

## [News story: Our online business rates service](#)

Our online service will be unavailable after midday on Thursday 30 March. This is so we can make improvements to the service ahead of launching the new business rates appeals system on 1 April.

If you would like to propose a change, or appeal your 2010 rateable value, you can [download the PDF form](#) and email it to us by 23:59 on 31 March 2017. More details on how to use this form, and how to submit it, accompany the form.

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## [Speech: Chief Secretary to the Treasury lays out Britain's long-term plan for Britain's infrastructure](#)

Good morning.

I'm here because I want to talk about our long-term infrastructure strategy for the future.

And as momentous a day as this is for the country, what it doesn't do, is in any way alter our commitment to the plans, structures and strategies we've put in place for Britain's infrastructure.

We've spent the last 7 years making sure that our whole system is built to offer more certainty, over a longer period, than this industry has ever had from a government.

So today, we might have fired the starting gun for our EU exit.

But when it comes to our infrastructure, we're already off the blocks, with the same, clear track to follow.

That's a big change. It's a clear departure from the kind of stop-go planning we've had in the past.

Short-termism, after all, makes for the shakiest of all foundations to build on.

When it comes to projects of scale, complexity and cost, this simply isn't an industry that talks in terms of months and years, it's one that plans decades ahead. And for so long, governments of the day have been rightly, and

roundly, criticised, for failing to take that adequately into account.

We have set about changing that and I think we are now light years ahead of where we used to be. In 2010, we developed the first ever National Infrastructure Plan, a strategy that spanned the full spectrum of our economic needs.

Last year, we published our National Infrastructure Delivery Plan, setting out in detail how the government will support delivery of key infrastructure projects and programmes.

And perhaps most crucially of all, we've established two bodies that are, in my book, completely game-changing. Both organisations, are I know, represented here today – and will be more than happy to discuss their work with you.

I am of course talking about the NIC, and the IPA. We set up the National Infrastructure Commission with the freedom and autonomy to provide independent advice on the infrastructure of most value to our economy. And we established the Infrastructure and Projects Authority to look after the actual delivery of our projects – and keep them on time, on track, and on budget – something which is of such importance to the Treasury and our spending control teams, that the IPA are actually based right by my own office!

But it goes without saying that you can have all the right structures and processes in place in the world, but they count for nothing without the investment to make them a reality.

And I want to stress that word – investment.

Under previous governments, investment has all too often been used as just a byword for spending. But what we've always been absolutely focused on, has been the economic case – what is the actual return on this investment?

With money tight, we have to assess every business case with a hard-headed appraisal of both its value for money, and the contribution it will make to getting our economy growing, our productivity levels rising, and our living standards improving.

The money we are spending, therefore, is no short-term, Keynesian fiscal stimulus, it's a long-term investment in our long-term prosperity.

And it's been a big investment that we've made.

In fact – if you add up all the investment since 2010 – from both the public and private sector – we've seen over a quarter of a trillion pounds invested in British infrastructure.

We've given flagship projects the go-ahead – like Hinkley Point C, HS2 and supporting a new runway at Heathrow.

We've invested in various sized projects, across the country and across

different sectors.

I could give you countless examples of the changes we've made. Like the flood defence project in Rossall, that's reconstructing around 2 kilometres of seawall on the North West coast near Blackpool. Set for completion later this year, it's going to reduce the risk of flooding to 7,500 homes.

Or look at the Crossrail project that will run for over 100km from Reading and Heathrow in the West, to Shenfield and Abbey Wood in the East – to bring an extra 1.5 million people to within 45 minutes commute from London. And consider, too, the way we're investing on a large scale in superfast broadband.

In 2010, average download speeds were just 5.2 megabits per second – last year they reached an average of 37. And by the end of this year, we're going to have 95% of all UK premises able to access superfast broadband. I won't go on with what is a very long list of different things we're doing.

But I do think it's important to reflect on just how much change is actually happening on the ground – or is coming in the pipeline.

And we recently ramped up our focus on infrastructure even further.

We placed it at the heart of the Industrial Strategy Green Paper we launched this year.

And at the Autumn Statement, we set up a new National Productivity Investment Fund, worth an extra £23 billion, with a focus on high-value infrastructure projects – spanning the full range, from homes, to transport, to digital infrastructure.

