. I think with shale we can see even more supplies of gas. It is cheap; it is relatively clean.

Sir Alan Beith (Chair): We are going to come on to that.

Mr Cameron: We will come on to that. This is an important point. If you have fixed a decarbonisation target and said you are going to take carbon out of electricity generation before you know whether you can get carbon capture and storage in place, I think you would be making a huge mistake. That is why I am hesitant about answering these questions.

Q46 Mr Arbuthnot: Prime Minister, moving on to the question of the possible longer term loss of electricity—I am talking about not hours or days, but the potential of months or even years. You will not have seen the Channel 4 docu-drama called “Blackout”, but its premise was that a cyber-attack on the national grid caused serious long-term damage to it.

As you know, because we have talked about it, there is a similar threat from solar weather, the possibility of a solar flare that might cause geomagnetic storms, or even from a high-altitude nuclear bomb, which could cause an electro-magnetic pulse. Obviously we hope that all those things will not happen, but are you confident that we have sufficient resilience in place, and that we have sufficient plans for recovery in the event that they did?

Mr Cameron: I am confident that we have a process for properly identifying risks and then trying to work out how to deal with them. I am not sure whether that did exist in the past, but I am not an expert. We now have a national risk register, a National Security Council and a National Security Secretariat. Those organisations are meant to weigh up the risks, give them a weighting and work out what we would do in each case.

I am not sucking up to Members present, but the work that parliamentary Committees, including your own, do in saying, “Have you properly considered this risk? Have you looked at this bit of scientific evidence?” is all very useful. I can use that to challenge the officials responsible and say, “Are we taking severe space weather or electro-magnetic pulses seriously enough in the national risk register?” I think the process is there. Whether what we then put in place is sufficiently robust is for Committees such as yours to judge.

Q47 Mr Arbuthnot: I gather you are having an exercise later this year to look at some of these issues. Could you bear in mind what Chris Train of the national grid said, that electricity is to a certain extent a luxury? There is something in what he said.

Mr Cameron: I don’t think it is a luxury. When you consider how essential it is for so many aspects of life, including hospitals and everything else—when grids go down,

you realise the full extent of your vulnerability—you see it not as a luxury, but as a necessity.

Q48 Joan Walley: Prime Minister, I wanted to go back to some of the points that Mr Yeo made on energy subsidies and fuel poverty. You mentioned being at the Dispatch Box and making comments on severe weather patterns and links to climate change. I just wonder how you square that with your actions when the energy companies started to put up their prices in October by 10% or more. You told the House that you wanted “to roll back some of the green regulations and charges that are putting up bills.”

Mr Cameron: If you quote me accurately, I think I said that I wanted to roll back the cost of some of the green levies and charges, and that is exactly what I have done. If you look at what we have done, for example, with the energy company obligation, we have rolled back its cost by some £35, but we have done it on a carbon-neutral basis, because we have introduced other changes to ensure that we are taking carbon out.

My view—we are all politicians and grown-ups who make our own decisions—is that energy bills, because of what has happened in the wholesale markets and what has happened with levies and charges, reached a level of unacceptability. It was time for the Government to roll up their sleeves, look at all these charges and levies and think, “How can we help people and how can we get the bills down?” We do the cold weather payments, the winter fuel allowance, the warm home discount and the big insulation schemes, and that is all well and good, but we needed to get the bills down. It was absolutely right to do that. We have rolled back the cost of the charges. We have not, I believe, sacrificed important green initiatives such as home insulation.

Q49 Joan Walley: But I think that some would argue with you about whether what you have done is actually carbon-neutral. One of the real concerns is on how you square the roll-back with the increase in additional carbon emissions and the slow progress there will now be in making homes more energy efficient. Of course, that links with changes that are being made inside the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Mr Cameron: First, we set out deliberately to try to do this in a way that was carbon-neutral. That was why we introduced the stamp duty discount for people who take action to improve the energy performance and energy efficiency of their home. I believe, on all the evidence that we had, that it is carbon-neutral. It was necessary and right to try to reduce the cost of people’s bills. I do not believe that we have done that by sacrificing insulation programmes. The truth is that it is getting harder. The early work as you improve the country’s housing stock—the solid wall insulation, the lagging of lofts—is the easiest and the most cost-effective. One of the problems is that as we do all of that—

Q50 Sir Alan Beith (Chair): Prime Minister, solid wall insulation is one of the more difficult things.

