



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [The work of the Home Secretary](#), HC 299

Tuesday, 22 March 2016

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Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair); Victoria Atkins, Mr David Burrowes, Nusrat Ghani, Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Tim Loughton, Stuart C. McDonald, Mr Chuka Umunna, Mr David Winnick

Questions 216 - 317

Examination of Witness

Witness: **Rt Hon Theresa May**, MP, Home Secretary, gave evidence.

Q216 Chair: I call the Committee to order and I welcome the Home Secretary as part of the Committee's regular review of the work of the Home Office. Home Secretary, we have altered the agenda slightly because of the events that have occurred in Brussels and we do appreciate this must be a very difficult day for you. We appreciate the fact that you have kept your appointment here with the Select Committee. The thoughts of this Committee and the House and the country are with the relatives of those who have died and they have our sympathy. We have heard just now on the radio that Daesh have claimed responsibility for these atrocities. Would you like to tell the Committee if there is any update on what has happened since the Prime Minister's statement and what implications there are for the United Kingdom?

Mrs May: Thank you, Chairman. I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words about the appalling terrorist attacks that have taken place in Brussels today. We don't yet know the full details of these attacks and the situation in Belgium—as I am sure members will recognise—is fast moving. There have been multiple explosions in Brussels Airport and a further explosion at Maalbeek metro station, attacks that have claimed the lives of at least 30 people and injured hundreds more and, Chairman, as you say, we all offer our thoughts and prayers to the families of those whose loved ones have been killed or injured and those caught up in Brussels today, including at least one British national.

I am aware of reports that the terrorist group Daesh have claimed responsibility. The Prime Minister spoke earlier to Prime Minister Michel of Belgium and I have offered support to my counterpart, Jan Jambon. We stand together against the terrorists and they will not win. Of course we already work closely with Belgium authorities on security matters. We share intelligence routinely and, after the November attacks in Paris, we deployed police and intelligence resources to Belgium in support of the investigations into the attackers that last week resulted in the arrest of Salah Abdeslam.

In the UK the threat level remains under constant review by the independent Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, which has not changed. It is currently set at “severe”, which means an attack is highly likely, and I would urge everyone to remain alert but not alarmed. The Prime Minister chaired a meeting of Cobra this morning. We are taking a number of precautionary steps to ensure public safety and to provide public reassurance. Border Force is carrying out more intensive checks at the UK border, including greater searching of vehicles, the use of search dogs and greater numbers of Border Force officers on duty. The police have confirmed that they have deployed additional officers to patrol at key locations and on the transport network, and a number of transport companies have taken the decision to suspend services to Brussels, again as a precautionary measure. I would like to reassure this Committee and the public that, while we will know more in the coming days and hours, we are doing everything that we can to help the Belgium authorities, to work with our international partners and of course to keep people in this country safe and secure.

Q217 Chair: Thank you very much for that very full update. We will deal with other aspects of your portfolio on counter-terrorism later but specifically on Belgium, the Mayor of London has said that there is no intelligence to suggest that there is any immediate threat, which is presumably why the threat level remains at severe rather than critical. Do you agree with that? It seems that your statement backs up what he has been saying?

Mrs May: As you will know, Chairman, the decision on the threat level is not one for Ministers or politicians. It is one that is taken independently by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre. At the moment they are maintaining the threat level at severe, which as I say means that an attack is highly likely.

Q218 Chair: In terms of what the public should be doing, your message to the public obviously is vigilance at all times. There have been reports that there has been an increase in security at our airports and at our railways stations. Is there any other message that you want to send them, apart from that they should be vigilant at all times at this particular moment?

Mrs May: That is the key message for people. As you say, the police have deployed extra resources in key locations including parts of the transport network. It is for people to be alert but not to be alarmed and, as you say, to be vigilant at all times. We have lived under the severe threat for some time now. Obviously, when we see incidents like the appalling attacks in Brussels today—and of course last year the attacks in France in November but earlier attacks in various countries in Europe—this reminds us of why it is important for us to be vigilant.

Q219 Chair: You must be concerned because, although this has not happened in the United Kingdom, two of our closest allies in the European Union, France and Belgium, have been attacked recently. When he appeared before us, Mark Rowley told this Committee that there are currently around about 2,000 suspects that are being watched. Has there been an increase in that level of monitoring of those suspects?

Mrs May: Of course, as you would expect, the police and the security services look very carefully at the operations that they are undertaking, and look very carefully at the arrangements that they have in place in relation to monitoring and gathering intelligence. They do that on an ongoing basis. As I have said on many occasions before, I think we should be grateful for the work that our police and security services do, day in and day out, in these difficult times to keep us safe.

Q220 Chair: There will be other opportunities to get an idea of what happened in Brussels, but there are a number of international organisations that we are a part of: Europol and Interpol. We have our own National Crime Agency. There is the Counter Terrorism Command. Are we offering Belgium any specific help? Have they taken any specific help, as opposed to a general offer of support?

Mrs May: After the attacks in Paris in November—and of course, as you will be aware, there were connections with Belgium identified—we have been working with the Belgians and the French. We have offered them some very specific support, including support from the police and helping them in their investigations. As I said, the Prime Minister spoke to Prime Minister Michal today and has continued with offers of help and any further offers of help if that would be of assistance to the Belgians.

Chair: Thank you. Are there any specific questions on Belgium? Mr Winnick.

Q221 Mr Winnick: Home Secretary, I know it is easy after the event but clearly this is retaliation for the successful operation last week. One wonders how far the Belgian authorities—as I say, it is easy after the event when you are not involved yourself but, knowing the murderous mindset of Daesh, I would have thought it was very nearly obvious that at the first opportunity they would retaliate. We are dealing with the most despicable kind of mass murderers, and you don't have to talk about that and nor does anyone round this room. I suppose it is a question of how far intelligence can go such that you anticipate and take the necessary measures, if it is at all possible.

Mrs May: You are absolutely right that this is a murderous group. I think the brutality that we have seen from Daesh is absolutely appalling. It is too early to tell, in relation to these particular attacks, whether they have any linkage to other things that have taken place. Obviously the picture will emerge more gradually as the intelligence and investigation continues, but it is important for us to be working together with people across the European Union and others to ensure that, as far as possible, we can gather intelligence to enable us to disrupt attacks before they happen.

Chair: Thank you. Could I have one question from colleagues on Belgium? We will come back to CT later.

Q222 Victoria Atkins: Today's awful attacks in Brussels—but also we remind ourselves of the attacks in Paris as well—demonstrate chillingly the threats we face in the western world. Do they not underline the need to ensure that our security services and police have the up to date powers they need to keep us safe?

Mrs May: As you say, I think it is a very chilling reminder of the need to ensure that our police and security services are able to do the job that we expect them to do and we ask them to do on our behalf. That does mean having the powers that they need. Of course that is a subject that is a matter for debate and discussion in Parliament through the Investigatory Powers Bill that is going through at the moment. Also, in the Comprehensive Spending Review last autumn, extra resources were made available to the three security and intelligence agencies and, indeed, counter-terrorism policing, to ensure that we can maintain the powers and resources that they need.

Q223 Mr Umunna: Home Secretary, you are right, these attacks are appalling on every level and, of course, our thoughts and prayers go out to those who have lost their lives, the injured and the people of Belgium today. When things like this happen I think it is very important that we all

respond in a responsible and considered way, but not everyone does this and I want to ask you: do you think it is appropriate, at moments like this, for people to respond to atrocities like this by calling for greater surveillance of Muslims, particularly at mosques; to call for the use of water boarding and torture against terror suspects? Do you think that is an appropriate response?

Mrs May: I do not think it is appropriate for anybody to talk about water boarding and torture as a response. We have a very clear position in the United Kingdom against torture and we should maintain that. I think today our thoughts must be primarily with the people of Belgium, particularly obviously those whose loved ones have been killed and those who have been injured in these terrible attacks.

Q224 Mr Umunna: In respect of the powers that you just mentioned in response to Ms Atkins, the reason I ask is that the probable Republican nominee in the United States, Donald Trump, called for precisely those things on US television this morning. He said he believed that the US and other countries facing these threats—and we are one of those countries—were soft and weak because we refuse to adopt these methods of torture and water boarding against suspects. Do you think we are soft and weak, Home Secretary, because we do not adopt those methods?

Mrs May: As I have just stated, we have a very clear position in relation to torture. What I think is necessary for us to do here in the United Kingdom is to ensure that we have appropriate powers, which can be used when necessary and proportionate in dealing with those who would do us harm, both terrorists but also serious and organised criminals and paedophiles.

Q225 Tim Loughton: It is obviously too soon to make any judgments, but when we were at Europol recently there was a criticism—and Belgium was specifically singled out—that various European countries are not as good at sharing intelligence between their intelligence services and their police services, which is part of the problem, in contrast with the way that we do it here with America and others. Do you share that observation?

Mrs May: Different countries operate in different legal frameworks, so the processes that they have for dealing with incidents can be different from those that we adopt here in the United Kingdom. I think it is important that we have very good working relationships here between the security service and the police and both our security services and that police work with their colleagues within Europe and elsewhere in the world, in terms of looking at the intelligence that can be shared and action that can be taken, because the terrorists know no boundaries. The terrorists will try to perpetrate their appalling brutality wherever they wish to, and we must make sure that we are co-operating in order to stop that.

Q226 Nusrat Ghani: Thank you. Home Secretary, you are absolutely right in saying the terrorists know no boundaries and, unfortunately, as time goes on we are discovering that there are links between these terrorists across Europe and that there potentially may be links with people in the UK as well that may have become radicalised. In reference to what Mr Loughton said, it was noted on the BBC by their security correspondent, Frank Gardner, this morning that the Belgian police officers have to get Belgian intelligence via the British police officers at MI5 because the Belgian intelligence and police force do not share that information. The second point I wish to raise is that as a committee we went over to visit Europol. They alluded to us that only five countries within the EU share information on the movement of terrorists and not the others, so my question there is: how do we work in an interconnected world when we have this partnership with Europol

but we cannot be aware of where these terrorists are going, if they are going outside those groups of five countries that are sharing that information?

