

Lord West of Spithead: My Lords, I can assure the noble Earl that the Government take this very seriously indeed. It is, of course, an extremely difficult area to work in, so I can understand why there is a shortage of people going into it. We are pursuing this issue, but it is worth looking at the good news and what we have achieved. We now have in place 127 specialist domestic violence courts. We were aiming for a total of 128 and we are about eight months earlier than we thought we would be. We have provided £7.8 million to roll out independent domestic violence advisers and the multi-agency risk assessment conferences. We now have 700 advisers and 200 advisory conferences. This is a huge step forward. In the past 12 months we have been able to protect 29,000 victims of domestic abuse. It is a horrible number but the fact that we are doing that is quite an achievement by the Government.

Baroness Corston: My Lords, is my noble friend aware that one woman a week in the United Kingdom is murdered as a result of domestic violence? Will he accept that in my work as the chair of the Fawcett Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System it has been evident that the Government's initiative on domestic violence courts, independent domestic violence advisers and sexual assault referral centres has gone a long way towards addressing the seriousness of this crime and its designation and treatment as a crime throughout our statutory services, including the police in many constabularies?

Lord West of Spithead: My Lords, I thank my noble friend who has put it much more succinctly than I have in my previous answers. We have achieved a great deal but that does not mean that we are complacent. There is more to do but her question shows that we are pushing in a huge number of areas. It is important that we keep doing that.

Baroness Gardner of Parkes: Does the Minister have details of how much domestic violence is fuelled by alcohol or drugs and whether any special response is provided for such cases?

Lord West of Spithead: My Lords, I do not know the specific answer to that but I would guess on my feet that it is dramatically fuelled by alcohol and drugs. We know that they have a huge impact on violence generally. I do not know the exact percentages but I shall get back to the noble Baroness in writing.

The Lord Bishop of Chichester: My Lords, is the Minister aware that alongside the very important work done by statutory agencies a huge amount of work on domestic violence is done by local community groups, many of which find survival difficult because of inconsistency of funding?

Lord West of Spithead: My Lords, the right reverend Prelate is absolutely right. Indeed, a couple of those groups have been unable to get over the bar for funding in the past year. We have not reduced the amount of funding; it is just that the demands for it are that much greater. It is an issue that we must look at as it is important to keep them fully involved.

Terrorism Act 2006

Question

3.23 pm

Asked By **Lord Naseby**

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many websites have been closed under the Terrorism Act 2006.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): My Lords, the police's preferred route for removing potentially unlawful terrorist content is through informal contact with the internet service provider. They are happy with the impact of this approach to date. As a result, it has not yet been necessary for them to use the formal powers given under the Terrorism Act 2006 to close any websites.

Lord Naseby: My Lords, is it not extraordinary that—after an Act was passed following the 7/7 bombings, in response particularly to pressure from Prime Minister Blair; and in view of the emphasis that the current Prime Minister puts on terrorism—according to the Answer that the noble Lord has just given, we are still allowing these websites to exist and to be the lungs of publicity for the terrorists, modified only by the judgment of someone in the police force?

Lord West of Spithead: My Lords, my Answer did not say that we are allowing those things to happen; we have a whole raft of measures. We are removing websites on a voluntary basis with the ISPs. We are countering them by putting our own stuff on them. We are talking to local community activists, who put stuff on the websites. We are looking at how we can filter them. We have talked to all the various providers to ensure that we do that filtering, and we have looked at reducing access in areas of search engines and in things like Facebook. We are doing a huge raft of work. Indeed, I would be embarrassed to stand here, having been doing this for two years and pushing it, to find that we had not done that. We are out there in amongst it really trading blows toe-to-toe. We are doing that and we are actually getting somewhere on this. Now, that does not mean that we do not have to keep working—it is very difficult. As we know—and this is part of the Cyber Security Strategy—a lot of this is international. A lot of this is abroad—it is carried on by ISPs abroad. We have to deal with them internationally. However, I can assure this House that we are really working hard in this area. We will jolly well get there, and we will jolly well knock them for six finally.

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer: My Lords, can Minister say a little more about how his department co-operates with other countries which are hosting websites of this nature?