Mr Cameron: Sorry. If I said that, I got it wrong. What I meant is the insertion of foam into cavity walls, which is relatively cheap. Solid wall insulation is incredibly expensive. The marginal benefit for the expenditure starts to become a bit challenging.

Q51 Joan Walley: But how do you square that with the changes that you are making to the codes for sustainable homes and the impact that that will have on insulation?

Mr Cameron: I think you have to get a balance between regulation that is green and regulation that will deliver the building of new homes. The standards that we have in place are exacting and the balance is about right.

Q52 Joan Walley: Looking at how you get that balance, do you think that enough has been done to alleviate the position that the poorest people are in with the price they pay for their energy bills?

Mr Cameron: There is always more to be done. The work on making this market more competitive is not finished. It is important that we are always driving down the cost of levies and charges. We should continue with that work. If you look at what we are doing to help people, we have kept the cold weather payments at the higher level—they were introduced just before the election, even though the money was not in the budget to do that—and we have kept winter fuel payments at a higher level.

Q53 Joan Walley: But it is always what is next to do.

Mr Cameron: The warm home discount is there. We have to continue with insulation programmes and energy efficiency programmes to help people. If we just think, “Let’s do lots of that and load costs on to other people’s bills,” it is ultimately self-defeating.

Q54 Joan Walley: But with excess winter deaths in England and Wales up by 29% to 31,000 do you feel that we will ever be in a position where we have eliminated fuel poverty? What is your ambition for that, and will you take a personal interest in ensuring that there are measures to help the fuel-poor?

Mr Cameron: We do need to take action to help the fuel-poor. I think the first thing is—

Q55 Joan Walley: Should there be a target?

Mr Cameron: I think we are going to introduce a target—we will do that later in the year. I think, first of all—

Q56 Joan Walley: Would you elaborate on that?

Mr Cameron: Yes, I will. As I understand it, your two Committees do not agree on whether to change the definition of fuel poverty. I think the first thing we have got to do, as politicians and parties and Governments and the rest of it, is decide: do we want to stick with the old version, in which you didn’t necessarily have to be poor to be fuel-poor, or do we want the new version which links fuel poverty and poverty? I favour the second, not the first, but I think it would be good if we could all decide what the right measure is.

Q57 Joan Walley: Just for the record—

Mr Cameron: Just for the record, on both the measures, fuel poverty has fallen under this Government, but we need to decide that and then we need, as a Government, properly to set targets.

Q58 Joan Walley: Just for the record, the issue about changes in definition of fuel poverty, we wanted to see what would be in place in future before abandoning anything there in the past.

Mr Cameron: Absolutely—I am not being difficult. Your Committee can now look at the new measure. We do not want to have different political parties with different energy targets—otherwise, we will all be talking a different language—so it would be good if we could all agree whether this new measure is the better one to have. So if your Committee looks at that—I think Tim’s Committee has already decided—that would be helpful, and then we should set a target.

Q59 Joan Walley: We have already referred to the changes in bills with reductions from £30 to £35 and a total, I think, of £50 altogether. Given your remarks just now, I am interested to know how that has been balanced across the coalition and the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chancellor: where the tensions are between how you—

Mr Cameron: I do not want to tell you too much about our internal—

Q60 Joan Walley: But in terms of energy policy in the future.

Mr Cameron: Look, let’s be frank about this: we are two parties. We have some different policy positions, some different perspectives. I would say this is quite a good example of how two parties had to work together to work out the right balance of investing in renewables for the future and in terms of levies and charges.

The answers will not satisfy everybody, but we came to an agreement and, if Nick Clegg was sitting here, I hope he would give similar answers. We agreed across the coalition that we were going to take £50 off bills by rolling back these costs. We were going to make sure it was carbon-neutral, but we maintained this big block of investment in renewable energy for the future because we want a balanced energy supply. There is a difference, I think, on decarbonisation, where I am cautious about a target for the reason I have given. I think the Lib Dems are a bit more gung-ho about this, but you can ask him along and see what he says.