Mrs May: There are different ways in which information can be shared and different channels through which information can be shared. One of the issues we have been working very closely on with other European Union member states is the question of increasing the amount of information that can be shared on some of the border systems—for example, like SIS-2—which I think is important and that is something that the UK has been leading. The Counter Terrorism Centre that has been established in Europol is a fairly new part of the organisation. We would certainly have been encouraging them to look at issues. For example, one of the issues around the European Union that we have been pressing on is the whole question of the movement of firearms. We have very strong firearms’ legislation here in the United Kingdom. The availability of firearms differs from country to country and I think it is important that we are able to track the movement of firearms around the European Union. That is one thing that we have been encouraging, not just other member states to take part in but also to see a role for Europol in that.

Q227 Chair: Thank you. Finally on this, commentators also suggested that in Belgium they have a district that we know is called Molenbeek and this has become a jihadist centre. As Home Secretary, are you satisfied that we don’t have any areas of this kind in the United Kingdom?

Mrs May: As you will be aware, Chairman, we look across the United Kingdom to see where people are identified as those who perhaps have been radicalised or who are at risk of radicalisation. We have programmes that work within communities, the Prevent programme, and the Channel programme that works individually with people. But I think it is incumbent on us to look across the board and make sure that, as far as possible, we are identifying those who are at risk of radicalisation and taking action to try to ensure that they are not taken down that route of radicalisation that can potentially lead to violence.

Q228 Chair: Thank you very much for your statement on Belgium. Please pass on from this Committee to those who have command of our counter-terrorism operation, and to those who are going to be watching the suspects and on the frontline, that they have our full support and thanks for keeping us safe in the United Kingdom.

Mrs May: Thank you, Chairman.

Q229 Chair: Let us turn to the issue of asylum and immigration. I was invited to spend a day in Glasgow with Mr Stuart McDonald, a colleague on the Committee. It wasn’t quite a weekend in Glasgow. It was 24 hours. He asked me to come and have a look at what he regarded as a very serious issue. That is the operation of the Compass contract there, specifically with regard to accommodation for asylum seekers. Are you satisfied, bearing in mind the report to this Committee on the red doors and the armbands that asylum seekers have been asked to wear, that the Compass programme is doing what you intended it to do when you signed that contract?

Mrs May: The Compass programme is there to identify suitable accommodation for asylum seekers. It identifies accommodation of various sorts and obviously we work very closely with local authorities to ensure that accommodation is identified. We set certain standards about the accommodation that needs to be available and there are processes of auditing those standards. The Home Office makes regular audits around the accommodation that is available. One of the things that we have done, though, following the incident that you particularly refer to—in relation to the red doors in Middlesbrough and the armbands issue that arose subsequently

elsewhere—is, first of all, to make sure that none of our contract providers are in any way using methods that would specifically identify asylum seekers to the rest of the public. Also through our audits we are looking at doing more to interact with the asylum seekers themselves, so with the users of the accommodation and what they feel about the accommodation, and not just through expecting them to talk to Home Office officials but working with charities and third sector groups as well. Because individuals may be more willing to talk to them about any concerns they have rather than coming direct to the Home Office. We have looked at how we can better understand the views of those who are using the accommodation. In Middlesbrough we did ask people if they had felt any concerns about the red doors issue, and the view that came back was that, no, people had not felt an impact as a result of that.

Q230 Chair: Yes, but the Minister was very good when he made his statement to the House and said action would be taken. Have you yourself visited the accommodation of asylum seekers?

Mrs May: No, Chairman, I have not visited the accommodation.

Q231 Chair: In all the years you have been Home Secretary you have never visited?

Mrs May: No. I have visited a range of Home Office facilities. I haven't visited asylum accommodation.

Q232 Chair: No. Can I suggest you do because when Mr McDonald and I went this weekend we saw some pretty poor accommodation that was being managed by Orchard & Shipman on behalf of Serco? One particular lady—and I brought the photographs, and I would like you to look at them later because I promised the asylum seeker that I would show them to you—a woman with two young children, had been placed in accommodation with sewage coming out of the kitchen sink. It was so bad that her young child got a viral infection as a result of living in this accommodation provided by Orchard & Shipman. Another gentleman had no light bulb in his property and he had to go into the bathroom to read his book. Mr McDonald and I gave him £5 to buy a light bulb. What worries me is that these companies are getting millions and millions of pounds of taxpayers' money. They are being inspected by the Home Office but there is still substandard accommodation being provided to these people. Why is this still happening when contractors are being paid to do this job?

Mrs May: First of all, Chairman, I think the Immigration Minister has met with Mr McDonald, and indeed Chris Stephens MP, to discuss particular concerns that they have about asylum accommodation. I would ask if I may, if you are able to identify this particular accommodation to us then we can ensure that this is looked into.

Chair: Thank you.

Mrs May: Obviously the purpose of having standards and having audit is to try to ensure that the asylum accommodation is appropriate and to the standard you would expect.

Q233 Chair: So that type of accommodation would be unacceptable. This woman who has come from Sri Lanka with two children after being subjected to domestic violence has been put in premises like that.

Mrs May: If you can identify it we can go and check what is happening in relation to this accommodation and ensure that accommodation that is being provided is appropriate and to the standard that we set, because we do set standards.

Q234 Chair: You do, but I think one of the problems is that Serco, G4S, Clearsprings and these other companies are being given £9.35 a day. That is £3,412 for each asylum seeker. That is accommodation and it is food in some cases. I was told by a councillor at Glasgow City Council that four years ago they were paid £18 a day for each asylum seeker. Syrian refugees are one of the successes of the Home Office. There is no doubt about that. You deserve our thanks for meeting the target that you set yourself and the Prime Minister set you. You re-housed 1,000 Syrian asylum seekers by Christmas but they get £8,250 per head and there have been no complaints from any of them about their treatment. Do you think it is a funding issue that, for the asylum seekers who are not Syrian refugees, they are being asked to provide this accommodation at indeed half the amount of money that is available to the Syrians? Therefore, the accommodation they get put in of a substandard nature?

Mrs May: The contracts that are entered into with companies will specify the standards of accommodation that it is expected that people will be put in. The purpose of the Home Office audits from officials is to ensure that the accommodation is at an appropriate standard. Those contracts will be negotiated with those companies in terms of the provision of standards. As I have said and as the Minister has said to Mr McDonald, he said if there are specific concerns—and you have raised specific concern about a particular property—then of course we will look into that.

Q235 Chair: We will come to Mr McDonald in a second, but I think what we are seeing is a two-tier system. You have the real success of the Syrian refugee settlement but it comes at a cost. By the time you re-house these Syrian refugees it will cost the taxpayer £165 million if you add that figure over the period of five years, and nobody has criticised that. It has actually been the only immigration target you have met as Home Secretary. You said 1,000 migrants by Christmas and 1,000 came in, whereas for the rest of them they seem to be struggling. Do you think there is a danger of a two-tier system?

Mrs May: There are obviously different schemes that we are operating here. The resettlement of Syrian refugees, particularly vulnerable Syrian refugees who have come from the region, is a very specific scheme. The funding that is available: there is a first year of funding that is available obviously from the DFID budget from ODA money. Thereafter there are different arrangements that kick in, in relation to the funding with the local authorities. There will be some people within that refugee scheme who are particularly vulnerable who will have very particular needs that need to be met. I think what we are dealing with is that, in a sense, not everybody is in the same circumstances and the same situation. We discuss with the companies. Obviously the contracts are entered into with the companies according to certain standards of accommodation that are set. We expect those standards to be met. That is why we have a process of looking at those standards but, as I have said, you found an incident where you have raised specific concerns and I am going to ensure that that is looked into.

Q236 Chair: Yes. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Yvette Cooper and other individuals, thousands of British citizens, have made an offer of accommodation in their properties. I think the last time the Minister was here he suggested that they all contact Lambeth Council, so I rang Lambeth Council to speak to the leader of the council about the Archbishop's offer to find out whether or not these asylum seekers could be accommodated by the Archbishop. Of course it is impossible to get through to some people and when we rang at 5 o'clock we were told, "It is 5 o'clock and we don't take calls after 5 o'clock". I wonder whether we should look again very seriously at these bold and open offers from these people, like the Archbishop of Canterbury and

others, to ensure that with these genuine offers—as was the case during the Bosnian crisis where individuals were housed in people’s homes—asylum seekers can have the benefit of living in the homes of British citizens. It would aid their social integration and it would be much more effective. Could we look again at these genuine offers that are being made, including by the Archbishop?

Mrs May: Chairman, we have been very clear that when people come forward with offers we do look at those offers. There was an outpouring of generosity from the British people when we set up the expansion of this scheme in relation to the re-settlement of vulnerable Syrian refugees from the region. I think at the time what some people did not recognise was that this was an offer for five years and that the people coming often had very particular needs. That is why we are very careful about how people are accommodated, because we need to ensure that their needs can be met in the area that they are placed.

Chair: But this is the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Mrs May: Chairman, I know it is the Archbishop of Canterbury but when we are placing individuals in accommodation we need to make sure that it is not just the accommodation that is available to them, that if they have particular medical needs that the medical facilities are suitable for the particular need that they have.

There is a range of issues that we have to take into account. What we are looking at, and are making some progress with, is there have been a lot of offers that are not about accommodation, which are about helping people to integrate into the local community. Some employers have come forward with offers of employment for Syrian refugees. We are working with a whole variety of different groups of people, including different faith groups around the country, as to how these offers can be translated and are being translated into active support.

Chair: I hope that that can be dealt with because when you have these offers, sending people off to local councils may not be the answer. I think they need to be acted upon, especially when it is someone like the Archbishop of Canterbury. I hope we will have some good news on that very soon.