We want to be innovative in how we get the best bang for our buck with this money.

A good example of that is how we're putting around 10% of that funding towards a new Housing Infrastructure Fund – to deliver the underlying infrastructure that can unlock thousands of new homes.

And beyond this new pot of money, we're also alive to the critical role that the private sector can play.

The UK Guarantees Scheme has already helped support some really important improvements – from the Mersey Gateway Bridge to the Countesswells housing development in Aberdeen, or the Speyside Renewable Energy project in Moray, Scotland.

So we have extended the scheme to at least 2026.

And I know Matthew [Vickerstaff – IPA Deputy Chief Executive] from the IPA has already set this in the context of our broader strategy on private finance.

A final point I want to stress is the value we see in technology.

We want to see the UK remain a world leader in innovation – and to make sure this contributes to how we improve the performance of both existing and new infrastructure assets.

This is, ultimately, a question of efficiency – which must, for any government, always be a watchword taken to heart.

That’s why I’m pleased that the NIC has agreed to produce a report on the role of technology in infrastructure, to be published this year.

And it’s why we’re already taken a range of things forward – like setting up the Future Cities Catapult, or investing in Digital Built Britain to set us on a path to new digital standards for construction.

So let me end there, because I do want to have time for some comments and questions from you – and though article 50 doesn’t change our long-term plans on infrastructure, it does unfortunately mean my time here has had to be curtailed!

But I want to close by saying that whether we’re talking about Brexit, or our infrastructure, we know that on both of these subjects, businesses operate best when people know what is coming.

We’ve already taken great steps to reform the whole way in which we plan and deliver infrastructure to help give you that kind of certainty.

And as the Prime Minister has already made clear, we’ll be doing the same as we plan and deliver our exit from the EU – giving you as much information and clarity as we can, every step of the way.

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## [News story: Redundancy Payments Service: telephony outage](#)

The Redundancy Payment Service are currently experiencing a telephony outage which is affecting Insolvency practitioners contacting them.

This is being investigated as a high priority however customers who urgently need to contact RPS can do so via the Redundancy Payments online mailbox, with the subject “urgent IP Query”.

Please accept our apologies for any inconvenience caused.

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# Speech: Karen Bradley's speech at the Nations and Regions Media Conference

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here in Salford. Watching the re-birth of this area in recent years has been incredibly encouraging and nothing short of inspirational.

I'd like to thank the organisers for being flexible enough to accommodate the fact that there are few things going on in Westminster, from where I've just rushed.

With more than 250 companies employing over 7,000 people, the transformation of MediaCity since work started here exactly ten years ago is incredible. With the BBC and ITV at its heart, this has become a world-class media cluster, with a life and energy all of its own.

Salford demonstrates that the television sector in the UK is not all about London – and that the best broadcasters on Earth can flourish in places other than London.

The Nations & Regions Media Conference is a major annual fixture for those of us who work in and with the media. It is a very important forum for learning, making contacts, and exchanging ideas.

This is also a chance for us to celebrate this country's extraordinarily successful media industry. To say that we punch above our weight is a massive understatement. British film, television, news, video games, music, and more are enjoyed and admired all over the world.

It is rare for a specific industry to appear in the name of a government department, but the size, reach, and influence of the UK media means that it absolutely deserves this distinction.

So thank you for having me.

I would like to use my speech today to talk about the future of Channel 4.

## **History and purpose of Channel 4**

Margaret Thatcher is perhaps not primarily remembered for her role in the creation of Channel 4, but it was her government that decided to set up a new public service broadcaster. Channel 4 took to the air on 2nd November 1982, with an episode of Countdown – which is now a British institution.

In today's world of endless programme guides and on-demand content, it is easy to forget what a revolutionary step this was: a fourth television channel in Britain! This was a time before breakfast TV or overnight broadcasting – TV channels went to sleep at night like everyone else.

Channel 4 was given a unique mission: to appeal to tastes and interests not

generally catered for by ITV. Educational. Innovative. Experimental. Distinctive. And with a funding model where non-public service content – including imports – helped pay for new and otherwise less commercial news, current affairs, arts, religion, and other programmes.