Q61 Joan Walley: Was the Deputy Prime Minister wrong when, in a speech before Christmas, he said that “the green consensus across the political parties is...falling away”?

Mr Cameron: He is obviously never wrong, but I do not really agree with that.

Q62 Sir Alan Beith (Chair): I think he was talking about all three parties.

Mr Cameron: Yes. I think—rightly—we are having quite lively debates across all parties at a time when people are very concerned about bills and the cost of living. We want to try to keep people’s bills down. It is right to have this debate. I think it would be awful if we just loaded charges on to people’s bills and said, “Well, all the politicians at Westminster have agreed—good night and thank you.” I think that would be dreadful.

I think it is right to have these debates. I very much initiated this debate about rolling back the costs of green levies and charges and I am not for one minute regretful about that. I think it was absolutely right to have that debate.

Q63 Joan Walley: Finally, looking forward to what the Government will do to show that they have not lost their nerve on green issues, what are the aspirations for the Conference of the Parties on climate change in Paris, the biodiversity conferences that are coming up and the sustainable development goals under the millennium development goals, which I know you took a personal interest in? How will you ensure that there will not be silo thinking across Government? How can Select Committees feed into that?

Mr Cameron: I think the first thing is we should try to cement the big green achievements there have been under this Government in this Parliament. The Green Investment Bank is up and running and lending money—that is a real step forward. The £33 billion of renewable energy investment that I talked about is very important, as is the fact that we have actually cut the Government's own greenhouse emissions by 14%. We need to keep working on that. There are some domestic things that we need to follow through on and ensure that we have absolutely delivered.

Overseas, in terms of the issue with the climate change talks, there is an opportunity, because some global trends are on our side. China's move from coal to gas is making a big difference. The shale gas revolution in the United States means that they are actually cutting their emissions, so there is the chance of the coming together of a more ambitious programme. We need to be engaged and using all our diplomatic heft for it to work, but although I do not want to sound complacent, I do not think that there is a lot more for Britain and the EU to do. We have put our best foot forward. We have put in place our carbon reduction targets and the rest of it. It is really about trying to encourage the others to have the courage to go for it now that the figures for them are looking a bit more manageable.

Q64 Joan Walley: Absolutely finally, in respect of the high-level talks on wildlife crime that are taking place very shortly, will you be supporting the African elephant plan?

Mr Cameron: Yes. We are having this conference in London. Owen Paterson has walked very hard on it, I know that the Prince of Wales is also going to be taking part, and I will play a role in it. I think it is one of those issues where the whole British public will come together and welcome a green initiative because it is about saving a species that means so much to us.

Q65 Miss McIntosh: Prime Minister, may I press you on climate change? What are the Government doing to make the country more resilient to extreme weather conditions?

Mr Cameron: What we are doing is having a proper review of critical infrastructure and risks, and then spending a lot of money in terms of flood prevention work. Look at the flood prevention schemes over the December and Christmas period—you could point to almost 1 million homes that were protected by schemes built over previous years, including under the previous Government. They made a very big difference, both the coastal schemes, because we had the big tidal surge, and those that protected against the flooding of rivers and streams. We need to continue with that. We will spend £2.3 billion in the current four-year period. The figures for capital investment

are now set out all the way to 2019, rising to £400 million a year, I think. So we go on with that.

We need to keep looking at resilience issues. As Prime Minister, I find that, when these weather events take place, we call Cobra, get everyone around the table and listen to where the pinch points and problems are. We still come across infrastructure and co-ordination issues that have not yet been totally nailed down. Oliver Letwin is doing a lot of work on that, and we should keep that up.

Q66 Miss McIntosh: Would you disagree with restoring the balance between the maintenance and revenue side, as well as the capital investment?

Mr Cameron: We are living in tough fiscal times, so we have to ensure that every organisation provides value for money. We have protected the capital of the Environment Agency the most, but I think that if you look at what the head of the Environment Agency said, I thought it was quite notable. He said: "The planned reductions in posts will not affect the Environment Agency's ability to respond to flooding incidents and the Environment Agency will minimise the impact on other front line services through the changes." This is an organisation that employs more than 10,000 staff, so you cannot entirely exempt it from efficiency, reform and effectiveness, but the chief executive is saying that they are going to make sure that they keep everything on the front line and do not affect the way that we respond to flooding. Meanwhile, the capital investment is going in and building flood prevention schemes that will protect lots and lots of communities.