Q237 Stuart C. McDonald: You have covered a lot of ground, Mr Chairman, but, given all the different stories that we have heard, we are very grateful to the Immigration Minister undertaking to investigate specific allegations that we have heard about: mistreatment, about poor housing, about poor allocation of housing, integration with other services and so on. None of these have been picked up by KPIs or the audits or anything else that you have referred to. For those reasons, isn’t it time that we had a broader and fundamental review of how the Compass contracts are managed and that we do that before you make any decision on whether to extend these for two years or not?

Mrs May: I indicated earlier, in response to the Chairman, I think that one of the reasons why we are looking at how we conduct the audits is precisely because you have identified that you feel there are concerns that have not been picked up by the process so far. That is why we are looking for ways to make sure that we are able to take a better indication from those who are living in the accommodation themselves about any concerns that they have and about their experience of the accommodation.

Q238 Stuart C. McDonald: That is very welcome as well, but you have a very big decision to make this year about whether to extend these contracts for two years. Surely it is in everybody’s interest, the taxpayers’ interest, the interests of asylum accommodation users,

for there to be a fundamental look at whether these contracts are still fit for purpose. Apart from anything else, between the time that they were signed and now there has been a significant increase in the number of people who are being accommodated under the Compass contract. Does all of this not add up to an absolute requirement that we look again comprehensively at whether this is fit for purpose or not?

Mrs May: When the Home Office is coming close to the point at which there is a contract that is ending, of course we look at what is appropriate to put in its place. There is not an exercise that just says, “We are going to go with the people we have already just because we have them”. We do look at what standards we have set, what the process is, and make sure that we believe that the contractors who we then enter into a contract with are able to provide what is necessary and what is required.

Q239 Stuart C. McDonald: Have you asked the contractors whether they would want to continue for another two years under these contracts?

Mrs May: I can assure you that there are regular discussions between the Home Office and the contractors.

Q240 Stuart C. McDonald: What was their feedback?

Mrs May: The discussions are ongoing.

Q241 Stuart C. McDonald: Isn't the point, though, that these companies are making millions of pounds of losses in these contracts and, even if you extend them for another two years now, they are going to be walking away two years further down the line? If they are losing millions of pounds, doesn't that also point to the fact that you have a contract where accommodation is provided at the cheapest skinflint level possible and yet again, because of the changes we have seen in the numbers of people requiring asylum accommodation, we have to look at the whole thing again?

Mrs May: What is important, I think, is that when we enter into these contracts we make clear that there is a set of standards that we expect will be met in terms of the asylum accommodation that is provided. As I have said, we have processes to audit that accommodation, but we have made some changes to the processes so that we can perhaps get a better indication from the people who are experiencing the accommodation rather than just what might come out from an inspection of the accommodation.

Q242 Mr Burrowes: Will the changes in relation to these contracts mean that they will not just be dependent on—as we heard from the companies—them hiding behind a defence that there have not been complaints and that they have not had to react to the complaints from those individuals? Will it mean that—as they said, their company's mission is to respect human dignity—plainly an objective view of looking at red doors or bands on particular individuals, the characterisation of that, regardless of whether there is a complaint or not or a concern from an individual, must have a higher standard that the Government alongside these companies must want to see adopted come what may?

Mrs May: Obviously, we have responded in relation to the two issues that you raise about red doors and the wrist bands because we do not think it is appropriate for asylum seekers to be identified in that sort of way. As I have indicated, we have changed and are looking at the processes we adopt, including, as I said, trying to work more with perhaps the third sector to

whom asylum seekers may be more likely to raise concerns rather than with Home Office officials. Of course, if a complaint is made to a company, then we would expect that company to respond to that complaint.

Q243 Mr Burrowes: But isn't the theme wider in terms of accommodation, in that it is not just complaints within these accommodation centres but also HM Inspectorate of Prisons has recently reported on a number of results that show a lack of human dignity? They have criticised conditions of short-term immigration holding centres. Dover Seaport: they say the accommodation was not fit for purpose; it was crowded, poorly ventilated and smelled badly. Frontier House: there was nowhere suitable to rest, no shower facilities, no windows. Longport freight shed: conditions were wholly unacceptable; detainees were held overnight and/or for several hours with no clean or dry clothes, no food or hot drinks and nowhere to sleep other than on a concrete floor. This has had to rely upon an inspectorate to expose what others have been concerned and campaigning about for some time. I appreciate the Shaw review is being looked at and the Government are accepting the broad thrust of those recommendations and there is a process of work, which is welcome. What level of priority and urgency are the Government giving to this concern that not just in other accommodations but also very much in these that are under the direct supervision of these companies that we are taking appropriate action?

Mrs May: We have been very clear that Longport freight shed should not be used for this purpose and that was very clear as soon as we saw the report that came through from the inspection of this facility that was being used. As I say, we have been very clear it should not be used in future. Obviously, when reports have concerning recommendations, concerning observations, about how the accommodation is being provided of various sorts, then, of course, we look at that very seriously indeed. We take action when appropriate to deal with those matters that have been raised.

Q244 Mr Umunna: Just a quick question, Home Secretary. I should just say that Lambeth Council and Lambeth where I am an MP has a very long and proud history of welcoming immigrants from all over the world, including my father, I should say, to our area. One of the things that I have been struck by from the evidence that we took on how asylum seekers are treated, do you not feel in some respects in this country that we obsess about the numbers—and, of course, we should look at the numbers of people coming to settle in our country—but we have not enough focus on how we integrate people into our country when they arrive here? This whole story, there is the practicality of how people are treated, whether they are given decent homes, but ultimately even in Lambeth, which is incredibly diverse, we are not necessarily the most integrated of communities. Don't you think we need to have more focus on integration?

Mrs May: I think you have raised perhaps a wider issue than looking at how asylum seekers—

Mr Umunna: I have set up an all-party parliamentary group to look at this.

Chair: It is an advert for Mr Umunna's group, which we hope you will join.

Mr Umunna: You are welcome to join, Home Secretary.

Chair: So if you could respond to the advertisement.

Mr Umunna: If you need to write to us about it—

Chair: Order, Mr Umunna.

Mrs May: The issue that you have raised is wider than just the question of asylum seekers. Of course, some asylum seekers will have been here on other visas and when their visa comes to an end they claim asylum in order to try to stay in the United Kingdom. There is a mixture of reasons why people are seeking asylum and some of those it will be found that they have no right to asylum here in the UK and should be returning to their country of origin. There are different groups of people within that overall description of asylum seekers.

There is an overall issue, though, that you have raised about the question of integration. This touches on some other areas of activity that the Government are involved in, including the Home Office. I think there is an issue for us in terms of looking at ensuring that we are removing barriers to people being able to integrate. This is one of the issues Louise Casey is looking at in the counter-extremism study that she is doing—

Mr Umunna: I have spoken to her.

Mrs May: —to say: why are there certain communities that do appear to be more isolated than others and is that because there are barriers in their way? What can we do to remove those barriers? As you say, I think there is a wider issue about ensuring that we bring communities together. Everybody is here because they want to live in the United Kingdom. We have a set of values that we share being here in the United Kingdom and we should be promoting those and working for cohesive communities.

Chair: Thank you. I will certainly be joining Mr Umunna's group and I say so publicly.

Mr Umunna: Thank you.

Q245 Nusrat Ghani: We have had the Immigration Minister come before us and we have talked about pregnant women in detention centres. I wonder if you could tell us what progress has been made with implementation of the Shaw recommendations to do with pregnant women in detention centres.

Mrs May: Yes. As Mr Burrowes indicated earlier, obviously we have been looking at the Shaw report and are looking at the broad thrust of the recommendations that the Shaw report made in relation to a number of areas. I recognise that there has been some concern raised about the specific issue in relation to pregnant women. This is a difficult area. I think we do need to look very carefully at how vulnerable people—and this is the point of having the Shaw report—are being treated in detention. I know there are some who feel there should be just a blanket ban on pregnant women being in detention but, of course, there may be some circumstances where somebody is, for example, going to be removed very quickly and it might be appropriate that they be in detention. We are looking at the issues around the support that is available to people in detention.

Q246 Nusrat Ghani: The concerns that were raised within detention centres is that the women were not provided with the same duty of care as they would have been if they were in a prison—for example, they could not shower with privacy, could not access healthcare—so looking at making sure that they are able to access what they would if they were in any detention centre.

Mrs May: Those sorts of issues, particularly around the access to healthcare and how that healthcare is provided, are precisely some of the issues that we are actively looking at, at the moment.

Q247 Chair: Thank you. Finally on immigration, Minister, I have two standard questions. Foreign national offenders: I am sure you wake up every morning wanting to know how many you have got rid of out of the country. Were you concerned at the judgment in the Andre Babbage case where the judge freed Mr Babbage, who had been in detention for two years, because he did not see there was a possibility that the Home Office was going to return him home and he was sent back into the community; and the report of Stephen Shaw that David Burrowes has talked about where he said that only 50% of those who enter immigration detention end up being removed from the United Kingdom? Why are we still not getting these people out?

Mrs May: Chairman, as I think I have probably said before in appearances at this Committee, there are a number of reasons why sometimes it is difficult to remove foreign national offenders. That can be in relation to ensuring that we have the right identity, the right nationality. It can be in relation to the issue around documents. Often these are people who do not have any documents. There is a process that has to be gone through to get documents. Sometimes there will be countries for which the courts say we cannot remove people to.

Q248 Chair: Poland, Ireland, Jamaica, these are friendly countries, Commonwealth countries, EU countries. Why are they not taking their citizens back?

Mrs May: We work with them in a number of ways to ensure that we can remove foreign national offenders to those countries. We are currently looking to see if there are any other processes in which we can enter into agreements with countries that would enable us to remove more foreign national offenders and to remove them more quickly. We are also looking at changes, for example, to require people in court to declare what their nationality is so that it is easier to identify people's nationality. Sometimes that can be a question. There are some countries who will query when we say that somebody is a national of that particular country.