Channel 4 soon established itself as bold and innovative. It has remained an essential part of the broadcasting landscape in a multi-channel age, and to its great credit has continued to evolve and innovate in the 35 years since Richard Whitely and Carol Vorderman first graced our screens.

This refusal to stand still has been key to its success. In 1987 – just five years after it first went on air – advertising revenue exceeded costs for the first time. Founding CEO Jeremy Isaacs handed over to Michael Grade to lead a new stage in Channel Four's development.

In 1993 the Channel Four Corporation became operational and began to sell its own advertising slots – giving it more control over its financial affairs just as The Big Breakfast was getting going.

1997 saw Channel 4 start broadcasting 24 hours a day and brought groundbreaking satire in the form of Brasserie to our screens.

E4 was launched as a pay-TV station in January 2001, becoming free-to-air in 2008. Channel 4's stable has continued to expand and now includes E4, More4, Film4, 4Music, All4, and the original Channel 4 itself.

Channel 4 continues to have creative and commercial success. It employs more than 800 people, spends around £700 million on programming, and has a key role in supporting the UK's independent production sector – which has become a £3 billion international success story.

In 2015, Channel 4 funded – through Film4 – films that secured a record 15 Oscar nominations, and it has been awarded Channel of the Year by Broadcast for the last two years.

So Channel 4 has evolved considerably over the years – partly of its own accord and partly due to the interventions of government.

But its fundamental status has not changed: it is a commercially-funded public service broadcaster which is owned by the country. I want to make sure it is also serving the whole country.

A public asset that should serve all the public As we made clear during the BBC Charter Review process, this Government is committed to our public service broadcasting system. Channel 4 is a unique and integral part of that system, and should remain so.

Over the last eighteen months, the Government has been looking at the risks and opportunities facing Channel 4. The TV market is facing unprecedented changes and challenges – increased consumer choice, new ways of watching, and fierce competition at home and abroad. We want to ensure that Channel 4 has a strong, sustainable, and successful future – able not only to survive, but to thrive.

Its current financial position appears strong: cash reserves are high, revenues are approaching £1 billion, and spending on programming is at record levels.

But the full picture is more complex. Channel 4 relied on advertising revenues for 94 per cent of its income in 2015. With changing viewing habits making the future of TV advertising uncertain, that in turn creates uncertainty for Channel 4's future revenues.

You only need to look at moves in the rest of the market – with channels diversifying and production companies consolidating – to see the challenges the market faces. None of us can be certain what effect continued changes in the media landscape and digital disruption will have on advertising revenues in the future.

It is absolutely right, then, for the Government to have taken the time to evaluate how to protect and enhance this precious public asset – and make sure it is best placed to serve the country in the years ahead.

Our approach was to look at the full spectrum of options, from the status-quo to privatisation, in order to make sure that Channel 4 will be on a secure and sustainable footing. A review is only truly comprehensive – and can only hope to reach the best conclusion – if it does look at all possibilities.

Channel 4's public service remit and support for the independent production sector across the UK are vitally important – and we have concluded that these are best served by keeping Channel 4 in public hands.

So I can announce that the Government will not give further consideration to privatisation at this time.

But the Government does think that Channel 4 can do more to deliver on its founding principles and that reforms can be made to protect and enhance the way it delivers for the country.

## **Enhancing accountability**

All public assets must be accountable to the public. Channel 4 is owned by the taxpayer, so we have a duty to do all we can to understand and limit risks.

As a result, the Government is working with Channel 4 to make sure oversight of its financial position is robust. We will agree the necessary arrangements around Channel 4's finances and the risks it faces – helping us to spot problems as they emerge so we can work together to tackle them.

## **Public Service remit**

On screen, Channel 4 is known for daring entertainment programmes like *The Word*, *Brookside*, *Peep Show*, and *Skins*; for groundbreaking factual programming like *Unreported World* and *Dispatches*; and for its peerless coverage of the Paralympic Games in 2012 and 2016.

But delivery in some areas of core public service content, such as arts and children's programming, is low. And Channel 4 is increasingly reliant on its non-public service portfolio channels.

I would like Channel 4 to stay true to the distinctive, innovative, and challenging programming it was set up to offer – in line with the obligations prescribed by Parliament. To provide a platform for unheard voices and untold stories from right across the United Kingdom.