Q67 Miss McIntosh: Do you recognise the statistic that the Government are making good progress on only 16% of their natural environment commitments? At the time of the coalition agreement, it was pledged that this would be the greenest Government ever.

Mr Cameron: As I have argued, without reeling out a huge list of achievements, we can make that claim realistically. When you look at renewable energy investment, the world's first green investment bank, massive support to low-carbon vehicles, a Government that have cut their own carbon emissions by 14%, those are very big and important steps. In terms of wildlife and diversity, the targets are all published, we are held to account for them and we must crack on.

Q68 Miss McIntosh: I am personally signed up to growing the green economy in a constituency like mine, but are you putting a higher price on growing the green economy than on your original priorities and DEFRA's to support a strong and sustainable green economy with resilience to climate change as well as thriving rural communities?

Mr Cameron: I think you might be reading a bit too much into specific words. In Owen Paterson, we have got a dynamo of a DEFRA Secretary of State who really believes in growing the rural and green economy. If you look at what is happening in terms of renewable energy, small business and the investment in broadband and how it is enabling businesses to start, I think we have got a good story to tell.

Q69 Miss McIntosh: Will you ensure that the green economy remains a priority in the run-up to the general election and that there will be resources, not just within DEFRA but in

budgets for local communities and local councils? Will those extend to the work that they are required to do in areas involving all their remit?

Mr Cameron: In terms of what DECC is doing and the money for energy projects, it is all there under the strike prices that have been published in the envelope for how much we spend on green energy. Local councils face financial challenges. We are asking them to be more efficient and more effective every year, and this is a tough ask. I still think there is a lot more they can do to share services and resources between councils; my local council shares a chief executive and a whole management team with a neighbouring authority in a different county. I am a great believer that there is more to be done here. The more they can do that, the more they can put resources into the front line and issues like growing the green economy.

Q70 Miss McIntosh: In terms of greenness, will you ensure that an environmental impact assessment is done before fracking takes place to any great extent?

Mr Cameron: Let me deal with shale gas, fresh from my visit yesterday to talk to a company that is very ambitious and is currently extracting oil and gas on the Lincolnshire-Nottinghamshire border. It is one of those things that not a lot of people know, but 4,000 barrels of oil a day are extracted from Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire. The local community is extremely happy that there is a thriving business investing in the area, and they want to move towards safely extracting shale gas. I think we should support that. There is a real opportunity for our country.

We have a very tough set of environmental permissions, permits and all the rest of it. I do not think we need to add to that; I think what we should do is allow this industry to develop within the very clear framework of environmental rules, regulations and planning that must take place now.

Q71 Sir Alan Beith (Chair): We are going to come on to that

Mr Cameron: I am sure, but I think that is what we should do. We have got the rules in place; now let this industry have a chance to develop.

Q72 David T. C. Davies: Prime Minister, I was going to ask about shale gas. As somebody who does not accept the consensus at all, I am tempted to go back to some of the other issues, but perhaps I would be told off for that. Instead, can I ask you this? I note from what we have seen in the United States, where they have been exploiting shale gas, that their carbon emissions have decreased significantly. Therefore, I would have expected the greens to be all in favour. We have also heard evidence in my Committee that a 10-acre frack pad situated in the right area could generate enough gas to give us more electricity than the entire wind industry. Do you agree that from all perspectives, this is something we should absolutely be supporting? I know you do, but what are we actually doing to make sure we get these industries off the ground?

Mr Cameron: I am a supporter. I think that if there is an opportunity to extract clean, low-cost gas from shale in the UK, we would be making a great mistake if we did not enable the industry to develop. In terms of the scale of it, if we recovered 7% from Bowland shale, which is an average recovery rate, that could supply the UK's gas needs for 30 years. The scale is worth having a proper discussion and a look at how

we could make this work in the UK. It could provide up to 74,000 jobs and over £3.5 billion invested.