Q249 Chair: Finally, the Paul Flynn question; for five years you have been asked this question by Paul Flynn. He is no longer on this Committee but we still ask his question. He turns out to be right. We published in our last report a list of areas and constituencies where asylum seekers have been dispersed. He always asked you why you have fewer than him. It turns out that the Prime Minister, Chancellor, Foreign Secretary, Defence Secretary, Lord Chancellor, Leader of the House, Education Secretary, Transport Secretary, Health Secretary, Business Secretary, Environment Secretary, Communities Secretary, Welsh Secretary, Culture Secretary, Work and Pensions Secretary and yourself have no asylum seekers, whereas Mr McDonald and I, Mr Umunna, and some of the others around this table have quite a lot of asylum seekers. In fact, Mr McDonald has—not in his own constituency—in the City of Glasgow, 3,000. In Leicester it is 875. How come they have missed all these Cabinet Ministers when they have dispersed these asylum seekers?

Mrs May: Because the discussions take place with local authorities, Chairman, and are based on the availability of accommodation and the ability of local authorities to accommodate those asylum seekers.

Q250 Chair: Since you are the Home Secretary, would you like to see your local authority take more asylum seekers?

Mrs May: What I think is right, Chairman, is that discussions take place with local authorities and where appropriate accommodation is available, then it is on that basis that the dispersal scheme operates. This is exactly the same dispersal scheme that operated under the last Labour Government.

Chair: Yes, I know we like blaming the last Labour Government for many years—

Mrs May: No, I am merely pointing out a fact, Chairman.

Chair: —but at the end of the day even your Minister of Immigration thought it was a little unfair and he felt that the burden should be shared.

Mrs May: In fact, we have seen more local authorities in discussions with the Home Office about the possibility of taking asylum seekers, but I emphasise that it cannot be an exercise in simply placing people around the country where no accommodation is available for them. You have to ensure that the accommodation is available. There will be some parts of the country where that accommodation might be more available than others.

Q251 Chair: Sure. Let's move to the EU and migration as the second theme. First of all, thank you very much for persuading the Prime Minister and persuading the rest of the EU to ensure that the threshold that currently exists for spouses coming from outside the EU now will also apply—if the deal is accepted and the referendum is agreed to—to those from within the EU. This is a big victory. The Committee recommended this several years ago and it has been accepted. Are you happy with the rest of the deal?

Mrs May: With the totality of the renegotiation?

Chair: Yes, in respect of immigration and migration issues because, of course, you were one of those Ministers nobody quite knew whether you were going to be in or out, but you came in firmly behind the Prime Minister.

Mrs May: Chairman, I took what I thought was a very logical position, which was to say that I would wait to decide whether to support being in or out until I had seen the deal. When I saw the deal, then I decided to be in. I think it was a good deal that the Prime Minister negotiated in this area. Obviously, it covers more than just the immigration and asylum area, but I think in this area it was important not just that we got the change that you have indicated but we also have an interpretation of the directive in relation to criminality, which means that it will be easier for us to exclude and deport individuals. We also have the agreement that we will have a new directive that will effectively overturn judgments of the European Court of Justice, which have made it harder for us to deal with the abuse of free movement such as sham marriages.

Q252 Chair: You have made your position crystal clear, but you head a Department where two of your Ministers—the Ministers of Policing and Security—have a different view to yourself. You are in a different position from Michael Gove, for example, who is for coming out but he has Ministers in his Department wanting to stay in. Have you had to stop them getting any papers in respect of EU matters?

Mrs May: We are working this on a very pragmatic basis and the two Ministers concerned are continuing to do their jobs excellently, as they have done.

Chair: You are all very friendly in the Department despite the fact that two of your Ministers are going to be campaigning against you?

Mrs May: Yes, we continue to work as a ministerial team.

Q253 Chair: Were you surprised at Iain Duncan Smith's resignation?

Mrs May: I was disappointed, Chairman, because Iain has spent six years ensuring that he sets welfare reform in this country on the right track and he has considered that issue very carefully and has been delivering on that. I was disappointed. I think there is more to be done, but Stephen Crabb will be an excellent Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and will continue that welfare reform.

Chair: Excellent.

Q254 Mr Jayawardena: I have two themes to cover, if I may, Chairman: first, Turkey and, secondly, migration generally. On Turkey, what is your assessment of the plan to extend visa-free movement to Turkish citizens by June?

Mrs May: That is a decision that has been taken by the Schengen countries. It does not apply to the United Kingdom. We will be able to continue with our visa requirements for Turkey. I think that is important. Part of the deal, obviously, is that we are very clear we are not part of Schengen and we retain our ability to have those visa requirements.

Q255 Mr Jayawardena: Do you not think that realistically it could end up being a step into non-Schengen countries if Turkey was, for instance, to join the EU?

Mrs May: Within the EU, there are countries that are members of Schengen who have certain visa arrangements with other countries outside. As the United Kingdom, we decide the visa arrangements we have with other countries, obviously, within the European Union, but as the Prime Minister said yesterday, in his response to questions on the European Council statement that he made, this is an issue where he thinks it will be some considerable time before the negotiations would get close to Turkey actually joining the EU.

Q256 Mr Jayawardena: For clarity, if they were to join the EU, their current population is 77 million, predicted to rise to 90 million by 2050. That population would as a member state then have access to the UK without visas?

Mrs May: We have been very clear as the United Kingdom, as again the Prime Minister reiterated, that for new accession countries we believe that what we will be doing is making certain requirements in relation to their relationship with the European Union before they would get access to the full free movement rights. There are transitional arrangements at the moment. We do not think those are sufficient. We think it should be possible to put further measures in place and we are very clear that that is what we would do. Of course it has to be a unanimous decision for a country to come in, so it is possible for any individual country to veto.

Q257 Mr Jayawardena: You mentioned transitional arrangements and the way that things might need to change more generally. One of the key features of the EU project, and I am no fan of the EU, has been the notion of soft power, that illiberal countries may become more liberal in the hope of being rewarded with EU membership. Last week, the Turkish President declared that, "Democracy, freedom and the rule of law, for us, these words have absolutely no value any longer". Given Turkey's human rights record, has the EU sold its soul in striking such a deal?

Mrs May: No. Of course, the arrangements that the European Union has come to with Turkey are about the issue of the migrants who are moving from Turkey into Greece. The Schengen countries have chosen a position in relation to visa liberalisation, which does not apply to the United Kingdom. There is a process that any country wishing to join the European Union goes through in which there is discussion around a variety of issues, which include issues like law and

order and the process of justice and so forth. Those discussions have taken place with new countries that have come in recently. They would take place with any country that is hoping to join in the future.

Q258 Mr Jayawardena: Thank you, Home Secretary. Chairman, if I can turn to the second theme on migration generally. Opinion polls consistently show that immigration is one of the British public's top concerns. The Conservative Party has consistently said that it wants to bring immigration down to the tens of thousands. That being the case—it is still in the hundreds of thousands—would you acknowledge that it is difficult to control those figures while being a member of the European Union because we do not have control of our borders?

Mrs May: We set the target we have to bring net migration down to the tens of thousands, to what we believe are sustainable levels, for a good reason: because of the impact that uncontrolled migration can have on people. We set that target at a time when we were a member of the European Union. We confirmed that target when we were a member of the European Union in 2010 and confirmed it again in the general election last year, still as a member of the European Union. In the immigration arena it is not possible to say in immigration that you can take one measure or, indeed, one suite of measures and then sit back and think that is going to have the overall impact. People's behaviour changes, economic circumstances change, so it is necessary to constantly be looking at these issues, as we are doing in relation to immigration from outside the EU. As part of the deal negotiated by the Prime Minister, we are going to be able to tighten up on aspects particularly in relation to the abuse of free movement.

Q259 Mr Jayawardena: Home Secretary, I am delighted to hear that we will continue to strive to control immigration regardless of the outcome of the referendum, but on a matter of fact would you agree that we would have to vote to leave to take back control of the borders on the basis that there is the opportunity for any EU citizen to enter the UK while we are members of the EU?

Mrs May: First of all, as I have already declared that I believe in remaining in the European Union, I suspect you can recognise what the answer to your question would be. Can I raise this issue of the phrase that is being used of control of borders because it gives the impression that nobody who comes across the borders of the United Kingdom is checked? Of course, people who come across our borders are checked. We are able to operate that control at our borders and, as I indicated, one of the things we have negotiated within the deal is a greater ability—through the change in interpretation of one aspect of the relevant directive—to be able to exclude and deport individuals, particularly those with criminal records. We are also working to share more information at our borders, which gives greater ability to operate in that way at the borders, so we are able to check people when they come across the borders.

Q260 Mr Jayawardena: But we cannot reduce the numbers?

Mrs May: We have taken steps within the deal. Obviously should the vote be to remain in the European Union, the European Commission and Council are very clear that the emergency brake on welfare benefits would kick in for the United Kingdom. I think that would act to reduce a pull factor because of the extent to which people are able to get in-work benefits currently as soon as they get here to the UK.

Mr Jayawardena: I hope that is the case.

Q261 Chair: Just one thing: you said we have 100% checks—this is what the Government have said—on departure. When we departed as the Committee—obviously you are in a different position as the Home Secretary—as passengers from the United Kingdom nobody checked our passports on departure. There were no immigration officials. We were checked by the airline, of course. When we left Holland back from our visit to Europol, our passports were checked by immigration officers. Do you still maintain that there is 100% exit checks when our passports are not checked by immigration officers?

Mrs May: Chairman, the exit checks take place in a variety of different ways. In some places, for example, if you go to St Pancras, your passport will be physically swiped.

Chair: I am talking about Heathrow Airport.