Because we want the benefits of this national asset to be spread far and wide, not just in London.

And that means rethinking where it is based, and where it spends money.

Spread creative organisations throughout the regions

I am unsympathetic towards those who recoil in horror at the very idea of media jobs being based outside the capital. Or for those who insist that people with ideas in the West Midlands, West Country or West Wales must travel to Westminster to get programmes made.

There is a great deal of talent outside London and too much of it is being overlooked.

Channel 4 has around 820 staff and fewer than 30 of them are based outside central London. I have had some initial discussions with Channel 4 on this issue, but we are a long way apart.

The Salford experience – which we can see for ourselves right now – is highly instructive. There were howls of protest when it was announced that part of the BBC would relocate here.

But just look around you; look at what has been achieved. This is a thriving, bustling media centre. It has driven a remarkable regeneration of the area, bringing new homes, new cultural institutions, and new transport links. More people now work in Salford Quays than in its heyday as a major seaport.

London is not a media centre because only London can do media – London is a media centre because media is centred there!

We want Channel 4 to have a major presence outside London, stimulating creative and economic activity – including jobs – right across the country. In so doing, it can play a leading role in a public service broadcasting system that reflects our United Kingdom.

Public assets should deliver for the public in every possible way. That is key to building an economy that works for everyone, not just a privileged few.

Channel 4 rightly prides itself in being different, in providing alternative views and new perspectives. This evolution will help to underpin that purpose and make Channel 4 even more distinctive – and give audiences the length and breadth of the UK content that speaks to them and where they come from.

## Consultation

As a result, I can today announce that the Government will launch a consultation on how best Channel 4 can increase its impact away from its traditional base – how it can deliver more jobs, develop more talent, and drive creativity wherever can be found.

This will have three main components.

Firstly, we will look at whether Channel 4 should relocate some or all its staff outside London, potentially including moving its headquarters.

I recognise that some Channel 4 business functions may need to retain a presence in the capital, but a publicly owned broadcaster should have far more than 3 per cent of its permanent staff outside London.

Like the BBC, Channel 4 could have a transformative role in helping drive creative hubs beyond the capital.

Secondly, we will consider spreading Channel 4's spending power more widely across the country. At present only 35 per cent of new British programming on Channel 4's main channel has to go to productions from outside the M25.

To its credit, this is currently running above the target at 39 per cent. But across the business as a whole, Channel 4 spends around twice as much on new productions from London as the rest of the UK put together.

Higher requirements, perhaps of to 50 per cent of expenditure on new content on the main channel, could lead to programming that better reflects audiences – and better supports production companies wherever they are based.

Thirdly, we will assess whether allowing Channel 4 to take bigger stakes in production companies would support the growth of the regional production sector and help Channel 4 diversify revenues and enhance its sustainability.

Channel 4 is limited in how it can do this at the moment, but its initial investments of up to 25 per cent through its "indie growth fund" have shown promise, and we want to work with Channel 4 and the independent production sector to see if this option can be strengthened.

We will of course work closely with Channel 4 throughout this process, including in finalising the consultation document before it is published in the coming weeks.

We also know it is not just Channel 4 that can do more to help us grow our creative economy. So we will explore whether there is more we can do together with other public service broadcasters to drive the strong creative clusters we have right across the UK.

To inform our decisions, we want to hear from the broadcasting and production sectors, from devolved administrations and local authorities, from potential new homes for Channel 4, and from audiences around the UK. This is an exciting opportunity, and we are determined to make the most of it.

## Conclusion

Channel 4 is a great British success story. The best stories see the main character develop, change and improve.

Channel 4 has survived and thrived because – throughout its history – it has adapted to an ever-changing broadcasting landscape.

In the next chapter of its story, we want to see Channel 4 make a bigger mark on more parts of the United Kingdom. I have every faith that our hero will become all the better for it and that this country will be all the better for it too.

Thank you.

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## Statement to Parliament: Prime Minister's Commons statement on triggering Article 50

Thank you Mr Speaker,

Today the government acts on the democratic will of the British people. And it acts, too, on the clear and convincing position of this House.

A few minutes ago in Brussels, the United Kingdom's Permanent Representative to the EU handed a letter to the President of the European Council on my behalf, confirming the government's decision to invoke Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union.