We can now look at the United States and see that a lot of the myths put around about shale have not come to pass there. Obviously it is for industry to develop and make these arguments. Our responsibility is to put in place a proper regulatory framework, which we have done, to make sure this industry knows where to go for information and advice—which is why we have the Office of Unconventional Gas in the Department of Energy and Climate Change—and make sure that Europe does not create a whole set of extra problems and procedures, which we have done by writing to every European leader, and the Commission has come out and said that it is not going to legislate in this area. Then there will obviously be local arguments and discussions. I just hope they can be properly informed by what the potential of this industry is.

Q73 David T. C. Davies: We had some conflicting evidence over what this would do to the price. Obviously it slashed energy prices in the US, but some have said that because of our connection with the European gas network, we would not necessarily see the benefits of a reduction in price. I presume that this might depend to some extent on what goes on in other European countries. Would you agree that there is a potential for a reduction in energy prices in the UK if we go ahead? Would you also agree that this would be a good thing for business and for home owners, because at the moment people are more worried about rising energy prices than rising global temperatures?

Mr Cameron: The US experience is interesting. As I understand it, they have seen their gas prices fall. They are a third of the level that they were. Not only can that benefit households, but it also makes manufacturing and investing in growing other businesses more cost-effective. They are seeing a process of some businesses re-shoring—a terrible jargon term, but none the less important—coming back to the US and investing, so that brings jobs and growth. For all these reasons we should be looking at it.

Obviously it is difficult to make a forecast about what it would do to energy prices here, but I note that some of the people who oppose this are the same people who posit that gas prices are going to rise and rise and rise. That is why they believe in decarbonisation targets and all the rest of it. You cannot have it both ways. One of the fears I have got is that there are some people who oppose shale because they are nervous about planning, they want to know the arguments, they want to see the evidence, they want to know that these pods are not going to be too big. Fine. I think we can answer all those questions. There are, though, some people who I think oppose shale because they simply cannot bear the thought of another carbon-based fuel being used in our energy mix.

That is irrational, because it is surely better for us to extract shale safely from our own country, rather than pay a large price for having it imported from around the world. If we can make carbon capture and storage work in the future, then we can take even more carbon out of the system in that way. I think that is why some people are so religiously opposed to it, because they just do not want to see any carbon-based energy work. I do not think that is helpful.

Q74 Andrew Miller: Following on from that, Prime Minister, IGas has drilled in my constituency and I had, I think, about five letters from constituents who were concerned about it. Maybe that is a little bit like the communities that are used to having nuclear power stations next door. Being a chemicals-related community, there is some acceptance of the work that goes on in making sure that it is safe. Your Ministers have talked about the various incentives that could go to communities. Could you list for us the different types of incentives that you have considered and why you have come down in favour of the approach you have adopted? It looks a bit like you are taking money away from councils and this is a sneaky way of giving it back to them.

Mr Cameron: I really want this industry to succeed.

Q75 Andrew Miller: So do I.

Mr Cameron: We have a big opportunity, so I have shaken the tree and said to all the experts: “Let’s come up with a package that is going to help make this happen”. The three things we have said I genuinely believe will help make it happen. If IGas is anything to go by, it is pretty enthusiastic about what we are proposing. So the first thing is, as soon as a well is dug, the local community should get £100,000. We have not yet decided exactly how that is distributed between parish, district and local councils, but it is £100,000 per well dug, at the point at which it is dug.

The second point is that the community should get 1% of the revenue over the life of that well. The experts tell me that if you think of how long a well could last over its life, that would be between £7 million and £10 million. That is a serious amount of money going into the local community. Again, we have to make the decision over how much goes to the district and how much to the county, and, crucially, whether because of the disturbance in the early stages of a well being dug there should be cash payments to householders. I am quite in favour of that—of saying to people, “There is going to be this small well drilling for shale gas, and in order to make up for any inconvenience, here is a cash payment.” That is the second part.