Mrs May: Yes, I am just about answering your question, Chairman. If I may start at the beginning again because I think it is important. Exit checks are undertaken in different ways. In St Pancras it will be a physical check of the passport. On airlines, we rely on the information that is given us in advance by the airlines. We are able to identify people who are travelling through the advance passenger information that we get.

Q262 Chair: Yes, I understand that, but on departure from Heathrow Airport your passport is not checked by an immigration officer. We know you get that information from the airlines because we have been pressing for you to get this on the basis of 100%, but on departure from Heathrow Airport an immigration officer does not check your passport. That is correct, isn't it?

Mrs May: Chairman, an exit check has taken place through the use of advance passenger information. You do not need to have a Border Force official there checking the passport for an exit check to have taken place.

Chair: I understand the meaning of the words “exit check” but I am asking you: an immigration officer does not check you on departure as they do in Holland?

Mrs May: We do it in a different way.

Chair: Okay. Mr Loughton, help us.

Q263 Tim Loughton: Home Secretary, what bearing has the Prime Minister's Euro reform deal—which we will be voting on, on 23 June—on the current migration crisis with over 1.8 million non-EU citizens coming into the EU?

Mrs May: The deal has a number of elements to it in this area. One is the reduction of the pull factor of the access to in-work welfare benefits.

Tim Loughton: They would not qualify because they are non-EU citizens, though.

Mrs May: Sorry, I thought you said EU citizens.

Tim Loughton: No, I am purely interested in the EU citizens who have come into the European Union. What bearing has the deal on that current crisis?

Mrs May: Sorry, you said the EU citizens.

Tim Loughton: No, non-EU.

Mrs May: Third country nationals who are not EU?

Tim Loughton: Syrians, Afghans, everybody else.

Mrs May: Yes. One of the impacts of one of the European Court of Justice judgments up until now has been that it has been possible for somebody who is in the European Union—a third country national in the European Union illegally—to gain free movement rights by marrying a European Union citizen. That is one of the judgments that will effectively be overturned by the new directive that will be imposed. There are a number of areas where the access to free movement has been extended and we will now be able to reverse that through the new directive that will be put in place.

Q264 Tim Loughton: Can I come to Calais? You are a great chum of Bernard Cazeneuve.

Mrs May: We work very well together.

Tim Loughton: Right. He said a little while ago that to end the Le Touquet agreement would represent a humanitarian disaster. Was he right to say that?

Mrs May: I think the Le Touquet agreement is very important. If the Le Touquet agreement were ended we would see more people coming to Calais to try to get to the United Kingdom. Having the juxtaposed controls is very important.

Q265 Tim Loughton: But do you agree that it would represent a humanitarian disaster?

Mrs May: What I agree with is that I think it would have an impact of more people coming to try to reach the United Kingdom. Now, what the circumstances for those people were when they reached Calais I am not going to speculate on.

Q266 Tim Loughton: Was he overblowing it when he said it will be a humanitarian disaster?

Mrs May: He said what he believed to be the case. We work very closely together. We both believe that the Le Touquet agreement is very important both for France and the United Kingdom.

Q267 Tim Loughton: On what basis can the Prime Minister strongly suggest that a vote to come out of the EU, on 23 June, would likely result in the end of agreements like Le Touquet?

Mrs May: If you look at the approach that is being taken within France at the moment, if you look at the voices that are raised within France, there are many voices in France suggesting that the Le Touquet agreement should be torn up and France should revert to the previous situation where there were no juxtaposed controls. All I would say is that we and France are both members of the European Union. We have an agreement with France. If we were not to be members of the European Union nobody can guarantee, nobody can say with certainty what the situation would continue to be.

Q268 Tim Loughton: Why is the EU a guarantee of a bilateral agreement between the United Kingdom and France, which has no bearing on the EU membership? Why would the Home Secretary responsible for immigration and the current Government of France want to inflict a humanitarian disaster on the people in Calais and other places simply because we choose to come out of the EU on 23 June? What is the logic of that?

Mrs May: Mr Loughton, what I have said is very simple, which is that, if we were to leave the European Union, there are no guarantees about what arrangements would continue to be in place for the United Kingdom and there is—

Q269 Tim Loughton: Why does it guarantee Le Touquet? Where does the EU guarantee Le Touquet?

Mrs May: Because France and the United Kingdom work well together within the European Union. Who is to say what the approach to the United Kingdom would be if we were not a member of the European Union?

Q270 Tim Loughton: Who is to say that the approach would be different if we vote to stay in because it is a bilateral agreement, which at any time before a referendum or after a referendum, France, the United Kingdom, can unilaterally cancel? That is the case, is it not?

Mrs May: We have been working with the French Government to maintain the Le Touquet agreement and that we have the arrangements at Calais that ensure we can identify clandestines who are trying to get across to the United Kingdom.

Tim Loughton: But, Home Secretary, you appreciate the point the Le Touquet agreement—

Mrs May: I appreciate exactly what you were trying to say, Mr Loughton.

Q271 Tim Loughton: I am trying to get you to give some justification—which your Immigration Minister struggled to—to the Prime Minister’s scaremongering that in some way there is a direct link between our membership of the EU and the existence of the Le Touquet agreement, which is entirely bilateral, not governed by anything within the EU, and the termination of which the person currently responsible for immigration in France has said would be a humanitarian disaster. The two are not closely linked, are they?

Mrs May: Mr Loughton, I return to what I said previously. First of all, I suggest you do look at the pressure that there is in France to change the Le Touquet agreement, because there is considerable pressure in France to do that. Secondly, I would simply say that there are two countries that are both members of the European Union that have come to an agreement in relation to juxtaposed controls. If we were not a member of the European Union it would introduce a degree of uncertainty as to what would happen.

Tim Loughton: It would make no difference.

Q272 Stuart C. McDonald: Just follow-up questions in relation to the line of questioning from Mr Loughton and Mr Jayawardena. First, in relation to Calais, you will obviously be well aware of the decision of the tribunal in ZAT and basically an order that the UK Government allows five or six very vulnerable kids into the United Kingdom without having to go through the process of claiming asylum and then sending in letters of request, a process that was taking up to about a year, leaving them stranded in those conditions. There are now around 150 children, currently in Calais or Dunkirk, who are estimated to be affected by that decision, all of whom have family or friends here in the United Kingdom. Why on earth spend millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money on fighting that case, instead of just accepting 150 very vulnerable kids from those camps?

Mrs May: First of all, the important point was that they did have to go through a process of claiming asylum in France. France is a safe country. I think it is right that people who are in France should be claiming asylum in France. The French Government has been encouraging that and we have been working with them on that. It is important because, under the Dublin regulations, you claim asylum in the country that you are in but if you then have family connections with another country that you wish to go to, then it is possible for those Dublin rules to be applied and that process to be applied.

I recognise you refer to the length of time that it can take for that process. That is one of the reasons why we have seconded somebody, an expert in this area, from the Home Office into the Ministry of Interior in France to work with them on how this process is operating. I am pleased to say that I think it is already showing a speeding up in the process of considering those cases, because of course for any case, when they have claimed asylum, it is then necessary to verify whether they do indeed have family in the United Kingdom.

Q273 Stuart C. McDonald: Do you have any indication just now of the timeframe that it takes for one of these kids to seek asylum and then to have the letters of request put in? At the time of that judgment, it was taking about a year; a year in these absolutely atrocious camps.

Mrs May: The timeframe in recent cases has been significantly reduced. I think the process took a matter of weeks in the recent cases of youngsters who came over, but I can certainly give some more indication to the Committee in writing if that would be helpful.

Q274 Mr Burrowes: One other thing was on 3 March, the £17 million for us to give shelter to migrants in cities in other parts of France, and also in the words of the Prime Minister, “To fund joint work to return migrants not in need of protection to their home countries”, does that funding also then include joint work because, as we said on 28 January, the commitment was made to step up efforts to reunite lone children with families in the UK. Will that also be included in the additional support taking place in France?

Mrs May: There are a number of initiatives. I think the announcement on 28 January you are referring to is the announcement the Immigration Minister made about the work we are doing with UNHCR, which is we have asked UNHCR for advice in relation to children at risk, particularly from the region surrounding Syria.

But in relation to the money, the £17 million, there are various elements of money that are being put in to support for children, particularly in Europe, so DFID is putting £10 million in, which is providing support to particularly vulnerable children, and we would certainly be looking to ensure that that can help to reunite those vulnerable children who are currently unaccompanied with their families. As I said, we are taking steps, partly through seconding somebody to the Ministry of the Interior, to improve the process, whereby a child who is in France who has claimed asylum, who has family—and obviously that has to be verified—in the United Kingdom to come to, to ensure that that process is rather smoother than it has been in the past.

Q275 Mr Burrowes: Beyond that level, into ministerial level, is there anything on the ground, any British officials who are involved in assisting in that process of dealing with the family unification point of view? I visited Calais on 2 March and one of the impacts of the dispersal, obviously, of the French authorities was a number of children not only being traumatised but also running as far away as they could from the French authorities. Some of them may well be at risk of going into the hands of traffickers, but also they do not get to the corner of the camp where you can

be processed, not least because it is only a French interpreter doing it. Isn't there a role for Britain to play, more practical on the ground with officials, to help ensure that those that do claim asylum are properly processed in relation to those unaccompanied minors?

Mrs May: We have been working with the French authorities. In particular, we have done some work with them on how to identify those children who may be being trafficked or have been trafficked so that they can be given particular support.

Q276 Mr Burrowes: The Committee has asked for particular information around numbers. It is a relevant question, because there is the Alf Dubs amendment in relation to 3,000 children being given refuge in this country. Has an estimate been made, as the Committee have asked for, of the numbers of children who first will be resettled in the UK direct from conflict zones? Is there an estimate that we have?