Lord West of Spithead: My Lords, the noble Baroness touches on something that is very difficult. We are in negotiation with a number of countries about this; as I said, the issue impinges on our whole Cyber Security Strategy. Cyberspace is global—that is one of the problems with it—and many of these actors are acting

[LORD WEST OF SPITHEAD]
elsewhere. Finding out who has done something, finding out which server the information is on and where it has come from, is very difficult. It takes very detailed and hard work. I am glad to say that we have some of the best people in the world doing this work, but it is highly complicated.

We deal with those countries, negotiate with them and talk about these things. However, some countries are not willing to do this—it is quite difficult—which is when we have to confront the problem and approach it in other ways. But we are working with many countries and trying to get international agreements. We have managed to do that in terms of paedophilia and child pornography and we need to try to do the same in this area, but it is much more complicated. What is violent extremism and what it is allowable for someone to say involve difficult nuances.

Lord Swinfen: My Lords, are some of these websites a source of information in the battle against terrorism?

Lord West of Spithead: My Lords, I do not think that I want to talk about that.

Lord Harris of Haringey: My Lords, my noble friend indicated that it had not been necessary to use the powers under the Terrorism Act 2006 because of the levels of co-operation and work being done with internet service providers to block access to particular sites. Is that co-operation forthcoming from all the internet service providers operating in this country, or are some providers perhaps less co-operative?

Lord West of Spithead: My Lords, so far, the police have not found it necessary to use what they could use from the Act. That means that they have managed to achieve what they want to achieve. It would be wrong to say that everyone is as co-operative, because they are not. There is one area of weakness that I thought someone might ask me about, and that I am not happy with. It is that because police forces are operationally separate, they have probably not recorded formally as well as they should exactly when they have shut down a site. We are in negotiations about that. When we passed the Act in 2006, we laid down a requirement to make such records, but it has not really been done. The Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism is now talking in great detail to the Association of Chief Police Officers, and the requirement will be met. We need to make sure that records are properly kept because we need to have precise facts to work on. The successes of the police forces are not being registered, and that needs to happen.

Baroness Neville-Jones: My Lords, apropos of the Minister's last remark, did he say how many sites have been recorded as having been shut down?

Lord West of Spithead: My Lords, I would be nervous of giving a figure because it would be meaningless as records have not been kept by all 51 police forces around the country. That is why we are doing this work now to ensure that records are formally kept. We are talking with ACPO about the need to get the precise figures. We need statistics and figures that are meaningful and can be accepted and used within this House.

The Earl of Erroll: My Lords, surely the terrorism websites should be closed down by the Serious and Organised Crime Agency, not by local police forces.

Lord West of Spithead: My Lords, we operate in this country by letting the local police carry on and take those particular actions. SOCA is very closely involved in some of these arenas, as is GCHQ and others, but the police take the action.

The Earl of Onslow: My Lords, can we have some advice on websites that instruct people on how to make bombs and are, in effect, sources of information rather than terrorist websites? It is unfortunate that people can just Google the question, "How can you blow everybody up?"

Lord West of Spithead: My Lords, the noble Earl identifies a difficult area. If that is tied to things that are inciting people to take action, it is much more straightforward, but it is very difficult when it is just straight information. One of the reasons I am concerned about the whole area of CBRNE—chemical, biological, radiological and novel explosive-type stuff—is that the availability of such detailed information on the internet is quite worrying. A lot of that—for example, stuff to do with biological—we cannot take off because there is no reason why it should not be there. However, it is extremely worrying because, more than ever, there is access to things that are very dangerous.

Lord Pearson of Rannoch: My Lords, when we use the word terrorism in this context, are we mostly referring to violent Islamism, to the jihadists, or are other sects involved when we use that word, in which case how many and to what extent?

Lord West of Spithead: My Lords, the word terrorism applies to a whole spectrum of people. The greatest threat to our nation at the moment, without a doubt, is al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda-inspired terrorism, but there are a number of others. I would not wish to go through them all, but all of them are monitored and have action taken against them if they are breaking the law.

Unemployment Question

3.30 pm

Asked By Lord Roberts of Conwy

To ask Her Majesty's Government when they forecast that unemployment will begin to fall.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government & Department for Work and Pensions (Lord McKenzie of Luton): My Lords, by long-standing convention, the Government do not publish unemployment forecasts.

Lord Roberts of Conwy: My Lords, I expected that reply, but I thought that the Minister might have taken advantage of this opportunity to welcome today's figures, because they show a welcome slowdown in the growth of unemployment. However, does the noble