

Mr. Ainsworth: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North raised a point that I need to respond to—he would want me to put this on the record. The UK produced a new design of nuclear weapon to coincide with the introduction into service of the Trident system. The warhead was designed and manufactured in the UK by AWE, although it was decided on cost-effectiveness grounds to procure certain non-nuclear warhead components from the United States. The design is likely to last into the 2020s, although we do not yet have sufficient information to judge precisely how long it can be retained in service.

No decisions have yet been taken on whether, or how, we will need to refurbish or replace the warhead. Such decisions are likely to be necessary during the next Parliament. To inform them, we will undertake a detailed review of the optimum life of the existing warhead stockpile and analyse the range of replacement options that might be available.

The spending on AWE—I shall try to reassure my hon. Friend about this, if nothing else—does not pre-empt such decisions. They are yet to be taken, and will be taken in the manner that I have just explained. I thought that he would want me at least to put that on the record.

To sum up, I am pleased to have been able to respond to the debate on this important issue. We are focused on maintaining the right balance between a commitment to strive towards a world free of nuclear weapons, and the need to protect our citizens in an unsafe and uncertain world. Within that context, AWE has served our nation and our allies well, and I am sure that the skill and dedication of its work force, suppliers and partners will continue to serve us in the future.