Mrs May: Obviously, a number of children will have come already from the Syrian refugees who have been resettled already and will be coming as part of the 20,000 Syrian refugees that we will be resettling, but we asked UNHCR for advice on children at risk in the region and we are discussing with them currently what steps we need to take.

Q277 Mr Burrowes: Secondly, the Committee asked for, in terms of those who resettle in the UK from Europe, whether that—as I understood from 28 January—was part of the commitment, whether that involves any numbers and whether there is any numbers you can give to the Committee on the likely numbers of resettled children.

Mrs May: We have been looking at resettling children from the region. We have also been doing work to provide support for those who may be unaccompanied, but currently in Europe. We have provided expertise to help identify those who may have been trafficked. As I say, we are trying to speed up and smooth the process for those who have family in the United Kingdom that, therefore, once they have claimed asylum are able, under the Dublin rules, to come to the United Kingdom to join those family, once obviously that has been verified.

Q278 Mr Burrowes: It would be useful if there was any estimate of the numbers, particularly from Europe, presently that may end up being resettled in this country, because Save the Children welcomed the 28 January commitment saying, in their words, "It could mean thousands more children are somewhere safe", not necessarily this country, but somewhere safe. If it was possible to have any more detail as to the anticipated numbers of children from Europe that would end up being resettled for one reason or another, that would be helpful.

Chair: If you could write to us about that that would be very helpful.

Mrs May: I am happy to write to set out the various steps that we have taken. Of course some of the numbers being used by some organisations are in themselves estimates.

Mr Burrowes: Because Parliament will be debating this issue.

Chair: Indeed. We will get that. As it is Victoria Atkins's birthday, I will give her a second chance.

Q279 Victoria Atkins: Thank you so much. I want to follow up on Mr Loughton's questioning about the Le Touquet agreement. In the summer last year, the Mayor of Calais came to give evidence before this Committee and she described the fact that 3,000 people have run over her town and taken it over. I think it is fair to say that she was quite keen to get rid of them because they

have ruined her town. Turning Mr Loughton's questions around, can you guarantee that the Le Touquet agreement will continue in the event that we run off the pitch and leave the EU?

Mrs May: No, that cannot be guaranteed.

Victoria Atkins: So rather ironically, Mr Loughton's position could be described as, "Trust the French, they will not change their minds"?

Q280 Chair: Okay. We will not have questions to members. I think we will leave it there; I think we will leave the referendum campaign there. Thank you very much to colleagues on that.

Let us move on to policing and the police and let me start with a question on Operation Midland. The Commissioner announced yesterday that Operation Midland was to close. It cost £2 million; no arrests. Do you agree with the Prime Minister, the Mayor of London and almost everyone else in your belief that it is appropriate to give Lord Bramall an apology? Here is someone who had his house searched and he went and gave two interviews to the police. His wife was very, very ill at the time, she was dying, and the police write a letter saying, "There is insufficient evidence to take this further". Do you think that is enough for Lord Bramall?

Mrs May: Obviously the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police has himself made the point that it is right when the police receive allegations that they properly investigate them. I think in this area—

Chair: Sure. I will come on to that in a second.

Mrs May: But I think that is important, because there are occasions when the police investigate individuals because allegations are received, in this sort of case and in others, and when that case is then not taken forward, somebody is not charged or the case is taken no further forward. The point that the Commissioner made was that he does not apologise in every such case.

Q281 Chair: No, but the point your Policing Minister said in the House was that it was commonsense for the police to say, "There was no evidence, therefore we did not proceed" rather than this, "Insufficient evidence" because this came up in the case of Paul Gambaccini. We did an inquiry into this and, indeed, you have made some very important comments about that that have now been enacted in the new Bill. We do not expect the Commissioner every single time to hold a press conference and say sorry, but at a local level, if there is an investigation and there is no evidence, surely the Policing Minister is right, the police should say, "No evidence" rather than, "Insufficient"?

Mrs May: What I think is important, if we look at these issues around child sexual abuse cases, I think—

Chair: No, sorry, you can go that way—

Mrs May: I am just talking a general point.

Chair: —but I am asking specifically on what the Policing Minister said to the House when I put to him, "If there is no evidence and they are not proceeding in the case of Gambaccini, Bramall and the other cases, isn't it right that the police should say, 'There is no evidence to proceed' as opposed to, 'Insufficient evidence'?" He said, "It is commonsense that they should do so".

Mrs May: What is right for the police is for the police to say what they feel they are able to say, in the circumstances of any case that they have investigated. It is not for the—

Q282 Chair: That is not what your Policing Minister said.

Mrs May: You put the question—

Chair: It was in the House.

Mrs May: —to him, “If there is no evidence, should they say there is no evidence?” What I am saying is that there will be circumstances for the police and the police should say what they feel in any particular circumstances of a case it is right and appropriate for them to say. That is an operational judgment that will be made by the police.

Q283 Chair: So you disagree with the Prime Minister and the Mayor of London, you do not think an apology should be offered to Lord Bramall?

Mrs May: What I have said, Chairman, is that the Commissioner has made the point that he does not apologise for every investigation that does not go further, but what I think is important for us to remember in this—and I have made this point in a number of the cases—is that the police should investigate in a timely fashion and they should inform people if they are not going to take charges forward in a timely fashion.

Chair: You have said that.

Mrs May: As you yourself have referred to, where people have been arrested and bailed, we are changing the legislation around bail so that we do not see people like Paul Gambaccini left on bail for a significant period of time, only to have no charges brought against him.

Q284 Chair: Yes, so you do not agree with the Prime Minister? You are the Home Secretary. You sit in the Cabinet with the Prime Minister. Both the Prime Minister and the Mayor of London, who sits in political Cabinet, have said in the circumstances of Lord Bramall’s case he deserves an apology. He happens to be a constituent of Mr Jayawardena, so I will allow him to come in next. You do not think an apology should be given; you disagree with the Prime Minister? You are not agreeing with the Prime Minister, are you? We cannot just—

Mrs May: No, what I am saying is that I think that there are circumstances in which the police should make sure that they deal with these issues in a timely fashion, and that they then inform people of what is happening as a result of that in a timely fashion

Q285 Chair: What is timely for you?

Mrs May: As soon as they know. I think in any investigation—and I think this is one of the reasons why we are changing police bail—it is that they should be making sure that they are continuing their investigations. Sometimes cases do take a significant period of time, but what we do not want to see is people just being pushed to one side by the police, “We will come back to that later” sort of idea while they get on with other things. They always have priorities, but I think it is important for them to deal with these issues.

But underlying this I think is a very important issue in relation to allegations of child sexual abuse. For too long what we saw was not being taken up by the police, and indeed other authorities,

when incidents were being reported to them and allegations were being made. That is why I think it is particularly important now, and obviously we have set up, for example, the Goddard Inquiry.

Chair: Indeed.

Mrs May: I think it is important, and we are supporting police in dealing with child sexual abuse cases, that they do so properly, that they do look into these cases and investigate them.

Q286 Chair: There is a difference of opinion between the Commissioner and Tom Winsor over the issue of belief of the complainer. Alex Marshall issued his guidance today and I spoke to him earlier today because I was a little confused. Is it your position that when somebody comes and makes an allegation, it should be recorded as a complaint and then investigated or do you think that the complainant needs to be believed unconditionally?

Mrs May: The position that the Chief Executive of the College of Policing, Chief Constable Alex Marshall, has set out is absolutely clear, which is that, at the point at which somebody makes the allegation, it should be believed to be recorded, unless there is very credible evidence that suggests that it should not be believed. It is a belief in order to record that as a crime. Thereafter, the police should investigate it without fear or favour and go where the evidence leads them.

Q287 Chair: But you accept what the Commissioner has said in respect of Superintendent Ken MacDonald that he was wrong to say the evidence in that case was credible and true?

Mrs May: Senior police officers have to be very careful with the language that they use in relation to this. What one expects of them, when they have a case that they are looking into, is that they investigate that case and they do not proclaim on it before the investigation is completed.

Q288 Mr Winnick: You said, Home Secretary—and rightly so—that allegations of sexual abuse should be thoroughly investigated, and all the more so in view of the notorious scandals of Savile and so on. Do you think that arising from the failure to find any evidence for what was described as Operation Midland, there is a possibility that allegations will not be taken with the seriousness that obviously we all want to see?

Mrs May: Mr Winnick, what I would hope is that everything that is being done in this area—which appears already to be having the impact of giving people greater confidence in coming forward—will continue to give people sufficient confidence to come forward. People will have seen in this particular case that no action has been taken, but there are other cases, like Operation Pallial in North Wales, for example, where there is an individual serving time as a result of the investigations that have taken place about allegations of incidents that happened some years ago.

Q289 Mr Winnick: Home Secretary, I am totally a lay person and certainly not someone who would have experience of police operations and all the rest of it, and perhaps that is so of all my colleagues around the table, but when I heard or saw the interview with the former Conservative MP, Proctor, whose political views could not be different than mine, saying, “A paedophile ring, including myself” that is Proctor, “and Edward Heath, when we could hardly exchange a single word”. As a layman, I could only take the view that the allegations that Edward Heath, of all people—against someone whose views I would obviously disagree with, but an honourable man by

all accounts in his private conduct—and Proctor would be together in a murder ring. It is not just a sexual ring, but carrying out murders as part of abusers in Dolphin Square. It seemed so absurd to me, if not to yourself, that I am surprised, absolutely surprised, that the police would take such allegations seriously.

Mrs May: As I have said, if you set this into the context, Mr Winnick, I think what is very important is that we have seen over the years police not taking allegations of sexual abuse of children seriously—

Mr Winnick: Quite.