The Article 50 process is now underway. And in accordance with the wishes of the British people, the United Kingdom is leaving the European Union.

This is an historic moment from which there can be no turning back. Britain is leaving the European Union. We are going to make our own decisions and our own laws. We are going to take control of the things that matter most to us. And we are going to take this opportunity to build a stronger, fairer Britain – a country that our children and grandchildren are proud to call home. That is our ambition and our opportunity. That is what this government is determined to do.

Mr Speaker, at moments like these – great turning points in our national story – the choices we make define the character of our nation. We can choose to say the task ahead is too great. We can choose to turn our face to the past and believe it can't be done. Or we can look forward with optimism and hope – and to believe in the enduring power of the British spirit.

I choose to believe in Britain and that our best days lie ahead. And I do so because I am confident that we have the vision and the plan to use this moment to build a better Britain. For, leaving the European Union presents us with a unique opportunity. It is this generation's chance to shape a brighter future for our country. A chance to step back and ask ourselves what kind of country we want to be.

My answer is clear. I want the United Kingdom to emerge from this period of change stronger, fairer, more united and more outward-looking than ever before. I want us to be a secure, prosperous, tolerant country – a magnet for international talent and a home to the pioneers and innovators who will shape the world ahead.

I want us to be a truly Global Britain – the best friend and neighbour to our European partners, but a country that reaches beyond the borders of Europe too. A country that goes out into the world to build relationships with old friends and new allies alike.

And that is why I have set out a clear and ambitious plan for the negotiations ahead. It is a plan for a new deep and special partnership between Britain and the European Union. A partnership of values. A partnership of interests. A partnership based on cooperation in areas such as security and economic affairs. And a partnership that works in the best interests of the United Kingdom, the European Union and the wider world.

Because perhaps now more than ever, the world needs the liberal, democratic values of Europe – values that this United Kingdom shares. And that is why, while we are leaving the institutions of the European Union, we are not leaving Europe. We will remain a close friend and ally. We will be a committed partner. We will play our part to ensure that Europe is able to project its values and defend itself from security threats. And we will do all that we can to help the European Union prosper and succeed.

So Mr Speaker, in the letter that has been delivered to President Tusk today – copies of which I have placed in the library of the House – I have been clear that the deep and special partnership we seek is in the best interests of the United Kingdom and of the European Union too.

I have been clear that we will work constructively – in a spirit of sincere cooperation – to bring this partnership into being. And I have been clear that we should seek to agree the terms of this future partnership alongside those of our withdrawal, within the next 2 years.

I am ambitious for Britain. And the objectives I have set out for these negotiations remain. We will deliver certainty wherever possible so that business, the public sector and everybody else has as much clarity as we can provide as we move through the process. It is why, tomorrow, we will publish a White Paper confirming our plans to convert the 'acquis' into British law, so that everyone will know where they stand.

And it is why I have been clear that the government will put the final deal that is agreed between the UK and the EU to a vote in both Houses of

Parliament before it comes into force. We will take control of our own laws and bring an end to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in Britain. Leaving the European Union will mean that our laws will be made in Westminster, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. And those laws will be interpreted by judges not in Luxembourg, but in courts across this country.

We will strengthen the Union of the 4 nations that comprise our United Kingdom. We will negotiate as one United Kingdom, taking account of the specific interests of every nation and region of the UK and when it comes to the powers that we will take back from Europe, we will consult fully on which powers should reside in Westminster and which should be passed on to the devolved administrations.

But Mr Speaker, no decisions currently taken by the devolved administrations will be removed from them. And it is the expectation of the government that the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will see a significant increase in their decision-making power as a result of this process.

We want to maintain the common travel area with the Republic of Ireland. There should be no return to the borders of the past. We will control immigration so that we continue to attract the brightest and the best to work or study in Britain, but manage the process properly so that our immigration system serves the national interest.

We seek to guarantee the rights of EU citizens who are already living in Britain, and the rights of British nationals in other member states as early as we can. That is set out very clearly in the letter as an early priority for the talks ahead. We will ensure that workers' rights are fully protected and maintained. Indeed, under my leadership, not only will the government protect the rights of workers, we will build on them.