The third part, which we announced yesterday, is to say that local authorities can retain 100% of the business rates. That is very significant, because if you take a typical set of wells, this could be somewhere around £1 million, £1.5 million, £1.7 million every year to the local authority. I do not know the figures for your local authority, but when I think how much the council tax in West Oxfordshire raises, £1.7 million is a lot of money on an annual basis. Obviously, it would be divided up between the councils. It is a significant amount of money that councils would be able to use for community provision or for massive reductions in the council tax. I think it is a good set of measures. I am always interested to hear if anybody has got any other ideas.

Q76 Andrew Miller: Have you considered any other types of measures?

Mr Cameron: I have asked my team, “Come up with a set of measures that you think will help this industry go.” If you have got other ideas, please—

Q77 Andrew Miller: Cuadrilla have talked about a community trust approach in their Lancashire set-up. In Germany, my Committee was looking at how the acceptance of wind has been pretty universal in central Germany. A significant part of that has been incentivised by creating local shareholding arrangements so that individuals in communities become shareholders. Are you looking at those things?

Mr Cameron: We are looking at all those issues. The first thing we had to settle was the amount—the £100,000, the 1%—

Q78 Andrew Miller: So that's it? That is the amount.

Mr Cameron: That is what we set. We are happy to listen to arguments, but I think with what you are suggesting, Andrew—having done that, do you want a community trust to distribute the money rather than councils? Do you want to give people a greater sense of ownership? I am happy to look at all those things, but I thought it was quite important to get the quantum of money sorted out first so people could see what we were talking about.

Q79 Andrew Miller: Just to complete this part of the questioning, I want to come back to Tim's original questions around confidence in the industry. There is absolutely no doubt that in the whole of the energy sector, confidence is key. You set out very boldly some of the things that you say you have done to maintain that. You have clearly had some extremely good briefing in terms of this session, and I suspect you have heard from Sir Mark Walport on some of the issues that you have covered. If Sir Mark was advising you and the Deputy Prime Minister on issues relating to this subject, the two of you would come to different political conclusions, quite legitimately—we have discussed this before; you can take a different policy decision, irrespective of the science. Given the need to instil confidence in this industry, how are you going to maintain that, given that there are clearly different views within Government about the priority that should be given to different energy sources, including shale?

Mr Cameron: The energy world can now see the Energy Act in place and the strike prices for all these different fuels set out in black and white—pounds, shillings and pence. They know how much money we are prepared to spend on renewable energy sources between now and the 2020s. I think it is all there to be seen, and now the market should deliver, depending on these prices, the outcomes that make sense. I do not think there is any disagreement on that between Conservative and Liberal Democrat. We have a disagreement on a decarbonisation target, because I am not prepared to set one until we know whether carbon capture and storage works; otherwise, we are going to put up people's bills unnecessarily and I do not want that to happen.

I have avoided politics for almost an hour and a half, but I cannot resist the point that your party leader, on the other hand, has said that he is going to freeze energy prices for a period but with absolutely no explanation of what would happen if the world energy price suddenly shot up. What on earth would Sir Mark Walport say? He can speak for himself, but he would probably come out in a rash, as any sane person would when hearing that piece of news. My policy is to roll back the cost of energy charges. I said I could do it. I have done it and the bills will be reduced. His policy of saying, "I am going to freeze energy prices, irrespective of the global price of energy," is bonkers.

Q80 Andrew Miller: So by going on the offensive, you are *de facto* admitting, that that division—that schism—between yourself and the Liberals creates a lack of confidence in the energy market.

Mr Cameron: No, I do not accept that at all. That is not what I said at all. The only person undermining confidence in the energy market now is one E. Miliband, who has come up with this policy that he cannot possibly explain of how you freeze prices when you are not in control—I am sure he is in control of lots of things, but he is not in control of the global price of gas. Unless you are in control of the global price of gas, you have to be able to explain this. So the difference between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives—I have mentioned the decarbonisation target, because I am so frank and open in front of this Committee, but I do not think that stops anyone from investing.

Q81 Andrew Miller: I was at his speech. You weren't.

Mr Cameron: Yes; all right.

Q82 Sir Alan Beith (Chair): Much as I would enjoy some time for debate on the way the coalition manages to work so effectively despite disagreement, I did promise to release you at quarter to six, and you and I at least agreed on that point.

Mr Cameron: Thank you very much. I feel released.

Sir Alan Beith (Chair): We look forward to your next time before us.