Mrs May: —and some people's lives being affected and in some cases damaged as a result of that attitude by the police. What is important is that when the police receive an allegation they do properly record it, as the advice has now gone out very clearly from the College of Policing, but that also they then investigate, as I say, without fear or favour and take that investigation where the evidence leads them. I think it is important. If you look at it, a lot of focus is put on the cases that have identified well-known individuals. As I have just indicated, there are other cases that are going through or have gone through the courts, in relation to Pallial and in other cases, where people are not well-known individuals, but whose lives were affected by sexual abuse as a child have now been able to come forward with their allegations and their perpetrators are now in jail and they feel justice has been done.

Q290 Mr Winnick: Of course, and indeed we endorsed or confirmed that Judge Goddard should be the chair of the inquiry and we are all deeply anxious that justice should be done, that sexual abuse is one of the most horrifying crimes committed. But can I put this to you: people may say there are all these allegations made, which seemed to be absurd, as I said, and yet someone like Lord Janner was not brought to justice until it was far too late. An attempt was made to bring him to justice and when that attempt was made, as we know, he had dementia. People will contrast the allegations made about Heath, Bramall and the rest and the fact that the Director of Public Prosecutions specified dates and the rest of it where Janner would have been charged if he was in a position to defend himself. So justice clearly did not occur in Janner's case, whether he was guilty or not, the allegations were made, he was not able to clear his name or be convicted in court and yet all these other people, there is not the slightest evidence they have been involved in sexual abuse.

Mrs May: The point of a police investigation is that when an allegation comes forward, the police investigate that allegation and identify whether there is evidence. What I have seen in cases, and quite a number of cases, is precisely that in the past, where allegations have been made about individuals having perpetrated abuse, the police have not listened to that allegation, the police have not acted on that allegation, the police have not investigated on that allegation, so people have not been brought to justice. Now, of course in the case of Lord Janner, I was disappointed with the first judgment that Director of Public Prosecutions made in relation to his appearance before the court, then of course the judge did bring him before the court and then the decision was taken that he was not able to stand trial because of his dementia.

But what is important in all of these things is that at the point where somebody comes forward with an allegation, what one wants is for something to be investigated as far as possible when it is first referred to the police, when it is first reported to the police. One wants people to be doing that, the police to be doing that and people to feel they can come forward when it is happening.

Mr Winnick: One last question.

Chair: Yes, of course.

Q291 Mr Winnick: Do you feel that the Metropolitan Police Commissioner should accept some responsibility for Operation Midland and the fact that nothing has arisen, no charges in the matter, that the operation is now closed? Do you think he should accept some responsibility for what occurred?

Mrs May: The police have operational independence. They make decisions as to who they investigate and how they investigate in relation to crimes, but what I am saying is I think that it is important when allegations are made that the police investigate those allegations.

Q292 Mr Winnick: If I may, just this: of course investigate, no one is suggesting otherwise, but to say in effect what was said at the beginning, what the Chair quoted, that the allegations were credible and true does not make any sense. Of course no one is suggesting that it should simply be dismissed out of hand, but to take the view that the police did and with all the media attention saying, in effect, "This is serious and true" seemed, to me at least, totally inappropriate.

Mrs May: But that is, if I may say so, Mr Winnick, a slightly different issue from the question as to whether the investigation should have been taking place. The Commissioner, as the Chairman has said, has already commented on the senior officer. Senior officers, all police officers, need to be very careful about the language that they use in relation to these issues.

Q293 Nusrat Ghani: I am chairing an inquiry into harmful sexual behaviour, which is being organised by Barnardo's. We took some evidence last week that was printed in *The Times* today that child sex offence allegations have increased by 80% and there were 70,000 investigations over the past year alone, costing £1 billion, which will increase to £3 billion by 2020. What increased capacity are the police being provided with to deal with child sex offence allegations?

Mrs May: There are a number of things that have been undertaken. First of all, we have provided support to Chief Constable Simon Bailey, who is the national policing lead, in dealing with these issues under Op Hydrant. We were particularly concerned about ensuring the police forces would be individually investigating allegations and we need to make sure that where perpetrators have committed crimes or there are allegations that cross police boundaries that cases can be brought together. So there is some specific support that we have given in relation to that. The College of Policing has also been providing support in relation to the sort of training that officers need to have in order to be able to conduct inquiries, particularly obviously dealing sometimes with very vulnerable victims.

Q294 Nusrat Ghani: Training of officers often comes up with NAPAC, the charity who I have been working with, which takes care of survivors of child sex abuse. New funding arrangements have been made and the Crime Commissioner for Norfolk is managing a £600,000 budget. Can you possibly update us on how funding will be available for charities like NAPAC who previously have received around £224,000 from the Home Office? They would like some assurances as to how they can access this funding.

Mrs May: Yes. The arrangements for accessing the funding will be different. Previously it went through the Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk, for reasons that were bureaucratic reasons and administrative reasons. That is why it was undertaken through that. But in future what we will be doing is money will be made available at force level for Police and Crime Commissioners and it will be possible to bid into the Police and Crime Commissioners for that funding.

Q295 Mr Jayawardena: You have helpfully asked the questions I had around the Midlands, Chair.

If I turn to a slightly different area of policing, which is procurement and efficiencies, because this Government has made a lot of positive steps towards helping police forces across the country better use their resources so that it can be used to deal with the challenges of our time. I was just wondering, however, according to the National Audit Office, around half of all forces still have their own independent procurement. Would you agree that it makes sense for forces and Police Commissioners to work closer together to help save taxpayers' money so that more can be directed at the frontline?

Mrs May: I would agree that I would expect all Police and Crime Commissioners to look to see how they can be saving money and in areas like procurement, that is one of them. One of the things that the Policing Minister has been very keen on and has done is ensured that there are now procurement figures for individual items published so that people can see if their police force is paying more for uniforms, for example, than another police force or more for other bits of kit. That is important, because then the public, through the direct elections, can hold their Police and Crime Commissioners to account.

Q296 Mr Jayawardena: Do you think that perhaps Government could consider, either in the Policing and Crime Bill or in subsequent legislation, looking at whether a duty of collaboration on procurement should be considered alongside a duty of collaboration with other emergency services?

Mrs May: On procurement issues, I think we should not be telling the individual Police and Crime Commissioners how they should be collaborating on procurement. I would hope that we have approached this in a slightly different way: rather than putting a statutory requirement to collaborate, by making information available to the public, they will be able to exercise their decision in the ballot box as to whether their Police and Crime Commissioner has been operating as efficiently as they would like them to be.

Q297 Mr Umunna: Home Secretary, the Chancellor has just, in effect, protected the Social Security budget by saying that there will be no further cuts to that budget and the £4.4 billion that was scheduled to come around in savings from cuts to PIP is no longer going ahead. That means that unprotected Departments like your own are going to have to shoulder the £4.4 billion worth of savings that are going to have to be made. Have you been given any assurance that you will not be asked to make further cuts to your budget in your Department to make up this £4.4 billion difference that there is existing at present?

Mrs May: What the Chancellor has done in the Home Office budget crucially is of course, when precept income is taken account, it protected police spending in real terms over the spending review period. That of course is the biggest chunk, if you like, of the Home Office budget.

Q298 Mr Umunna: But then you have the Border Force and other parts of what your Department does. Can I just ask the question again: have you been given any assurance that the Treasury are not going to come to you to make a contribution to the £4.4 billion worth of savings that now have to be found from unprotected Departments like your own?

Mrs May: When we were going through the Comprehensive Spending Review process, we put forward a very serious bid across all areas of the Home Office funding. Of course Government is

going to be looking over the coming years at ways in which it can continue to save money and I have to say—

Q299 Mr Umunna: So you have not been given such an assurance? Would you be happy to contribute to the £4.4 billion difference?

Mrs May: I was about to say, Mr Umunna, that I think one of the ways in which Government has shown in the past an ability to save money is the significant amounts of money that have been saved by precisely things like better procurement across Government. I think that there are more areas in which it is possible to save money and provide a better service to the public.

Q300 Mr Umunna: So you would be happy to make a contribution? I just want a yes or no answer. Would you be happy to make a contribution to this £4.4 billion cut?

Mrs May: The answer I am giving to you, Mr Umunna, is that discussions about an individual Department's budgets are held between the Department and the Treasury, not between, I am afraid, the Department and the Home Affairs Select Committee.

Mr Umunna: I will take that as a no.

Chair: I am sure we change that in future. Victoria Atkins has a quick question on counter-extremism and we move to that topic.

Q301 Victoria Atkins: Home Secretary, on extremism, discussions about extremism tend to focus at the moment on Islamist extremism, but there is also a worrying rise in far right extremism and in particular anti-Semitism. What action is being taken to tackle anti-Semitism and what should Jeremy Corbyn be doing to support such efforts, given recent very serious allegations concerning the Labour Party?

Chair: Of course I should say you are not responsible for Jeremy Corbyn. He is not part of the portfolio of the Home Office, but I am sure you will have an answer to give to Victoria Atkins.

Mrs May: First of all, yes, it is absolutely right to say that extremism obviously does not just deal with Islamist extremism. We have been very clear in our counter-extremism strategy that it covers all forms of extremism. In fact, it is already the case that there will be a proportion of cases and referrals made to the Channel programme that are about far right, people who are being radicalised through far right extremism, so it is not just about Islamist extremism. The issues that have been raised in the Labour Party in relation to anti-Semitism I think are of concern. I was at the CST dinner a few weeks ago, where reference was made to what had happened at Oxford University in relation to the Labour Party and there are a number of members in the Labour Party who have been clear that they do not think that what was happening inside the Labour Party was right at all or appropriate and was wrong. I think this anti-Semitism is wrong.

We should all be concerned about a situation where there are members of our Jewish community who are concerned about being here in the United Kingdom because of the incidents of anti-Semitism that are taking place. There is a specific group that looks at issues around anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. We are looking to ensure that hate crime with a religious element can be separately identified by the police and we are able to get a good picture of what is happening in this area. I myself have had a meeting with representatives of the Jewish community together

with the Director of Public Prosecutions and the College of Policing to look at the question of ensuring that where incidents take place, they are properly investigated and properly dealt with.