We will pursue a bold and ambitious free trade agreement with the European Union that allows for the freest possible trade in goods and services between Britain and the EU's member states; that gives British companies the maximum freedom to trade with and operate within European markets; and that lets European businesses do the same in Britain.

Because European leaders have said many times that we cannot 'cherry pick' and remain members of the single market without accepting the 4 freedoms that are indivisible. We respect that position. And as accepting those freedoms is incompatible with the democratically expressed will of the British people, we will no longer be members of the single market.

We are going to make sure that we can strike trade agreements with countries from outside the European Union too. Because important though our trade with the EU is and will remain, it is clear that the UK needs to increase significantly its trade with the fastest growing export markets in the world.

We hope to continue to collaborate with our European partners in the areas of science, education, research and technology, so that the UK is one of the best places for science and innovation. We seek continued cooperation with

our European partners in important areas such as crime, terrorism and foreign affairs.

And it is our aim to deliver a smooth and orderly Brexit – reaching an agreement about our future partnership by the time the 2-year Article 50 process has concluded, then moving into a phased process of implementation in which Britain, the EU institutions and member states prepare for the new arrangements that will exist between us.

Mr Speaker, we understand that there will be consequences for the UK of leaving the EU. We know that we will lose influence over the rules that affect the European economy. We know that UK companies that trade with the EU will have to align with rules agreed by institutions of which we are no longer a part, just as we do in other overseas markets. We accept that.

However, we approach these talks constructively, respectfully, and in a spirit of sincere cooperation. For it is in the interests of both the United Kingdom and the European Union that we should use this process to deliver our objectives in a fair and orderly manner. It is in the interests of both the United Kingdom and the European Union that there should be as little disruption as possible. And it is in the interests of both the United Kingdom and the European Union that Europe should remain strong, prosperous and capable of projecting its values in the world.

At a time when the growth of global trade is slowing and there are signs that protectionist instincts are on the rise in many parts of the world, Europe has a responsibility to stand up for free trade in the interests of all our citizens.

With Europe's security more fragile today than at any time since the end of the Cold War, weakening our cooperation and failing to stand up for European values would be a costly mistake.

Our vote to leave the EU was no rejection of the values that we share as fellow Europeans. As a European country, we will continue to play our part in promoting and supporting those values – during the negotiations and once they are done.

We will continue to be reliable partners, willing allies and close friends. We want to continue to buy goods and services from the EU, and sell them ours. We want to trade with them as freely as possible, and work with one another to make sure we are all safer, more secure and more prosperous through continued friendship.

Indeed, in an increasingly unstable world, we must continue to forge the closest possible security co-operation to keep our people safe. We face the same global threats from terrorism and extremism. That message was only reinforced by the abhorrent attack on Westminster Bridge and this place last week.

So there should be no reason why we should not agree a new deep and special partnership between the UK and the EU that works for us all.

Mr Speaker, I know that this is a day of celebration for some and disappointment for others. The referendum last June was divisive at times. Not everyone shared the same point of view, or voted in the same way. The arguments on both side were passionate.

But, Mr Speaker, when I sit around the negotiating table in the months ahead, I will represent every person in the whole United Kingdom – young and old, rich and poor, city, town, country and all the villages and hamlets in between.

And yes, those EU nationals who have made this country their home and it is my fierce determination to get the right deal for every single person in this country. For, as we face the opportunities ahead of us on this momentous journey, our shared values, interests and ambitions can – and must – bring us together.

We all want to see a Britain that is stronger than it is today. We all want a country that is fairer so that everyone has the chance to succeed. We all want a nation that is safe and secure for our children and grandchildren. We all want to live in a truly Global Britain that gets out and builds relationships with old friends and new allies around the world.

These are the ambitions of this government's Plan for Britain. Ambitions that unite us, so that we are no longer defined by the vote we cast, but by our determination to make a success of the result.

We are one great union of people and nations with a proud history and a bright future. And now that the decision to leave has been made – and the process is underway – it is time to come together. For this great national moment needs a great national effort. An effort to shape a stronger future for Britain.

So let us do so together. Let us come together and work together. Let us together choose to believe in Britain with optimism and hope. For if we do, we can together make the most of the opportunities ahead. We can make a success of this moment. And we can together build a stronger, fairer, better Britain – a Britain our children and grandchildren are proud to call home.

I commend this statement to the House.