Q302 Chair: Thank you very much. Let us move on to other questions, because I am conscious that we will all want to go vote either for or against the Budget, otherwise we will all get into trouble, so I want to wind up as quickly as I can.

On police bail, the Committee wants to thank you for pushing through one of the recommendations we made in our police bail report concerning the length of time that people are on bail. That was one aspect of the evidence of the sister of Siddhartha Dhar, the person who fled the country to join Daesh while he was on bail. We were concerned that the police did not have the power to seize passports at the time they gave bail. In fact, Mark Rowley, in his evidence to us, described the current rules as too weak. He said they were toothless. This is not in the Bill and the Committee may decide—we have not had a discussion on this yet—to put an amendment into that Bill about the ability of the police to seize passports on terrorism issues as a condition of bail. How do you feel about that? Do you think that this should have been in the Bill and can you look at it again?

Mrs May: This is an issue that we are looking at, Chairman, around the question and particularly in relation to terrorist cases. Obviously the police make judgments about bail when they apply bail to individuals currently, about how long they give them to return their passports, but we are looking at this issue, given the concerns that have been raised.

Q303 Chair: That is very helpful, because obviously he was allowed to go home. They wrote him a letter saying, “Surrender your passport” and he had gone to Syria by the time he replied, or he never replied, so the fact you are looking at that is very helpful. Would you write to us if you are intending to amend the Bill? That would be helpful.

Mrs May: I can certainly write to you on the outcome of our considerations.

Q304 Chair: Excellent. On the issue of prostitution, I hate to bring Jeremy Corbyn back into our discussions, because of course you are not responsible for him, but the Committee is conducting an inquiry into prostitution and we are going to call witnesses, of course. Do you have a view at the moment as to whether the law is adequate or it needs to be changed? Do you think aspects should be changed? Do you think it should be decriminalised in some part or another?

Mrs May: This is one of those difficult issues where, honestly, the evidence is not clear in relation to the approach to be taken. At the moment I think the law is right. Obviously we have the issue of the offence of the purchase of sex from somebody who has been trafficked or exploited into the provision of sexual acts. If you look across at the various countries that have taken a different view in relation to this, as I say, I do not think the evidence is there for one particular approach being a preferable one to that we take at the moment. What is important is that we are able to operate in a way that helps us to prevent harm and exploitation from taking place. There are some regimes where what you see is it is becoming harder to be able to interact, to identify and to deal with those.

Q305 Chair: Do you have an open mind on this, you are ready to be convinced by the evidence, or is your mind closed, that the law is fine?

Mrs May: My current view, Chairman, is that the law is appropriate. Obviously, as in any issue, if further evidence comes to light that suggests a different approach is a better one, then we will look at the evidence, I will look at that evidence, but my current view is that it is not necessary to change the law.

Q306 Nusrat Ghani: A quick question on counter-terrorism. There is evidence to suggest that young people that are groomed by extremists are groomed by either a friend or a family member and the most dangerous person to then groom them is someone that has returned from being involved in a terrorist activity, so monitoring them and being aware of what they are doing and what they are up to is key to making sure that we do not have even more home-grown terrorists. In 2014, Europol attempted to begin storing information of people suspected of travelling across borders to engage in terrorism. Apparently, by the day after the Paris attacks late last year, only half of the EU members had registered foreign fighters on this system. Why does there seem to be such a reluctance to share information that could play a part in saving lives and what can we do about it?

Mrs May: Through various channels we are working with European colleagues to look at the sort of information that can be shared and the appropriate platforms for sharing that information. As I am sure you will be aware, there are some circumstances in which intelligence becomes available, very sensitive intelligence from sensitive sources. How that information is shared is something that needs to be looked at very carefully and with great consideration. We are looking across with other partners in the European Union as to what information can be shared and how that should best be shared in order to maintain the necessary confidentiality or secrecy around some of that information.

Q307 Nusrat Ghani: There was some evidence to suggest that the terrorists involved in the atrocities in Paris might have had a link to this country or may have even visited Birmingham. Are you able to shed any light on that?

Mrs May: I recognise the reports that have been in the press in relation to this matter. As you will be aware, I do not comment in public on individual cases of national security of that sort.

Q308 Mr Burrowes: Do you agree with the Metropolitan Police that prostitution is a form of violence against women?

Mrs May: I think that there are, sadly, many circumstances in which prostitutes find themselves on the receiving end of violence. There are many prostitutes and I think we must be very concerned with that number of prostitutes who are here being sexually exploited because they have been trafficked into this country, they are effectively in slavery in this country. But I think it is important when we look at the law around this we ensure that it is that our legislative response is something that the police can deliver and is workable for them.

Q309 Mr Burrowes: But isn't there a case for change, given that our law is framed around prostitution being a public order offence rather than it being of this nature, violence against women?

Mrs May: In any circumstance, if the police are taking action against somebody for the exploitation of an individual, then they should look at what is the appropriate offence that they should be charging that individual under. If violence has taken place, then obviously they should be looking at the offences that relate to violence.

Q310 Mr Burrowes: But the Metropolitan Police's enforcement is on the basis of prostitution being a form of violence against women and you have obviously, Home Secretary, taken a lead in other areas of law in leading the way on that. Surely prostitution should not be excluded from that framework?

Mrs May: Mr Burrowes, this is an area where there is much discussion in relation to the appropriate legislative response that should take place. We did in fact in the Home Office in the previous coalition Government and this was an issue that Lynne Featherstone, when she was a Minister in the Home Office, looked at. Having seen the evidence that she brought forward, we decided that we would not take any action in relation to changing the law in this area. Now, obviously one of the issues that I think we would all agree on is that again in this area, on this particular issue, the police should not push it to one side where they are concerned and when they believe that there are incidents that have taken place that should require investigation and action from them.

Q311 Mr Burrowes: In terms of paying for sex, do you consider that as a form sexual exploitation?

Mrs May: I have met people from the organisation that is the English Collective of Prostitutes, I think they are referred to, who would take a different view from that. That is why I say this is—

Q312 Mr Burrowes: I am not asking their view.

Mrs May: This is a very difficult area in which to deal.

Chair: Mr Burrowes wants to hear your view, not the view of the English Collective of Prostitutes. You are giving evidence to this Committee. What is your view?

Mrs May: But the reason I referred to the English Collective of Prostitutes is that if you are going to say that prostitution in every case is exploitation, then that has to assume that those who are providing the sexual service have had no choice in doing that. There are those who would say that they have. Now, this is a very wide debate, it is a very serious topic and I suggest, Mr Burrowes, it is something that needs a wider debate than simply a question and answer at the end of House session.

Q313 Mr Burrowes: No, that is what this Committee is doing in its inquiry and it is just asking for an open mind on that issue. As a matter of law, those who are under 18, we classify that as exploitation.

Mrs May: Yes.

Q314 Mr Burrowes: Just on youth violence, very quickly. In terms of the law against selling knives to children, on the figures released by the Ministry of Justice, it is barely enforced and largely ignored. Online sales are on the increase, sadly with sometimes fatal and tragic consequences. Is it not time to bring knife sales laws up-to-date so we can catch those reckless online retailers? I do appreciate the work that has been undertaken with Emerson and others, but isn't it also worth looking at the law as well?

Mrs May: We are looking at the law around the so-called zombie knives, but I have also been in discussions with both online and offline retailers to consider what action can be taken in this area in relation to the responsibility they have to ensure that those who should not be accessing

knives are not, and looking at the underage sales particularly as an issue in this area. So that is the step that we are taking at the moment.

Q315 Nusrat Ghani: Home Secretary, when you were here in December, I asked about sharia courts and I am always asking you every time we meet. You know that I have huge concerns that there might be parallel legal systems within this country being conducted by community leaders who are self-appointed, who are making decisions that contradict the laws of our land and do not see women equal to men. Can you provide an update on the timetable and format of the review that you are conducting?

Mrs May: Yes. I cannot provide you a date. We are currently still in discussion with a number of people who might be members of the panel that would undertake that review. I would hope that we would be in a position within the not too distant future to be able to announce the chairman and members of that panel, but it is important that we get the right shape of that panel for the review going forward.

Q316 Nusrat Ghani: We are hoping to hold an inquiry here within this Committee this year, I hope, so will your review take place by the end of this year or early next year, do you think?

Mrs May: We are still in discussion about the chairmanship and members of the panel. Obviously once we have that in place, they will have to make a decision as to how long they think that it will be necessary for them to meet to undertake that review. I would hope that we would be able to meet that timetable.

Nusrat Ghani: Good, thank you.

Q317 Chair: Let us end where we began, on Brussels. The budget on counter-terrorism is protected by the Chancellor and by you in the autumn statement. We heard from Mark Lyall Grant at a joint committee that a number of members of the intelligence agencies had been recruited, so basically more spies had been employed to help gather intelligence, but there was a concern that there was not enough space for them in Cheltenham. Has this come across your desk? Are you aware of this issue, and if you are, has it been resolved? Have they been found the accommodation that they need?

Mrs May: It has not come across my desk because I am not responsible for GCHQ. That is the responsibility of the Foreign Secretary.

Chair: Okay, that is a very good answer.

Secondly, in respect of the next few days, obviously these are very, very serious moments in the life of this country and the life of our allies. I just want to reiterate the support of this Committee to those who are on the frontline, who day in, day out put their lives at risk, to re-emphasise the appeal that you made at the beginning for the public to be vigilant in all communities. The only way we are going to get this information is if everyone supports the police with that information. But also from this Committee to you—because you have done this job for six years, it is one of the toughest jobs in the Government—good luck over the next few days and weeks, because this is a very serious time also for you and we appreciate it greatly that you have taken the time on a day like today to keep to your commitment to come to this Committee. You have done your job in an exemplary way and we wish you well in the very difficult days that lie ahead.

Mrs May: Thank you, Chairman.

